

Resolving the Chasam Sofer's Powerful Question

How Can We Attest in Kiddush to the Fact that HKB"H Rested from Creation on the Seventh Day

In this week's parsha, parshas Yisro, we read the Ten Commandments — the "Aseres HaDibros" — uttered by HKB"H to all of Yisrael at the momentous revelation on Har Sinai. In this essay, we wish to focus on the fourth commandment, the positive commandment (Shemos 20, 8): "זכור את יום השבת לקדשו" — remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it. Elucidating this passuk, our blessed sages state (Pesachim 106a): "זוכרהו על היין בכניסתו" — remember it over wine, at its onset.

Let us recall the well — known words of the Gaon Chida in Moreh B'Etzba (4, 143). He teaches us that one must contemplate thoughts of teshuvah prior to reciting kiddush over the wine, so that one is qualified to testify. He writes: "כיון מאד בקידוש ויהרהר בתשובה, כי אמירת ויכולו להעיד כי ה' ברא שמים וארץ ונח בשבת, ורשע פסול לעדות, על כן יהרהר בתשובה שיהיה ראוי לעדות" — reciting the paragraph of "vayechulu" is tantamount to giving testimony to the fact that Hashem created the heavens and the earth and rested on the seventh day; a "rasha" is not qualified to testify; hence, it is essential to have thoughts of teshuvah in order to qualify to give testimony.

This is a novel idea. After all, the Tur writes (O.C. 268), concerning the communal recitation of "vayechulu" on Friday night after the silent amidah prayer: "ויש אומרים שנהגו לומר אותו בקול רם ומעומד, משום שהוא עדות להקב"ה על מעשה בראשית, וכתוב (דברים יט — יז) ועמדו שני האנשים, ודרשינן (שבועות ל.) אלו העדים שצריכין להעיד ביחד — ומעומד, ולכן צריך שיעמדו ויאמרו אותו ביחד" — some authorities state that it is customary to recite it out loud and while standing, because it is testimony that HKB"H created the world; witnesses must testify together while standing.

We see clearly that when reciting "vayechulu" in the synagogue one must have in mind that he is testifying to the fact that HKB"H created the universe. From the words of the Chida, we learned that when reciting kiddush at home one must also have in mind this same testimony. Therefore, one must contemplate teshuvah prior to reciting kiddush. Support for the Chida's notion is found in Yesod V'Shores HaAvodah (8, 5), where he writes:

"אחי ורעי הלא תדעו ותבינו מוסדות ועיקר התיקון בעולמות העליונים באמירת פרשת ויכולו גם בקידוש, הוא דוקא שיכוין באמירתו, להעיד עדות על אחדות אלקותו יתברך שמו ויתעלה זכרו לעד בעובדא דבראשית, ושצריך להעיד עדות זו בשמחה ובכוונה עצומה."

Reciting the passage of "vayechulu" constitutes a tremendous tikun; this includes its recitation in kiddush; however, this tikun is only accomplished if it is recited with proper "kavana" — intent and focus. One must have in mind that one is testifying to the fact of G — d's oneness and that He created the universe; this testimony must be given joyfully.

He brings proof from the following passage in the Zohar hakadosh (Vayakhel 207b):

"קדושה של ליל שבת זו היא קידוש של שבת בראשית... סוד העדות של מעשה בראשית, דהיינו ויכולו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם וגו' ויכל אלקים... וצריך בן אדם להעיד עדות זו בשמחה וברצון הלב, להעיד לפני הקב"ה אדון האמונה, וכל מי שיעיד כן ויכוון לבו ורצונו לזה מכפר על כל עוונותיו."

The Zohar hakadosh states explicitly that one must have in mind when reciting kiddush on Shabbos night that one is testifying to the fact that HKB"H created the universe. It seems clear that this Zohar must have been the Chida's source. So, it makes perfect sense that he advises a person to have thoughts of teshuvah prior to kiddush in order to be a kosher, qualified witness.

"Your iniquity shall depart and your sin shall be atoned for" so that You Will Be Fit to Testify

In fact, support for the Chida's idea can be found in the Gemara (Shabbas 119b): "כל המתפלל בערב שבת ואומר ויכולו, שני מלאכי השרת המלוין לו לאדם — מניחין ידיהן על ראשו, ואומרים לו (ישעיהו 1 — 2) וסר עוונך וחסאתך תכופר" — whoever prays on Erev Shabbas and recites "vayechulu," the two ministering angels that escort him home place their hands on his head and say to him: "and your iniquity shall depart and your sin shall be atoned for."

The Eliyahu Rabbah writes (O.C. 268, 12): "ומהאי טעמא אמר זקני: 'וגאון זכרונו לברכה הא דכל האומר ויכולו, מלאכי השרת המלוין לו אומרים וסר עוונך וכו', משום דאמרין באבן העזר דאומרים לעדים בגט שיהרהרו בתשובה כי רשע פסול לעדות, לכך אומרים לו וסר עוונך' We learn that the malachim that place their hands on a person's head, inform him while he is still in the synagogue, prior to reciting "vayechulu," that he merited the forgiveness of his sins.

In a similar vein, the Tiferes Shlomo writes (Ki Seitzei): "כל האומר ויכולו וגו' מוחלין על כל עוונותיו, כי ויכולו הוא עדות על חידוש העולם, ובעל כרחך צריך האדם להיות כשר לעדות, אם כן הוא אם עבר עבירה ח"ו הוא פסול לעדות, לכן מוחלין לו על כל עוונותיו להיות עדותו כשרה"

לאמיתתו — one who utters “vayechulu” is absolved of all his sins, because he is testifying regarding the creation of the world; hence, it is necessary that he be qualified and fit to testify; a sinner is not fit to be a witness; therefore, all of this person’s sins are forgiven so that his testimony will be acceptable and above scrutiny.

The great author of the Ben Ish Chai also presents this idea in his sefer Ben Yehoyada. He also provides a nice explanation as to why the two malachim that escort the person home place their hands on his head. He refers to the Gemara (Kiddushin 49b) where we learn that if a man betroths a woman on the condition that he is a tzaddik, she is betrothed to him, even if he is considered a wicked person — a “rasha”; for, it is possible that he has contemplated teshuvah. So, we see that even if one merely has thoughts of teshuvah, he is already considered a tzaddik.

For this very reason: “whoever prays on Erev Shabbas and recites “vayechulu,” and contemplates teshuvah so that his testimony will not be disqualified, “the two ministering angels that escort him home place their hands on his head” — signifying that he had thoughts of performing teshuvah — “and say to him: “and your iniquity shall depart and your sin shall be atoned for.” They signify that his thoughts of teshuvah were sufficient to remove his iniquities and to consider him a tzaddik, fit to testify.

How Is It Possible to Testify about Something We Did Not Witness?

Nevertheless, concerning this testimony that we give with the utterance of “vayechulu” in the synagogue and in kiddush — that HKB”H created the universe in six days and rested on the seventh day — it is appropriate to raise a point that has troubled us for years. Seeing as man was not created until the sixth day of creation, how can we testify to something that we did not actually witness? Albeit we believe wholeheartedly that HKB”H created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. Nevertheless, it is implausible that a person would be allowed to testify in court about something he merely believes to be true but did not actually witness.

After considerable research, we learned that this question is addressed in the Derashos Chasam Sofer (Pesach, page 272, column 3): **“והענין בזה כי המשמר שבת מעיד על כל הנ”ל, אך איך אוכל להעיד מה: שלא ראיתי ולא ידעתי. אמנם בשעת יציאת מצרים ראינו בעינינו כי הוא הבורא, הוא החפץ, הוא היכול, אם כן על ידי יציאת מצרים נעשה עד על שבת בראשית”** — he answers that during the exodus from Mitzrayim we witnessed with our own eyes that HKB”H is the Creator and that He is omnipotent; witnessing the exodus from Mitzrayim gave us the credentials to testify concerning the creation.

Clearly, the Chasam Sofer’s answer requires further explanation. While it is true that “yetzias Mitzrayim” proved to us beyond a shadow of a doubt that He is the Creator and is omnipotent, but the fact remains that we did not actually witness HKB”H creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh day. Although we sincerely believe this to be true, how can we testify to something that we did not witness with our own eyes?

“If a person is meritorious, we say to him: you preceded all of creation”

In honor of Shabbas kodesh, I would like to propose a solution to this perplexing question based on a statement from our blessed sages in the Midrash (V.R. 14, 1) elucidating the passuk (Vayikra 12, 2):

“אשה כי תזריע וילדה זכר, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים קלט — ה) אחר וקדם צרתני... אחר זה יום האחרון וקדם זה יום הראשון... דכתיב (בראשית א — ב) ורוח אלקים מרחפת על פני המים, זה רוחו של מלך המשיח, [גירסת ה”מתנות כהונה” על פי הילקוט שמעוני: “זה רוחו של אדם הראשון”], אם זכה אדם אומרים לו, אתה קדמת לכל מעשה בראשית, ואם לאו אומרים לו, יתוש קדמך, שלשול קדמך.”

The passuk in Tehillim (139, 5) states: “You have confined me in between the last and the first.” The last refers to the last day; the first refers to the first day. It states on the first day that: “the spirit of G — d hovered above the surface of the waters.” This either refers to the spirit of the Melech HaMashiach, or according to the version of the Matnot Kehunah based on the Yalkut Shimoni, this refers to the spirit of Adam HaRishon. If man is meritorious, they say to him, “You preceded all of creation.” If not, they say to him, “A mosquito preceded you; a lowly earthworm preceded you.”

Even if man is meritorious, how can they say to him: “You preceded all of creation”? After all, he was not created until the sixth day. Here is how the Sefas Emes interprets the Midrash (Tazria 5641):

“בבחינת הנשמה קדם אדם לכל מעשה בראשית, כמו שאמרו חז”ל (רש”י בראשית א — א) בראשית, בשביל ישראל שנקראו ראשית, ורוח אלקים מרחפת, דרשו על מלך המשיח שהוא הנשמה כללית של בני ישראל, ולכן כפי הזדככות החומר לבטלו אל הנשמה שתהיה הנשמה מאירה בגוף, אז אומרים לו אתה קדמת לכל מעשה בראשית, ואם ח”ו להיפוך נקרא רק על שם הגוף, והגוף של האדם למטה מכולם.”

We know that man is composed of a spiritual part and a physical part — a neshamah and a body. The body created from the dust of the earth was not created until the sixth day. The neshamah, however, the divine contribution from above, preceded the rest of creation. Now, it is man’s purpose to insure that the neshamah reigns over the body; the body should be totally subservient to the will of the neshamah and its service of Hashem. In this scenario, the neshamah is man’s essential and primary constituent; the body is secondary to the neshamah. On the other hand, if man does not place his neshamah in control of his body, the body is in charge and focuses on the frivolous pursuits of this world. In this scenario, man forces his neshamah to be subservient to his animalistic desires and cravings. Here the body is primary and the neshamah is secondary to the body.

This is the meaning of the Midrash: “if man is meritorious” — if he purifies and refines his body to be totally subservient to the will of the

neshamah — “they say to him, ‘You preceded all of creation’” — for, the neshamah was indeed created before the rest of creation. On the other hand, “if not” — if man does not refine his body to serve the neshamah, but rather the body controls the neshamah to satisfy its will — “they say to him, ‘A mosquito preceded you; a lowly earthworm preceded you’” — because, in fact, the physical body was created last, on the sixth day of creation.

All the Neshamos Were Set Apart on the Shabbas Prior to Creation

Continuing onward and upward along this exalted path, let us explain in greater depth the statement made to man if he is meritorious: “you preceded all of creation.” Seemingly, the Midrash justifies this statement based on the passuk: “and the spirit of G — d hovered above the surface of the waters” — a reference to the spirit of the Melech HaMashiach which includes all of the neshamos. This is still problematic. For, if the neshamah was only created on the first day of creation, it was still preceded by the heavens and the earth — which were the first things created on the first day. Note the sequence in the opening pesukim of Bereishis. First it records that: “In the beginning G — d created the heavens and the earth.” Only afterwards does it state: “and the spirit of G — d hovered above the surface of the waters.” So how can they say to a man deserving merit: “you preceded all of creation”?

It seems clear, therefore, that the Midrash does not intend to suggest that the spirit of Mashiach was only created on the first day of creation. For, in truth, the neshamos of Yisrael were conceived in thought prior to the creation of the world. As we know, the entire universe was only created for the benefit of Yisrael. The Sefas Emes proves this from the passuk: “בראשית ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ” — this passuk is interpreted as stating that G — d created the heavens and the earth for the Torah and for Yisrael — both of whom are referred to as “reishis,” meaning first — indicating their primary significance. Thus, the first passuk in the Torah teaches us that on the first day of creation, the spirit of Mashiach was already present; for, in reality, it had already been set apart before the creation of the world. Therefore, the deserving man is rightfully told: **“אתה”** — **קדמת לכל מעשה בראשית** — you preceded all of creation.

It is worthwhile introducing another explicit source stating that the neshamos of Yisrael were set aside prior to the creation of the world. The Zera Kodosh (Chukas) and the Bnei Yissaschar (Shabbasos 8, 1) cite a fascinating idea in the name of the great Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Rimanov, zy”a. He addresses the statement of the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 156a) that the time of Minchah on Shabbas kodesh is referred to as **“רעוא דרעוין”** — a time of good will — an opportune and auspicious time. For this reason, we state during Minchah on Shabbas (Tehillim 69, 14): **“ואני תפלתי לך ה' עת רצוין”** — As for me, may my prayer to You, Hashem, be at an opportune time. So, let us endeavor to explain why specifically the time of Minchah on Shabbas is an opportune and auspicious time.

His explanation is founded on the well — known fact that HKB”H had Yisrael in mind from the onset and created the world for them. Rashi expresses this fact as follows: **“בראשית”** — for Yisrael who are referred to as “reishis” — **“ברא אלקים את השמים ואת הארץ”** — G — d created the heavens and the earth. Now, the world was created on the evening prior to the first day, as it is written (Bereishis 1, 5): **“ויהי”** **“ערב ויהי בוקר יום אחד”** — there was evening and there was morning, one day. Thus, it turns out that at the time of Minchah on Shabbas, prior to creation, HKB”H’s desire to create the world for the sake of Yisrael originated. Consequently, on every Shabbas at Minchah time, this moment of good will is reawakened.

He Consulted with the Souls of the Tzaddikim

Let us return to the words of the Bnei Yissaschar (ibid.). He adds an interesting tidbit based on the Midrash to the explanation of the great Rabbi of Rimanov, zy”a. The Midrash states (B.R. 8, 7): **“רבי יהושע דסכנין בשם רבי שמואל אמר, בנפשותן של צדיקים נמלך, הדא הוא דכתיב (דברי הימים א ד — כג) המה היוצרים ויושבי נטעים וגדרה עם המלך במלאכתו ישבו שם... עם המלך מלך מלכי המלכים הקב”ה ישבו נפשות של צדיקים, שבהן נמלך הקב”ה וברא את העולם”** — the souls of the tzaddikim sat with the King of Kings, HKB”H; HKB”H consulted with them and created the universe.

The Bnei Yissaschar interprets the Midrash based on the following Zohar hakadosh (Lech Lecha 88a): **“באתערותא דלתתא אשכח אתערותא”** **“לעילא, דהא לא אתער לעילא עד דאתער לתתא”** — a positive influence from above cannot be elicited unless it has been triggered from below by mitzvos or good deeds performed by human beings. If this is the case, what event below was the stimulus for the creation of the world?

On that Shabbas, before the creation of the world, the idea of Yisrael and their potential was conceived. HKB”H imagined, so to speak, in His wisdom and thoughts, how much pleasure He would derive from Yisrael’s service once the world was created. This thought was enough to cause a trigger from below to create the world. This then is the message of the Midrash: **“נמלך בנפשותן של צדיקים, המה היוצרים ויושבי נטעים וגדרה”** **“עם המלך מלכו של עולם”** — the souls of the tzaddikim played a role, in a sense, in creating the world along with HKB”H. Their good deeds provided the necessary stimulus from below to elicit the creation of the world. This concludes the Bnei Yissaschar’s explanation.

Let us expand on this idea based on the following passuk (Yeshayah 55, 8): **“כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי נאום ה', כי גבהו שמים מארץ: 8) כן גבהו דרכי מדרכיכם ומחשבותי ממחשבותיכם”** — For My thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not My ways — the word of Hashem. As high as the heavens over the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. A human being can imagine a building in his mind. Nevertheless, this image and thought alone are not sufficient to actually build the building and transform it into a reality.

This is in direct contrast to HKB"H's thoughts. Just as his words and speech sufficed to create the world — as it is written (Tehillim 33, 6): **“בדבר ה' שמים נעשו”** — with the word of Hashem the heavens were made — so, too, HKB"H's thoughts effect a spiritual creation. Hence, on the Shabbas prior to creation — when He envisioned the neshamos of Yisrael and decided to create the world on their behalf — this thought alone served to create the neshamos of Yisrael.

This understanding provides us with some insight into the following passuk concerning the creation of man (Bereishis 2, 7): **“וייצר ה' אלקים את האדם עפר מן האדמה, ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים והיה האדם לנפש חיה”** — and Hashem G — d formed the man of soil from the earth, and blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living soul. The author of the Tanya writes in Likutei Amarim (Chapter 2) in the name of Sefer HaKaneh: **“מאן דנפח מתוכיה נפח, פירוש מתוכיותו ומפנימיותו”** — the one who blows, blows from within himself; thus, a part of the blower enters the object. Accordingly, when man was created, the soul of Adam HaRishon, containing all of the neshamos, already existed in the Blessed One's thoughts.

As we have explained, this refers to the neshamos of Yisrael that were conceived in thought on the first Shabbas prior to creation. Now, let us reexamine the passuk: **“and the spirit of G — d hovered above the surface of the waters. The Midrash taught us that this refers to the neshamah of the Melech HaMashiach, which contained all of the neshamos. So, the passuk informs us that the spirit of Mashiach hovered over the waters, although it was actually created already on the Shabbas prior to creation. Therefore, if man is meritorious, they say to him: “you preceded all of creation” — because you were conceived and created on the Shabbas prior to creation.**

Testimony from the Neshamah that Was Created on the Shabbas prior to Creation

We have now been enlightened and can comprehend how a Jew can testify with his utterance of **“vayechulu”** in kiddush over the wine — that HKB"H created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day. For, this testimony emanates from the neshamah — that divine portion from above — that was already set aside on the Shabbas prior to the creation of the world. As we learned from the Midrash, together with the Bnei Yissaschar's insight, the neshamah actually participated in the creation of the universe; HKB"H consulted with the souls of the tzaddikim. Therefore, the neshamah is qualified and trustworthy to testify that she saw HKB"H create the world in six days and rest on the seventh day.

How nicely this explains Rav Himnuna's statement in the Gemara (Shabbas 119b): **“כל המתפלל בערב שבת ואומר ויכולו, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו נעשה שותף להקב"ה במעשה בראשית”** — whoever prays on Erev Shabbas and recites **“vayechulu,”** Scripture treats him as if he had become a partner to HKB"H in the act of creation. The Maharsha

(ibid.) explained that this is because he testifies to the fact that HKB"H created the universe. Notwithstanding, we must still explain why this testimony makes him a partner to the act of creation.

Yet, based on what we have just explained, it works out beautifully. As explained, the testimony comes from the neshamah that was created on the Shabbas prior to creation — when the neshamos of Yisrael were conceived in thought and provided the stimulus for the creation of the universe. Therefore, specifically one who utters **“vayechulu”** — providing testimony regarding the creation of the world — is considered a partner to HKB"H in the act of creation. For, he is connecting with his spiritual self, his neshamah, that was conceived in thought prior to creation and was instrumental in the decision to create the world.

Additionally, we can better appreciate the significance of the passuk (Shemos 31, 16): **“ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת לעשות את השבת לדורותם: ברית עולם, ביני ובין בני ישראל הוא לעולם, כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת הארץ וביום השביעי שבת וינפש”** — Bnei Yisrael shall observe the Shabbas, to make the Shabbas an eternal covenant for their generations. Between Me and Bnei Yisrael, it is a sign forever that in a six — day period Hashem made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He relaxed and He rested. HKB"H reveals to us that the observance of Shabbas, Yisrael's testimony concerning the creation of the universe: **“ביני ובין בני ישראל את השבת לעולם”** — between Me and Bnei Yisrael, it is a sign forever — because this testimony emanates from the neshamos of Yisrael, which were alone with HKB"H prior to the creation of the world. Consequently, they are qualified to testify: **“כי ששת ימים עשה ה' את השמים ואת הארץ וביום השביעי שבת וינפש”** — that in a six — day period Hashem made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day He relaxed and He rested.

We can now insinuate this idea into the words of the Chasam Sofer cited above. He resolves the difficulty concerning our qualifications to testify regarding the events of creation as follows: **“בשעת יציאת מצרים ראינו בעינינו כי הוא הבורא, הוא החפץ, הוא היכול, אם כן על ידי יציאת מצרים נעשה עד על שבת בראשית”** — during the exodus from Mitzrayim we witnessed with our own eyes that HKB"H is the Creator and that He is omnipotent; witnessing the exodus from Mitzrayim gave us the credentials to testify concerning the creation. We can understand the matter as follows: we mention the exodus from Mitzrayim in our prayers and in kiddush in order to invoke the miracles associated with the exodus. By doing so, we release the neshamah from its own personal exile in Mitzrayim. For, she is confined within the body that does not serve Hashem adequately. Therefore, by means of the exodus from Mitzrayim, the neshamah is able to provide testimony regarding the creation of the universe which she witnessed.

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