

Naso and Chag HaShavuot 5777

BS"D Parashat Naso and Chag HaShvu'ot 5777

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Kingship vs. Fatherhood

HaShem, in His infinite wisdom, brought about myriads of entities in all the worlds He created.

In the spiritual worlds which are far beyond our experience or comprehension with their innumerable universes and spiritual levels, angels are ranked according to their innate ability to comprehend the infinite Creator. There are the elementary Serafim, and the higher level Ofanim, and the Cha'yot Hakodesh, and many more.

In the daily Shacharit (morning) service we quote the initial stage of angels – serafim, who praise HaShem with the words:

"קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' מלא כל העולם כבודו

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.

These Serafim comprehend HaShem's glory as it manifests itself in our earthly world including the entire space that we call the "universe" which is estimated to measure 20 billion light years from end to end.

Following the Serafim, there appear the more elevated angels of Ophanim and Chayot Hakodesh who comprehend a greater glory of HaShem, and they declare:

קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' מלא כל העולם כבודו

Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place.

“From His place”, meaning the Seraphim see HaShem as limited by a place (the universe); however, HaShem’s glory, as discerned by the Ofanim and Chayot Hakodesh go beyond his place of the “earth”. They continue to the limitless realm of the “Holy Throne” – the Kisai Hakavod.

As stated, HaShem created a hierarchy of inherent spiritual beings (angels) whose sanctity is dictated to them with no possibility of self-change. The situation is fundamentally different with regard to the Jewish nation. HaShem is goal orientated, so He presents to every Jew the freedom to choose his goal level of sanctity which will determine the depths of understanding the Almighty after the individual leaves this world.

There are basically two levels which observant Jews can strive for, but whose details number in the many millions. (In this divrei Torah I don’t include the non-observant for whom I have only great pity for what they are relinquishing in return for the fleeting moments of imagined pleasure).

The two levels can be categorized as אבנא אבנא – our Father our King, when one is “King” and the other “Father.”

HaShem is King when one fulfills the Torah laws because they were commanded by HaShem to the Jewish nation. He is King when one fulfills the mitzvot because of fear of punishment and even loss of one’s place in the world to come. The Torah is replete with warnings of what will ensue if we don’t abide by HaShem’s commandments – the commands of the King.

When one abides by the Torah only because of fear of the heavenly King he cannot be considered irreligious or non-observant, but he is limited to the status of a loyal servant.

However there are those who view HaShem as their heavenly eternal Father, and express those feelings in concrete terms, by acting toward the Almighty as a son or daughter would to a parent.

Two examples:

1- Rashi, the master teacher of the TaNach and Talmud, is famous for his clarity and preciseness of presentation, where every word is measured and meaningful.

There is one place in Rashi's commentary on the Talmud which appears to simply be a mistake. The Gemara (Ketubot 112b) in its discussion of the great mitzva of living in Eretz Yisrael relates:

רבי חייא בר גמדי (ה"ה גמדי): אבנים ,אבנים אבנים אבנים אבנים 'ו
אבנים אבנים אבנים אבנים אבנים

Rabi Chiya bar Gamda would lie on the ground of Eretz Yisrael, as stated (Tehilim 102:15): For her stones (of Eretz Yisrael) are dear to your servants; her very dust arouses in them feelings of love

Rashi's comment on this excerpt is a simple repeat of the verse as it appears in the Gemara:

אבנים אבנים אבנים אבנים אבנים אבנים אבנים אבנים

For her stones (of Eretz Yisrael) are dear to your servants; her very dust arouses in them feelings of love

So, what is Rashi telling us that the Gemara does not already say?

Rashi is indeed teaching us a great lesson. Look closely and you will discern that Rashi in his quote of the verse omitted one essential word from the Gemara's text, the word "אבנים" – meaning "as stated".

Rashi is teaching us that if your feelings for the holy land of Eretz Yisrael are dictated by the fact that the mitzvah of living in the Promised Land is stated in a verse, then you have no real feelings of love to the land and you have not completed the mitzva.

In a similar vein, if you honor your parents because it is stated in the Torah "Honor your Father and mother", then you are a halachic robot who has not absorbed the spirit of what HaShem wants from us.

Just as our relationship to a parent is not dependent on a particular verse in the Torah but should be a part of our natural makeup as civilized human beings, so too the laws of the Torah have to become part of our very selves. We should keep Shabbat because Shabbat is in our blood. We should give tzedakah because we agonize at the suffering of another Jew. The purpose of the written mitzvot is not that they should remain articles in the "law book" but that we study them until they become an intrinsic part of our basic personality.

One who fulfills the will of HaShem that became his own will has elevated HaShem to the status of Avinu – our Father, and the individual to the status of son or daughter.

2- What makes the episode of Akaidat Yitzchak (the binding of Yitzchak in preparation for being sacrificed) so essential in Judaism?

The call to sacrifice Yitzchak was made by HaShem to Avraham – not to Yitzchak. So, in fact, Yitzchak had the prerogative to refuse. And had he done so, Avraham would have been exempted from his obligation, and Yitzchak could not have been held liable, because he was not commanded.

Yet Yitzchak agreed to be sacrificed for one reason. Despite the fact that HaShem did not command Yitzchak to give up his life, Yitzchak knew that it was HaShem's will that he be sacrificed on the altar on what was to become the Temple

Mount, in Yerushalayim.

When one keeps the Torah not because of the dictate of the King but in the knowledge that it is the wish of the King, then the King becomes a Father and the Jewish nation attains the privileged status of princes and princesses.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Shevout Samayach,

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