

Bo 2016

1.

What is the midah k'neged midah of the makah of choshech?

Ohel Aryeh page 101: “there was a thick darkness throughout the land of Egypt.” (10, 21)
The Tanna D'bei Eliyahu Raba (perik 7) (that we mentioned in parshas Va'eira 2013): explains that everything that transpired during the process of the redemption from Egypt was in some form midah k'neged midah (measure for measure) for what the Egyptians did to us.

The question arises, what is the midah k'neged midah of the plague of darkness? What did the Egyptians do to the Jews that caused them to deserve darkness come upon them?

Rav Elyashiv Zt'l explains that it was because of what Paroah answered Moshe and Aharon. They came to Paroah saying that Hashem had told them to tell him to send out the Jews. Paroah asked “who is Hashem that I should listen to Him.” He also rudely asked if Moshe had seen God. Moshe answered that in the negative, but that he heard His voice. **Since Paroah claimed that Moshe never actually saw God, the Egyptians were punished by not being able to see.**

The sefer Kli Chemda answers differently, and explains that it was due to the fact that **the Egyptians made the Jews work, not only all day, but during the night as well. Therefore, darkness was brought upon them as punishment for making the Jews work at a time of darkness.** Similarly, the Shach says it was because they darkened the hearts and the eyes of the Jews from serving Hashem, so their lives were darkened.

Surprisingly and interestingly the Ohel Aryeh does not quote the answer of the Kli Yakar. We will though. The Kli Yakar (7, 17) explains and answers that **the Egyptians caused the Jews to hide their children in darkness therefore in turn the Egyptians received darkness.**

A fascinating side point is that both the Tanna D'bei Eliyahu Raba and the Midrash Tanchuma (parshas Va'eira os 14) which explain the measure for measure behind every plague, do not give an explanation for darkness.

2.

Learning Torah and performing Mitzvos with simcha

“And it shall be a sign upon your arm etc.” (13, 16)

"והיה לאות על ידכה וגו."

Why do we put tefillin on the left arm?

Rav Moshe Feinstein Zt'l (Drash Moshe chelek alef page 45) quotes the Gemara in Menachos (37) which explains the reason for this atypical practice (of not performing this mitzvah with our stronger arm like all other mitzvos) is due to **the pasuk which states "ידכה."** **The pasuk is**

commanding us to put the Tefillin on the יד נהיה, i.e. the weaker arm. (This is why a lefty places Tefillin on his right arm.) Rav Moshe explains that sometimes we do mitzvos only because we are obligated to do so. However, this is not the optimal way of performing mitzvos. Similarly, the Gemara in Berachos (28b) says davening in routine like manner is not ideal. This doesn't only apply to davening; rather, it also applies to all other mitzvos. For example, on Shabbos one shouldn't think about how much business he is losing. If he does this it will negatively affect him and his children. If, on the other hand, he happily keeps Shabbos, and thinks about the fact that Hashem will pay him back and bless him even more, then he will be guarded from bad behavior and his children will be more likely fulfill mitzvos properly.

This is why we put tefillin on our left arm, which is the weaker arm; to allude to and demonstrate that we will undergo many difficulties throughout our lives. Even though we will face many challenging mitzvos, we must fulfill every mitzvah, no matter how difficult it might be. Rav Moshe adds that this is impossible without having proper holy and truthful thoughts. For this reason we put on the Tefillin shel rosh as well. The Tefillin shel rosh is placed on our heads on top of our brains. This will get us to realize that even the mitzvos that are more difficult (symbolized by our left arm) should be performed like the easier mitzvos.

Rashi (15, 6) writes that when the Jews do the will of Hashem, His left hand (which represents judgment) turns into the right hand (which represents mercy). The explanation of this is that from the merit of performing difficult mitzvos in an 'easy' way, meaning not just because we have to, or in order to receive reward, Hashem will remove the strict judgement from upon us and pay us back in a loving manner. However, if we perform mitzvos with the mindset that they are a burden, Hashem will pay us back accordingly, with punishments. (This is a quintessential example of the concept of mida keneged mida.)

An additional reason we put tefillin on our left hand, Rav Moshe says, is because when one is weak he usually becomes lazier when it comes to performing mitzvos. When one knows and internalizes that this is the ikur (main purpose) of life, and he strengthens himself, then it will get easier for him. Therefore we must strive to make our left into our right and strengthen it. Meaning, we should strengthen ourselves to perform mitzvos.

This concept of happily performing mitzvos is a major principle. The Gemara in Berachos (30b) states that Abayai was sitting in front of Rabbah and he saw that Abaya was laughing a lot. Rabbah told him that the pasuk says "rejoice with trepidation." Abaya responded that he was wearing tefillin.

The obvious question on this bizarre and incredibly cryptic response of Abaya is, laughing should not be a result of wearing Tefillin; shouldn't a more serious demeanor be attempted and would seemingly be the appropriate attitude?

The Rabbeinu Yonah answers and explicates that Abaya was extremely happy that he was able to perform this chashava (important) mitzvah. Abaya had been sick for many days and wasn't able to fulfill the mitzvah of tefillin. After such a long interval of not wearing tefillin, Abaya had a colossal level of simcha shel mitzvah (happiness because he was able to perform the mitzvah) to the extent that he was laughing when he wore his Tefillin. (The Tiferes Shmuel (on the Rash) in os beis has the same approach.)

What about other areas other than performing mitzvos. Do we still need to have simcha? The Braisa in Pirkei Avos (perek six) teaches that there are 48 ways to acquire the Torah. One of the

ways listed is through simcha, happiness. Rashi explains that simcha is one of the ways to acquire the Torah because the Shechina (divine presence of Hashem) only dwells within one who is in a state of joy from a mitzvah (Shabbas 30b, Pesachim 117b). Similarly, Rav Chaim of Volozhin (Ruach Chaim) states that **someone who happily learns for an hour could learn more than one who unhappily learns for many hours**. Similarly, the Eglai Tal (in the introduction to the sefer) elucidates that **people who think you shouldn't gain simcha from learning are mistaken. Rather, that is the main point of learning: to get a geshmak. When one enjoys his learning, the Torah gets absorbed into his blood**. Similarly, the Sifsei Chaim (middos veavodas Hashem chalek alef page 191) writes that **simcha is not solely a result of learning Torah, but simcha is also a prerequisite and a necessary condition to acquire Torah knowledge**.

The pasuk in Tehelim 100:2 states "Serve Hashem with gladness." "עבדו את יקוק בשמחה." The Seforno explains this means **we have to happily serve Hashem and not as if someone is forcing us**. (We should attend the shiur because we want to and because we know it is vital. We have a chavrusa because we know this is what is important for us and the whole world. We daven and perform mitzvos because we recognize that this is incredibly essential.) The Radak interprets this pasuk to mean that we shouldn't feel like our avoda is a burden. We should do it because we know instinctively that this is the correct method. We should accomplish mitzvos with happiness.

How can we reach this level of simcha? The pasuk in Shir Hashirim says "drag me, we will run after You! The king brought me into His chambers; we will rejoice and be glad in You." (1, 4) "משכני אחרריך נרוצה הביאני המלך חדריו נגילה ונשמחה בך." The Shir Hashirim Rabah explains, the more one merits entering into Hashem's 'rooms', the more simcha he will have. **The more one learns, and the deeper he goes, the more he realizes how geshmak it is and how much happiness it brings**. The Ramchal (Mesilas Yesharim Perek 19 or 10) writes that simcha is a big principle when it comes to serving Hashem. The main simcha should result from one serving Hashem. The deeper one learns, the more simcha he'll have. The Kuzari (2:50) says that every opportunity that one is granted to perform a mitzvah should lead to simcha. It is in effect as if you just received an invitation to dine with the king! Naturally, you should be happy.

The pasuk in Tehelim (2, 11) says we should serve Hashem with fear. Many Mefarshim are perplexed regarding these seemingly contradictory pesukim. They ask the following question; which one is it? Should we serve Hashem with fear or simcha? The Medrash Shocher Tov (100, 3) explains that it is not a contradiction. **We should be happy and also be fearful, because we are standing in front of God**. The Beur Hareai'm elaborates, and clarifies that this means we should have simcha since we are able to perform the mitzvah, and simultaneously, we should fear who you are doing the mitzvah for. Both elements at once must be applied; simcha and fear.

In conclusion, the Gemara in Berachos (61b) relates some of the details of the death of Rebbi Akiva. An elaboration of his death is discussed in the Yerushalmi Sotah (perik 5 Halacha 5). Rebbi Akiva was judged in front of Tornifus for violating the decree forbidding publically teaching Torah. **The time for kriyas shema came and Rebbi Akiva started to recite shema while laughing! They were in the midst of combing his skin off his body but he was still laughing!** Tornifus said to Rebbi Akiva, either you are a magician or you don't care about pain

(meaning you're crazy)! Rebbi Akiva answered back 'I'm not either one!' Rebbi Akiva said: my entire life I've been reciting the pasuk that says "love Hashem your God with all your heart, soul, and finances" multiple times every day. I was always able to fulfill serving Hashem with all my heart and all my money. Up until this juncture I have been unable to serve Hashem with all my soul, as I have been uttering every day. Now when the opportunity finally manifests itself, am I not going to take advantage? **That's why I'm reciting shema while laughing! I'm happy that I'm able to fulfill the will of Hashem by giving up my life for him!**

This is the highest level of simcha! Even while Rebbi Akiva was dying, Rebbi Akiva was jubilant that he was able to serve Hashem! If Rebbi Akiva was able to attain such a lofty level of simcha shel (of a) mitzvah while he was dying al (for the sake of) Kiddush Hashem, all the more so should we strive to the best of our abilities to have simcha shel mitzvah while living!

Thank you Yair Moshe Ausabel for typing this up. Thank you Ari Zaslowsky for editing this.