

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
 with Reb Yoel Kahn

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THREE MIRACLES, THREE NUMBERS

The Chanukah story consists of a series of miraculous events. First, the miniscule Chashmona'i army vanquished the powerful Greek forces. Then, they found a single jug of oil which the Greeks had miraculously not discovered. And finally, the menorah was lit with this oil and burned for eight days.

According to certain Rishonim, these three miracles took place on three successive days. The war was won on the 24th of Kislev, the jug was found on the 25th, and the miracle of the oil lasting for eight days began on the 26th (because there was sufficient oil for the first day, and the miracle actually began on the second day). This opinion is quoted and explained in several *maamarei Chassidus*.

What is the connection between these three miracles and the days when they occurred—24, 25, and 26?

TWO TYPES OF BITTUL

The Zohar points out that the verse *Boruch shem* contains 24 letters, while the *possuk Shema yisrael* contains 25. It also states that the last word of *Boruch shem*, *וְדַל*, and the last word of *Shema*, *אֵלֵךְ*, are actually one and the same, except that the letters are interchanged (the *alef* becomes a *vov*, the *ches* becomes an *ayin*, and the large *daled* of *Shema* becomes a regular *daled*).

In other words, *Boruch shem* expresses a lower level of *achdus Hashem*, “interchanged” from the level of *achdus Hashem* expressed in *Shema yisrael*. To use chassidic terminology, *Shema yisrael* is *yichuda ila'ah*—a higher level of oneness, and *Boruch shem* is *yichuda tata'ah*—a lower level of oneness.

What is the difference between *yichuda ila'ah* and *yichuda tata'ah*?

The word *echad* is made up of three letters—*alef*, *ches*, and *daled*. This symbolizes that the seven heavens and the earth (*ches*) and the four directions of the world (*daled*) are completely

battel to Hashem, the Master of the world (*Alufo shel olam—alef*). This is the level of *yichuda ila'ah*—a level where the world has absolutely no significance whatsoever. *Yichuda tata'ah*, on the other hand, is a level where the world has a certain measure of significance, but nevertheless it is *battel* to Hashem.

IS LIFE A FANTASY?

Yichuda ila'ah doesn't mean that the world doesn't exist, and life is just one big fantasy. Chassidus explains that the world is indeed a true existence, and one of the proofs for this is the fact that most mitzvos are done with physical objects. It is obvious that mitzvos are real. Since we need wool to fashion tzitzis and parchment to create tefillin, it must be that these entities are real as well.

But by using mitzvos as proof that the world is real, Chassidus is actually demonstrating what *yichuda ila'ah* is all about. When viewed in this perspective, it would be normal to assume that physicality is just a figment of our imagination, and the proof that this is not so is because it is used for mitzvos. In other words,

wool and parchment have no existence on their own. Wool exists only so that there can be tzitzis, and parchment exists only so that there can be tefillin.

The Rebbe would often demonstrate this concept from a halacha in *nigleh*. One is only liable for carrying food on Shabbos if a certain amount is carried. If one carries less than the required amount, he is exempt. Furthermore, if one carries this small amount of food via a utensil, he is exempt as well, even

though he would have been liable had the utensil been empty. Why? Because in such a case, he is not carrying the *utensil*; he is carrying the *food*. The utensil loses its individual existence, as its entire purpose is to carry the food. Since he is *potur* on the food, he is *potur* on the utensil as well.

This, then, is the difference between *yichuda ila'ah* and *yichuda*

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tata'ah. *Yichuda ila'ah* means that the world has no existence of its own, and it is here solely for Hashem. *Yichuda tata'ah*, however, is a level where the world is taken into account. One feels physicality as an entity of its own; it's just that this entity is subservient to a higher cause.

THE KOHEN GADOL'S SEAL

This is also the difference between the first two miracles of Chanukah—winning the war and finding the jug of oil.

For the small, weak group of Chashmona'im to conquer the great, mighty Greek army was certainly a supernatural event. However, there was still a need to go out and fight a war. This demonstrates that at that time, the Jews were holding at a level where it was necessary to take the world into account and fight their opponents, and then, with Hashem's help, they witnessed a miraculous victory. This is the level of *yichuda tata'ah*, and therefore this miracle took place on the 24th day of Kislev, corresponding to the 24 letters of *Boruch shem*.

The miracle of finding the jug of oil, however, represents the level of *yichuda ila'ah*. The Greeks were unable to contaminate this oil; this symbolizes that the Jews were then holding on a higher level, where their opponents were non-existent. This is why it took place on the 25th day, corresponding to the 25 letters of *Shema yisrael*.

This explains why the jug was sealed with seal of the Kohen Gadol. The Kohen Gadol was the only one who was allowed to enter the *kodesh hakodoshim*, a place where there was no room for any opposition to *kedushah*.

TOTAL TRANSCENDENCE

However, despite the greatness of *yichuda ila'ah*, it is still not the ultimate *bittul*. 25, *chof hei*, creates the word *ko*, "like this"; i.e., *yichuda ila'ah* is a level that (only) resembles yet a higher level (in contrast to *zeh*, "this," where one can point directly at the original).

In the perspective of *yichuda ila'ah*, although the entire purpose of the world is for Hashem, in a subtle way the limitations of

the world are still taken into account. To use the example of the utensil and the food: although the utensil is only there to transport the food, the utensil must be proportionate to the food, and if one were to desire to transport a larger quantity, a larger utensil would be necessary. Although the *ches* and *daled* are completely *battel* to the *alef*, they nevertheless possess some slight measure of existence.

But then there is a higher level—not *echad*, but *yachid*. This is a level where Hashem is "single"; i.e., the world is not taken into consideration whatsoever.

This is the difference between the second and third miracles of Chanukah—finding the oil and the oil lasting for eight days. Although finding the oil was miraculous indeed—the Greeks defiled every single jug, and yet they overlooked this one—it did not totally transcend the boundaries of nature. However, for the oil to last

for eight days is a phenomenon that defies nature entirely. This represents the level of *yachid*, where the world is totally *battel* to Hashem.

THREE MIRACLES—TODAY

Although these three miracles took place many years ago—*bayamim haheim*, they can be applied in our *avodah* today—*bizman hazeh*.

The level of *yichuda tata'ah* is a level where one must push himself to set aside times to learn Torah and to fulfill mitzvos *behiddur*. Although there are impediments in his path, he combats them and prevails. The level of *yichuda ila'ah* is a higher level, where he doesn't view them as obstacles to begin with; on the contrary, the reason there is a world is only for Torah and mitzvos. However, there are still certain constraints in his approach. Finally, there is the level of *yachid*, where he breaks free from all limitations completely.

For further study, see the *maamar Ve'atah Berachamecha Harabbim*, 5748

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