

Parshas Bamidbar

June 7, 2019

A Taste of Torah Heart Surgery

by Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky

Sometimes, as a holiday approaches, one can feel overwhelmed. One knows that the holiday is filled with opportunities to achieve great spiritual heights, and it can feel daunting to try and reach them. How does one tap into the day and connect to its loftiness in a meaningful way?

The solution is to try and focus on one specific aspect of the holiday. It's less daunting if one can stay focused on one element and truly take its lesson to heart. This can then have a lasting impact on the person, which can last long after the holiday has passed. Let us focus on one aspect of the upcoming festival of Shavuos.

The Medrash (Shir Hashirim Chapter 1) says that when G-d said the 2nd commandment, "You shall not recognize the gods of others," the *Yetzer Hara* (Evil Inclination) was removed from the hearts of the Jewish People. This seems to mean that hearing this command from G-d directly had such a powerful impact on their souls that the *Yetzer Hara* left them completely.

While this sounds like a wonderful thing, it raises a big problem. The entire purpose of a Jew in this world is to choose good over evil, thereby sanctifying G-d's name. This is only possible by having free will to choose either. If the *Yetzer Hara* did indeed leave the hearts of the Jewish People at Mt. Sinai, that implies that they lost their free will. If so, they have lost the entire purpose of their mission in this world. How can that be?

The Shem Mishmuel (Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain; 1855-1926) points out that a precise reading of the Medrash reveals that the *Yetzer Hara* was not completely

eradicated; rather, the Medrash states it left their hearts. This means that the *Yetzer Hara* was definitely still in existence, except that it had left their hearts. What is the meaning and significance of the *Yetzer Hara* leaving one's heart, if apparently, it still exists?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that before the sin of Adam eating from the Tree of Knowledge, the *Yetzer Hara* was a separate entity, not part of the human psyche. Man himself was completely pure and had a clear view of his purpose in life. The *Yetzer Hara* was there as an outside force, prodding Man to sin. After Adam sinned, the *Yetzer Hara* became incorporated into his body. Now, Man is a mixture of holiness and darkness. What used to be crystal clear to Man is now clouded with confusion.

When the Jewish Nation stood at Mt. Sinai and heard G-d command them not to follow other gods, the power of that experience allowed them to return to the state of Adam before the sin. Once again, the Jew is completely clear and pure. The *Yetzer Hara* was removed from their hearts and was relegated to once again being an external force.

After that awesome experience, history repeated itself and, as Adam had done, the Jews sinned. This removed the effect of Mt. Sinai to some extent, but not completely. The essence of the human being was purified and cleansed from sin to a large degree.

Every year on Shavuos, this same powerful cleansing experience takes place. If one taps into the spiritual energy of the day, one can merit that the *Yetzer Hara* will be less attached to him than it was before Shavuos. He will

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Stories for the Soul

It's All in the Mind

Reb Elya Lopian (1876-1970) once saw a group of people paving the road. He recognized two of them from his home town; they had come to Eretz Yisrael after the war. Rabbi Lopian asked one of them, "How are things for you?"

The man told him that while he worked very hard, he was happy with his lot. "At least I am able to bring home some food for the family."

Rabbi Lopian then asked the second fellow how things were. "Things are wonderful," replied the second man. "It's hard work, but I have the opportunity to do *chesed* (kindness) all the time."

"What *chesed* are you referring to?" asked Rabbi Lopian.

"I pave roads, and the paved roads help others. People are now able to walk on the road easily and comfortably, without falling into ditches..."

Rabbi Lopian immediately returned to his yeshiva and repeated this exchange to the students there. He pointed out how a person's intention makes all the difference. These two people were both doing the same thing; they were both working hard in the sun, paving roads. One of them was working for a few pennies, while the other one's focus was on the *chesed* that he was doing.

Therefore, he said, for this very same deed, one will earn a few pennies, while the other will earn eternal reward in the Next World.

He told his students, "When you will marry and have children who awaken in middle of the night, you

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Kollel Happenings

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Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: Although most communities nowadays do not have a *meturgeman* (translator, to translate the Torah reading, as mentioned in the Mishna), there are some prevalent customs based on that custom. What are they?

A: *Akdamus*, a poem in Aramaic, is recited by Ashkenazic congregations at the Torah reading on the first day of Shavuot. *Yetziv Pisgam*, another Aramaic poem, is recited by Eastern European communities at the *haftarah* of the second day of Shavuot. Both

poems were originally intended to be the *meturgeman's* introduction to his translation. Although the custom of having a *meturgeman* is not practiced by these communities, these introductions have remained!

Sources: Chumash Ma'or Einayim, Shemos 80a; Machzor Vitri, pp. 166-179.

This week's question: Who authored a large portion of a book in *Tanach* (Scriptures), yet did not merit to have it named for him?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Eliezer Silver Part V

After the *get* was given, Rabbi Silver realized that a serious error had been made by the rabbi in the document, invalidating it. Rabbi Silver tried to convince the man to go through the process a second time, but the man

refused.

Rabbi Silver, after much pleading, finally convinced the man to redo the *get* document, but only after he promised the fellow \$500, then a huge sum of money.

A Taste of Torah

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always be there right outside the door, beckoning one to follow his ideas. But at least one will have gained a powerful sense of clarity. The person can achieve a crystal clear sense of his purpose in the world.

This is one element of Shavuot that one can choose to focus on. One can work

on achieving clarity on what's important in the world, and what is just the *Yetzer Hara's* false reality that he has painted for us. Once one has achieved a clear sense of mission, it will be so much easier to fight the *Yetzer Hara*. He may be a master painter, but one has seen through his bluff!

Stories for the Soul

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shouldn't be upset. You should realize that by caring for them, you are doing *chesed*. How would you feel if a neighbor's child is hungry, and no one is around to help? Wouldn't you give the child food with joy? So why shouldn't we have the same joy for our own children, when we try to help them?"

In this week's parsha, the Torah describes

the arrangement of the Tribes in the desert, and we discover the unique role of every tribe in serving Hashem. Every person has different opportunities in life, but if one focuses on using those opportunities to serve Hashem, he has achieved greatness in this world and the next.