



PhiloTorah D'var Torah

Take-Away from a Sofer

This PTDT will be part educational and part Mussar; it won't be easy to swallow. Put differently, it will be part brain-to-brain and part heart-to-heart.

Shortly after the opening p'sukim of R'ei, the Torah tells us that when we enter Canaan and conquer it, we must get rid of the Avoda Zara that is there.

Then the Torah says: LO TAASUN KEIN LASHEM ELOKEICHEM - You shall not do so to HaShem, your God.

The plain understanding of this pasuk is that we must destroy the trappings of idolatry, but we may not similarly destroy that which belongs to HaShem. We are taught from the Oral Law that this pasuk forbids erasing HaShem's Names - referring to the Seven Names that may not be erased.

This prohibition is one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah, one of the 365 prohibitions.

Not only are these names not to be erased - they require special intention when a Sofer writes them. Before writing one of HaShem's

names, a Sofer is supposed to say - L'SHEIM K'DUSHAT HASHEIM, for the sake of the sanctity of the Name. The ideal situation is the Sofer's saying this every time he writes one of HaShem's name.

If a Sofer writes HaShem's name without saying L'SHEIM K'DUSHAT HASHEIM, even once, there is a question as to whether the Sefer Torah (if that is what he is writing) is kosher or not. And this is a defect that cannot be detected by examining the writing.

(Halachic sources discuss the validity of the Name is the Sofer made a declaration that all Names that he will write during this session are hereby sanctified. All seem to agree that L'CHATCHILA, initially, ideally, the Sofer must say L'SHEIM each time he writes the name.)

The previous paragraph is in parentheses because I want to focus on the paragraph before it.

And here is my train of thought...

We are not all Sofrim, but we all (should be) davening and making brachot. And in doing that, we say HaShem's names many, many times.

Just the brachot we recite in the morning - Netilat Yadayim, Asher Yatzar, Elokai, Birchot HaTorah, Birchot HaShachar - we say G-d's name 40 times, not counting MELECH CHAI V'KAYAM, a nickname to avoid

saying one of His Names before washing.

Let's take a quick look at the week-day Amida. First word of the introductory pasuk - ADO-NOI. Then nineteen brachot with at least one HaShem. But there are so many more. First brachot has eight more Sheimot. And another 27 in the rest of the Amida. That's 47. I can keep on counting for you, but that's not necessary for what I am about to say.

Before I do, let me make something very clear. I am about to borrow something from the Sofer that is not the same when said, in contrast to writing. But the idea is there.

Imagine if we were required to pause briefly before saying G-d's name in davening and brachot, every time we are about to say His Name, to think for a fraction of a second that I am about to mention G-d's name - a name I avoid saying because of its holiness when I am not davening, making brachot, or reading the Torah. And imagine if not focusing on the Names would invalidate the davening or bracha that I'm saying. And even if that is not exactly so, imagine that not saying His Names with special kavana is considered disrespecting Him.

When I spoke about this idea in one of my Zoom Shiurim, I said right up front that I was talking primarily to myself and hopefully others would hear me

talking to myself and take some of what I'm saying to heart. Same goes for these written words. I am writing them to reinforce my resolve to daven slower, use a siddur even for parts I know by heart. To pay attention to His Name and its meaning of ADNUT, His being the Master of the Universe. Different meanings for some of His other names and nicknames (KINUYIM). If you are reading what is essentially a personal diary or journal entry and if you take something positive away from it - wonderful.

(Off the record, it has been five days since I started paying more attention to what I say in prayer and brachot. It isn't easy. But it is worth the effort. Thanks for reading over my shoulder.)

PTDT

P.S. I wrote this PTDT and then before I uploaded it to the website I davened Mincha and Maariv. And that got me thinking that what I'm suggesting above is not easy at all. So here's a suggestion. Focus on the three most neglected, said on automatic pilot, rushed through words we say to G-d - BARUCH ATA HASHEM. (We'll work on ELOKEINU MELECH HA-OLAM at another time.)

In both davening and brachot, these three words are said a lot. Each time, think that G-d is the source of all blessing. That's BARUCH. Think that we have a personal relationship with

Him that allows us to address Him in second person familiar. That's ATA. And think that His Name is sacred and that it means that we recognize Him as the Master of the Universe. I think this is a good first step. All it takes is a few extra seconds and it is the respectful way to speak to Him. B'hatzlacha.