

HEY, HEY, HEY!

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

This week's Perceptions has been dedicated in the zechut of Rivka bat Yehudit. May the merit of all those who learn it help her receive a speedy refuah shlaimah, and may she and her family live a long and healthy life together.

FRIDAY NIGHT:

"You shall no longer be called 'Avram', but rather 'Avraham', because I have made you a father of many nations. (Bereishit 17:5)

Before Avraham became "Avraham", he was only Avram. At that point, the gematria of his name was only 243. It was only after G-d changed his name in this week's parshah that it totaled 248, with the addition of the letter Heh. It was an addition of just one letter, but it made all the difference in the world.

First of all, the letter Heh is part of G-d's Four-Letter Name, the one that we do not pronounce the way it is written. Actually, the Heh is found in the Name twice, second (after the Yud) and fourth (after the Vav) in that order. In terms of the Sefirot, the first Heh corresponds to the sefirah of Binah (Understanding), where as the final Heh corresponds to the sefirah called "Malchut" (Kingdom).

Thus, when the Talmud says that this world was made with the letter Heh in order to make the concept of teshuvah (Menachot 29b) possible, it is not being metaphorical. For, our history is governed by the six sefirot of Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferet, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod, which emerged from the sefirah of Binah, the first Heh of G-d's Name.

Furthermore, the word "teshuvah" can be read "tshuv Heh", which means "return Heh" (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 21). This is because, explains the Arizal, when a person sins he causes the final Heh of G-d's Name to become distanced somewhat from the upper three letters, and therefore repentance reverses this trend. It returns the Heh to its proper location.

Adding the Heh to Avraham's name meant adding all of this potential to his being, and also to that of his future descendants.

Accordingly, his name totaled 248, the number of Positive Mitzvot in the Torah, and correspondingly,

the number of limbs in the human body necessary for performing the Positive Mitzvot. Even though there are more Negative Mitzvot than Positive Mitzvot, that only require us to NOT do something, which is very different from actually having to get up and do something (positive).

The "energy" necessary to do Positive Mitzvot, especially on a daily basis, also emanates from the Heh, and is what makes Klal Yisroel different from the nations of the world. For, as the Maharal explains, the Negative Mitzvot equal the number of days of the solar year because they are meant to help us protect the physical world from destruction, to maintain the "solar world".

However, the Positive Mitzvot are meant to help the Jew elevate himself above the physical world. Whereas the Negative Mitzvot protect the world, the Positive Mitzvot sanctify our limbs, channeling the energy in the service of G-d, transforming us into zealots:

When Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen, saw it, he rose up from amidst the congregation and took a spear - romach - in his hand. (Bamidbar 25:7)

The letters of "romach" (spear) also total 248, as if to say that what Pinchas took in his "hand" to avenge G-d was the energy of the Positive Mitzvot, which allows a Jew to guide his daily life according to Torah. "Zrizim makdimin l'Mitzvot" - "the zealous run to do mitzvot", is just not talking about people who abstain from doing that which is forbidden; it is also talking about people (and a very small portion of the world's population) who see Positive Mitzvot as a merit, as an opportunity to personal growth.

The addition of the Heh to "Avram" was the addition of the potential for all of this, and that was only the beginning.

SHABBAT DAY:

He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them!" He said to him, "So will be your descendants." (Bereishit 15:5)

The words "Mazel Tov" are meaningless. Either you have one or you don't, because mazel is the destiny with which a person is born. One's lifespan is also decided in advance, based upon the type of soul a person has (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 35). That was the way it was for everyone, until Avraham Avinu came along, as the Talmud explains:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: From where do we learn that the Jewish People are not subject to mazel? It says, "He [G-d] brought him [Avraham] outside..." (Bereishit 15:5). Avraham said to The Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the World! 'The overseer of my house will inherit me!' (Ibid. 3)." He answered him, "Only that which comes out from your belly..." (Ibid. 4). Avraham said to Him, "But Master of the World! I saw through my astrology that I am not fitting to father a son."

He answered him, "Leave your astrology, for there is no mazel for a Jew!" (Shabbat 156a)

And, more accurately, there was no mazel for Avraham. There was for Avram as Avraham had

clearly known, but the addition of the letter Heh represented more than just a name change; it was the opening of a spiritual door through which Avraham was allowed to "crawl" through to another plane of Hashgochah Pratit. As a result, "Mazel Tov!" gained new meaning, but only as a result of getting our own mazel as a result of our mesirat Nefesh (self-sacrifice) in the line of duty for G-d.

Thus, Pinchas, as a result of his deed of self-sacrifice, completely changed his mazel, from that of Pinchas ben Elazar HaKohen to that of Eliyahu HaNavi. At first he was a virtual nobody, and then he did act of zealousness and became a somebody. And not only did he become somebody, but he specifically became the prophet turned into an angel whose job it is to herald in the coming of Moshiach, may it be in our time, and all because he took "248" in hand.

This is why the word for "womb" is "rechem", the same letters again as the word "ramach" (248) and "romach" (spear), because birth is the first stage of transformation of mazel. This is because inside the womb the fetus is very much a part of the mother, and its mazel is bound up with hers. However, once the child is born it is subject to its own mazel and grows into a position whereby his or her own actions have the power to change it.

Kabbalistically, this transformation is seen as the change from "chometz" to "matzah", each of which is three letters long and each of which contain a "Mem" and a "Tzaddi". However, "chometz" has the letter "Chet" in it also, whereas "matzah" contains the letter Heh, which is like a Chet except that the left leg of the letter is broken. It is this break in the left leg of the Chet that transforms it into a Heh and which created the little "window" in the upper left-hand corner through which, the Talmud says, the person who has done teshuvah is able to crawl back "in".

Hence, Avraham Avinu is identified with the holiday of Pesach because it is the holiday during which, the Leshem explains, the world is created anew. And, as we rid ourselves of chometz and replace it with matzah, we in fact transform the Chet into a Heh all over again, and create a spiritual portal through which have the potential to ascend to a higher dimension of Hashgochah Pratit, and ascend above the mazel with which we were born.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

G-d said to Avram, "Go (lech-lecha) from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, to the land which I will show you. (Bereishit 12:1)

In the Sixties it became popular to "find" one's self, which at first seemed strange because if you didn't know who you were, then usually what you needed was to find a good therapist. However, it became apparent after time that a generation had been born that no longer took for granted what previous generations seemed to rely upon, and that is, that we are who we are by default.

Unfortunately, though the question was a good one ("Who am I really?"), the answers often were not and usually only further confused the issue until many, either became permanently lost or eventually just capitulated to the greater force of general society. In search of "lecha" they "leched",

but with no certain destination in mind.

What is amazing is that by the time G-d speaks to Avraham at the beginning of this week's parshah with the command of "lech-lecha" - "Go to yourself", Avraham was already 70 years old and a man who had already been prepared to give up his life for G-d. In fact, ever since he had been three years old Avraham had been in pursuit of the Master of the Universe and had fashioned his life accordingly. What more was there for him to find out about himself?

The answer to the question is in these words: to the land which I will show you.

Why the mystery? Why couldn't G-d have been forthright with Avraham and just tell him, "Leave Charan for Eretz Canaan. That is where you are to move your family"? What point was being made by keeping the future location of Avraham's household a secret?

The answer is that it wasn't meant to be a mystery; we're just emphasizing the wrong part of the posuk. What counts in the posuk is not the land to which Avraham is meant to move, but the fact that G-d is the only one who can show it to him. Indeed, the posuk is really saying that it really doesn't make a difference which land G-d takes him to, as long as it is G- d Who is taking him there.

Up until that point in time Avraham had worked on his own, and with incredible and accurate results. Nevertheless, though he was larger than life he was still human, and capable of going only so far towards human perfection on his own. From the level he reached, he needed a guide, and not just any guide but THE Guide, the Creator Himself. Only G-d can show us who we really are and who we are meant to be. Only G-d can bring us to the level of the Heh.

Therefore, though it is one thing to want to find yourself, it is something else to actually do it. This is because just as man was meant to be a partner with G-d in bringing Creation to fulfillment, so too is G-d meant to be a partner in bringing us to completion. However, this is something He will only do if we let Him in on the journey, and if we travel with Him with a willingness to go wherever He takes us.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Nefesh HaChaim

Now I will explain what we began to discuss previously in Chapter Five, that man is called the "soul" and "living spirit" of countless worlds, since it cannot be that man acts exactly like the soul that is literally affixed within the body of man; that is not possible.

However, what this really means is: just as the limbs of the body act in accordance with the movements and direction of the living soul within him, so too do the forces, worlds, and sections of the Merkavah ("Chariot") respond to the actions of man - to be built up and perfected, or G-d forbid, destroyed. This is, as we said in Chapter Five, because he incorporates all the forces and the upper and lower worlds, since the root of his upper soul is higher than and the essence of the worlds themselves. And, though we stated another reason for this in the previous chapter, that all the

worlds contributed to his make-up, it is really the same idea.

For this reason, it is only he who must answer in judgment for his decisions, for having drawn himself and the worlds in the direction he chose. And, if he has caused through his sins, G-d forbid, destruction to the world and the order of the Merkavah, lowering them, he has the ability to rectify them and to rebuild that which he destroyed, since he incorporates them and is in partnership with them.

This is what Dovid HaMelech said, "G-d is your shadow on your right side" (Tehillim 121:5): just like a shadow moves in the same direction as that which casts it, so too does G-d cause the worlds to "shadow" the actions of man.

The Midrash explicitly states: G-d said to Moshe, "Go and tell the Israel that My name is, 'I will be what I will be.' " What does "I will be what I will" be mean? It means that, just as you are with Me, that is how I will be with you. This is what David meant when he said that "G-d is your shadow": with a shadow, if you laugh at it, it laughs at you; if you cry to it, it cries to you; if you present an angry or happy countenance, it will present to you likewise, and thus it is with G-d, "your shadow". As you are with Him, so He will respond to you.

In the Zohar it says:

Though the lower world must always receive... The upper world only gives to it based upon the situation of the standing of the lower world: if it radiates, then the upper world emanates light from above; if it is in a state of sorrow, then it triggers judgment; hence, serving G-d in joy is important because it draws joy to the person from above. Thus it is the way for the lower world, what it arouses that's what it draws from above... (Tetzaveh 184b)

This is what was indicated by the Keruvim, which embraced each other "as humans embrace, and as faces turn toward the other" (Melachim 7:36). However, the Keruvim made by Solomon "faced toward the Bayit"; the difference will be explained soon, G-d willing.

Have a great Shabbat,
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Text

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