

## מתוקים מדבש



## Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI YOSEF GAVRIEL BECHHOFER

## Bemachashavah Techilah

At the root of the word “vayakhel” that the Torah employs to describe the gathering of the Jewish people at the beginning of this week’s parashah is the word “kahal.” The word *kahal* is one of several words the Torah uses when discussing various groupings of the Jewish people. Other terms include “*Bnei Yisrael*,” “*Beis Yisrael*,” “*Yisrael*,” “*Bais Ya’akov*,” “*Am*,” “*Goy*,” “*Eidah*” - and the list goes on.

Some *Rishonim* believe there are multiple words with identical meanings in the Hebrew language. The great *Acharonim*, however, including the Malbim *zt”l* and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch *zt”l* have inculcated within us the other view, that there are no synonyms in *Lashon HaKodesh*. Thus, if the Torah uses various terms to discuss the Jewish nation, they each must possess distinct and separate meanings. It is, therefore, axiomatic that if the Torah chooses to base the description of this gathering as an instance involving a *kahal*, it was intended to specifically to create a *kahal*.

The connotation is clear. In Devarim 4:10 Moshe Rabbeinu relates that *Hashem Yisborach* had commanded him, in gathering the nation for *Mattan Torah*: “*Hakhel li es ha’Am*.” In Devarim 9:10, Moshe calls the day of *Mattan Torah*: “*Yom HaKahal*.” Obviously, the connot-

ation of *kahal* is *Mattan Torah*. But why?

Exploring here the full gamut of terms that we began to note above is not possible for us. Let us analyze one continuum of terms: *goy-am-eidah*-

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*kahal*.<sup>1</sup>

An inferior description of a national entity is that of “*goy*.” *Moshe Rabbeinu* describes the process of redemption from Egypt as “*goy mikerev goy*” - a nation from the

<sup>1</sup>An indispensable tool for the amateur linguist and philologist is the “*Ya’ir Or - HaCarmel*,” two works generally bound together, the former by the Malbim himself, the latter a compendium of his comments, culled from all of his writings, on the definitions of words and the differences between synonyms. Much of what we propose here (and much more than we have proposed here) may be found under the various relevant entries in the *HaCarmel*, although we have deviated from the Malbim’s explanations.

midst of another nation. On that phrase Chazal<sup>2</sup> comment that “these were not circumcised and those were not circumcised.” Obviously, the term *goy* connotes a parallel between ourselves and the nations of the world, and implies a national identity bereft of any national idea - an association based on some commonality, perhaps, at a minimum, the unique names, language and garb that the Israelites retained in Egypt.

A notch above the term “*goy*” is the term “*am*” - a term that is, in its very spelling, related to the word “*im*” - “with.” A national idea or ideal bonds the *am*. For us, *Am Yisrael*, that national ideal is the mission with which Hashem charged us at Mount Sinai: “*mamleches kohanim vegoy kadosh*.” It is not enough for us to be a *goy*. At a minimum, we must be a *goy kadosh*. *Kehunah* and *kedushah* are our *leitmotifs*.

Still, both *goy* and *am* are abstractions: They describe the status of the people as a nation, and do not address the conduct of the people at a given time. For that purpose the Torah uses the terms *eidah* and *kahal*.

“*Eidah*”: A group convened for a specific purpose (the Malbim says that “*eid*” in the Torah always connotes two witnesses because the two witnesses are a mini-*eidah*, and

<sup>2</sup> Vayikrah Rabbah 23:2

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch postulates that they connect to "ya'ad" - designation). Nevertheless, an *eidah* can be an "*eidah ra'ah*." The term defines a lower form of gathering, and thus related to the word "*eider*" - a flock or herd.

"*Kahal*": A group convened in a religious or refined manner.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>3</sup>The *Sidduro shel Shabbos* at the end of *Shoresh 6 Anaf 1* explains the statement in Tehillim (149:1) "*tehillaso b'kahal chassidim*" that through *kahal*, the *gevuros* become *chasadim*. He explains that in *KH"L* the H = the five *gevuros*, and the K-L = the five *chasadim* (5x26 [*Shem*

purpose of many *mitzvos* is to transform "*Adas Yisrael*" into a *Kahal Hashem*, or "*Kahal Adas Yisrael*." The purpose of *Vayakhel* was to forge that *Kahal*.

Sometimes we do not act in complete accordance with our lofty destiny: Then the Torah calls us an

*Havaya"h]* = 130. Note the significance of other 130's, such as "*tzam*" - fasts turn *gevuros* into *chasadim*. He alludes to the custom during davening, (at least) of clasping one's left hand with and enveloping it in the right one - enveloping *gevuros* in *chasadim*.

*eidah*. We strive for the high level of achievement that the term *kahal* connotes. To attain that level requires unity. That unity was first achieved through the bond of *machatzis hashekel* and the other massive outpourings of materials used to make the *Mishkan*. The *Avodas Hashem* in the *Mishkan*, and later in the *Beis HaMikdash*, united all the individuals in the Jewish nation, recalling *Kabbalas HaTorah* "*ke'ish echad be'lev echad*."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Rashi, Shemos 19:2

### RABBI MICHA BERGER

## Bakeish Shalom

When the parts of the *Mishkan* were completed, the *Mishkan* was then dedicated in the *Shemonas Yemei Hamilu'im*, 8 days in which it was assembled and taken down. For the first seven days, it was assembled by Aharon and his sons, the *kohanim*. On the eighth day, Moshe assembled the *Mishkan*.

What was the purpose of this? If the building of the *Mishkan* was just practice, to learn how to do it in the future, Moshe would have demonstrated to the *kohanim* how to assemble the *Mishkan* on the first day, not the last, after they've done it seven times already.

R' Samson Raphael Hirsch sees in these 8 days a symbol for the subsequent history of all of the sanctuaries. The *Mishkan* was assembled in five places: Sinai, Gilgal, Shilo, Nov, and Gideon. After the *Mishkan*, we have had two *Batei Mikdash* so far, and await the build-

ing of the third. In all, sanctuaries are built eight times in Jewish history.

There is a famous *aggadita* that explains why Moshe Rabbeinu could not be the one to take us into *Eretz*

*Moshe was not merely participating in the consecration of the Mishkan, but was also demonstrating the permanence of the messianic age. The Temple will not fall again; there will be no more exiles.*

*Yisrael*. Everything Moshe did is permanent. This is important, because if it were possible to abrogate one thing that he did, it brings into question the permanence of the Torah. However, Hashem knew that the time would come when the Jews would deserve punishment. By having Yehoshua and not Moshe bring us into Israel, Hashem made exile a possible punishment.

This makes Rav Hirsch's comment even more interesting. On the

eighth day Moshe performed the assembly. The eighth day also parallels the Third *Beis HaMikdash*, which will never be destroyed. Moshe was not merely participating in the consecration of the *Mishkan*, but was also demonstrating the permanence of the messianic age. The Temple will not fall again; there will be no more exiles.

But what gave Moshe Rabbeinu's actions the power of permanence? And more pragmatically, how can we learn from this a way to make a permanent impact?

We find that Hashem uses two adjectives to describe Moshe. The first is *anav*, modest. "And the man Moshe was very modest" (Bamidbar 12:3). Modesty is a necessary precondition for prophecy. If one is too full of himself, there is no room for G-d. If everything you perceive is colored by what you want to hear, then you cannot hear Hashem. The second is that Hashem calls him "Moshe My

servant”, *Moshe Avdi*. “*Moshe avdi* is not like that” (ibid 7). Rav Hirsch finds a similarity between *eved*, with an *ayin*, and *avad*, with an *aleph*. *Avad* means lost. *Eved*, with the voiced *ayin* instead of the silent *aleph*, means one whose will, desires, and self-identity are occluded by another’s. *Moshe Avdi*, therefore, means: Moshe, who made his desires secondary to Mine. Both adjectives, *anav* and *eved*, describe Moshe Rabbeinu as one who placed his own desires second. Everything Moshe did was *lesheim Shamayim* (for the sake of [the One in] heaven). All of his actions were an expression of Hashem’s Will.

R. Yochanan HaSandler<sup>1</sup> describes what gives permanence to a congregation. “Any congregation which is *lesheim Shamayim* will end up existing, and congregation which is not *lesheim Shamayim* will not end up existing.”

Perhaps this too is the source of the permanence of Moshe Rabbeinu’s actions. Just as a congregation that is *lesheim Shamayim* endures, so too other activities.

Chazal comment on the phrase “*Mishkan Ha’eidus*” (the *Mishkan*, dwelling place, of testimony), “*Sheyismashkein ba’avonos Yisrael*”, it will be made temporary through the sins of Israel. Divrei Shaul writes that

<sup>1</sup> Avos 4:14

this is because it was built by Betzalel, a human being. However, the third *Beis HaMikdash*, “*tivneh chomos Yerushalayim* – You will build the walls of Jerusalem” (Te-hillim 51:20). Hashem will build it, and so it will be permanent.

It is not clear how literally to take the idea that Hashem will build it. In *Hilchos Melachim*, the Rambam clearly describes the building as part of the role of the *Melech HaMo-*

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*shiach*. How then would the Rambam understand “*tivneh chomos Yerushalayim*”? We said that Moshe assembling the Mishkan on the eighth day foreshadowed the building of the third *Beis HaMikdash*. Perhaps this is to indicate that people who, like Moshe, are acting entirely *lesheim Shamayim*, with no element of personal motivation, will build the third *Beis HaMikdash*. Since “a person’s messenger is like himself”, it could be said poetically that Hashem was doing the building, even though the king will be leading it. Since it is being done *lesheim Shamayim*, it would still have the permanence described in the *Divrei Shaul*.

We hold that in general “*mitzvos einam tzrichos kavanah* – mitzvos do not require intent”. (Exceptions are those mitzvos, like *tefillah*, where intent is the whole substance of the mitzvah.) But look how much is lost when we only fulfill this minimal requirement! The mitzvah is robbed of its ability to have lasting impact!

We say in the *berachah* before the morning Shemah, “*lishmor, vela’asos ulkayeim* – to guard, to do, and to make permanent all the words of Your Torah.” *Shemirah*, guard, is a term that refers to prohibitions.<sup>2</sup> *La’asos*, to do, refers to obligations. What then is *lekayeim*, to fulfill, which literally means to give permanence?

To truly get value out of the mitzvos, we have to explore our motivations. Am I doing this because that is how I was raised? Or because it will impress my neighbors with my “*frumkeit*”? Hashem tells me to do this, but why? What can I learn and take with me from the deed I am about to do? When one acts from this position of *lishmah*, one gives the action the power to make a permanent *rosheim*, impact, on one’s soul.

<sup>2</sup> Shevuos 20b

### RABBI SETH MANDEL

## Sefasai Tiftach

**T**efillah is one of the central mitzvos of the Torah according to many; it is the mitzvah where a person develops and nurtures his relationship to G-d. According to the Chazal, it is referred to as *Avodah*, the same term for the offering of the korbanos in the *Beis HaMikdash*, but *tefillah* is “*avodah*

*shebalev*,” how one serves G-d inside himself. It is clear that, as an internal *avodah*, *tefillah* may serve its purpose only if a person properly focuses on it. Too often our harried lives reduce *tefillah* to the status of an obligation that is performed as quickly as possible and with little attention. Not only does this not fulfill the mitzvah,

but it damages one’s main purpose in life, which is to develop the relationship to G-d and His Torah.

There is no need for *tefillah* to take a very long time, but there is a need to focus one’s thoughts when saying *Shemoneh Esrei*. The

Rambam<sup>1</sup>, lists *kavanah* as one of the essential elements of *tefillah*, and later<sup>2</sup> states that any *tefillah* without *kavanah* is worthless, and one should not say *Shemoneh Esrei* until he can focus his thoughts. But this *kavanah* does not require, according to the Halachah, holding complicated thoughts in one's mind. Rather, as the Rambam<sup>3</sup> defines the necessary *kavanah*, "one must empty his mind of all thoughts and picture himself as standing in front of the Divine Presence." The *Tur*, followed by the *Shulchan Aruch*,<sup>4</sup> similarly says "one must remove all thoughts that distract oneself."

The *Tur* also says that one must understand the words, and the *kabbalah* adds esoteric ideas to be focused on during prayer. But before one could think of developing these other ideas, one must find a way to have the essential, basic element: emptying one's mind of all other preoccupations and understanding that one is now in the Presence of G-d, addressing G-d directly.

This basic *kavanah* is so essential that without it, *tefillah* is considered worthless. The Rambam, on the basis of a Gemara in Berachos, holds that one must go back a repeat *Shemoneh Esrei* if one prayed without *kavanah*. Other rishonim disagree, but not because they think that *kavanah* is not essential, but because of a different issue: if one prays without *kavanah*, what makes him think that if he repeats his prayers, he will do it with *kavanah*? This perhaps is a necessary concession to people's lack of *kavanah* nowadays, but it does not absolve one from one's obligation to pray with *kavanah*. As mentioned, according to all rishonim *tefillah*

without the necessary, basic *kavanah* is worthless.

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ations, many people spend a short time focusing on the task at hand prior to entering the meeting. In exactly the same way, one should spend a second thinking that he is going into a meeting - indeed he is, with the King of Kings - and prepare himself to deliver a presentation to G-d, where his success may depend on how convincing his presentation is.

This is exactly what the Rambam<sup>5</sup> says is necessary: "Because of this [requirement to focus one's thoughts], one must pause a little bit before the *tefillah* in order to focus his thoughts." In addition, he states<sup>6</sup> (and it is repeated in the *Shulchan Aruch*) that "one may not start praying immediately following laughter, jokes, intense discussion, quarrels, or anger. nor even following dealing with a halachic question, so that he will not be preoccupied with the question." So it is clear that the problem is not that immediately before *tefillah* one might be pre-occupied with mundane matters; even a preoccupation with holy matters poses a barrier for successful *tefillah*. This is also the reason for the

halachah brought in the Gemara Eruvin and recorded by the Rambam<sup>7</sup> that "one who comes from a trip and who is tired or not at ease, is forbidden to pray until he can concentrate his thoughts. The *Chachamim* said [that this applies] even for three days, until his mind is relaxed, and only then may he pray."

This is not a blanket exemption that anyone going on a trip should not pray, but rather a reflection of the key role *kavanah* plays: if one cannot concentrate, his prayers fulfill no function, so Chazal record that after a trip, if one's mind is not at ease, he must wait until he can concentrate before approaching the King of Kings.

Reminding oneself of the important "meeting" that one is about to go into is a very useful technique in focusing one's thoughts. This is also the basis for the view that one should take three steps forward before starting one's prayers: to inculcate in one's mind that he is entering a "meeting." Only a second is needed for the steps and for the focus, but this second can transform *tefillah* from a rote recitation (which the Rambam considers worthless) into something sublime.

<sup>7</sup> 4:15

<sup>1</sup> Hilchos Tefillah 4:1

<sup>2</sup> 4:15

<sup>3</sup> 4:16

<sup>4</sup> Orach Chaim 98

<sup>5</sup> 4:16

<sup>6</sup> 4:18

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