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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A Bribe of Kindness

“Stand fast and see” (14:13)

There was a friend of mine who suffered a terrible tragedy.

His sister was involved in a horrific car accident which left her brain seriously starved of oxygen for critical minutes. The doctors said she would probably never regain consciousness.

This terrible shock hit the teenage children worst. Who is more important in your teenage years than your mother? The hospital moved quickly to bring in psychological support for the family.

The psychologist recommended to the father that he should go out and buy them expensive presents. The eldest, who had passed her driving test but as yet had no car, received a super-compact mini that could be parked nose first. I forget what presents the other children received, but they were equally lavish.

At the time I felt that trying to compensate a child for the potential loss of their mother with some bauble – however extravagant – bordered on the obscene.

Interestingly though, I saw that it succeeded in mitigating the immediate shock to some extent.

The mishna in Pirkei Avot teaches that one should “Weigh the loss of a mitzvah against its reward on one side; and on the other, the ‘reward’ of a sin against its loss.”

Mitzvahs can incur losses: losses of time in praying and learning, expenditures on kosher food, kosher education, kosher phones and more. Almost everything that is kosher

is more expensive than its non-kosher equivalent. However, the reward of a mitzvah is priceless beyond pearls and lasts forever.

A sin also has a ‘reward’: a cheap thrill that turns out to be very expensive, but you can’t say there’s no ‘reward’ – otherwise, who would want to do a sin?

What’s interesting is that we need a mishna to tell us to make this calculation, which implies that left to ourselves we would conclude that the bribery of the cheap and the fleeting outweighs the eternally valuable.

It is this same quirk of human frailty that can be used to create a temporary forgetfulness with a bribe of kindness.

“Stand fast and see.” (14:13)

It’s difficult to understand why the Jewish People were in need of the towering miracle of the sundering of the sea. They numbered more than two million people, vastly outnumbering Pharaoh’s storm-troopers.

The mind can make us big and the mind can make us small.

A century of subservience had planted in the minds of the Jewish People a vassal mentality incapable of standing up to their former masters. Only a Divine miracle could break that mindset. Only a miraculous bribe of kindness.

● *Source: based on Ibn Ezra*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Chullin 37:43

A Fatal Error

We are all familiar with the Torah prohibition of *treifa* from a different verse in the Torah: “And you shall be holy people to Me, and you shall not eat an animal torn in the field.” (Shemot 22:30) Rashi comments: If you (the Jewish People) are holy and separate yourselves from eating the meat of a *neveila* (an animal that dies without *shechita*, due to illness or fatal injury) or the meat of a *treifa* (a mortally ill or injured animal that had *shechita*), then you are Mine; and if not, you are not Mine.”

This philosophical concept taught in Rashi’s commentary is actually one of the reasons offered as explanation for why the Torah prohibited eating a *treifa*. This prohibition relates to one’s spiritual well-being, since consuming *treifa* food products (eggs and milk as well as meat) harms the purity of one’s intellectual spirit and increases impure desires. Another reason offered for the prohibition of *treifa* is a medical one: the meat may contain a poison or a dangerous contaminant that might be passed on to the consumer.

According to Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish’s teaching, a *treifa* will not live. The simple meaning of this opinion is that the wounded animal is not viable and will not recover from its injury or illness. It will likely die within twelve months. Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish sees a hint to a *treifa*’s lack of viability from the verse in Vayikra 11:2, “This is *hachaya* that you may eat.” The word *hachaya* is interpreted by him to mean “viable” – a kosher animal that has been mauled but will still live and not die from this injury. In this was the verse is saying: An animal that *will continue to live, you may eat*; but an animal that will not continue to live is a *treifa*, and you may not eat it. It is forbidden to eat even if it had a kosher *shechita*. This same concept that a *treifa* is not viable is also found at the end of our *mishna*. It states that “This is the rule: any animal that suffers a wound, which a healthy animal that would suffer a similar wound and would *not* be viable afterwards – is a *treifa*.”

The Rambam, however, appears to learn that a *treifa* animal is one that is *not viable* from a different source. He derives this in his *Mishneh Torah*, in chapter 4 of the Laws of Forbidden Foods. The animal mentioned in the verse that was “torn in the field” and is called a *treifa* cannot be one that was killed in the field since then it would be called a *neveila* and not a *treifa*. It can also not be injured in a way

that it would recover since the verse would not say about this scenario “throw it to the dogs.” Therefore, concludes the Rambam, the definition of a *treifa* is an animal that has sustained a mortal injury, to the extent that it is only fit for throwing it to the dogs. This shows that a *treifa* will not live, in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish. (It is important to note that although the verse speaks about a *treifa* as resulting from being torn in the field, a *treifa* status also occurs if the injury occurred “at home” or even as a result of illness. The Torah speaks about an animal torn in the field since that is the most usual cause of a mortal infliction.)

Our *mishna*, which begins the third *perek* of our *masechet*, lists numerous types of injuries that render an animal as a *treifa*, and other signs of *treifa* are taught throughout this *perek* and are codified in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 33. Perhaps the most “famous” sign of an animal being a *treifa* is having a hole in its lung. The *halachot* that teach about if and when there is a need to check an animal after *shechita* for any sign of being a *treifa*, and the rules for how to conduct the check, are written in detail in the Shulchan Aruch and in many responsa from the *Poskim*.

Permit me to share a personal story about checking chickens for *treifa* signs, one that occurred some 40 years ago. Soon after our marriage, a question arose regarding which *kashrut* certification we should rely upon when buying chickens for our home. I was aware of the *hechsher* given by one organization, which involved checking the lungs of every chicken. But it was more expensive than the chickens prepared by the Yeshiva where I ate lunch at the time, which carried a *hechsher* from a reputable organization that checked every third chicken. Not being sure what to do, I went to a place in Meah Shearim where Rav Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, *zatzal*, was available to answer questions. When I explained the two options (including our budget), he told me that it was perfectly fine to rely on the less strict *hechsher*. I thanked him and rose to take leave. Rav Eliyashiv then took my hand warmly and added that although it would be fine for us to rely on this *kashrut* certification, I should realize that if in fact the truth would be that we had eaten from a chicken was a *treifa*, there would be a need for *teshuva*. Therefore, if our budget should increase and allow for purchasing only chickens that were individually checked, it would be the correct thing to do.

● *Chullin 42a*

PARSHA Q & A

1. What percentage of the Jewish People died during the plague of darkness?
2. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
3. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
4. Where did the Egyptians get animals to pull their chariots?
5. What does it mean that the Jewish People "took hold of their fathers' craft" (*tafsu umnut avotam*)?
6. How did G-d cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off?
7. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
8. To what future time is the verse hinting when it uses the future tense of "Then Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* will sing"?
9. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead, and straw?
10. The princes of Edom and Moav had nothing to fear from the Jewish People. Why, then, were they "confused and gripped with trembling"?
11. Moshe foretold that he would not enter the Land of Israel. Which word in the *parsha* indicates this?
12. Why is Miriam referred to as "Aharon's sister" and not as "Moshe's sister"?
13. The Jewish women trusted that G-d would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we see this?
14. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
15. When did *Bnei Yisrael* run out of food?
16. What lesson in *derech erez* concerning the eating of meat is taught in this week's *parsha*?
17. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the manna?
18. The Prophet Yirmiyahu showed the Jewish People a jar of manna prepared in the time of Moshe. Why?
19. Which verse in this week's *parsha* alludes to the plague of blood?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

Answers

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

1. 13:18 - Eighty percent (four-fifths).
2. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
3. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
4. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of G-d and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
5. 14:10 - They cried out to G-d.
6. 14:25 - He melted them with fire.
7. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
8. 15:1 - Resurrection of the dead during the time of *mashiach*.
9. 15:5 - The wickedest ones floated like straw, dying slowly. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
10. 15:14 - They felt horrible seeing Israel in a state of glory.
11. 15:17 - "*T'vi'eimo...*" – "Bring *them*" (and not "bring *us*").
12. 15:20 - Aharon put himself at risk for her when she was struck with *tzara'at* . (See *Bamidbar* 12:12)
13. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous victory celebration.
14. 15:25 - Shabbat, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
15. 16:1 - 15th of Iyar.
16. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiety.
17. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever manna remained in the fields. This flowed into streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals tasted manna.
18. 16:32 - The people claimed they couldn't study Torah because they were too busy earning a livelihood. Yirmiyahu showed them the manna saying: "If you study Torah, G-d will provide for you just as he provided for your ancestors in the desert."
19. 17:5 - "And your staff with which you smote the river...."
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the people of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

The Fig's Message

When King Shlomo compared Torah to the fig tree (*Mishlei 27:18*), he conveyed an important message about gaining and retaining Torah knowledge.

Rabbi Chiya bar Abba quoted Rabbi Yochanan (*Eiruvin 54a*) as to why the comparison was made:

“Just as one constantly finds figs when he approaches the tree (since they do not all ripen at the same time, there are always some available for eating – Rashi), so too one will find a new taste in the Torah he is studying.”

If this message about gaining Torah knowledge is derived from the comparison to the fig tree itself, there is another message from the words of this passage regarding the protection of that fig tree, which yields fruit for its protector: “If one who sees a fig tree in a dream,” say our Sages (*Berachot 57a*), “it is a message from Heaven that his Torah knowledge is retained and protected in him.”

The fig tree thus conveys the double message of gaining Torah knowledge by appreciating the new thrill which comes with every step of learning, and the need to retain and protect that knowledge through constant review so that we can enjoy the fruits of our study even if we are not lucky enough to see a fig tree in our dreams.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. With pillars of cloud and fire, G-d leads them toward *Eretz Yisrael* on a circuitous route, avoiding the Pelishtim (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but G-d protects them. Moshe raises his staff and G-d splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by G-d, commands his army to pursue, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song of thanks.

After three days' travel only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain. Moshe miraculously produces potable

water. In Marah they receive certain *mitzvot*. The people complain that they ate better food in Egypt. G-d sends quail for meat and provides manna, miraculous bread that falls from the sky every day except Shabbat. On Friday a double portion descends to supply the Shabbat needs. No one is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbat. Some manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations.

When the Jews again complain about a lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Then Amalek attacks. Joshua leads the Jews in battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

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ASK!

Your Jewish Information Resource – www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman

Ponytails for Men

From: Anonymous

Dear Rabbi,

I am an observant divorcee woman and after many years of being single, I have finally found a man who is suitable and whom I plan to marry. He is also religious and we are very compatible. The only thing is, he has a ponytail, which I actually like very much, but I was wondering if it's forbidden or if there are spiritual considerations that might warrant cutting it off

Dear Anonymous,

First let me wish you a heart-felt *mazal tov* on your wedding plans. May everything work out smoothly, and may G-d bless the two of you with happiness and fulfillment together in a life of Torah and mitzvahs.

Regarding the issue of a man having a ponytail or long hair in general, there are halachic and kabbalistic issues to consider.

Unlike a *nazir*, who grows his hair for religious reasons and not as a matter of style, when a man grows long hair or a ponytail, one concern would be the prohibition against dressing up or appearing in a way that women do. This concern applies to men's earrings as well. The question is whether long hair or earrings are exclusively associated with the female gender.

The definition of what constitutes male or female dress becomes unclear when the style is worn by both genders, even if more prevalent by one than the other. It would seem that since some men have long hair and/or earrings, and are usually recognized as men and not women, technically it would be permitted. In fact, Rav Chaim Pinchas Sheinberg, *zatzal*, said that although he doesn't condone men wearing earrings, it's not forbidden to do so according to halacha.

Another halachic concern pertains to *tefillin*. Excessive hair between the *tefillin* and the head, for example, may be considered an intervening substance that invalidates the mitzvah. However, the main problem with this seems to be

with a certain hairstyle (*blorit*) where the hair is grown long and folded over to a place where it doesn't grow. *Tefillin* which rests on such a patch of hair is considered to be resting in an unnatural way, which disqualifies the mitzvah. (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 27:4; M.B. and Kaf HaChaim).

In the case of a ponytail, while this wouldn't pose a problem with the *tefillin* at the front of the head, it could pose a problem regarding the knot at the back if the knot of the *tefillin* would be resting on hair pulled back from the front. If the hair were let loose though so that the knot rests on the hair that grows there naturally (or if the knot of the *tefillin* was placed *below* the ponytail), it seems that it would be alright. After all, a *nazir* fulfills the mitzvah of *tefillin* despite his long hair.

Nevertheless, from a social or spiritual point of view, it may be improper or inappropriate for an observant Jewish man to wear a ponytail. Firstly, it is not the Jewish custom for men to have long hair and ponytails, and incorporating that style from the non-Jews into Judaism would seem improper. Also, long hair (and hairstyles in general) normally stem from, or lead to, vanity. While it's a mitzvah to be presentable, it's inappropriate for a Jewish man to focus too much on his appearance, and the appearance of his hair. Even those who grow side-locks for religious reasons must not be preoccupied with them more than what's necessary for an orderly appearance.

According to the Kabbala, in a spiritual sense hair is the "waste product" of the brain. Long strands of hair in men may act as "ropes" to which negative influences can take hold. This is considered particularly true regarding the hair at the back of the neck near the brain stem, which is the point of connection between the brain and the rest of the body. "Harmful influences" seek to attach themselves there in order to sever a healthy connection between the spiritual and physical, causing a sort of "spiritual decapitation".

Thus, the Zohar (Ha'azinu) states that long hair in general is a place for harsh judgment, as in the verse, "For He crushes me with a tempest (*se'arah*)" (Job 9:17), where the

Hebrew word for tempest is phonetically similar to the word for hair (*sa'arah*). And in particular, hair at the back of the neck indicates harsh judgment, as in the verse, “and they have turned their back to Me and not their face” (Jeremiah 32:33).

Interestingly, the Zohar (Naso) differentiates between the rest of the hair and the hair at the sides of the head and of the beard. This latter hair is said to originate from holy sources and projects positive spiritual energy: “The hair locks are shaped and hang in wavy curls from one side to the other side of the skull. This is what is written, ‘His locks are wavy’....They are situated as hanging in curls because they flow forth from great springs of the three divisions of the brain. From the spring of the first space in the skull, [*Chochma*]....From the second space,

[*Bina*]....From the third space, [*Da'at*] go forth thousands of thousands of rooms and chambers, and the hairs flow forth continuously from all.”

In summary: 1) Strictly speaking, according to Jewish law there seems to be no prohibition; 2) Since long hair may affect character traits, he should be careful, and anyway a ponytail is undesirable as it is a non-Jewish style; 3) Most people don't conduct themselves according to the Kabbala. Therefore, while I'm not condoning long hair for men, his not cutting it off shouldn't be a reason to “cut it off” (your relationship, that is). Rather, patiently and lovingly encourage him to round off his present observance with a more outward Jewish appearance, cutting off the unwanted split-ends of non-Jewish influence, in order to spur new growth together from Jewish roots.

MEZUZAH MAVEN

by Rabbi Ze'ev Kraines

Nails vs. Tape

Q: Last night, after midnight, when the movers finally left, we remembered that we needed to put up our mezuzahs! We couldn't find the double-sided tape, so we put up the mezuzahs with scotch tape and mounting putty. We said the berachot as well. Did we do the right thing?

A: Ideally, the mezuzah should be affixed with two nails, top and bottom, or with double-sided tape strong enough

to last for a long time. Scotch tape and mounting putty are not appropriate, as they are less permanent.

Even so, your mitzvah was performed according to a minimal standard, and your berachot were not recited in vain. Nevertheless, you should make sure to put them up properly as soon as possible, without reciting a new beracha.

- Sources: *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 289:4; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 11:6; *Chayei Adam* 15:19; *Bach* 289:7; Sources: *Shulchan Aruch* Y.D. 289:4; *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 11:6; *Chayei Adam* 15:19; *Bach* 289:7; *Shach* Y.D. 289:7; *Aruch HaShulchan* 289:15; *Sha'arei Mezuzah* 15:18, citing many authorities; *Agur B'ohalecha* 10:6:14, 10:17:38, 10:18; Cf. *Teshuvos V'Hanhagos* 1:646

Got a mezuzah question or story? Email rabbi@ohrsandton.com or submit on my website mymezuzahstory.com. Free “Mezuzah Maven” book for every question or story submitted (when published in the near future!)

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Cut it Out! (Part 1 of 2)

In this week's Torah portion, the Torah relates one of the most captivating stories in the entire Bible: the splitting of the sea. After the Egyptians finally let the Jews out of Egypt, they quickly changed their minds and followed in pursuit of their former slaves. The Jews traveled and traveled until they reached edge of the *Yam Suf* (Red Sea, or Reed Sea). With the Egyptians behind them and the sea in front of them, the Jews had nowhere to go but forward, so G-d miraculously split the sea open and allowed the Jews to cross the dry sea bed. Jewish tradition immortalizes this fantastic miracle as *Kriyat Yam Suf* – literally, “the tearing of the *Yam Suf*”. However, if one looks very closely, one will notice that Torah never uses the verb *korea* (“tearing”) to describe the sea opening up. Rather, the Torah uses the verb *bokea* (“splitting”) to refer to G-d's breaking the sea open (Ex. 14:15, 14:21). What is the difference between *bokea* and *korea*? And why does the Torah use the former, but other traditional sources use the latter?

The Gerrer Rebbe, Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Alter (1799-1866), author of the *Chiddishei HaRim*, was once asked this question. He replied that he has much to say, but from Above he is stopped from giving a full answer. Instead, the Gerrer Rebbe said that he could reveal only a partial answer, one that is based on the halachic definition of the act of *korea* (“tearing,” which is forbidden on Shabbat). The *Shulchan Aruch HaGraz* (Orach Chaim §340:17) defines *korea* as the act of ripping apart two things that were joined together, but were once separate. The Midrash says that when G-d first created the world, He stipulated with the water that when the time comes, they will split in order to allow the Jews to cross the *Yam Suf*. Because of this prior stipulation, the water can be seen as having already been split from the time of Creation. Thus, when the Jews came to the *Yam Suf* and G-d split the sea for them, He was actually splitting something which had already once been split. For this reason, the Oral Torah uses the word *korea* when talking about splitting the sea. Nonetheless, the Gerrer Rebbe said that he cannot reveal why the Written Torah uses the word *bokea*.

Rabbi Shmuel Borenstein of Sochatchov (1855-1926) offers a different answer. In his work *Shem Mi'Shmuel*, he explains that the difference between *bokea* and *korea* lies in whose voice is speaking. He explains that the word *bokea* refers to something which was split from the inside out. For example, a hatchling which bursts out from inside an egg is described as *bokea* (Isa. 34:15), as is wine which busts open a flask (*Gittin* 26a). In contrast, the term *korea* applies to something which is cut by an outside force (like North Korea and South Korea, which were split by the Cold War).

Accordingly, Rabbi Borenstein explains that from G-d's point of view the sea split from the inside out, because He commanded it to split and it listened to Him. For this reason, the Written Torah – in which G-d speaks to us— uses the term *bokea* when describing the sea's splitting. However, the Oral Torah is written from the perspective of the Jewish People. From that vantage point the sea did not appear to split on its own. Rather, we look at the sea as having split due to an outside force acting upon it. In other words, we look at G-d as coming from the outside and splitting the sea on our behalf. For this reason the Oral Torah uses the term *korea* when describing the sea splitting.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) writes that *korea* refers specifically to “tearing” or “ripping” something which is soft and can be easily torn. The halachic requirement for one to rend one's clothes when in mourning is called tearing *kriyah*. According to this we can explain that when speaking of the tradition of G-d's “tearing” the sea open, we specifically use the term *kriyat yam suf* to note that vis-à-vis G-d, tearing the sea is no great feat, because He can do everything. When He tore open the sea, it was as though He tore or ripped something which can be easily torn.

Elsewhere, the Bible uses a third verb to denote the cutting open of the sea. In Psalms 136:13, the splitting of the sea is referred to as “cutting (*gozer*) the *Yam Suf* into cuts (*l'gezarim*)”. We also thank G-d in the daily Maariv prayers for being “the one who passes His children between the

cuts (*gizrei*) of the *Yam Suf*". How does this verb *gozer* differ from *bokea* and *korea*?

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *gozer* refers to the act of precision-cutting with an instrument. Anything which is purposely "cut out" from being attached to something bigger can be described as *nigzar* or a *gizrah*. A decree, or judicial verdict, is also called a *gezirah* because the final ruling is "cut out" from the greater back-and-forth of the legal discussion, and is applied on its own. Interestingly, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ps. 136:13) writes that the Psalmist specifically chose the word *gozer* because that word refers not only to "cutting," but also denotes "decreeing" and "deciding". At the splitting of the sea G-d decided the fates of two nations: the Jewish nation who crossed the sea bed on dry land, and the Egyptians who ended up drowning.

In a separate discussion about the meaning of the root *gozer*, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that it denotes the type of cutting whereby one must continuously apply a blade, moving it backwards and forwards until it has cut through whatever one is cutting. This type of cutting is used for cutting something especially thick, such as people (I Kings 3:25), animals (Gen. 15:17), or wood (II Kings 6:4). Accordingly, cutting the *Yam Suf* is referred to by the verb *gozer* because the sea is considered something eminently thick.

Rabbi Pappenheim and others explain that the two-letter root GIMMEL-ZAYIN – from which *gozer* is derived –

refers primarily to "shaving" or "trimming," which is a type of cutting that leaves some parts attached and some parts detached. Some quick examples of words that are derived from this root: *geiz* (Ps. 72:6) refers to the grass remaining after trimming, *gozez* (Gen. 38:12, 31:19) is the act of shearing wool from sheep; *gezel* is the act of stealing or robbing somebody's possession (while leaving some of his other possessions intact); *gazam* is a type of grasshopper which meddles in produce by eating some of it (and leaving over the rest); *geza* is a tree whose top has been truncated, and *gazit* refers to a hewn stone (i.e. parts of the stone are shaved down, and the rest of the stone remains in place). In light of this we can easily understand the etymology of *gozer* ("cut"), and how it relates to the two-letter root GIMMEL-ZAYIN. [The Modern Hebrew word *gezer* ("carrot") is not directly related to this discussion because it is actually derived from the Arabic word for that root-vegetable, *jazar* (which also means "cut" in Arabic).]

I had to cut this article into pieces, so next week we will have the opportunity to continue our discussion about different Hebrew word for "cutting". *To be continued...*

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rklein@ohr.edu

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S. R. Hirsch
By Rabbi Yosef Herman

Brooding over Bread

After our miraculous rescue from the pursuing Egyptian army, and after a joyous song of praise and thanksgiving, the fledgling Jewish nation was on its way to accepting the Torah. After three days of travel in the desert, their water supply was depleted and they complained of thirst. Moshe Rabbeinu cried out to G-d, and G-d instructed him how to miraculously sweeten the bitter waters at Marah to make them drinkable. There, in Marah, the nation was given an introduction to Torah, and significant foundational concepts of law and justice were taught. Moreover, the nation learned an experiential lesson: even the most bitter experiences become sweet through G-d's Torah.

At the next stop, Elim, the nation discovers twelve springs of water. They travel from this place of plenty to the wilderness, and *the entire nation* begins complaining of hunger and fear of starvation. It is here where G-d sends the manna, the miracle food that would sustain the nation for forty years in the desert.

We can learn a great deal not only from the manner in which G-d chose to sustain his people in the desert, but also from the anxiety and panic that preceded it. The memory of the miracles of salvation during the plagues in Egypt and at the sea, along with the basic instructive experience at Marah – all these vanish before the specter of starvation that threatened their families.

Our Sages have taught: *the provision of one's daily bread is more difficult than the splitting of the Red Sea* (Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu 474). One way to understand this is

that the threat of hunger – real or imagined – undermines all principles and unravels noble resolves.

When man cannot disengage himself, not from the *responsibility* of providing for his family, but from the overwhelming *anxiety* that accompanies this responsibility, he is unable to fully realize G-d's Torah.

Freedom from this anxiety comes only with the deep awareness that success in the effort to sustain oneself is not in man's hands alone. Surely a person must do his part to achieve this objective, but the result is in G-d's Hand.

As long as man does not possess this awareness, as long as he believes that his livelihood is a product of his own limited powers, there will be no end to his anxiety. He may come to believe that he must not only secure his financial position for tomorrow, but for his whole future, and for the future of his children, his grandchildren and even his great-grandchildren. This belief goads him into an endless and ruthless pursuit of greater wealth, leaving him no time for the pursuit of other aims and goals.

Hence, the message of the manna necessarily preceded the giving of the Torah. The people would have to experience this anxiety in the wilderness, where the future seemed hopeless, and learn to trust in the ultimate provision of the Almighty. Only then would they be free to pursue the more lofty goals that the Torah entrusted to them.

- Source: Commentary, Shemot 16:2

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A PERFECT TU B'SHVAT

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

A while ago a close friend told me of a fabulous idea that he had read in Rav Tzadok HaKohen's sefer Pri Tzadik. It centered on how each of the Ten Plagues correlated to a different month of the year. I was so intrigued that I searched around until I found it. The month of Shevat, being two months away from Nissan in a regular year (did *you* start cleaning for Pesach yet?), corresponds to the Plague of Locusts. But what is the connection?

Rav Tzadok explains that before we, the Jewish People, were able to prepare ourselves for the Exodus from Egypt, we had to detach ourselves from any misdirected physical desires and cravings. In Tevet, G-d sent the Plague of Hailstones. It was so devastating that, with the exception of the wheat and the spelt crops, the entire food supply in Egypt was destroyed. According to our Sages the Egyptians were sure that they were all going to die of starvation. However, once they saw that some shoots had been spared the onslaught, they began to believe that everything was going to be all right. I remember reading in autobiographies of Holocaust survivors that in the ghettos one of the first reactions of Jews who emerged after having been hidden underground for extended lengths of time was to touch the grass. They could not believe that amidst the death and the destruction there was still potential for anything to grow. That small bit of knowledge was a source of great comfort for many of them. For the Egyptians too the small shoots symbolized hope for the future. The very fact that something could grow in the midst of all the devastation was enough to fill them with optimism.

And then G-d sent the locusts.

As the Egyptians watched the last traces of food disappear, devoured by the swarms of locusts that covered the country, their hopes and aspirations for the future disappeared as well. As the Jewish People watched they came to the realization that everything in the world, whether spiritual or physical, belongs to G-d. And that, writes Rav Tzadok, is the beginning of the sanctification of the physical and our becoming more spiritual.

Rav Tzadok explains that understanding the significance of Shevat in this way is a prerequisite for comprehending why Adar, the symbol of the uprooting of Amalek, follows Shevat. Adar can only be a meaningful continuation by fully

understanding that Shevat has been given to us as a means of cleansing our physical desires and raising them to a spiritual plane.

There's a famous story of the Chasid who went to speak with his Rebbe. As they were talking the Rebbe asked him to wait a moment while he made a *beracha* over a piece of fruit. As the Rebbe did so and took his first bite, the Chasid began to think to himself, "You know, I eat fruit just like the Rebbe. I wonder if there is any real difference between us. After all he's only a human being just like me. Maybe I'm wasting my time here. What can he offer me that I can't get elsewhere?" The Rebbe looked at his Chasid (who hadn't said a word) and said to him, "Do you want me to tell you the real difference between us? I eat in order to be able to make *berachot* you make *berachot* in order to eat!"

The beauty and the depth of the story are clear. Unlike his Chasid, the Rebbe had managed to elevate the mundane and turn it into something very special. Eating a piece of fruit was an intensely spiritual and "nourishing" experience. And that, says Rav Tzadok, is the meaning of Tu B'Shevat. Shevat on the face of it is a pretty bleak month. It comes in the winter, its cold and wet, the daylight is short and the darkness is long, but it is also a time of incredible potential. Underneath the surface things are beginning to move. Come springtime, they will begin to sprout and blossom and reveal their wondrous splendor for all who care to look. All that beauty, all that magnificence, is being nourished from the month of Shevat. Tu B'Shevat is the time to elevate the fruit from its physical properties to something that is intensely spiritual.

In the Mishna, Tu B'Shevat has the same classification as Rosh Hashana. It is the "New Year for the Trees". Just as Rosh Hashana is "stock-taking" time, a moment to stop and evaluate one's relationship with G-d, likewise Tu B'Shevat offers us a unique opportunity to reflect on the wonders of G-d's Creation, and to ponder if we really utilize the incredible gifts that He has given us through His "natural" world to get closer to Him.

And if we do that we are destined for a truly special year.