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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

Our Role in Endowing Kedusha

Kedusha permeates many aspects of Avodas Hashem. There are four aspects of kedusha which, although different from one another, have unifying themes in common. There is kedushas makom, the sanctity of a geographic location such as the Beis Hamikdash and Eretz Yisrael; kedushas zman, the endowing of time with holiness, which includes Shabbos and yom tov; the words of Torah are holy and therefore sifrei Torah, tefillin and mezuzos are treated as sacred objects; and performance of mitzvos are an expression of kedusha that is incorporated into the text that is recited prior to mitzvah observance, " אשר קידשנו במצותיו".

For one to create a halachic status, it is often necessary that the particular area of halacha be relevant to the one attempting to do so. For example, one who is not obligated or does not wear tefillin is disqualified from writing the parshiyos for tefillin. Similarly, a non-Jew cannot be a shochet or a mohel because these mitzvos are not relevant to them. Following this model, only one who is endowed with kedusha could impart kedusha to other entities. Parshas Kedoshim begins with the identification of two sources of kedusha. The ultimate source of all kedusha is Hashem, Who is described as "כי קדוש אני ה' אלוהיכם". The Jewish people are commanded to emulate the characteristic of kedushas Hashem and are instructed to attain the level of "קדושים תהיו". Only Hakadosh Baruch Hu and His holy nation can, in turn, endow kedusha on others. Within the four dimensions of kedusha, Hashem and Klal Yisrael endow this sanctity.

There are two parts of kedushas makom, the kedusha of the Beis Hamikdash and of Eretz Yisrael. Halachically, these kedushas are each endowed differently. The Rambam explains this distinction between them as emanating from different sources. Hashem's Presence sanctifies the Beis Hamikdash, whereas Eretz Yisrael receives its holiness from the conquest and settlement of the land by the Jewish People. It is this distinction that results in a difference whether the kedusha can ever be removed. Concerning Eretz Yisrael, the laws that relate to agriculture depend on the status the Jewish People have in the land. At times the mitzvos of teruma, ma'aser and shemita may not be applicable d'oraysa if the vehicle that creates kedushas Eretz Yisrael, which is Klal Yisrael, is not present. Kedushas Beis Hamikdash, which results from Hashem, can never be suspended. The Rambam observes that "שכינה אינה בטלה" - the Divine Presence that sanctified the BeisHamikdash can never be removed.

Similarly, in the realm of kedushas zman there is a fundamental difference between Shabbos and yom tov. Hashem sanctifies Shabbos and therefore Shabbos existed before the birth of the

Jewish People. Yom tov cannot exist without Klal Yisrael as it is the Jewish People that sanctifies Rosh Chodesh, thereby bringing about kedushas yom tov. Chazal highlight this difference in how they formulated the text of the tefillah and kiddush. On Shabbos we refer to Hashem as the One who is "מקדש שבת", and only on yom tov do we refer to Klal Yisrael as the prerequisite to kedushas yom tov by saying "מקדש ישראל והזמנים".

Within the world of Torah knowledge there are two aspects of kedusha. The תורה שבעל פה and the parts of the תורה שכתב that were transmitted directly to Moshe on Har Sinai which were endowed with kedushas haTorah by Hashem. The Torah was given to Klal Yisrael to analyze and interpret properly. The portion of תורה שבעל פה that emanates from Chazal using the rules transmitted to משה רבינו as to how to correctly understand תורה attains its kedushas haTorah from kedushas Klal Yisrael. In the realm of mitzvah observance there are mitzvos from the Torah itself and others that were instituted by Chazal. We recite the identical beracha, "אשר קידשנו במצותיו", when we perform mitzvos such as matzo and shofar that were given directly by Hashem and when we light Chanuka candles and read the Megillah which were instituted by Chazal.

Kedusha bestowed by Hashem and by Klal Yisrael are related to one another. In the realm of kedushas makom this is apparent in the way Eretz Yisrael is sanctified. The method of conquest is accompanied by representation of the Beis Hamikdash. The special Kohen Gadol that goes out to accompany those sanctifying the land and the Aron that joins the battle highlight that the kedusha of Eretz Yisrael is an outgrowth of kedushas Hamikdash. Similarly, the yomim tovim are dependent upon Shabbos, as Shabbos is described as the "חוליה למקראי קדש" - the first of the holy days." Concerning Torah and mitzvos, halachos instituted by Chazal are modeled after direct word of Hashem - "כל דתקון רבנן כעין דאורייתא תיקון". The halachic guidelines that govern מצוות דרבנן are parallel to מצוות דאורייתא. The goal of דינים דאורייתא is to preserve and enhance our observance of דינים דרבנן. Our privilege to endow place and time with sanctity and to incorporate דינים דרבנן into תורה ומצוות is contingent on our knowledge as to the source of our kedusha. "קדושים תהיו כי קדוש" - by imitating Hashem and living up to the standards of kedusha incumbent upon us, we are granted the opportunity to partner with Hashem in bringing kedusha to the world.

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Food For Thought

By Rabbi Reuven Taragin

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Sitting and Eating

The second Mishna of Avot's third perek quotes Rebbe Chanina ben Teradyon's statement about the importance of sharing Torah with those we sit with. The very next Mishna quotes Rebbe Shimon, who emphasizes the need to share Torah with those we eat with. What is the relationship between these two statements? Does sharing Torah at a meal have additional significance?

What We Are Sustaining

The Chasid Yavetz explains that sharing Torah at meals is uniquely important because it defines and expresses how we view our lives. Man, like an animal, needs to eat to sustain his life. That said, our existence means more than that of animals. We need to express this distinction when we eat, like animals, to sustain our lives; we do so by sharing Torah with those we eat with.

The Netziv (Ber. 2:7) sees the source of the difference between human and animal life in how Bereishit describes their creation. In contrast to animals, which Bereishit defines as “alive” as soon as they were created, Adam is depicted as “alive” only after Hashem added his soul. Because man’s life is meant to include spirituality, Bereishit describes him as alive only once Hashem added his soul.

In his commentary on Devarim, the Netziv uses this idea to explain why the Torah links our lives to mitzvah observance. A person is only described as “living” when he realizes his ultimate purpose. The more a person fulfills mitzvot, the more alive he is. Onkelos makes this point in a subtle yet powerful way. The Torah states that man does not live by bread alone, but rather through G-d’s word (Dev. 8:3). Whereas the Torah uses the same word (“yichye”) to describe man’s survival from both food and the word of G-d, Onkelos employs a different term to translate the latter – “chaye” as opposed to “mitkayem.” Although we can survive on bread, we only truly live when we include G-d in our lives.

This also explains Rebbe Akiva’s famous comparison of a Jew’s need for Torah to a fish’s dependency upon water (Ber. 61a). A person can survive physically without Torah, but he dies spiritually. This is why reshaim, even when alive, are considered dead: their lives are no deeper than their physical existence.

Food For Thought

Lacking this perspective can allow the pursuit of food and survival to cloud our judgment. When we are tired and hungry, we are anxious to revive and sustain ourselves. This anxiety can cause us to lose sight of our life’s bigger picture and purpose, and eat like animals rather than human beings.

Eisav is an excellent example of this phenomenon. The Torah tells us that Eisav denigrated his bechorh (firstborn rights), to which he was naturally entitled, by trading them for a bowl of lentils. Why did he make the trade? The Torah explains that he returned home tired and hungry. In that state, he “reasoned” that, as he would die in any case, he had no need for the bechora. His hunger caused Eisav to ignore the value of anything beyond sustaining his physical existence.

In contrast to Eisav, we know that our lives matter because we use them to pursue valuable goals. We emulate our ancestor, Yaakov, who worked to acquire the bechor rights for himself and his descendants. The Kuzari (3:1-30) uses this idea to explain the purpose of the berachot we recite before and after eating. The berachot express our appreciation of the special significance of sustaining our lives, as opposed to those of animals. Both man and animal eat to maintain life, but our lives hold greater meaning. We express and reinforce this distinction by thanking Hashem for our food.

In our Mishna, Rebbe Shimon teaches us that we should express this appreciation not only by thanking Hashem for our food but also by placing the most meaningful aspect of our lives – Torah learning – on the table. By sharing Torah at meals, we express our belief that the lives we sustain matter because of the Torah we learn and the mitzvot we fulfill.

We Are Why We Eat

Rebbe Shimon adds that those who do not share Torah at meals are considered as eating from “zivchei meisim.” The Chasid Yavetz explains this term as referring to the consumer’s status, since the food is, of course, dead. Because one who does not include Torah as part of his meal is not alive, he eats a meal that belongs to the dead. Though the food he eats sustains his physical life, his lack of emphasis on his life’s meaning causes us to regard him as dead.

Elevating Our Meals

Rebbe Shimon adds that, in contrast, one who does share Torah at a meal is viewed as eating from G-d’s table. A Torah context elevates a meal to the point where we are considered as eating from Hashem’s table.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik expressed a similar idea: “Transforming an animal need into an act of worship is a uniquely Jewish idea. The table is referred to in our tradition as an altar, and meals which are associated with religious observances are called seudot mitzvah (Reflections of the Rav, pg. 214).”

Rav Soloveichik spoke of a seudat mitzvah – a meal associated with mitzvah. Rebbe Shimon teaches us that even regular meals, eaten as part of our daily lives, can be elevated by sharing Torah at them.

We live in a world that regards food, along with sexuality, as ends in themselves rather than as means of survival. This reflects and reinforces a lack of appreciation for life’s deeper meaning and purpose.

Let’s make sure to share Torah over meals to define our lives properly. May this commitment to our spiritual journey give us access to Hashem’s table!

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Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

Usually, reaction to defeat and tragedy is the true defining moment of one’s inner strength and faith. Aharon’s silence in the face of the loss of his two older sons is reckoned in Jewish tradition as an act of nobility and sublime acceptance of the unfathomable judgment of Heaven.

Contrast Aharon’s silence and humble acceptance of fate with the response of Iyov to his troubles and tragedies. Iyov has a great deal to say, to complain against, to bitterly question and to debate almost endlessly with his companions and visitors as to the unfairness of what has befallen him. To the human eye, we are all aware that life and its events are often unfair.

There is no one that I am aware of that has successfully “explained” the Holocaust. So it seems that we are faced with two diametrically opposed choices as to the proper response to mindless fate and tragedy. Are we to remain mute and silent or are we to rail against the arrogant fate that has brought misfortune to us?

The Torah does not seem to inform us about this and in fact, as shown above, apparently even contradicts itself regarding this continually recurring facet of human existence. Yet the Torah and all the books that it contains is one seamless whole, and the seeming contradictions lie within us and not within its holy words and exalted ideas. We are brought to study this matter with greater introspection and with less judgment and personal bias.

I think that the Torah means to teach us that there is no one correct, one-size-fits-all response to the failures and tragedies of life. Aharon is correct in his response to inexplicable tragedy and so is Iyov. King Solomon correctly noted that there is a time for silence and a time for speech. So too there are people for whom mute silence is the proper response to tragedy and there are people who must give expression to their feelings of grief and frustration by words, debate and even complaint. In most instances the rabbis of the Talmud voted for silence

over speech and acceptance of one's fate over complaint and public debate. Yet the rabbis did not exclude the book of Iyov from the biblical canon of holy books. In that act of inclusion, they allowed varying degrees of response to troubles and travail.

Iyov also has a place in the pantheon of heroic human views regarding tragic events. Within limits and with a faith-based attitude one can question and complain, express wonderment and even somehow demand answers. But, deep down, all humans understand that they cannot fathom Heaven's wisdom, decisions and the individual fate that is visited upon us all. So the death of Aharon's sons serves as a template for life, a lesson for all of us.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Love Is Not Enough

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Life-Changing Ideas Acharai Mot, Kedoshim

The opening chapter of Kedoshim contains two of the most powerful of all commands: to love your neighbour and to love the stranger. "Love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord" goes the first. "When a stranger comes to live in your land, do not mistreat him," goes the second, and continues, "Treat the stranger the way you treat your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were strangers in Egypt. I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:33-34).[1]

The first is often called the "golden rule" and held to be universal to all cultures. This is a mistake. The golden rule is different. In its positive formulation it states, "Act toward others as you would wish them to act toward you," or in its negative formulation, given by Hillel, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour." These rules are not about love. They are about justice, or more precisely, what evolutionary psychologists call reciprocal altruism. The Torah does not say, "Be nice or kind to your neighbour, because you would wish him to be nice or kind to you." It says, "Love your neighbour." That is something different and far stronger.

The second command is more radical still. Most people in most societies in most ages have feared, hated and often harmed the stranger. There is a word for this: xenophobia. How often have you heard the opposite word: xenophilia? My guess is, never. People don't usually love strangers. That is why, almost always when the Torah states this command – which it does, according to the Sages, 36 times – it adds an explanation: "because you were strangers in Egypt." I know of no other nation that was born as a nation in slavery and exile. We know what it feels like to be a vulnerable minority. That is why love of the stranger is so central to Judaism and so marginal to most other systems of ethics.[2] But here too, the Torah does not use the word "justice." There is a command of justice toward strangers, but that is a different law: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him" (Ex. 22:20). Here the Torah speaks not of justice but of love.

These two commands define Judaism as a religion of love – not just of God ("with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might"), but of humanity also. That was and is a world-changing idea.

But what calls for deep reflection is where these commands appear. They do so in Parshat Kedoshim in what, to contemporary eyes, must seem one of the strangest passages in the Torah.

Leviticus 19 brings side-by-side laws of seemingly quite different kinds. Some belong to the moral life: don't gossip, don't hate, don't take revenge, don't bear a grudge. Some are about social justice: leave parts of the harvest for the poor; don't pervert justice; don't withhold wages; don't use false weights and measures. Others have a different feel altogether: don't crossbreed livestock; don't plant a field with mixed seeds; don't wear a garment of mixed wool and linen; don't eat fruit of the first three years; don't eat blood; don't practice divination; don't lacerate yourself.

At first glance these laws have nothing to do with one another: some are about conscience, some about politics and economics, and others about purity and taboo. Clearly, though, the Torah is telling us otherwise. They do have something in common. They are all about order, limits,

boundaries. They are telling us that reality has a certain underlying structure whose integrity must be honoured. If you hate or take revenge you destroy relationships. If you commit injustice, you undermine the trust on which society depends. If you fail to respect the integrity of nature (different seeds, species, and so on), you take the first step down a path that ends in environmental disaster.

There is an order to the universe, part moral, part political, part ecological. When that order is violated, eventually there is chaos. When that order is observed and preserved, we become co-creators of the sacred harmony and integrated diversity that the Torah calls "holy."

Why then is it specifically in this chapter that the two great commands – love of the neighbour and the stranger – appear? The answer is profound and very far from obvious. Because this is where love belongs – in an ordered universe.

Jordan Peterson, the Canadian psychologist, has recently become one of the most prominent public intellectuals of our time. His book, *Twelve Rules for Life*, was a massive best-seller in Britain and America.[3] He has had the courage to be a contrarian, challenging the fashionable fallacies of the contemporary West. Particularly striking in the book is Rule 5: "Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them."

His point is more subtle than it sounds. A significant number of parents today, he says, fail to socialise their children. They indulge them. They do not teach them rules. There are, he argues, complex reasons for this. Some of it has to do with lack of attention. Parents are busy and don't have time for the demanding task of teaching discipline. Some of it has to do with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's influential but misleading idea that children are naturally good, and are made bad by society and its rules. So the best way to raise happy, creative children is to let them choose for themselves.

Partly, though, he says it is because "modern parents are simply paralysed by the fear that they will no longer be liked, or even loved by their children if they chastise them for any reason." They are afraid to damage their relationship by saying 'No'. They fear the loss of their children's love.

The result is that they leave their children dangerously unprepared for a world that will not indulge their wishes or desire for attention; a world that can be tough, demanding and sometimes cruel. Without rules, social skills, self-restraints and a capacity to defer gratification, children grow up without an apprenticeship in reality. His conclusion is powerful:

Clear rules make for secure children and calm, rational parents. Clear principles of discipline and punishment balance mercy and justice so that social development and psychological maturity can be optimally promoted. Clear rules and proper discipline help the child, and the family, and society, establish, maintain and expand order. That is all that protects us from chaos.[4]

That is what the opening chapter of Kedoshim is about: clear rules that create and sustain a social order. That is where real love – not the sentimental, self-deceiving substitute – belongs. Without order, love merely adds to the chaos. Misplaced love can lead to parental neglect, producing spoiled children with a sense of entitlement who are destined for an unhappy, unsuccessful, unfulfilled adult life.

Peterson's book, whose subtitle is "An Antidote to Chaos," is not just about children. It is about the mess the West has made since the Beatles sang (in 1967), "All You Need is Love". As a clinical psychologist, Peterson has seen the emotional cost of a society without a shared moral code. People, he writes, need ordering principles, without which there is chaos. We require "rules, standards, values – alone and together. We require routine and tradition. That's order." Too much order can be bad, but too little can be worse. Life is best lived, he says, on the dividing line between them. It's there, he says, that "we find the meaning that justifies life and its inevitable suffering." Perhaps if we lived properly, he adds, "we could withstand the knowledge of our own fragility and mortality, without the sense of aggrieved victimhood that produces, first, resentment, then envy, and then the desire for vengeance and destruction." [5]

That is as acute an explanation as I have ever heard for the unique structure of Leviticus 19. Its combination of moral, political, economic and environmental laws is a supreme statement of a universe of (Divinely created) order of which we are the custodians. But the chapter is not just about order. It is about humanising that order through love – the love of neighbour and stranger. And when the Torah says, don't hate, don't take revenge and don't bear a grudge, it is an uncanny anticipation of Peterson's remarks about resentment, envy and the desire for vengeance and destruction.

Hence the life-changing idea that we have forgotten for far too long: Love is not enough. Relationships need rules.

[1] Note that some read these two verses as referring specifically to a ger tzedek, that is, a convert to Judaism. That, however, is to miss the point of the command, which is: do not allow ethnic differences (that is, between a born Jew and a convert) to influence your emotions. Judaism must be race- and colour-blind.

[2] Had it existed in Europe, there would not have been a thousand years of persecution of the Jews, followed by the birth of racial antisemitism, followed by the Holocaust.

[3] Jordan Peterson, 12 Rules for Life: an antidote to chaos, Allen Lane, 2018.

[4] Ibid., 113-44.

[5] Ibid., xxxiv.

Parshat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim: How Yom Kippur Works Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

"For on this day He will forgive you, to purify you from all your sins; before the Lord you shall be purified." (Leviticus 16:30)

The major source for the awesome, white fast known as Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, is to be found in the Torah portion of Acharei Mot.

It is fascinating to note that while Yom Kippur is the most ascetic day of the Hebrew calendar—a twenty-five-hour period wherein eating, drinking, bathing, sexual relations, bodily anointment and leather shoes are all forbidden—it is nevertheless considered a joyous festival, even more joyous than the Sabbath (Yom Kippur nullifies the seven-day mourning period after the death of a close relative, whereas the Sabbath does not).

The great Hassidic sage Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev would often say, "Even had the Jewish tradition not commanded me to fast during our two major fast days, I would be too mournfully sad to eat on Tisha B'Av and I would be too excitedly joyous to eat on Yom Kippur."

From whence the excitement, and from whence the joy? It seems to me that Yom Kippur is our annual opportunity for a second chance, our possibility of becoming forgiven and purified before God. On the festival of Matzot we celebrate our birth as a nation; seven months later on the festival of Yom Kippur we celebrate our rebirth as human beings. On Pesach we renew our homes and our dishes, routing out the leavening which symbolizes the excess materialism and physical appurtenances with which we generally surround ourselves; on the Day of Forgiveness we renew our deeds and our innermost personalities by means of repentance.

Despite the hard work entailed in pre-Pesach cleaning, and in due deference to the hardy Jewish men and women who spend so much quality time tracking down all traces of leavening and thoroughly destroying them, such a physical cleaning job is still much easier than spiritual purification. Such a repentance is at least a two-step process, the first of which is kappara (usually translated as "forgiveness" and literally meaning "a covering over") and the second tahara (usually translated as "purification" and literally meaning "a cleansing.")

These two divine gifts of the day correspond to the two stages or results of transgression. The first is a stain or an imperfection in the world as a result of an act of theft or the expression of hateful words. The second is a stain on the individual soul as a result of his/her committing a transgression.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik believed that kappara – paying back the theft, asking for forgiveness by saying I am sorry, or bringing a sacrifice to the holy Temple – removes the first stage. Tahara – the repentance of the soul, the decision of the individual to change his personality and to be different from what and who he was before – removes the second. Kappara is an act of restitution, utilizing objects or words; tahara is an act of reconstitution of self, which requires a complete psychological and spiritual recast.

Clearly kappara, restitution – paying the debt, bringing the offering, beating one's breast in confession – is much easier to achieve than a reconstitution of personality. How does Yom Kippur help one pass the second phase? How can an individual on a particular date acquire the requisite spiritual energy and profound spiritual inspiration to transform his/her inner being to be able to say: "I am now a different person; I am not the same one who committed those improper actions?"

I believe the answer is to be found in the manner in which we celebrate Yom Kippur. It is a day when we separate ourselves from our materialistic physical drives in order to free our spiritual selves to commune with God; the purpose of this separation is not to make us suffer but rather to enable us to enjoy the eternal life of the spirit in the presence of God.

We leave behind our homes and good clothes; our cars, wallets and credit cards; our business offices and cell phones; our physical drives for food and sex; and remain in the synagogue for a complete day, garbed in simple white dress and virtually naked before the loving Creator of the universe, who is ready to accept, forgive and purify us.

Indeed, Franz Rosenzweig, a Jewish theologian of the early twentieth century, entered university as a completely assimilated Jew. He decided to convert to Christianity, which he understood to be the advanced stage of Judaism. However, he decided that the most intellectually sound path for him to take was to graduate from Judaism into Christianity. He therefore began to study the biblical and Talmudic texts, and went to synagogue on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. He told his friend Rosenstock-Huessy that the prayer experience on Yom Kippur was so intense that he knew by the conclusion of the day that he would remain a Jew all of his life and would devote whatever time God gave him to live to study the faith of his forebears.

If we truly internalize what the day of Yom Kippur is trying to say to us, it can become a truly transforming experience. It is this kind of inspiration that Yom Kippur hopes to effectuate as we stand in God's presence for a full day: "Before the Lord shall you be purified" (Lev. 16:30). And this is the message of Rabbi Akiva at the end of the Tractate Yoma:

"Fortunate are you Israel! Before Whom are you purified and who purifies you – our Father in Heaven.... The Lord is the Mikveh of Israel: just as a mikveh purifies those who are impure, so does the Holy One Blessed be He purify Israel." (Mishna Yoma 8:9)

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed Redemption through Natural Means Revivim

The Redemption of Israel—that is, the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land'—must occur through natural means • The intention of the Torah is that God will assist Israel in fulfilling this commandment • Without God's help, no human effort will bear fruit • Due to the abundance of discourse about a miraculous redemption, the commandment to do everything possible to ascend to the Land and settle it, has been forgotten • The process of redemption will unfold in such a way that initially, Israel will return to their Jewish identity, ascend to the Land, and settle it

The redemption of Israel, that is, the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land', must occur through natural means. For the commandment of ascending to the Land and settling it is a practical mitzvah incumbent upon the entire nation of Israel and upon each individual, and it is fulfilled when the Land of Israel is inhabited by Jews under Jewish sovereignty (see Peninei Halakha: Ha'Am

Ve'HaAretz 3:1–3). It follows that the sin causing the delay of redemption is the national negligence in organizing the Ingathering of the Exiles and the Settlement of the Land, and the negligence of each individual Jew in ascending to the Land, and settling it.

Similarly, we find in the second redemption, in the days of the return from Babylon and the establishment of the Second Temple, that most Jews did not ascend to the Land. Therefore, the people of Israel did not succeed in achieving sovereignty over the Land, the Divine Presence did not dwell in the Temple, and we were not obligated in tithes, terumot, and the sabbatical year from the Torah (see Peninei Halakha: Kashrut 12:11). Therefore, the Sage, Reish Lakish, said that he hated the Babylonians who did not ascend to the Land in the days of Ezra, because due to them the Divine Presence in the Temple was partial, the settlement in the Land was weak, and ultimately, the Second Temple was destroyed, and Israel went into a long exile (Yoma 9b).

Those Who Claim That Redemption Must Occur Miraculously

Some claim that, indeed, the essence of redemption is the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land,' but these must come from God through signs and wonders. And so they learned from the plain meaning of the verses, that God will gather the exiles and settle the Land, as it is said:

"Then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and He will return and gather you from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. Even if your exiles are at the ends of the heavens, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will take you. And the Lord your God will bring you into the Land that your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers" (Deuteronomy 30:3–5).

And it is also said:

"I will take you from among the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land" (Ezekiel 36:24), and similarly in other verses in the Torah and the Prophets.

The Intention of the Torah Is That God Will Help through Natural Means

However, the intention of the Torah is that God will help Israel to fulfill the commandment, for without God's help no human effort will bear fruit. And if we do not explain it thus, God forbid, we would nullify the commandment that God commanded Israel to settle the Land, as it is said: "You shall dispossess the inhabitants of the Land and dwell in it, for I have given you the Land to possess it. And you shall inherit the Land" (Numbers 33:53–54). And it is said: "You shall possess it, and dwell in it" (Deuteronomy 11:31).

Sanctification of God's Name through Natural Means and Through Miracles

Some claim that if the redemption occurs through natural means, there will be no sanctification of God's name, because only through signs and wonders will His name be sanctified. However, the truth is that the greatest sanctification of God's name is when the children of Israel walk in God's ways, and God blesses the work of their hands through natural means, as explained in the Torah (in the portions of Bechukotai and Ki Tavo). For then, heaven and earth are connected, and God's blessing flows in everything, and all creation sings praise, and it is revealed that "the Lord is God in heaven above, and on the earth below; there is no other" (Deuteronomy 4:39). And as Rabbi David Tabil wrote, that when God governs the world in a hidden manner under the wings of nature, "this is the highest form of governance... by sending blessing in the work of their hands... as was the case in the wars of David," and this was a greater sanctification of God's name than the miracle that God performed for Hezekiah in his war against Sennacherib. Therefore, King David, of blessed memory, did not ask God to perform a miracle for him. "For King David, of blessed memory, estimated in his soul that he was ready and prepared to be a chariot for receiving the divine abundance, even in his physical structures, his arteries, and his material sinews... and the desire was that he himself would strike them, and this is the greatest of the levels" (Nachalat David, Discourse 1).

The Meaning of the Description of Redemption through Miracles

Two interpretations have been given for the fact that the prophets described the redemption through miraculous means (Isaiah 11:1–10; 30:25–26; Ezekiel 38:18–23, and others), and both are true. The first is to explain that God will help Israel succeed in ascending to the Land and settling it. And the miraculous aspect of the descriptions is expressed in metaphorical language, to describe the great wonder of the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land' that was desolate and ruined and will become blooming and prosperous, something that has not happened to any nation or land. And what is said that the wolf will dwell with the lamb, means that the wicked of the world, who are likened to wolves, will not do evil to kill (Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 12:1).

The second is that the miraculous descriptions were said about the World to Come, which is after the days of the Messiah and the redemption, which is indeed beyond the nature of this world, and entirely miraculous for us. This is what our Sages said: "There is no difference between this world and the days of the Messiah except for the subjugation to kingdoms alone" (Sanhedrin 99a), meaning, that even in the days of redemption, the world operates as usual, except that Israel is free in their Land and can choose the good, and only afterward, in the World to Come, nature will be perfected and elevated.

The Encouragement, and the Risk

Indeed, at times we find in the words of early and later authorities who wrote about the imminent redemption that it would occur through miraculous means, contrary to the commandment of Settling the Land, which, as we have learned, is a practical mitzvah that must be fulfilled through natural means, and contrary to the destiny of Israel to reveal God's word through natural means. And perhaps they feared that Israel would despair of their redemption, after it seemed that there was no chance to act for the 'Ingathering of the Exiles' and the 'Settlement of the Land,' and therefore, they encouraged their spirits with the hope of a miraculous redemption, beyond nature. And there is truth in this, because even when redemption comes through suffering and natural means, there is an aspect of a miracle that is unbelievable. However, due to excessive talk about miraculous redemption, the commandment to do everything possible to ascend to the Land and settle it was forgotten, and thus, when it was possible to ascend to the Land, they remained in exile, and great and terrible troubles came upon us: the Holocaust, the rule of the evil communist regime, and assimilation. Perhaps there was no choice, and without the hope of a miracle, we would not have survived, but the price of relying on the miracle was unbearably heavy.

Indeed, had they studied the Torah properly, they would have understood that the commandment of Settling the Land obligates Israel in every generation to do everything possible to ascend to the Land, and consequently, in modern times, when suitable conditions were created, according to the Torah, it was necessary to ascend to the Land and build it, thereby advancing the process of Israel's redemption.

The Words of the Rambam

And so we find that many of the Sages of Israel, headed by Rabbi Akiva, hoped that Bar Kokhba would be the Messiah, and if redemption depended on miracles, it would not have been conceivable that Bar Kokhba would be the Messiah, for all his actions for the independence of Israel were through natural means. And so the Rambam wrote:

"Do not think that the King Messiah must perform signs and wonders, or bring about new things in the world, or resurrect the dead, and similar things that the fools say. It is not so. For Rabbi Akiva, a great sage of the Mishnah, was the arms-bearer of King Koziba, and he would say about him that he is the King Messiah, and he and all the sages of his generation thought that he was the King Messiah, until he was killed due to sins. Once he was killed, it became known that he was not the Messiah. And the sages did not ask him for a sign or a wonder" (Hilchot Melachim 11:3).

The Words of the Later Authorities

And so wrote Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer in his book *Derishat Tzion*:

"The redemption of Israel, which we await, let no one think that suddenly the Lord, blessed be His name, will descend from heaven to earth, saying to His people, 'Go out!' Or that He will immediately send

His Messiah from the heavens to blow a great shofar for the dispersed of Israel, and gather them to Jerusalem, and make for her a wall of fire and a Temple descending from above” (Geulat Tzion, Essay 1). Rather, the redemption will come by Israel awakening to ascend to the Land and settle it, and from this, all the words of the prophets will be fulfilled in us.

And so wrote his colleague Rabbi Eliyahu Gutmacher:

“Many err in thinking that they will sit... each according to his way in his home, and suddenly the gates of mercy will open, miracles will be performed in the heavens and the earth, and all the prophecies of the prophets will be fulfilled, and they will be called from their place of residence. But it is not so,” rather, they will need to act naturally to ascend and settle the Land (Shivat Tzion, pp. 260-261 in the Har Bracha edition).

And so wrote many, among them the Malbim:

“For the redemption will sprout gradually... and the settlement of the Land of Israel will precede the coming of the Messiah” (ibid., p. 196).

And so wrote Rabbi Yehoshua of Kutna that it is a commandment to ascend to the Land, and settle it,

“...for the Ingathering (of exiles) is the beginning of redemption” (Yeshuot Malko, Yoreh De’ah 66). And so wrote the Netziv (ibid., pp. 200-205).

The Process of Repentance and Redemption

From examining the words of the Torah (Deuteronomy 30:1-10), and the prophets (Ezekiel chapter 36), we have learned that the process of redemption will occur in such a way that initially Israel will return to their Jewish identity, ascend to the Land and settle it, and this is called “and you will return to (‘ad’ in Hebrew, lit. ‘up until’) the Lord your God,” and not “to” completely, and from this, they will continue to progress until they return in complete repentance “to the Lord your God.” So wrote and taught Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook ztz”l (‘The State as the Fulfillment of the Vision of Redemption,’ LeNetivot Yisrael Part 1, p. 281 in the Beit El edition). And so wrote before him Rabbi Alkalai in the name of Rabbi Yehuda Bibas (Writings of Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai Part 1, p. 20, Part 2, p. 324). And so wrote Rabbi Teichtal in the book ‘Eim HaBanim Semeicha’ (pp. 109-120), based on many sources, “that the essence of repentance (in the first stage of redemption) is the return and restoration to the Land of Israel, thus fulfilling all those who have deviated from the ways of the Torah and commandments due to our many sins, the repentance that the Lord, blessed be He, expects... and afterwards the Holy One, blessed be He, will open their hearts with a great opening, and incline their hearts to love Him, and serve Him with all their heart.”

In the Merit of Those Engaged in the Commandment of Settling the Land, We Merit Redemption

Rabbi Kook wrote: “They ask: What merit did our generation have for redemption? The answer is simple: it merited because it engaged in the greatest commandment of all the commandments, in the commandment equivalent to the entire Torah, because it engaged in the redemption of Israel. And not only did it engage, but it engages, and will engage incessantly, in its redemption, and this divine power elevates and exalts it in salvation” (Shmona Kevatzim 7:201).

Called Up Yet Again

By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

This past week, tens of thousands in Israel received the message from the IDF that they are being called up, yet again, not for a few days, but for several weeks or months. Children will have to adjust again to being without parents. Spouses will have to manage households by themselves. Parents will again have sleepless nights. Employers will again struggle to manage without key personnel. And tens of thousands will again put their lives on the line and live in challenging, difficult and dangerous conditions. While there are efforts to persuade reservists to protest and not answer the call, yet again, overwhelmingly, our heroic soldiers are showing up and doing so in record numbers, again.

When the war began over a year and a half ago, Jews and Israel supporters in the United States and around the world responded by

raising significant funds, sending supplies, organizing missions, tying tzitzis, sponsoring BBQs, writing letters and more. Over time, these efforts dissipated as cease fires were observed and for many, fatigue set in.

Our soldiers have been called up and despite their true exhaustion and very real emotional fatigue, they are showing up, and so must we, in our own small and modest ways. If we care, if we are connected, we must answer in our own record numbers to resume the coordinated efforts and show of support, to get back to planning trips, to dig deeper to send more funds, to do more to help bear the pain and struggle.

This week we will read Parshas Kedoshim and be reminded of the obligation to love our fellow Jew as ourselves, v’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocha. What does it mean to love fellow Jews? R’ Moshe Leib Sassover used to tell his chassidim that he learned what it means to love a fellow Jew from two Russian peasants. Once he came to an inn, where two thoroughly drunk Russian peasants were sitting at a table, draining the last drops from a bottle of strong Ukrainian vodka. One of them yelled to his friend, “Do you love me?” The friend, somewhat surprised, answered, “Of course, of course I love you!” “No, no”, insisted the first one, “Do you really love me, really?!” The friend assured him, “Of course I love you. You’re my best friend!” “Tell me, do you know what I need? Do you know why I am in pain?” The friend said, “How could I possibly know what you need or why you are in pain?” The first peasant answered, “How then can you say you love me when you don’t know what I need or why I am in pain.”

R’ Moshe Leib told his chassidim, he learned from these peasants that truly loving someone means to know their needs and to feel their pain. Real love is not lip service, it is not just tolerating one another. Love is noticing someone is having a bad day, it is feeling their pain, it is showing someone you care, even when that person is someone you barely know or don’t know at all.

The morning blessings of Birchos HaShachar are said in the plural – שְׁעָשָׂה לִי כָל צָרָתִי, מַלְבִּישׁ עֲרוּמִים, פּוֹקֵה עוֹרִים, etc. There is one exception – תַּחֲנוּן, thank you God, who fulfills all of my needs. Why is this blessing written in the singular?

The same R’ Moshe Leib Sassover who taught us what it means to love a fellow Jew explains that when it comes to ourselves, we should have an attitude of “I have everything I need”. We should feel content and satisfied. However, when it comes to others, we must be thinking – he or she don’t have everything they need. What are they lacking? How can I help them? What can I do for them?

Loving our brothers and sisters in Israel means recognizing their sacrifices on behalf of our people and stepping up in our own small ways to show gratitude, display support, provide relief, and do all we can to help.

The great Arizal suggested that before beginning davening in the morning, one should say: הֲרִינִי מִקְבֵּל עָלַי מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה שֶׁל וְאֵהֵב לְרַעַךְ כְּמוֹךָ, I hereby accept upon myself the positive commandment to love your fellow as yourself.” Based on R’ Moshe Leib Sassover’s insight, we can understand this to mean that before we can pour out our hearts to Hashem for all of our needs, we must pause to think about our fellow brothers and sisters and their needs. Before we ask Hashem to be there for us, we must commit to be there for others.

As you think about upcoming trips or vacations, consider going to Israel to volunteer. As you review your finances and tzedakah opportunities, consider how you can contribute to help the physical, mental and emotional well-being of the soldiers and their families. When you feel love for fellow Jews, express it by identifying with their pain and doing what you can to make it go away.

Rav Kook Torah

Kedoshim: A Letter for the Neturei Karta

“Do not take revenge nor bear a grudge against the members of your people.” (Lev. 19:18)

During the British Mandate, the Jews of Eretz Yisrael were no more united than they are today. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the Chief Rabbi,

extended a warm hand to the secular Zionists. But others, especially the deeply pious group in Jerusalem known as Neturei Karta—the “Guardians of the City”—bitterly opposed them. And for that, they opposed Rav Kook too.

One day, the daughter of a Neturei Karta leader fell gravely ill. A rare and dangerous condition. After much consultation, the doctors concluded that only one man could treat her properly—a world-renowned professor, abroad, a specialist with unmatched skill.

The father inquired and found out what that meant. The professor was in high demand, his time booked solid. And the fee was well beyond anything a simple Jerusalem family could afford. Even if they managed to get her there, they'd be lucky to see him at all.

But then he heard something: the professor was an admirer of Rabbi Kook. A personal letter from Rav Kook, and doors might open. The professor might even clear his schedule to take the case.

Now the man faced a bitter irony. How could he possibly go to Rav Kook? He had publicly disgraced the rabbi, slandering him numerous times. To ask now for a favor? The humiliation would be too great.

Then he had an idea. Rabbi Aryeh Levin, the saintly figure known as the “tzaddik of Jerusalem,” was close to Rav Kook. The man approached Reb Aryeh and, with visible discomfort, asked if he might intercede on his behalf.

Reb Aryeh didn't hesitate. Of course he would. He went immediately to Rav Kook's house.

Once Rav Kook understood the problem, he immediately agreed. “Of course I'll write the letter to the professor. What does this have to do with any difference of opinion between us? A child is sick.”

He sat down, took pen and paper, and composed the letter. Deliberately, he described the father in warm, generous terms.

“If I speak of him favorably,” Rav Kook explained, “I ensure no resentment finds its way into my words.”

Reb Aryeh took the letter and left, deeply moved. On his way out, he passed two prominent rabbis who, he knew, could never forgive the zealots of Jerusalem for their hostility toward Rav Kook. He greeted them politely and continued on his way.

Then, just as he turned the corner, he heard his name called. He was being summoned to return.

Reb Aryeh froze. For a moment, he feared that those two rabbis had said something to change Rav Kook's mind, to revoke the letter.

But his feet carried him back. “If the Rav calls,” he thought, “I must go.” He returned to the house with a heavy heart.

Rav Kook met him with a smile. “I had another thought,” he said. “The trip abroad is very expensive. I remembered that there is a shipping line that honors my requests, providing a substantial discount to those in need. Let me write a letter to that company as well.”

And so he did.



Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Kedoshim

Honorable Mentshen

This week the Torah tells us about loving every Jew. It adds a special verse exhorting us to be especially sensitive to a special type of Jew – the convert. “When a proselyte dwells among you in your land, do not taunt him. The proselyte who dwells with you shall be like a native among you, and you shall love him like yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt — I am Hashem, your G-d” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

A person who converts has the status of a Jew. He is a full-fledged member of the community and every social, moral and ethical tenet applies to him. Though he may be exempt from particular laws concerning “kahal” (which would have implications in marital law), he is otherwise as equal as any Jew. And that's why this verse troubles me. After all, if the convert is a Jew, why do we need a special command telling us not to inflict any discomfort upon him? Hadn't the Torah told us in verse 18, “Love your neighbor as yourself?” Why implore born-Jews to be nice to the newcomers through a series of commands that seem to use a moral approach: “You were once a stranger, so you know how it feels?” A convert is a Jew. And a Jew is a Jew is a Jew! All rules apply!

When my grandfather Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, was dean of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath back in the 1950s, he developed a professional relationship with a psychotherapist who worked with some of the students. The doctor would often call Rabbi Kamenetzky to discuss his treatment of some of the students under his care. They also would have discussions on psychology and education. The doctor was a student of the famed psychotherapist, Dr. Sigmund Freud, and despite Freud's attitude toward religion, this particular doctor was always respectful and never attributed any of the students' problems to observance or religious commitment.

Years later, when Rav Yaakov was informed that the doctor had passed away, he felt it incumbent to attend his funeral. He assumed it would not be the type of service he was used to, and even understood that he, a frocked and bearded sage, would appear out of place among a medical community of his distinguished colleagues, assimilated German and Austrian psychotherapists and mental health professionals. However, Rav Yaakov's gratitude overruled his hesitation.

When entering the Riverside Chapel, Rav Yaakov was shocked to see that a distinguished Rav, a friend of his, was performing the funeral and that scores of Torah observant Jews were participating. After the service which was done in total compliance with halacha, Rav Yaakov approached his friend who had officiated.

How do you know the doctor? What connection do you have with him? “What do you mean,” answered the Rav. “Of course I knew him. The doctor davened in my shul three times a day!”

My grandfather had never discussed religion with the man, he just respected him for his professionalism and abilities.

The Torah tells us that even though there is a universal command to love every Jew as yourself, an additional concept applies specifically to a convert. We must be kind to him as part of the overall moral obligation of a nation that also endured the trauma of being strangers. In addition to loving Jews as their inherent birthright, it is also imperative to display love to them when our moral obligation demands it. The Torah is teaching us not only to act with affection as born Jews but as honorable *mentshen*.

Good Shabbos

Dedicated in honor of Thomas & Judith Raskin

Insights into Halacha

For the week ending 10 May 2025 / 12 Iyar 5785

5785: The Rarest Year of Them All - Part V - BeHa"B vs. Pesach Sheini

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

As detailed at length in a popular multi-part series earlier this year, titled “5785: The Rarest Year of the All,” 5785 is not only a rare year, but calendarically speaking, actually the hands-down rarest of them all. You see, 5785 is classified as a HaSh"A year in our calendars. This abbreviation is referring to Rosh Hashana falling out on Thursday (*hei*), both months of Cheshvan and Kislev being *shalem* (*shin* - 30 day months instead of possibly

29; these are the only months that can switch off in our set calendar).[1] and Pesach falling out on Sunday (aleph).

As noted, a HaSh"A year is the rarest of years, and out of the 14 possibilities in Tur's 247-year calendar cycle.[2] this year type occurs on average only once in about 30.19 years (approximately 3.3 percent of the time).[3] Indeed, at times there are 71 years (!) in between HaSh"A years. The last time this year type occurred was 31 years ago in 5754 / 1994. The next time will be 20 years hence in 5805 / 2044. The next several times after that are slated to be 27 years further, in 5832 / 2071 and then a 51 year gap until 5883 / 2122.

The reasons and rules governing the whys and whens this transpires are too complicated for this discussion; suffice to say that when the Mishnah Berurah discusses these issues he writes "ain kan makom l'ha'arich," that this is not the place to expound in detail.[4] which is certainly good enough for this author.

Obviously, such a rare calendar year will contain many rare occurrences. Although the series has so far delineated many fascinating phenomena, this article focuses on what is perhaps the most significant one of the year. And so, after considerable research into their ramifications, we now continue our halachic trek through this remarkable year...

As discussed in previous articles in this series, this year hosted a rare and joyous Yerushalayim Purim Meshulash as well as the complicated Erev Pesach Shechal B'Shabbos. Although these are rare phenomena that always occurs in a HaSh"A year, they can also occur in other year combinations as well.[5] In fact, over the entire twentieth century they occurred eleven times, or eleven percent of the time. This was the fourth occurrence in the twenty-first century.

BeHa"B or Pesach Sheini?

What happens when there is a rare convergence of PesachSheini and BeHa"B? You see, during this exceptional year, 5785, the third and final day of the Chodesh Iyar BeHa"B falls out on PesachSheini (this week), as it does any year that contains a Purim Meshulash and Erev Pesach Shechal B'Shabbos. But before we can address this question, a bit of background is in order.

What is BeHa"B?

We are actually currently in a semi-annual period that many do not even realize exists: a series of "Days of Tefillah" colloquially known as BeHa"B. This acronym stands for Monday (Beis - 2nd day of the week), Thursday (Hei - 5th day of the week), and the following Monday (Beis). These days are commonly observed on the first Monday, Thursday, and Monday following the earliest Rosh Chodesh after Pesach (Rosh Chodesh Iyar), and likewise after Sukkos (Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan).[6]

The custom of utilizing these specific days for prayer and supplication is already mentioned almost 900 years ago by the Baalei Tosafos, its importance reiterated by the Tur, and unbeknownst to many, actually codified in halacha by the Shulchan Aruch as a proper minhag.[7]

Whose Minhag Is It, Anyway?

Although both the Tur and Rema refer to BeHa"B as a German-French custom, and the Shulchan Gavoh (cited lemaaseh by the Kaf Hachaim) writes that this was not the minhag in Sefarad, implying that Sefardim are not beholden to keep BeHa"B.[8] nevertheless, it must be noted that the Shulchan Aruch himself must have felt strongly about this minhag of BeHa"B, as aside for spending a whole (albeit brief) siman on it – Orach Chaim 492, he also refers to it and its importance in at least two other locations – Orach Chaim 429:2 and 566:2-4. However, in the latter citing he does refer to fasting b'tzibbur for BeHa"B as an "Ashkenazic minhag."

Later Sefardic authorities as well, including the Knesses Hagedolah, Pri Chodosh and Chida (ad loc.) also discuss its importance. Therefore, this author finds it interesting that the general Sefardic minhag is not to recite BeHa"B. In fact, there does not seem to be any Sefardic tradition of specific liturgical tefillos for BeHa"B and the Siman referring to BeHa"B – Orach Chaim 492, is noticeably absent from the Yalkut Yosef Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, implying that it is not relevant to the average Sefardi. Indeed, in Rav Yaakov Hillel's Ahavat Shalom Luach it simply states: "U'Bizmaneinu Bnei Sfard lo nahagu l'hisanos – nowadays, the Sefardic minhag is not to observe BeHa"B." [9]

And it is not just the general Sefardi populace who do not recite BeHa"B. Already in his time, the Taz noted that even among Ashkenazic communities BeHa"B observance was not widespread. More recently, Rav Menashe Klein, in a side point to the issue being addressed in a teshuva, maintains that one who does not observe BeHa"B is not considered "Poresh Min HaTzibbur" (separating himself from the general community), as even nowadays its

observance is not prevalent.[10] But, among many Yeshiva communities, and especially in Eretz Yisrael, reciting BeHa"B twice annually is de rigueur.

Why Now?

The reason most commonly mentioned by the Poskim[11] why these days of prayer are following the holidays of Pesach and Sukkos, is that over the extended holidays, when there is a mitzvah of feasting and simcha, it is more likely that people may have stumbled in some area due to improper behavior and inadvertent sin, and BeHa"B is meant to help rectify any possible offense. This idea is based on Iyov (Ch. 1:5) who would bring Korbanos after "Yemei Mishteh", or "Days of Feasting". These sins might be due to a variety of probable offenses including: mingling - at a festive meal or even at a Drasha in the Shul (!), Yom Tov and Chol Hamoed related transgressions, Chillul Hashem, or overabundance of merriment and gastronomical pleasures.[12]

Other explanations offered to explain why BeHa"B was established include:

To entreat Hashem to strengthen our bodies especially at the time of changing seasons when many are likely to get ill.[13]

To beseech Hashem that we should have abundant harvests after Pesach and plentiful rains after Sukkos.[14]

To commemorate Queen Esther's original 3-day fast (which actually was Pesach time, and not Purim time).[15] This is pushed off until the first opportunity after Chodesh Nissan. [The Taanis Esther that we fast before Purim is not really due to Esther's actual fast as recorded in the Megillah, but rather to commemorate that when the Jews went to war against the anti-Semites of their day, they fasted].

Yet, interestingly, although BeHa"B is traditionally meant to be a fast day, still, very few actually do fast, as in our generations people are considered weaker. Instead, most make do with Selichos (and perhaps Divrei Mussar), with the majority also reciting Avinu Malkeinu. This rationale is found in many sefarim, including the Chavos Yair, Aruch Hashulchan, Mishnah Berurah, and Kaf Hachaim, who, quoting the Elyah Rabba, cites this as the Minhag of Prague.[16] As an aside, if not actually fasting, one should replace the word 'Taanis' in the Selichos with 'Tefillah' instead.[17]

Monday, Thursday, Prayer Days...

Monday and Thursday are considered especially potent days for prayer, as Moshe Rabbeinu climbed Har Sinai to receive the Torah on a Thursday and returned with it on a Monday.[18] A mnemonic to showcase this is the first pasuk read on a public fast day Haftara, "Dirshu Hashem B'H imatzo" - "Seek out Hashem when He is to be found." [19] The letters Beis and Hei show that an auspicious time when Hashem may be found is on Monday and Thursday; [20] therefore Mondays and Thursdays are preferable for fasting and prayer. For whichever reason BeHa"B was established, we certainly shouldn't let this golden opportunity for tefillah pass us by.[21]

Pesach Sheini

The 14th of Iyar is commonly dubbed "Pesach Sheini." [22] Pesach Sheini commemorates the day when those who were unable to bring the annual Korban Pesach (special Pesach sacrifice - Pascal lamb) at its proper time (Erev Pesach), were given a second chance to offer this unique Korban.[23]

Although technically not considered a true holiday, and despite the fact that it is (astonishingly!) [24] not listed in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days that Tachanun is not recited, nevertheless, the custom for many is specifically not to recite Tachanun on Pesach Sheini, in order to 'tap into' the merit that this particular day had during the times of the Beis HaMikdash.[25] Although the Pri Megadim [26] maintains that Tachanun should be recited on Pesach Sheini - as the original day it is commemorating was only meant for individuals in unique circumstances, and its absence of mention in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days that Tachanun is not recited speaks volumes, nevertheless, most authorities rule that one should not say Tachanun on this day.[27]

On the other hand, it is known that the Chazon Ish and Steipler Gaon did recite Tachanun on Pesach Sheini. Other Gedolim who are quoted as reciting Tachanun on Pesach Sheini include the Chasam Sofer and later the Brisker Rav. This is also the basic 'Minhag Ashkenaz,' and Pesach Sheini is not listed as one of the days of not reciting Tachanun in most Germanic sources.[28]

There is an interesting common custom associated with Pesach Sheini - eating Matzah.[29] Another interesting fact about Pesach Sheini is that it is commonly considered the Yahrzeit of Rabi Meir Baal HaNeis,[30] and many visit his kever in Teveria on that day.

Pesach Sheini vs. BeHa"B

But what happens when there is a rare convergence of Pesach Sheini and BeHa"b? You see, during this exceptional year, 5785, the third and final day of the Chodesh Iyar BeHa"b falls out on Pesach Sheini, as it does any year that contains a Purim Meshulash and Erev Pesach Shechal B'Shabbos.

So our question essentially is - what does Klal Yisrael do? Which holiday do we observe? The joyous Pesach Sheini or the official fast of BeHa"b?

As with many inyanim in halacha or minhag, there is no one-size-fits-all answer. This debate seems to be based on Megillas Taanis, which states (see Chullin 129b) that Pesach Sheini is a day in which one may not eulogize (indicating it is a full-fledged holiday), and hence strongly implying that certainly one may not fast on it.

Yet, others counter that Megillas Taanis is no longer considered authoritative or binding (see Rosh Hashana 18b-19b; which concludes that Megillas Taanis was essentially void with the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, except for the Rabbinic holidays of Chanuka and Purim), and Pesach Sheini, as it is essentially a make-up holiday for those who were unable to offer the Korban Pesach on Erev Pesach, cannot be considered any more stringent than Erev Pesach itself. And Erev Pesach is known for its Taanis Bechorim, Fast of the Firstborn. So perhaps fasting is not only permitted on Pesach Sheini, but actually mandated when it coincides with BeHa"b. So what do we do?

Although several Poskim maintain to fast only until Chatzos on that day as a sort of compromise solution, or hold not to fast at all and rather push BeHa"b observance off until the next day (Tuesday) or several days later to the coming Thursday or the next Monday,[31] it is feasible that this is only regarding actual fasting - which the vast majority does not currently do anyway.

The Chazon Ish, who generally holds of no special inyanim for Pesach Sheini, held that one may fast as usual. And in fact, in Orchos Rabbeinu it cites that this is what he and his brother-in-law, the Steipler Gaon, did when Pesach Sheini and BeHa"b coincided - they recited Selichos and Tachanun as usual. The Brisker Rav did so as well. This is also the common minhag among Germanic ("Yekkish") communities.[32]

No Contradiction

Interestingly, there is little mention of this issue in any early source, so it seems that there truly is no real discrepancy. As pointed out by Rav Sroya Debilitzky zt"l, Sefardim generally did not recite Tachanun on Pesach Sheini, whereas Ashkenazim did, until the 'not saying' minhag crept out and spread to Ashkenazic circles, via Minhag Eretz Yisrael, as the original Ashkenazic communities in Eretz Yisrael adopted several Sefardic minhagim over the years.

On the other hand, as mentioned previously, only Ashkenazim classically observed BeHa"b fasting and prayers. Hence, in the classic sense, "ne'er the twain" actually met, as whenever a convergence occurred, Sefardim would observe the 'no Tachanun' of Pesach Sheini, whereas Ashkenazim would keep the Selichos of BeHa"b.[33]

Yet, nowadays, when most of the world (Ashkenazim as well) does not recite Tachanun on Pesach Sheini anyway, the minhag of many is to synthesize the two: recite a somewhat abbreviated version of BeHa"b Selichos - utilizing precedent from other times when Selichos and 'no Tachanun' coincide, for example when a Bris occurs on a fast day (as per Orach Chaim 131:5), while also skipping Tachanun. This is probably the most common minhag in shuls where BeHa"b is normally recited. Indeed, this 'synthesis psak' is brought down lemaaseh in both Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin's authoritative Ezras Torah Luach, as well as the Belz Dvar Yom B'Yomo Luach.[34]

The psak to still recite Selichos (and perhaps fast when applicable) when Pesach Sheini and BeHa"b coincide, was taught by many Poskim - including Rav Yaakov Emden, the Chasam Sofer, the Maharam Ash, the Maharsham, and the Eishel Avraham (Butchatch), as the proper minhag. The Maharsham adds that the Rema M'Fano wrote that normally one should not fast on Pesach Sheini - unless it coincides with BeHa"b, as then "mutter Itzibbur lehisanos bo." [35]

Practically - Pesach Sheini

On the other hand, on a practical note, as most shuls in the world (unfortunately) do not "do BeHa"b" nowadays, this debate is essentially a moot point, and Pesach Sheini would trump. As Rav Yisroel Reisman wryly remarked in his introduction to the book "Tachanun," non-Jews cannot possibly comprehend the simchah and elation (and perhaps sigh of relief) felt when the gabbai klops on the bimah and the tzibbur skips Tachanun (especially "Long Tachanun").

There actually is strong basis for this hanhagah in our case, as Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, and Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer ruled to skip a whole day of BeHa"b for Pesach Sheini, following the main old Yerushalmi minhag, as per the Tukachinsky Luach, the Aderes, and Rav Yisrael Nissan Kuperstock - as apparently this is indeed 'Old Minhag Yerushalayim,' that Pesach Sheini entirely trumps and displaces the third and last BeHa"b when they coincide.[36]

This minhag first seems to be cited in Rav Shalom Schwadron's Hagahos on his grandfather (and namesake)'s Shu"t Maharsham. The Maharsham actually maintained that one should fast when Pesach Sheini and BeHa"b coincide, arguing on Rav Yosef Shaul Nathanson's Yad Shaul V'Yosef Daas - who held not to fast. Rav Schwadron added that Minhag Yerushalayim, as he was informed by Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop that the Gedolim of Yerushalayim already dealt with this issue, as was cited in the Pinkas (ledger) of Rav Shmuel Salant's Beis Din in the Churva Shul in 5663/1903 (a year when Pesach Sheini and BeHa"b coincided), to specifically not fast or recite Selichos on that day.[37]

This would also certainly hold true according to the opinion of the Cheshek Shlomo, who writes that it is prohibited to fast on Pesach Sheini, as it is a chag listed in Megillas Taanis, which he asserts was not one of those that was discontinued, as Pesach Sheini is not a holiday that was established due to miracles.[38] A similar assessment was given by the Shaarei Deah, and as mentioned previously, Rav Yosef Shaul Nathanson.[39]

BeHa"b?

Yet, there are those who nowadays argue that the obscure source that Rav Schwadron was quoting was recently printed, and it actually stated that Pesach Sheini only trumps that specific day, but BeHa"b observance should nonetheless still be kept - by pushing it off to that upcoming Thursday, creating a rare BeHa"b (Monday, Thursday, Thursday).

This is also the conclusion of the Maharsham, that although he is of the opinion that Selichos should be recited, on the other hand, if one follows an alternate minhag and skips BeHa"b observance on that day, he should nonetheless make-it up on the following Thursday or Monday. On a more contemporary note, Rav Sroya Debilitzky concludes similarly as well.[40] Hence, it seems that the true Old Yerushalmi Minhag is not as is commonly cited, but should rather be to push off the last BeHa"b to Thursday.

There is a recent small sefer titled "Pischa Zeira," which discusses various subtopics related to Pesach Sheini, who devotes a full chapter to this topic and debate. He posits that there may be a differentiation between a Bris and Pesach Sheini when coinciding with BeHa"b. Regarding a Bris on a Taanis, it is still a day that is meant for fasting, hence Selichos are still recited, just not Tachanun in that specific location, due to the simcha of the Bris. This is opposed to Pesach Sheini, which many maintain that as it is a minor holiday and mentioned in the Torah, simply cannot be overruled as a day intended for fasting.[41]

Come what may, we see there is no clear-cut contemporary consensus to the observance of this rare convergence, and each Kehillah should and I'm certain will, follow their own minhag.[42] But in this author's mind, it is quite fascinating that this remarkable coincidence will occur in our exceptional year.

Our fascinating journey detailing the many remarkable facets of our rare year will iy"H be continued...

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch famously wrote that "the Jew's catechism is his calendar." [43] It is this author's wish that by showcasing the uniqueness of our calendar year and its rare minhagim, this article will help raise appreciation of them and our fascinating calendrical customs.

This article was written L'Iluy Nishmas Sara Chaya bas R' Yaakov Eliezer, Yisrael Leizer ben Zev, and the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Nosson Nota ben R Avaraham Yitzchak (Schiller), and L'Refuah Sheleimah for Rav Yair Nissan ben Sarah and R' Avrohom Yaakov Abish ben Chana Rivka

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halachic issues relating to food, is now back in stock and available in Jewish bookstores worldwide.

It's a Beautiful Heart
Rabbi YY Jacobson

Counting Days and Weeks: Confronting Mental Illness, Trauma, and Depression

Counting Days and Weeks

There are three kinds of people, goes the old joke: those who can count and those who can't.

There is something strange about the way we count 'sefirah'—the 49-day count, in the Jewish tradition, between Passover and the festival of Shavuot.

The Talmud states:[1]

Abaye stated, "It is a Mitzvah to count the days, and it is a Mitzvah to count the weeks." This is because both are mentioned explicitly in the Torah:

Leviticus 23:15-16: From the day following the (first) rest day (of Pesach)—the day you bring the Omer as a wave-offering—you should count for yourselves seven weeks. (When you count them) they should be perfect. You should count until (but not including) fifty days, (i.e.) the day following the seventh week. (On the fiftieth day) you should bring (the first) meal-offering (from the) new (crop) to G-d.

Deuteronomy 16:9-10: You shall count seven weeks for yourself; from [the time] the sickle is first put to the standing crop, you shall begin to count seven weeks. And you shall perform the Festival of Weeks to the Lord, your God, the donation you can afford to give, according to how the Lord, your God, shall bless you.

Clearly, the Torah talks about two forms of counting: counting seven weeks and counting 49 days. We thus fulfill both mandates: At the conclusion of the first week, we count as follows: "Today is seven days, which is one week to the Omer." The next night, we count as follows: "Today is eight days, which is one week and one day to the Omer." "Today is forty-eight days, which is six weeks and six days to the Omer."

Yet this is strange. Why is the Torah adamant that we count both the days and the weeks simultaneously? One of these counts is superfluous. What do we gain by counting the week after counting the days? Either say simply: "Today is seven days to the Omer," and if you want to know how many weeks that is, you can do the math yourself, or alternatively, stick to weeks: "Today is one week to the Omer," and you don't have to be a genius to know how many days that includes!

Biblical or Rabbinic?

There is yet another perplexing matter.

The "Kurban Omer" was a barley offering brought to the Holy Temple on the second day of Passover (on the 16th of Nissan). They would harvest barley, grind it to flour, and offer a fistful of the flour on the altar. The rest of the flour would be baked as matzah and eaten by the Kohanim (Omer is the Hebrew name for the volume of flour prepared; it is the volume of 42.2 eggs).

Hence, the Torah states:[2] "And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Sabbath, from the day on which you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks shall there be, until the morrow of the seventh week you shall count fifty days..."

When the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple) stood in Jerusalem, this offering of a measure (omer) of barley, brought on the second day of Passover, marked the commencement of the seven-week count. Today, we lack the opportunity to bring the Omer offering on Passover. The question then arises, is there still a mandate to do the sefirat haomer, the counting of the Omer? Without the Omer, are we still obligated to count the seven-week period?

As you may have guessed, there is a dispute among our sages.

שולחן ערוך הרב אורח חיים סימן תפ"ט סעיף ב' ומצוה זו נוהגת בארץ ובחו"ל בפני הבית ושלא בפני הבית. ויש אומרים שבזמן הזה שאין בית המקדש קיים ואין מקריבין העומר אין מצוה זו נוהגת כלל מדברי תורה אלא מדברי סופרים שתיקנו זכר למקדש וכן עיקר.

The Rambam (Maimonides), the Chinuch, the Ravva, and others believe that the mandate to count isn't dependent on the Omer offering. Even today, we are obligated biblically to count 49 days between Passover and Shavuot.

However, Tosefot and most halachic authorities, including the Code of Jewish Law,[3] maintain the view that the biblical mitzvah of counting directly depends on the actual Omer offering. Hence, today, there is only a rabbinic obligation to count, to commemorate the counting in the time of the Holy Temple. Our counting today is not a full-fledged biblical commandment (mitzvah deoraita) but a rabbinical ordinance that merely commemorates the mitzvah fulfilled in the times of the Beit HaMikdash.

So far so good.

The Third Opinion

But there is a fascinating third and lone opinion, that of the 13th-century French and Spanish sage Rabbeinu Yerucham.[4]

רבינו ירוחם ספר תולדות אדם וחוה, חלק אדם, נתיב ה' חלק ד': ונראה לן, משום דכתוב בתורה [שתי פרישיות,] שבועה שבועות תספור לך וגו' וכתוב נמי מיום הביאתכם את עומר וגו' שבע שבתות תמנימות תהיין, נמצא שלא נכתבה ספירת שבועות כי אם גבי העומר, אבל ספירת הימים [תספור חמשים יום] לא כתיב גבי עומר, נמצא דספירת הימים הוא מן התורה אפילו בזמן הזה, וספירת השבועות בזמן דאיכא עומר. והיו מברכים זה על זה בזמן שביהמ"ק היה קיים...ובזמן הזה אנו סופרים לשבועות זכר למקדש...לכך אנו אומרים שהם כך וכך שבועות שאין זו ספירה ממש.

He says that it depends which counting we are talking about. The days or the weeks. The counting of the days is a biblical mandate even today, while the counting of the weeks, says Rabbeinu Yerucham, is only a rabbinic mandate. This third opinion is an interesting combination of the first two: According to Rabbeinu Yerucham, it is a biblical mitzvah to count the days even when the Beit HaMikdash is not extant, but the mitzvah to count the weeks applies only when the Omer is offered and is thus today only a rabbinical commandment.

The rationale behind his view is fascinating. When the Torah states to count the weeks, it is stated in context of the Omer offering; so, without the omer offering, the biblical obligation falls away. But when the Torah states to count the days, it says so independently of the Omer offering. So even without an omer, there is still a mitzvah to count 49 days.

Now this seems really strange. How are we to understand Rabbeinu Yerucham? Counting is counting, what exactly is the difference between saying "Today is twenty-eight days of the Omer" and saying "Today is four weeks of the Omer"? How can we make sense of the notion that counting days is a biblical mandate while counting weeks is a rabbinic mandate?

To be sure, he offers a convincing proof from the Torah text. But that only transfers the question onto the Torah: What would be the logic to command Jews today, in exile, to count only days and not weeks? Yet Jews during the time of the Holy Temple were commanded by the Torah to do both?

The views of Rambam and Tosefos are clear. Either the entire obligation (the count of the days and the weeks) is biblical, or it is all rabbinic. But the split Rabbanu Yerucham suggests seems enigmatic. Why would the Torah make this differentiation? Why would it deny us the opportunity to count weeks during exile, but still obligate us to count days lacking the Holy Temple?

Two Types of Self-Work

Let's excavate the mystery of the days and the weeks and the three views of Rambam, Tosefos and Rabanu Yerucham, from the deeper emotional, psychological and spiritual vantage point. This explanation was offered by the Lubavitcher Rebbe during an address, on Lag B'Omer 5711, May 24, 1951.[5]

The teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidism describe seven basic character traits in the heart of each human being: Chesed (love, kindness), Gevurah (discipline, boundaries, restraint), Tiferet (beauty, empathy), Netzach (victory, ambition), Hod (humility, gratitude, and acknowledging mistakes), Yesod (bonding and communicatively) and Malchus (leadership, confidence, selflessness).

This is the deeper significance of the "counting of the omer," the mitzvah to count seven weeks from Passover to Shavuot. Judaism designates a period of the year for "communal therapy," when together we go through a process of healing our inner selves, step by step, issue by issue, emotion by emotion. For each of the seven weeks, we focus on one of the seven emotions in our lives, examining it, refining it, and fixing it—aligning it with the Divine emotions.[6]

In the first week, we focus on the love in our lives. Do I know how to express and receive love? Do I know how to love? In the second week, we focus on our capacity for creating boundaries. Do I know how to create and maintain proper borders? In the third week, we reflect on our ability to empathize. Do I know how to empathize? Do I know how to be here for someone else on their terms, not mine? In the fourth week, we look at our capacity to triumph in the face of adversity. Do I know how to win? Do I have ambition? The fifth week is focused on our ability to express gratitude, show vulnerability, and admit mistakes. The sixth week—on our ability to communicate and bond. And finally, in the seventh week, we focus on our skills as leaders. I'm I confident enough to lead? Do I know how to lead? Do I possess inner dignity? Is my leadership driven by insecurity or egotism? I'm I king over myself? Do I possess inner core self-value?

But as we recall, the mitzvah is to count both the days and the weeks. For each of the seven weeks is further divided into seven days. These seven traits are expressed in our life in various thoughts, words and deeds. So during the seven days of each week, we focus each day on another detail of how this particular emotion expresses itself in our lives. If the week-count represents

tackling the core of the emotion itself, the day-count represents tackling not the emotion itself, but rather how it expresses itself in our daily lives, in the details of our lives, in our behaviors, words and thoughts.[7]

Transformation vs. Self-Control

When I say, “Today is one week to the omer,” I am saying that today, I managed to tune in to the full scope of that emotion, transforming it and healing it at its core.

Every once in a while, you hear what we call a wondrous journey of incredible healing and transformation. Someone who was struggling with a trauma or an addiction for many years, uncovers a deep awareness, or perhaps goes through a profound healing journey, or a therapeutic program, and they come out completely healed. They have touched such a deep place within themselves, that it completely transformed their life. The trauma is healed; the addiction is gone. Their anger or jealousy is no longer an issue. Like a child who is being toilet trained, at one point, he stops entertaining the idea of using a diaper. He has matured. So too, there is a possibility of counting weeks i.e. completely transforming a particular emotion, completely weeding out the distortions.

The Day Model

But that is a unique experience. And even when it occurs, it may not last forever, or we may still vacillate back to our old coping mechanisms caused by our traumas. We now come to the second model of self-refinement, the “day model.” This is the model that belongs to each of us at every moment. I am not always capable of the week-model, but I am always capable of the day-model. There is no great transformation here, the urges are there, the temptations are there, the dysfunction is there, the addictions are there, the negative emotions are there, and the promiscuous cravings are intact, but I manage to refine the day—meaning I learn how to control where and how that emotion will be expressed in the details of my life. I may not be able to redefine the very core of the emotion—the entire “week”—but I can still choose how it will be channeled, or not channeled, in the details of my life.[8]

Imagine you are driving your car and approaching a red light. Now you've got someone in the backseat screaming, “Go! Run the light! Just do it!” The guy is screaming right in your ear. The screams are loud and annoying, but if you're behind the wheel, no amount of screaming can make you run the light. Why not? Because you can identify the screamer as an alien voice to yourself; he is a stranger bringing up a ludicrous and dangerous idea. You may not be able to stop the screaming, but you can identify it and thus quarantine it, putting it in context of where it belongs—to a strange man hollering stupidity.

But imagine if when hearing that voice “take the red light,” you decide that it is your rational mind speaking to you; you imagine that this is your intelligence speaking to you—then it becomes so much harder to say no.

Same with emotions and thoughts. Even while being emotionally hijacked, I still have the wheel in my hand. I may not have the ability now to transform my urge, and stop the screaming of certain thoughts. Still, as long as I can identify that this thought is not my essence and is coming from a part of me that is insecure and unwholesome, I need not allow that thought to define me and to control my behavior.

Suicidal Thoughts

A woman struggling with suicidal thoughts recently shared with me how she learned to deal with them more effectively.

“I always believed that when I have my suicidal urges, I'm not in control. After all, suicide urges were not something that I could bring up at will - I had to be triggered in a hugely discomforting way for the suicide ideas to surface so vengefully.

“But this time around, I realized that thoughts were just that, thoughts. And it's we who choose if to engage the thoughts and define ourselves by them. We choose to act on our thoughts or not. It's not easy thinking new thoughts when the old familiar thoughts tell you that suicide is the only answer.”

If the only thing people learned was not to be afraid of their experience, that alone would change the world. The moment we can look at our urge or temptation in the eye and say, “Hi! I'm not afraid of you, all you are is a thought,” we have gained control over that urge.

The Text Message

Say you get a text from your wife: “When are you coming home?” Immediately, you experience a thought that produces anger. “Will she ever appreciate how hard I work? What does she think I am doing here in the office? Can't she just leave me alone!”

But hey, relax. All she asked was when you were coming home, perhaps because she misses you, loves you, and wants to see your face. But due to your own insecurities, you can't even see that. You are used to your mother bashing you, and you instinctively assume she is also bashing you. But she is not. She just asked a simple, innocent question.

Can I get rid of my insecurity and my anger at the moment? No! But I can IDENTIFY my emotion as coming from my insecure dimensions, and I can say to myself, I will not allow that part of myself to take control over my life. I will not allow the toxic image of myself as the man whom everyone is waiting to criticize to overtake me completely. Once I identify where the emotion comes from, I can quarantine it and let it be what it is, but without allowing it to define me. The key is that I do not get trapped into thinking that that thought is me—that it reflects my essence. No! It is just a thought. It is not me. And it does not have to be me. I define it; it does not define me. It is part of me, but it is not all of me. It is the guy in the back seat screaming, “Take the light.”

I did not manage to refine the week, but I did manage to refine the day—I got control of how my thoughts and emotions manifest themselves in the individual days and behaviors of my life.

Winston Churchill suffered from depression. In his biography, he describes how he came to see his depression as a black dog always accompanying him and sometimes barking very loudly. But the black dog was not him. The depressing thoughts were just that—thoughts.

One of the powerful ideas in Tanya is that thoughts are the “garments of the soul,” not the soul. Garments are made to change. We often see our thoughts as our very selves. But they are not; they are garments. You can change them whenever you want to. [9]

A Beautiful Mind; a Beautiful Life

Several years ago, John Nash, one of the greatest mathematicians of the 20th century, was killed with his wife in a devastating car accident in NJ.

It is hard not to shed a tear when you read the biography “A Beautiful Mind” about the tragic and triumphant life of Mr. Nash (later also produced as a film).

John Nash, born in 1928, was named early in his career as one of the most promising mathematicians in the world. Nash is regarded as one of the great mathematicians of the 20th century. He set the foundations of modern game theory—the mathematics of decision-making—while still in his 20s, and his fame grew during his time at Princeton University and at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he met Alicia Larde, a physics major. They married in 1957.

But by the end of the 1950s, insane voices in his head began to overtake his thoughts on mathematical theory. He developed a terrible mental illness. Nash, in his delusions, accused one mathematician of entering his office to steal his ideas and began to hear alien messages. When Nash was offered a prestigious chair at the University of Chicago, he declined because he planned to become Emperor of Antarctica.

John believed that all men who wore red ties were part of a communist conspiracy against him. Nash mailed letters to embassies in Washington, D.C., declaring they were establishing a government. His psychological issues crossed into his professional life when he gave an American Mathematical Society lecture at Columbia University in 1959. While he intended to present proof of the Riemann hypothesis, the lecture was incomprehensible. He spoke as a madman. Colleagues in the audience immediately realized that something was terribly wrong. He was admitted to the Hospital, where he was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. For many years he spent periods in psychiatric hospitals, where he received antipsychotic medications and shock therapy.

Due to the stress of dealing with his illness, his wife Alicia divorced him in 1963. And yet Alicia continued to support him throughout his illness. After his final hospital discharge in 1970, he lived in Alicia's house as a boarder.

It was during this time that he learned how to discard his paranoid delusions consciously. “I had been long enough hospitalized that I would finally renounce my delusional hypotheses and revert to thinking of myself as a human of more conventional circumstances and return to mathematical research,” Nash later wrote about himself.

He ultimately was allowed by Princeton University to teach again. Over the years, he became a world-renowned mathematician, contributing majorly to the field. In 2001, Alicia decided to marry again her first sweetheart, whom she once divorced. Alicia and John Nash married each other for the second time.

In later years they both became major advocates for mental health care in New Jersey when their son John was also diagnosed with schizophrenia.

In 1994, John Nash won the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences.

What Is Logic?

In the final scene of the film, Nash receives the Nobel Prize. During the ceremony, he says the following:

I've always believed in numbers and the equations and logic that lead to reason.

But after a lifetime of such pursuits, I ask,

"What truly is logic?"

"Who decides reason?"

My quest has taken me through the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional—and back.

And I have made the most important discovery of my career, the most important discovery of my life: It is only in the mysterious equations of love that any logic or reasons can be found.

I'm only here tonight because of you [pointing to his wife, Alicia].

You are the reason I am.

You are all my reasons.

Thank you.

The crowd jumps from their chairs, giving a thundering standing ovation to the brilliant mathematician who has been to hell and back a few times.

And then comes one of the most moving scenes.

Nothing Is Wrong

Right after the Noble Prize ceremony, as John is leaving the hall, the mental disease suddenly attacks him in the most vicious and sinister way. Suddenly, his delusions come right back to him, and in the beautiful hallways of Stockholm, he “sees” the very characters that were responsible for destroying his life. He suddenly “sees” all the communists who he believed were out to destroy him.

It is a potentially tragic moment of epic proportions. Here is a man who just won the Nobel Prize, who has become world-renowned, and who is considered one of the greatest minds of the century. Here is a man standing with his loving wife, basking in the shadow of international glory. And yet, at this very moment, the devil of mental illness strikes lethally, mentally “abducting” poor John Nash.

His wife senses that something is happening; she sees how he has suddenly wandered off. He is not present anymore in the real world. His eyes are elsewhere; his body overtaken by fear.

In deep pain and shock, she turns to her husband and asks him, “What is it? What’s wrong?”

He pauses, looks at the fictional people living in his tormented mind, then looks back at her, and with a smile on his face he says: “Nothing; nothing at all.” He takes her hand and off they go.

It is a moment of profound triumph. Here you have a man at the height of everything, and the schizophrenia suddenly strikes him. There was nothing he could do to get rid of it. It was still there; it never left him. Yet his hard inner world allowed him to identify it as an illness and thus quarantine it. He could define it and place it in context rather than have it define him. He could see it for what it was: an unhealthy mental disease alien to his beautiful essence.

No, he does not get rid of schizophrenia but rather learns how to define it rather than letting it define him. He must be able to at least identify it as thoughts that do not constitute his essence and stem from a part of him that is unhealthy.

John Nash could see all those mental images and say to himself: “These are forces within me; but it is not me. It is a mental illness—and these voices are coming from a part of me that is ill. But I am sitting at the wheel of my life, and I have decided not to allow these thoughts to take over my life. I will continue living, I will continue loving and connecting to my wife and to all the good in my life, even as the devils in my brain never shut up. I can’t count my weeks, but I can count my days.”

Nash once said something very moving about himself. “I wouldn’t have had good scientific ideas if I had thought more normally.” He also said, “If I felt completely pressure-less, I don’t think I would have gone in this pattern”. You see, he managed to even perceive the blessing and the opportunity in his struggle, despite the terrible price he paid for them.

Nash was a hero of real life. Here you have a guy dealing with a terrible mental sickness, but with time, work, and most importantly, with love and support, he learns to stand up to it. He learns how his health isn’t defined by the mental chatter and by what his mind decides to show him now. He has

learned that despite all of it, day in and day out, he can show up in his life and be in control, rather than the illness controlling him.

The Accident

On May 23, 2015, John and his wife Alicia were on their way home after a visit to Norway, where Nash had received the Abel Prize for Mathematics from King Harald V for his work.

He did arrange for a limo to pick him and his wife up from Newark airport and take them home to West Windsor, NJ. The plane landed early, so they picked up a regular cab to take them home.

They were both sitting in a cab on the New Jersey Turnpike. When the driver of the taxicab lost control of the vehicle and struck a guardrail. Both John and Alicia were ejected from the car upon impact and died on the spot. Nash was 86 years old; his wife 80.

What Can We Achieve Now?

At last, we can appreciate the depth of the Torah law concerning the counting of the omer. The quest for truth, healing, and perfection continues at all times and under all conditions, even in the darkest hours of exile. Thus, we are instructed to count not only the days but also the weeks. We are charged with the duty of learning self-control (days) and trying to achieve transformation (weeks).[10] But it is here that Rabbeinu Yerucham offers us a deeply comforting thought.

True, in the times of the Holy Temple, a time of great spiritual revelation, the Torah instructs us and empowers us to count both days and weeks. In the presence of such intense spiritual awareness, they also had the ability to count weeks. However today, says Rabbeinu Yerucham, we don’t breathe the same awareness. We are in exile. We live in a spiritually diminished level of awareness. Hence, the biblical obligation is to count the days, to gain control over our behavior. Counting the weeks, i.e. fully transforming our emotions, is only a rabbinic obligation, simply to reminisce and remember that ultimately there is a path of transformation we strive for.[11]

Indeed, as we are living today in the times of redemption, more and more we are experiencing the ability for full healing—transforming our days and our weeks, bidding farewell to our traumas forever.

[1] Menachos 66a

[2] Leviticus 23:15

[3] Tosefos Menachos 66a. Shlchan Aruch Orach Chaim section 489. See all other references quoted in Shlchan Aruch HaRav ibid.

[4] Rabanu Yerucham ben Meshullam (1290-1350), was a prominent rabbi and posek during the period of the Rishonim. He was born in Provence, France. In 1306, after the Jewish expulsion from France, he moved to Toledo, Spain. During this time of his life, he became a student of Rabbi Asher ben Yeciell known as the Rosh. In the year 1330, he began writing his work Sefer Maysharim on civil law. He completed this work in four years. At the end of his life, he wrote his main halachik work Sefer Toldos Adam V’Chava. Various components of halacha as ruled by Rabbeinu Yerucham, have been codified in the Shulchan Aruch in the name of Rabbeinu Yerucham. He greatly influenced Rabbi Yosef Karo. He is quoted extensively by Rabbi Karo in both the Shulchan Aruch as well as the Beis Yosef on the Tur.

[5] Maamar Usfartem Lag Baomer 5711. As far as I know, it is the first and only source to explain the view of Rabanu Yerucham according to Chassidus.

[6] Likkutei Torah Emor, Maamar Usfartem (the first one).

[7] Since the focus is on the expression of emotion in the details of our life, hence there are seven days, representing the seven nuanced ways in which each emotion expresses itself, through love, or through might, or through empathy, or through ambition, etc.

[8] In many ways, this constitutes the basic difference between the Tzaddik and the Banuni in Tanya.

[9] See Tanya Ch. 4, 6, 12, and many more places.

[10] See Tanya ch. 14

[11] For Rambam, both counts even today are biblical. Whereas for Tosefos, both counts today are rabbinic. Perhaps we can connect this with the idea in Sefarim, that the galus for the Ashkenazim was far deeper than for the Sefardim.

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

Dedicated in loving memory of Yitu bas Rafael, Joan Lefkowitz.
The Essential Torah

You should not take revenge and you shall not bear a grudge against the members of your people; you should love your fellow as yourself; I am Hashem (19:18).

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the well-known statement of the Tanna R' Akiva regarding the end of this verse ("you should love your fellow as yourself"); "This is a great rule of the Torah" (see Toras Kohanim 4:12). The implication of R' Akiva's statement is that this possuk somehow encapsulates the very essence of the message of the Torah. R' Shimon Ben Azzai, one of R' Akiva's students, poses a stunning question to R' Akiva's teaching: What if one does not like himself?

Meaning, if one allows himself to be embarrassed and treated poorly by others is he now permitted to treat others in the same manner? Ben Azzai therefore uses another verse in the Torah (that of Hashem creating man) as his "great rule of the Torah" (see Bereishis Rabba 24:7).

Before we enter into a discussion of these two philosophic principles of Torah, let us digress for a moment and marvel at the breathtaking analysis of human psychology of our great Torah scholars from two thousand years ago. While many continents were filled with depraved and downright disgusting cultures of human behavior (cannibalism, for example, springs to mind), our ancestors were carefully considering the effects of low self-esteem on societal behavior. It is truly remarkable.

In order to begin to approach a suitable answer to Ben Azzai's question on R' Akiva, we must first examine a very enigmatic statement of Hillel. The Talmud (Shabbos 31a) relates the well-known story of the gentile who came to Hillel and asked that he be converted to Judaism with the sole caveat that Hillel teaches him the entire Torah while he stands on one foot. Hillel taught him the now famous statement, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow" and then converted him.

On the surface, Hillel's statement is quite problematic; clearly, Hillel is basing his teaching on the verse in this week's parsha: "You should love your fellow as yourself." But why did Hillel feel obligated to restate the Torah's clear instruction of how we must treat someone? Furthermore, (and quite incredibly) he chose to make it a negative mandate! In other words, reinterpreting this obligation of how to treat a fellow Jew as what one may not do seems to be extremely limiting. What compelled Hillel to make this modification on "a great principle of the Torah"?

Not surprisingly, Hillel's interpretation is actually quite brilliant. Anytime we do something for someone else, for example, an act of kindness or compassion, we have an innate feeling of satisfaction. Thus, doing something for someone makes us feel good. On the other hand, if we have a juicy piece of gossip about someone that we want to share or if we wish to insult someone who has hurt us, exercising self-restraint doesn't give us any pleasure — quite the opposite, in these cases holding our tongue makes us feel like we want to explode.

Hillel is telling us that the true barometer for loving your friend isn't what we are willing to do for him, because usually doing something for him is also doing something for ourselves. The true barometer of "loving your fellow" is treating him as we would want to be treated (e.g. just as we don't want people saying gossip about us we shouldn't gossip about others). That is a much harder plateau to achieve.

This insight also answers Ben Azzai's question on R' Akiva — "what if a person has low self-esteem?" The essence of low self-esteem is a person's perception of themselves vis-a-vis others. This possuk's obligation of doing for others is based on the principle of being God like. This is why the end of the verse states, "I am Hashem."

Hashem's purpose in the creation of the world was to do kindness for mankind by creating the world and giving mankind a reality of existence. The key to resolving one's own issues of low self-esteem is in becoming God like and doing for others — solely for their sake. Recognizing that one has the ability to give a sense of reality to others by helping them, innately gives one a sense of fulfillment and establishes self worth. This possuk is precisely the antidote to low self-esteem!

Cold or Compassionate?

Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons [...] Speak to Aharon your brother — he may not always come into the Kodesh within the Paroches [...] and he will not die [...] (16:1-2).

Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem is likened to a doctor that is giving advice to his patient: "Do not eat cold food, sleep in a damp chilly place, so that you will not die like so and so perished." This is the reason the Torah gives the context of Hashem speaking to Moshe "after the death of Aharon's two sons."

In other words, Hashem asks Moshe to instruct Aharon that he must carefully abide by the rules of entry into the Kodesh or else he will die in the same manner that his sons died.

This is difficult to comprehend. Losing a child is among the most traumatic experiences a person can ever endure. Aharon lost not one, but two children; men who were the incoming leaders of the generation (they were considered greater than Moshe and Aharon — see Midrash Tanchuma, beginning of Parshas Shemini).

Aharon's loss was obviously profound. It hardly seems necessary to remind Aharon to be careful not to perish in the same manner that his children died. This would be akin to telling a person who lost his children to a drunk driver to be mindful of drunk drivers. In fact, it seems rather heartless to bring it up at all. What message is Hashem trying to convey?

A careful reading of the verses and Chazal statements gives us the answers. Hashem doesn't tell Moshe to tell Aharon that if he doesn't obey the rules of entering the Kodesh he is going to die. Rather, Hashem tells Moshe to instruct Aharon his brother not to enter the Kodesh improperly so that he doesn't die.

Therefore, Hashem isn't telling him that if he doesn't obey Him he's going to die; rather, Hashem is almost pleadingly with Aharon not to go in there at the wrong time so that he doesn't die. Hashem is expressing compassion for Aharon, and essentially telling him not to do something that is harmful to himself.

This is why Chazal compare Hashem to a doctor. This seems rather unusual as Hashem is our king, and if we don't obey him he has every right to punish us. Practically speaking, it makes more sense to compare Hashem to a king. So why do Chazal compare Hashem to a doctor?

Chazal are teaching us that Hashem is telling us what is good for us, just as a doctor who cares about his patient would advise him. This isn't about disobeying Hashem's commandments, this is about Hashem showing us that he cares about us. So too, by Aharon, Hashem is asking him to behave properly so that he won't die. He isn't telling Aharon not to behave like his sons, Hashem is telling Aharon, "I care about you and I don't want you to die."

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