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On the Parsha

Rav Gamliel Rabbinowitz Shlita is one of the leading Roshei Yeshiva and Kabbalists in the world. He is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Shaarei Shamayim, the Yeshiva that was headed by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ZT"l. Rav Gamliel, in his Tiv HaTorah (on Sefer VaYikrah p. 411) provides us with a fascinating Kabbalistic interpretation of the following verse in this week's Parsha.

"The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land belongs to Me, for [כי] strangers and temporary residents [וְתוֹשְׁבֵי] you are [אִתָּם] with Me." (VaYikrah 25:23)

Before we discuss Rav Gamliel's fascinating interpretation, a brief introduction is in order: We are unique among all of the nations of the world because of our unique ability to achieve a Dveikus B'Hashem — a cleaving and closeness to HaKadosh Baruch Hu by emulating his Middos. This Deviekus leads to a dramatic leap in our spirituality and allows us to reach exceedingly high levels in prayer, Torah study, and character improvement.

However, not all of us can reach this lofty level of Dveikus, where the above referenced leap in spirituality can occur. Many of us are not even close to this level as we are mired in Gashmius (the material world), overvaluing the possession of material things which impedes our spirituality. We have become estranged from both Hashem and the Torah.

However, Rav Gamliel offers us hope with his explanation of the verse above.

Rav Gamliel explains that the word כי in this verse can mean "for" or it can mean "when." Therefore, in the aforementioned verse, we can read it as follows: כי strangers = when you are "estranged" [from Me or from My Torah], there is still hope for there are two tools, two methods or devices that can bring you back to me – that can once again cause Bnei Yisrael to be what it once was - to be "with Me."

What are those two tools? Let's continue reading the verse. Throughout the Zohar, and other Kabbalistic

works, we find that the rearrangement of letters carries great significance. The two tools, that can bring Bnei Yisrael back to Hashem are the next words in the verse - וְתוֹשְׁבֵי the observance of Shabbos which is hinted at as the word contains the letters "ת", "ש" and "ב" – when rearranged, the letters of Shabbos; and the second device is "אִתָּם" which, when rearranged, spells the word "אמת" truth. The last word in the verse is "with Me". Putting it all together, the verse is saying that, "When you are estranged from Me or my Torah, through Shabbos and Truth, notwithstanding your temporary estrangement, you will ultimately merit to return to Me."

Truth is the signet ring of Hashem (Shabbos 55a) and can bring us back to Him as we learned above. It is quite the opposite with falsehood which distances us from him. Dovid HaMelech writes in Tehillim (101:7) "He who deals deceitfully shall not live in my house; he who speaks untruth shall not stand before my eyes."

We see the words of Rav Gamliel's Kabbalistic interpretation come to life every day in the Baal Teshuvah movement. There are thousands of Baalei Teshuvah (those who were not observant – estranged from Hashem, who have returned to an observant life), whose grandparents, although not necessarily observant, led simple honest lives. This honesty is what ensured that their estrangement would be temporary as their children would ultimately find their way back to Hashem.

Halacha – Jewish Law

Beis Hillel and Beis Shammai disagree about what we may say to a Kallah (bride) to further endear her to her new husband. Beis Hillel says we may lie to further this cause, hence they believe that we may sing the classic wedding song that includes words that speak to her beauty even if she is not attractive. Beis Shammai says that we describe as she is and may not lie. (Kesuvos 17a)

The Rashbatz (Sefer Zohar HaRakia Assin 159:59) writes that we must certainly include the obligation to tell the truth as one of the 613 Mitzvos (i.e. a Torah prohibition),

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for what else could the Torah possibly expect of us? He provides further support for his position by citing Bava Metziah 49a which learns from the words “Hin Tzedek” (Vayikra 19:36) that when we say “Yes” to something, the Torah is telling us that we must keep our word. The Sefer Chareidim quotes the Rashbatz and rules (Mitzvos of the mouth #26) that even if the falsehood does not cause any harm, it is still a Torah prohibition according to the Rashbatz.

The following question can be raised. How would the Sefer Chareidim and the Rashbatz explain Beis Hillel’s ruling that one may say a Kallah is beautiful? It is true that no harm is caused to the Kallah, by falsely praising her, but the lie should be prohibited, nonetheless?

The Sefer Chareidim and Rashbatz would explain that Beis Hillel believes that ordinarily it would not be permitted. However, in this case, for peace (i.e. to enhance the relationship between husband and wife) it would be permitted. However, Bais Hillel would still believe that the lie should be minimized. Therefore, the words to be used when praising her beauty “Na-eh V’Chasudah” could also mean that she is beautiful in her deeds (which hopefully is true).

Typically, we follow the view of Beis Hillel and that is why we sing the following classic wedding song today.

♪ Keitzad MeRakdim, Keitzad MeRakdim, Lifnei HaKallah; Keitzad MeRakdim, Keitzad MeRakdim, Lifnei HaKallah – Kallah Na-eh, Kallah Na-eh V’Chasudah (the Kallah is fair and attractive) ♪

When Moshiach comes (speedily in our days) we will follow the view of Bais Shammai and perhaps sing the following:

♪ Keitzad MeRakdim, Keitzad MeRakdim, Lifnei HaKallah; Keitzad MeRakdim, Keitzad MeRakdim, Lifnei HaKallah – V’im B’emes Mum Yesh Bah, Yishteku velo Yeshabchuha (but if there is a blemish in her, they should be quiet and not praise her). ♪

The above song that we would sing according to Beis Shammai is to be taken tongue in cheek. However, these words would actually fit the traditional tune that we use (try and sing it for yourself!).

Tosafos says that according to Bais Shammai, we would actually not sing any song if there was a blemish in her, or alternatively, we would sing a song, but only sing about good (and truthful) qualities that she possesses.

Chizuk - Inspiration

The following story was told at the Shiva of Rebbitzen Sheila Feinstein A”H, wife of YBLC”T Rav Reuvain Feinstein Shlita. A Rebbe with limited financial resources was in a car accident in Staten Island. He was at fault and immediately took responsibility. However, he requested that the woman whose car he had hit, have her mechanic provide an estimate on the cost of the repairs. The Rebbe would then be able to get the care fixed without working through the car insurance provider, thereby avoiding an increase in insurance rates. The woman readily agreed.

When the estimate came in from her mechanic, it was rather high. He asked if it would be possible to go to his mechanic to see if it would yield a lower estimate. Again, she readily agreed.

The estimate from his mechanic was significantly lower. However, the Rebbe’s financial situation was rather dire at the time and even with the lower estimate, the Rebbe still could not afford to pay for the damages. He asked if the woman could pay for the repairs herself and then he would pay her back with a series of payments over a period of time. Once again, she readily agreed.

When the Rebbe was ready to give her the last payment, he decided to drive it over to her house personally. The Rebbe asked her, “Thank you so much for all of your patience and forbearance during this time. I am at a loss to understand why you have been so remarkably kind to me. How is it that you have been so trusting of me?”

The woman responded, “I am a teacher at a public school where Mrs. Sheila Feinstein is the principal. I know that she is an observant Jewish person. She is such a remarkable and honest person. When I first saw you, I recognized you as an observant Jewish person. I said to myself, since you are from her tribe, I most certainly can trust you.”