



CLASSIC DAF KESHER

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פרשת בהר - PARSHAT BEHAR

DVAR TORAH THE MEKALEL AND MOUNT SINAI

There doesn't seem to be a smooth transition between the end of Parshat Emor and the beginning of Parshat Behar. The Torah moves from the dramatic episode of the "mekalel," the man who cursed the Divine Name, to a discussion of Shemittah and its halachot.

The Baal Haturim, Harav Yaakov son of the Rosh, זצ"ל, in his commentary on Chumash, searched for points of connection between the two sections, and says: "At Sinai they heard G-d say, 'You shall not take the Name of Hashem your G-d in vain,' and the entire world shook. Yet this person, the 'mekalel,' heard but did not take heed." The giving of the Torah was accompanied by thunder, lightning, and trembling as the Divine Voice spoke. But, says the Gemara (Shavuot 39a), when Hashem said the uniquely severe prohibition, "You shall not take the Name of Hashem your G-d in vain," the entire world quaked. How was it possible for this man who actually heard those Divine words at Sinai to curse the Divine Name?

Perhaps, even though he heard the Divine command at Mount Sinai, he was not affected by it. Perhaps only the rest of the world trembled, but he did not.

Why didn't he tremble? The Midrash gives us an insight. The Torah opens the episode with, "The son of an Israelite woman **went out** ..." yet does not say where he went out from. One of the answers to "Where did he go out from?" is given by Rabbi Berechyah (Vayikra Rabbah 32:3), who says, "He went out of the previous passage in the Torah." The mekalel left Moshe Rabbeinu's shiur about the lechem hapanim, the twelve showbreads. He heard how only once a week new breads were placed on the Shulchan, the Table in the Temple, and the ones taken off were eaten – only on the following Shabbat. When the mekalel heard this from Moshe Rabbeinu, he mocked it: "What is more normal for a King to eat – fresh bread or bread that is nine days old (it was baked on a Friday, yet only eaten on the following Shabbat morning)?"

According to Rabbi Berechyah the mekalel was a cynic whose negativity and ego erupted in sarcasm. He made fun of Moshe's shiur instead of asking him a question. Had he asked, he would have found out about one of our most beautiful and subtle daily miracles. Moshe would have told him that even though the showbreads were taken off the Shulchan on the ninth day after they were baked, they were just fresh as they were when they came out of the oven (Menachot 29a). This was a sign of G-d's love for Israel. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says that when the Jews would come to the Beit Hamikdash on the three festivals the Kohanim would show them the showbreads as a sign of how much Hashem loves Israel.

The mekalel was the type who could listen to the Divine word at Mount Sinai but not take it to heart. It is striking that the reference to Mount Sinai following the mekalel is the opening to the Torah's passage about Shemittah at the beginning of Behar. Like the miraculous freshness of the showbreads, the Land of Israel was blessed with miraculous bounty every Shemittah cycle. The mekalel mocked Moshe Rabbeinu's shiur about the showbreads, but he never made it to the shiur about Shemittah. He didn't have the basic positivity needed to be open to G-d's miracles and blessing. He probably didn't have the humility or simple trust in G-d needed to keep Shemittah in the blessed Land that is home to the Divine Presence.

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SOURCE GUIDE: WHY IS IT AVOT CALLED AVOT?

Where did the section of the Mishnah called Avot get its name from? This week's source guide is devoted to the Tiferet Yisrael's answer to this question, and is based on the introduction to "Avot Lador," Tel Aviv Chief Rabbi (and former Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Israel) Yisrael Meir Lau, שליט"א's commentary on Pirkei Avot.

A. The Source of All Ethics

Rabbi Lau points out that commentators searched for reasons for calling this tractate "Avot" because most of the tractates have topical names – Shabbat, Sanhedrin, Berachot (Beitzah gets its name from its opening words).

Harav Yisrael Lipshitz, זצ"ל (Germany 1782-1860), author of the classic Tiferet Yisrael commentary on Mishnayot, first quotes others' approach and then adds his own:

<p>1. Tiferet Yisrael Introduction to Pirkei Avot The earlier commentators wrote that the reason this tractate is called Avot is because all of the ethical teachings of both the Jews and the nations of the world are included within it, provided one plays close attention to its words. Therefore its words are "avot" – general principles – for all those things that are hidden within it.</p>	<p>תפארת ישראל הקדמה לפרקי אבות כתבו קמאי, דלהכי נקראת מסכת זו אבות, משום דכל המוסרים המובאים בכל ספרי חכמי ישראל ואה"ע, כולן כלולים במסכת זו למי שמדייק בדבריה היטב. ולכן דבריה הם האבות לדבריהן המרומזים בה.</p>
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Those commentators see Avot as the book containing within it all ethical teachings. Its teachings are the basis, the principles, from which all other teachings can be derived. They are the avot, the fathers, and those matters that are hinted at are toldot, their offspring.

B. Pre-Requisite for Torah

His own approach is slightly different:

<p>2. Tiferet Yisrael Introduction to Pirkei Avot In my humble opinion it is called Avot because it includes the very important teachings of how a person can properly establish his character traits and approaches. This is the "derech erez," the proper way of living, that preceded the Torah twenty-six generations (as it says in Vayikra Rabbah Tzav 9:3, and see Pesachim 118a).</p>	<p>תפארת ישראל הקדמה לפרקי אבות ולפע"ד נקראת כן, משום דנכבדות מדובר בה איך יכונן האדם הדעות והמדות שלו. והן הן הדרך ארץ שקדם כ"ו דורות לנתינת התורה [כמ"ש ויק"ר צו ס"ט ופסחים קי"ח א'].</p>
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Here is that Midrash, along with the source of the more well-known formulation, "דרך ארץ קדמה לתורה":

<p>3. Vayikra Rabbah 9:3 For Rav Yishmael son of Rav Nachman said: Twenty-six generations "derech erez" preceded the Torah, as it says, "To watch the path of the Tree of Life" (Bereishit 3:24). "The path" refers to "derech erez"; and the "Tree of Life" refers to Torah.</p> <p>Otzar Hamidrashim (Eisenstein) Rav Shmuel son of Nachmani said: Derech erez is great, for it preceded Torah twenty-six generations, for it says...</p>	<p>ויקרא רבה ט: ג דא"ר ישמעאל בר רב נחמן: עשרים וששה דורות קדמה דרך ארץ את התורה. הה"ד, "לשמור את דרך עץ החיים" (בראשית ג:כד) "דרך" זו דרך ארץ, ואח"כ "עץ החיים" זו תורה.</p> <p>אוצר המדרשים (אייזנשטיין) א"ר שמואל בר נחמני: גדולה דרך ארץ שקדמה לתורה כ"ו דורות, שנאמר ...</p>
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The Tiferet Yisrael explains that Midrash:

<p>4. Tiferet Yisrael Introduction to Pirkei Avot It does not only precede naturally, like a cause precedes a goal, but also by way of reward. For Moshe Rabbeinu of blessed memory only merited becoming the intermediary between Israel and the Holy One, blessed be He, through his precious character traits. It ends up that upright approaches and character traits are like fathers that give birth to keeping the Torah, whereby a</p>	<p>תפארת ישראל הקדמה לפרקי אבות ולא לבד בדרך טבעי כהקדמת סבה לתכלית, כ"א גם בדרך שכו, דהרי משרע"ה לא זכה להיות סרסור בין ישראל להקב"ה, רק ע"י מדותיו היקרים. נמצא שהישרות הדעות והמדות הן אבות מולידות שמירת התורה, אשר בה ישלים גופו ונשמתו לשלם</p>
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person will complete and perfect his body and soul to fulfill his obligations towards G-d and man.	חיוביו לאלהים ואדם.
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This tractate is called Avot, because the teachings it contains about character traits are a necessary pre-requisite to Torah. This is supported by a baraita in Kinyan Torah, the Sixth Chapter of Pirkei Avot, devoted to Torah study. A baraita (Avot 6:6) lists forty-eight things needed in order to acquire Torah. Many of them are character traits, like: awe, fear, humility, joy, purity, companionship, tranquility, slowness to anger, good heartedness, satisfaction with one's lot, likableness, love of G-d, love of humanity, love of charity, love of justice, love of rebuke, and participating in the burden of one's fellow.

THE GIFT OF KEDUSHAH BY RABBI MENDEL FARBER

A. Shabbat, the Source of Kedushah

Let us try to understand kedushah, a concept so central to the Torah yet so difficult to understand. Just translating kedushah as "holiness" or "sanctity" does not do it justice. We have a tradition that if we wish to discover a concept's meaning, we should look at the first time it is mentioned in the Torah. Kedushah is first mentioned in connection with Shabbat in the creation story (Bereishit 2:3). "... וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדְּשׁ אֹתוֹ ..." – "Hashem blessed the seventh day and made it kadosh ..." We see that the source of kedushah is Shabbat. What is the kedushah of Shabbat? What did Hashem do when He was "mekadesh" Shabbat?

While the world was being created during the six days of creation its purpose was hidden. On Shabbat Hashem revealed its purpose. On Shabbat the natural world was refined to the point where its essence and purpose surfaced and was perceptible to man, the one for whom the world was created. During the week the physical world is opaque, hiding its essence; on Shabbat the physical becomes refined, permitting its essence and purpose to rise to the surface. That is what kedushah means. When it is clear that the natural world is only the means to achieve Hashem's ideal, and that its sole purpose is to express that ideal, the world is kadosh. **Anything that represents or expresses the Divine ideal is kadosh.**

Shabbat is referred to as "me'ein Olam Haba." Shabbat is a microcosm of what the real world will ultimately be like. That is why it is the source of all kedushah. Shabbat reveals the goal, what the world will be like when creation is complete and it will be the perfect environment for Man to receive the good that Hashem wishes to bestow upon him. Ultimately all there will be is Shabbat. As the Mishnah says, "On Shabbat we say "מְזוּמָר שִׁיר לַיּוֹם שְׁכוּלוֹ שֶׁבֶת" – "A song to the day that is all Shabbat." That is what kedushah is. One whose life and his very being is an expression of the Divine ideal for which the world was created, is said to be kadosh.

B. Acquiring Kedushah

But kedushah is different than other attributes we attempt to acquire. The Mesilas Yesharim, who sees kedushah as the highest rung on the ladder of growth, explains the difference. The Ramchal opens his chapter on kedushah (Mesilat Yesharim Chapter 26) with, "The issue of kedushah is twofold. It begins with service and ends with reward; its beginning is toil, and its end is a gift. That is to say, Man must first sanctify himself, and then they sanctify him from the heavens." We sanctify ourselves by living the ideal, but it is granted from heaven that one's physical being becomes an expression of the ideal. The achievement of kedushah is a heavenly gift. Even though a person can live a life of kedushah, to become an expression of kedushah is a gift from heaven.

The source for this we also find in Shabbat. The Gemara explains the difference between the ending of the brachah we say in the Amidah on Shabbat and the brachah we say in the Amidah on Yom Tov. On Shabbat we say "Mekadesh Ha'Shabbat," and on Yom Tov we say "Mekadesh Yisrael Vehazmanim." The Kedushah of Shabbat was created exclusively by Hashem. "Blessed is Hashem who sanctified the Shabbat." The seventh day is a result of the creation cycle of seven days. Hashem's goal in creation was Shabbat. "סוֹף מַעֲשֵׂה בַמַּחֲשָׁבָה תְּחִלָּה" – "The thought that motivated creation was the final act of creation." Hashem wanted Shabbat, but needed the six days to create the Shabbat. On Yom Tov, however, the brachah ends, "Mekadesh Yisrael Vehazmanim," Hashem is Mekadesh Yisrael and we are Mekadesh Yom Tov. Yom Tov is a result of Bet din's being Mekadesh Rosh Chodesh. We create Kedushat Yom Tov. Kedushat Shabbat is a gift from heaven. Kedushat Yom tov is the result of human effort.

The Maharal tells us that Shabbat is "Mei'ein Olam Haba" and Yom Tov is "Meiein Yemot Hamashiach." Just as Mashiach is a preparation for Olam Haba, so is Yom Tov a preparation for Shabbat. The source of kedushah is Shabbat, and therefore the ultimate kedushah is a gift, just as the Shabbat is a gift. The Gemara tells us, "Hashem told Moshe, 'Go tell my people I have a precious gift I am bestowing upon them and Shabbat is its name.'" With all the effort we exert, we cannot create a Shabbat; but we can live our six days of the week in a way that merits the great gift of Shabbat.

C. Shavuot, the Shabbat-like Yom Tov

There is one Yom Tov that in some degree shares the quality of Shabbat, and that is Shavuot. The Gemara tells us that even though there is an argument about what calendar date the Torah was given, the sixth or the seventh of Sivan, everyone agrees it was given on Shabbat. What connects Shavuot to Shabbat? Shavuot is the only Yom Tov that the Torah does not connect to a calendar date. It is the fiftieth day after the first day of Pesach. That day did not become Yom Tov because the Bet Din was Mekadesh Rosh Chodesh Sivan, but because Klal Yisrael counted forty-nine days. Great effort was needed to merit that fiftieth day. It wasn't simply counting; it was achieving, each day, through great effort and toil, the level that day represented. Level by level we came closer to the fiftieth day. But, alas, we did not count the fiftieth day. We entered into that day by the grace of Hashem, the ultimate heavenly gift, the Torah. All human effort cannot create a Torah, but it can make us worthy of receiving the Torah. Our kedushah is our Torah. It, and only it, can bring us to the ultimate goal and gift, the eternal world with all the "Heavenly Good" destined for us, "Olam Haba".

The Mesilat Yesharim ends the chapter on kedushah by saying that the real heights of kedushah are not reached by refraining from or avoiding contact with the physical aspects of our world. On the contrary, it is achieved by converting that world itself into a true expression of the ideal. That is the heavenly gift, the creation of a new world with all the beauty of Hashem's Divine Ideal.

As we approach Shavuot let us do what is incumbent upon us, to strengthen our commitment to Torah; learning it and implementing it in every aspect of our lives. Then, with Hashem's help we will merit that greatest of all gifts, to receive the Torah once again on Shavuot, with all its beauty, newness and freshness.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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