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DAF KESHER

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DVAR TORAH CHEVRAYA

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his group of students are referred to as "Chevraya," the Friends. The expression appears hundreds of times in the Zohar, and is also frequently used in the Yerushalmi to refer to groups of Amoraim. Why are they called "Chevraya" instead of "Rabbanan" – Rabbis – or "Chachamim" – Wise Men?

"Torah is only acquired in a 'chaburah' – a group of friends" (Berachot 63b), so the Rabbis are a group of friends. But why is learning alone deficient and why does Torah thrive when learned as a group?

One practical explanation is that only through learning in a communal setting will there be a give and take between scholars; only then will one find out his mistakes. This explains why Rabbi Chanina, quoted in that same passage, says that those who only learn as individuals eventually become foolish and sin (!). Even a wise man needs others to point out his mistakes; and, if he makes halachic rulings based on his mistaken understanding, he will end up sinning, and perhaps cause others to sin through an incorrect psak halachah.

But there is another dimension to learning as a group, as the Maharal (Harav Yehudah Loewe, זצ"ל, 1525-1609) explains in his commentary to Chapter Six of Pirkei Avot, the Baraita of Kinyan Torah. The Maharal refers to the Torah as "Sechel Nivdal" – "Pure Mind." When a person learns only by himself, his mind is still embedded within his body. Only when he learns with another does his mind extend beyond himself and rise to the level of "Pure Mind"; he can now connect with the Torah, which is "Pure Mind."

One of the forty-eight ways of acquiring Torah (Avot 6:6) is through learning with friends. There are two versions (girs'a'ot) of this expression. Most versions have the text "dikduk chaverim" – meaning, paying close attention to your friend's words, understanding them properly. But the Maharal's version is "dibuk chaverim" – clinging to friends. This implies that connecting with friends is essential to Torah learning, not just discussing Torah with them. This points to yet a third dimension of learning as a "Chevraya." The Torah was given to the People of Israel as a unit. Only when Israel camped as one unified organism at the foot of Mount Sinai were they ready to accept the Torah. Learning Torah demands emulating and tapping into the Revelation at Sinai.

An interesting document reveals an extreme expression of this approach. The great kabbalist Harav Shalom Sharabi, זצ"ל, (1720–1777, Rosh Yeshivah of Yerushalayim's Yeshivat Beit El) and eleven other colleagues and disciples joined together as a unit, and formulated their connectedness in a written covenant (a copy appears in Shem Hagedolim, written by the Chida, Harav Chaim Yosef David Azulai, זצ"ל, 1724–1806, himself one of the signatories). Here is a selection: "We, the young sheep who are signed below, have become as one man, friends, all for the unity of the Holy One, blessed be He, to give satisfaction to our Creator. Because of this we have made a covenant together ... First: All of us signed below, twelve men – the same number of the twelve tribes of Israel – will all love each other with a powerful love ... We are tied together as one man ..." They promise to help each other, feel each other's pain, and help each other spiritually in This World and in the Next. Their connectedness is a model Chevraya.

SOURCE GUIDE: MASTERS OF TIME BY RABBI AVRAHAM FISCHER

In the section discussing the Jewish calendar, which makes up a large portion of Parshat Emor, special emphasis is placed on the agricultural aspects of the festivals. The Children of Israel, still in the wilderness, are thus prepared for the rhythms of life in our Land.

A. The Omer Period – 4 Difficulties

In this connection, we learn about the Omer period, in which we now find ourselves:

<p>1. Vayikra 23:9-10, 15-16, 22</p> <p>(9) And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying,</p> <p>(10) “Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When you come to the land which I give you and you reap its harvest, then you shall bring an Omer (a sheaf, or a dry measure equivalent to approximately 3.6 liters) of the first of your harvest to the Kohen. ...</p> <p>(15) And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the festival, from the day of your bringing the Omer of the waving, seven complete Sabbaths (weeks) shall it be.</p> <p>(16) Until the morrow after the seventh week shall you count fifty days...</p> <p>(22) And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not completely finish the corner of your field when you reap, and the gleaning of your harvest shall you not gather up: for the poor and the stranger shall you leave them. I am Hashem, your G-d.</p>	<p>ויקרא כג:ט-י, טו-טז, כב</p> <p>(ט) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר.</p> <p>(י) וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַאֲמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וּקְצַרְתֶּם אֶת קְצִירָהּ וַהֲבֵאתֶם אֶת עֹמֶר רֵאשִׁית קְצִירְכֶם אֶל הַכֹּהֵן ...</p> <p>(טו) וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמִּקְרַת הַשָּׁבֹת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאְכֶם אֶת עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שִׁבְעַת שָׁבֹתוֹת תִּמְיַמַת תִּהְיֶינָה.</p> <p>(טז) עַד מִקְרַת הַשָּׁבֹת הַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּסְפְּרוּ חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם וְהַקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַה' ...</p> <p>(כב) וּבְקַצְרְכֶם אֶת קְצִיר אַרְצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פְּאֵת שְׂדֵךְ בְּקַצְרְךָ וְלֶקֶט קְצִירְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעֹנִי וְלְגֵר תַּעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.</p>
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As explained by our Sages, the procedure of the Omer was as follows: On the second night of Pesach (the morrow of the festival), amidst great ceremony and festivity, a large sheaf of ripened barley was reaped and brought to the Beit Hamikdash. There, it was winnowed, parched, ground and sifted through 13 sieves until there was an Omer of flour. On the next day, this was mixed with oil and frankincense and waved up and down and side-to-side. Then a handful was burnt on the altar and the kohanim ate the rest. Beginning with the night of the reaping, 49 days are counted. The fiftieth day is the festival of Shavuot (“Weeks”).

A number of questions can be raised about this passage:

- Why is the Omer offered?
- What is the significance of the counting?
- Why is the holiday of Shavuot determined by counting, rather than by a set date, as is the case of the other festivals?
- Why are the commandments of leaving the corner of the field (peah) and the gleaning (leket) “for the poor and the stranger” mentioned here, even though they were discussed earlier (Vayikra 19:9-10)?

B. Pesach and Shavuot: Past and Present

In answering these questions, two elements of the festivals of Pesach and Shavuot must be taken into consideration: On the one hand, they recall and reenact the Exodus, from the moment of leaving Egypt until the Revelation of the Torah at Sinai. On the other hand, they celebrate the two grain harvests in Israel, barley and wheat. These two factors are inseparable, because our past and our present, our history and our current efforts, reinforce each other.

During the seven-week period from Pesach to Shavuot, we progress along two parallel tracks:

1. the historical track, from slavery to freedom; and
2. the agricultural track, from economic uncertainty to economic self-sufficiency.

The Omer sacrifice permits use of the new grain (verse 14). The Kohen waves the Omer offering in all directions to ask that Hashem protect the produce from damaging winds and precipitation (Menachot 62a). The Omer offering is a way of asking Hashem to bless the grain in the fields (Rosh Hashanah 16a). All of these are present concerns, and reflect some degree of anxiety, as the Midrash notes:

<p>2. Yalkut Shimoni – Emor Chapter 23 – Section 654 ... On Pesach you do not find the word simchah (joy) mentioned even once. Why? Because on Pesach the grain is being judged, and a man does not know if the year will produce a yield or not. ... On Shavuot, simchah is mentioned once: "You should make a Shavuot holiday to Hashem your G-d, and be joyous, you and your household" (Devarim 16:10-11). Why was joy mentioned once? It is because the grain has been gathered in.</p>	<p>ילקוט שמעוני אמור – פרק כג – רמז תרנד ... אבל בפסח אין אתה מוצא שכתוב בו אפילו שמחה אחת למה. אתה מוצא שבפסח התבואה נידונית ואין אדם יודע אם עושה השנה [תבואה] אם אינו עושה ... וכן אתה מוצא שאין כתוב בעצרת אלא שמחה אחת, דכתיב: "ועשית חג שבועות לה' אלקיך, ושמחת אתה וביתך" (דברים טז:י-יא). ולמה כתב בה שמחה אחת? [מפני] שהתבואה נכנסת בפנים ...</p>
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At the same time, we recreate the mood of our ancestors when they came out of Egypt, anticipating the Revelation with excitement:

<p>3. Rambam, Guide to the Perplexed 3:43 This was the goal and the purpose of their leaving: And I will bring them to Me (Shemot 19:4) ... Like one who looks forward to the arrival of the one who is most beloved to him of all people, he counts the days by hours ...</p>
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C. Masters of Time

While progressing along these dual tracks, we are made acutely aware of the dimension of time. However, we do not merely measure time as it passes us by; we determine the passage of time by counting the days. It is we who fix the time of Shavuot. We are not only subject to time; we are also its masters.

Harav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, זצ"ל (1903-1993), explains this in an essay:

<p>4. Selection from, "Sacred and Profane: Kodesh and Chol in World Perspectives" The individual who measures time in purely quantitative terms is an essentially passive personality. He is a recipient and not a giver, a creature rather than a creator. His prototype is the slave. The slave has no time of his own. When the Jews were delivered from the Egyptian oppression and Moses rose to undertake the almost impossible task of metamorphosing a tribe of slaves into a nation of priests, he was told by G-d that the path leading from the holiday of Passover to Shavuot, from initial liberation to consummate freedom (Gilui Shechinah, Revelation), leads through the medium of time. The commandment of Sefirah was entrusted to the Jew; the wondrous test of counting forty-nine successive days was put to him. These forty-nine days must be whole. If one of the days be missed, the act of numeration is invalidated. A slave who is capable of appreciating each day, of grasping its meaning and worth, of weaving every thread of time into a glorious fabric, quantitatively stretching over a period of seven weeks but qualitatively forming the warp and woof of centuries of change, is eligible for Torah. He has achieved freedom.</p>

As we are propelled passively along the path from barley-harvest to wheat-harvest, we simultaneously and actively create the path towards total freedom. We are not merely locked in the inescapable cycle of the seasons; we are partners with Hashem in historic progress.

Our history demands that we remember our origins and learn from our experiences:

<p>5. Vayikra 19:33-34 And if there dwells a stranger with you in your land, you shall not hurt him. Like one born among you, so shall the stranger</p>	<p>ויקרא יט:לג-לד (לג) וכי יגור אִתְּךָ גֵר בְּאַרְצְכֶם לֹא תונוּ אֹתוֹ. (לד) כְּאֶזְרָח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לְכֶם הַגֵּר הַגֵּר אִתְּכֶם</p>
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be to you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am Hashem, your G-d.

וְאֶהְיֶה לָּךְ כְּמוֹד כִּי גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם
אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

Perhaps this is why our verse is motivated to repeat the commandments of caring for the poor and the stranger: To remind you that while you are caring for your present needs, learn from the past and apply those lessons appropriately.

When we mold our present and live our past, we are then truly free.

CYNICAL COMMENTS

The last 8 words of our Parshah caught the attention of the commentators. The Parshah closes with the tragic episode of the man who cursed in the camp and was sentenced to be stoned: “Moshe spoke to the Children of Israel (and told them Hashem’s verdict); they took the one who cursed outside the camp and stoned him – וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת מֹשֶׁה – and the Children of Israel did as Hashem commanded Moshe” (Vayikra 24:23). Doesn’t the verse already say that the people stoned the man who cursed? Why add that “the Children of Israel did as Hashem commanded Moshe”?

Most of the commentators explain that the end of the verse elaborates on the stoning. Some say that the Torah here emphasizes that they acted not out of anger, but to fulfill G-d’s command. Others say that the end of the verse adds that Israel followed all the rules of stoning that only appear in the Book of Devarim.

But the author of the Meshech Chochmah, (Harav Meir Simchah of Dvinsk, זצ״ל, 1843–1926), takes a different direction. He bases his explanation on Rabbi Berechiah’s comment (Vayikra Rabbah 32:3, quoted by Rashi on Vayikra 24:10): The cursing man first mocked the halachah of the showbreads (the section of the Chumash immediately preceding this episode), then cursed. He said, “Is it the way of a king to eat warm, fresh bread every day – or perhaps cold bread nine days old?” (The breads were placed on the Shulchan (Table) on Shabbat, but eaten only on the following Shabbat. When Rosh Hashanah preceded Shabbat the showbreads would sit on the Shulchan for nine days before being eaten.)

Says the Meshech Chochmah: After the cursing man was put to death, the People of Israel fulfilled **the mitzvah of the showbreads** (not, like the other commentators say, the mitzvah of stoning) just as Hashem commanded Moshe. Why was this so praiseworthy?

Even someone who himself might not **make** a cynical comment, will still find it difficult to **ignore** a comment said by another. The listener of cynicism is challenged not to get into the speaker’s cynical mindset. The People of Israel heard the cursing man’s sarcastic comment but they were not affected. This was not simple. As one rabbi put it: “An entire community can be uplifted by a drashah, and one cynical comment can destroy all of their inspiration in a moment” (see also Mesilat Yesharim 5 and Chazon Ish Emunah Uvitachon 3:30). The last eight words of our Parshah teach us the greatness of resisting the influence of a cynical comment.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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דרכיה דרכי נועם

The following digital Torah resources have been extremely helpful in researching and preparing the Shapell’s Daf Keshet:
DBS – Hataklitor Hatorani, Otzar Hachochmah, the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, and Hebrewbooks.org.

We pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.