The Bubbling Eroticism of Tzedakah
Sukkah 49a - b

Rabbah bar Bar Hana citing Rabbi Johanan stated, The Pits have existed since the Six days of creation, for it is said, *The roundings of your thighs are like the links of a chain the work of the hands of a skilled workman* (SS7:2). ‘The rounding of your thighs’ refers to the Pits; ‘like the links of a chain’ implies that their cavity descends to the abyss; ‘the work of the hands of a skilled workman’ means that they are the skillful handiwork of the Holy Blessing One.

The school of Rabbi Ishmael taught: *Beresheet*; read not *beresheet* (“in the beginning”) but *bara sheet* (“God created the sheetteen, the pit”).

It has been taught, Rabbi Jose says, The cavity of the Pits descended to the abyss, for it is said, Let me sing of my well-beloved, a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. *My well-beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill And he dug it, and cleared of it stones, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a vat therein* (Is 5:1,2). ‘And planted it with the choicest vine’, refers to the Temple; ‘and built a tower in the midst of it’, refers to the altar; ‘and also hewed out a vat therein’, refers to the Pits. …

It has been taught, Rabbi Eleazar bar Zadok stated, There was a small passage-way between the ascent and the altar, on the westward of the ascent, and once in seventy years the young of the priesthood used to descend there and gather up therefrom the congealed wine which had the appearance of rounds of pressed figs, and proceeded to burn it in a state of sanctity as it is said, *In the holy place shall you pour out a drink-offering of strong drink unto the Lord* (Num 28:7), just as its libation was done in sanctity, so must its burning be done in sanctity. But what is the proof? — Ravina answered, An analogy is made between two expressions of ‘holy’. It is written here, ‘In the holy place shall you pour out a drink-offering of strong drink unto the Lord’, and it is written elsewhere, Then shall you burn the remainder with fire, it shall not be eaten, because it is holy (Ex 29).

Whose view is followed in what we learned, ‘The law of sacrilege applies to drink-offerings at the beginning, but after they have descended into the Pits, the law of sacrilege does not apply to them’? Must we say that it is that of Rabbi Eleazar bar Zadok, for if it were that of the Rabbis [the objection could be raised: Did they not state] that the Pits descended to the abyss? You may even say that it is that of the Rabbis, [but it refers to] where it was collected.

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There are some who read: Must we say that it is that of the Rabbis, and not that of Rabbi Eleazar bar Zadok, for if it were that of Rabbi Eleazar bar Zadok, [the objection would arise:] Do they not still retain their hallowed character? — You may even say that it is that of Rabbi Eleazar, for sacrilege cannot apply to anything whose commandment has already been fulfilled.

Rav Eleazar stated, Greater is one who performs charity than [one who offers] all the sacrifices, for it is said, To do charity and justice is more acceptable to the Holy One than sacrifice (Pr 21:3).

Rabbi Eleazar stated, A young scholar who has not much wine should swallow it in quaffs. Raba used to gulp down the cup of benediction.

Raba remarked, What is the implication of what was written, How beautiful are thy steps in sandals, O prince's daughter (SS 7)? How beautiful are the steps of Israel when they go up [to Jerusalem] to celebrate a festival. ‘O prince’s daughter’, means, daughter of our father Abraham, who is called prince, as it is said, The princes of the peoples are gathered together, the people of the God of Abraham (Ps 47). ‘The God of Abraham’! And not the God of Isaac and Jacob? But the meaning is, The God of Abraham who was the first of proselytes.

The School of Rav Anan taught: It is written, The roundings of your thighs (SS 7:2). Why are the words of the Torah compared to the thigh? To teach you that just as the thigh is hidden, so should the words of the Torah be hidden, and this is the import of what Rabbi Eleazar said, What is the implication of the text, It has been told you, O human, what is good, and what the Holy One requires of you: Only to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God (Micah 6:8)? ‘To do justly’ means [to act in accordance with] justice; ‘to love mercy’ refers to acts of loving kindness ‘and to walk humbly with thy God’ refers to attending to funerals and dowering a bride for her wedding. Now can we not make a deduction a fortiori: If in matters which are normally performed publicly the Torah enjoins ‘to walk humbly’, how much more so in matters that are normally done privately?

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R. Eleazar further stated, Gemillut Hasadim is greater than charity, for it is said, Sow to yourselves according to your charity, but reap according to your hesed (Hosea 10:12); if a person sows, it is doubtful whether one will eat [the harvest] or not, but when a person reaps, that person will certainly eat. Rabbi Eleazar further stated, The reward of charity depends entirely upon the extent of the kindness in it, for it is said, Sow to yourselves according to charity, but reap according to the kindness.

Our Rabbis taught, In three respects is Gemillut Hasadim superior to charity: charity can be done only with one's money, but Gemillut Hasadim can be done with one's person and one's money. Charity can be given only to the poor, Gemillut Hasadim both to the rich and to the poor. Charity can be given to the living only, Gemillut Hasadim can be done both to the living and to the dead.

Rabbi Eleazar further stated, One who executes charity and justice is regarded as though they had filled all the world with kindness, for it is said, If a person loves charity and justice, then the earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Holy One (33:5). But lest you say that whoever wishes to do good succeeds without difficulty, Scripture expressly says, How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God (Ps 36:8). You might say that this applies also to a person who fears God, so Scripture expressly says, But the lovingkindness of the Holy One is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear God (Ps 103:7).

Rabbi Hama bar Papa stated, Everyone who is endowed with grace is without doubt a God-fearer, for it is said, But the lovingkindness of the Holy One is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear God. Rabbi Eleazar further stated, What is the purport of what was written, She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the Torah of lovingkindness is on her tongue (Pr 31:26)? Is there then a Torah of lovingkindness and a Torah which is not of lovingkindness? But the fact is that Torah [which is studied] for its own sake is a ‘Torah of lovingkindness’, whereas Torah [which is studied] for an ulterior motive is a Torah which is not of lovingkindness.

Some there are who say, Torah [which is studied] in order [subsequently] to teach it is a ‘Torah of lovingkindness’, but Torah [which is] not [studied subsequently] to teach it is a Torah which is not of lovingkindness.

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