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Gevurah – The Weaker Arm

The seventh *perek* of *Masechet Bechorot* discusses various blemishes that invalidate a man from serving in the *Beit Ha'Mikdash*. The sixth *Mishnah* outlines an argument between *Rebbi* and the *Chachamim* over whether a *Kohen* who is ambidextrous would be considered *pasul* from doing the *avodat Ha'Mikdash*. *Rebbi* says that such a person would be invalid while the *Chachamim* disagree. However, the main point that can be derived from this argument is that certainly all agree that someone who is left handed would be seen as blemished and invalid from serving.

The *Mishnah* seems to imply that the use of the left hand is a somewhat negative trait – however this raises an apparent contradiction. In *Shmot* (13:16) we say that the parsha of *Shema* should be “a sign on your arm (*Yadecha*)”. *Chazal* derive from the Hebrew word used in the *pasuk*, *Yadecha*, should be split into two words *Yad Kaheh* (literally – the weaker hand/arm) signifying that this sign (i.e. the *tefillin*) should be placed on the left hand. Why would G-d choose to have a *Mitzvah* which symbolises our eternal bond with Him demonstrated with the weaker hand?

One answer given by the *Chachamim* is very practical. The left arm is the part of the body that is closest to the heart. Therefore to symbolise the bond between our heart and *Hashem* we place the *tefillin* on the left arm, whereby it can be in the closest possible position and signify this connection.

However another explanation is offered by the *Yemin Moshe*. It states in a *pasuk* in *Tehillim* (89:14) “You [G-d] have a mighty arm (*Zeroah Im Gevurah*): strong is your hand, and high is your right hand”. The *Mefarshim* explain (see *Chulin* 134b) that *Zeroah* signifies the right side which is the *Middah* of *Chessed* while *Gevurah* is signified by the left side which is the *Middat HaDin*. *David Hamelech* is teaching us from the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* that from G-d's perspective it is all considered a ‘mighty arm’ – one entity, within *Gevura* there is *Chessed* and vice versa. In front of G-d, the elements of *Gevura* and *Din* are not mutually exclusive.

The *Ramban* comments on a *pasuk* in *Shmot* (13:16):
...through the great and famous open miracles man comes to the understanding that the hidden miracles are the foundation of the *Torah*, for one cannot contend with the *Torah* of *Moshe* until he believes that all the happenings were all miracles and there is no such thing as ‘nature’.

The *Ramban* writes that when a man witnesses and experiences a great miracle he will come to a certain level of understanding. His eyes will be opened to the workings of G-d in the world and will realise that even the mundane, natural events that occur daily are really all miracles from G-d. However, since these events occur so often and we have become desensitised to them – we label them as ‘natural’ events.

This is the meaning of the end of the *pasuk* from *Tehillim* – “strong is your hand, and high is your right hand”. The strength (*Gevurah*) of *Hashem's* left hand is shown to us through the open miracles – and through this we come the realisation of the loftiness of the right hand. This is symbolised to us in the everyday *chessed* that *Hashem* does for us which we may take for granted and see as ‘natural’ events. By witnessing the open miracles we gain an extra appreciation for these everyday events and for *Hashem* who is orchestrating them.

This explanation can now provide another answer as to why *Tefillin* is worn on the left hand. The *Yemin Moshe* explains that in parallel to *chessed* and *Gevurah*, *Hashem* is either able to use his “*Yad HaGedolah*” (great hand) or “*Yad HaChazakah*” (strong hand). The *Yad HaGedolah* is used when *Hashem* does acts of *chessed* and *Gevurah* is done using the *Yad HaChazakah*. When *Hashem* took *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt He demonstrated his strength and *Gevurah* (*b'chozek Yad*). He cast ten plagues on the Egyptians, and drowned them in the sea. Therefore when we wear the *Tefillin*, we symbolise the fact that *Hashem* used his *Gevurah* on the Egyptians by placing the *Tefillin* of the arm on our left side. We remember the miraculous as we recite *Shema* in the beginning of the day so we can appreciate *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* involvement throughout the remainder.

Yehuda Gottlieb

Revision Questions

בכורות ז' ד' – ח' י'

- How big or small are one's eyes if they are considered a *mum*? (ז' ד')
- What is a *tzimeah*? (ז' ד')
- What is a *tzimem*? (ז' י')
- What are some problems with one's lips that would be defined as a *mum*? (ז' ה')
- What are the three definitions given for *mro'ach ashech*? (ז' ה')
- What is an *ikel*? (ז' י')
- What is a *pika*? (ז' י')
- When is an additional finger considered a *mum*? (ז' י')
- Which case of additional fingers is subject to debate? (ז' י')
- Explain the debate regarding one who is ambidextrous? (ז' י')
- What nine *mumim* listed are not considered *mumim* for animals? (ז' י')
- What five blemishes are considered *mumim* for animals but not for humans? (ז' י')
- Till when is a *kohen* that married a divorcee invalid for service in the *Beit Ha'Mikdash*? (ז' י')
- Provide the cases for the following situations, a person is considered:
 - A *bechor* for inheritance, but not for the *kohen* (i.e. does not require *pidyon bechor*)?
 - A *bechor* for the *kohen* but not for inheritance? (ח' י')
- Explain the debate regarding the case where the first son was born via caesarean section and the second son was born naturally? (ז' ב')
- What is the law regarding a case where a person gave birth to twin boys and but we are not sure which was born first? (ז' ג')
- Regarding the previous question what is the law if one of the children passed away prior to *pidyon bechor*? What is the law if the father passed away? (Provide both opinions.) (ז' ג')
- What other two cases are similar to the ones in the previous question? (ז' ד')
- In what similar cases would the *kohen* receive nothing? (ז' ח')
- What two cases involving the children of two fathers is similar to the cases already provided and in which specific detail is the law different? (ז' ה-ו')
- If a *bechor* is old enough such that he is obligated to redeem himself, which takes preference: redeeming himself or redeeming his son? (ז' ח')
- Who much money is used for *pidyon bechor*? (ז' ח')
- Which other payments use this currency? (ז' ח')
- Which is the only "redemption" that cannot be performed with something a value and must use money? (ז' ח')
- What other items cannot be used for *pidyon bechor*? (ז' ח')
- From what items does the *bechor* not receive double? (ז' ט')
- What transactions are not returned in the *yovel* year? (ז' י')
- Explain the debate regarding whether a gift is considered a sale regarding *yovel*? (ז' י')

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Sunday -Thursday
Between mincha & ma'ariv
Mizrachi Shul

Friday & Shabbat
10 minutes before mincha
Mizrachi Shul

Audio Shiurim on-line!

- 613.org/mishnah.html
- www.shemayisrael.com/mishna/

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
12 th October י"ג תשרי	13 th October י"ד תשרי	14 th October ט"ו תשרי	15 th October ט"ז תשרי	16 th October י"ז תשרי	17 th October י"ח תשרי	18 th October י"ט תשרי
Bechorot 9:1-2	Bechorot 9:3-4	Bechorot 9:5-6	Bechorot 9:7-8	Erchin 1:1-2	Erchin 1:3-4	Erchin 2:1-2

