ב"ה

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Tiferes Shlomo on the Parsha

שְׂאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפַּר שֵׁמוֹת כָּל־זָכָר לְגֻלְגְּלֹתָם: ... וְאִתְּכֶם יִהְיוּ אִישׁ אִישׁ לַמַּטֶּה אִישׁ רֹאשׁ לְבֵית־אֲבֹתָיו הוּא:

"Count the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael by their families, to its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head… Together with you shall be a participant from each tribe, each one the head of his ancestral house".

There are many words in Lashon Hakodesh for counting. Why does the verse employ the cryptic term "lift up the heads of the Jewish people"? And what is the lesson to us from this command to Moshe and Aharon to count Bnei Yisrael?

Hashem's directive to Moshe and Aharon, is a perpetual command to the leaders and Tzaddikim of Klal Yisroel, to lift up the Jewish people and elevate them. This is why the counting is described as "lift up the heads".

The words ואתכם יהיו "with you shall be ..." can be read as saying "they shall be with you". Since the Tzaddikim have the power and responsibility to spiritually uplift the Jewish people, Hashem tells them that Bnei Yisrael shall be with you - that you must reach out to all of the Jewish people and draw them close.

איש למטה איש can be read as "every man who is lowly" (למטה). Hashem is telling the Tzaddikim that even if they see a Jew who appears to be on the lowest spiritual level, they are obligated to reach out and draw them closer as well.

Why is this? Because איש ראש לבית אבותיו הוא - each man is a "head" and belongs to "their fathers' house". Every Neshama, comes from the loftiest heights. And every Jew is a descendant belonging to the "house of the Avos" Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

Becoming a Beautiful Bride

The marriage of a Chosson and Kallah is a metaphor for the union between Hashem and the Jewish people. This marriage was forged at Matan Torah and is renewed every year on Shavuos. The concluding words of the Haftorah for Parshas Bamidbar, which is read before Shavuos, describe how we achieve this marriage-bond.

וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי לְעוֹלָם וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי בְּצֶדֶק וּבְמִשְׁפָּט וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים: וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי בֶּאֱמוּנָה וְיָדַעַתְּ אֶת ה'

"And I will betroth you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy. And I will betroth you to Me with faith, and you shall know the Lord."

Many have the custom of reciting these Pesukim when wrapping the Tefillin strap around their middle finger, like the wedding ring that unites us with Hashem.

Not all brides are alike. The Gemara asks 'how do we dance before the bride?' Beis Hillel say that we praise every Kallah as 'beautiful and graceful'. Beis Shammai point out that Beis Hillel's approach is not always honest, asking 'what if the Kallah is blind or lame?'. Beis Shammai teach that we describe the bride as she is.

The Halacha is like Beis Hillel because every bride is beautiful in the eyes of her husband. But from an objective stance, the differences in appearance still remain.

The Alter Rebbe explains that in the Neshamos of the Jewish people we find the same 2 types of bride. There is the beautiful bride and the bride who is spiritually lacking – lame or blind.

The word Kallah also means to yearn deeply as the verse says—כלתה נפשי"My soul yearns longingly for Hashem". This is alluded to in Hashem's words to Chava "your desire will be to your husband". The Neshama as a Kallah, has a deep and constant yearning to unite with her "Chosson" – Hashem.

The first stage of marriage is the act of Kiddushin. The act of Kiddushin is performed by the groom giving an item of monetary value to the bride. Universal Jewish custom is to use a ring. By accepting Kiddushin, two things occur; the bride become forbidden to other men and she enters an exclusive bond with her husband.

The same is true with Hashem's betrothal of the Jewish people. Through this betrothal, all other desires for materialism become forbidden to us. We also unite with Hashem in an exclusive bond of oneness.

Hashem betroths us through Torah and Mitzvos. We allude to this in the Bracha of each Mitzvah where we say "Asher Kideshanu Bemitzvosav" which can also mean that He has 'betrothed us' with His Mitzvos.

It is easy for the 'beautiful Kallah' Neshama to unite in Kiddushin with Hashem. These are the souls who seek to cleave to Hashem through the words of Torah and Tefillah; studying with a depth of understanding and Davening with Kavanah.

The spiritually-deficient bride is the Neshama that struggles to overcome the animalistic soul, unable to actualise her deep yearning for connection to Hashem because of the animalistic soul that leads her astray after materialism and sin. These souls need to take a different route to the Chuppah.

"And I will betroth you to Me forever" refers to the beautiful bride, the Neshama which has a constant and unchanging bond with Hashem through immersion in Torah and Tefillah.

The continuation of the verses teach us how even the bride who is "blind" or "lame" can become betrothed and connected to Hashem.

"And I will betroth you to Me with righteousness (Tzedek) and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy". Tzedaka has the power to redeem the Neshama from its captivity, as our sages teach, "Tzedaka brings redemption". There must also be justice – referring to judging oneself to actively remove the negativity of the animalistic soul.

"Loving-kindness and mercy" refers to the Avodah of arousing mercy and feeling a deep sense of Rachmonus for our Neshama that has fallen so low. This arouses Hashem to have Rachmonus on us and help to lift us up from this state of captivity.

But for those Neshamos that do not have the means to give Tzedaka or the ability to arouse this sense of Rachmonus, there is a third path; "And I will betroth you to Me with faith".

Every Neshama possesses deep within it, a core of pure faith. No matter what is happening on the external levels of the soul, this spark of Emunah remains intact, albeit hidden. This faith can be revealed through meditating on how Hashem transcends all existence. With this faith revealed, we can overcome all of the concealments and confinements of the animalistic soul.

By revealing this faith, this Neshama too becomes a beautiful and graceful bride. The finalisation of the marriage, where the bride and groom become "one flesh" is Nisuin. This is alluded to in the conclusion of the verse וְיָדַעַתְּ אֶת ה' "and you shall know the Lord".

The Torah describes the intimate union of Adam and Chava with the word ידע. In contrast to the external union associated with Kiddushin, Daas (knowing) represents a deep, intimate and internalised bond.

This finalisation of the marriage bond will be realised with the coming of Moshiach, when "the world will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem"

~ Based on Likutei Torah Parshas Bamidbar

The Weekly Halacha Analysis

Davening Early Maariv on Shavuos

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Even though Shabbos and Yomtov come in at Shkiya (sunset), one is able to bring them in early. One may Daven the Shabbos or Yomtov Maariv before nightfall after Plag Hamincha, even though it is still light. It is considered praiseworthy to bring in Shabbos early[1].

One may also make Kiddush and eat their Shabbos or Yomtov meal from Plag Hamincha[2]. Many people will do this as a matter of convenience throughout the Summer months.

Based on Kabbalah, one should always daven Maariv after Tzeis Hakochavim. Nonetheless, one may still bring in Shabbos and Yomtov early and indeed it is praiseworthy to do so.

Whilst one may bring in Yomtov early for every Yomtov, the Ta"z[3] writes that on Shavuos we delay the davening if Maariv until Tzeis Hakochavim… with the exception of the first night of Shavuos.

The reason for this is because before Shavuos, we must count the seven weeks of Sefiras Haomer, which must be Temimos – complete.

By davening Maariv early, one is ushering in the new day and concluding the preceding day. Doing so on the eve of Shavuos would mean that one has shortened the last day of Sefiras Haomer and they would no longer be Temimos.

The Magen Avraham[4] is likewise concerned about the issue of Temimos, writing that we do not make Kiddush on Shavuos until after Tzeis Hakochavim.

Machatzis Hashekel writes that it appears that according to the Magen Avraham, the concern only applies to making Kiddush. One would be able to daven Maariv early. This would be like the opinion of the Shela"h[5] that the Kpeida applies only to Kiddush.

He infers this from the continuation of the Magen Avraham who writes that since one is staying awake the entire night and will not say the bedtime Krias Shema, they should be careful to recite the Shema after Tzeis Hakochavim. This warning would not be necessary if one was not allowed to daven Maariv before Tzeis.

The Aruch Hashulchan rules like the Magen Avraham, that only making Kiddush early is problematic.

However, the Alter Rebbe[6] Paskens like the Ta"z, that davening early is also problematic. He writes that one should not make Kiddush for the same reason as not davening Maariv early. It is not clear how the Alter Rebbe understands the Magen Avraham. The Mishna Berura also rules like the Ta"z.

Some suggest that the ruling of the Ta"z not to daven before nightfall, was a safeguard so that people don't make Kiddush early, which is the main concern[7].

Rabbi Yaakov Emden in Siddur Yaavetz writes that the basis for not davening early is very weak and that the main concern is eating before nightfall. On the contrary, one who davens early to "add from the weekday to the holy" is praiseworthy.

The same concern over davening or making Kiddush early, would apply to women bringing in the Yomtov of Shavuos by lighting candles before nightfall[8]. This is so, even though women are exempt from the Mitzvah of Sefiras Haomer.

What about Tosefes Shabbos?

Shaalos Uteshuvos Hisorrerus Teshuvah[9] questions the entire concern of not Davening or making Kiddush for Shavuos before Tzeis Hakochavim. There is a Mitzvah Deoraisa to add to Shabbos and Yomtov from the weekday, by bringing it in early[10]. This is referred to as Tosefes Shabbos and it seems from the Gemara that it applies to all Yomim Tovim without distinction.

If so, one is Biblically obligated to bring in Shavuos early. One must say that the requirement of Temimos for the Seifras Haomer only applies until the beginning of Tosefes Shabbos. Since Tosefes Shabbos does not have a set time amount, even if one were to daven very early, there would be no issue of Temimos.

One must say that "the same Hashem who commands us to observe Tosefes Yomtov, also commands us that the weeks of Sefiras Haomer must be Temimos". Obviously, the two laws cannot be contradictory. Rather, by bringing in Yomtov, one ends the previous day and it is still considered as being Temimos.

One cannot argue that the first day of Shavuos is excluded from the requirement of Tosefes Yomtov, because of the requirement of Temimos, because were this so, the Talmud should have mentioned Shavuos as being an exception. (It is worth noting that the interpretation of Temimos meaning that one cannot daven Maariv early, is not sourced in the Talmud, whereas Tosefes Shabbos is).

(There are Poskim who maintain based on this seeming discrepancy, that there is no obligation of Tosefes Yomtov for Shavuos).

The question of the Hisorrerus Teshuvah does not apply to those Poskim who write that Tosefes Shabbos can be observed by abstaining from Melacha and does not require accepting on oneself the Kedusha of the day. According to these Poskim, one could observe both Tosefes Yomtov and Temimos without any question).

At the end of the Teshuvah, he justifies the practise of waiting to daven Maariv after Tzeis, because Shema must be recited after Tzeis. Those who daven early rely on the bedtime Krias Shema that they will recite later. But on Shavuos, where we stay awake all night, this would not apply and there is the concern that one may miss out on Shema.

The Netziv[11] explains that the reason for not davening early is not because of the word Temimos. If it was, then the concern would apply every night of Sefiras Haomer, because each day needs to be complete.

Rather, the Torah uses the term בעצם היום הזה in connection to Shavuos, meaning that we must declare the sanctity "on that very day" i.e. on the day itself. He suggests that this comes to exclude the requirement of Tosefes Yomtov for Shavuos and one may not daven early.

Many Poskim question this approach, because we cannot make up new derivations ourselves, that are not found in the Gemara.

Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef[12] quotes Yosef Ometz who writes that he did not see any of the great Rabbis in Ashkenaz wait to daven or make Kiddush on Shavuos. He continues that on the contrary, if those who stay up all night learning (the Seder Tikkun) would wait until Tzeis Hakochavim to eat, it would take up at least half the night of their learning time… and the night is already very short (in the Northern Hemisphere). He says that Kiddush can be recited in Beis Hashemashos.

Rav Ovadiah concludes with his Psak, that in countries where it is possible to wait until nightfall (e.g. the Southern Hemisphere), it is preferable to wait and be concerned for the Ta"z and Magen Avraham.

But in places where the night is too short and it would interfere with the learning of Tikkun or if it would be difficult for family members and young children to remain awake, one can make Kiddush and eat before nightfall. It would still preferable to wait until Shkiya if possible.

1. Shulchan Aruch Harav 267:1
2. Gemara Brachos 27a. Shulchan Aruch Harav 267:3
3. OC 494
4. OC 494 based on Teshuvos Masais Binyomin
5. Beginning of Mesechta Shavuos
6. 494:2
7. Lehorot Natan 7:31
8. Piskei Teshuvot 494:2, Lehoros Noson 7:31
9. 2:56 by Rabbi Shimon Sofer, son of the Ksav Sofer and` grandson of the Chasam Sofer
10. Tosfos Brachos 27a. Yoma 81b. See Shulchan Aruch Harav 261:4
11. Haamak Davar Vayikra 23
12. Yechave Daas 6:30