GETTING TOGETHER AGAIN, FOR GOOD

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Yehudah approached [Yosef] and said, "My master, let your servant speak a word in my master's ears. Don't be angry with your servant, for you are like Pharaoh." (Bereishit 44:18)

The world has become so very complicated. There are so many nations, so many people in the world, and so many different ways of life. The world has also come a long way since the days of the Shevatim and it seems to have absolutely no connection to anything going on in these parshiot. Today, these parshiot are just something taken seriously by a bunch of religious Jews (and gentiles too) who believe that the Torah really came from G-d at Mt. Sinai.

"Hey, a person is entitled to believe what he wants to believe", millions of disbelievers would say, "but don't interrupt some important board meeting with a discussion about how the way we run the business is directly related to the stories of the Bible!" Even for religious Jews who work in the gentile world there seems to be two realities: a religious one and a business one, and nary do the twain meet.

A mistake? Indeed, a mistake so big that it really is just a replication of the very first one, as we shall now discuss, b'ezrat Hashem. Chanukah may be over, but hopefully its effects are not. Perhaps that is the deeper reason why we light the menorah for eight days, and eat enough latkes for twice that many days: to keep Chanukah "alive" even after it is over.

The question is, what did we gain (besides weight)? We are told that the light of Chanukah is the light of Yemot HaMoshiach, but what does that mean, practically-speaking? We are taught that one of the four places that G-d "hid" the Original Light of Creation with which He made Creation, performed miracles in Egypt, split the sea, and gave Torah, is in the Nerot Shel Chanukah. But where? What is THAT supposed to mean, and again, practically-speaking?

What does having access to the Ohr HaGanuz (the Hidden Light of Creation) mean? It has always meant the difference between the Aitz HaDa'at Tov v'Rah the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), and the Aitz HaChaim (the Tree of Life) — two very different approaches to knowledge, and two dramatically different approaches to reach the same place with dramatically different results, as we have seen.

As the Arizal explained, eventually Adam HaRishon would have been able to eat from the Aitz

HaDa'at Tov v'Rah. There was never a question of it, but how, and when? According to the Zohar, the only tree in the Garden of Eden before the sin was the Aitz HaChaim, and every other "tree" in the Garden at that time was actually only a branch off of the Tree of Life, each particular tree possessing its own unique fruit.

According to the Ohr HaChaim, had Adam HaRishon eaten from the Aitz HaChaim first, he would have simultaneously tasted from every other tree in the Garden in that single bite — All of the trees at one time! How could that be possible? Even if you put five different fruits in your mouth at one time (but I don't suggest doing this), you could never taste each independent fruit simultaneously. The best you could do is to taste something that was a combination of all the different tastes.

If you wanted to be able to taste a particular fruit, you would have to eat it by itself before moving onto the next fruit. And that is precisely what Adam HaRishon did: he ate specifically from the Aitz HaDa'at Tov v'Rah, Completely by-passing the Aitz HaChaim in order to do so, and that is why the world is the way it is today. That is the reason why the brothers sold Yosef into slavery, and why the world has become what it is today: trillions of details and tremendous over-specialization. This is because the Aitz HaDa'at Tov v'Rah was a tree of details, of all the countless facts that make up Creation and explain how creation works. The Aitz HaChaim, on the other hand, is the single thread that unites them all, the "why" of Creation, the philosophical basis of all of existence that gives meaning to all the many details, no matter how different and varied they may be, just like it was at Mt. Sinai when the Torah was given.

SHABBAT DAY:

The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil were in the middle of the garden. (Bereishit 2:9)

At the base of Mt. Sinai, 3,000,000 Jews were camped, or should we say, 4.5 million opinions! A Jew tends to be quite individualistic, and then some, and though each opinion may be valid in its own right at the right time, taken together with millions of other opinions at one time can result in nothing less than near-total chaos. At the very least, it results in the reality of the Aitz HaDa'at Tov v'Rah.

Yet, we are told, at Mt. Sinai just the opposite happened: they camped k'ish echad b'leiv echad — like a single person with a single heart. That is, with A SINGLE OPINION! The experience of Sinai, the revelation of G-d, and ultimately the giving of His Torah was an experience on the level of the Aitz HaChaim... on the level of the Ohr HaGanuz... automatically "electrifying" the various and unique parts of the Jewish people into a single, well-organized whole — pure synergy.

This is the most important part: by becoming part of the whole, was the identity of the individual lost or enhanced? By psychologically melting into a single whole, did each individual Jew surrender his personality, as in the case of cults? Or, did each individual become an even more unique personality as part of the Klal? The latter, of course, and the question is why? The answer, of course, is because of the Ohr HaGanuz. Or, even more to the point, the Aitz HaChaim.

As we said before, the Aitz HaChaim was a single tree, yet when a branch grew out from it, it formed a tree unto itself, even though it came from one trunk and was nourished by the same roots as every other branch on the tree. This meant that the potential for every other tree that could ever exist had to already exist in the very being of the Aitz HaChaim, a potential that was fulfilled once the tree emerged as its own separate branch.

This is why tasting from the Aitz HaChaim, which according to the Ohr HaChaim was its bark, provided one with a taste of every other tree in the Garden, all at the same time. After all, what is taste? Is it discerned in the mouth? No, it is decided in the brain based upon information that may originate in the mouth, but it is the brain that decides what tastes sweet, or sour, or bitter. It is an intellectual reality, which is why learning and understanding are often defined in eating terms.

In other words, our limited ability to taste more than one thing at the same time comes from the mouth's inability to do so; the brain is capable of achieving far more than our senses allow it to. It is our physical limitations than greatly limit our spiritual capabilities, something the Torah and Chanukah came to expand... to show us how to surpass so that we can accomplish the impossible. Well, this may be physically-impossible, but not spiritually-impossible.

In fact, the Kabbalists explain that on the level of Sod, unlike the levels of Torah below it, knowledge isn't simply learned and retained. It is a state of being. Indeed, just describing a purely Kabbalistic idea in words has the effect of lowering the idea into the everyday world of the mundane, removing from the realm of Sod down into the level of Drush, Remez, and even of Pshat — something we seemed forced to do as a result of the sin of eating from the Aitz HaDa'at Tov v'Rah. It is a perfect example of the idea: "yeridah tzorech aliyah", a "going down for the sake of going up".

On the level of Sod, on the level of the revealed Ohr HaGanuz knowledge just is, and the person who merits to reach this level "just is" with that knowledge as well. He is one with it, and being a part of him eliminates the need to articulate that knowledge to himself, for he feels all his knowledge simultaneously, resulting in a tremendous sense of connectivity to all knowledge, or more precisely, All Knowledge, G-d Himself.

Thus, when Adam HaRishon ate from the Aitz HaDa'at Tov v'Rah, he had approached knowledge from an individual detailed point of view, transforming the world of knowledge, and therefore the rest of Creation for that matter, into a world of individual details — countless individual details. And, though all those details may be pearls of wisdom unto themselves, without the strand to join them together into a unified whole, the Aitz HaChaim lacks the brilliance of a beautiful pearl necklace, and true "Shalom Bayit".

This, therefore, was the underlying cause of the brothers' rejection of Yosef, and at the same time, the reason why the world has become a place of countless details and little unity. It is the reason why jokes like, "Two Jews, three opinions" exist at all: they are all the result of Adam HaRishon's path to knowledge, of a world that has come to represent the Aitz HaDa'at Tov v'Rah more than the Aitz

HaChaim, something that Chanukah came to help us turn around.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

He sent Yehudah ahead to Yosef to prepare for their arrival. They traveled to the land of Goshen. (Bereishit 46:28)

Thus, when Yehudah goes down to meet Yosef, it is a big event, not just for Ya'akov's entire family but for all of mankind. The unification of the family, which must eventually happen, is an important step towards the unification of the Aitz HaDa'at Tov v'Rah with the Aitz HaChaim. This is the Chanukah message, and this is what happens when the Ohr HaGanuz, the light of Creation, the light of the Final Redemption, the light of Yemot HaMoshiach, shines for eight days, something that is alluded to in the parshah itself:

He sent Yehudah ahead to Yosef to prepare for their arrival. They traveled to the land of Goshen (Goshnah). (Bereishit 46:28)

As many commentators point out, the word "Goshnah" is spelled: Gimmel-Shin- Nun-Heh, the very same letters on the side of the dreidel (in the Diaspora) that allude to the words: Neis Gadol Hayah Shum — a "Great Miracle Happened There".

Perhaps more striking is the Haftarah itself, which reads:

The word of G-d came to me to say: "You, Son of Man, take one piece of wood and write on it, 'For Yehudah and the Children of Israel, his friends', and one piece of wood and write on it, 'For Yosef, the wood of Ephraim and the entire House of Israel, his friends'. Bring them together each to the other to become one piece of wood, and they will become one in your hands. When they say to you, your people, 'What does this mean?' Tell them, so says G-d, 'Behold, I will take the wood of Yosef which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Yisroel, his friends, and I will put on them the wood of Yehudah and make them one wood, and they will become one in My hand'." (Yechezkel 37:1)

We might have asked the question, why two sticks, and why must they become one in the prophet's hand? For one is clearly the Aitz HaDa'at Tov v'Rah and the other is the Aitz HaChaim, and their unity represents the unity not just of the Shevatim, but of all of Creation, resulting in the Garden of Eden in which we will only eat from the Aitz HaChaim, and be able to taste every aspect of Creation at the same time, while preserving the identity of uniqueness of each at the same time.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Nefesh HaChaim, Ch. 15

This is remarkable, since the Neshamah is referred to as the breath (neshimah), which appears to the eye as that which ascends from the heart. It is also on the level of the Ohr Chozer (returning light), which is not considered to be on such a high level (in the Sefirot). However, the reference to "breath" is not to that of men, but to the breath that emanates from the mouth of G-d, so-to-speak, as the

verse says, *"And he breathed into his nostrils a living soul"* (Bereishit 2:7).

The rabbis made a comparison between the soul of man and the breath of a glassmaker when discussing the resurrection the dead:

It can be deduced from an inference from the minor to the major: A glass container created by the breath of man... flesh-and-blood, which is the product of the breath of G-d, how much more so... (Sanhedrin 91a; the same is found in Shochar Tov, Tehillim Mizmor 2; see there.)

We can distinguish three levels of breath from the mouth of the craftsman in the vessel at the time of its creation. The first level is the breath while it is still in his mouth, before it makes its way down the hollow tube; this is called "Neshimah". The second level is the breath after it has entered and travels straight down the tube; this is called "Ruach" — Wind. The third level is the final stage of the breath which occurs after the breath leaves the tube and fills the vessel, as the glassmaker desires; this is called "Nefesh", which denotes "stopping" and "resting". Analogously, the three levels of souls: Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah, begin as the "breath" of G-d and end below within the body of man as the Nefesh. The Ruach is that which is "poured" from above, its highest point being attached to the lowest point of Neshamah. It enters into the body of man and is attached to the highest point of the Nefesh. This is alluded to by the verses *"Until You will pour upon us ruach from the heights"* (Yeshayahu 32:15). And, *"I will pour My spirit"* (Yoel 3:1). It has an impact on man as a kind of "pouring", as we will explain later in more detail, G-d willing (in Chapter 17), with regard to the "joining."

The Neshamah is the internal, hidden breath, its source being the "breath" of G-d's mouth, so-to-speak. Its essence never enters the body of man, except in the case of Adam HaRishon before he sinned. However, because of the sin it was withdrawn and now only "hovers" above man, with the exception of Moshe Rabbeinu who also possessed this essence within his body. Thus, he was called a "Man of G-d" (Devarim 33:1, etc.). However, other than Moshe no other man has merited more than the sparks of light that emanate from the Neshamah to the head of a man, each one according to his level.

In the Zohar, it says:

"And G-d breathed into his nostrils a living soul" This is the personage on a man (Rayah Mehemna, Naso 123b)

and again,

If he merits, then greatness will descend upon him from above... a holiness will be aroused from above and will settle upon him, completely enveloping him; what settles upon him is from high up, from the upper place. What is it called? It is called Neshamah. (Zohar Chadash, Rut, 643)

This provides man with extra understanding with which he can penetrate to the inner knowledge of our holy Torah, as it says in the Zohar:

The Neshamah arouses understanding in man (Lech Lecha 79b).

And in the Zohar Chadash:

It arouses within him wisdom from above (Rut 64a).

It also says in the Aitz Chaim:

Not everyone merits this... Know that it is by the strength of his actions... That he will be able to remember Torah well and understand the secrets of Torah... And that they will reveal to him the correct secrets of Torah. (Sha'ar Mochin d'Katnut, Chapter 3; etc.)

This is what the verse says:

It is the spirit (ruach) within man and the breath of G-d that gives them understanding. (Iyov 32:8)

What he refers to is the Ruach, which is linked to, and affects man from within, and also to the Neshamah, which is the "breath of G-d," that is, the "breath" of His mouth. Its essence does not directly influence or find revelation within man, for it dwells in the "heights," within the "mouth" of G-d, so-to-speak. However, it does provide understanding through the sparks of its light, in order to allow comprehension of the mysterious depths of the holy Torah.

Thus, when the Zohar and the Kabbalists say that the Neshamah dwells within the brain, they merely refer to its sparks of light, which allow the brain to understand; they do not mean its actual essence.

In fact, the main reference is to the three primary levels of the Ruach, the basis of the brain, which at times emanates light and which at times the light is also withdrawn. It is they that provide additional light to those who merit it, as it is well known; they do not refer to the essence of the Neshamah. Our great and pious teacher, the Vilna Gaon, likewise said the same thing in Heichalah Tinyana.

It is all the same thing in the end, for the lower end of the Neshamah that gives off sparks into the mind to understand, are the three primary levels of the Ruach that is in a person's brain, as we will explain, G-d willing.

Have a great Shabbat,
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Text

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