

KIDDUSH AND BLESSING

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

We were talking about Kiddush on Friday night. The idea is to transform it from a perfunctory act to one of the most important of the entire week. Like everything in life it's a question of knowing what is at stake, and what can be done about it.

Last week we discussed the first paragraph of Kiddush. This week we will look at the second paragraph, ב"ה, and connect it to this week's parsha.

The second paragraph of Friday Night Kiddush is about Yetzias Mitzrayim—the leaving of Egypt. It is the other incredibly important event of history, especially Jewish history. "Ma'aseh Bereishis" is about the creation of the world. Yetzias Mitzrayim is about the creation of the Jewish people who justify the creation of the world when they live according to Torah.

As mentioned in halachah, the technical importance of Kiddush on Friday night is that there there is a mitzvah, based upon a verse, to verbally sanctify the day of Shabbos. It doesn't require that much focus and concentration to accomplish that.

You have to look into the teachings of the Arizal to better understand what does. It is Kabbalah that reveals the true spiritual opportunity of a true spiritual moment, especially Kiddush.

Like everything in life, it has to do with tikun—rectification. Mitzvos may prove a person's loyalty and earn them reward in the World-to-Come. Primarily, they allow a person to partner up with God in perfecting Creation.

When a child is born, he has a lot more than he actually uses. For example, his brain already has tremendous capacity, but so much of it goes unused, not yet filled with knowledge and experience.

First, it is the role of the parents first, then of the educators, to draw light into the brain of the child. As a child grows older, light will be "poured" into his mental vessel like water into an empty container. Once a child learns the importance of knowledge, he will continue the process of mental development on his own.

It works the same with Creation. The upper spiritual realm was created perfect from Day One. It anchors Creation and remains unaffected by the actions of man to protect Creation from TOO much destruction. It is only the lower levels of sefiros that man can impact by what he does.

Here's the story. It is the bottom seven sefiros that require rectification, especially the final one, the Malchus. It's what gives our free will meaning, because it is our free will decisions that either draw

light into the empty vessels of Creation, or cause it to leave.

Just like a child who becomes more learned becomes more “rectified,” so do the sefiros become more rectified when they receive additional light. This is reflected in how much more constructive or destructive history is. War may seem like just an unnecessary by-product of human history, but it is really what develops when the sefiros that govern our history become light-deprived.

What does this have to do with Kiddush? A lot. The Arizal explained that the person making Kiddush is in place of the six sefiros of Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod, otherwise known as “Zehr Anpin.” The Kiddush cup itself corresponds to the final sefirah of Malchus.

Thus, by saying Kiddush, Divine light is drawn down from the upper three sefiros of Zehr Anpin—its Chochmah, Binah, and Da’as—to the upper three sefiros of the Malchus. Its “vessels” are filled with light they did not have, making the Malchus more complete, more perfect.

Of course, if a person does not know much Kabbalah, these words will probably be meaningless. Translating them into everyday terms, they mean that the world becomes a better place. Mankind becomes less crazy. God-awareness goes up. How much? That will all depend upon how many people make Kiddush on Friday night, and their level of intention.

Like with all prayer, the actual act has a limited amount of power to ascend to the upper heights. It is kavanah—intention—that takes prayer the final distance to its ultimate destination. Simply, the more kavanah a person has, the more powerful his or her prayer will be.

The Zohar goes to great lengths to speak about the power of kavanah when it comes to prayer. Just to get to a stage that kavanah can even make a difference, a person has to say each word perfectly correct. Speed might be okay in an emergency, like when your flight is about to board and you have five minutes to pray. Without a sound halachic reason to pray quickly, it will strip prayer of its potential to improve life.

The kavanah is what “impresses” the upper realm. The Zohar says that words properly prayed and with the right kind of kavanah are greeted by special angels who crown each word. Then they present them to God Himself, and then He showers blessing on the source of such spiritual beauty. A lack of blessing does not mean that God is not listening. More than likely, it means that we’re not praying the way we should.

When it comes to Kiddush, it is not just about prayer. It is about saying thank you. In Kiddush, we praise God for the creation of the world, and of the Jewish nation. We show Him extreme gratitude for being blessed with the mitzvah of Kiddush, and the potential to make a difference to Creation.

It’s all about appreciation. That is what the blessings and curses in this week’s parsha emphasize. The parsha starts with blessing because God does as well. He blesses us in more ways than we can notice, and all He expects back from us is our appreciation.

Abuse it, lose it. The curses are not merely punishment. One of the saddest of human conditions is that we tend not to appreciate the good we have until we lose it. The curses are what happen when we lose the blessings we once enjoyed, but neglected to appreciate. Friday Night Kiddush is a good time to avoid that, and the curses that can follow if, God forbid, we do.