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Orders of the Triple Torah

From Rosh Chodesh Sivan, the third month of the Jewish year, we begin to prepare ourselves to receive the “three-faceted Torah” as it is described in the Talmud:¹

Blessed is the Almighty who gave a three-faceted Torah to a three-faceted people by three [individuals: Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam] on the third day² of the third month [Sivan].

A primary triplet of terms that connects to the secret of the three-faceted Torah can be found in the words of the *mishnah*:³

“The world stands on three things: On the Torah and on the service (service of the heart, which is prayer) and on performing acts of lovingkindness.”

This triplet repeats itself in various ways during the “time of the giving of our Torah,” the holiday of *Shavu’ot*, as we shall now see.

The Order of the Three Tzaddikim of Shavu’ot

On Shavu’ot, we connect to three *tzaddikim* who have a special affinity with the day. Moses, who brought us the Torah from heaven, King David, whose day of birth and day of passing are on Shavu’ot, and the Ba’al Shem Tov, whose day of passing is also on Shavu’ot. These three illustrious figures parallel the order of “Torah, service of God and acts of lovingkindness. Clearly, Moses is the pillar of Torah. In all that he did, King David, who is referred to as the pleasant Psalmist of Israel,⁴ aspired his entire life to build the holy Temple in Jerusalem. He composed the Book of Psalms to be sung in God’s Home. He is the pillar of service of God. The Ba’al Shem Tov, the founder of Chassidut, is the pillar of *chessed* (loving-kindness). He teaches us to perform acts of loving-kindness on the physical plane, which will also lead to acts of kindness on the spiritual plane.

The Order of the Patriarchs

In the generations that preceded the giving of the Torah, the order is opposite: Abraham is the pillar of loving-kindness, Isaac is the pillar of service of God, which is prayer, and Jacob is the pillar of Torah. After the giving of the Torah, this pre-Torah

¹. *Shabbat* 68b.

². See Exodus 19:16.

³. *Avot* 1:2

⁴. 2 Samuel 23:1.

order is expressed in our connection to our unique portion of the Torah: Acts of kindness express the generous donations of the Jewish people to the building of the Tabernacle (and to the building and beautification of synagogues). This parallels Abraham, the pillar of loving-kindness. Every weekday, we give charity before our morning prayers and then pray from the inner recesses of our hearts. This parallels Isaac, the pillar of service of God. Finally, after prayer, we learn Torah, corresponding to Jacob, the pillar of Torah.

The Order in Time

The sages learn that the Torah is three-faceted from the verse, “Have I not written to you *shaleesheem* [lit., a threefold lore], with wise counsel”⁵ (הלא כתבתי לך שלשים עם חכמה). In the Bible, the word *shaleesheem* is written differently than the way it is pronounced, i.e., there is a *keree* and *keteev* variation here. The reading means “threefold” while the written variant means “the day before yesterday” (םי ןש ןש). The two meanings of this word point to another order, based on the order of the Mishnah, “Torah, service of God, and acts of kindness.” The Torah, which is described as preceding the world’s creation by 2000 years, is the secret of “the day before yesterday” (םי ןש ןש). To our eyes, it is the distant surrounding light of God that serves as the foundation for all our service of God. (The Torah will be revealed in its entirety only in the future, in the “new Torah” of Mashiach). “Yesterday” implies the close surrounding light that rests upon us, awakens longing in our hearts and opens our heart and lips to pray. The service of “to do them (the *mitzvot*) today”—upon which the arrival of Mashiach (“today”) depends—is the service of charity and acts of kindness.

“Whoever says I have only Torah, does not even have Torah.”⁶ But when we strengthen ourselves with the pillars of Torah, service of God and acts of kindness, we will be privileged to receive the Torah with joy and inner secrets. Acts of kindness attach the source of joy to the pillar of Torah—the joy of performing a major, glorious *mitzvah* (as the Rambam writes about giving gifts to the poor). Our Torah learning then becomes joyous as the day that it was given on Mount Sinai. Prayer from the inner dimension of the heart attaches the inner dimension to the pillar of Torah. It infuses the inner dimension of the heart with words of Torah and they re-appear as Torah directives that “come from the heart (of the speaker) and enter the heart (of the listener), having an effect.”

⁵. Proverbs 22:20.

⁶. *Yevamot* 109b.