

Yet, we know very well that the Jewish people is composed of twelve Tribes, twelve *Shevatim*. And half of them were born to Bilhah and Zilpah the handmaidens. If Bilhah and Zilpah are not considered *Imahos* of the Jewish people, how can half the Jewish people come from them?

The answer is that Bilhah and Zilpah were faithful servants to Rachel and Leah and they did not assert independent identities. They were self-effacing toward their mistresses Rachel and Leah, who were the *Imahos*. Thus they built up *Beis Yisrael*, the Jewish people, on the names of Rachel and Leah, as if Rachel and Leah mothered all the children.

The sons of Leah held that the subservient status of Bilhah and Zilpah applied also to their children as well. Only according to the principle that “the servant of a king is himself a king,” the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah were to be considered *Shevatim*.

Chazal say:

The servant of a king is a king.³

This is why the sons of Leah called them “servants.” Their position of subservience was actually what bestowed upon them the status of *Shevatim*. The sons of Leah didn’t call them “servants” because they were trying to put them down. On the contrary, this is what gave them the status of *Shevatim*.

Yosef disagreed. He held that Bilhah and Zilpah’s status as handmaidens did not carry over to their children. The mothers’ subservient status caused the children to be considered as if they were born to Rachel and Leah. The children were thus *Shevatim* in their own right, according to Yosef’s opinion, since they were considered the sons of *Imahos*.

³ *Shevu’os* 47b.

This *machlokes* between Yosef and the sons of Leah was a basic disagreement between them. It was rooted in Yosef’s dreams and their interpretation. Yosef saw in his dream that the sun and the moon are bowing down to him. The “moon” represented his mother Rachel. But Rachel had already passed away; she couldn’t bow down to him. If so, how could this prophetic dream make any sense? Because Bilhah, the handmaiden of Rachel, was considered like Rachel herself. Bilhah was truly considered the “moon.” Yosef deduced from this that Bilhah’s children were *Shevatim* in their own right.

But Yaakov rebuked Yosef when he heard of this dream. He defended the position of Leah’s sons, saying: הַבּוֹא נְבוֹא אֲנִי וְאִמִּי לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לָךְ – “Will I and your mother... bow down to you?!”

As Rashi explains, Yaakov was pointing out that Rachel was already dead and thus could not possibly bow down to Yosef. However, Yaakov only said this in order to stick up for Leah’s sons, while he held it was true, and expected the dream to be fulfilled, as Rashi goes on to explain. So we see that Yaakov agreed with Yosef regarding the status of Bilhah.

This also explains the earlier story about Reuven rearranging the bedding of his father. After Rachel passed away, Reuven took the bedding of his father Yaakov from the tent of Bilhah to the tent of Leah.⁴ This is because Reuven, a son of Leah, held that the sons of the handmaidens were “servants.” He held that Bilhah is not like Rachel herself. So he stuck up for the honor of his mother Leah, who, in his opinion, came before Bilhah.

However, Yaakov held that Bilhah is like Rachel herself, thus she comes before Leah. ●

⁴ *Bereishis* 22:22, see Rashi *ad loc.*



Do It Happily

וַיִּשְׁמַע רְאוּבֵן וַיִּצְלֵהוּ מִיָּדָם. (בראשית לז, כא)

Reuven heard, and rescued him from their hands. (*Bereishis* 37:21)

R. Yitzchak said: Here the Torah taught you proper behavior. When a person does a *mitzvah*, he should do it with a happy heart. If Reuven had known that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* would write about him, “Reuven heard, and rescued him from their hands,” he would have put Yosef on his shoulders and carried him to his father.

If Boaz had known that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* would write about him that “he handed Ruth roasted grain,” he would have fed her fattened calves. (*Vayikra Rabbah* 34:8)

You do *mitzvos*. Who writes them down?

R. Kohen, and R. Yehoshua son of R. Simon in the name of R. Levi, said: In the past, a person would do a *mitzvah* and the *Navi* would write it down. Now, when a person does a *mitzvah*, who writes it down? *Eliyahu Hanavi* and *Melech Hamashiach* write it, and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* signs on it, as it says: אֲז נִדְבְּרוּ יִרְאֵי ה' אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ וַיִּקְשָׁב ה' וַיִּשְׁמַע וַיִּכְתֹּב סֵפֶר זִכְרוֹן לְפָנָיו לִירְאֵי ה' וּלְחֹשְׁבֵי שְׁמוֹ – “Then the fearers of *Hashem* spoke to one another, and *Hashem* listened, and it was written in the Book of Remembrance before Him, for the fearers of *Hashem* and those who think of His Name.¹

It wasn't just then. Also today, the *mitzvos* we do are remembered and recorded.

Reuven and Boaz didn't realize the greatness and importance of their deeds. It seemed to Reuven like he was just helping his brother Yosef and getting him out of a tough spot.

But in truth, if Yosef had been killed, this would have cancelled the whole future Jewish

people, and the purpose for which the world was created would have come to naught. *Chazal* say that the Jewish people can be built only from all the twelve Tribes together, no less. And besides that, if not for Yosef, the human race would have perished during the seven years of famine that were destined to come.

On the other hand, if Reuven had put himself out more for the *mitzvah* of rescuing Yosef, if he would have carried Yosef on his shoulders back to his father, he would have thereby saved the Jewish people from the whole exile in Egypt.

As we know, Yaakov and his household went down to *Mitzrayim* to sojourn during the years of famine because Yosef was viceroy of Egypt, he was *mishneh lamelech* there.

If Yosef had not been sold to Egypt, but had rather been returned to his father Yaakov, then Yaakov and his household would not have gone to live in *Mitzrayim*, and the whole saga of Egyptian slavery would not have taken place.

As for Boaz and Rus, it was all about the future birth of *David Hamelech* and *Mashiach*, who were destined to descend from Rus. However, Boaz and Rus did not give the matter enough importance at the time. They did not know that their actions would become part of the Torah and determine the future of the Jewish people for ever and ever.

¹ *Vayikra Rabbah* 34:8.

In their minds, they were just doing their deeds as individuals, and didn't think it had significance beyond that.

But the deeds of Reuven and of Boaz had supreme significance, far beyond what they thought at the time. And according to the above-quoted *Midrash*, the same is true of us. The *Chumash* is already a closed book, and no matter what we accomplish, it will not be added to the *Tanach*, either, but this shouldn't make us think that our *mitzvos* have no special significance and lack profound effect on the Jewish people and the future.

Every good deed of every Jew goes into building the future of the Jewish people. It is so significant that *Eliyahu Hanavi* and the *Mashiach* write it down themselves in a special book, because their mission depends on this *mitzvah*. And *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* comes and signs on it. That's how important is every *mitzvah* we do.

Thus *Chazal* said:

Be as careful about a light *mitzvah* as

about a severe *mitzvah*, because you don't know what reward the *mitzvos* bear.²

The "reward of the *mitzvos*" spoken of here is not just the *sachar* that awaits us in *Gan Eden* and *Olam Haba*. It is also telling us that we don't know what great, fateful matter depends on this seemingly little *mitzvah* we are about to do. This applies to the future of the person doing the *mitzvah* and to the fate of the Jewish people as a whole.

Even if the *mitzvah* in front of us doesn't look very special to us, it looks like just another ordinary *mitzvah*, we should know that *Eliyahu Hanavi* and *Mashiach* are aware of its immense worth and value. They are just waiting and longing for this *mitzvah* to be done properly and fully in a spirit of joy – and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will sign on it, to build the future of the Jewish people and bring the *Geulah Sheleimah* very soon. ●

² *Pirkei Avos* 2:1.



Two Kinds of Yetzer Hara

וַיֵּט אֱלֹהִים אֶל הַדֶּרֶךְ. (בראשית לח, טז)

Yehudah turned to the way she was on. (*Bereishis* 38:16)

Said R. Yochanan: Yehudah wanted to pass by, but *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* brought to him an angel responsible for physical desire.... "Yehudah turned to the way she was on" – against his will, not for his own good. (*Bereishis Rabbah* 5:11)

There are two kinds of *Yetzer Hara*. First of all, human nature has a coarse, physical side to it. The material aspect of our nature pulls us toward worldly *taavos* and physicality. This is one part of the *Yetzer Hara*.

The other part is the force of impurity that

Hashem created. It is an angel that pushes people to do *aveiros*. An example of this is the *malach* that pushed Yehudah to turn off his way toward Tamar's way, something that he did "against his will, not for his own good."

This resolves a contradiction between various

teachings of *Chazal* regarding the *Yetzer Hara*.

Did the great *tzaddikim* of the past conquer the *Yetzer Hara*, were they immune to its allures? Or did they struggle with the *Yetzer Hara* and were in danger of falling prey to it?

It's not so clear.

On the one hand, the *Gemara* tells us¹ that one of the *Amoraim*, when he came to a wedding, would put the *kallah* on his shoulders and dance, in order to gladden her. When his disciples asked him if they could do the same, he answered, "If the young ladies are like a board of wood to you, go ahead, and if not, not."² There is a similar account about Rav Gidel, who would instruct the women how to properly immerse themselves in the *mikveh*, and remarked that "they like white geese to me."

Thus we see that these *Amoraim* were unaffected by the *Yetzer Hara*.

On the other hand, *Chazal* tell of great people who had to struggle really hard to overcome the *Yetzer Hara*. For instance, there is the story about R. Amram Chasida.³ Female hostages who had just been redeemed from captivity were brought to his home to spend the night in his attic. R. Amram was sorely tested. He found himself moving a heavy ladder, which had previously been removed, so he could ascend to the attic where the women were. When he finally overcame temptation, and exorcised the *Yetzer Hara* from himself, the *Yetzer Hara* appeared as a pillar of fire as it left him. R. Amram then commented, "See that you are fire, and I am flesh, yet I overpowered you."⁴

Here we see that great *Amoraim* had a struggle

with the *Yetzer Hara*.

The answer is there are two kinds of *Yetzer Hara*. It seems that the natural *Yetzer Hara* that every person has was not much of a challenge for the Sages of the *Gemara*. They conquered it completely. They did not feel the natural pull toward worldly desires, because they sanctified their bodies. To illustrate this point, R. Elazar son of R. Shimon remarked, "Rejoice, my innards!"⁵ Their bodies and souls were purified and were attached to *Hashem* and His Torah. These holy people had nothing to do with the physical *Yetzer Hara*.

But when *Hashem* sends a fiery angel, that is a different story. We know that *Yaakov Avinu* had an epic struggle with an angel from heaven. Such an angel is sent to push a person to sin. When this happens, even the greatest of the great are sorely tested. It is a very tough struggle.

Chazal recount⁶ that R. Meir and R. Akiva made fun of sinners. How could sinners stoop so low as to do such things? Then the *Satan*, who is an angel, appeared to them as a woman, and attempted to get them to sin. The *Satan* was unsuccessful in the end, but remarked, "If not that it was announced in Heaven, 'Be careful about R. Akiva and his Torah,' you would not have been worth more than two cents [in face of my great strength]."⁷

If we would try to exorcise the *Yetzer Hara* from ourselves, like Rav Amram did, our innards would come out along with it, because the *Yetzer Hara* is part of us. But for Rav Amram Chasida, the *Yetzer Hara* was an external force. It was a fiery angel, not a natural desire. And he defeated it nevertheless, testifying to his greatness. ●

1 *Kesubos* 17a.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Kiddushin* 81a.

4 *Ibid.*

5 *Bava Metzia* 83b.

6 *Kiddushin* 81a.

7 *Ibid.*

The *Chanukah* lights are an exceptionally precious *mitzvah*, as the Rambam states in *Hilchos Chanukah* 4:12. Out of all the *mitzvos*, why was this said only about *Chanukah*?

And the *dreidel* that children play with on *Chanukah* bears letters signifying the *Chanukah* miracle, calling it *nes gadol*, a “great miracle.” There were really two miracles on *Chanukah*: defeating the Greeks, and the oil burning eight days. The blessing of *She’asah Nissim* was enacted specifically over the miracle of the oil. However, there are other times of year when great miracles took place for our forefathers, miracles that seem greater than that of the oil. Yet, we don’t recite *She’asah Nissim* over them. Why?

Furthermore, the miracle of the oil of the *Menorah* lasting eight days happened only once in history, whereas the *Menorah* experienced a regular, daily miracle. The westernmost lamp of the *Menorah*, the one adjacent to the *Kodesh Kodoshim*, would be kindled first, and it always extinguished last, even though all the lamps were given the same amount of oil. This miracle took place for more than a thousand years. It, too, is a miracle of the *Menorah*’s oil lasting longer than naturally possible. Yet we make no special remembrance of this miracle, although we make a big remembrance over the *Chanukah* miracle of the oil. Why is only the latter a “big miracle”?

Let us put *Chanukah* in perspective. Objects of furniture, such as tables and chairs, typically stand on four legs. An object standing on four legs has a stable base. Yet, the Jewish people ostensibly has only three legs, which are the three *regalim*, the three festivals of *Pesach*, *Shavu’os* and *Sukkos*. Where is the fourth leg? The Arizal says it is *Chanukah*. The *Gemara* states that the *Chanukah* lights need to burn until people go home in the evening, literally, “until the **leg** is no longer in the marketplace.” The Arizal says that the word *regel*, “leg,” alludes to the fact that *Chanukah* is the fourth leg of the Jewish people, without which

there is no stability.

The significance of the other three *regalim* is quite clear. *Pesach* is when we left Egypt and became *Hashem*’s people, which granted us eternal freedom. *Shavu’os* is when we received the *Torah*, and *Sukkos* is the time of *deveikus* between *Hashem* and His people.

What is the special message of the *Chanukah* miracle?

It teaches us how to deal with darkness. How to conduct ourselves in the darkness of *galus*. The greatest thing you can do for someone is not to suggest that he ignore his troubles or forget about them, but rather to give him the tools to deal with them.

All the other holidays are *Mikraei Kodesh*. They are times of *kedushah*. But *Chanukah* is really just mundane weekdays on which we are permitted to perform all manners of work. *Chanukah* is something unique in that respect. It is a *mo’ed* held on ordinary weekdays. How is this possible? What granted it the quality of a *mo’ed*? It was the *mesirus nefesh* of the *Chashmona’im*. *Mesirus nefesh* means going above human nature. It means giving one’s soul for *kiddush Hashem*. This transcends the normal human outlook. The wondrous *mesirus nefesh* of the *Chashmona’im* did away with the Greek kingdom. The *Chanukah* miracle taught us that we can live a life of *kedushah* even within the course of natural life, on mundane weekdays.

Why is this called a “great miracle”?

First we need to understand the following point. We know that the Jewish people is different from all the nations of the earth. What makes it different? Is it that we proclaim G-d’s existence, that He created the world? No, this is not a uniquely Jewish idea. The nations of the world know about the Creator. It even says on the American dollar bill in Whom they trust. It is just a matter of common sense to believe

in G-d; only fools don't.

Judaism is all about personal connection to *Hashem*. It is one thing to believe that G-d exists somewhere up there in the heavens or on some abstract metaphysical plane. It is something else altogether to develop a deep, personal connection with Him through *tefilah* and *berachos* and *Torah* learning. This is the uniqueness of being a Jew.

Hashem loves us greatly. Our intimate relationship with Him is described in many places as that of husband and wife. The two *keruvim* that were on the *Aron* of the *Beis Hamikdash* symbolized this intense love, which was expressed at *Har Sinai*, where *Hashem* spoke to us "face to face," a revelation that is described in *Shir Hashirim* as "May He kiss me with the kisses of His mouth." Kissing on the mouth, as opposed to kissing on the hand, is by nature a mutual expression of love. If you kiss someone's hand, he may or may not return the kiss, but a kiss on the mouth is by nature reciprocal.

Let's imagine that a very wealthy bridegroom offers to his beloved bride, who comes from a poor but respectable background, that after their marriage, she will come to live with him in a magnificent mansion replete with an army of servants who will serve her like a queen. She responds that she prefers for him to join him in her humble home.

Which will express greater love: if the husband insists that she come to his mansion, or if he agrees to go and live with her in her humble home? Clearly, the latter is a greater expression of love.

This explains the difference between *Chanukah* and the other holidays. On the three *regalim*, *Hashem* raises us up to Him, He invites us to approach His holy abode. On *Shabbos*, too, we are invited to partake of a banquet with *Hashem*, so to speak. It is *Hashem's se'udah*: דא היא סעודתא דעתיקא קדישא. This is a miracle, but it is not a "great miracle."

Chanukah is a "great miracle." The Jewish people

were enveloped in deep darkness. Not only did the Greeks rule over them, but many Jews were *misyavanim*, they followed the Greek ways. Thus they lived in great "poverty." Nevertheless, the core of the Jewish people remained faithful to *Hashem*, so He made for them a "great miracle" in the midst of all the darkness. He was with us in our time of distress. This miracle was not just the fact that the *Menorah* burned for eight days; it was the "kiss" that *Hashem* gave us, it was His special closeness to us in all our darkness and poverty.

In our great darkness, *Hashem* showed us special affection and treated us as His precious beloved ones. The other holidays celebrate the greatness of *Hashem* as demonstrated by the miracles of *Yetzi'as Mitzrayim* and so forth. *Chanukah* celebrates *Hashem's* special affection for the Jewish people. He came to us in our darkness and poverty. This was expressed by the miracle of the *Menorah* burning eight days.

On *Chanukah* we received a "kiss" from *Hashem* like we never received on the three *regalim*. Instead of *Hashem* bringing us up to Him, on *Chanukah* He came down to us. All He asked is for us to return the kiss, and that is what the Chashmona'im did: "Afterward, Your children entered the hall of Your house and cleared out Your palace and purified Your Temple and kindled lights in Your sacred courtyards."

Our generation is shrouded in a darkness like never was before. On the other hand, *Hashem* shows us tremendous affection. So many *yeshivos* and *Torah* schools and other blessed institutions have been established. All *Hashem* asks is that we should return the kiss, and give Him a place in our lives and our homes.

Hashem shows His love to us at all times. We, in return, should purify our homes from all the impurities of the street. In this merit, may we see miracles and wonders that will lead us to the *Ge'ulah Sheleimah*. ●