

Romemu Dvar Torah May 13, 2016

So two amazing things were happening the last couple of months as my wife and I were preparing for this baby. One was that, given that we knew that the two younger boys, or the two older boys, I should say, would think about what it's like for them to go, to have this experience, we wanted to assign everybody a job. So, obviously Ariel is the feeder.

My wife is the feeder for the baby. The refrigerator, the feeder, you know. My other son, Bear, is responsible for caressing the baby.

And the second son, Tal, is responsible for cuddling the baby. And they gave me a very special job. We'll get to that a little bit later.

I mean, essentially, yes, I had to clean up the poop and diaper, exactly. And this kind of, exactly, roughly corresponded with what did you just say? Holy work, exactly. Well, that's exactly the next thing that was happening the last couple of months, which is that somehow the boys heard the phrase, holy you-know-what.

And so the kids were running around for the last five months saying that phrase, you know, and not even knowing what it meant. Obviously, just holy you-know-what, holy you-know-what, holy you-know-what, holy, holy, holy, holy. So here we are in our house, and out of nowhere, I'll be sitting and learning or writing or something, and all of a sudden I'll hear my five-and-a-half-year-old out in the living room saying, holy, holy, you know, like that.

And it's like, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, holy, and it's, you think to yourself, okay, what do I do here? Because it's not only the juxtaposition, obviously, of these two phrases, which are, what's radical about them is that they're actually so far apart, right? They're so antithetical, it would seem, one to the other. And it raises a deeper question, which is the question of language. Like, do they really get it? Do they really understand what they're saying? Is there any point in reinforcing it? How do you, is there a way out of reinforcing it? If you say not to say it, then they think, why don't you say it? And what's wrong with saying it? And then you're off to the races.

But it points to the question of language, with something like maybe philosophical terminology, the ontological question of language. Does language have inherent meaning? Or is it instrumental in some way? Do we just affix, you know, sounds? I call one guy David, and he says, okay, that's me. And if it weren't his name, he wouldn't know.

Is it accidental? The Bible is very, very into language, as you probably all know this already. The God of the Bible creates the world with speech. Baruch she'amar v'hayah ha'olam.

Blessed is the one whose speech creates worlds. Not only do words matter in the Torah, but even more than words, even letters matter, right? Do people know this? The rabbis were obsessed with letters. They counted each and every one of the letters in the Torah.

If a Torah is missing even not a word, but even a letter out of the 304,000 letters, give or take some letters. The rabbis were so meticulous with these letters that after counting them

like pearls, the rabbi said that each and every one of us is a letter in the Torah. And this, of course, became the absolute integrity of scribes when they wrote Sifrei Torah.

When they wrote Torot, when they wrote a Torah, a scribe with his quill, each and every letter had to be absolutely checked and double-checked. Very few variants in the Torah. So how amazing is it that many of you know that I have a bit of an obsession with a certain rabbi whose name is Meir, Rabbi Meir, whose name literally means the illuminator rabbi.

The illuminator rabbi, Rabbi Meir, the one who gives forth light. According to the Midrash, Rabbi Meir had his own Torah. B'torotol shel rabbi Meir is a phrase that finds itself in the Midrash, that in Rabbi Meir's Torah.

And I'm going to research that. There's no other rabbi in the rabbis who have their own Torah. My sister and my brother have Torot in their house.

They had them, they hired scribes to make Torot for their kids, be mitzvahs, the bat and bar mitzvahs. So people have Torot, but they don't mean that his own personal Torah that he keeps in his living room for a minyan, for a prayer service. They mean he had his own version of the Torah.

And I get this, in the Torah of Rabbi Meir, there are a number of variants, a number of moments where his text is completely different than the Torah that we have with us today. In fact, one of the most famous ones I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, it says that, and by the way, this change should jar you a little bit. If you remember it from a couple of weeks ago, this change in particular is absolutely essential to understanding Jewish mystical reality.

In this one change is encapsulated almost everything every religion seems to speak to, and certainly ours does. In this one change, I feel like, anybody ever watch Letterman? I take this letter off my chest and I turn back to dark, I don't know. This letter, Rabbi Meir, Illuminated Rabbi, is a letter man, and he changed the Torah in one significant place.

It says in the Torah, when Adam and Eve ate from the tree that they were not supposed to eat from, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, at that moment, they realized that they were naked and ashamed. And God, in God's mercy, v'yal b'sheim Adonai kutnot or, and God clothed them in this term, kutnot. Can you all say that? Kutnot or, kutnot or.

One more time, kutnot or, which means pelts, animal skins. Kutnot are garments, and or, right? Or is the Hebrew word for skin or, ayin vavresh, it's this human skin. And it's also animal skins.

God clothed them, they were naked. Katuv v'torah toshir, Rabbi Meir, is written in the Torah, Rabbi Meir. Al tikri or im ayin or im aleph.

Do not read and God clothed them in garments of skin or pelts, but rather God clothed them in skins of, garments of light or with an aleph. Radical and mystical, Rabbi Meir's Torah, the word or with an ayin is written with an aleph and changes the meaning, although the pronunciation and the sound of it is, unless you're a real ayiner, if you really, right, you hear it, it's almost precisely the same. Garments of skin in Rabbi Meir's Torah become garments of light.

The word skin, light, or, and ayin are differentiated by two Hebrew letters. There's an aleph and there's an ayin. One is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, aleph, and one is the 16th letter, ayin.

And you know, everyone, that every Hebrew letter has a numerical value and also forms a word. Aleph is the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet and it has the value of one. Ayin is the 16th letter in the Hebrew alphabet and it has the value of 70.

Aleph, the first letter, means prince or regal, and ayin, 70, means I or wellspring. This letter mysticism, this numerical play points to a deeper truth. The aleph, which means light, means that God garmented us in princely garments made of unity, of clarity, of transparency, of radiance.

To be clothed in garments of light means a deep knowing that even in our deepest moments of shame, after the fall, after our deepest human moment, we are still connected to that one source, that aleph, that aleph light. We are still clothed in a garment of transparency. The ayin, though, the skin whose value is 70 and whose meaning is I, physical garments made of multiplicity, of seven times 10 of everything that the eye can see, garments of skin, of diversity, of the plural, of divine fecundity everywhere.

We originally began with an awareness of all that is. We fell original skin, which was light became skin, which is thick. Words matter.

The word or matters. The letters matter. Language matters.

Ideas matter. In fact, everybody, you are all sitting here inundated every day by marketing companies that are trying to figure out what exactly is the word that will induce you to buy their product. That kind of marketing conversation, branding is, how is it that we are perceived? What eye looks at this item and names it with a word? Religions have brands too.

Christianity, you might think, the brand of Christianity, the word that describes it may be salvation, may be sin, may be Christ, may be Messiah. In Islam, it might be surrender, subdue, submission. It might be Allah.

There might be one word that immediately comes to mind that says that's the brand of that particular tradition. Buddhism, you might think, what's the word that might come to mind that you might think, oh, that's Buddhism? Nothing. That's good.

Nothing comes to mind. Enlightenment, maybe. Maybe suffering.

Maybe Buddha. Maybe Dukkha. Most people probably think meditation.

Well, Judaism has a word. Just like the or with an aleph and an ayin, it matters. It says something.

It speaks to a truth. And that word, which is the brand of Judaism, this is Judaism. If you want to know, here it is.

Hillel on one foot, give a sentence. We might find one word. And that word is Kaddosh, Kiddushah.

Kiddushah is I would humbly submit. And on this, I'm basing myself on the great Rav Avram Yitzhak Cohen Cook, the great first chief rabbi of Palestine, whose name meant light. Ria Rav Cook, all of whose books were written as or, as light.

Rav Cook wrote that Kiddushah, Kodesh, or what he called Orot Kodesh, the lights of holiness, is the entire movement of creation towards God. The entire movement of creation as the 70, which represents all of this back to the one. Kiddushah is the movement of, as Tamar Deshardan, the great Christian theologian wrote, the divinization of the cosmos.

All of it moving back towards the one. And so of course, the place where Kiddushah appears for the first time is significant. Whenever a word or a concept appears in our tradition, in the Torah for the first time, it is significant.

And what's the first place in Torah of Kiddushah of this evolution towards the one? It is on Shabbat. Vayikadesh oto, and God made Shabbat holy. Kiddushah is inherent.

It is in creation. It's here inside. All of this stuff is Kiddushah.

God made the world holy. And Shabbat is an expression of the return to that Aleph, a return to that unity. It is called in the Zohar, the world of unity, the Alma, the Yechuda, the Raza, the Echad.

Shabbat represents the Aleph, the garment of light of the illuminated Rabbi, Rabbi Meir, and on Shabbos, we wear new clothing, not the clothing of the 70 days and the 70 nations, but the clothing of unity, the clothing of openness, the clothing of transparency. That is Shabbat. That is the secret of one.

Vayikadesh oto. It is one. And so tomorrow morning, tomorrow morning, parashat kiddushim, what is known by the scholars, the academics as the holiness code.

And whenever I hear that, I think Da Vinci code, right? Like kodesh, right? Code, the holiness kodesh. That's the code. Kodesh is the code.

This holiness code, which is an essential piece of Leviticus, of the priestly writings, which essentially are saying, here's the manual for living a kodesh life, which means, which means here's how you walk love out into the world of skin. Here's how you walk love out into a world where skin does separate me from Arnie and me from Melissa and me from all of you in a world where skin does seemingly separate into the world of ayin, where the eye sees the 70, the garments of skin, skin encapsulated egos, all of us divided and boundaried in that world kiddushim to you. Holy you shall be, says the Torah chapter 18 of the book of Leviticus.

Holy shall you be. Be holy, meaning be kodesh. Take oneness and live it out in the world, in your ethics, in how you treat each other.

That's an expression of or with an ayin, an ayin, the eye expressing love, the one. To extend the aleph into the ayin, the light into the skin and awaken all of that ayin, all of that eye with an eye to the aleph. That's the project.

That's the holiness code. That's our mission statement. That's our brand.

That's our brand. And we need something brand new. We need a new brand.

We need a brand new. We're holiness workers. That's what we do. We elevate life. To be connected to kiddushah is to say life needs to be elevated. It's already elevated. It needs to be elevated more. It's already aleph, but there's ayin. There's more to do.

There's more God, says the Hasidic masters. Not because I am holy, you should be holy, but ki means be holy so that I can be holy, God says in the minds of the Hasidic masters. When we act in a holy way, there's more God in the world.

It's as simple as that. There's more aleph in the ayin. You got your aleph in my ayin.

You are the aleph of my ayin, says the Torah, when you see someone whom you hate in your heart, you've just blocked off aleph. Because even though it seems like he's not you, in the world of aleph he is, and so treat him like you would want to be treated because you're not divided by your skin, you are united by your aleph. Your eye divides, but the heart unites. So live ethics is love lived. It's aleph performed.

You get it? You get it? This is the Torah of Rabbi Meir. And so it should not surprise any of us that tomorrow morning when we open up the holiness code, when that chapter 19, excuse me, of the book of Leviticus is opened, you won't actually find ethics there as the first commandment. What will be the first commandment we will read? Keep Shabbat.

Keep Shabbat. Because Shabbat, whether you use your phone or you don't use your phone, whether you go to shul, you don't go to shul, Shabbat represents in the rabbi's minds, the world that is all Shabbat, is a world where it's all aleph. Where all of the eye and all the skin becomes light, where each and every one of us touches each other and connects like a newborn infant born whose skin needs to touch his mother's skin, his father's skin, to know that they're still in that place together, skin to skin, eye into eye and aleph to aleph.

That's Shabbat. That's the holiness project. That's the code, Esh. An elevated life. So we just read, L'chad dodi likad kalah, b'nei Shabbat nikabela. The light of a person's face on Shabbat, light with an aleph, is not the same as it is during the week.

There's an or chadash. There's a new light that shines. And so we sing, Hit orri, hit orri.

Arise, awaken, right? You can hear or with the hit orri, awaken, you skinnies, you skinny people, you skin, awaken. Hit orri means to awaken. Wake up, skin.

Wake it up. This oneg, this ayin, is also full of aleph.