

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d told Moshe and Aharon to tell them, "*Tell the Children of Israel that these are the animals which they may eat...*" (Vayikra 11:1)

Once again we are addressing the topic of animals which may be eaten and those which are "treif." What makes one animal kosher and another not kosher? Only G-d knows for sure. Perhaps it has to do with the animal's nature, or living habits. Fine, but what about a kosher cow that is treif because it wasn't slaughtered properly? In such a case, the difference between being kosher or not kosher can be a hairsbreadth, as Rashi points out at the end of the parshah:

Between impure and pure . . . between whether only half the windpipe was cut, or the majority. (Rashi, Vayikra 11:47)

Why should it make a difference whether or not the majority of the windpipe was cut, or just a portion of it, as long as the animal was ritually slaughtered? How does it change the status of the animal from being kosher to treif, or because it was attacked by an animal and on the verge of death?

These are good questions, and obviously they have been asked throughout the ages. However, today most Jews don't pay much attention to them because, thank G-d, in most places that Jews live nowadays, there is plenty of meat to go around. Indeed, in many communities, the kosher butcher shops rival some of the treif butcher shops, so we don't even feel the need to wonder about such issues. Instead, we contently leave their answers to the realm of chok-laws whose reasons seem to defy human logic.

Surprisingly, their reasons are not quite so chuki, and even more surprisingly, they have so much to do with the Final Redemption for which we anxiously await. In fact, understanding them perhaps, could have saved the Jewish people and the rest of mankind the pain of so much suffering, and perhaps, also from the pain of any other suffering that might be coming up, G-d forbid.

It has to do with the concept of Gevuros. Gevuros means "strength," but it is also the name of the fifth sefirah. It is principally associated with the constriction of Divine Light, which is what makes free-will possible. Its job is to create what the Torah calls "Hester Panim," the hiding of G-d's face, or what is better known in the Western World as Teva (Nature), which gives the impression that Creation is

automated.

Without Gevurah, the light of Chesed would shine through full-blast, meaning that the Presence of G-d would be an intellectually inescapable reality. So, Gevurah is a light that acts as a kind of spiritual "belt" around the light of Chesed, containing it and limiting its illumination in the world. A miracle is when the belt comes off, so-to-speak, and the light of Chesed bursts through into the mind's of all those who witness it.

Thus, when people look at the world and have difficulty seeing G-d, to such an extent that they feel comfortable assuming that He is not even there, it is really the effect of the light of Gevurah. It is like looking at an overweight person who is wearing his belt taut, and assuming that he is actually underweight, or like looking into a two-way mirror and assuming that your reflection in the mirror is all that is looking back at you.

Thus, as nasty as Gevuros sound—all evil is the result of them, and they play a very important role in history, a temporary one, but a very important role nonetheless. In other words, they only have value, at least in this form, as long as free-will remains necessary, and they will lose their value once free-will becomes unnecessary, such as in Yemos HaMoshiach (Succah 52a). Indeed, Yemos HaMoshiach is specifically tied to the rectification of the Gevuros.

And what about rectification? Who said anything about rectification? The Gevuros may obstruct the light of Chesed, but that is their job. What is broken about the light of Gevuros is how do you fix it, but what does it have to do with eating kosher?

SHABBOS DAY:

Whatever has a real cloven hoof, and chews its cud, you may eat. (Vayikra 11:3)

Right! Now what does that have to do to make an animal kosher?

The answer has to do with the role of Gevuros. If their role is to hide the light of Chesed, which conceals the reality of G-d, then it must be incumbent upon man, and particularly the Jewish people, to combat the light of Gevurah so that the light of Chesed can break through and reveal the hand of G-d in life. This, in fact, is the basis of a Kiddush Hashem (the Sanctification of G-d's Name).

Obviously, if we are expected to "combat" the Gevuros, and if they are only a temporary reality, then they must be limited. In other words, there must be a set amount of Gevuros that require tikun, and indeed this is the case. The moment that the last aspect of Gevurah is rectified is synonymous with the first moment that Moshiach assumes his rulership of the world, of course, on behalf of G-d.

With the mission defined, we need to know where our enemy can be found and the best way to defeat him. The answer is, Gevuros are everywhere throughout Creation, and the best way to defeat them is not the way you might think. For, whereas most enemies that you have to face you might want to completely destroy, like Amalek, for example, Gevuros are meant to be converted, not

annihilated.

In fact, the currency of Olam HaBah (the World-to-Come) is rectified Gevuros. A U.S. Dollar bill may have "In G-d We Trust" written on it, but you will not be able to take it with you to the next world. Instead, what does go with you, and actually precedes you is all the Gevuros that was rectified through your own actions.

The fact that everything in the physical world can be a source of abuse, meaning that it can be used in a way that the Torah does not sanction, indicates that Gevuros is lurking. Like with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, there is something in everything that pulls at us in a way that can result in our using it in a selfish and unG-dly manner. That is called a "sin."

The negative pull to abuse Creation that we refer to as the yetzer hara is really a function of Gevuros. It is the Gevuros that acts as that mystical magnetic pull to do that which the Torah forbids. Likewise, when inertia prevents us from getting up and doing that which the Torah commands, or at least in a satisfactory way, that is also the Gevuros at work.

If you can feel the tension and the struggle, and you hesitate to do the wrong thing, or you feel bad not doing the right thing, then you are locked in battle with the light of Gevurah. If you lose that battle when you should have won it, then it is called a sin, and if teshuvah is not forthcoming, then punishment will be forthcoming. But if you win the battle, by either avoiding doing the wrong thing or overcoming the inertia against a Positive Mitzvah, then something really interesting happens to the Gevurah: it is sweetened, after which it ascends and is deposited in your Olam HaBah account.

This process is called Mituk HaGevuros (the sweetening of Gevuros) or, Bisum HaGevuros (the perfuming of Gevuros). Either way, the Gevuros have been tamed, converted, and added into your personal account. And, just as important, the "pot" of Gevuros has been emptied somewhat, and the world has moved that much closer to its own rectification and the end of history. It is the heroic way to bring rectification to Creation. Again, what does this have to do with animals being kosher or treif?

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

For I am G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your G-d. You will therefore be holy, for I am holy. (Vayikra 11:45)

If you think about it, it should not be so hard to figure out where the Gevuros hold out. If the result of Gevuros is the hiding of G-d's light, the light of Chesed, you just have to identify those things in Creation which do the same thing. The more something acts contrary to Torah, which can even be a fully Torah-observant Jew who has acted out of Torah character for even just a moment, the more the Gevuros have exposed themselves in the world.

Let's rephrase that. As the Torah points out, it is really an issue of holy and unholy, the latter being the result of Gevuros. Hence, a "red- light district" is a very overt and obvious sign that Gevuros are at work, whereas an area of a city in which holy things occur is a place where the Gevuros have been

subdued, although perhaps not completely (as shul politics can prove).

And this is what makes an animal kosher or treif, and why shechitah is an exact science and an important rectification for Ma'aseh Bereishis. For, before the sin of eating from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah, ALL the animals were kosher and pure, and the only thing possessing Gevuros and requiring rectification was the tree itself, and of course, man. Abstaining from eating until the first Shabbos, only three hours later, would have taken care of all of that.

However, explain the Kabbalists, not only did Adam HaRishon, in not obeying G-d's commandment, NOT rectify himself or the tree, he unrectified that which G-d had previously rectified during the previous five days of Creation, including, of course, the animals. And thus, the treifness of an animal is really just an expression of the depth to which the Gevuros, that were a result from man's sin, affected one species of animal as opposed to another.

Therefore, a cow is kosher because it is not as affected by the Gevuros as much as a treif animal is. However, it was affected enough that it cannot be eaten without some kind of preparation, unlike fruits and vegetables. In other words, a process like shechitah is not only about taking the life of the animal, it is also a Divinely-designed method for removing the remaining Gevuros from the animal, to make it completely kosher, in every sense of the term.

Likewise, if shechitah does not work to make an animal kosher, then it means that the Gevuros are so inter-woven within the fabric of the animal that it can't be removed, at least before Moshiach comes and the Gevuros are completely rectified. And, to eat such an animal means to consume pure Gevuros, which are obviously going to have an effect on the holiness of the person. This is what the Torah is trying to instruct us to avoid, so that we can pursue holiness and self-rectification, without which one can become a breeding ground for Gevuros, with tremendously adverse effects that are the basis of what has always gone wrong, and what is going wrong today.

MELAVE MALKAH:

G-d told Moshe, *"Speak to the Children of Israel and tell them that when you come into the land which I give to you and you harvest, then you must bring an omer of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He must wave the omer before G-d, to be accepted for you; on the day after the day of rest [the second day of Passover] the priest must wave it."* (Vayikra 23:9-11)

So that's what history is all about, and will continue to be about until Moshiach comes: sweetening the Gevuros, using them as a way to reveal G-d as opposed to hiding Him. This means that instead of allowing ourselves to be conquered by them, as most of the world does by simply pursuing the designs of their hearts, we must use their strength to do what we have been mandated to do: work as a partner with G-d to rectify Creation.

If ever there is a time in the Jewish year that this is true, it is now, during Sefiras HaOmer (the counting of the Omer). Purim is like the yetzer hara's last hurrah, L'Shem Shamayim, but this is then

followed by cleaning for Pesach, a.k.a. the dismantling of the yetzer hara (chometz) on our journey to achieve the spiritual simplicity of matzah. Seder Night is the break from its bond, the leap toward spiritual freedom.

The next night, we get to work on sweetening as much Gevuros as possible while we're in our mode of freedom. The Omer-Offering was one of barley- se'orah-in Hebrew, which Kabbalah says represents Din (Judgment) or Gevuros. Bringing the Omer to the Temple had the same effect that shechitah has on a kosher animal, releasing the Gevuros from within it.

It is no coincidence that there are fifty days to the Omer Counting, a number that always alludes to the Nun Sha'arei Binah (the Fifty Gates of Understanding). The Nun Sha'arei Tuma (the Fifty Gates of Spiritual Impurity) are what the Gevuros look like unsweetened; the Fifty Gates of Understanding are what they look like after they have been rectified, and that results in Kabbalos HaTorah-the holiness and the Reception of Torah.

Even though we remain without a temple today, and are unable to fulfill the mitzvah of bringing the Omer-Offering, by simply counting the omer each day and accessing the Middas-HaYom, the special trait of each particular day (listed in most siddurim: Chesed sh'b'Chesed, Gevurah sh'b'Chesed, etc.), has a similar effect. Just as verbalizing the daily sacrificial service that takes its place in the meantime, likewise does verbalizing the Omer-Offering act in its stead until such time as we can once again continue the Temple service.

For, it is all about finding and accessing the Gevuros in Creation, and then drawing them out and channeling their energy into some activity that rectifies Creation. And, just as G-d has many messengers to carry out His will, He has many methods for allowing Gevuros to be used up and rectified. The counting of the Omer between Pesach and Shavuos is one such very important process.

We already know from previous essays the centrality of speech, especially when it comes to this time of year. Pesach (peh-sach: "the mouth that spoke") is the holiday that celebrates the true freedom of speech, from a Torah perspective. Pharaoh (peh-ra: "the evil mouth") was defeated by Moshe Rabbeinu, who once complained about having uncircumcised lips, but whose "power was in his mouth." We finally achieved freedom at Pi HaChiros, the "Mouth of Freedom."

Indeed, the mouth is one of the most important battle grounds for fighting against the Gevuros. "Loose lips sink ships," and the road to Gihennom is tiled with words of loshon hara. Thus, prayer is such a powerful tool for redemption, and a short declaration like counting the Omer can have a phenomenal effect in terms of personal and world rectification, just as eating kosher food also does. For, when food is properly prepared and eaten with the right intentions, it is also like bringing an offering to G- d, to such an extent that the table upon which we eat is compared to the altar. And it was there, on the altar, that the Gevuros, in the form of the fire, were used to free the Holy Sparks in every aspect of the sacrifices to bring the world closer to perfection.

*Have a great Shabbos,
PW*

Text

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