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Ability of Disability

In a letter dated the 13th of Shevat 5750 (1990), R' Moshe Shapiro wrote to a student of his that had a child with Down syndrome: "...Hashem sent you an unparalleled great present. This child has the ability to bring out in you powerful and wondrous strengths from the depth of your heart that nothing else in the world can... Every Neshama is sent to This World with a purpose, to fix something up. Most people are sent to This World to work on themselves primarily and affect those around them to a lesser extent. But there are Neshamos that are unable to rectify themselves properly. They are lofty Neshamos and don't need a rectification concerning themselves. They are sent to This World to rectify their surroundings. A high Neshama like this was sent to your house..."

A student of R' Yisrael Salanter had a sick daughter whom he loyally took care of. One day the girl passed away. Soon after, her father died. R' Yisrael Salanter remarked that at first it seemed that the daughter's life was dependent on her father, who was

taking care of her. Now we see that the father was alive in the merit of his daughter.¹

Rough Start

Rashi tells us that originally Hashem considered, so to speak, to create the world with the attribute of דין. When He saw it wouldn't be able to endure, he combined it with the attribute of Rachamim as it says ביום עשות ה' אלהים-ים.²

This is the nature of beginnings as shown in the following:

1) We first have the night followed by the day as in ויהי ערב ויהי בקר. This is symbolic of life in that we face challenges and the like in this world (represented by the darkness of night). If we rise up to the challenges we receive the reward in the next world (symbolic of the light of day). This is also signified by our week in that we work the first 6 days (Din) and then we rest on Shabbos (Rachamim).³

2) The Midrash teaches that Hashem created and destroyed worlds (Din) before creating our present world (Rachamim).⁴

3) The first of the Shevatim is ראובן. He embodies Din as we see from his stone on the Choshen, אודם⁵ which is from the term אדום, red. Red is Din⁶ as in אדם יאדמו כתולע.⁷

4) We know that Esav was born before Yaakov. What color was Esav? Red (Din).⁸ What is the name of his nation? אדום, red. We are told that he was a שופך דמים, murderer⁹—another aspect of Din. We are taught that Esav married two women from חתי.¹⁰ חתי is related to the term חת, fear, as in ואל תחת¹¹, which is rooted in Din.

¹ A father of a Down syndrome child was told by his Rav, "It's not a test. It's your tafkid." This gave the father more meaning to his situation as he now felt it's not a test that he has to constantly struggle with, rather it is his reason for being here in the world.

² Breishis, 1:1, Rashi. Breishis 2:4. This is why רחם, mercy and מחר, future (that is what tomorrow, מחר, is)—See Shemos 13:14, Rashi—are composed of the same letters as it is because of רחמים that the world has a future existence.

³ This is in contrast to the non-Jews who enjoy this world. Thus, their holiday is Sunday, the beginning of the week.

⁴ Breishis Rabba 9:2.

⁵ Shemos 28:17. Rabbanu Bechaye, Breishis, 49:27.

⁶ The word ruby which is red is rooted in ראובן since his stone on the Choshen was red. See Rabbanu Bechaye, Shemos 28:15.

⁷ Yeshaya 1:18. This also explains why signs that tell us to stop are red—the red light on a traffic light, stop sign, and so on. Also, blood is red and people get squeamish from blood. These are all facets of Din.

⁸ Breishis 25:25. A comical story is told of the Satmar Rebbe who was traveling in a car when the red traffic lights were something new. Upon his driver stopping at the red light, the Satmar Rebbe inquired why he did so since he wasn't aware of such a thing. After the driver explained it to him, the Satmar Rebbe said this explains בי נן ויאמר אליו אדום לא תעבר בי נן (Bamidbar 20:18)—when it is a red light, don't pass because it may be dangerous.

⁹ Breishis 25:25, Rashi. Esav descends from Yitzchak, the one who possesses the trait of Din. Also, he refused the Torah because of לא תרצה, Din. We also see his connection to death (Din) from his Malach who is also the המות.

¹⁰ Breishis 26:34.

¹¹ Yirmiya 30:10.

We also see Esav associated with Din in the way his descendants use the calendar. They follow the solar year, the sun which is red (Din).¹² This is contrary to us who follow the lunar calendar, the moon. In fact, the word לבנה is sourced in לבן, white—Chessed.¹³ We combine our calendar with the sun in order to have leap years so that it stays in accordance with the seasons.¹⁴ This is because it is Chessed bound with Din since both are necessary.¹⁵ This is in contrast to the Moslems who follow strictly the moon. They therefore can have for example Ramadan at all seasons over a number of years. This is because they are unbounded Chessed as we see they stem from Avraham who embodied the trait of Chessed. They have the negative side of Chessed as they are known for promiscuity¹⁶ which is sourced in Chessed as it says in regard to immorality חסד הוא.¹⁷

This is shown to us in the way the languages are written. The descendants of Esav write from left to right as in the English language. Left is Din. The Moslems write Arabic from right to left—Chessed (right is Chessed). We write Hebrew right to left (Chessed) but we start on the left side of the letter. So that is Chessed combined with Din.¹⁸ One last example is that the holiday of Esav (Christians) is on Sunday which is to the left of Shabbos—Din. On the other hand, the holiday of the Moslems is on Friday,¹⁹ the right of Shabbos—Chessed. Shabbos is in the center which is a combination of Chessed and Din.²⁰

5) The בכור, firstborn personifies this characteristic of Din as he is the one who will perform the Avoda (in the future) as it says ... בתוך כל בכור. Additionally, the Bechor receives a double inheritance.

6) The concept of כל התחלות קשות, all beginnings are hard, also shows us that beginnings start with Din.

7) When a seed is put into the ground, it rots until it seems eroded (Din). Then, it begins to sprout (Rachamim).

8) Fruits are covered by a shell (Din) before we can get to the fruit (Rachamim).

Jewrinity

The Gemara²¹ tells us that we Jews are called אדם. Why are only we referred to as אדם?

¹² Indeed, this is why it is called חמה from the term חום as it says by the sheep of Yaakov (Breishis 30:32, Rashi).

¹³ לבן is called so precisely because of his deceit! This can be explained through a story with R' Yitzchak Zev Solevechik who explained why the Russian newspaper was called provda which means truth although it was filled with lies. He explained if it would be called lies, then that would be the truth.

¹⁴ This is the trait of Yaakov (who we are called after—בני ישראל)—Tiferes, combining Chessed and Din.

¹⁵ An example of this is we act with Chessed to our children but they also require discipline.

¹⁶ As the Gemara (Kiddushin 49b) says that 9/10 of זנות, promiscuity were given to ערביא.

¹⁷ Vayikra 20:17.

¹⁸ This is in accordance with חזו מוליהו חזו לא חזו דאניהו לא חזו דאניהו, even though they didn't see it, their representative angels saw it (Megila 3a).

¹⁹ R' Tzadok Hakohen points out that that Yishmael who embodies promiscuity have their holiday on Friday, the day of Midas.

²⁰ In the Zemiro of Shabbos we say in בשבחין קלה—אומר בשבחין קלה, referring to three days before Shabbos and after while Shabbos is in the middle so we see that right refers to the days before Shabbos.

²¹ Yevamos 61a.

In the process of performing an act of bravery which saved many lives during a terrorist attack on America, a police officer named James was killed. In an effort to raise money for the deceased officer's family, an appeal was broadcast all over America. After the extensive fundraising campaign, a total of \$5,000 was collected. In another episode that occurred the very same week, there was an American Jew, Yosef, sitting on an Elal flight next to an Israeli man, Eliyahu, who was traveling from Israel with his son to America. When asked why he was traveling to the United States, Eliyahu related that his son was critically ill and in need of an urgent operation. Yosef inquired further and realized Eliyahu didn't have health insurance, thus not having the money for this \$100,000 operation. Eliyahu told Yosef that although he didn't have the money to pay for it, he had no choice but to follow through with the operation since his son was so ill. Eliyahu said that his plan was to reach out to different organizations in America. Upon hearing Eliyahu's story, Yosef walked up and down the aisles on the plane collecting money for Eliyahu. Yosef didn't return to his seat until he came back with \$100,000 (some in cash and some in checks).

In December 2017, there was a non-Jewish American that was released from prison after spending 30 years there for crimes he didn't commit. Who was there to greet him? Naturally, not too many people. His mother, his attorney, and some family members. Just a few hours after this man's release, Shalom Mordechai Rubashkin was being released in a small town in upstate New York. There were people that never met him from Bloomingburg, to greet him and sing. And as soon as Jews heard the good news, Jews of all ages, in all Jewish communities, all over the Globe from the US east to west coast, from Europe to Israel and anywhere in between, from Chasidish to Litvish, to Modern Orthodox, all took to the streets and to Shuls to dance and to thank Hashem for this. All this to partake in this great Simcha of a man they never met, and perhaps never will meet. Additionally, many of the people weren't even intimately familiar with the "Rubashkin" case. Yet the unity was palpable, as Jews cried tears of joy and sang and danced.

Of the various ways to say "man" (גבר, אנוש, איש) only אדם doesn't have a plural form (אנשים, גברים). This is because we are one entity. When something happens to a Jew in one place, a Jew in another place feels it. That is a unique unity that is only by the Jewish people. This also explains why the word נפשות (plural) is used to refer to the non-Jews in contrast to us, Jews, who are called נפש (singular).²² The singular term signifies unity.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander Ztz"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg Ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the Sefer, Fascinating Insights: Torah Perspectives on Unique Topics. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

²² Breishis 46:26, Rashi.