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A THOUGHT FROM REB LEVI YITZCHAK

The 20th of Av commemorates the *yahrtzeit* of the Rebbe's father, Reb Levi Yitzchak. His surviving works are all of a kabbalistic nature, because although he had written thousands of pages on subjects in both *nigleh* and Kabbalah, they were all confiscated when he was arrested. All that remains is what he composed during his exile. He possessed no *seforim* there, nor paper, save for the margins of a Zohar and a Tanya, upon which he wrote his insights. We thus only have access to those limited kabbalistic writings.

Yet, there are certain kabbalistic ideas he explains in a way that even ordinary individuals can understand. What follows is one such thought.

KIDDUSHIN THAT LEAD NOWHERE

The *halachah* always follows Rava's opinion in his disputes with Abaye, except in six instances cited in the Gemara, known by the acronym *Ya'AL KaGaM*. In these six cases, the *halachah* follows Abaye. The *K* in *KaGaM* refers to the case of *kiddushin shelo nimseru l'biah*, a halachic betrothal which cannot be consummated.

This involves a case where a person betrothed one of two sisters, without specifying which one. In such a situation, it is impossible to move forward and marry either woman, because each one might be the sister of his true wife, and is therefore halachically forbidden.

Such *kiddushin* are called *kiddushin shelo nimseru l'biah*, as they inherently cannot lead to marriage. The question is whether such *kiddushin* are valid to begin with. Rava maintains that they are not, while Abaye maintains that they are. The *halachah* here is in accordance with Abaye's position.

Reb Levi Yitzchak explains this dispute through the lens of Kabbalah, but elaborates upon it a bit, in a way we can understand.

TWO TYPES OF MAKIF

Kabbalah and Chassidus often employ the terms *pnimiyus* and *makif*. *Makif* itself is further divided into two levels: *makif hakarov* (a close *makif*) and *makif harachok* (a distant *makif*).

One example that demonstrates these three concepts is of a master teaching his student. Certain parts of the lesson can be completely absorbed and internalized by the student—*pnimiyus*.

Additionally, the student recognizes that what he understands is only the superficial aspect of the lesson, and there is a depth which lies beyond his comprehension. These transcendent ideas are *makif*. However, the fact that he is at least attuned to their existence demonstrates that they are somewhat close to his realm of understanding—*makif hakarov*.

Finally, there are elements to which he remains utterly oblivious. This is the level of *makif harachok*, ideas that are distant and completely outside his sphere of comprehension.

DOES BEYOND COUNT?

In the case of *makif hakarov*, the *makif* will eventually be internalized. For example, while initially many ideas remain beyond the student's comprehension, as he matures, he is able

to absorb what he previously could not. However, in the case of *makif harachok*, since the *makif* is so distantly removed from the person, it will never become internalized.

This is the meaning of *kiddushin shelo nimseru l'biah*. *Biah* is an act of *pnimiyus*, while *kiddushin* is a prefatory act of *makif*. While an ordinary *kiddushin* will lead to *biah*, we have here a case where it will never be consummated. Is such *kiddushin* halachically valid? In other words, is a spiritual level utterly beyond

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the world's parameters something be reckoned with? Rava argued that we should not take *makif harachok* into account, while Abaye held that we should.

MEM AND SAMECH

These two levels of *makif hakarov* and *makif harachok* are represented by the two letters of *samech* and final *mem*. Unlike all other letters, *samech* and final *mem* are both spherical, surrounding the space inside. This represents the idea of *makif*.

Since the etchings in the *luchos* were from end to end, the Gemara notes that the insides of the *samech* and final *mem* hovered miraculously; there was nothing to hold them in place. This further shows that these letters represent the level of *makif*, ideas that cannot be grasped.

Yet there is a difference between these two letters: the final *mem* is a square, whereas the *samech* is a circle. This suggests that the *samech* is a greater type of *makif*—the level of *makif harachok*, as opposed to the final *mem*, which corresponds to *makif hakarov*.

Now, the Gemara relates that both Rava and Abaye passed away at a young age: Rava at the age of 40, and Abaye at the age of 60. This fits in beautifully with what was explained above. Rava, although on the level of *makif*, was associated with *makif hakarov*, *mem* (the numerical value of which is 40). Abaye, on the other hand, was associated with *makif harachok*, *samech* (the numerical value of which is 60).

THE ROOF OR THE HEAVENS?

Moreover, the Gemara relates that as children, Abaye and Rava were both asked who our *berachos* are directed to. They both replied that we make *berachos* to Hashem. They were then challenged to identify His location. Rava pointed at the roof, while Abaye went outside and gestured towards the heavens.

Both youngsters meant to indicate that Hashem transcends our world and comprehension. However, the manner in which they did so differed greatly. Rava pointed toward the roof, while Abaye did not suffice with that—he went outside and pointed towards greater heights, the heavens. Thus, their inherently different

outlooks, hinged on the source of their individual *neshamos*, had already manifested themselves when they were children.

[It's also interesting to note that a house is itself a square, like a final *mem*, while the heavens are spherical, like a *samech*.]

ABAYE'S APPROACH TODAY

We know that today the *halachah* follows Beis Hillel, because Beis Shamai's words are beyond our grasp. Beis Hillel's approach was to draw higher levels into the reality of our world (*hamshachah milmaalah limatah*). Beis Shammai's approach, by contrast, was to ascend from this world to loftier heights (*haalaah milmatah limaalah*). Only once Moshiach comes will we follow Beis Shamai's positions, because the world will then rise to a higher level.

The same applies for Abaye and Rava. Ordinarily, the law follows Rava, not Abaye, because Abaye's approach emanated from a plane beyond our realm of reality.

However, there are certain areas where we are able to catch a glimpse of a reality that is beyond ours, even while remaining on our present level. The six instances of *Ya'AL KaGaM* reflect the idea that we are sometimes able to perceive a transcendent level normally beyond our reach, and that is why in these cases the *halachah* follows Abaye.

This teaches us an amazing lesson. Just as the *halachah* usually follows Rava, we must generally act within the parameters of nature and avoid relying on miracles. However, *Ya'AL KaGaM* teaches us that we must sometimes rule like Abaye—there are times when we must switch gears and transcend nature.

For further learning, see *Toras Levi Yitzchak* pp. 137-140.

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