Transforming Darkness into Light

The heiliga Bas Ayin (second piece on Parshas Devarim) teaches (based on Vayikra Rabbah 36:4) that the primary purpose of creation was for the sake of the Jewish people, whose job it would be to bring out the light amidst the darkness; to turn darkness into light — ויהפכו חשוכא לנורא. That is, through their studying Torah and performance of Mitzvos, the Jewish people would reveal/release/relinquish the sparks of holiness that are hidden/concealed/contained inside the kelipos (the shells that hide the interior light).

The Bas Ayin reveals that the very name ישראל has a gematria of 541, which is exactly the same as the value of the words אור and חושך (light | darkness), together. This alludes to the Divine mission of the Jewish people: to unearth and uncover the holy light that exists even in dark/impure/evil places.

No matter how dark/bleak a situation may appear, a Jew recognizes that there is always light; there is holiness and positivity. When experiencing times of judgement (דין/גבורה), the job of a Jew is to look at the goodness hidden in the darkness, as it says (see Berachos 54a): "A person is obligated to bless Hashem on the bad just like he blesses Hashem on the good." Because in truth and actuality, גם זו לטובה — even this seemingly bad thing is really good!

Gam Zu L'Tovah: Even the "Zu" Is for the Good

The Bas Ayin explains this concept based on a teaching from Rabbi Chaim of Krasni zt"l. The Tetragrammaton (the Name of Hashem that we use, Y-H-V-K) represents the attribute of compassion; it is the attribute of חסד. The Name Kuzu (כוזו), however, is the "backside" of the Tetragrammaton (the letters that come after yud, hei, vav, and hei are chaf, vav, zayin, and vav), which represents the attribute of harsh judgement; it is the attribute of גבורה. The first two letters of כוזו are כ (chaf) and ו (vav), which have the same value as Y-H-V-K (26). It turns out that the full name Kuzu, which is the attribute of Gevurah, exceeds the Name Y-H-V-K, which is the attribute of Chessed, by the letters זו (zu). This means that the letters ZU (זו) indicate harsher judgment than the other letters represent, since it is the hidden part of the "backside" Name of Hashem. This is the deeper meaning of גם זו לטובה: "Even this — even זו (zu), which is the attribute of Gevurah — is for the good!"

When Nachum Ish Gam Zu would go around saying "Gam ZU L'Tovah," he was expressing this idea: that even the ZU (זו, two letters that represent Gevurah) aspects of life have goodness and compassion within them.

This is what it means when we say in the first paragraph of Shema: "Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad" — there are aspects of Y-H-V-K (compassion/chessed) and aspects of ELOKIM (judgement/gevurah), but ultimately, Hashem Echad — it's really all compassion!

Ever HaYarden: Remove the Harshness

The Torah tells us that the rebuke from Moshe Rabbeinu to the Jewish people took place בעבר הירדן (see Devarim 1:1) — "On the other side of the Jordan River." The Bas Ayin asks a fundamental question: The "other side of the Jordan" is not a clear identifying description of where Moshe was actually standing, because the "other side" is relative to wherever you are standing. So what is

being expressed with the phrase "the other side of the Jordan"?

The Bas Ayin explains that the phrase בעבר הירדן (the other side of the Jordan) is — indeed — not indicating Moshe's location at that time, but rather it refers to the message that Moshe was conveying to the people. The word בעבר means להעביר, to remove. And the word ירדן comes from the word רידוי, striking/hitting, which represents the attribute of גבורה/דין (harsh judgment). Moshe was teaching the Jewish people a powerful message: Your job is בעבר הירדן — to remove the aspect of harshness and discover the goodness/light that is concealed beneath the surface!

Switching the Letters

In Eicha (2:1), we read the following pasuk that discusses the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash: השליך משמים ארץ תפארת ישראל — "Hashem threw the glory of Israel down from Heaven to earth." The Bas Ayin, however, sees this pasuk in a positive light. The word ארץ comes from the word רצון, as Chazal say: "Why is the earth called ארץ? Because the earth desired — רצה — to do the will of its Creator." When the pasuk says השליך משמים ארץ, it means: Hashem threw down from Heaven רצונו, His desire. What is that desire? His desire is for the Jewish people to discover Hashem's love and the good in every situation. His desire is for the Jewish people to transform darkness into light.

And how do we do this? Says the Bas Ayin, through היפוך צירוף אתוון — by changing around the order of the letters, from seemingly negative words into positive words.

There are times of צרה (distress), but a Jew can find the רצה — that which is good/desirable — beneath the surface. There are times of מרה (bitterness), but a Jew can find the רמה — that which is elevated/holy — hidden inside. There are times of נגע (negativity), but a Jew can find the ענג — that which is pleasurable — deep down.

A Jew is given the unique ability to switch the letters around and transform difficulty into positivity.

The Fasts Add Up to 26

The Bas Ayin reveals an astounding gematria based on the pasuk in Zecharia which delineates the various fast days. The pasuk says (8:19): צום הרביעי וצום החמישי וצום השביעי וצום העשירי — "The fast of the 4th (Shiva Asar B'Tamuz), the fast of the 5th (Tisha Be'av), the fast of the 7th (Tzom Gedalia), and the fast of the 10th (Asara B'Teves)." If you add the values of each month — 4, 5, 7, and 10 — you get a total of 26, which corresponds to the Name of Hashem — Y-H-V-K — that represents kindness and compassion. The fast days represent times of hardship and difficulty that befell the Jewish people. However, hidden beneath the surface — as always — is goodness/hope/positivity.

Churban Spells Nivchar: Chosen

On Tisha Be'av, we reflect on the חרבן, the destruction of the Temple. On the surface, it represents harshness/judgment/negativity. However, if we apply the same sacred challenge — to switch around the letters — we will discover that חרבן also spells נבחר, chosen. Beneath the dark surface, we understand that we are the עם הנבחר, the chosen people, and despite the loss of the Beis HaMikdash structure, we are still around!

In addition, as we read the קינות (kinot) and connect to the sadness of the day, there is positivity that exists beneath the surface. When rearranged, the letters of קינות can also spell תיקון, which conveys fixing and rebuilding. It also spells תינוק, which is a child — thus teaching us that beneath the bleakness and darkness of exile, we recall our relationship with Hashem. He is our Father (hence, Tisha Be'av is in chodesh Av, אב), and we are His children.

On this Shabbos before Tisha Be'av — Shabbos Chazon, the Shabbos of Vision — we connect to this unique ability of the Jewish people to see the positivity and holiness that exists beneath the dark surface; to transform darkness into light!

Good Shabbos!

— Ori Strum

Questions, comments, feedback, or sponsorships — feel free to reach out: rabbistrumo@gmail.com
A PROJECT OF
Torah Sparks
Inspiration. Everywhere.