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Hitting the Right Note on Humility

Tiferes Shlomo on the Parsha

אלהי אבי אברהם ואלהי אבי יצחק ה' האומר אלי
כו' קטנתי מכל החסדים

G-d of my father Avraham and G-d of my father Yitzchak...

Rashi teaches us that as he travelled to meet his brother Esav, Yaakov prepared himself for three things; for a gift, for prayer and for war - לדורון ולתפילה ולמלחמה.

In Yaakov's preparations, the Tiferes Shlomo finds an allusion as to how we should prepare ourselves when we approach and stand before Hashem in prayer.

The gift represents an action that is physical and tangible. It alludes to the physical actions that we do to prepare ourselves before prayer.

The Gemara tells us how Rabbi Elazer would first give a coin to a pauper and only afterward begin to Daven.

The "gift" before Davening also includes other physical Mitzvos that we do in preparation for Davening, such as putting on a Tallis and Tefillin.

When we begin to Daven, we must then be prepared for war. This refers to the inner battle that we must wage to combat the foreign thoughts that distract us from the Kavana that we are supposed to have in prayer.

This is why prayer is called Avodah, literally "work". Davening with proper focus and Kavana, without being distracted, is hard work and takes self-strength and restraint.

The opening word of Yaakov's Tefillah is the word Katonti, literally I am small. This represents humility. When we stand before Hashem in prayer, we should see ourselves as undeserving and unworthy to stand in the presence of His greatness. With this attitude, we can then appeal to His Mercy, to grant our requests, as Yaakov continues "and You said 'I will surely do goodness to you'..."

This week I was asked the following question about the Trop (cantillation notes) in the Parsha.

Yaakov opens his prayer to Hashem before facing Eisav, with the word Katonti - I have become diminished or small. Rashi explains that Yaakov was worried that his merits may have been diminished because of all of the kindnesses that Hashem had shown to him in the past. He was worried that he would no longer have sufficient merits to be spared from the hand of Eisav and that perhaps his sins would make him vulnerable.

I was asked, if Katonti is an expression of humility, why is it read with such an exuberant Trop that seems to convey the opposite meaning. He was referring to the Trop of "Azla Geresh" which is a very pronounced note that has an "ascending" melody.

When I started to research the Trop on this word, I quickly discovered that it is no simple matter at all. There are different transcriptions of the Mesorah and whilst many of them have the "Azla Geresh" which is the prevalent Minhag, there are versions, dating back centuries, that have the word Katonti with the Trop "Revii".

In contrast to the flamboyant "Azla Geresh", the "Revii" is a more simple Trop. And unlike the "Azla Geresh" that "ascends", the tune of the "Revii" "descends". This would be a more fitting Trop for the meaning of the word Katonti.

So why do we use the "Azla Geresh"?

Some suggest that the divergent Mesorahs reflect an argument in the Midrash Rabbah on the word Katonti. According to Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, Yaakov was saying that he had never been worthy of deserving of Hashem's kindnesses. Rabbi Levi understands that Yaakov was saying that whilst he was deserving and worthy of Hashem's kindness, he was concerned that maybe the credit of his merits had already been "used up" with the past kindnesses that he had received.

Rabbi Abba's interpretation is one of total and complete humility, making the Revii more appropriate. According to Rabbi Levi's explanation, Yaakov is still recognising his merits and worthiness, which may be justification for the Revii.

On a more philosophical note, perhaps the "Azla Geresh" is alluding to the perspective of the Zohar on the attribute of humility. In Parshas Chayei Sarah,

the Zohar teaches that "one who is small (זעיר) is really great (רב) and one who is great is really small." The Zohar adds that one who makes themselves small in this world, how great and elevated will they be in the World to Come.

In our worldly perspective, we see humility as a sign of meekness. But in truth, far from being lowly, humility is true greatness.

In Kabbalistic thought, the Sefira of Malchus is a paradox. Malchus is associated with the trait of humility. Malchus is likened to the moon, the smaller of the two luminaries, which does not produce its own light, but merely reflects the light of the sun. Yet, Malchus means kingship, reflecting the ultimate power and authority.

The teachings of Chassidus explain that these are not contradictory at all. Humility means to surrender ourselves to Hashem. This is also referred to as Bittul, self-negation. When we surrender ourselves to Hashem, we become conduits for His infinite greatness and power. The more surrendered we are, the greater Hashem's light shines within us. This in turn is not a contradiction to humility, because one does not see their power and strength as their own.

This week we will be celebrating Yud Tes Kislev, the day on which the Alter Rebbe was released from Czarist imprisonment, having been slandered by fellow Jews who opposed the ways of Chassidus.

After his liberation, the Alter Rebbe penned a letter to his Chassidim, beginning with the word "Katonti" and addressing its message. He writes that with every kindness that Hashem does for us, it should make us smaller; to become more humbled. Hashem's kindnesses are an expression of Him drawing us closer. A paradigm of the realm of holiness is that the closer one is to Hashem, the more insignificant (Batel) they should be.

As such, after experiencing Hashem draw them close to Him through this salvation, "they should not become haughty over their brothers... rather they should humble their spirits and hearts before every person..."

Perhaps this is the deeper allusion in the elevated note of the "Azla Geresh" on Katonti; that our humility comes from being elevated by Hashem and that the more humbled we are to Him, the more His Power and Greatness will shine within us.

Lighting Chanukah Candles at the Right Time

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The Gemara¹ records a Braisa that teaches that the Mitzvah of Chanukah candles is to light them “from when the sun goes down until the feet leave the market” i.e. there are no more people there. The Gemora explains that this refers to the feet of the *Tarmudai*, a nationality who would sell kindling wood and thus remain later than others in the market. The Rishonim define this time as being half an hour after the sun has gone down - משתשקע החמה².

[There is a dispute amongst the Rishonim and Poskim whether משתשקע החמה refers to *Shkiya* (sunset) or *Tzeis Hakochavim* (nightfall). There is also a dispute amongst the Rishonim on the calculation of these times. This article will not focus on these issues.]

The Gemara presents two explanations of the Braisa “from when the sun goes down until the feet leave the market”;

The first explanation is that the Braisa defines the window of time in which one may light. Accordingly, if one did not light at sundown, they may do so only until “the feet leave the market”. After this time one may no longer light Chanukah candles³.

Alternatively, the Braisa is not defining the window of time in which one may light, but rather the length of time for which the candles must burn. Accordingly one must ensure that sufficient oil has been placed into the candle before lighting, to allow it to burn for this duration⁴. After the candles have burned for the required time, they may be extinguished or used for one’s personal needs⁵.

The Gemora does not rule decisively like either of these two explanations.

Most Rishonim write that *Lechatchila* we adopt the stringencies of both interpretations and one should ensure to light within the allocated time frame⁶. *Bedieved* if the time passed, one should still light, relying on the second explanation⁷ according to which the *zman* for lighting candles extends for the entire night⁸.

In contrast, the Rambam⁹ rules that if one failed to light (either intentionally or unintentionally) at sundown, they may light up until “the feet leave the market”. After this time, they may no longer light. The Rambam understands that the two explanations in the Gemora are not mutually exclusive and therefore we rule conclusively like both of them¹⁰ i.e. one

must light within this window of time and one must have sufficient oil to burn for this length of time. Baal Halachos Gedolos also rules that one may not light after the time defined in the Braisa.

Some of the Rishonim qualify that the time window limitation only applied when they used to light Chanukah candles outside. Since the *Pirsumei Nissa* was to those in the street, the timeframe was restricted to when there would be passers-by. Nowadays when we light the Menorah inside and the *Pirsumei Nissa* is to the residents of the house, one may light at any time of night¹¹.

Others rule that even nowadays *Lechatchila* one should light at the proper *zman* because *zerizim makdimin l'mitzvos* – the diligent rush to do their Mitzvos at the earliest time¹².

What about lighting earlier? Some Rishonim¹³ rule that one may light earlier from *Plag Hamincha*. The Gemara is only discussing the primary time to light. However according to the Rambam and Baal Halachos Gedolos quoted above, one may not light early, just as one may not light later.

The Mechaber¹⁴ initially quotes the view of the Rambam but subsequently brings the view of Tosfos that *Bedieved* we can light at any time during the night. The Ram”o¹⁵ quotes the opinion that nowadays when we light indoors, one may light later. However *Lechatchila* one should still light at sundown.

Doing other activities before lighting

The Magen Avraham¹⁶ rules that one should light before eating¹⁷. He quotes the Rasha”l that one may not even learn once the *zman* of lighting arrives. If one was already learning, they are required to stop when the *zman* arrives¹⁸.

The Acharonim rule, that even within the half hour before the *zman* one should not start any Melacha, sleep, eat a meal¹⁹ or even learn. We find a similar Halacha regarding Krias Shema. Mishna Berura²⁰ concurs with this view, however he is lenient and allows one to learn Torah during the half hour preceding the time of lighting.

This half-hour safeguard is so that one does not become otherwise occupied and forget to do the Mitzvah. The reason we are stringent with this safeguard despite Chanukah only being a Rabbinic Mitzvah (as opposed to Shema which is Mideoraisa) is because according to the first explanation of the Gemara (above), there is only a small window of time in which to light and it could be easily missed.

According to most opinions, if one began a meal, work or other activity more than half an hour before the *zman*, they are not obligated to stop at the *zman* in order to light.

However the Bach likens this Halacha to *Bedikas Chometz*²¹, where even if one began their activity many hours before the *zman*, they are required to stop at the *zman*. The reason this differs from Krias Shema is because the Mitzvos of *Bedikas Chometz* and Chanukah candles were set to be done at a preferred specific time (עיקר זמן). Therefore one is required to stop at that time²².

It is appropriate for *Yarei Shamayim* to be strict and follow the ruling of the Bach and ensure to be at home to light at the proper time²³. This is especially so because according to the first explanation of the Gemora and the ruling of the Rambam, one is not *Yotzai* if they light later than this time. If one was doing another activity such as a meal, work or shiur they should stop to light *b'zman*.

Based on the above, the Poskim do not look favourably on scheduling simchas or Chanuka parties at a time which would preclude people from being at home to light *b'zman*.

Bedieved or in situations of great need, one may be lenient and rely on the majority of Poskim that *Bedieved* one is *Yotzai* and may light later, especially if the activity that they are involved in began more than half an hour before sundown.

- Shabbos 21b
- Rosh Chapter 2 Siman 3
- Tosfos ibid ד"ה דאי לא מודליק מודליק
- Rashi לשינורא, ר"ד. According to the first explanation, there would be no required amount of oil or duration for the candles to burn.
- Tosfos ibid, Rosh ibid, Rif
- Tosfos ibid, Rosh ibid
- Tosfos ibid. See Beis Yosef who explains that this is because of the doubt that perhaps the halacha does not follow the first explanation. For a case of doubt in a Rabbinic law we can follow the lenient ruling (Bach).
- Tur OC 672
- Hilchos Chanukah 4:5. See Biur Halacha who questions Ramba's source. However the Rambam's ruling is the same as the Baha"g
- Bach
- Tosfos ibid, Rosh ibid. The Tur rules like this opinion ibid.
- ד"ה דאי לא מודליק ר"ד
- Ran
- OC 662:2
- ibid
- OC 662:5
- This refers to an Achilles Keva as opposed to a snack
- Referencing the Shulchan Aruch on *Bedikas Chometz* OC 341:2 and Bach
- See *Machatzis Hashekel*
- Shaar Hatziyun 14
- OC 431
- It could be that Chanukah candles are even more stringent than *Bedikas Chometz* since according to the first explanation of the Gemora (above) one is not allowed to light later in the night.
- See Nitei Gavriel 4:2 and 5:3

