

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

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Bemachshvah Techilah

What is the role of the laws of business listed in Choshen Mishpat?

One approach could be that working for income is a necessary evil. It's Hashem's punishment to Adam for eating the forbidden fruit – “with the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread”. However, by following these laws these activities are kosher, they are rendered permissible. But if all it offered were the ability to deal with a necessary evil, we would have difficulty understanding a

Gemara about this week's parashah.

Ya'akov crosses his family and almost all of his belongings across the river, and has to return for some small vessels. There, on the far side of the river, he encounters and battles an angel until dawn.

“And Ya'akov was left alone.” (Bereishis 32:25) R. Elazar said: He remained behind for the sake of some small jars. From here [we learn] that to the righteous their money is dearer than their body. Why [do they care] so greatly? Because they do not extend their hands to robbery.”¹

At first this is very hard to understand. Are *tzaddikim*, righteous people, supposed to be that materialistic? However, as we see

from the answer, it is not the monetary value of their belongings, but their spiritual value that holds the attraction. It is their sanctity of being acquired within the laws of Choshen Mishpat. The Gemara teaches that the honest business deal is not a concession to reality, but part of the ideal.

This can be understood using the approach of Rav Yecheil Ya'akov Weinberg, the author of *Seridei Eish*. In a memorial volume, he explains that Rav Samson Raph-

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ael Hirsch's motto of *Torah im Derech Eretz* – Torah with the way of the world – is about the proper marriage between the Torah and the “real world”. The union between Torah and *Derech Eretz* in that tiny word “*im*” is not haphazard. He writes, “The Torah, according to Rav Hirsch, is the force that gives form. Form, to Aristotle's thought, means a thing's essential nature – in distinction to the substance from which it is embodied. *Derech Eretz* is merely the matter on which Torah works.”²

In Aristotelian metaphysics, all objects are composed of two things: substance and form. Substance is

the inherent matter³; its form is the shape and properties it assumes. As the architectural adage goes, “Form follows function.” An object is shaped to serve an intended function. Form is not only the shape that the object assumes, but also its use and its goal.

When the Torah speaks of *kedushah*, it usually uses the preposition “*le-*”, “*to*”. The *kohen gadol* wore a *tzitz* that reads “*Kadosh laShem*”, “sanctified to G-d”. In the marriage formula, the *chasan* tells the *kallah* that she is thereby “*mekudeshes li*”, “consecrated to me”. We use the term “*kadosh*” when something is consecrated for a particular function, from something assuming a form.

Torah defines the goal of our lives, the function for which we were created. It therefore dictates the form that we give the things we do. The resulting life has *kedushah*. To Ya'akov Avinu, his possessions were holy because they were the substance to which he applied the Torah's blueprint.

³ In Greek, the word for substance is “*hyle*”. The Ramban uses this term in his commentary on Bereishis 1:1. The initial *beri'ah* ex nihilo in v. 1 was of shapeless *hyle*, which was then given form during the *yetzirah* of the rest of the chapter.

² Harav Shimshon Rephael Hirsch: *MishnasoveShitaso*

¹ Chullin 91a

When we look at Eisav in this light, we see that he took the exact opposite approach. The Torah explains Yitzchak's attraction to Eisav with "*ki tzayid befiv*"⁴ which the midrash understands to mean "he used his mouth to ensnare"⁵. Eisav would impress his father with shows of religiosity, asking questions like the correct way to tithe salt, knowing full well that salt is not tithed. To Eisav, Torah was a tool, something you manipulate, to gain material ends.

Seforno⁶ understands this *pasuk* not to mean that Yitzchak loved

⁴ Bereishis 25:38

⁵ Quoted by Rashi ad loc.

⁶ Ad loc.

The Torah speaks on many different levels, *peshat* being only the most basic and straightforward. There are other levels of meaning in the text from which we can draw many important lessons. Ya'akov's overtures toward Eisav are classic lessons on how to deal with dangerous potential enemies, the proper way to conciliate yet defend. While on the *peshat* level this is generally understood as a guideline on how to deal with a physical adversary, on a more esoteric plane it can also be read as directions on how to defeat the yetzer hara. On an allegorical level, one can say that Eisav is the yetzer hara. As we explore Ya'akov's various actions in response to Eisav we can learn how to properly control the yetzer hara.

The initial message that Ya'akov sent was to "*adoni Eisav*",

Eisav instead of Ya'akov, but rather that "Yitzchak also loved Eisav even though he knew he was not as whole as Ya'akov." Yitzchak originally dreamed that his sons would live together in a partnership – Ya'akov would study Torah and Eisav would provide the means with which to do so. Eisav did commit himself to the land, but he became an *ish sadeh*, a person who is defined by the field, rather than learning the proper path in this world, *derech eretz*. He therefore fit the Torah to his own purposes, inverting the form and the substance.

"my master, Eisav" (Bereishis 32:5-6). It is critical not to underestimate the power of one's physical desires. The yetzer hara is a force that has overwhelmed many people and it is

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important for us to recognize that. Until one stops minimizing its power one cannot begin to overcome it.¹

Ya'akov's message was that he had lived with Lavan, a rasha, but still "*garti*", he had fulfilled all of the mitzvos.² We have spent our lives in the physical world awash in temptations but have still been able to live a frum life full of mitzvos. We have accomplishments of which we should be proud. We are capable

¹ See Sukkah 52b

² See Rashi, Bereishis 32:5

Rashi quotes Bereishis Rabba⁷ that the angel who battled Ya'akov when he was alone on the far side of the river was the guardian angel of Eisav's children, the nation of Edom. The confrontation between Ya'akov and Edom's *malach* was a fundamental event about the relationship between the idealism of Torah and the realism of being in this world. When Ya'akov embodied the proper relationship of physical and spiritual, when he saw the holiness one can imbue even the purchasing of small jars, that was when he faced the specter of Eisav.

⁷ Bereishis 32:25

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Bakeish Shalom

people who have overcome much in our lives and can overcome this yetzer hara as well. Only with confidence can we fight the yetzer hara.

Ya'akov continued that he has oxen, donkeys, etc. He has established a life for himself and has much to lose should he fail in his battle against the yetzer hara. This is what we need to say to ourselves and our yetzer hara. We are strong, we are accomplished, and we have a good deal to lose if we do not conquer our yitzrei hara.

Ya'akov was still frightened and distressed (Bereishis 32:8-9). As well we should be of the yetzer hara. Only if we recognize the strength of our physical desires and acknowledge that the battle against them will be very difficult can we summon up the necessary power for the struggle. We should be frightened. We need to be frightened.

Only then will we labor long enough and hard enough to conquer our yetzer hara.

Ya'akov then created a plan for triumph. He split his family into two camps so that even if Eisav attacked one group the other would be able to escape and survive. The biggest mistake people make when trying to conquer a yetzer is not devising a plan. One needs to arrange a detailed strategy on how to overcome a physical desire before attempting to confront it. The ba'alei mussar experimented with different methods for defeating various yetzarim and we need to learn from their successes on what plans work best. Whether it be timetables for withdrawal from certain pleasures, repeated verbal affirmations of abstinence or other strategies, only a clever pre-planned approach will succeed.

Then Ya'akov prayed (Bereishis 32:10-13). One will not succeed in defeating a yetzer hara without Divine assistance. It is simply impossible. Man is too frail a being to

“One who eats and does not recite a *berachah* is called a thief.”¹ Most of us were taught this statement to refer to theft from Hashem. He made this world, and therefore using Hashem's handicraft without requesting His permission is akin to theft. However, Rav Chaim Volozhiner understands the Gemara as being about theft from the universe. This notion underlies his approach to *berachos* and how he understands their structure.

A *berachah* begins with the word “*baruch*”, which is a term denoting quantitative increase or

¹ Berachos 35b

be able to accomplish such a task without help from Above. However, we are told that one who attempts to purify himself will be assisted in this task by G-d.³ Therefore, we pray. While it does not obviate the need for hard work, it will help the effort succeed.

Finally, Ya'akov sent gifts to Eisav (Bereishis 32:14-22). Physical pleasures are the natural breeding ground for the yetzer hara. Certainly, it is appropriate to enjoy in moderation the pleasures of the world that Hashem has graciously given us. However, it is very easy for one to grow too accustomed to these joys and to thereby become lax in some character trait or observance. While chocolate is a nice treat, overindulgence in it is unhealthy and is a sign of a lack of self-control. The only way to regain control is to sacrifice some or all consumption of chocolate. One cannot use the physical world in the

³ Yoma 38b

enlargement. The Zohar² writes that the purpose of a *berachah* is to draw down life from the Source of Life. The *berachah* is not an attempt to do the impossible, to increase Ein Sof, the Infinite. Rather, it refers to G-d as the Source, the wellspring (*bereichah*) from which our existence flows, the Provider of increase.³

Rav Chaim explains⁴ that the name *Havayah*, the tetragramaton, does not refer to the *Ein Sof* Itself. The *Ein Sof* is unnamable. Even the expression “*Ein Sof*” refers to the

² Ra'ayah Mehemna, beginning of Parashas Eikev pp. 71, 72

³ Nefesh Hachaim 2:2

⁴ Ibid ch. 3

same way and still expect to overcome a physical desire. Whether it is throwing away certain magazines – or a television – one must somehow rid oneself of a physical item or attitude in order to defeat the yetzer hara. Just like Ya'akov gave some of his possessions to Eisav in order to win or forestall a battle with him, so too one must give some physical object in order to conquer a physical desire.

We learn from Ya'akov that defeating Eisav is possible. Once we acknowledge that we have a yetzer hara that needs taming we can follow Ya'akov's blueprint for conquering. However, among the many actions required is following a plan. The way to devise a plan is through mussar. Whether it be as a weapon or as a method of finding an appropriate strategy for fighting the yetzer hara, studying mussar is a basic component of any plan to conquer a physical desire.

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Sefasai Tiftach

lack of limit, the inability for a created being to find a handle with which to define Him. The name *Havayah* refers to G-d as he Who was, is, and will be, Who is the cause and source of all existence. It describes G-d as he relates to His creation.

Elokeinu refers to Hashem when His actions appear to be one of justice and law. *Elokeinu* means “our G-d, Master of all the forces.” “And *Elokim* said, ‘Let Us make man in Our Form, like Our Image’ (Bereishis 1:26). *Elokeinu* refers to the image of G-d in which man was created; man can master forces beyond himself.⁵

⁵ Ibid ch. 5

Finally we describe G-d as *Melech Ha'olam*, King of the world.

The *berachah* is therefore a progression from the abstract notion of G-d as Source downward to the human perspective.

But the phrasing is *Atah*, You. However, when we reach the closure of the *berachah*, we shift to the third person. "Who sanctified us with His *mitzvos*..." We start with a sense of closeness to Hashem, and conclude with one of distance. The one making the *berachah* retraces the steps, the flow of Divine Emanation, of *shefa*, down from Him to us.

(This rule that the closure of a *berachah* must be in the third person is taken as a given by R' Chaim's rebbe, the Vilna Ga'on. The *berachah* after the abbreviated *Shema* said in the *Korbanos* section of *Shacharis* concludes in standard *Ashkenaz* with "*mekadeish shimcha barabim* – may You sanctify Your name amongst the masses." The Vilna Ga'on, in keeping with this principle, preferred the variant "*ham'kadeish shemo barabbim* – Who sanctifies His name amongst the masses.")

Man, by consciously retracing the flow of *shefa* to the world, strengthens that flow. Someone who eats an apple without making a *berachah* upon it robs the world of the potential life-force that the *berachah* could have provided.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner's more Kabbalistic approach provides an

interesting compliment and contrast to the Hirschian approach Reb Jonathan Baker discussed in these

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pages in last week's issue.⁶ Rav Hirsch's explanation describes man as grappling with the dialectic of a G-d who is both Immanent and yet Transcendent. We therefore go from "*Atah* – You" to the transcendent connotations of *Havayah*, He who is beyond time, to the less transcendent notions of Lawgiver and king. The mental image is a vacillation, portraying the unity behind apparently conflicting notions.

Rav Chaim portrays the purpose of the *berachah* as explaining the means of resolving that contradiction; of seeing how it is only because Hashem is transcendent that He is able to emanate sustenance into every thing, and therefore be inherent in all of creation.

Also interesting is their respective treatments of the word "*baruch*". Both deal with the problem of how one can meaningfully apply a term that denotes increase to Hashem, who clearly cannot be increased nor needs increase. To Rav S.R. Hirsch, *baruch* becomes a call to action, to dedicate to Hashem's purposes the one thing over which He voluntarily relinquished control – our free will. We can thereby increase Hashem's

influence. Rav Chaim understands *baruch* as about Hashem as the One Who increases. Not the Subject of the increase, but its Cause. The *berachah* is itself the means by which we can strengthen that power of increase. They share a common theme that the one making the *berachah* participates in adding G-dliness to the world.

Probably the most frequently made *berachah* is *Shehakol*. Perhaps we can view this *berachah* in terms of a symmetry. The closing reads "... *shehakol nihyeh bidvaro* – that the all exists by His Word." *Hakol*, the all, refers to the universe, that over which the *Melech ha'olam* is king. *Nihyeh* is from the same root as *shem Havayah*, however we're not speaking of the Cause of existence, but we speak in passive voice of that which is caused. *Bidvaro*, with His Word, is a reference to that which emanates from the Source, in contrast to *Baruch*, which refers to the Source Himself.

This reflection points to the realization that the world that comes from G-d is itself an expression of His world. We not only see creation as coming down from Hashem to the universe, but creation also points upward to Hashem.

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⁶ See "Sefasai Tiftach", Mesukim Midevash vol. 1 no. 4, Vayeitzei 5764, <<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/5764/vayeitzei.pdf>>.