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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Plain-Clothes Jew

“...and they made the holy vestments for Aharon” (39:1)

There’s much talk about the rise of antisemitism at the moment. Actually, I don’t think there is a rise in antisemitism. Jew haters are always out there and their numbers don’t change. What changes is their confidence in showing their hatred openly, whether verbally or physically.

I just got back from visiting my mother, who will be 100, G-d willing, in two weeks. My mother lives in St Johns Wood, an upscale suburb just north of London’s Regent’s Park. It’s not exactly Oxford Street on a Saturday, where you could expect ten thousand pro-Palestine protesters, chic-ly clad with their keffiyehs around their necks, screaming “From the river to the sea,” but I still weighed up whether I should wear my standard outfit of dark suit and fedora, or put on a baseball cap and become a plain-clothes, undercover Jew.

In the event, I decided to stand up and be counted, and I discovered something very interesting: There are Jew-lovers out there! Now, I’m not going to say they are as many or as vocal as Jew-haters, but they are out there. In St. John’s Wood High Street, there was this big black traffic cop giving out tickets, who looked up at me, gave me a big smile and said, “Me and my mates, we’re behind the Jews one hundred and ten percent!” and then he went back to giving out parking tickets. On Friday night as I made my way back from St. John’s Wood Synagogue, I turned into a rather dark side street, and saw a taxi driver getting into his cab. He looked at me. I couldn’t tell exactly what his attitude was, so I said, “Good Evening!” “Good Shabbos!” he shot back at me. I still wasn’t sure whether he was being sarcastic or not, but as he drove past me, he wound down his window, gave me a big thumbs-up and shouted: “Israel Forever! Long Live Israel.”

The Koran explicitly warns Muslims not to make the same mistakes as the Jews did, by not keeping G-d’s commandments. They understand this led G-d to reject the Jewish People. There’s a similar theme in the Christian scriptures that depicts the “Wandering Jew” outcast from the Promised Land because of the failure to keep G-d’s ‘testament’. This is remarkably similar to our reason for sitting on the ground and fasting every Ninth of Av. We too understand that through our many sins, we were exiled from the land of Israel. However, our belief is that G-d will never revoke His Covenant with the Jewish People, nor will He take to Himself another nation.

The Midrash tells us that when Hashem gave the Jewish People the Torah on Mount Sinai, the kings of the East and the West were aware that something cataclysmic had happened that could destabilize their power. They felt the shaking of the earth beneath their feet. They feared another global flood and so asked the Gentile prophet Bilaam what caused this disturbance of the natural order. Bilaam said that there would be no flood, nor would a deluge of fire envelop the world. Rather, the world was responding to the momentous event of the giving of the Torah on Sinai – “*Hashem Oz L’Amo Yiten.*” To which they responded, “May Hashem bless His people with peace.”

That’s the default reaction of the nations of the world: “May Hashem bless His people with peace.” But, when we lose our connection to Torah, then they see in us no spirituality, no “chosen people.” They see us as a choker around their necks, stifling their enjoyment of this world. They see us as a gang of killjoys, for we have lost the ability to be the light to the nations, which is G-d’s role for His people. However, when we exemplify our true heritage, the nations will finally say, “May Hashem bless His people with peace!”

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Knowing When It’s Lost

Rav Yitzchak said, “It is the nature of a person to frequently feel for his wallet of money to check that he still has it.”

The *gemara* cites this teaching of Rav Yitzchak regarding human behavior to explain why we are taught that a finder of lost money may keep it for himself. Why shouldn’t he be concerned with the possibility that the person who lost the money may not be aware that it fell from him, and therefore did not actually consciously give up hope of getting the lost money back? (The halacha is according to Abayei who requires a “conscious” giving up of hope, as opposed to Rava who accepts an “assumed” giving up of hope had the loser known that he lost the money in order to rule “finders keepers”.)

Years ago, when I was sitting near a great Rabbi in Jerusalem who was teaching Torah to our group of students, I noticed that he was reaching inside his suit jacket quite often and seemed to be feeling his heart. I was worried that he wasn’t well, and asked him after the lecture if he was feeling okay. He replied, “Baruch Hashem,” he was feeling fine. When I explained that I was concerned due his frequent reaching inside his jacket, he said, “Today I am carrying a wallet inside my jacket, and the *gemara* says that it is the way of a person to frequently feel for his wallet.” He concluded: “I want to be considered a person!”

▪ *Bava Metzia 21b*

Q & A

Questions

1. Why is the word Mishkan stated twice in verse 38:21?
2. Why is the Mishkan called the "Mishkan of Testimony"?
3. Who was appointed to carry the vessels of the Mishkan in the *midbar*?
4. Who was the officer in charge of the *levi'im*?
5. What is the meaning of the name Bezalel?
6. How many people contributed a half-shekel to the Mishkan? Who contributed?
7. Which material used in the *bigdei kehuna* was not used in the coverings of the sacred vessels?
8. How were the gold threads made?
9. What was inscribed on the stones on the shoulders of the *ephod*?
10. What was on the hem of the *me'il*?
11. What did the *Kohen Gadol* wear between the *mitznefet* and the *tzitzit*?
12. What role did Moshe play in the construction of the Mishkan?
13. Which date was the first time that the Mishkan was erected and not dismantled?
14. What was the "tent" which Moshe spread over the Mishkan (40:19)?
15. What "testimony" did Moshe place in the *aron*?
16. What function did the *parochet* serve?
17. Where was the *shulchan* placed in the Mishkan?
18. Where was the *menorah* placed in the Mishkan?
19. Who offered the communal sacrifices during the eight days of the dedication of the Mishkan?
20. On which day did both Moshe and Aharon serve as *kohanim*?

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

Answers

1. 38:21 - To allude to the *Beit Hamikdash* that would twice be taken as a "*mashkon*" (pledge) for the sins of the Jewish People until the nation repents.
2. 38:21 - It was testimony for the Jewish People that G-d forgave them for the golden calf and allowed His *Shechina* to dwell among them.
3. 38:21 - The *levi'im*.
4. 38:21 - Itamar ben Aharon.
5. 38:22 - "In the shadow of G-d."
6. 38:26 - 603,550. Every man age twenty and over (except the *levi'im*).
7. 39:1 - Linen (See *Rashi 31:10*).
8. 39:3 - The gold was beaten into thin plates from which threads were cut. (See *Rashi 28:6*).
9. 39:6, 39:7 - The names of the tribes.
10. 39:24,25 - Woven pomegranates and golden bells.
11. 39:31 - *Tefillin*.
12. 39:33 - He stood it up.
13. 40:17 - *Rosh Chodesh Nissan* of the second year in the desert. For seven days before this, during the consecration of Aharon and his sons, Moshe erected and dismantled the Mishkan. (*Rashi 39:29*)
14. 40:19 - The curtain of goatskin.
15. 40:20 - The *Luchot Habrit*.
16. 40:21 - It served as a partition for the *aron*.
17. 40:22 - On the northern side of the *Ohel Mo'ed*, outside the *parochet*.
18. 40:24 - On the southern side of the *Ohel Mo'ed* opposite the *shulchan*.
19. 40:29 - Moshe.
20. 40:31 - On the eighth day of the consecration of the Mishkan.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 17)

BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

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

The requests continue: The Compassionate One, may He send us abundant blessing to this house and to this table that we have eaten upon.

Why does the request for an abundant blessing make mention of both our house and also the table that we ate on? What singles out the dining room table from any other piece of furniture in the home? The Talmud teaches (*Brachot* 55a) that the *mizbeyach* [altar] in the Holy Temple would atone for the sins of the Jewish Nation. However, since the loss of the *mizbeyach* and the destruction of the Temple it is our dining room tables that atone for us. Because it is to our Shabbat and Yom Tov tables that we invite those in need. Our dining room tables give testimony, as it were, to our openhearted and openhanded generosity. And by doing so, our sins are atoned, just as they were on the *mizbeyach*. In fact, Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel (1250-1327), known as the Rosh, writes that in his era the wealthier Jews of Provence, France had a custom to have their coffins made out of their dining room tables. It is as if they wanted their dining room tables to accompany them on their final journey to bear witness to all of the *chasadim* that they performed in this world!

Rabbi Yaakov Dovid Willowsky (1845-1913), known by his acronym Ridvaz (Rabbi Yaakov Dovid ben Zeev), was the brilliantly erudite Chief Rabbi of Slutsk, Belarus. In 1905 he settled in Israel serving as the Chief Rabbi of Tzefat where he opened and headed a Yeshivah named *Torat Eretz Yisrael*. The Ridvaz is famous among other things for his commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud.

The Ridvaz recounted that once, while still in Slutsk, he was so sick that the doctors gave up all hope and despaired for his life. As he was lying on his deathbed he had a dream. In his dream the Ridvaz saw the Heavenly Tribunal debating whether he had enough merits to allow him to continue living in the physical realms. After a lengthy deliberation, the court ruled that there was no alternative and he must leave this world.

The Ridvaz saw himself pleading before the celestial court, “I didn’t finish writing my commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud. If I die it will never be finished and it will never be printed.” The court told him that another scholar would finish the commentary and print it. Then the Ridvaz said, “But I support many widows and orphans. What will be with them if I die? Let me live, so I can help them.” The court replied, “It is true that your support of widows and orphans is truly beloved by the Father of all widows and orphans, but if two members of the community take on your responsibilities they will be able to carry out your holy work just as you do. You, however, must leave the world.” Finally, the Ridvaz told them, “In our home, the tablecloth is on the table in honor of Shabbat on Thursday night and we always bring in Shabbat earlier than the regular time” (what is called *Tosefet Shabbat*.)” When the presiding angels heard that they replied, “In this merit, you will live many more years.”

According to the Ridvaz’s own words it was his dining room table and his care in adding to Shabbat that saved him from the ultimate judgment of being taken from this world! Afterwards the Ridvaz lived a long and spiritually fulfilled life. Among all of his other tremendous accomplishments, he successfully completed two brilliant and indispensable commentaries on the Jerusalem Talmud – *Chidushei Ridvaz* and *Tosfot haRid* – which are now printed alongside the Talmud as standard additions.

We ask Hashem to send us an “abundant blessing to this house and to this table that we have eaten upon” because, possibly even more than our homes, it is our tables that testify to the intensity and the purity of our connection to Hashem.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Crafty Artisans

In discussing the craftsmanship and expertise of Betzalel and Ohaliav – who were instrumental in the construction of the Tabernacle and its associated paraphernalia – the Torah uses the terms *charash*, *choshev*, and *rokem* (Ex. 35:35, 38:23). On the surface, all three terms seem to be synonymous in reference to specific skills and abilities that these two men possessed, but the commentators show the nuances expressed by the use of these three distinct terms. This essay explores those nuances and discusses other words that are etymologically-adjacent to these three words to help gain a better appreciation of what the Torah meant to convey when describing Betzalel and Ohaliav's talents.

In a somewhat cryptic passage, the Talmud (Yoma 72b) explains that *choshev* and *rokem* both refer to sorts of “embroidery,” but that *choshev* refers to embroidery via weaving which produces “two faces,” while *rokem* refers to embroidery via stitching which produces “one face.” Rashi (to Yoma 72b, there 26:1, 26:31) explains that the Talmud means that both of these terms refer to a double-sided embroidery: *choshev* refers to weaving an image (say a lion) on one side of a fabric, weaving another image (say an eagle) on one side of another fabric, and then combining them into a two-ply fabric with different images on each of its sides (a lion and an eagle). On the other hand, *rokem* refers to the more advanced ability to embroider a symmetrical image into one fabric such that it can be seen in the same way from both sides of the fabric. Maimonides (Laws of Klei HaMikdash 8:15) and Abarbanel (to Ex. 26:1) explain that *rokem* refers to the ability to embroider an image on one side of a fabric (leaving the other side empty, per Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky in *Derech Chochmah*), while *choshev* refers to what Rashi explained as *rokem*. Either way, it is telling that neither the Talmud, nor the above-mentioned commentators, discussed what *charash* means in relation to all of this.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 26:1) offers a similar explanation that connects REISH-KUF-MEM to REISH-GIMMEL-MEM (via the interchangeability of KUF and GIMMEL) to argue that just as the latter refers to “stoning” a person to death by piling stones upon him, so does the former apply to one who weaves an embroidered fabric in such a way that it appears as though the foreground image was piled on top of its background.

Rabbi Yonah (Marwan) Ibn Janach (990–1050) authored *Sefer HaDikduk*, which was one of the first studies on the Hebrew language. In his introduction to that work, he explains that he divides this book into two parts, the first is called *Sefer HaRikmah* (“the Book of Embroidery”) and the second is called *Sefer HaShorashim* (“the Book of Roots”). While the second part deals exclusively with the etymological/lexical roots of words in the Hebrew language, the first part deals with a wide array of grammatical, orthographic, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and linguistic issues related to the Hebrew language. Ibn Janach writes that because of the wide range of topics discussed in that first part of his book, he called it *Sefer HaRikmah* in allusion to *rikmot ha'adamah*, a phrase which referred to botanical gardens in which multiple species were planted, which harkens back to the Biblical concept of *rokem*, defined as “one who produces fabrics comprised of multiple colors.” Radak (to Judges 5:30, Yechezkel 17:3, and in *Sefer HaShorashim*) also defines *rokem* as one who weaves or sews a multicolored textile. [Interestingly, I have been unable to find the phrase *rikmot ha'adamah* used anywhere else besides Ibn Janach's introduction. It should be pointed out, though, that Ibn Janach's work was originally written in Judeo-Arabic and was only later translated in Hebrew.]

Targum Onkelos translates these three words into separate Aramaic terms, rendering *charash* as *uman*, *choshev* as *nagar* (“carpenter/woodworker” in Modern Hebrew), and *rokem* as *tzayar* (“painter” in Modern Hebrew). Although none of these words appear in the Bible, the word *uman* appears many times in the Mishnah (for example, *Bikkurim* 3:3, *Pesachim* 4:6, *Kiddushin* 4:14, *Sanhedrin* 3:4, *Avodah Zarah* 5:7, *Erachin* 6:3, *Taharat*

7:3) and has a close relative that appears once in the Bible, aman (Song of Songs 7:2). Machberet Menachem defines an uman as any sort of artisan or craftsman, while Radak (in Sefer HaShorashim) implies that only an expert in his field may be called such.

*For more about the words charash, choshev, and rokem with a discussion of how they differ from each other, check out the full version of this essay online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

THE MENORAH (Part 2 of 2)

Mitzvah #98 in Sefer HaChinuch

THE WISDOM OF THE TORAH

The Menorah symbolizes that Hashem provides illumination for His world in the spiritual sense as well, that is, through the Divine wisdom of the Torah. As opposed to the Aron, which symbolizes the actual Torah that was received by prophecy, the Menorah symbolizes the wisdom of the Torah as it is attained by the study of the Jewish people (*Rav Hirsch*). The central branch represents the Written Torah, and the six protruding branches represent the six orders of the Oral Torah (*Arizal*, cited in *Be'er Basadeh*). The 7 branches, 22 cups, 11 spheres, and 9 flowers add up to 49 components, corresponding to the 49 days in which the Torah was given. Accordingly, there is a custom to recite *Tehillim* §67, which has 49 words, written out in the shape of a Menorah, during the 49 days of the Omer that lead up to Giving of the Torah. The Menorah weighed 120 *manah*, corresponding to the three times forty days that Moshe spent on Mount Sinai in order to receive the Torah (*Maaseh Rokeach*). The Menorah is positioned in the south of the Mishkan, which is called its “right side,” since *the heart of the wise man is on his right* (*Koheles* 10:2; *Midrash Tadsheh* §11).

The Midrash expounds that the verse, *The beginning of Your words shall illuminate* (*Tehillim* 119:130), alludes to the Menorah. *Arizal*, *Rama* (*Toras HaOlah* §16), and the *Vilna Gaon* explain this to mean that the opening verses of the Torah’s five Books allude to the various components of the Menorah. The opening verse of *Bereishis* has seven words, alluding to the number of branches; the opening verse of *Shemos* has eleven words, alluding to the number of spheres; the opening verse of *Vayikra* has nine words, alluding to the number of flowers; the opening verse of *Bamidbar* has seventeen words, alluding to its height. [Although its height is *eighteen* handbreadths, the Commentators explain that the eighteenth is alluded to by the *kollel*, or the eighteenth handbreadth is a part of a handbreadth and is not counted, or it corresponds to the base of the Menorah, or it is alluded to by the *beis* of *Bereishis*, or a combination of the above.] The opening verse of *Devarim* has twenty-two words, alluding to the number of cups.

We may suggest that these five components correspond precisely to the contents of those Books, as follows: *Bereishis* is the Book of Creation, which is described in a verse as, *He formed seven pillars for it* (*Mishlei* 9:1), meaning, Hashem created the world in seven days (*Rashi*); so too, the Menorah has seven lamps that correspond to the seven days of Creation (*Tanchuma*), set on seven pillars. *Shemos* begins with tribes descending to Egypt, and they are represented by eleven stars; hence, eleven spheres. *Vayikra* speaks about the mitzvos that pertain to a tribe that is not counted amongst the rest: Levi. Levi is comprised of eight families (Livni, Shimi, Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron, Uziel, Machli, and Mushi), plus Aharon’s Kohanite family, and so too, there are eight flowers

along the branches of the Menorah, plus a ninth by its base. The flowers are associated with the Tribe of Levi, as we find that Aharon's staff sprouted blossoms (*VaOlech Eschem Komemiyus*). *Bamidbar* describes the Jewish people travelling through the Wilderness in a camp of eighteen elements: the Mishkan in the center; surrounded by four family groups (Gershon to west, Kehas to south, Merari to the north, and the families of Moshe and Aharon to the east); surrounded by four groups of three tribes; and the encampment as a whole (the *kollel*). This finds expression in the Menorah's height of eighteen handbreadths, which alluded to in the seventeen words of the opening verse of *Bamidbar*, along with the *kollel*. In *Devarim*, Moshe teaches the Torah to the Jewish people, and the Torah is symbolized by its twenty-two letters; hence the number of cups.

THE TORAH SCHOLAR

A Torah scholar is compared to a tree, and so too, the Menorah has a trunk, branches, flowers, cups similar to the ovary of a flower, and spheres shaped like fruit (*Rav Hirsch*; see there). The height of the Menorah is that of an average man (*Alshich*). It measures eighteen handbreadths, the numerical value of the word *chai* (life), because the Torah is the Tree of Life (*Toras HaOlah*). The cups, which contain spheres, from which blossom forth flowers, allude to the three stages of a Torah scholar's development. First, he must focus solely on receiving Torah from his teachers, like a cup; then he must focus on retaining his studies, like sealed-off sphere; and then he becomes capable of blossoming and producing novel Torah thoughts in accordance with Torah's truth (*Dvar Mikra*, by *Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein*). The seven lamps correspond to the seven gateways to the soul: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and the mouth (*Midrash Tadsheh* §11). Every Jew is capable of radiating with Divine glory by acquiring Hashem's wisdom that is contained in the Torah, our national heritage.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Book of Shemot concludes with this Torah portion. After finishing all the different parts, vessels and garments used in the Mishkan, Moshe gives a complete accounting and enumeration of all the contributions and of the various clothing and vessels that had been fashioned. *Bnei Yisrael* bring everything to Moshe. He inspects the handiwork and notes that everything was made according to G-d's specifications. Moshe blesses the people. G-d speaks to Moshe and tells him that the Mishkan should be set up on the first day of the first month, i.e., Nissan. He also tells Moshe the order of assembly for the Mishkan and its vessels. Moshe does everything in the prescribed manner. When the Mishkan is finally complete with every vessel in its place, a cloud descends upon it, indicating that G-d's glory was resting there. Whenever the cloud moved away from the Mishkan, *Bnei Yisrael* would follow it. At night the cloud was replaced by a pillar of fire.

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