



Likkutei Sichos

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Preparing for a Mitzvah

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1.

WHY WERE THE ORIGINAL TONGS CREATED ON *EREV* SHABBOS AT TWILIGHT?

In this week's¹ chapter {of *Pirkei Avos*},² the *Tanna*³ lists ten things that “were created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight.” He then cites another opinion, which includes “also the burial place of Moshe and the ram of our father Avraham,” and concludes: “And some say also destructive spirits;⁴ and also tongs, made by tongs.”

The Talmud explains in tractate *Pesachim*⁵ that “tongs, made by tongs” means that tongs can be made only by using another pair of tongs.⁶ This raises the question: Who made the original tongs? Our *Tanna* answers that the original tongs were a Heavenly creation, and **they** were made on *erev* Shabbos at twilight.

We need to clarify: What is the connection between the (creation of these) tongs and the time of twilight on *erev* Shabbos?

Regarding the other inventions listed in the mishnah, the commentators⁷ explain why they were created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight: Unlike those things created during the six days of Creation, which are strictly within the realm of the natural, these latter inventions were miraculous creations. Therefore, they were created in proximity to Shabbos, since Shabbos is the time of rest and respite from the creation of natural things.

However, the novelty in the manufacture of “tongs, {which are} made with tongs” involves a natural process — the same applies (and, in fact, with greater novelty) to all animals and plants: In order for an animal or plant to come into

¹ {Between Pesach and Rosh Hashanah, it is customary to study one chapter of *Pirkei Avos* every Shabbos after *Mincha*.}

² *Avos* ch.5, mishnah 6.

³ {A title given to a Sage from the era of the Mishnah.}

⁴ {I.e., demons.}

⁵ *Pesachim* 54a. See also Rashi, Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenura (and others) on the mishnah here.

⁶ {A metalsmith needs to use a (previously made) pair of tongs in order to form metal into tongs.}

⁷ *Derech Chaim* (by *Maharal*); see Rambam and the sources quoted in *Midrash Shmuel*, et al.

existence, a prior animal or plant had to exist ({going back} until {the first animal or plant, which was} created by Hashem). So why is it that tongs specifically were created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight?⁸

Another even more perplexing point: The Talmud says in tractate *Sanhedrin*⁹ that the reason Adam was created on the sixth day {of Creation — *erev* Shabbos}, (after all the other creations) was “in order (that he would find everything prepared, so) that he would partake in the feast immediately.” Based on the above discussion, however, the original tongs were only created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight — after the creation of Adam — so we cannot say that “**everything** was prepared,” as the “tongs” had not yet been “prepared.”

[The other “ten things...” {that were created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight} pose no difficulty, as they were all needed for later generations, and were unnecessary (they were not “prepared”) for **Adam**. “Tongs,” however, are seemingly no different from anything else encompassed by the teaching, “everything was prepared” — which includes everything that was created during the six days of Creation].

2.

THREE QUESTIONS

We must also clarify:

a) Why does the mishnah tell us this by **informing us** that “tongs, made by tongs”? This term does not refer to the **original** tongs that were created.

(On the contrary, simply understood, the mishnah refers to a **subsequent** pair of tongs, **tongs** that were “made” with existing tongs. It is only that we can deduce that the original tongs must have been a Divine creation, and from

⁸ As per the difficulty posed in *Pirkei Moshe* (of Rabbi Moshe Almushninu) here {on this mishnah}.

⁹ *Sanhedrin* 38a and Rashi’s commentary there.

this (wording in the mishnah) it is understood that the intent of the mishnah is to inform us that a pair of tongs were created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight)—

Seemingly, the mishnah should have said¹⁰ this clearly and **concisely** — “and also *the* tongs” (as it is indeed recorded in tractate *Pesachim*:¹¹ “Rabbi Yehudah says, ‘also *the* tongs’”).

- b) From the fact that the **same** opinion adds **both** — destructive spirits and tongs — clearly, they share a common denominator, because of which they were both (according to the particular approach of this opinion) created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight.

[True, the wording “and **also** tongs...” — and not “**and** tongs” (as the previous opinion {in the mishnah} says: “also the burial place... **and** the ram...”)] — implies that destructive spirits and tongs are separate cases. Nonetheless, we must say that they share a common denominator, which, according to this opinion, makes it necessary to add them {to the mishnah} besides {those things included according to} the earlier opinions.]

We need to clarify: What is the common denominator between destructive spirits and tongs?

- c) What is the practical lesson in *avodah*¹² that we learn from the clause, “also tongs, made by tongs,” in general; and specifically, in “matters of piety,” which is the subject of tractate *Avos*?¹³

The other enumerated things have, at the very least, a unique connection to the Jewish people, and as Mishnah commentators explain¹⁴ — they exist “for the benefit of Israel.” Tongs, however, have no specific connection to Jews, and certainly not to the **avodah** of Jews.

¹⁰ As per the difficulty posed in *Pirkei Moshe* (of Rabbi Moshe Almuehshinu).

¹¹ *Pesachim* 54a.

¹² {Divine service.}

¹³ See *Bava Kama* 30a.

¹⁴ *Midrash Shmuel* on this mishnah. And see also *Meiri* here.

3.

THE AVODAH OF SHABBOS VS THE WEEKDAYS

This will be understood by prefacing with the (deeper) meaning of the above statement of our Sages:¹⁵ Adam was created on the sixth day (after everything was “prepared”) “in order that he would partake of the feast immediately,” so that he would have everything “prepared” to be able to (immediately) perform his *avodah*.

For it is a general principle¹⁶ that “**everything** that was created during the six days of Creation requires an action {by a person} (i.e., repair)” — {as implied by the verse} “*that Hashem created to do*¹⁷ — to repair,” and it is repaired by {the *avodah* of} a person. This is the meaning of Adam’s “feast” — the things that he required for his *avodah*¹⁸ — “everything that was created during the six days of creation,” which he needed to repair.

This is also the deeper reason why the things created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight were **not** part of Adam’s “feast.” And since every Jew is like Adam¹⁹ — “you are called Adam”²⁰ — clearly, these things also are not part of his “feast,” the *avodah* of every Jew {to refine worldly things} (even) in **later** generations:

These ten things listed {in the mishnah} are not “prepared” for a person’s *avodah*. They do not require any action or repair by a person, since Hashem created them from the outset as “complete” and “prepared.” Therefore, they were created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight — close to **Shabbos** — which is a time of delight and rest from action and toil.

Even the *avodas Hashem* on Shabbos is not to refine and repair the **worldly matters** of the six days of Creation (since on Shabbos, we are in a

¹⁵ {See sec. 1.}

¹⁶ *Bereishis Rabbah* 11:6 and Rashi’s commentary there.

¹⁷ *Bereishis* 2:3.

¹⁸ The **broad** meaning of “feast” includes all of a person’s needs. *Avodah* is his primary need, for it is the purpose of his existence.

¹⁹ See *Sanhedrin* 37a, 38a.

²⁰ *Yevamos* 61a, and the sources cited there. And see *Likkutei Torah*, “*Nitzavim*,” 47b.

sanctified state and removed from worldly things — mundane matters). Rather, the *avodah* of Shabbos is within the very realm of holiness, to ascend from level to level. Therefore, this *avodah* is performed then with delight (without toil).²¹

4.

THE NEED FOR SELF SACRIFICE

Thus, the ten above-mentioned things (and the *avodah* of Shabbos) are not included in the “feast,” i.e., the *avodah*, of a person because they are intrinsically **beyond** other created things. (And therefore, they do not lack the requirement “to do — to repair” through a person’s *avodah*).

Likewise, on the other extreme, there are also things²² that are **not** (intrinsically) “ready” for a person’s *avodah* because of their **inferiority** to the created things of the six days of Creation, and a person cannot repair them by engaging in regular, ordered, *avodah*. To repair them, a person’s *avodah* must not be {done in an ordered, limited manner, as expressed in the verse}, “and live by them,”²³ but with self sacrifice, “with all your might — בכל מאדך,”²⁴ beyond his (natural) limitations.

Therefore, **these** things are also not connected to the “feast,” the *avodah*, of a person, for a person’s *avodah* as was (originally) instituted from Above is structured in a way reflected by the phrase, “and **live** by them,” specifically — in an orderly fashion.

[This is alluded to in the name *Adam* — אדם. As known,²⁵ the letters א'ד'ם symbolize the ordered structure of a person ({א symbolizes} the head, {ד symbolizes} the torso, and {ם symbolizes} the leg; thought, speech, and action) —

²¹ Regarding all of this, see *Likkutei Torah*, “Balak,” 72a ff., and in many other sources.

²² {An example of such a thing is given in Section 5, below.}

²³ *Vayikra* 18:5; *Sanhedrin* 74a.

²⁴ {*Devarim* 6:5.}

²⁵ *Likkutei Torah*, *Behaaloscha* 31c. And see *Hemshech* “VeKachah” 5637, ch. 20; et al.

emblematic of an ordered {limited} *avodah*.²⁶ In contrast, the *avodah* of “with all your might” is indicated when the letters of מִאֵד are **rearranged** {so that the last letter becomes the first} to form the word, “מֵאֵד, might” — *avodah* that is beyond limitation].²⁷

5.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF DESTRUCTIVE SPIRITS

This explains why this last opinion says further, “also destructive spirits, and also tongs...”:

“**Destructive spirits**” cannot be rectified by a person’s *avodah* — they came into existence because of a person’s sins,²⁸ and his responsibility is to negate them — to destroy them {as he cannot repair them}.

True, the **ultimate** goal is to transform them into {forces of} good. In the words of our Sages²⁹ {commenting on the verse,³⁰ “I will eliminate wild beasts (connoting also spirits of destruction) from the land”}: “He will eliminate them from causing harm.” (That is, they will **exist**, but they won’t cause harm; they will not be destroyers {since they will be transformed}). However, this {transformation} neither rectifies nor changes **the beasts themselves**, because the transformation is not accomplished by **revealing** the good that they have within them, for their very identity is that of **destructive spirits**. Rather,

²⁶ {The same is true of the spiritual level of “Adam” {man}: It refers to a limited, ordered level of G-dliness, where the G-dly light is enclosed and limited by vessels (*keilim*). It is referred to as “man,” since man is, by definition, a limited being, whose emotions are controlled and restricted by his limited mind. See *Hemshech* “*VeKachah*” 5637, ch. 20.}

²⁷ Series of *Maamarim* entitled “*VeKachah*” 5637, ch. 20.

²⁸ See commentary of *Nachalas Avos* on the mishnah here (at the end); Ramban on *Vayikra* 26:6 (regarding wild beasts); and see *Pirkei Moshe* here.

²⁹ *Toras Kohanim*, *Vayikra* 26:6. And see the Tzemach Tzedek’s *Or Hatorah (Yahal Or)* on *Tehillim* 92:1 (and the addenda there); *Hemshech* “*Mayim Rabim*” 5636, ch. 161ff; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, first *sicha* of *parshas Bechukosai* (and see p. 196 there); Vol. 17, p. 59ff.

³⁰ {*Vayikra* 26:6.}

we bring about their **reinvention**³¹ — they become (akin to) a **new** entity, something that previously did not exist.³²

And this is the connection between the creation of destructive spirits and *erev* Shabbos at twilight:

The existence — the “purpose” — of destructive spirits, as they were created **from Above**, is for them to be ultimately transformed to good. Therefore, their creation (from Above) took place on *erev* Shabbos at twilight, for this novelty regarding destructive spirits (“that they will not cause harm”) is impossible according to the natural, worldly limitations({associated with} the six days of Creation). It is possible only through the power of **Shabbos**, which surpasses the (limitations of the) world.

And, therefore, this **avodah** {of transforming destructive spirits into forces of good} is also not part of a person’s “feast,” for the rectification of destructive spirits is accomplished {only} by a person going **out** of his “*Adam*” — his natural limitations.³³

6.

*HECHSHER*³⁴ MITZVAH

This opinion then adds further, “and **also** tongs...”: “Tongs” were also created on *erev* Shabbos at twilight for a similar reason (to that of destructive spirits). Only, this reasoning is less applicable to tongs, and so the mishnah specifically writes “**also** tongs...”; and the mishnah explains {that the reason

³¹ {In the original Yiddish, “נאר מ'פועלט אין זיי א חידוש.”}

³² Although before Adam’s sin the beasts also did not inflict harm (as discussed by Ramban, cited above {fn. 28}) — nevertheless, that earlier state does not compare to the state alluded to by the “He will eliminate them from causing harm” that will take place when Moshiach comes (see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, p. 194, fn. 29).

³³ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 12 (p. 74ff) at length, where it is explained that the concept of creating something new (in the *avodah* of *ishapcha* {– the transformation of evil} etc.), stems from the power of the Essence of Hashem that is within a Jew’s soul, for Hashem and the Jewish people are completely one — see there.

³⁴ {The initial preparation required in order to observe a mitzvah.}

tongs were created on erev Shabbos at twilight} is because the tongs are “tongs, made by tongs”:

The phrase, “tongs, made by tongs,” informs us that the purpose of the creation of the original tongs was **only** in order so that another pair of tongs could be made later. All creations (of the six days of Creation) — including those things from which come (or are used to make) other things — were (also) created with an **intrinsic** purpose and aim, **for themselves**. However, the first tongs were created with no purpose or aim for themselves. They were created only because tongs need to be made by other tongs — “tongs, made by tongs” — so that with them, Adam could make a second pair of tongs.

Everything existing in the world exists “first” in the Torah.³⁵ In the Torah, the concept that “tongs, made by tongs” is analogous to the idea of *hechsher mitzvah*.

The act of preparation is not a mitzvah; it is only the **means** by which we can fulfill the mitzvah with a **different** object. For example:³⁶ “One may cut down trees to prepare charcoal in order to fashion iron” (“for a circumcision knife”). No mitzvah is performed with the trees; they are only a preparation of a preparation, etc., for the mitzvah of circumcision.

Since the cutting of trees is only a preparation {for the mitzvah of circumcision}, the wood itself **seemingly** should not (even according to Torah logic) become a vessel for holiness. This action itself {of cutting down trees} does not draw G-dliness {into the world, since no mitzvah is performed with the wood}. True, when a Jew eats for the sake of Heaven, “in order to serve Hashem with the energy provided by the food,”³⁷ the energy is clothed “in the words of Torah and prayer,”³⁷ as long as he is energized by what he ate. However, we cannot even say that the wood is somehow “clothed” in the mitzvah.

³⁵ See the beginning of *Bereishis Rabbah*; *Zohar*, vol. 2, 161a-b.

³⁶ *Shabbos* 130a, and Rashi there.

³⁷ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” beg. of ch. 8; see loc. cit., ch. 7, and ch. 37 (47a).

{However, this is not so regarding the items used in preparing to do a mitzvah:} **Their** purpose is achieved only when a **second** entity {in the case of circumcision, the male organ} becomes a mitzvah and a vessel for holiness.³⁸

7.

NOT ONLY A MEANS TO AN END

This is the *chiddush* of the mishnah when it says that “also tongs, made by tongs”: Hashem Himself (“the very Essence and Being of the Emanator”)³⁹ also involved Himself with creating the “tongs” that were created only in order to be used to manufacture another pair of tongs.

And since the original tongs were the handiwork of Hashem (in a revealed sense), we cannot say that the entire purpose of their existence is only for the sake of something else, and after they have been used to make the second pair of tongs, there is no longer any purpose for their existence. Rather, they also attain significance and purpose for **themselves**.

The reason this is so on a physical level is because it is so in **Torah**: From the standpoint of an ordered *avodah* — an *avodah* based on reason — the *hechsher* mitzvah has no purpose or significance for itself {it is only a means to an end}. However, from the standpoint of the **Divine Will** (of Hashem Himself) that is within the mitzvah, there is no difference between the mitzvah itself (which draws G-dliness {into the world}) and the preparation for the mitzvah.⁴⁰

Therefore, when a Jew stands with a supernal *bittul*⁴¹ to the Divine Will ({in a manner} beyond reason), it makes no difference to him what the Divine Will wants of him. As the Alter Rebbe says,⁴² even “had he been commanded to

³⁸ {I.e., they themselves do not serve as a vessel for holiness, but are only a means for another thing to become holy.}

³⁹ *Iggeres HaKodesh*, ch. 20 (130a ff).

⁴⁰ Note *Likkutei Dibburim* (vol. 4, p. 1540) that from the standpoint of the Supernal Will in mitzvos, even the beautification of a mitzvah is part of the essence of the mitzvah (see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 3, p. 954, fn. 7).

⁴¹ {*Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

⁴² *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shlach*,” 40a; and see *Hemshech* 5666, end of p. 360ff.

chop wood” (which would not accomplish any {supernal} “unification” or elicit any flow of G-dliness), it would not detract from his enthusiasm in fulfilling the command.

[Therefore, **this** *avodah* also has a connection to *erev* Shabbos at twilight, for it is an *avodah* that is beyond the *avodah* of the structure of “Adam” — an ordered *avodah*, as discussed above.⁴³ From this, a similar reality evolved concerning physical creations, as well — the creation of tongs took place on *erev* Shabbos at twilight].

8.

THE GREAT DEEDS OF CHIYA

This is also a practical lesson in matters of piety⁴⁴ — how important it is that a Jew should also be involved in things that are “no more” than a *hechsher* mitzvah. {This is illustrated through} **a practical episode**.⁴⁵

The Talmud⁴⁶ relates: “How great are the deeds of Chiya,” that he personally involved himself not only with actually studying Torah with Jewish children, but he also personally performed all the **preparations** and **the preparations-for-the-preparations** (the *hechsher* for the *hechsher*) required for the teaching of Torah. **He personally sowed flax, weaved nets, trapped deer, prepared parchment, and wrote the Five Books** {Torah scrolls} for the children.

This is astonishing: Why did Rabbi Chiya need to do all those things by himself? Could he have not given these preparatory jobs to one of his students or servants (tasking someone who was **not** a full-time Torah student)?⁴⁷

⁴³ {In Sec. 4.}

⁴⁴ {As mentioned at the end of Sec. 2 above, the topic of *Pirkei Avos* is “matters of piety.”}

⁴⁵ {Lit., “practical action is great.” It is a general principle in matters of Torah that a practical precedent is the greatest proof for the truth of an idea. See, for example, *Shabbos* 21a and Rashi’s commentary there.}

⁴⁶ *Kesubos* 103b; *Bava Metzia* 85b.

⁴⁷ {In the Hebrew original, “*yoshev ohel*”; lit., “someone who sits in a tent (where Torah is learned).”}

On account of his superlative *bittul* to the Supernal Will, however, Rabbi Chiya showed the same dedication — the same enthusiasm — for doing the preparations, and the preparations-for-the-preparations, as for doing the mitzvah itself.

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Behar-Bechukosai*, 5737 (1977)