

MEKADESH HASHABBOS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday night Kiddush is a highpoint of the week for me. It has been for years now, starting from when I learned the halachah about how it is an important “segulah” for parnassah, making a living. Few things get a person's attention and kavanah—intention—more than an opportunity to make more money. For some people, not even health beats it.

The experience became more intense for me as the years went on. The combination of Friday night itself, after shul and ready to eat a delicious seudah, b"H, together with a sense of gratitude for the previous week, increased my desire to say thank you to God. This was even more so if I had a really productive week.

A slowly-said and well-intentioned Friday night Kiddush seemed to me like a great opportunity to show appreciation to God. I am usually more relaxed and spiritually focused at that time of week.

Once I began to learn a little Kabbalah, my Kiddush went to the next level. The first paragraph of Kiddush recalls how God made Creation and rested on Shabbos. Kabbalah taught me a little of what that really means. I try to go through some of that in mind while saying the words.

Of course not everyone participating in my Kiddush knows that. In fact, I have to worry sometimes about people not paying attention to every word of Kiddush, as they should. It is not easy to remain focused when someone else is saying Kiddush, and slowly at that. Not that they remain focused on every word of Kiddush when the “Mekadesh” goes fast either.

One guest, a relative, recently asked me about the speed at which I recite Kiddush. “Why do you make Kiddush so slowly?” they asked. “It almost sounds like you are performing for your guests.”

I was so taken aback by the comment that I didn't answer it until the next day. Here I was trying to reach great heights of spiritual consciousness at one of the holiest moments of the week, and I was being “accused” of showmanship? Yech.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized where the question was coming from. For so many people, Kiddush seems to be a perfunctory act, a halachic key to open the door to a delicious meal. The meal is the climax making Kiddush just a stepping stone to it.

It became a good opportunity to turn things around and set things straight.

To begin with, there is a Torah mitzvah to verbally sanctify the day of Shabbos. Most opinions hold that a man fulfills this mitzvah in his Friday night Shemonah Esrai when he makes the brochah,

"Mekadesh HaShabbos." Nevertheless, some say there is a second Torah mitzvah to do so again over a cup of wine, while others say that there is at least a rabbinical mitzvah to do so.

The first paragraph of Kiddush recounts Ma'aseh Bereishis—Creation. For many, Creation was as simple and as brief as it seems to be recorded in the Torah. They are unaware of the many intricate steps NOT mentioned in the Torah, but which are the basis of some of the deepest Kabbalistic discussions.

How many people have heard of the concept of Sheviras HaKeilim—the breaking of the vessels? Which vessels, how did they break, and who was responsible? Were they insured?

It turns out that God did it. You see, He had in mind from the very beginning, which incidentally goes back a long way before the first day of Creation, to make a world that allows for evil. Evil He decided was necessary for free will, the entire point of Creation.

Nice idea. However, it created a philosophical dilemma, though not one God couldn't solve. God is ALL good. Everything He creates is ALL good. How then can evil exist and not be ALL good, and therefore, not evil?

Back to the drawing board? Not necessary. Instead, God decided to make a perfectly IMPERFECT world. He decided to make Creation, our world, from "broken pieces," to allow for built-in imperfection, and therefore, evil.

When He got around to rebuilding the pieces back into Creation, He did it on FIVE levels. There are not one but FIVE levels of reality, each one more spiritual than the one below it. They act like a spiritual ladder to climb closer to God by shunning evil, or away from Him by choosing it.

The amazing thing is how two people can walk the same earth, yet live on two entirely different planes of reality. The higher up the level of spiritual consciousness, the more accurate the vision of truth, and the more meaning a person can derive from his or her life.

That is part and parcel with the special light God made on the first day of Creation. On the surface of it, light is light. Deeper down, there is the physical light of which we make use everyday, and there is a spiritual light which only spiritually privileged people can access. It is hidden from most people, and therefore called the "Ohr HaGanuz"—the Hidden Light.

Rashi alludes to this light when explaining the fourth verse. He mentions that God, concerned about abuse by the evil people of Creation, hid the light for the righteous at a future time. Kabbalah explains that "future time" also includes the rest of history. It turns out that hiding THIS light from evil people meant allowing access only to those whose actions allow it, like righteous people.

Though two people can look at the exact same thing, if one of them is righteous and one is evil, they will see the thing differently. For the righteous person its inner light will be visible to him and he will learn truth. For the evil person, the thing will be spiritually opaque, and he will not understand it on

its more profound level of existence.

It is this light that is the basis of Torah. Each letter of a Sefer Torah is a conduit for the Ohr HaGanuz. Someone who learns Torah correctly, and for the right reasons, will gain access to the Hidden Light of Creation and the splendor of existence it reveals. What a tremendous gift!

All of this is included in the first paragraph of Kiddush. And more. We're just getting started, so this will be a multi-part series of essays, b"H.