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Nissan - The Tribe of Yehudah

The Vilna Gaon writes that the twelve months of the year are parallel to the twelve *shevatim* (tribes). There are many different opinions in the writings of our Rabbis concerning which months are parallel to which of the 12 tribes. According to some opinions, the month of Nissan represents the tribe of Yehudah.

Yehudah: The Expression of Hodaah (Giving Thanks)

When Yehudah was born, his mother Leah expressed thanks for him, saying, “*This time, I thank Hashem.*” The name Yehudah is rooted in the word *hodaah*, thanks, because Leah felt thankful to Hashem over his birth.

As our Sages say, being that Yaakov Avinu had four wives^[1], and since our matriarchs knew through prophecy that 12 sons would come from Yaakov Avinu, the natural order of events would have been that 3 children would come from each mother [4x3=12]. Therefore, Leah thought she would not beget more than the 3 children to Yaakov. When she saw that she was given a fourth child, she realized that Hashem was giving her even more than her allotted portion of children. Thus, she had special reason to thank Hashem.

The Gemara^[2] says that Leah was the first person in history to give *hodaah* (thanks) to Hashem, when she gave *hodaah* to Hashem over the birth of Yehudah. However, there is also a deeper understanding to this, as we will see.

‘Hodaah’: Through Denying Idol Worship

The *posuk* in the *Megillah* says that Mordechai was called “*ish yehudi*” [which simply means that he descended from Yehudah]. The *Gemara* expounds upon this that “Whoever denies idol worship, is called a ‘*Yehudi*’ (a Jew).” Mordechai fought the trend of idol worship in his times, thus he earned the title of ‘*ish Yehudi*’. Thus, a denial of heresy, along with acknowledging the existence of Hashem, is what constitutes being called a ‘*yehudi*’. If so, *hodaah* is not just about admitting to something. It is about denying the other alternative.

The Torah records that Esav married a woman whose name was “Yehudis”. *Chazal* explain that her name was called Yehudis because she denied idol worship, and anyone who denies idol worship ‘*yehudi*’. Esav married her with the agenda of impressing his father Yitzchok, marrying a righteous woman who didn’t serve idols, which would get his father to think that he had given up his ways of

idol worship. [In reality, this was all a deception, and later we will explain more about this].

So the root of the term *yehudi*/*hodaah* is not just about acknowledging Hashem. It involves a denial of idol worship, and from that, faith and acknowledgment in Hashem can then become revealed.

'Hodaah': 'Bittul'\Nullification

There is another aspect to Yehudah's name. In the episode of Yehudah and Tamar, Yehudah admitted to Tamar that she was correct; "*She is more righteous than me.*" Chazal praise Yehudah in this act for the fact that he "admitted, and he was not ashamed", and because of this meritorious act, Yehudah merited that the kingdom of David descended from him. This paved the roots of Mashiach and the future redemption.

The *Gemara* says that our matriarch Rachel is praised for grabbing onto the art of silence, whereas Leah is praised for the grabbing onto the art of gratitude. We see that the *hodaah* which Leah revealed is expressed as well in the life of her son Yehudah who is associated with that very *hodaah*, as follows.

The *Gemara* states that Yosef sanctified the name of Hashem in private^[3], thus he merited that a letter of Hashem be added to his name; there is *possuk* in the Torah which names Yosef as "*Yehoisa*", so we see that a letter *h* was added onto his name; whereas Yehudah sanctified Hashem's name in public^[4], thus he merits the full name of Hashem in his name^[5].

Thus, there is a deeper aspect to the *hodaah* in Yehudah's name. It wasn't just because Leah felt gratitude to Hashem that she had been given more than her allotted portion of children. It was because *hodaah* implies admitting to something, which is the trait of nullifying oneself. This is called *bittul* (nullification).

Even more so, *hodaah* implies a denial of something else. In order for a person to give *hodaah* to Hashem, he has to first deny idol worship. After denying heresy, a person can then have faith in Hashem and be thankful to Him. So in order for a person to be "*modeh al ha'emes*" - to admit to the truth - he has to first deny the opposite of truth.

The deepest implication of *hodaah* is when Hashem's Name is sanctified in public. The *Gemara* says that because Yehudah sanctified Hashem's Name in public [through being '*modeh*' to Tamar], he merited to have Hashem's Name of *havayah* revealed in his own name.

Denying Idol Worship: The Incomplete Level of 'Hodaah'

Let us reflect more about Yehudah and the root concept behind his name, *hodaah*. As explained above, *hodaah* implies a denial of the alternative option. In order to 'admit' that Hashem exists, one has to deny the existence of other gods, or else his *hodaah* is not a true *hodaah*. If I believe in Hashem, that means I must deny that there are other gods.

Thus, all *hodaah* implies a denial of something else. As the *Gemara* says, a Jew is only called '*Yehudi*' if he denies idol worship. If this is the definition, though, such *hodaah* is not the complete level of *hodaah*, for it involves an element of denial. Although the denial here is a denial of idol worship, which [denial of idol worship] strengthens the admittance to one's belief in Hashem, the entire such *hodaah* is based on the fact that idols are denied, which makes the *hodaah* incomplete. It is *hodaah* only in the sense of the denial of idol worship [and it is not *hodaah* for the sake of *hodaah*]. It is reminiscent of the case in the *Gemara* of '*modeh b'miktzas*'^[6], one who admits partially to a claim. In the case of *modeh b'miktzas*, he admits partially to the claim, but he denies the other half that he isn't admitting to. The entire *hodaah* is based on a *kefirah* (denial) of something else. It is thus called

modeh b'miktzas.

Thus, the *hodaah* of Leah over the birth of Yehudah wasn't the complete level of *hodaah*. Her *hodaah* to Hashem was based on the fact that she received more than her allotted portion of children; this came at the expense of the other wives of Yaakov *Avinu*, who would now bear less children, now that more children were being given to Leah. Since her *hodaah* came at the expense of others, we can view it as an incomplete kind of *hodaah*, because her *hodaah* implied that she is getting her part, while the others are being denied their part.

Thus, any *hodaah* which results in a deficiency to another, cannot be called complete *hodaah*. Whenever it comes to interpersonal relationships with others, any *hodaah* that one expresses will imply that he has received what others didn't receive, so the *hodaah* is incomplete. By contrast, the complete level of *hodaah* is only when my *hodaah* isn't causing any deficiency to another; when it isn't coming at the expense of another.

Incomplete "Hodaah"

Thus, when *hodaah* is a denial of something else, or when it comes at the expense of another, it is the incomplete level of *hodaah*. Such *hodaah* is only considered *hodaah* from the perspective of this "world of falsity" that we live in. [In contrast, true *hodaah* comes from a higher dimension than this world of falsity].

The *Sforno* says that Yehudah was not the first person to be named Yehudahh. The wife of Esav, Yehudis, preceded him. Yehudis denied idol worship, thus she is called Yehudis, for anyone who denies idol worship is called "Yehudi". Why indeed did Esav marry a righteous woman who denies idol worship? He wanted to trick Yitzchok *Avinu* by making him think that he married a righteous woman. If so, the entire *hodaah* of his wife Yehudis is a *hodaah* that was false! It represents a kind of *hodaah* which isn't about admitting for the sake of the truth. The true and complete kind of *hodaah* it is being done for the sake of the truth, and not for any other personal reason.

Thus, *hodaah* is incomplete when it is based on a denial of the alternative option. Such *hodaah* involves an element of falsity, and it is represented by the false *hodaah* of Esav, in his marriage to Yehudis. The *hodaah* found on This World includes both admitting and denial; the "denial" aspect in it makes it incomplete, for true *hodaah* does not come from a denial of something else.

Complete 'Hodaah'

Where do we find a revelation of complete *hodaah*? It is hinted to in the words of the *Gemara* we brought earlier: Yehudah sanctified the name of Hashem in public, and because of this, he merited that the four-letter Name of Hashem (*havayah*) be part of his name. This is a kind of *hodaah* (admittance) which does not come due to any denial of something else.

It was revealed in this world by the giving of the Torah, when Hashem said, "I am Hashem, your G-d." This was a revelation of the ultimate *hodaah*, the belief in Hashem's existence, before there was any mention or possibility of other gods. It was a kind of *hodaah* that is above this world entirely. Such *hodaah* is not coming for the purpose of denying other gods; it is coming to state the existence of Hashem. It is not about a denial of falsity. It is a revelation that there is only one option in reality, as opposed to "two" options (belief in Hashem vs. belief in idols and falsity).

The higher revelation of *Emunah* is when it is revealed there is only "one" option - faith in Hashem - as opposed to 'choosing' between the 'two' options (faith vs. heresy). When one's *Emunah* is crystal clear, there is no possibility of another option. When one's *Emunah* is not that clear, though, although he can still have *Emunah*, his *Emunah* is being questioned, because he sees 'another' option.

This can be compared to *Chazal's* critique of Noach for being one who 'believes, yet doesn't believe.' With such *Emunah*, a person believes in Hashem and admits to His existence, denying any other possibility, but he is still retaining the 'option' that there is another 'possibility'. He still has doubts, and he wonders about other possibilities. As is well-known, doubts are induced by the force of Amalek in the world. When a person has any doubts in his *Emunah*, Amalek has some hold on him.

When *Emunah* is clear, there are no doubts, no trace of Amalek. With such *Emunah*, there is no need in the first place to deny the notion of false gods.

Thus, the *hodaah* represented by Yehudah is not complete *hodaah*, for it involved a denial of something else (it came at the expense of the other wives of Yaakov *Avinu*, who would now have less children, now that Leah is being given more children). Therefore, all *hodaah* which we recognize in This World is incomplete, for it is within the perspective of the current 6000 year era we are in.

Nissan, Yehudah, and Redemption

In the month of Nissan, we were redeemed, and *Chazal* state that in the future, we will be redeemed as well, in the month of Nissan. This has its roots in Yehudah, whom the month of Nissan represents. Yosef was the first to go down to Egypt. He represents the exile. Yehudah represents the power to leave the exile. How do we see this? *Chazal* state that Yehudah established a yeshiva in Goshen, in Egypt, for the duration of the exile. This laid the hidden roots for the redemption from Egypt.

In Nissan, we will be redeemed, and [throuredemption comes] through the power of Yehudah. However, it will not be through the '*hodaah*' aspect of Yehudah, which is incomplete. The future redemption will not be about denying other gods so that Hashem can be revealed. Rather, the future redemption will be like Yehudah's act of sanctifying Hashem's Name of public - a complete *hodaah*, a *hodaah* for the sake of revealing His name of '*havayah*.' When the name of *havayah* is revealed in the future, it will be revealed then that Hashem "was, is, and will be", the only 'one' option that exists.

The Sages state that nowadays, the Throne of Hashem is incomplete, due to the presence of Amalek, who does not allow for the complete revelation of Hashem's Name. In the future, when Amalek will be erased, there will be no more possibility of doubts, and the *Emunah* in Hashem will be absolute and definite.

This is the depth of "In Nissan, in the future, they [the Jewish nation] will be redeemed." It will be revealed then the complete level of '*hodaah*' that is present in Yehudah's name, the revelation of a reality in which there are no other possibilities, other than the full acknowledgement of Hashem's existence.

Nissan: The Time To Reach The Complete Level of Emunah

During this time of the year, Nissan, we can reveal the more complete level of *Emunah*, in which there are no 'two' possibilities, and that there is only 'one' possibility: our complete *Emunah* in Hashem.

When we see *hester* (concealment) in creation, our simple way to deal with this is to choose to have *Emunah*, rather than focus on the *hester*. But the deeper method, which reflects the *avodah* here we have been describing - the power of Yehudah, which is more revealed in the month of Nissan - is to view the *hester* as being part of our *Emunah* itself. All *hester* that we see is somehow a part of our *Emunah*, and is not in contraction with it.

This is the concept of complete *hodaah*, of *Emunah shelaimah* (complete faith), of Yehudah sanctifying the 'Name of Hashem' in public...

[1] The two Imahos, Rachel and Leah; and the two maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah.

[2] Talmud Bavli: Tractate Berachos: Chapter Nine

[3] By the confrontation with the wife of Potiphar, when he refrained from sinning with her

[4] When he admitted publicly that he was wrong and that Tamar was correct

[5] The name "Yehudahh" contains the four letter name of Havayah

[6] Bava Metzia 3b

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