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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Device Maintenance

“Moshe wrote their goings forth, according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth.” (33:2)

The screen flashed: “Device maintenance! Tap below to optimize your machine!” I tapped. “Wow! You’ve got 5 memory-hungry programs hogging up your memory! Let’s see what we can you about this! Tap below to improve it! This won’t affect your personal data.”

I tap the button. Immediately, circles spin on my screen, and little flashes, like so many drops of sweat, seem to spin off the circles as we valiantly do battle with those memory-hugging hogs. And then, in quick succession, “10 background apps closed.” “100 MB of storage space freed up.” “No abnormal battery use detected.” “No app crashes detected.” “No malware apps detected.” “Virus scanning turned on.” “Total freed up - 2.5 GB since you started using Device Maintenance!” And at the top the screen, inside a large circle throb the words: “100 - Excellent! Your device had been optimized.” I felt good about that.

It’s amazing how far a little encouragement goes - even from an inanimate machine.

“Moshe wrote their goings forth, according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth.”

In the first half of this verse, Hashem tells Moshe to encourage the people and write that all their “goings forth” were only for the goal of reaching Eretz Yisrael – the destination of all their “journeyings.” That is why in the first half of the sentence, “goings forth” precedes the word “journeys.” Without that encouragement to the Jewish People in the desert, their journeyings seemed like nothing more than an incessant road-trip. In the second half of the verse, the word “journey” precedes “going forth.” Now, another place. Now, another place. Like a seemingly endless succession of “goings forth.” They didn’t focus on where the journey was taking them. A little encouragement goes a long way.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Shabbat 128-134

From Head To Toe

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, "A person should always sell the roof beams of his house and buy shoes for himself."

People say that the clothes make the man. I would argue that the man makes the clothes – well, someone has to make them! We find earlier in our *masechta* that Rabbi Yochanan said, "My clothes honor me." (Shabbat 113a) Rashi explains that clothes honor the person who wears them. Rabbi Yochanan wore "rabbinical garb" that was suitable for him and therefore honored him. And when a person dresses up for Shabbat, his clothing helps him express his great honor for Shabbat.

While the importance of dressing properly – especially on Shabbat – is beyond dispute, our *gemara* seems to teach the unique significance of wearing shoes. We are taught that one must even sell (at least part of) his home, if needed, to acquire appropriate footwear. The significance of shoes seems to be beyond that of ordinary clothing. Rashi in our *sugya* explains that there is no greater disgrace than walking barefoot in public. Shoes contribute to our basic sense of human dignity. We are taught that Rabbi Akiva instructed his son Rabbi Yehoshua to never go barefoot.

It is said that when the Kotzker Rebbe would discard his worn-out shoes, he would first cover them up before disposal. He said, "How can I throw away shoes that have served me so well for so long in a disrespectful manner?" Shoes are virtually a necessity to assist us in making our path through life with the goal of fulfilling our purpose in this world. There is even a *beracha* that was enacted to be said when putting on one's shoes in the morning: "Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has provided me my every need." (The widespread custom nowadays is to say this *beracha* together with the other *Birkot Hashachar* – the Morning Blessings – in shul before Shacharit.)

Kabbalistic teachings apply the shoe-concept to the relationship between a person's body and soul. The shoe symbolizes the physical body. And just as the shoe encases the lowest part of the physical body and allows it to ambulate in the world, so too does the body encase the lowest level of the soul and allows it to ambulate and relate to the physical world.

- *Shabbat 129a*

Once in Joy, Always in Joy

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, "Every mitzvah which the Jewish People accepted in joy, such as milah, is still celebrated to this day with joy (with a festive meal - Rashi)."

Where do we find the source for this idea? David Hamelech said, "I rejoice in Your command, like one who finds great treasure." (*Tehillim 119:162*) Rashi, in his commentary to Sefer Tehillim, quotes Chazal's teaching that this verse refers to the constant *simcha* that accompanies the mitzvah of *milah*. When David Hamelech was in the bathhouse and saw himself without *tzitzit*, *tefillin* and Torah (due to its being a place where people are not clothed), he was distraught. He said, "Oy vey, I am 'naked' of all commandments!" Immediately, however, when he thought of the mitzvah of *milah* that he was constantly fulfilling, he rejoiced. When he exited the bathhouse he said, "I rejoice in Your command."

Rashi, in our *gemara*, explains that since the word for command is singular and not plural ('*imratecha*' instead of '*imrotecha*') it refers to the singular mitzvah of *milah*, which preceded the other mitzvahs when it was commanded to Avraham *Avinu*. David Hamelech rejoicing in the mitzvah of *milah* – a mitzvah that once it is performed provides constant fulfillment without effort – indicates that *milah* is a mitzvah that was accepted by the Jewish People with joy and is therefore a mitzvah that will always be celebrated with joy.

- *Shabbat 130a*

Q & A

Matot

Questions

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "machane" (camp). Which *machane*?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* position themselves?
10. What promise did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 and 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The *aron* and the *tzitz*.
6. 31:19 - The *Machane Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikve*.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

Q & A

Masei

Questions

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *yovel*?

Answers

1. 33:1 - To show G-d's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2,000 *amot*).
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvot* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

When Suddenly...

The way the Torah looks at it, there are three types of murderers: One who kills by mistake (*shogeg*), one who kills by complete accident (*oness*), and one who kills on purpose (*meizid*). The Torah mandates that one who murders another by mistake must flee to a City of Refuge. In describing how one might inadvertently kill somebody, the Torah says: “And if, with suddenness (*peta*), without enmity, did he (the murderer) push him (his victim), or he threw an instrument upon him...” (Num. 35:22). In this passage, the word *peta* (technically, *feta*) appears in the sense of something that happened “suddenly.” This rare word appears only seven times in the entire Bible, often accompanied by its apparent synonym *pitom* (“suddenly”). In this essay we will consider what – if anything – is the difference between the words *peta* and *pitom*.

The Torah teaches that if a Nazirite becomes ritually impure, he must shave his hair, bring certain sacrifices, and restart his term as a Nazirite. In introducing this law, the Torah writes: “And if a person should die upon him (the Nazirite) with sudden (*peta*) suddenness (*pitom*), and he became impure...” (Num. 6:9). In this passage, *peta* and *pitom* appear in tandem, to stress that the Nazirite must restart even if he became ritually impure unintentionally – meaning, even if it happened “all of a sudden.” [The Bible also uses *peta* and *pitom* as a couplet in Isa. 29:5, Isa. 30:13 and Prov. 6:15. In the other two Biblical passages where *peta* appears (Chavakuk 2:7, Prov. 29:1), *pitom* does not appear alongside it; *pitom* appears a total of twenty-five times in the Bible.]

The Mishna (*Kritut* 2:2) rules that although one generally brings a sin-offering or guilt-offering for a sin committed by mistake, when it comes to the Nazirite who became ritually impure, he must bring a guilt-offering, whether he violates the terms of his Nazirite vow by mistake (*shogeg*), by accident (*oness*), or on purpose (*meizid*). The Talmud (*Kritut* 9a) justifies this ruling by explaining that regarding the Nazirite becoming impure, the Torah uses the words *peta* and *pitom*. Now, the Talmud maintains that *pitom* is the more ambiguous of these two terms, as it could refer

to *shogeg*, *oness*, and even *meizid* (see below). Because of this, one might have thought that just as, in general, a guilt-offering is brought only when one’s sin is *shogeg*, but not if it was *oness* or *meizid*, so too does the term *pitom* when discussing the Nazirite refer only to *shogeg*. This supposition would exempt the Nazirite from bringing sacrifices if he became ritually impure by accident or on purpose. In order to obviate this supposition, the Torah wrote *peta* alongside *pitom*. Since *peta* only means *shogeg* (see below), then *pitom* must mean something other than *shogeg*, thus providing the basis for the Mishna’s ruling that the Nazirite must offer a guilt-offering even if he *purposely* (*meizid*) becomes ritually impure.

How does the Talmud know that *pitom* can refer to *shogeg*, *oness*, and *meizid*? The Talmud cites three proof-texts in which *pitom* or words similar to it appear in situations of *shogeg*, *oness*, and *meizid*. The first passage reads, “The clever one sees evil and hides, while the fools (*petaiim*) violate and are punished” (Prov. 22:3). This verse alludes to deliberate sinning (*meizid*), and refers to such foolish sinners with a word that resembles *pitom*, thus teaching that *pitom* can mean *meizid*. Then the Talmud cites another passage: “The fool (*peti*) believes everything” (Prov. 14:15). This verse criticizes the fool’s naivety that can lead to mistaken (*shogeg*) sin. Since the word for “fools” (*peti*) is similar to *pitom*, this shows that *pitom* can also refer to *shogeg*. [Bartenuro (cited below) cites Ezek. 45:20 to illustrate the *pitom-peti* connection.] Finally, when it comes to *pitom* meaning *oness*, the Talmud cites the verse, “And G-d spoke suddenly (*pitom*) to Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam...” (Num. 12:4). This means that He suddenly foisted a prophecy unto the trio in a way that was totally beyond their control. This is akin to an *oness*, which is something that happens by complete accident and is totally beyond a person’s control. Because *pitom* appears in that passage, the Talmud understands that *pitom* can refer to *oness*.

How do we know that *peta* means *shogeg*? The Talmud explains that *peta* refers to *shogeg* because the

unintentional murderer is only obligated to flee to a City of Refuge if he killed somebody by mistake (*shogeg*), but if he innocently killed somebody in a freak accident (*oness*), then he is exempt from fleeing to a City of Refuge. Since in that context the Torah uses *peta* to describe the inadvertent killer's "sudden" action that led to his victim's death, this indicates that *peta* refers to *shogeg*.

If truth be told, not all of the Sages agree to the Talmud's assumption that *peta* refers to *shogeg* and *pitom* refers to all three frames of mind. The Midrash (*Sifrei* to Num. 6:9) admits that *peta* and *pitom* refer to two different degrees of unintended actions, but registers a dispute over how exactly this works out: According to Rabbi Yoshiya, *peta* refers to *shogeg* (like the Talmud assumes) and *pitom* refers to *oness*, while Rabbi Yonatan maintains that *peta* refers to *oness* and *pitom* refers to *shogeg*. Rashi (to Num. 6:9) seems to follow Rabbi Yonatan in explaining that *peta* means *oness* and *pitom* means *shogeg*. However, Rabbi David HaLevi Segal (1586-1667), author of *Turei Zahav* (*TaZ*), explains in *Divrei David* (there) how Rashi actually follows the Talmud in adopting Rabbi Yoshiya's opinion (see also *Biur HaGra* to Prov. 6:15).

To summarize our findings so far, *peta* and *pitom* both refer to something that happened "suddenly," but seem to refer to different degrees of intentionality in the one who executed/experienced that sudden event.

Interestingly, Rashi (to Num. 35:22, Prov. 6:15, and *Makkos* 7b) explains *peta* as an expression of "closeness" and "immediacy." In this sense, it denotes something "sudden" as happening in such quick succession that one could not have possibly been careful about preventing it. In fact, the word *haftaah* ("surprise") in Modern Hebrew is derived from *peta*. All this seems to fit with Rashi's ostensible opinion that *peta* refers to *oness*.

Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenuro (*Amar Nakeh* to Num. 6:9) offers a slightly different take on why *peta* should refer to *oness*. The trilateral root of *peta* is PEH-TAV-AYIN, but Bartenuro explains that since the letter PEH is often interchangeable with the phonetically-similar letter BET, we can view the root of *peta* as BET-TAV-AYIN. Bartenuro explains that BET-TAV-AYIN is, in turn, a permutation of BET-AYIN-TAV, which means "startled" or "frightened" in Biblical Hebrew (for examples, see Esther 7:6 and Jer. 8:15). The Arabic word *baghta* is a cognate of this root and means "unexpected event." Bartenuro explains that *peta* refers to something that happened in a surprising way that caught somebody totally off-guard. This means that *peta* must refer to *oness*.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) explains that BET-AYIN-TAV is actually derived from the two-letter root BET-AYIN, which refers to something that "reveals itself from beneath the surface." Thus, he explains that a *buva/avabua* (Ex. 9:9-10, Isa. 64:1) refers to "boils," which bubble up on the surface of one's skin. As a corollary of that usage, this root came to mean "fear," which is often accompanied by goose-bumps on the surface of one's skin.

Rabbeinu Efrayim ben Shimshon of Regensburg (to Num. 12:4) parses the word *pitom* as a portmanteau comprised of the words *peh* ("mouth") and *toem* ("fits" or "matches"). He ostensibly explains that something which happens *pitom* happens so quickly and suddenly that it resembles the speed at which words exit one's mouth. Rabbi David Golomb (1861-1935) similarly writes that the TAV-ALEPH-MEM element in the word *pitom* denotes "fitting" or "matching," as if to say that when something happens suddenly, a person may have been in the midst of experiencing a calm serene moment (where everything is "in sync" and "fits together") – when suddenly something happens to disrupt the idyllic situation.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 9:27, Num. 6:9) offers a discussion on the concept of *pitui* ("convincing" or "seducing") which is relevant to our study. He explains that *pitui* essentially recalls a state wherein a person is easily swayed by external impressions and influences. Rabbi Hirsch relates *pitui* to *petach/patuach* ("open"), because for one to be convinced by another, one must be "open" – and thus susceptible – to the influence of such external stimuli. This also relates to the simple-minded fool (*peti*), who can be easily deceived or talked into doing things.

In this spirit, Rabbi Hirsch explains that *peta* refers to a "surprise" that a person could have foreseen if he had simply thought about the likely outcomes of a given situation or course of action. This is comparable to the halachic level of *shogeg*, where one's inadvertency derives from a mistake. If the inadvertent sinner had been a bit more mindful, then he could have avoided sinning. In a similar way, the "surprise element" of a *peta* could have been neutralized if only one would have put more thought into the matter.

On the other hand, the term *pitom* denotes a surprise occurrence that no amount of analytics or forecasting could predict. When it comes to such an event, the "surprise element" and lack of foreknowledge renders one akin to a *peti*, who could not have anticipated or prepared for this sudden event. In further clarifying the difference between *peta* and *pitom*, Rabbi Hirsch summarizes that

peta denotes a subjective surprise, while *pitom* denotes an objective surprise.

Rabbi Pappenheim actually writes the exact opposite. He maintains that *peta* refers to a surprise occurrence, whose catalyst or direct cause is not readily visible in an objective way, while *pitom* refers to a surprise occurrence that those affected by the sudden surprise were subjectively unable to prepare for, even though the signs of its impending arrival were demonstrably clear. Either way, most sources point to a marked difference between the words *peta* and *pitom*

– whatever the exact difference between those two words may be.

In contrast to all this, Ibn Ezra (to Num. 35:22) seems to say that *peta* and *pitom* are one and the same. Rabbi Avraham Menachem Rappaport (*Minchah Belulah* to Num. 12:4) seemingly follows this idea when he suggests that *peta* and *pitom* are etymologically-related because the letters AYIN and ALEPH can be interchangeable, such that PEH-TAV-AYIN equals PEH-TAV-ALPEH-(MEM). According to this approach, *peta* and *pitom* may actually mean the exact same thing; they are not synonyms but rather are different forms of the same word!

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Matot

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows, especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. *Bnei Yisrael* wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive. They were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not even one casualty among *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering that is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting).

The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan River and not enter the Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer the Land of Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

Masei

The Torah names all 42 encampments of *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan River into Eretz Yisrael. G-d commands *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from the Land of Israel and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to completely rid the Land of the Canaanites, those who remain will be "pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides." The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the Levites, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established so that someone who unintentionally kills another person may flee there. The daughters of Tzlofchad marry members of their own tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of *Bamidbar*/Numbers, the fourth of the Books of the Torah.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSING EIGHT : STANDING TALL

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who straightens the bent.”

The previous blessing acknowledges our ability to break free from the restraints of the physical world so that we can focus on our spiritual selves. Which leads us directly to the eighth blessing: “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who straightens the bent.” Who is bent over? Someone who is overburdened by the weight of the world’s problems. Someone who unceasingly feels the heaviness of that responsibility.

But Judaism teaches that the existence of the world is not the responsibility of any one particular individual. The world belongs to G-d. Therefore, a person who knows with certainty that they do not have the undivided responsibility of the world’s wellbeing on their shoulders is not bent down with the weight of that responsibility. In effect, they are able to stand up straight because they do not have to carry a burden that is not theirs. Rather, they will be able to focus on their own personal responsibilities instead.

Of course, this is not to suggest that a person’s individual duties are not numerous and all-encompassing. They are. We are obligated to live our lives in such a way that reflects the Divine that resides within us. That is a solemn responsibility that requires much inner strength and determination. But, what we are not obliged to do is to take sole responsibility for the world. More than that, by accepting that it is G-d Who directs and oversees the running of the world, we open ourselves up to the capability of contemplating our own individual obligations. To focus on the reality that G-d has tasked each of us with a particular purpose, and, most importantly, with the wherewithal to fulfill our purpose. It is an obligation that we should all

embrace enthusiastically because it confers personal meaning to each and every person’s existence.

Yes, it may be a weighty responsibility, but it is the most exhilarating concept as well.

On June the 2nd in 1952, Princess Elizabeth was crowned as queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. The investiture ceremony is very long, full of British pomp and pageantry. The coronation clothing is heavy. Very heavy. Just like the crown itself, which is worn only once in the lifetime of a monarch, and weighs in at just under five pounds. Due to its excessive weight, wearing it for an extended period of time is extremely uncomfortable, perhaps even oppressively so. When Rabbi Shimon Schwab was asked by one of his children how the newly crowned queen could possibly sit there for so long while wearing such a load on her head, he answered, “You are right. It is frightfully heavy, and, I am sure, it is very, very uncomfortable. But I guarantee you that at *that moment* she wouldn’t change places with anyone in the world!” The reason is obvious. All of that “extra” weight is not really extra at all. The glorious magnificence that are the crown jewels define the wearer as the Queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. And it is worth every moment of discomfort to wear them!

When we recite the blessing, “Who straightens the bent,” we are accepting upon ourselves the leadership of G-d. And, together with His Torah, we now have the wherewithal to be guided in the correct direction so that we can fulfill our task in this world. We stand up straight, like soldiers on parade, secure in the knowledge that it is the ultimate Monarch Who is ruling over us.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Value of a Vow

Avow has the power to create new obligations and prohibitions. For example, a vow designating an animal for a holy purpose creates a prohibition against using it for the mundane. In the case of a personal vow, a new obligation - a personal mitzvah - is created with binding force. Consequently, there are many laws regarding validity, fulfillment and annulment of vows. But one may wonder: Why the vow? Would it not be simpler to merely bring the animal as a sacrifice without the vow, or perform or refrain from the designated act without the commitment?

Our Sages disagree as to whether it is preferable to vow to bring an offering before bringing it, or to bring the offering without the preceding vow. However, the root of the disagreement is not about whether there is value to the vow per se. The only factor that makes a vow suspect is that something may get in the way of its fulfillment. If one could be sure of its execution, then all would agree that a vow is preferable.

Why is this so?

Rav Hirsch points out that, unlike any other mitzvah, the laws regarding vows take effect even before the age of maturity - one year before a boy turns thirteen and one year before a girl turns twelve - provided that they understand that they have made this vow to Hashem. There is a deep psychological basis for this law. In the case of other mitzvahs, the obligation comes only at the age of maturity, when the child's intelligence is sufficient to

warrant the imposition of responsibility. However, there is great significance to the resolutions a youth makes approaching the age of maturity. These are resolutions, uttered secretly, known only to G-d, but they are often decisive for a lifetime. Such vows are statements of purpose and of goals, the ripening of which will happen with maturity. The verbal commitment of a youth is received with loving seriousness, as long as the youth knows it is to G-d that he vows, because it is a commitment that is to ripen into a relationship that will then yield more fruit.

Commitment, then, has spiritual value independent of fulfillment. We need look no further than the Israel's acceptance of Torah at Mount Sinai to see this truth: G-d presented us with the opportunity to first *commit* - "We will do, and we will hear" - and only then, to put into practice. Both stages have relationship value. This is also why when someone intends to do a mitzvah, but is prevented from doing so, he is still rewarded. The "reward" - the increased relationship with Hashem - has already taken root.

Our human interactions are no different. When actions are preceded by thought, planning and verbal commitment, they are laden with deeper relationship meaning. There is much value to a vow.

- *Source: Based on the Hirsch Commentary, Bamidbar 30:4*

SEASONS - THEN AND NOW

by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

Harmony of a Nation - Overcoming Baseless Hatred (Part 3)

Ways to Overcome Baseless Hatred

People often think that it is impossible to change the way one feels about someone else. After all, how can a person be expected to control his/her instinctive, emotional feelings about others? This is especially true if, as a result of past interactions, there is built-up hatred or animosity between the two. In such cases, people regularly think that there is no way to stop hating someone after the things that went on between them. This is, however, simply not true.

We mentioned previously that every type of hatred, other than that which is halachically permitted (refer to the previous article about the details of when it is permitted), is considered baseless hatred – because no reason is good enough to hate someone. We also mentioned that one can be guilty of baseless hatred by merely hating someone in one’s heart without doing any action against one’s fellow at all. For example, just taking pleasure in the downfall of one’s fellow, even without taking part in causing it, is considered baseless hatred. Now, it is obvious that Hashem wouldn’t demand something from us if it was not within our ability to do it. Therefore, from the very fact that Hashem commanded us not to hate anyone (outside of where halacha allows it), it means that it is within the ability of each and every one of us to control our emotions and remove the hatred from within us. This being the case, let’s analyze different things one can do to remove inner hatred.

Overcoming Jealousy

The commentaries explain that often the root of baseless hatred is jealousy. It is jealousy that causes one to find faults in the other person’s actions, in order to justify his personally triggered hatred (see the Chafetz Chaim’s *Ahavat Yisrael*, Perek 4). So, the question becomes: How can one fight jealousy, especially when one considers the fact that there are opinions that hold that one transgresses the prohibition of jealousy by merely wanting something his friend has – even in his heart? (See Ibn Ezra on Shemot 20:14, Rambam, *Sefer Hamitzvot*, *lo taaseh* 266.)

The Chafetz Chaim explains that a person who is a carpenter is not jealous of a diamond maker’s tools. Even

though the diamond maker’s tools are much more expensive than the carpenter’s, he does not desire them since he has no use for them. So too, every person should realize that Hashem has put him in this world to accomplish certain tasks that are specifically meant for *him*. Hashem, with His all-encompassing knowledge, also gave him all the tools he needs to accomplish his goals. These tools include his mental abilities, skills, financial means, familial upbringing, and more. If there is anything that was not included in this “package” from Hashem, then it is a sure sign that that tool is simply unnecessary for his purpose in this world! While overcoming jealousy is no simple task, contemplating this idea can be very beneficial in removing jealousy (*Machaneh Yisrael* vol. 2 *perek* 1. See also Ibn Ezra on Shemot 20:14). (Notwithstanding the above, it must be noted that sometimes the reason one is not given something from Hashem is because of his transgressions or because he didn’t pray for them.)

Overcoming the Desire for Taking Revenge

Often, hatred is a form of passive revenge for a seeming offense that was done to him. This means that even though one wouldn’t actively try to hurt his fellow, nevertheless, he would take pleasure in bad things that might happen to him. The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that one reason behind the prohibition of taking revenge is to instill in us the realization that everything is essentially from Hashem (*Sefer Hachinuch*, 241). Even if the other person did do something wrong by performing the misdeed, from the fact that Hashem did not stop him from doing it we see that Hashem wanted it to happen! As it says in the Gemara: No one can lift even a finger without Hashem allowing him to do so (*Chullin* 7b), and elsewhere it says: Nobody has the ability to touch something that is meant for another person (*Yoma* 38b). Therefore, if someone did “touch” something that belonged to us, we must realize that it was not really meant for us at all. By remembering this, we are able to avoid taking the action personally, and minimize – if not eradicate – the hatred we feel.

Another way to fight the desire for revenge, and thereby remove the hatred one feels, is by remembering the words of the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Yerushalmi explains that someone who takes revenge is like a right hand, which, upon being cut by the left hand, goes and cuts the left hand in return (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4). Commenting on this Yerushalmi, the Korban HaEida explains that we are all different parts of one whole – so just because one was hurt by another, hurting him in return would be just as absurd as the right hand cutting the left in return for its carelessness. One can get to this level by working on the mitzvah of *loving one's fellow as oneself*, until one can reach a degree of love where one feels like he is “one” with his fellow. But, how can one build love towards someone he hates? *Chazal* tell us that one way to build love and unity with one's fellow is through giving and doing acts of kindness, which is the topic of the following section.

Generating Love through Giving

Chazal tell us that if one wants to love his friend, he should perform acts that will benefit his friend (Derech Eretz Zuta, *perek* 2; see also Bava Metzia 32b and Tosefot “*lakof yitzro*” there). To explain these words of *Chazal*, Rav Dessler writes that people generally think that it is because they love someone that they perform positive acts for them. And the more that someone loves another, the more he gives to him. People generally are under the notion that it is their love for another that generates their giving to them. However, when investigating further, we find that, in fact, the opposite is even truer. Rav Dessler explains that every person essentially loves himself, and

when he gives and helps others he extends of himself to that person, and it is that extension of himself *that he sees in the other* that generates love towards him. Based on this, we can say that it is the giving that leads to the love.

So, the more one gives, the more love is created. Rav Dessler explains that this is why people love their children, their pets, their plants, their creations. In all these cases it is the giving that is creating the love! This also explains why parents usually love their children more than the children love their parents. Since the giving is often from the parents to the children, the parents feel more love towards the children. All of this wisdom is contained beautifully and succinctly in the words of *Chazal*, who say that when one wants to love another, he should give to him (see Michtav M'Elياهو, vol. 1 p. 31-39).

Based on the above, one should try to give to, or do acts of kindness for, someone whom he doesn't like, in order to generate love for him. One can even do this through praying for him. This, too, is an act of giving that can create love (see Igrot, Chazon Ish 1:123).

Next week we will, *iy"H*, continue with more ways of overcoming baseless hatred.

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