

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn



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THE FEET'S ADVANTAGE

The *bracha* Asher received from Yaakov in this week's Parshah is that his "bread be plump" with oil. Rashi notes that the *bracha* Moshe gave the tribe of Asher in Parshas Vezos Habracha had a similar content, that he will "dip his foot in oil" due to its abundance in his territory.

Aside from the literal meaning of these blessings, that Asher was blessed with actual oil, Chassidus explains that oil represents tremendous wisdom. We see this association in the Gemara, where it is explained that the wise woman who visited Dovid Hamelech received her astuteness due to the abundance of oil in her hometown of Teko'a.

However, despite the loftiness of oil, we are told that Asher dipped his *feet* in oil. The feet are the lowest and lowliest part of the body, far beneath the mind and heart, and are only capable of action, not of understanding or feeling. Yet, Asher's feet are to be serviced with oil!

We must say that Asher's "feet" were of such a lofty stature that they were worthy of such treatment. How is this to be explained?

Furthermore, Moshiach's legs are described as "standing atop the Mount of Olives," the mountain being the source of the olives which are in turn the source of oil. This shows that Moshiach's legs are higher than (even the *source* of) the wisdom represented by oil. This, too, begs for explanation: How can the otherwise deficient feet be considered superior to oil?

AT THE BACK

When describing the manner in which the Jews camped in the desert, the Torah tells us that the tribe of Asher belonged to Dan's camp, along with Naftali. This camp was at the back, last among the Jews in the desert. Yet, the camp of Dan is described as the one charged with collecting and returning the lost objects of the Jews in front of them. In other words, although they were

behind everyone else, the rest of the tribes were dependent on them.

What does this mean in *avodas Hashem*?

When serving Hashem, one can do so as a "head," using his mind to comprehend *Elokus*, or as a "heart," experiencing love or fear of Hashem. On the other end of the spectrum is the "foot." This refers to a person who lacks proper comprehension and feelings, but one thing is clear to him: Hashem is my Master, and I must follow His orders with *kabalas ol*.

Through serving Hashem with *kabalas ol*, the element of *bittul* is retrieved, which might otherwise be lost when focusing on intellect and emotions.

At first glance, the latter sounds like a drawback. Such an individual is a hollow existence, lacking insight or emotion, serving Hashem with dry subservience. However, from another perspective, the foot-based *avoda* has a major advantage over a heart- or mind-based *avoda*.

Serving Hashem solely with intellect and feelings may result in a fatal loss of *bittul*. He can become overly preoccupied with himself; after all, *I* am the one who understands and

feels! It is only when one serves Hashem with *kabalas ol* that a proper *bittul* to Hashem is ensured.

This is the inner meaning of Chazal's statement, "Who is a fool? One who loses what—*mah*—is given to him." *Mah* is a reference to *bittul*. Too much focus on understanding and feeling may result in losing one's *mah* and *bittul*.

This is the meaning of Dan's retrieval of others' lost objects. Through serving Hashem with *kabalas ol*, Dan "retrieved" the element of *bittul*, which might otherwise be lost when focusing on intellect and emotions.

Among the three tribes comprising the camp of Dan, Asher was at the center, demonstrating that he was the camp's focal point, and therefore the greatest personification of *kabalas ol*.

A QUESTION AND AN ANSWER

Adjacent to the above-cited *possuk* in Vezos Habracha, the tribe of Asher is described as being “beloved among his brothers.” The Sifri attributes this to the fact that Asher’s fields were blessed during the *shmita* year, when all other fields lay fallow, and they would therefore supply everyone else with grain. Thus, like the camp of Dan in the desert centuries earlier, they once again found themselves supporting others.

The fact that their fields were blessed during the *shmita* year is also associated with their distinction in the realm of *kabalas ol*.

The model for sustenance during this year is expressed in Parshas Behar, when the Torah itself repeats the question one may ask: “What will we eat during the seventh year? We will not sow, nor will we gather our produce!” The Torah immediately supplies the answer, replying that Hashem will bless the fields during the sixth year, so that it will produce sufficient grain for three years.

Why is there a need for this to be stated in a question-and-answer format? Why not present the same information as a statement, saying, “Keep *shmita*, and the fields will be blessed with plenty of grain”?

In truth, however, the question itself is an integral part of *shmita*. *Shmita* is designed to raise that very question, seemingly placing a person in an utterly illogical situation. No blessings are immediately apparent, yet we’re expected to observe the *mitzva* unquestioningly in spite of our misgivings. Indeed, it is this unwavering devotion and *kabalas ol* that elicits the *bracha*.

Shmita thus inherently calls for *kabalas ol*. We aren’t transformed into the state Moshe was in when he didn’t subsist on food for forty days. Neither does the grain of the sixth year have similar properties to the meal Eliyahu ate, which provided him with energy for the following forty days. We don’t receive special Heavenly *mon* either, leaving us with the need for the same

inferior bread as usual. The situation appears grave, but with the power of the *bittul* of Asher, *shmita* is observed. In this merit, the natural order of the world is infused with Hashem’s blessing.

All twelve *shvatim* exist within each individual, and the other *shvatim* represent the faculties of intellect, emotion, and so on. When Asher supported his brethren with grain, he was also sharing the underlying message it contained, displaying the importance of *kabalas ol* in the world of understanding and feeling.

A FOOT ABSORBED WITH OIL

This is the inner meaning of Asher’s foot being serviced by oil. Asher’s “foot” is very great indeed, having an advantage lacking even in the heart and mind. This is why it is deserving of being bathed in oil.

There is another element inherent in this *bracha*: Not only does *kabalas ol* have an advantage, it transforms the higher faculties as well, granting our hearts and minds the ability to view things through the lens of *kabalas ol*.

Asher’s *bracha* emphasizes yet another point: By telling us that the foot is absorbed with oil, the Torah is teaching us that proper *bittul* should be supplemented with wisdom and feeling. When coupled with understanding and emotion, the “foot” *absorbs* the “oil,” and the *kabalas ol* is infused with excitement and delight, reaching the ultimate perfection and elevation.

For further learning see לקו"ש חלק א' פרשת ויחי.

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