

TWO HALVES/ONE WHOLE

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

The Maggid from Mezritch said: "The matter of Matan Torah [The Giving of the Torah] is to draw the Ten Commandments within the Ten Utterances with which G-d created the World. In other words, our spiritual goal on the Holy Days of Shabuot is too combine the matters of the physical world with the teachings of the Torah so that they mesh and become one.

This would answer a difficulty in the Talmud. The Gemara in Pesachim 68b relates a dispute as to our behavior on the holidays. Should one devote the entire day to spiritual pursuits or should one divide his or her activities between spiritual and physical enjoyment? The Gemara then states that even the one who holds that on the other holy days one should be totally immersed in the spiritual, requires physical pleasures - eating and drinking - on Shabuot. One would think it should be the opposite. The other days that celebrate our physical freedom from bondage - Pesah - and our physical protection from the elements in the desert for 40 years - Sukkot - should involve physical pursuits but the Holy day of the Giving of the Torah should, on the other hand, be totally of the spirit! Only if one realizes that our job is to combine the spiritual world of Torah with the physical world does one realize why one is required to enjoy both types of pleasure on Shabuot.

This would explain the reason why one must not interrupt between the donning of the tefillin of the arm with the tefillin of the head. [Ashkenazic custom is to say a separate blessing on each - Sefaradim do not interrupt even with a blessing]. The tefillin of the arm symbolize the mundane activities and actions of the physical world while the tefillin of the head represent the spiritual pursuits. Since we must not separate the two we are not allowed to interrupt between donning the two types of tefillin.

In Shulhan Arukh, Siman 47:10 we are instructed to recite blessings before embarking on the study of Torah every morning. Although we interrupt our learning at different times during the day the blessing said in the morning is sufficient for all learning that day. Why is this so? We see with other commandments that are repeated throughout a day - with interruptions - like sitting and eating in a Sukkah - that we do in fact recite a blessing each time we do the misvah not merely once in the morning for the whole day.

The answer is that an interruption takes us away from the performance of the commandment and therefore we are required to say a new blessing when we perform the misvah again. One must keep Torah on one's mind all day long. There are laws that outline how one is to dress, speak, do business, and relate to others etc. The laws of the Torah involve EVERY aspect of life . As long as the

individual is awake one does not really take one's mind off of the Torah. Even while involved in mundane pursuits the involvement is constant. Therefore, one set of blessings per day is sufficient.

The day the Torah was given is also a day annually that one may draw on potent spiritual emanations that fill the atmosphere on that day. The ability to re-accept devotion and submission of all of one's pursuits to the dictates of the Torah are available every year on Shabuot. Let us all approach the day with resolve to mesh the physical aspects of our lives with the lofty ideals and principles of our Holy Torah. May our renewed dedication find favor in the eyes of Hashem so that He will bring the coming of Mashiah and complete redemption speedily and in our days.

A LESSON FROM THE STORY OF RUTH

Boaz, the leader of the Jewish people, praised Ruth, the Moabite princess who married Naomi's son, for 2 great attributes. First, he commended her kindness towards her widowed mother in law. Second, he praised her self-sacrifice in leaving the palace of her father to accompany her mother in law to the land of Israel and to a life of abject poverty.

It seems that the priorities are reversed. It is only natural that a young lady feels mercy for her widowed in-law and shower her with kindness to ease her difficult life situation. It is surely commendable, but also expected behavior for anyone with common decency. But to leave the lap of luxury of the royal palace in order to live a life of poverty is truly a test that most would fail and, therefore, truly commendable. The fact that these two reasons are stated together and in this particular order teaches a great lesson.

The Torah places the attribute of kindness first so that we would learn and appreciate the value of kind deeds in the eyes of G-d. Says Rabbi Henach Leibowitz, "A small hesed - kindness - done in a meticulous and loving manner, with strong and sincere kavanah - intent - to do the will of G-d, can have a spiritual impact greater than Ruth's monumental sacrifice to become a Jew. It was this act of heartfelt hesed that was the primary reason for her deserving the eternal reward of the royal dynasty of David Hamelech and his descendants."

We have just completed our count to perfection --the Omer. As we approach the holy days of Shabuot we should realize that acts of kindness are much more than just good deeds. They serve as the Misvah to emulate G-d. May we all increase our benevolence towards others with sincerity and generosity and bring the coming of Mashiah, the descendant of Ruth, speedily and in our days-- Amen!

Hag Sameah and Shabbat Shalom

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