

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

T'CHEILET

MA NISHTANA T'CHEILET MIKOL MINEI TZIV'ONIN? (Why is T'cheilet different from all other colors?)

"Because the color T'cheilet is like the color of the sea and the sea is like the color of the firmament and the firmament to the Throne of Glory: (Menachot 43:2) (Rashi: the power of t'cheilet reminds us of the One who sits on the Throne of Glory.)

I have been wondering on and off for years about the above Chazal that explains the reason for the p'til techeilet (blue thread) on the tzitzit. I couldn't understand why it was necessary to have the blue remind me of the ocean which reflected the sky which is where we envision the "domicile" or the Throne of Glory of HaShem. Why all the steps? I would venture to say that the average person thinks of the sky as blue way before thinking of the ocean as blue (especially since city-folk usually only see the ocean as green). Blue equals sky, to which we look when in prayer.

Then I started thinking that maybe this was not meant to be taken literally, but rather symbolically: maybe YAM (sea) represents something as does RAKI'A (sky) and maybe one leads to the other in some way. So, what does YAM represent? It could be Torah, "...and the

earth will be filled with knowledge of HaShem as water fills the sea" - but then that really refers to water, not the sea. So, I looked at the verse attributed to the YAM in Perek Shira: YAMIM OMRIM: MIKOLOT MAYIM RABIM, ADIRIM MISHB'REI YAM, ADIR BAMAROM HASHEM (T'hilim 93) - More than the voices of mighty waters, than the mighty waves of the sea, Gd on high is mighty. R. Nosson Slifkin, in his book on Perek Shira, Nature's Song, says that the ocean is the most powerful force in nature; the waves being their most devastating feature. Witnessing the might of the ocean strikes fear of Gd into people: "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do their work in great waters; they saw the works of Gd and His wonders in the deep. For He commanded and He raised the stormy wind, and it lifted up the waves." (T'hilim 107:23-25). I can then conclude that it is possible that YAM would represent fear, YIR'AT HASHEM.

What about RAKI'A? Again, if we look at the verse attributed to the RAKI'A in Perek Shira, we learn more: "The heavens (SHAMAYIM) speak of Gd's glory and the skies (RAKI'A) tell of His handiwork" (T'hilim 19). R. Slifkin defines SHAMAYIM here as the heavens, outer space; and RAKI'A as earth's atmosphere. The atmosphere is responsible for weather phenomena. Weather is one way that Gd demonstrates His active involvement in Man's affairs (as is clearly depicted in the second para-

graph of the daily Sh'ma, (V'HAYA IM SHAMO'A...). The RAKI'A tells us that Gd is closely involved in a relationship with us. And although this relationship carries within it the possibility of ONESH - punishment - as well, it is a relationship nonetheless, and that allows me to feel closer to Gd. Perhaps this could represent AHAVAT HASHEM - the love of Gd.

So now, I'm beginning to understand the need for the blue to represent YAM as well as RAKI'A, which ultimately would lead to KISEI HAKAVOD. What confirmed this conclusion for me was a Kli Yakar I found on the parsha of tzitzit. He asks, how can looking at a 'blue thread' remind us to do mitzvot? (UR-ITEM OTO - can't refer to the tzitzit because that is feminine and it should say UR-ITEM OTAH, so it must refer to the blue thread. This would create a problem in our understanding of Rashi's take on the gematria of 'tzitzit').

In answering, he cites the Sifrei in Ha'azinu: "Look at the heavens that I created to serve you; have they changed their measurements or has the orb of the sun risen from the West? Not only that but it is happy to fulfill my desire, as it says '...and it is like a bridegroom leaving his marriage canopy, rejoicing as a 'gibor' to run on his route'(T'hilim 19). Will you not fear Me... who has placed the sand as a border to the sea as an eternal law (Yirmiyahu 5:22); has it changed its qualities? Not only that, but it regrets wanting to and cannot as it

says 'and they storm (the waves) but they cannot overcome'. From here is proof that the sea doesn't change its ways - its qualities - out of fear, for it regrets that it is not permitted to do what it wants; and the heavens do not change their qualities out of love."

"...One who performs out of love and serves HaShem with joy, is greater than one who merely fears Gd... therefore it is as if the sea is always before his eyes and afterwards... like one who looks at the sky; for the sea (YAM) resembles the heavens and from it he will learn to fear and to do. Just as the RAKI'A, not only doesn't change but rejoices to serve, so too, he should also serve HaShem with joy and from love. And if you say, what is the advantage of one who serves HaShem out of love over one who serves out of fear, this is why we are taught 'the RAKI'A resembles the Throne of Glory', for through this, he will remember that through love (raki'a) he will come to cling to the Sh'china".

The Kli Yakar, then concludes that the first stage is YIR-A, fear. It would seem to be a more natural instinct towards the Almighty. Then, this recognition of Gd's might lead one to realize that this same power provides us with our needs, relates to us through natural phenomena in a personal way; a realization that would encourage AHAVAT HASHEM, the love of Gd. And serving Gd from love would, ultimately, lead to His throne, representing our clinging to Him.

This explanation of the Sifrei appears to support an impression I had of a chapter in T'hilim that had always struck me as giving a message beyond the simple meaning, beyond what appeared on the surface. In describing the praise of Gd from the heavens and their contents, T'hilim 148 attributes their praise - Y'HAL'LU ET SHEM HASHEM - to the fact that - KI HU TZIVA V'NIVRA'U VAYA'AMIDEM LA'AD L'OLAM. CHOK NATAN V'LO YA'AVOR. They praise Gd because He set them in an unchangeable, eternal way and this pleases them. When the chapter continues and describes the praise of the lower spheres, however, - HAL'LU HASHEM MIN HA'ARETZ - it is a different praise: Y'HAL'LU ET SHEIM HASHEM KI NISGAV SH'MO L'VADO, HODO AL ERETZ V'SHAMAYIM. It seems that the source of their praise is recognition of the overwhelming power of Gd. It would seem to stem from a sense of awe as opposed to an appreciation. YIR-A from the lower spheres and AHAVA from the celestial. This would correspond with the Sifrei.

Now I have a way of understanding that original Chazal much more than before. I learned something.