

DVAR TORAH RAV KOOK ON THE SHEMITTAH YEAR

In Shemittah year 5670 (1909-1910), Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, zt"l, then chief rabbi of Yaffo, published his classic volume on the laws of Shemittah, *Shabbat Haaretz*. Though it is primarily a halachic work, it includes an eight page introduction that describes the relationship between the people of Israel and the land of Israel, the spiritual functions of the Shemittah (Sabbatical) and Yovel (Jubilee) years, and the process of exile and redemption. Here is one idea from that introduction (not a translation of Rav Kook's Hebrew original):

What Shabbat accomplishes for the individual, Shemittah does for the entire Jewish people.

We have, at our core, *kedushah* (holiness), but G-d wants us to also live in a world of *chol* (non-kedushah). But the mundane, the regular, the 'this-worldly' existence can stifle our ability to totally express our holiness. A Jew needs the periodic ability to cast off the cover of mundane life, a life of *chol*, and totally express his true essence. The individual has the opportunity to do this once a week on Shabbat.

But the Jewish people – as a collective unit – also needs to periodically express its national *kedushah* without limitations. That happens during the Shemittah year in the land of Israel. For a complete year, as a nation, we have the opportunity and challenge to cast off the cover of 'this-worldly' activities: working the land, trade and business. This allows the Jewish essence to come out in all of its glory and intensity. Even though agriculture and trade are necessary aspects of the existence of a nation, periodically we need to severely limit them to preserve our national character.

The only place where this national renewal can take place is the land of Israel. It is only in the land of Israel that the people of Israel's *kedushah* can fully express itself, and it is only the people of Israel that can bring out the *kedushah* of the land. The essence of the land of Israel and the national soul of the people of Israel are tied together. G-d chose this people from all the nations, and of the entire world, He gave only this land the unique quality of *kedushah*, and He committed Himself to giving this land to this people. This connection between the people and the land of Israel reaches intensity and full splendor in the shemittah year.

We pray that the connection between Israel and its land can soon be restored to its ideal state.



On Yom Haatzmaut 5771, Shapell's / Darche Noam students and rebbeim, in a field near Mevo Choron, harvested wheat (under the direction of Rabbi Binyomin Adilman) later used for shemurah matzah.

(pictured here, Shapell's student Rafi Wolfe, photo by Shapell's alumnus Adrian Salt)

LIVING ON A DIFFERENT PLANE – PIRKEI AVOT 3:9

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa (whose sayings are recorded in the 9th and 10th mishnayot of the third chapter of Pirkei Avot) is mostly known to us through the aggadic sections of the Talmud. We will learn a collection of anecdotes about him and his family (beginning on Taanit 24b – the translation draws from the Soncino Talmud) that illustrates how Rabbi Chanina lived according to his own teachings in Pirkei Avot:

הוא היה אומר כל שמעשיו מרבין מחכמתו, חכמתו מתקימת, וכל שחכמתו מרבה ממעשיו, אין חכמתו מתקימת: [Rabbi Chanina son of Dosa] would say ... One whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom endures. But one whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom does not endure.

As you learn the anecdotes, think about two things:

1. How do these stories – at least some of them – illustrate the Mishnah above?
2. Note the structure of each aggadic statement, and the structure of the entire passage.

AGGADIC STORIES – RABBI CHANINA BEN DOSA, HIS WIFE, AND DAUGHTER

Taanit 24b – 25a

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Every day a Heavenly Voice goes out, declaring, “The whole world draws its sustenance because [of the merit] of Chanina my son, and Chanina my son suffices himself with a kab of carobs from one Shabbat eve to another.”

Every Friday his wife would light the oven and throw something that creates smoke into it so as not to be put to shame. She had a bad neighbor who said, “I know that these people have nothing, what then is the meaning of all this [smoke]?” She went and knocked at the door. [The wife of Rabbi Chanina], feeling humiliated [at this], retired into a room. A miracle happened and [her neighbor] saw the oven filled with loaves of bread and the kneading trough full of dough. The neighbor called out to her: You, you, bring your shovel, for your bread is getting charred; and Rabbi Chanina’s wife replied, “I just went to fetch it.” **A Tanna taught:** She actually had gone to fetch the shovel because she was accustomed to miracles.

Once his wife said to him: How long shall we go on suffering so much? He replied: What shall we do? – Pray that something may be given to you, [she replied]. He prayed, and there emerged the figure of a hand reaching out to him a leg of a golden table. She saw in a dream that all the *tzaddikim* (righteous people) would in the future eat at a three-legged golden table but she would eat at a two-legged table. Her husband said to her: Are you content that everybody shall eat at a perfect table and we at an imperfect table? She replied: What then shall we do? – Pray that the leg should be taken away from you. He prayed and it was taken away. **A Tanna taught:** The latter miracle was greater than the former; for there is a tradition that if something is given from Heaven they do not then take it back.

תענית כד - כה.

אמר רב יהודה ואמר רב: בכל יום ויום בת קול יוצאת ואומרת כל העולם כולו ניזון בשביל חנינא בני וחנינא בני דיו בקב חרובים מערב שבת לערב שבת.

הוה רגילא דביתהו למיחמא תנורא כל מעלי דשבתא ושדייא אקטרתא משום כיסופא. הוה לה הך שיבבתא בישתא אמרה מכדי ידענא דלית להו ולא מידי מאי כולי האי אזלא. וטרפא אבבא. איכספא ועיילא לאינדרונא. איתעביד לה ניסא דחזיא לתנורא מלא לחמא ואגנא מלא לישא. אמרה לה: פלניתא פלניתא אייתי מסא דקא חריך לחמיך אמרה לה: אף אנא להכי עיילי. **תנא** אף היא להביא מרדה נכנסה מפני שמלומדת בנסים.

אמרה ליה דביתהו: עד אימת ניזיל ונצטער כולי האי? אמר לה: מאי נעביד? בעי רחמי דניתבו לך מידי. בעא רחמי יצתה כמין פיסת יד ויהבו ליה חד כרעא דפתורא דדהבא. חזיא בחלמא עתידי צדיקי דאכלי אפתורא דדהבא דאית ליה תלת כרעי ואת אוכלת אפתורא דתרי כרעי. אמר לה: ניחא לך דמיכל אכלי כולי עלמא אפתורא דמשלם ואנן אפתורא דמחסר? אמרה ליה? ומאי נעביד? בעי רחמי דנשקלינהו מינך. בעי רחמי ושקלוהו. **תנא** גדול היה נס אחרון יותר מן הראשון דגמירי דמיהב יהבי מישקל לא שקלי.

Once on a Friday evening he noticed that his daughter was sad and he said to her, My daughter, why are you sad? She replied: My oil container got mixed up with my vinegar container and lit the Shabbat candles with it. He said to her: My daughter, why should this trouble you? He who had commanded the oil to burn will also command the vinegar to burn. **A Tanna taught:** The light continued to burn the whole day until they lit the Havdalah candle from it.

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa had goats. On being told that they were doing damage he exclaimed, "If they indeed do damage (to adjacent fields) may bears devour them, but if not may they each of them at evening time bring home a bear on their horns. In the evening each of them brought home a bear on their horns.

Once a woman neighbor of Rabbi Chanina was building a house but the beams would not reach the walls. She thereupon came to him and said: I have built a house but the beams will not reach the walls. He asked her: What is your name? She replied: Aiku. He thereupon exclaimed: Aiku, may your beams reach [the walls]. **A Tanna taught:** They projected one cubit on either side. Some say that new pieces joined themselves [miraculously] to the beams. It has been taught: Polemo says: I saw that house and its beams projected one cubit on either side, and people told me, "This is the house which Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa covered with beams, through his prayer."

From where did Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa have goats – wasn't he a poor man? And furthermore, did not the Sages say: We may not rear small cattle in Palestine? – Rav Pinchas said: Once it happened that a man passed by his house and left there hens and the wife of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa found them and her husband told her not to eat of their eggs. As the eggs and the chickens increased in number they were very troubled by them and he therefore sold them and with the proceeds he purchased goats. One day the man who lost the hens passed by [the house] again and said to his companions, "Here I left my hens." Rabbi Chanina, overhearing this, asked him: Have you any sign [by which to identify them]? He replied: Yes. He gave him the sign and took away the goats. These were the goats that brought on their horns.

Think about the following:

1. The five miracle stories – the oven, the table leg, the vinegar, the bears, and the beams – are followed by the story of the lost hens and the herd of goats. Suggestion: perhaps besides just solving the problem of how someone so poor could have a herd of goats, this story might answer another question – why did Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa merit being the facilitator of so many miracles?
2. Which is the most intense miracle of the five? It is probably that of the table leg. A normal miracle goes against the "rules of nature," whereas this one goes against the "rules" of miracles! In other words, Hashem, so to speak, "broke the rules" of miracles and took back the table leg for the sake of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa and his wife's share in the world to come.

חד בי שמי חזייה לברתיה דהוות עציבא. אמר לה: בתי למאי עציבת? אמרה ליה: כלי של חומץ נתחלף לי בכלי של שמן והדלקתי ממנו אור לשבת. אמר לה: בתי מאי איכפת לך מי שאמר לשמן וידלוק הוא יאמר לחומץ וידלוק. **תנא** היה דולק והולך כל היום כולו עד שהביאו ממנו אור להבדלה.

רבי חנינא בן דוסא הווי ליה הנך עיזי אמרו ליה קא מפסדן. אמר: אי קא מפסדן ניכלניהו דובי ואי לא כל חדא וחדא תיתי לאורתא דובא בקרנייהו. לאורתא אייתי כל חדא וחדא דובא בקרנייהו.

הוה ליה ההיא שיבכתא דקא בניא ביתא ולא מטו כשוריי. אתיא לקמיה אמרה ליה: בניתי ביתי ולא קמטו כשוראי. אמר לה: מה שמך? אמרה ליה: איכו. אמר: איכו נימטו כשורייך. **תנא** הגיעו עד שיצאו אמה לכאן ואמה לכאן ויש אומרין סניפין עשאום. תניא פלימו אומר: אני ראיתי אותו הבית והיו קורותיו יוצאות אמה לכאן ואמה לכאן, ואמרו לי: בית זה שקירה רבי חנינא בן דוסא בתפלתו.

ורבי חנינא בן דוסא מהיכן הווי ליה עזים והא עני הוי? ועוד אמרו חכמים אין מגדלין בהמה דקה בארץ ישראל! אמר רב פנחס: מעשה ועבר אדם אחד על פתח ביתו והניח שם תרנגולין ומצאתן אשתו של רבי חנינא בן דוסא, ואמר לה: אל תאכלי מביציהן. והרבו ביצים ותרנגולין והיו מצערין אותם ומכרין וקנה בדמיהן עזים/ פעם אחת עבר אותו אדם שאבדו ממנו התרנגולין ואמר לחבירו: בכאן הנחתי התרנגולין שלי. שמע רבי חנינא אמר לו: יש לך בהן סימן? אמר לו: הן. נתן לו סימן ונטל את העזין. והן הן עיזי דאייתו דובי בקרנייהו.

TORAH FROM OUR FACULTY

SPEECH, REALITY, AND MOCKERY, BY RABBI SHAYA KARLINSKY

Rebbe Chanania ben Tradyon says: Two people who are sitting together, and no words of Torah are exchanged between them, are considered to be in a session of scoffers, as it says: "And in a session of scoffers he did not sit" (Tehillim 1:1). But two people who are sitting together and there are words of Torah between them, the Divine Presence resides between them, as it says "Then those who fear G-d spoke to each other, and G-d listened and He heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for those who fear G-d and who contemplate His Name" (Malachi 3:16). - Pirkei Avot 3:3 (This article is based on the Maharal's comments on this Mishnah.)

The word for speaking or conversation is *dibbur*, whose root (דבר) is the word *davar* which means "thing," as well as *dabar* which means to "lead" or "guide." (see Tehillim 47:4.) What is the connection between the concepts of "thing," "speech," and "guiding"?

The true power of speech, *dibbur*, was given to man as a way to communicate higher level, more abstract realities even when in the lower level, more concrete, material world. Words are supposed to communicate the true essence of the "thing," reflecting and concretizing to the outer world its inner reality.

When used properly, words are spoken with a dimension of commitment and imperative. Since they are supposed to reflect reality, words must have true significance, reflecting what must be, if they are to embody the true power of speech, *dibbur*. Torah is the essence of *dibbur* since it communicates a system which reflects the imperative of Divine reality, providing a guide to that reality.

But speech can also be used in a corrupted fashion,

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Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky

where the words don't reflect any imperative reality, when they are spoken to mislead, are ambiguous, or are simply strung together in a haphazard fashion. If they can represent "whatever," and they communicate things that don't reflect any sort of imperative reality, then they do not constitute true *dibbur*. There is a special attraction towards this kind of *dibbur* since it negates the concept of commitment and imperative, allowing one to interpret things as desired, detached from any objective reality, ultimately creating a system that has no limitations or imperative requirements.

Commitment and imperative are things man resists, certainly in his material dimension. "No one is going to tell me what to do." Discipline and structure are resisted by the self-centered and physical side of our existence. Communication built on such a system is represented by *leitzanut*, scoffing and mockery, where ideas, people, etc. are negated not because of compelling arguments reflecting reality, but simply by word manipulation, ridicule, and derision. Western society, with its modern form of comedy on the one hand and literary deconstructionism on the other, gives us a good picture of the results of the culture of *leitzanut*.

Torah reflects the essence of *dibbur*, communicating a system of imperatives, where the words communicate reality. So speech which communicates reality within a system that acknowledges imperatives, embodies within it some dimension of "words of Torah."

