



A Time for Distinction and Difference

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E20)

From Sanctity to Secularity – how to know and feel the difference.

Conflicting moods at Havdala

There is typically excitement or anticipation associated with embarking on a new project or beginning a new chapter in one's life. And some of that surely can be felt at Havdala as we approach the coming new week with its challenges and opportunities.

But a spiritually sensitive person can also feel an undeniable letdown. Shabbos is leaving and with it the spiritual gifts that it brought. The closeness that we forged with the Creator and with family that came with Shabbos have taken a back seat. The נשמה יתירה we were blessed with on Shabbos is heading back. We must shift from the celestial heights to the pedestrian street. Havdala recognizes and addresses these losses with a boost of encouragement to propel us forward into the weekdays.

With You we will not fear

The סופר הת"ם points our attention to the encouragement contained in the Posuk with which we introduce הברלה:¹

הנה א-ל ישועתי אבטח ולא אפחד כי עזי וזמרת י-ה ה' ויהי לי לישועה

The first part of the Posuk can be paraphrased as 'Hashem, we know that You are the source of our salvation and so we will not fear.' One who recognizes that everything is in Hashem's Hand does not fear the 'happenings' of one's life because there is only one relationship that 'counts.'

In the next part of the Posuk we affirm that the relationship of total dependence on Hashem is pleasing for us; indeed, we sing out in praise over our realization that all depends on Hashem.

Drawing from the spring or the well

The next Posuk that we recite in הברלה is the next Posuk in:

ושאבתם מים בששון ממצעיני הישועה

The מפרשים point out that when one draws from a מעין – a spring – there is a different feeling than when drawing from a well. A well always comes with a fear that this could be the last drink that one could draw from it. When drawing from a spring there is a sense of confidence that the source will give forth an unlimited supply of fresh water. We affirm that You, Hashem, are the מעין, the spring and source of compassion and salvation. That affirmation gives us confidence as we step out of the enveloping cushion of Shabbos into the

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¹ ישעיהו יב:ב



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otherwise frightening week. We are drawing from Your endless מעין שבת.

It's all in the Name

Hashem has different names. The four-letter name (י-ה-ו-ה) refers to Hashem's attribute of רחמים. It is surely no accident that in the פסוקים that introduce the הברלה the four-letter name of Hashem appears six times – Sunday through Friday! These פסוקים capture our תפילות for a week of ברכה and רחמים.

Hints in the parts of הברלה

The four parts of the הברלה form the acrostic of the word יבנה – (יין, בשמים, נר, הברלה). This hints at our prayer that now that Shabbos is over (during which building was forbidden), we look forward to יבנה המקדש the ultimate building project, with the prayer that it commences immediately!

Another hint contained in the acrostic of הברלה is the word בינה – understanding. The prayer for the gift of understanding is also part of our yearning as we step forward into the week. This acrostic can add a layer of 'understanding' into why the הברלה which we recite in the שמונה עשרה of מעריב is placed in אתה חונן...ומלמד לאנוש בינה.

The Wine

We have previously mentioned the benefits of wine which include happiness and, when imbibed in proper measure, an element of clarity of thought (רדי"ק). While those are true with any

cup of wine, they are especially true regarding a הברלה such as כוס של ברכה.

My cup overflows – כוסי רוויה

Unlike any other כוס של ברכה there is a custom to let the wine of הברלה spill over the brim of the cup.² This draws from the Gemara³ which teaches that when wine spills like water there is a סימן ברכה in that home. We are invoking the sense of plenty and blessing implied by spilling valuable wine as though it were water.

But the ט"ז says that the Gemara is not referring to the wine, but to the attitude of the homeowner when wine spills. The סימן ברכה is invoked when a person does not get angry when something 'serious' happens, like spilled wine, just as one would naturally not get angry when some water spills on the floor. This interpretation aligns with the Gemara⁴ which teaches that in the home where anger is present, Brocha is absent. When we are asking for ברכה to follow us into the coming week we ensure that there is no anger and that even יין נשפך כמים – the wine spills and causes no more irritation than water would.

From the bottom to the top

The תשב"ץ points out that the Brochos recited at Havdalah have an interesting sequence to them. They proceed from lowest to highest on one's face and from closest to furthest from oneself.

The הגפן refers to the sense located lowest of the senses on one's head and the taste of the wine can only be appreciated by one's tongue. It is the

² ט"ז או"ח סימן רצ"ו סעיף א'

³ עירובין סה.

⁴ טוטה ג:



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lowest sense and needs the source to be the closest. The בשמים are a step up. Fragrance can be appreciated by the nose and at a bit of a distance. Following the pattern, the נר is yet another step up to the eyes, and light can be sensed at great distance. Finally, the הברלה involves דעת. The mind is without limit and can be the vehicle to grasp that which is מסוף העולם – from one end of the time and place to the other. It is the highest and the furthest. Through הברלה we move up from the immediate and transitory to the most ethereal and eternal – מעלין בקודש.

A note about בשמים

The ט"ז comments⁵ on the בשמים and explains that by smelling the בשמים we are trying to comfort and restore our hurting Neshama which loses the נשמה יתירה when Shabbos ends. There is a logic to using the nose and a fragrance to comfort the Neshama. R' Shaya Winiarz writes⁶ that the Neshama comes in and leaves through the nose. The Posuk tells us ויפה באפיו – that Hashem blew the Neshama into Man through his nose and the Neshama leaves via the nose, as well. (Indeed, our custom to wish someone good health when they sneeze relates to the idea that a sneeze was the manner that the Neshama would leave the body, via the nose.) Thus, it makes sense to 'pacify' the Neshama via fragrance.

The eyes see the fire

Fire was created on שבת קודש of that first Shabbos. The Gemara⁷ refers to two things that

Hashem 'left' to create on מוצש"ק and fire is one of them. The Midrash⁸ teaches that the heavenly lights were cursed when Man sinned. However, owing to כבוד שבת, Hashem did not darken the world until after שבת קודש אדם. שבת אדם thought that this was it. His חטא caused eternal darkness. The Posuk⁹ testifies to his fear – וְאָמַר אֶךָ הַשֶּׁךְ יְשׁוּפְנֵי – surely the darkness will envelop me.

Just as he was despairing, Hashem gave him the idea to rub two flintstones together and out came light – a flame which could provide both light and heat. His relief and joy at the newfound fire is echoed in our Brocha.

Perhaps that is why we bring together two wicks, not just a solitary flame. While there can be comfort in a candle, there is hope and promise in a torch.

Separation – the Brocha of הברלה

Separation and distinction lie at the core of responsibility. When a soldier is commissioned to a new level of service he is at once distinguished from the other soldiers and is given greater responsibilities as well. That is the story of the עם ה'. Separate, distinguished, and responsible. The Holy Name rests on His People and we are called to bear that Name with distinction. The notion that everyone is the same is another way of saying that nobody must assume responsibility. That is clearly rejected when we recite Havdalah. For just as there is a difference between day and night, between the holy and the profane, there is a difference

⁵ ט"ז או"ח סימן רצ"ז ס"ק א'

⁶ In his book, 39 Things You CAN Do on Shabbos

⁷ פסחים נד.

⁸ בראשית רבה יא: ב'

⁹ תהלים קלט: יא'



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between כלל ישראל and the nations to whom we must serve as an example.

Without wisdom there are no distinctions

The Gemara¹⁰ teaches the rationale for placing הברלה in the first request in Ma'ariv – אתה חונן – אתה חונן. We could assume that it is placed there because that is the first Brocha that signals that this Amidah is a weekday תפילה. But the ירושלמי teaches that אם אין דעה הברלה מניין – if there is no wisdom, there are no distinctions. Without wisdom people may notice differences, but they cannot pick up distinctions. Distinctions are not just differences; they are the differences that make a difference.

Make the separation – aloud

To permit מלאכה one must declare the separation. At minimum, that declaration must be ברוך המבדיל בין קודש לחול. It is important to note that one who, for whatever reason, did not Daven Ma'ariv may not do מלאכה without a declaration of separation. Permission to do מלאכה is not only a matter of time; it requires a verbal declaration. This requirement can be inadvertently overlooked if, for example, a woman wants to light the Havdalah candle but has not yet declared the separation.

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach זצ"ל would say שבוע טוב to the bus or cab driver after Shabbos, thus eliciting a שבוע טוב from the driver who may

not have recited ברוך המבדיל. In that way, the driver would have minimally fulfilled the requirement to separate, and he would thereby not be doing (further) מלאכה before 'Havdalah.'

A precious prayer

Those who know me are aware of my special relationship with Yiddish. You can present an idea in English, but you can only give over the feeling of the Jewish heart in a Jewish tongue. In that light, I encourage you to take a cue from generations of Jewish women and recite גוט פון אברהם before or after Havdalah. You will be hearing an echo of the yearnings of the soul.

Demonstrating preciousness

The Rema¹¹ brings the custom to extinguish the candle in the wine one spills from the cup. Indeed, many have the custom to touch one's eyes and pockets with the moisture of this 'mix' of the flame and the wine. The Mitzvah is dear to us and we thereby demonstrate its חביבות – preciousness.

Havdalah is a farewell, it is a separation, but it is also a boost and a lift of hope and prayer for the coming week. When we wish one another a גוט וואך we are announcing that Shabbos is over, but we are also filling our mouths with blessing –

May the coming week bring you boundless ברכה והצלחה ברוחניות ובגשמיות

Takeaway: I will try to focus my thoughts at Havdalah on responsibility and Brocha

¹⁰ תלמוד ירושלמי ברכות פרק ה' הלכה ב' 10

¹¹ אור"ח רצ"ו: א' 11