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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Vayeshev

LIGHT AND ENLIGHTENMENT

“And they took him, and cast him into the pit; and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. (37:24)

Rashi: By inference from that which is stated: And the pit was empty, don't I know that there was no water in it? Rather, why does the verse say: There was no water in it? The verse comes to emphasize and teach that there was no water in it, but there were snakes and scorpions in it.”

The Torah portion of Vayeshev always coincides with Chanukah. What is the connection between the two?

The Talmud (Shabbat 22a) states that the Chanukah lights cannot be placed above twenty cubits from the ground. Rashi and others explain that if the lights are placed above twenty cubits, they cannot not be easily seen by a person passing in the street.

Immediately following this law concerning the maximum height of the Chanukah lights, the Talmud interrupts its discussion of the laws of Chanukah in order to teach us that the pit into which Yosef was thrown was empty of water, but nevertheless contained snakes and scorpions. Why does the Talmud interrupt its discussion of Chanukah to discuss this verse in our Torah portion?

The *Torah Temimah* suggests that the two lessons both deal with the limitations of human vision. Just as an object that is twenty cubits high is not readily observed, so too the brothers were unable to clearly see the bottom of the pit. Therefore, they did not realize that they had thrown Yosef into a pit containing snakes and scorpions.

On a deeper level, Chanukah is all about seeing and the limits of human vision. A holy light burns in the lights of Chanukah. A light as old as the world itself. We may not use the Chanukah lights to illuminate our homes. Their radiance may not be used for any practical purpose at all. We may only look into the light itself. We may only gaze into its depths. But why can't we use the lights of Chanukah for some other sacred

purpose? Why can't we use their glow to read words of Torah, for example? What sets aside the Chanukah lights from every other worldly light? Why may we only gaze into the light itself, and what are we supposed to see there?

You can look at light in two ways. First of all, your surroundings are illuminated. You can see what's around you. Second, you can see the light itself, the source of illumination. And when you look into the light, into the source, the world that surrounds you recedes from view. When we look at our surroundings, our perception of the light is second-hand, reflected. It's "en-lightenment" – but it's not the light itself. When we look at the light itself, we see the source. We perceive the light, not as a reflection, but the thing itself. We know of the light's existence because we see the light. We don't need it's reflection to give us evidence of its existence.

There are two words in Hebrew that are spelled identically. They have different vowels, but their letters are the same. One is the word for "proof" (rye-ah) and the other is the word for "sight" (ree-ah). These two words express these two aspects of light: Rye-ah, proof, is the reflection of the light, the verification that the light exists by its illumination of our surroundings. Ree-ah, sight, is seeing the source. When you look at the source, you don't need proof. You don't need "en-lightenment." You are looking at the light itself.

In Psalms, King David writes "For with You is the source of life. In Your light do we see light." (Tehilim 36) Because the Creator is the source of life, His light cannot be perceived by reflection. Only in His "light do we see light." Not in His reflection.

If we want to see His reflection in this world, if we want a proof of the existence of the light – a rye-ah – we could look at the way His light illuminates this world. We will find evidence of His Hand. Of His light.

We will find evidence in the outrageous improbability of a "cosmic soup" that just happens to spawn life. We will find evidence of His light in the highly unhistorical history of the Jewish People. We will find direct evidence of His light in an unbroken chain back to Sinai.

Yes, we will find evidence of the light. We will find proof of its existence, a rye-ah. But we will not see the light itself.

"For with You is the source of life. In Your light do we see light." We may not use the lights of Chanukah for any purpose, however holy, for "...with You is the source of life." When we look into the lights of Chanukah, we are looking to the Source of life itself. For "In Your light do we see light." We connect to the Source of life, not through its reflected light, not through evidence and proof, not through rye-ah, but rather through ree-ah, through gazing directly into the light. And when we do that, this world of reflection vanishes from our sight.

If we wanted to prove the efficacy of an antibiotic, we could go to a laboratory, take a blood sample and analyze it empirically. We could evaluate how many white blood cells there were, how many red. We could take finite measurements which would lead to empirical conclusions. There is, however, no empirical measurement for a mitzvah. The Torah is lacking in empirical proofs because it is not a description of that which already exists. It is the source of that which is to be. It depicts an existence which has yet to be. It is the source, not the outcome. It is the light, not its reflection.

The Torah does not conform to Greek thought. It does not observe the world. It is the source of the world. It is not a reflection of the light. It is the light itself. When you look into the light, all you can see is the light. You can go beyond the limits of human vision.

When you look into the light itself, into the Source of life, you can see far above and beyond, to the hidden Source of life itself. "For with You is the source of life. In Your light do we see light."

Miketz

IT'S IN THE GENES

"...and he (Pharaoh) gave him (Yosef) Osnat, daughter of Potiphara, Chief of On, for a wife." (41:45)

Osnat was Potiphar's daughter. The Alschich says that by allowing Yosef to marry his daughter, Potiphar vindicated Yosef in the eyes of the Egyptians from the charge that he had molested Potiphar's wife. By resisting a supreme challenge, Yosef bequeathed to his offspring a tremendous strength, one which has halachic ramifications to this day.

It's Chanukah. The whole family gets together for a party. There's music and words of Torah and food. You wash, you eat, and you say birkat hamazon. But, whoops, you forget to say *Al hanisim* and don't know what to do! You quickly leaf through your Siddur and you see that you can insert in a Harachaman:

"The Compassionate One! May He perform for us miracles and wonders as He performed for our forefathers in those days, at this time!

The issue is that there's an explicit Gemara saying that we're not allowed to pray for miracles.

Rabbi Sholomo Kluger answers that the miracle of Chanukah was different from all the other miracles in the history of the Jewish People. The splitting of the sea, the manna, the ten plagues - all other miracles were preordained from the beginning of the world. They were built into the fabric of Creation.

The miracle of Chanukah was brought about by the Jews' willingness to give up our lives rather than allow the Greeks to eradicate our holy Torah.

From where did this immeasurable strength come? Rabbi Shlomo Harcavi says it was a spiritual inheritance from Yosef Hatzaddik. Yosef withstood an ultimate test for the sake of Hashem, and thus Yosef instilled into the collective DNA of the Jewish People the strength for us to withstand the overwhelming allure of the physicality of the Greek world to this day. Because the Jewish People were prepared to give up their lives on Chanukah, we have the birthright to ask for miracles in return.

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Questions

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...."
Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

Answers

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

Q & A - Miketz

Questions

1. What did the fat cows being eaten symbolize?
2. How did Pharaoh's recollection of his dream differ from Nevuchadnetzar's recollection of his dream?
3. What was significant about the fact that Pharaoh dreamed repeatedly?
4. What does "Tsafnat Panayach" mean?
5. What happened to the Egyptians' grain that was stored in anticipation of the famine?
6. What did Yosef require the Egyptians to do before he would sell them grain?
7. Did Yaakov and his family still have food when he sent his sons to Egypt? If yes, why did he send them?
8. What prophetic significance lay in Yaakov's choice of the word "redu" – "descend" (and not "lechu" – "go")?
9. Why does the verse say "Yosef's brothers" went down to Egypt (and not "Yaakov's sons")?
10. When did Yosef know that his dreams were being fulfilled?
11. Under what pretext did Yosef accuse his brothers of being spies?
12. Why did the brothers enter the city through different gates?
13. Who was the interpreter between Yosef and his brothers?
14. Why did Yosef specifically choose Shimon to put in prison?
15. How does the verse indicate that Shimon was released from prison after his brothers left?
16. What was Yaakov implying when he said to his sons: "I am the one whom you bereaved"?
17. How did Reuven try to persuade Yaakov to send Binyamin to Egypt?
18. How long did it take for Yaakov and family to eat all the food that the brothers brought back from Egypt? Give the answer in terms of travel time.
19. How much more money did the brothers bring on their second journey than they brought on the first journey? Why?
20. How did the brothers defend themselves against the accusation of theft?

Answers

1. 41:4 - That all the joy of the plentiful years would be forgotten. (Not that the good years would provide food for the bad years.)
2. 41:8 - Pharaoh remembered the contents of his dream but didn't know its meaning. Nevuchadnetzar forgot even the contents of his dream.
3. 41:32 - It showed that the seven good years would start immediately.
4. 41:45 - He who explains things that are hidden and obscure.
5. 41:55 - It rotted.
6. 41:55 - Become circumcised.
7. 42:1 - Yes, but he sent them because he did not want to cause envy in the eyes of those who did not have food.
8. 42:2 - It hinted to the 210 years that the Jewish people would be in Egypt: The word "redu" has the numerical value of 210.
9. 42:3 - Because they regretted selling Yosef and planned to act as brothers by trying to find him and ransom him at any cost.
10. 42:9 - When his brothers bowed to him.
11. 42:12 - They entered the city through 10 gates rather than through one gate.
12. 42:13 - To search for Yosef throughout the city.
13. 42:23 - His son Menashe.
14. 42:24 - Because he was the one who cast Yosef into the pit and the one who said, "Here comes the dreamer." Alternatively, to separate him from Levi, as together they posed a danger to him.
15. 42:24 - The verse says Shimon was bound "in front of their eyes," implying that he was bound only while in their sight.
16. 42:36 - That he suspected them of having slain or sold Shimon, and that they may have done the same to Yosef.
17. 42:37 - He said, "Kill my two sons if I fail to bring back Binyamin."
18. 43:2,10 - Twice the travel time to and from Egypt.
19. 43:12 - Three times as much, in order to repay the money they found in their sacks and to buy more even if the price had doubled.
20. 44:8 - They said, "We returned the money we found in our sacks; can it be that we would steal?"

Q & A - Chanukah

Questions

1. Which miracle do we celebrate with the lighting of candles?
2. How did they know that the oil found was uncontaminated?
3. Who led the battle against the Hellenites?
4. During which of the "four exiles" did the miracle of Chanukah take place?
5. Name two non-halachic customs connected with Chanukah.
6. How many blessings are made before lighting candles?
7. Why do we light the extra candle known as the "shamash"?
8. What is added to our regular prayers at least three times a day?
9. What is the special reading of the Torah each day?
10. Is it obligatory to eat a meal like on Purim?
11. When do we have occasion to use three Sifrei Torah on Chanukah?
12. What three *mitzvot* did the Hellenites decree against?
13. What damage did the Hellenites do to the Beit Hamikdash?
14. What two military advantages did the Hellenite army have over the Jews?
15. Is it permissible to do work on Chanukah?
16. Why is there no Mussaf prayer on Chanukah except for Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh?
17. How does the name Chanukah indicate the date when this holiday begins?
18. What special prayer do we add to the morning services?
19. What did the Jews do after victory that explains the name Chanukah?
20. Which regular prayers in the morning service do we omit on Chanukah?

Answers

1. The oil for lighting the menorah in the Beit Hamikdash after the victory over the Hellenites was only enough for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight days until a new supply of pure oil was available. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
2. Its container had the seal of the *kohen gadol*. (*Mesechta Shabbat* 21b)
3. Matityahu, the *kohen gadol* and his sons. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1, and the "Al Hanissim" prayer in the Siddur)
4. The third exile under Hellenite oppression during the era of the second Beit Hamikdash. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
5. Eating either donuts or potato pancakes made with oil and playing with the *sivivon* (dreidel).
6. Three blessings the first night and two the other nights. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:4)
7. Since it is forbidden to benefit from the light of the candles we light an extra one so that if we do benefit it will be from that one called the *shamash* because it is sometimes used to serve as the lighting agent. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 673:1)
8. The prayer "Al Hanissim" (Ibid. 682:1)
9. The gifts of the *nesi'im* (heads of the twelve tribes at the inauguration of the Sanctuary as recorded in *Bamidbar* 7:1-8). (Ibid. 684:1)
10. No. But if the meal is accompanied by songs of praise to Heaven it is considered a *seudat mitzvah*. (Ibid. 670:2)
11. When Rosh Chodesh Tevet is on Shabbat and we read selections for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Chanukah. (Ibid. 684:3)
12. Shabbat, circumcision and Rosh Chodesh. (*Midrash*)
13. They made breaks in the walls and contaminated the sacred items. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
14. They were stronger and more numerous. ("Al Hanissim" Prayer)
15. It is permissible to work but women have a custom of refraining from work for the first half hour that the candles are burning. (*Mishna Berurah* 670:1)
16. Because there were no additional sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash during Chanukah. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 682:2)
17. If we break up the word into two parts – *Chanu*, and the letters *chaf* and *hei*, we read that they rested from the war on the 25th day of the month.
18. Hallel (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)
19. They rededicated the altar in the Beit Hamikdash, which the Hellenites had defiled. ("Chanukah" means inauguration.)
20. Tachanun and Psalm 20 before *Uva Letzion*. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayeshev: Mercantile Man

The Bible reports that around the same time that Joseph was sold as a slave in Egypt, his older brother Judah met the daughter of a man named Shua and married her. Shua is described as an *ish c'naani* (Gen. 38:1), which typically would mean “a Canaanite man.” However, rabbinic tradition teaches that Judah’s father-in-law was not actually a Canaanite, but rather the word *c'naani* used to describe him means “merchant.” In this essay, we explore the three Biblical Hebrew words for “merchant” – *socher*, *rochel*, and *c'naani* – as well as the standard Aramaic word *tagar*. In doing so, we seek to clearly understand the various etymological bases of these words, and show in what ways these various synonyms differ from each other.

The Biblical Hebrew term *socher* in the sense of “merchant” appears approximately sixteen times in the Bible. For example, when Joseph’s brothers threw him into a pit, the Bible relates that Midianite “merchants” later passed by, implying that they bought Joseph as a slave and sold him to the Ishmaelites (Gen. 37:28). In that context, the term used for “merchant” is *socher*. Other Biblical Hebrew declensions of the triliteral root SAMECH-CHET-REISH from which *socher* derives include verbs for “engaging in trade” and nouns that refer to “merchandise.”

Another meaning found in words root derived from SAMECH-CHET-REISH is “around.” This meaning is seen in the Biblical word *scharchar* (Prov. 38:11), which refers to round-going moving (in Modern Hebrew, *scharchoret* means “dizziness” “vertigo”). In fact, the common word in Targum for the Hebrew *saviiv* is *s'chor* (“around”). The Talmud similarly uses an expression that refers to what a person might tell a Nazirite (who is forbidden from drinking wine) who comes close to a vineyard: “Go go (*lech lech*), turn around, turn around (*sechor sechor*), do not approach the vineyard” (*Shabbat* 13a and more).

While Ibn Saruk and Ibn Janach seem to understand the “merchant” and “around” meanings of this root as two unrelated concepts expressed by the same root, Radak bridges the gap by explaining that a “merchant” typically travels “around,” so it makes sense why the same root would mean both “merchant” and “around.”

Another word in Biblical Hebrew that means “merchant” is the masculine noun *Rochel* (and feminine noun *rochelet*), which appears seventeen times in the Bible, mostly in the Book of Ezekiel. Rashi (to *Arachin* 23b) actually defines *rochel* as *socher*, thus showing that he saw those two terms as more or less synonymous. Interestingly, an adjacent term derived from the same root REISH-KAF-LAMMED, *rachil*, refers to “slander” (*rechilus*) and famously appears in Lev. 19:16 (as well as in five other passages such as in Prov. 11:13). This is because merchants who travelled from place to place were often seen as tale-mongers, because they would bring all sorts of news and rumors from one place to the next.

Rashi (to Lev. 19:16) comments that the CHET of the word *Rochel* is interchangeable with the letter GIMMEL, thus associating the word *Rochel* with *regel* (“foot”) and *meragel* (“spy”). As Rabbi Avraham Bedersi (in his work *Chotam Tochnit*) explains it, a merchant in some ways has to function like a spy, going from place to place to scout out the best merchandise to buy and sell. We may add that perhaps a *Rochel* would typically travel by foot to panhandle his goods, hence its associated with the word *regel*. This understanding bears similarities to the aforementioned explanation regarding *socher*, whose etymology hints to the idea of a merchant needing to go “around” to buy and sell his products.

*To learn about how all of this relates back to the word *c'naani* in the sense of “merchant,” check out the rest of this essay at the Ohr Somayach site: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

Miketz: Say it Clear (Part 1 of 2)

Throughout the stories of Joseph interpreting the dreams of the Pharaoh’s butler and baker, and then of the Pharaoh himself, the Bible uses the verb *poter* (“interpreting”) and the noun *pitaron* (“interpretation,” “meaning,” or “solution”) exactly fourteen times (Gen. 40–41). These terms are inflections of the trilateral root PEH-TAV-REISH, but beyond this pericope, no other words derived from that root appear anywhere else in the Bible! Instead, the Bible and later Hebrew typically use a whole slew of other terms for “interpretation,” like *peshet*, *beiyur*, *peirush*, and *hesber* – but not *pitaron*. This essay attempts to define the various Hebrew terms for “interpretation” with more nuance, and use that understanding to show in what ways they resemble and differ from one another.

Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* looks only at the cases in which inflections of *pitaron* appear in the Bible as his evidence, and based on that evidence concludes that *pitaron* refers specifically to the “interpretation of a dream,” and not to all other sorts of interpretations. Rabbi Meir Leibush Weiser (1809-1879), better known as the Malbim, in his work *Yair Ohr* makes the same point, and explicitly uses that to differentiate between *pitaron* (which refers to interpreting dreams) and its near-synonyms *peirush* and *beiyur* (which refer to interpreting other things, like enigmatic texts).

This usage of *pitaron* is also found in the Talmud (*Brachot* 55b), which teaches that at one point in history, there were twenty-four *potrei chalomot* (“dream interpreters”) in Jerusalem, using an agent noun (that is, a noun derived from a verb) based on this Biblical Hebrew term for dream interpretation.

Although until now we’ve only encountered inflections of *poter* that refer specifically to “dream interpretation,” the Talmud sometimes uses inflections of *poter* as if to say about a certain teaching, “It should be interpreted as referring to...” – even if that teaching has nothing to do with dreams.

Interestingly, Menachem Ibn Saruk (920–970), the author of *Machberet Menachem* (an early lexicon of Biblical Hebrew) often refers to “explanations” or “definitions” of words in the Bible as their *pitaron*, a nomenclature also adopted by his interlocutor Donash Ibn Labrat (920–990), as well as later by Rashi and his grandsons (Rashbam and Rabbeinu Tam). In fact, in Modern Hebrew the term *pitaron* takes on such a broad meaning that it can refer to a “solution/explanation/interpretation” to anything, and has nothing to do with dreams, per se.

Although the classical lexicographers see the root of *poter* as the trilateral PEH-TAV-REISH, Rabbi Shmuel Dovid Luzzatto (1800–1865), known as Shadal, offers an alternate, novel explanation. He explains *poter* as a contraction of the phrase *potetach ohr* (“he opens light”), as a way of referring to one who sheds light on matters (via interpreting them) by which others are perplexed.

*For more about the words *poter* and *peshet*, check out the continuation of this essay at:

https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

In the next issue of Ohrnet Magazine we will, G-d-willing, continue this discussion with an essay about the difference between *peirush* and *beiyur*.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Kama 37-50

In Awe of Torah Scholars

Shimon Ha'amsoni (others say it was Nechemia Ha'amsoni) was explaining the significance of each and every time the word "et" appears in the Torah. However, when he reached the verse "et Hashem Elokecha tira" (Deut. 6:13) – fear the Lord your G-d – he stopped. His students said to him, "Our Rabbi, what will become of your explanations of the word "et" that you taught until now?" He replied, "Just as I received reward for explaining, so too I will receive reward for abstaining from explaining." Then Rabbi Akiva came and taught that the word "et" in the verse "et Hashem Elokecha tira" teaches to include Torah scholars (i.e., just as the verse teaches the mitzvah to fear Hashem, likewise it teaches to fear Torah scholars).

This *beraita* on our *daf* is based on the idea that every word and letter in the Torah has meaning. Therefore, even the word "et", which does not have any particular translation, must be there to include something else that is not mentioned explicitly each time it appears in the Torah. This is why these Sages sought to explain what each "et" in the Torah is meant to teach. Shimon Ha'amsoni "did not know" what to do with the "et" in this verse (Rashi).

The Maharsha on our *daf* refers to Rashi's commentary in Masechet Kiddushin (57a), where Rashi writes that the Sage "feared" to equate the fear of "anything else" to the fear of Hashem, and could therefore not attribute any meaning to the word "et" in the verse that appears in the command to fear Hashem. Based on this explanation, the Maharsha explains why this Sage said that he would receive reward for *ceasing* to explain the meaning of each "et" in the Torah, just as he had received reward for toiling in Torah study to attempt attributing special meaning to this word in other cases. His act of "cease and desist" when encountering the word "et" in the verse commanding fear of Hashem was itself a true act of awe and fear of Hashem, and therefore deserving of the reward for fulfilling this mitzvah to fear Hashem.

Tosefot asks a question on the stance of the Sage Shimon Ha'Amsoni. "Why did he cease?" asks Tosefot, who cites a *gemara* (Kiddushin 30b) which in fact equates the fear of one's parents to the fear of Hashem. Why didn't he continue to interpret "*etim*" in the Torah, and include the fear of one's parents from the "et" in this verse? Tosefot answers that the Sage did not want to include the fear of one's parents from the "et" in this verse since he did not want to derive from here a *second*, additional mitzvah to fear one's parents from the existence of this word in this verse. Which begs the question: "Why not?" I once suggested the following explanation of the answer of Tosefot to a great Rabbi in Jerusalem: If the Sage would derive from the word "et" in this context that there are actually two positive commands to fear one's parents, as opposed to "only" one positive mitzvah to fear Hashem, doing so would be an act of "lack of fear of Hashem" – and contrary to the mitzvah stated explicitly in the verse.

As a parenthetical remark, it appears that Tosefot understands Shimon Ha'Amsoni's reason for stopping differently than Rashi does, as explained by the Maharsha. According to Rashi he ceased since "fear of Hashem" inherently means that there is no other entity to be equated to Hashem, and therefore to be feared to the same degree. If so, even the fear of one's parents would not "equate", and would not be a "candidate" to learn from the word "et" in the mitzvah to fear Hashem, and Tosefot's question would not pose any difficulty to Rashi's explanation (and the *gemara* in Kiddushin 30b could be reconciled with this approach in a

number of ways). But since Tosefot asks the question regarding fearing one's parents, Tosefot appears to understand that the Sage ceased to interpret "etim" "only" because he could not find anything suitable to include, and therefore Tosefot asks, "Why not include from this "et" fear of one's parents?"

Unlike the first Sage in our *beraita*, Rabbi Akiva felt it correct to explain that the word "et" in this verse teaches to include fear of Torah scholars as well as fear of Hashem, since fearing Torah scholars is also showing honor to Hashem and His Torah, because Torah scholars dedicate their lives to the study of Hashem's Torah. (Maharsha)

▪ *Bava Kama 41b*

Children of the Righteous

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa said (rhetorically): "Something at which that righteous person toils, is it possible that his child should 'stumble' (i.e., die) as a result of?"

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa stated this principle – an example of a "Divine trait" by which G-d metes out mercy or punishment in this world – in response to a specific event that was brought to his attention, as the *gemara* on our *daf* relates:

The daughter of a man named Nechuniya "the well digger" (who dug wells for the use of people who would come up to Jerusalem for the Festivals – Rashi) fell into a deep well, and there was fear for her life. People informed the great Torah scholar and righteous man Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa as to this dangerous situation. In the first hour (when it was still possible for her to be alive in the well – Rashi) he told the people, "Shalom", i.e. she is alive and well. In the second hour he repeated his declaration. In the third hour (when it she could no longer have survived being in the well – Rashi) he said, "She has already come out of the well."

When the people asked Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa if he knew all this because he was a prophet, he replied, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but this is what I 'said' (i.e. 'know'): "Something at which that righteous person toils at, is it possible that his child should 'stumble' (i.e., die) as a result of?"

Nevertheless, said Rabbi Acha regarding righteous Nechuniya the well digger, "His son died of thirst". Rabbi Acha cited a verse (Tehillim 50:3) as the basis for the punishment in this case, which states in part: "...and around Him it storms furiously." Rashi explains this to mean that "the righteous" – who "cleave and are around Hashem" – are judged by a margin of transgression that is as narrow as a "strand of hair" (the word for "storm", "sa'ara", in the verse, is spelled with the letter "sin", like the Hebrew word for "hair", instead of the way storm is normally spelled, with a "samech").

Tosefot finds the death of the righteous well digger's son by thirst difficult to understand, based on Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa's principle that a matter in which a righteous person suffers will not be reason for his offspring to suffer, as he pronounced in the case of the well digger's daughter. How could his son die in this manner, since the father toiled to dig water wells for the purpose of providing water to others so they should not be thirsty?

The difference, answers Tosefot, is that “in *that thing itself*, it is not fit for the child to suffer.” This answer may seem vague, but Tosefot in Masechet Yevamot (121b, and as explained by the Ba’Ch there) writes that a well, which was what the righteous father toiled at, did not cause the death of the son. Rather, it was the lack of water. Therefore Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa’s principle did not apply for the son, unlike its applying for the daughter who would not die as a result of the well of water, the type of item that her father dug. It appears that Rashi on our *daf* agrees with this explanation since he carefully explains “the toil of her father” as “digging wells and cisterns for people travelling to Jerusalem for the Festivals,” and the son did not, in fact, die in a well.

However, another take on Rashi’s commentary is that the father dug holes in the ground which he hoped would be filled with rainwater afterwards, but he did not dig wells of water per se. This is the difference between his daughter and his son: Although his daughter could not die in a well (since he dug wells), his son could indeed die from a lack of water (since the father did not provide water for the wells). (Etz Yosef)

Another possible answer is that the principle that Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa taught is true only when the mitzvah is performed completely and perfectly “for the sake of Heaven.” The righteous father dug wells for the sake of the mitzvah of helping people fulfill the mitzvah to come up to Jerusalem for the Festivals, having sufficient water to drink along the way and arrive in good health. The father fulfilled the mitzvah exactly for the correct reason at the time of his daughter’s predicament, but he was lacking “by the breadth of a hair” in the perfection of this mitzvah at the time of his son’s fatal thirst.

One more answer I have heard is that when Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa stated that a matter in which a righteous person toils and suffers will not be reason for his child to die, it is not truly a “principle” describing Hashem’s actions. Rather, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was telling the people the words that he prayed to Hashem for the safety of Nechuniya’s daughter, a prayer that he was certain would be received by G-d, and the daughter would be alive and well. (Apparently, there was no such prayer in the case of the man’s son, for whatever reason.)

▪ *Bava Kama 50a*

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SPECIAL CHANUKAH FEATURE!

8 Reasons for 8 Days: why Chanukah is celebrated for 8 days

Compiled by the Ohr Somayach Faculty

The Chanukah miracle: A flask with one night's oil burned for 8 nights. But being that there was oil for one night, the miracle actually lasted only 7 nights. So why is Chanukah 8 nights?

Here are 8 approaches to answer this question:



They divided one night's oil into eight portions. Miraculously, each portion lasted an entire night.

Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 670



The Greeks ransacked the Temple many days in search of oil to defile. Despite their strength and numbers, they overlooked one flask. A few weak, battle-weary Jews found it immediately.

HaMeiri in Lehodos U'lehallel; Sefer HaEshkol, Chanukah 6:13



Wanting the oil to last, they made the wicks one-eighth of the normal thickness. Nevertheless, the flames burned just as brightly as if the wicks had been the normal thickness.

Chidushei HaRim



The golden Menorah was ritually impure. So were all the Jewish soldiers, having come in contact with death on the battlefield. Therefore, they were forced to make a temporary earthenware Menorah, because earthenware is more resistant to impurity. But earthenware is porous, and when it's new it absorbs a small but significant part of any oil put in it. Therefore, one night's oil for a gold Menorah was not sufficient for an earthenware menorah because some of the oil is lost to absorption.

Bava Metzia 40a & Maharsha Chullin 55



In one account, the text reads "and there wasn't enough (oil) it to burn **even** one day..."

Sheiltos DeRav Achai Gaon, Parshas Vayishlach found in footnote to Megillas Antiochucus in Siddur Otzar Hatefilos



Seven days commemorate the miracle of the oil, and one day commemorates the miracle that a few weak Jewish soldiers defeated the mighty Greek legions.

Kedushas Levi



Chanukah occurred in the year 3622 (139 BCE). Calendar calculations and other historical sources indicate that the 25th of Kislev, the first day of Chanukah, fell on Shabbat that year. Therefore, they needed to light the menorah before sunset Friday night, and consequently needed a little more than a night's-worth of oil.

Atzei Zayis



The commandment to light the Menorah with pure oil is written in the Torah (Leviticus, chapters 23 and 24) immediately after the commandment to observe the *Succos* festival for 8 days (7 days of *Succos* followed by *Shemini Atzeres*). The Sages saw this as a Divine hint that Chanukah should be for 8 days.

Bnei Yisaschar in the name of the Rokeach

**Research based on Sefer Ner Leme'ah by Rabbi Yerachmiel Zeltzer*



COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 4)

BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”
(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

The first blessing continues: “And through His great goodness we have never lacked, and may we never lack, nourishment for all eternity. For the sake of His Great Name, because He is Hashem, Who nourishes and sustains all, and benefits all, and He prepares food for all of His creatures that He has created. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who nourishes everything.”

The Eitz Yosef explains that we are asking Hashem for an ever-plentiful supply of food, just as there was for the Jewish nation as they journeyed for forty years in the desert. And then we reveal our motives for requesting Hashem to be so benevolent with us. Not, as it may sound, because we want an abundance of food to satiate our physical beings. But, rather, for a more altruistic reason, to help us serve Hashem more effectively, for the “sake of His Great Name.” Because, as we all know, hunger makes it difficult to focus on that which is truly important.

Rabbi Binyamin Lifton, a Rabbi in the Yeshiva of Central Queens for decades, said that while in his teens in Eastern Europe, his parents wanted him to learn Torah in the illustrious Yeshiva in Grodno, Lithuania. It was headed by Rabbi Shimon Shkop (1860-1939), who was regarded as one of the most incisive, brilliant scholars of his generation. The young Rabbi Lifton traveled for days by train and foot to Grodno, hoping to be accepted by the Yeshiva. The entrance exam procedure was demanding, but surprisingly informal. The prospective student would give a short discourse on the part of Talmud he was learning, followed by Rabbi Shkop asking him questions about what he had just said. Based on the student’s answers, Rabbi Shkop would decide whether or not to accept him.

Rabbi Lifton finally arrived at the Yeshiva, exhausted and starving, late one evening. To his surprise and consternation, the very first person he met was Rabbi Shimon Shkop. Rabbi Lifton was so flustered to be met by the head of the Yeshiva, of all people, that he immediately began reciting the piece of Talmud he had prepared, without even remembering to return Rabbi Shkop’s greeting! Rabbi Shimon Shkop gently interrupted him, saying that he had two questions. Bracing himself for innovative, ingenious questions he would likely have no hope of answering correctly, Rabbi Lifton heard Rabbi Shkop ask, “When was the last time you ate a hot meal? And when was the last time you slept in a bed?” On hearing that Rabbi Lifton had not done either since leaving home on his journey to Grodno, Rabbi Shkop took him home to personally prepare a hot meal for him and arrange a bed for him to sleep in. On the following morning, the Rabbi accepted him into the Yeshivah.

Many years later, Rabbi Lifton would tell his students in New York that due to the difficulties and suffering he had endured in the Holocaust, he had forgotten much of the Torah that his Rebbi, Rabbi Shimon Shkop, had taught him. Yet, he said that he never, ever forgot those two questions that were his “entrance exam” into one of the most prestigious Yeshivas in the world at the time.

Exhaustion and hunger are not normally conducive to building a significant relationship with Hashem (or with anyone else, for that matter). That being the case, we ask Hashem to supply us with an abundance of

goodness so that we will be more receptive and better able to achieve a lasting and meaningful connection with our Father in Heaven.

The Maharal of Prague explains that this is why the blessing states that Hashem, “nourishes and sustains all, and benefits all.” According to the Maharal, “He is Hashem, Who nourishes” means that Hashem provides a person’s minimum requirements. “Sustains all” means that Hashem also gives us more than just our minimum necessities. “And benefits all” means that Hashem is providing us with even more than that. He provides us with so much more. Finally, “He prepares food for all of His creatures who He has created” means that Hashem not only takes care of human life. He supplies food to all of His living creatures. Consequently, we conclude our blessing with the declaration, “Blessed are You, Hashem, Who nourishes everything.”

To be continued...

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

FEAR OF THE ENEMY

Mitzvah 525 (see also mitzvah 526)

You might say in your heart, “These nations are greater than me! How can I possibly conquer them?” Do not fear them; you shall surely remember what Hashem your G-d did to Pharaoh and to all the Egyptians...Do not be terrified of them, for Hashem your G-d is in your midst – the great and awesome G-d! (Devarim 7:17-21)

THE MITZVAH

We are commanded to refrain from being afraid of our enemies during battle, and not to flee from them. It is our obligation to stand up against the enemies of the Jewish people (*Sefer HaChinuch*).

Fear comes upon a person involuntarily. The Torah therefore advises to think thoughts that dispel fear: remember that the omnipotent Hashem is amongst us and fighting for us, and remember what He did to the Egyptians who came upon us (*Malbim* to v. 18).

REASON ONE: FEAR WEAKENS

Soldiers are commanded not to fear the enemy, since this will cause them to flee, and flight is the beginning of defeat (*Rabbi Menachem HaBavli*, based on *Sotah* 8:6).

Rambam (*Melachim* 7:15): “Once a soldier enters battle, he must place his trust upon the Hope of Israel and their Savior in their time of distress, and he must realize that he is fighting for Hashem’s sake. He should therefore place his life in his hands, and he should not fear. He should not think about his loved ones, but should rather erase their memories from his heart and focus entirely on the battle. Anyone who begins to think and worry, and brings terror upon himself, has transgressed this commandment. Moreover, the lives of the whole nation are dependent upon him, and therefore, if he does not fight with all his heart and soul, [but

rather succumbs to feelings of terror,] it is as if he has murdered. It is thus written, *and he shall not cause his fellow soldiers' hearts to melt like his own*. On the other hand, a soldier who fights with all his heart and without fear, and whose intent is only to sanctify Hashem's name, is assured that he will not be harmed, and he will merit to establish a family and bear progeny and merit eternal life in the World to Come."

REASON TWO: FOR THE HONOR OF HASHEM AND HIS NATION

Fighting on behalf of the Jewish people is a matter of Hashem's honor. We are therefore commanded to trust in Hashem and not care about our bodies when we have the opportunity to convey glory to Hashem and his nation (*Sefer HaChinuch*). [In addition, by fearing people as if they have the power to harm us against Hashem's will, we are being disrespectful to Hashem, Who has commanded us to trust in Him.]

REASON THREE: FEAR HAS NEGATIVE SPIRITUAL EFFECTS

Hashem promised the Jewish people that when they observe the Torah, He will deliver all of their enemies into their hands, and He therefore commanded us not to fear. Fear of people comes from a weakness of character. It can also be harmful, because when a person becomes afraid, the angel that protects him becomes weakened, and he strengthens his foes and brings upon himself calamities that he does not deserve. Conversely, if someone trusts in Hashem and does not fear the enemy, he can merit to be spared even from deserved harm (*Rabbeinu Bachaye* (v. 25) and *Shem MiShmuel* (Moadim, Zechor Bris 5675) based on *Mishlei* 29:25; *Rabbenu Yonah* to *Mishlei* 3:26; see beginning of *Chovos HaLevavos*, *Shaar HaBitachon*).

REASON FOUR: CONTRADICTION TO FEAR OF HASHEM

When we take to heart that He is One and Only, we revere Hashem and fear disobeying His will. This also means that we should *not* fear others, who cannot harm us against Hashem's will. Fear of Hashem and fear of others are therefore mutually exclusive, and when a person fears people, he automatically removes some of his fear of Hashem. The Torah therefore commands us to recall that Hashem is a "great and awesome God," meaning, we should *only* Him, and nobody else (*Kad HaKemach: Yirah*; see also *Ibn Ezra*).

PARSHA OVERVIEW - Vayeshev

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers.

In the Torah portion's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished

in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *Mashiach*.

Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In prison, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

PARSHA OVERVIEW - Miketz

It is two years later. Pharaoh has a dream. He is unsatisfied with all attempts to interpret it. Pharaoh's wine chamberlain remembers that Yosef accurately interpreted his dream while in prison. Yosef is released from prison and brought before Pharaoh. He interprets that soon will begin seven years of abundance, followed by seven years of severe famine. He tells Pharaoh to appoint a wise person to store grain in preparation for the famine. Pharaoh appoints him as viceroy to oversee the project. Pharaoh gives Yosef an Egyptian name, Tsafnat Panayach, and selects Osnat, Yosef's ex-master's daughter, as Yosef's wife. Egypt becomes the granary of the world. Yosef has two sons, Menashe and Ephraim.

Yaakov sends his sons to Egypt to buy food. The brothers come before Yosef and bow to him. Yosef recognizes them but they do not recognize him. Mindful of his dreams, Yosef plays the part of an Egyptian overlord and acts harshly, accusing them of being spies. Yosef sells them food, but keeps Shimon hostage until they bring their brother Binyamin to him as proof of their honesty. Yosef commands his servants to replace the purchase-money in their sacks. On the return journey they discover the money, and their hearts sink. They return to Yaakov and retell everything. Yaakov refuses to let Binyamin go to Egypt, but when the famine grows unbearable he accedes. Yehuda guarantees Binyamin's safety and the brothers go to Egypt. Yosef welcomes the brothers lavishly as honored guests. When he sees Binyamin, he rushes from the room and weeps. Yosef instructs his servants to replace the money in the sacks and to put his goblet inside Binyamin's sack. When the goblet is discovered, Yosef demands Binyamin to be his slave as punishment. Yehuda interposes and offers himself instead, but Yosef refuses.

Ohr Somayach wishes all of our friends, alumni and readers of Ohrnet Torah Magazine a festive and luminous Chanukah that will light up our lives with good health, much happiness and peace. And may all the hostages be returned safely.

Chanukah Somayach!