

The Wonders of Your Torah

Choice Excerpts from the Teachings of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh Shlit" a

How long will we have to wait for Mashiach?

Patience, alacrity, Torah and mitzvah

In a previous article, we discussed the swiftness with which Pinchas acted and in contrast we saw that Joshua did not complete the task of conquering the land of Israel because of his excessive patience. From the fact that Pinchas was appointed to lead the war against Midian, the sages learn that, "He who begins a mitzvah is told to finish it."¹ Pinchas began the mitzvah of overpowering the Midianites with his swift killing of Kozbee and it was therefore his responsibility to complete the assignment. In contrast, the sages teach us that despite his military prowess, Joshua remained behind in the camp to pray with Moses. Since Joshua was to be the next "Rebbe" of the Jewish people, his task was to pray for their success in battle.

One way of understanding the different approaches of Pinchas and Joshua is by considering the fact that Pinchas was appointed to complete the mitzvah, while Joshua remained behind in the camp to pray. A mitzvah, by its very nature, is meant to be completed; mitzvot do not require an indefinite amount of time to complete. However Torah study, is something that has no end. From here we can learn that Pinchas' alacrity was suited to the task of fulfilling one's duty with regard to mitzvot, while Joshua's patience was suited to serve the perpetual tasks of Torah study.

In fact, Torah study has both qualities of being a mitzvah that can be completed and of being an open-ended task that cannot be completed in a lifetime. The Alter Rebbe in his codex states that one can indeed fulfill the mitzvah of Torah study (which is why the Lubavitcher Rebbe encouraged people to learn Maimonides' Mishneh Torah), but only the aspect of the mitzvah in Torah study. In essence, Torah study remains a task that, "Is not for you to complete"² because it is infinitely vast. Indeed, the Ba'al Shem Tov interprets the verse, "God's Torah is whole; it revives the soul," using the allegory that if one studies Torah with the mindset that he can never complete it, like a dog lapping at the ocean—for all its

efforts, the ocean will remain just as whole as it was, then the Torah revives the soul. So we see that it must be possible to comply with the requirements of studying Torah as a mitzvah, as with any mitzvah which is complete when we have done our duty. Nonetheless, the inherent essence of the Torah is that one can never fathom its entire depth.

Short and Tweet

-The Zohar is not afraid of the media; it writes exactly what it wants to say without the need to be politically correct.

-Wallowing in self-pity leads to tragic hero-worship; an age-old trend. But pain is a call from God to soul-search and change direction.

-God commanded us to "Choose life!" To choose life, we need to see the goodness in life by refining our outlook.

-One of the names used in the Bible for idols is "sadness." Depression can be overcome through trust and faith in God's loving-kindness.

Mashiach – Torah or mitzvah?

We might ask, is the coming of the Mashiach like Torah—which is open-ended, or is it like a mitzvah—closed-ended? Some people may consider Mashiach to be like the Torah, meaning that essentially Mashiach is something we can never hope to bring. If an individual shares this feeling, he can spend his time dealing philosophically with Mashiach ad infinitum, but will never bring him in this way. Indeed, one of the revelations of Mashiach will be his infinite flow of Torah innovations. Nonetheless, appointing a king is the first mitzvah that we are commanded to perform on entering the land of Israel. It is our challenge to perceive Mashiach as a mitzvah that must be completed.

Indeed, this is what Moses prayed for when he prayed that God allow him to enter the land of Israel, "You began' to give the Torah through me, but the main purpose of the Torah is in the land of Israel, and one who begins a mitzvah is told to finish it. So, 'Let me pass over and see it.'"³ Had Moses entered the land of Israel, he would have been Mashiach.

¹ Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:5.

² Avot 2:16.

³ Rabeinu Bachyei, Deuteronomy 3:24.

Constructing kingdom from nothingness

Constructing the kingdom of Israel

Following the incident in which Pinchas avenged God's Name by swiftly killing Zimri and the Midianite princess who seduced him, God told Moses to take revenge on the Midianite nation for sending their daughters to seduce the Jewish men. Pinchas was chosen to lead the Jewish army to war and he returned victorious after killing all the adult males. The Jewish army returned with the war booty, including all the women and children and they brought them before Moses. But when Moses saw that they had taken the adult women into captivity, he rebuked the soldiers, because these very women had been the instruments of seduction that caused the plague in which so many Jews had died. The only captives to be kept alive were the "the baby women," i.e. females under three years old, who were not yet capable of having marital relations.

The numerical value of the phrase "the baby women" (הַטַּף בְּנָשִׁים) is 496, which is also the *gematria* of the word "kingdom" (מַלְכוּת), referring to the feminine *sefirah* of kingdom. The *Arizal* explains that the *sefirah* of kingdom is constructed out of judgments (*gevurot*), the same judgments whose pristine state is symbolized by the baby women of Midian.

Short and Tweet

-A good matchmaker will first make sure that the potential groom is kind. Only then should she look for added qualities.

-By nature, a Jew is merciful, shy, and acts with loving-kindness. By nature a chasid is kind, God-fearing and a scholar.

-The initial letters of Kind (חסיד), God-fearing (ירא שמים) and a scholar (למדן) spell חייל – a soldier.

-A worthy woman is "a woman of valor" (אשת חיל) or "the wife of a soldier" (אשת חייל). She is praised for her husband's qualities.

-When a woman's husband dies, God forbid, before she has born him a child, she can marry his brother and bear a son with her husband's soul.

-A levirate marriage is a marriage of loving-kindness. The man does a kindness to his wife and she does a kindness to her deceased husband.

-In the Torah Judah married Tamar, his sons' widow, and she bore two sons. Judah is the royal tribe. He built his kingdom from kindness.

-Boaz married Ruth, his nephew's widow. Ruth became the Mother of Kingdom; matriarch of David's empire and forerunner to Mashiach.

-By doing kindness you build an entire world.

The Zohar describes how in order to be rectified and compassionate, female judgments need to be sweetened by reconstructing them with male loving-kindness. A woman who marries a Jew connects to his innate attribute of compassion and loving-kindness and her judgment is thus sweetened. This was the reason why only the baby girls who could not have had any interaction with non-Jewish males were spared.

The Zohar teaches us that kingdom can either be constructed from judgment and might, or from loving-kindness. Although we could understand this to mean that a government can either rule by force or with compassion, this case of the Midianite girls teaches us that kingdom being constructed from might actually means that the feminine judgments must be taken captive while still in their pure state of being, before they are even capable of marital relations. A woman who marries a Jewish male (whether she is a Jew from birth or a convert) is affected by his innate attribute of loving-kindness and her judgments are sweetened; likewise for these young Midianite girls. Once they had converted they could marry a Jewish man, as the *Or Hachayim* explains. In this way, all their harsh judgments are sweetened at their source. It is specifically the sweetened state of the Midianite chaotic and unruly judgments that is needed to construct the redemptive and rectified society we yearn for in the kingdom of Mashiach.

Constructing the kingdom of my soul

Translating this idea into the psychological realm, we can understand that once we are victorious in our battle against the evil powers of the soul that wish to seduce us away from serving the Almighty, we must take captive the "baby girl" inside us (this is true for men and women alike). The "baby girl" represents the primal and pristine state of nothingness that is the raw material of pure judgment. Once we have returned to this formless state of judgment, our innate Jewish quality of kindness comes to the fore and forms the raw material into an ability to contribute with loving-kindness to our community.

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