

We read in this week's *Parashah* that Avraham said (15:8), "My *Adon* / Master, *Hashem*/Elokim, 'By what shall I know that I am to inherit it?'" Citing this verse, the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 7b) teaches: "From the day that *Hashem* created the world, no person called Him '*Adon*' until Avraham came along and call Him '*Adon*'." [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) writes: Everyone is looking for independence, to be his or her own master, but they don't realize that they are looking in all the wrong places. If they were wise, they would discern that there is nothing in the world that does not come from *Hashem*, so how can one hope to be independent, to be a master, except by accepting Him as the One Independent Master?

It is no wonder, R' Charlap writes, that people seeking misguided forms of independence actually become enslaved. From where else can independence come if not from a connection with *Hashem*, and they are distant from Him! There is no independence, no being a master, except when one devotes himself completely to *Hashem*. This is what our Sages mean when they say, "There is no free person except one who engages in Torah study." This is because until one accepts *Hashem* as Master, one cannot know what true independence is or what it means to truly be a master. Before Avraham, no one had done this. (*Mei Marom* Vol. II, Introduction)

Shabbat

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the *Chafetz Chaim*; died 1933) writes: It is good for a person to eat fish at all three *Shabbat* meals, unless fish do not agree with him or he dislikes fish, for *Shabbat* was given to us for *Oneg* / delight, and not to cause pain.

He adds: If fishmongers price gauge, it is appropriate to decree that the community not buy fish for a few weeks until prices fall. If one bought fish before the decree was made, he is permitted to eat what he bought.

(*Mishnah Berurah* 242:2)

R' Chaim Mordechai Margaliot z"l (Ukraine; died 1823) writes: In his work *Yam Shel Shlomo* (*Gittin* ch. 4 #51), R' Shlomo Luria z"l (1510-1573; Poland; known as "*Maharshal*") calls to task the many people in his time who did not observe the *Halachah* requiring the daytime meal on *Shabbat* to be more substantial than the Friday night meal. R' Luria adds there: Personally, I drew a line for myself, and I do not eat fish on Friday night so that the daytime meal will have something significant that the nighttime meal does not have. Even if the nighttime meal has many delicacies, none can compare to the fish course that the daytime meal has. (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* 271:1)

At *Shabbat*-morning *Kiddush* following the marriage of the son of R' Yechezkel Shraga Halberstam z"l (1813-1898; rabbi and *Chassidic Rebbe* of Sieniawa, Poland; known as the "*Shinever Rav*") to the daughter of R' Yehoshua Rokeach z"l (1825-1894; second *Belzer Rebbe*), the groom's father asked for *schnaps* on which to recite *Kiddush*, as was his custom. The *Belzer Rebbe* told him, "We use only wine for *Kiddush*, so we can save the *Berachah* of *She'hakol* to recite over the fish at the *Kiddush*--the choicest of the day's foods." (If one says *Kiddush* over *schnaps*, whose *Berachah* also is *She'hakol*, he would not say a separate blessing on the fish. And no *Berachah* is recited on the fish at the meals, because *Hamotzi* exempts the other foods from blessings.) Hearing this argument, the *Shinever Rav* changed his custom and began making *Kiddush* over wine. (*Parashat Mordechai* p.187)

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“And when He had finished speaking with him, Elokim ascended from upon Avraham.” (17:22)

Rashi z”l writes: We learn from this (i.e., from the words “from upon Avraham”) that the righteous are the Chariot of the Omnipresent G-d. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Leib Mintzberg z”l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel) explains: Simply stated, the *Shechinah* is present in this world because of the righteous; therefore, it is as if they are the seat of the *Shechinah*. (Ben Melech)



“Why do you say, Yaakov, and declare, Yisrael, ‘My way is hidden from Hashem, and my judgment has been passed over by my Kel’? Could you not have known even if you had not heard, that the eternal Kel is Hashem, Creator of the ends of the earth, Who neither wearies nor tires, Whose discernment is beyond investigation?” (Yeshayah 40:27-28—the opening verses of the Haftarah)

Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekudah z”l (Spain; early 11th century) writes that these verses teach one of the sets of fundamental insights that together justify our *Bitachon* / trust in *Hashem*, specifically: *Hashem* watches over mankind, He does not abandon man or ignore him, nothing is hidden from *Hashem*, and nothing causes Him to forget anything else.

(Chovot Ha’levavot: Sha’ar Habitachon ch.3)

R’ Pinchas Yehuda Lieberman z”l (Yerushalayim; 1930-2005) elaborates based on the commentary of R’ David Kimchi z”l (*Radak*; 1160–1235; Narbonne, France):

“Why do you say, Yaakov, and declare, Yisrael”--Why does the long exile cause you to say:

“My way is hidden from Hashem”--“He no longer watches over us, and He ignores the many troubles that we suffer,” and, furthermore . . .

“My judgment has been passed over by my Kel?”--“He does not judge those who oppress us”? Do not say this!

“Could you not have known even if you had not heard, that the eternal Kel is Hashem”--Is it not obvious that *Hashem* always watches over the world and judges it, for He is **“Creator of the ends of the earth.”** Since the world is His handiwork, He surely pays attention to it.

Perhaps you will say, “Yes, He does watch over the world, but sometimes He gets tired.” That is not so, for He is the One **“Who neither wearies nor tires.”**

You might ask: If *Hashem* created the world and He watches over it at all times, why does He not rescue His nation from the long exile and its suffering? The answer is that He is the One **“Whose discernment is beyond investigation.”** *Hashem* knows what He is doing, but it is beyond our understanding. (Pitchei Lev Al Chovot Ha’levavot)

“My Adon / Master, Hashem/Elokim, ‘By what shall I know that I am to inherit it?’” (15:8)

The *Gemara* (*Nedarim* 32a) asks: Why was Avraham punished that his descendants were enslaved in Egypt for 210 years? One answer that the *Gemara* gives is that Avraham erred by asking the question in our verse. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Nosson Sternhartz z”l (1780-1845; foremost student of R’ Nachman of Breslov z”l) writes: Any fault that our Sages attribute to the great *Tzaddikim*, the Patriarchs of the world, is of a similar nature to this case, where Avraham tried to press *Hashem* to bring the ultimate redemption earlier than He planned. Here, as soon as *Hashem* promised Avraham that his descendants would inherit *Eretz Yisrael*, Avraham wanted it to be a done deal already. He wanted to know exactly how it would happen, and he wanted to inherit the Land forever. (*Likkutei Halachot: Hil. Gezeilah* 5:8)

“He took all these to Him--he cut them in the center, and placed each piece opposite its counterpart. . . So it happened--the sun set, and it was very dark. Behold! There was a smoky furnace and a torch of fire which passed between these pieces.” (15:10, 17)

Rashi z”l explains: *Hashem* was making a *Brit* / covenant with Avraham to keep His promise to give the Land as an inheritance to Avraham’s descendants. It was the custom for parties to a covenant to divide an animal and to pass between its parts (see *Yirmiyahu* 34:19). Here, the smoking furnace and the flaming torch passed between the pieces as representatives of the Divine *Shechinah*, which is referred to as ‘fire.’ [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Yosef Albo z”l (Spain; 1380-1444) explains why a *Brit* was formalized in this way: Making a covenant means creating a lasting bond of love between the parties to the covenant, so that they become one unit, and each protects the other as he would protect himself. Parties to a *Brit* would cut an animal in half and pass between its parts, as if to say, “Just as these two halves were once part of a unit and each felt the other’s pain, until death separated them, so we will be as one unit, and only death will separate us.”

R’ Albo elaborates: Parties to a *Brit* undertake to feel each other’s pain, and each party to the covenant commits to coming to the aid of the other, even at great cost. Certainly, one party to the *Brit* must never conceal information if he becomes aware that a third party is planning to harm the other party to the covenant. In addition, one party to a *Brit* reveals his secrets and innermost thoughts to the other, for the other is not separate from himself. This, R’ Albo adds, is the essence of the *Mitzvah* (*Vayikra* 19:18), “*Ve’ahavtah le’rei’acha kamocho*” / “You shall love your friend as yourself”--complete love that unites two people as one.

(*Sefer Ha’ikkarim* IV ch.45)