

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

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Bemachashavah Techilah

“**A**nd it was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons, and the elders of Israel” (Vayikra 9:1). Aharon and his sons just completed the seven days of *milu'im*, the period after their anointing that they spent within the *Ohel Mo'eid*, the tent of meeting, as part of their being consecrated as *kohanim*.

This day is described as both part of, and subsequent to, the *milu'im* period. Rashi, on the opening of this week's *parashah*, remarks about the word “*shemini*” that the Torah, by calling the day the eighth, is including it within the *milu'im* period. However, it clearly was different in kind from the others. The obligation to remain within the *Ohel Mo'eid* did not apply “because in seven days your hands will be filled.”¹ Seven, not eight. They are reassured that if they “remain within the door of the *Ohel Mo'eid* day and night, 7 days, and guard in Hashem's guard, they will not die.”² This promise stands in stark contrast to the eighth day, when Nadav and Avihu do die, within the *mishkan*, while serving Hashem – albeit improperly.

In a number of places, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch comments on the meanings of the numbers six, seven and eight in Jewish symbology.

In his translation of Rav Hirsch's commentary on the *chumash*, Dr. Isaac Levy provides this summary:

“The origin of this meaning is to be found in the work of the Creation. The visible material world created in six days received with the seventh day a day of remembrance of, and bond with its invisible L-rd and Creator, and thereby its completed con-

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summation. Similarly the symbolism of the number seven in the Menora, in the Temple, in the Mussaf offerings, in the sprinklings of the blood on Yom Kippur, in the Festivals of Pessach and Succoth, in Sabbath, Schmita, Tumma etc. etc. The symbolism of the number eight: starting afresh on a higher level, an octave higher. The eighth day for Mila, Schmini Atzereth and Israel as the eighth of G-d's Creations. With the creation of Israel G-d laid the groundwork for a fresh, higher mankind and a fresh higher world, for that shamayim chadashim [new heavens] and the aretz chadashah [new earth] for which Israel and its mission is to be the beginning and instrument.”³

“So that there are three elements in us. (a) our material sensuous bodies, like the rest of the created visible world = 6; (b) the breath of free will, invisible, coming from the Invisible One = 7; (c) the calling of Jew, coming from the historical choice of Israel = 8.”⁴

For Rav Hirsch, the week gives meaning to the numbers six and seven. The Maharal, though, finds that the week itself is based on a more primary idea. He attributes the symbolism of six and seven, and therefore implicitly that of eight, to the structure of space:

“When you look closely you will find that the physical has six opposing sides, which are: top and bottom, right and left, front and back. All these six sides are related to the physical, because each side has extent, and limits physical objects. But, it also has in it a seventh, and this is the middle, which has no exposure on any side. Because it is not related to any side it is like the non-physical, which has no extension [takes up no volume of space].”⁵

This difference is typical of their approaches to explaining ritual. To Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, symbols are a means of communication by

¹ Vayikra 8:33

² Ibid. v. 35

³ Yishayahu 65:17

⁴ Bamidbar 16:41

⁵ *Gevuros Hashem*, Ch. 46

which Hashem relays basic truths to man in a manner that uses experience to make a deeper impression than can speech. The symbolic system is a matter of convention between the parties of the communication. The Maharal sees them as expressions of ontologies, reflections of actual existences in how Hashem created the universe and man.

Still, to the Maharal too, six represents the physical world, and seven is the spiritual inherent in the physical world.

The highest drive Rav Hirsch calls the drive to be beyond human, to go beyond the seven days of creation and into the eighth day of the *bris*. The idea that eight represents “an octave higher” can be seen in the form of the letter *ches*. Its shape as described in the gemara and as found in Ashkenazi script is that of two *zayin*’s connected by a bridge. *Zayin* is seven in *gematria*. *Ches* is eight. *Ches* shows the bridge between one seven, one complete world, and the next.

The second *berachah* of *Shemoneh Esrei* is that of *Gevuros* (Might). However, the *berachah* does not close with a mention of Hashem’s *Gevurah*, but with “*Mechayeih hameisim*”, calling Hashem “the Giver-of-life of the Dead”. The *berachah* actually mentions the theme of the resurrection repeatedly, “You are the *Mechayeih meisim*”, “You are *mechayeih meisim* in great mercy”, “He keeps His trust to those who sleep in the dust”, “the King who causes death and causes life.” Nor does the body of the *berachah* contain those things that we would normally associate with might; such as a mention of the flood, or

There is a debate as to what exactly Nadav and Avihu did to merit death.⁶ Rashi quotes *tanna'im*: Rabbi Eliezer said it was that they ruled halachically without seeking their rebbe’s opinion; Rabbi Yishmael said they served in the temple while drunk. The Ramban and Ibn Ezra say the sin was that they brought their own fire to burn the *ketores*, whereas on that day a miraculous fire was to be used.

The source of their error was too much sanctity, not too little. It was one of overestimating the step to be taken between the world of the seven days of milu'im and the eighth.

All three could be understood as an overestimation of themselves. They thought that they could know what was appropriate without requiring Moshe Rabbeinu’s wisdom and

⁶ Commentaries on 10:2

prophecy. Alternatively, they thought that they had grown beyond having negative influences, that only the joy of *mitzvos* was left within them for wine to release. The fire of the first *ketores* was to be G-d’s, from this higher existence. But they, thinking that they were there already, thought that their own fire would suffice.

Moshe Rabbeinu said to Aharon, “Aharon my brother, I knew that the temple would be sanctified through those who are close to Hashem, and I thought that it would be through either myself or you. Now I see that they were greater than you or I are.”⁷ The source of their error was too much sanctity, not too little. It was one of overestimating the step to be taken between the world of the seven days of *milu'im* and the eighth. The Jewish people’s mission is to build that world; we are not yet within it.

⁷ Rashi ad loc, quoting Chazal

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perhaps the destruction of Sodom and Amarah, or the plagues and drowning the Egyptians, or even of the notion that “one can not see Me and live.”

To understand this focus, perhaps we should look at both what is *gevurah*, and second, what is the purpose of *techiyas hameisim*.

To understand *gevurah*, I would like to revisit what we saw about the concept of *gevurah* expressed in the opening *berachah*, *Birkas Avos*. The Vilna Gaon understands the *berachah* by casting Moshe’s praise of Hashem, “*haKel haGadol haGibor vahaNorah*” as its backbone. The rest of *Birkas Avos* are iterations and elaborations of these

ideas. Looking in particular at the middle two, we have “*haGadol*”, the Great, referring to Hashem as suffusing creation. This idea is elaborated upon with “*gomeil chasadim tovim*” (supports through good acts of kindness). *HaGadol* is *chessed*. And, as per the normal thesis-antithesis structure, *chessed* is followed by *gevurah*.

This understanding of the *berachah* unsurprisingly associates “*Hashem E-lokeinu*” in its opening with the verse iteration of these two themes. As Rashi tells us in the beginning of *Bereishis*, “Hashem” is a name that connotes Mercy, “E-lokim”, with justice. It also associates *gevurah* with the phrase

after “*gomeil chasadim tovim*”, “*veKonei hako*l”, which the Gr”a renders “Who repairs everything”. In the final iteration through the themes, the pair is rendered “*Ozeir uMoshia*”, “Helper and Savior”.

Chessed vs. *Gevurah* is giving vs. restraint. However, *chessed* emerges first. “*Olam chessed yibaneh*” – the world is built on *chessed*. What greater act of giving is there than the giving of existence itself? As Rav Shimon Shkop writes, the world exists so that Hashem could have recipients to whom He could give. How and why then does *gevurah* emerge? Because with restraint, Hashem can give us a greater gift, the opportunity to be givers ourselves, to be in His Image.¹

But *gevurah* goes beyond that. With the ability for man to make his own choices and create and give on his own, comes the ability to make mistakes. This is the role of justice, to correct those errors. It is also why we need a *Konei*, a Repairer, and why we need a *Moshia*, someone who saves us after being mired in such errors, not only an *Ozeir*, a Helper.

These notions of *Konei* and *Moshia* run throughout *Birkas Gevuros*. Aside from *Mechayeih meisim*, we also praise Hashem as “the One Who causes the winds to blow and the rains to fall”, allowing winter to revive the crops, as “the One Who supports the fallen, Who heals the sick, Who releases the imprisoned”, and “Who causes redemption to sprout”. Were the world run with *chessed* alone, Hashem would simply prevent downfalls and sickness; there would never have a need for salvation.

The connection between this idea and reviving the dead is quite

¹ Introduction to *Sha'arei Yosher*

blatant – Hashem allows us our frailties and then, when appropriate, saves us from them. But by looking at the purposes suggested for the resurrection, we can get some idea of the true subtleties of the *berachah*. Four *rishonim* present conflicting views of its purpose, and therefore I would like to suggest that they would imply different meanings about the thrust of the *berachah*.

According to the Ramban², life after the revival is permanent, and is in fact what we call “*Olam haBa*”, the world to come, the

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ultimate reward. (Which is not the same as *gan eden* and *gehenom*.) The *berachah* then is not only about Hashem’s *Gevurah*, but also how that *Gevurah* allows man to eventually live up to his promise.

The Rambam³ understands *techiyas hameisim* as the beginning of a second, temporary life, from which one again dies. The ultimate reward, *Olam haBa*, is only possible without the limitations of physical existence, and is therefore identical to *gan eden* – the splendor of the afterlife. Why then is there a resurrection? So that man can be judged. This would focus on Hashem’s *Gevurah* as the source of Justice.

Rav Saadia Gaon⁴ teaches that *techiyas hameisim* is the means by

² *Sha’ar HaGemul*

³ *Peirush HaMishnayos*, Sanhedrin, introduction to ch. Cheilek

⁴ *Emunos VeDei’os* 7:9

which the righteous who worked toward the messianic era are rewarded by being able to experience it. It’s a revival well before the day of ultimate judgment, when the souls of the righteous are taken to a non-physical *Olam haBa*, a revival into the messianic period. The Ikkarim, Rav Yosef Albo⁵ has a similar but slightly different position. In his view, *techiyas hameisim*, follows the day of judgment, and leads to a qualitatively different kind of life, even though it concludes with a more mundane second death. The post-*techiyah* life is one without illness or downfall. It is one in which service of Hashem is taken to the next level, where the only challenges of such service are those internal to the person himself. (Perhaps because those resurrected are only those who mastered the challenges of our current kind of existence.)

According to Rav Saadia and the Ikkarim, the *berachah* is about *Gevurah*’s transitory nature. Because of Hashem’s *Gevurah*, history can progress, provide challenge and develop humanity until the day when man reaches the level where the synthesis of *chessed* and *gevurah* can be perceived, and life not lived as a tension between the two.

⁵ 4:31

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