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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Pekudei

The New Israel

"And he made the breast-plate as a craftsman, like he made the ephod, from gold, turquoise, purple and crimson wool..." (39:8)

At the beginning of Megillat Esther, Achashverosh throws a party to end all parties. The party of the millennium. He was celebrating his unassailable grip on the throne of the Persian Empire. At this party, Achashverosh brought out the vessels of the Holy Temple which the Babylonians had plundered and caroused with.

But he didn't stop there. Achashverosh's party attire consisted of the vestments of the High Priest. Why did he do this? Was it some elaborate spoof? Was Achashverosh poking fun at the Jewish People and their prophecies of the demise of his all-mighty kingdom? Or was there something more sinister behind this charade?

"And the land was formless and empty and darkness on the face of the deep." (Bereishet 1:2)

These words form part of the opening words of the Torah. They hint to four mighty empires that will subjugate the Jewish People. The first, Babylon, will snatch the crown of Empire from the Jewish People, and then the Persian, Greece and Roman empires will successively snatch world domination, one from the other. Eventually, the last of those empires, Rome and its cultural heirs, will return the kingship to the Jewish People.

When that happens, *"The lost ones will come from the land of Ashur"* (Yeshayahu 27:13) – and the final exile will end. The name *Ashur* is related to the Hebrew word *ishur*. An *ishur* is a certification. Each nation who takes the kingship from the Jewish People seeks to "certify" itself as being the true and final recipient of the crown of the world. But they can only do this by proclaiming themselves the true heirs. They claim to be the "New Israel," so to speak. They claim that the testament of faith of the Jewish People is old and that they have a new one.

This, in essence, was what Achashverosh was attempting to do at his millennial party. He was certifying himself as the "New Israel." His party was a grotesque replication of the Temple service. The vessels of the Temple were there and were being used. He was dressed as the *Kohen Gadol*, the high priest. He even went so far as to name his ministers after the offerings of the Holy Temple. He was trying to utilize those forces of holiness for his own means, to set his own seal on world domination, using the higher spiritual forces. This was no charade.

But we know what transpired. The truth and eternity of Hashem, His Torah and His nation of Israel prevailed, and will always prevail.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Pesachim 114-121

The Matzah Meal of Freedom and Purity

Rabban Gamliel would say, “Whoever does not say (i.e. explain the reason behind the mitzvah for – Rashbam) these three things on Pesach, does not fulfill his obligation, and these are: the *korban Pesach*, matzah and maror (bitter herbs).”

This *mishna* is likely to be familiar to everyone as part of the *Hagaddah Shel Pesach* that is read at the Seder. Historically, when the Beit Hamikdash stood, the *korban Pesach* was eaten on Pesach night together with matzah and maror. There are two views regarding how they were eaten: all at once, as a “sandwich,” which is the opinion of Hillel, or these three food items of mitzvah could even be eaten separately, which is the ruling of the *Chachamim*. Nowadays, we do not have a *korban Pesach*, eating maror is a rabbinic mitzvah, and eating matzah is a Torah mitzvah (as the Torah teaches, “in the evening they will eat matzah” – the obligation to eat matzah is independent of the *korban Pesach* and is a Torah mitzvah even in our time - *Shemot 12:18*). Nowadays, we eat the matzah and the maror separately, with separate blessings, and the matzah is eaten first.

The Maharsha makes a fascinating observation in the teaching of Rabban Gamliel. In this *mishna*, Rabban Gamliel is teaching that there is a requirement to explain the reasons for the need to eat each of these specific foods (including the *korban Pesach* when it was possible). Otherwise, we have not fulfilled the mitzvah. This requirement to explain the reason for the mitzvah in order to fulfill it is unique to these three mitzvahs, explains the Maharsha. For any other mitzvah in the Torah that involves eating, no reason is required to be enunciated. At most, a blessing is said, before or after the act of eating – or both. But no explanation is necessary. What makes the mitzvahs of Pesach, matzah and maror unique, in this aspect, that they require that we state the reason for our eating them in order to successfully fulfill the mitzvah? This question seemingly provides “food for thought” for our upcoming Pesach *Sedarim*, G-d willing.

The Maharsha offers an answer to this question, which I will try to state briefly, and I heartily suggest learning the Maharsha’s explanation in full, if possible. It is certainly, in my opinion, on any respectable “Recommended Reading List” when learning this *daf* or learning the Pesach Hagaddah in preparation for the Seder.

The theme that serves as the common denominator for all of these three mitzvahs is a fundamental theme of Pesach, and is essential to understand in order to truly appreciate what Pesach really means to us as individuals and as a nation. Pesach is a time when Hashem not only took us out of physical slavery in Egypt to physical freedom. More importantly, He took us out of a spiritual slavery-state of the impurity of Egypt, from the horrific spiritual slavery of knowing nothing other than idolatry. He “took us out,” and step-by-step brought us closer to the pinnacle of spiritual purity, drawing us closer and closer to Him and His holy Torah.

This is the running theme of the Pesach, mitzvah and maror mitzvahs, which highlight our recalling and reliving the Pesach experience: Hashem brought us out of a place of spiritual impurity in a way that gave us the opportunity to discard this impurity and follow the will of Hashem in purity and holiness.

Pesach: “The *korban Pesach* that our ancestors ate was on account of Hashem passing over the houses of the Jewish People in Egypt (when he killed the firstborn Egyptians during the tenth plague). As the Torah says, ‘It is a Pesach offering to Hashem, for He passed over the houses of the Jewish People in Egypt when He killed the Egyptians – and He saved our houses.’” (*Shemot 12:27*) This reason expresses the theme that Hashem – while killing the idolatrous

Egyptians who worshipped the lamb as a deity – told us to slaughter the lamb in view of the Egyptians to signal that it was time to stop the impure, idolatrous practices of the past, and move toward the holiness of being close to Hashem, Who would give us the holy Torah and sanctify us with its commandments.

Maror: “These bitter herbs that we eat are because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our ancestors in Egypt, as the Torah says, “And they (the ancient Egyptians) embittered their (the Jewish people’s) lives with hard labor, with clay and with bricks and with all kinds of labor in the fields, all their work that they worked with them with back-breaking labor.” (*Shemot 1:14*) In taking us out from Egyptian slavery, Hashem not only saved us from the bitter hardship of torturous labor, but also saved us from the bitter impurity of idolatrous Egypt, in order to bring us to the sweetness of becoming close to the One Almighty by receiving the Torah and living according to its wisdom.

Matzah: (Here it gets a bit “tricky.”) According to the text in our *gemara*, Rabban Gamliel says that “matzah is because our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt. As the Torah says, ‘They (the Jewish People) baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as matzah cakes, for it had not become chametz, as they were driven out of Egypt and could not tarry – and, also, they had not made provisions for themselves.’” (*Shemot 12:39*) The Maharsha explains how the reason for matzah, based on this verse, should be understood as following the same theme of spiritual purity as explained for the *korban Pesach* and *maror*. Eating matzah on Pesach – with no chametz for seven days – is eating “bread” that has not risen, leavening being a symbolic sign for haughtiness – which leads to impure and forbidden thoughts, words and deeds. This is why the *korban mincha* – the meal offering eaten by the *kohen* – is made as matzah and not chametz. When the *kohen* serves Hashem in eating the *korban mincha*, he certainly does so in the utmost purity and holiness. Likewise is our Divine service in eating unleavened matzah on Pesach.

The Maharsha acknowledges that the reason for matzah that we find in our Hagaddah is different from that which we see on our *daf*. He writes that the text we have in our Hagaddahs is the correct text according to most copies of the Talmud Bavli that he had seen, and is the text accepted by many *Rishonim*. This alternate text reads, “This matzah that we eat is because *there was insufficient time for the dough that our ancestors took out from Egypt to rise*, before the King who reigns over kings – *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* – revealed Himself to them and immediately redeemed them. As the Torah says, “They (the Jewish People) baked the dough that they had taken out of Egypt as matzah cakes, *for it had not become chametz since they were driven out of Egypt and could not tarry* – and, also, they had not made provisions for themselves.” (*Shemot 12:39*)

According to our Haggadah’s text, the Maharsha has two new questions. One: If the matzah was baked *after* leaving Egypt, it was after midnight at that time, and why is the mitzvah to eat matzah to be fulfilled specifically *before* midnight? Two: Why were the Jewish People in Egypt commanded to eat unleavened matzah (with the *korban Pesach* and *maror*) on the *first* Pesach *before they had hurriedly left Egypt with their dough*, without time for it to rise? He answers both of these questions in accordance with the same theme he proposed for understanding the essence of three Pesach food mitzvahs. In the context of this Torah verse, matzah is a food of purity and humility, and Hashem – in His great kindness – took the Jewish People out of the unimaginable impurity of Egypt *before* they had a chance to “become chametz” – i.e. before they became too steeped in the Egyptian impurity. Hashem did this in order to purify the Jewish nation, bring us close to Him, and, ultimately, sanctify us by giving us His holy Torah at Mount Sinai.

- *Pesachim 116b*

Q & A

VAYAKHEL

Questions

1. On which day did Moshe assemble the Jewish People?
2. Why is the prohibition against doing work on Shabbat written prior to the instruction for building the Mishkan?
3. Why does the Torah specify the particular prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbat right after it had already noted the general prohibition of doing work on Shabbat?
4. What function did the "yitdot hamishkan" serve?
5. What function did the "bigdei hasrad" serve?
6. What was unusual about the way the women spun the goat's hair?
7. Why were the *Nesi'im* last to contribute to the building of the Mishkan? How does the Torah show dissatisfaction with their actions?
8. Who does the Torah identify as the primary builders of the Mishkan? From which tribes were they?
9. What time of day did the people bring their daily contributions for the construction of the Mishkan?
10. For what was the woven goat's hair used?
11. What image was woven into the *parochet*?
12. Why does the Torah attribute the building of the *aron* to Bezalel?
13. Where were the sculptured *cheruim* located?
14. How many lamps did the *menorah* have?
15. Of what materials was the *mizbe'ach haketoret* composed?
16. Of what material was the *mizbe'ach ha'olah* composed?
17. The *kiyor* was made from copper mirrors. What function did these mirrors serve in Egypt?
18. How did the *kiyor* promote peace?
19. The *kiyor* was made from the mirrors of the women who were crowding at the entrance to the *Ohel Mo'ed*. Why were the women crowding there?
20. Of what material were the "yitdot hamishkan" constructed?

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

Answers

1. 35:1 - The day after *Yom Kippur*.
2. 35:2 - To emphasize that the building of the Mishkan doesn't supersede the laws of Shabbat.
3. 35:3 - There are two opinions: One opinion is to teach that igniting a fire on Shabbat is punishable by lashes as opposed to other "*melachot*" which are punishable by death. The other opinion is to teach that violation of numerous "*melachot*" at one time requires a separate atonement for each violation.
4. 35:18 - The edges of the curtains were fastened to them. These were inserted in the ground so the curtains would not move in the wind.
5. 35:19 - They covered the *aron*, the *shulchan*, the *menorah*, and the *mizbachot* when they were packed for transport.
6. 35:26 - It was spun directly from off the backs of the goats.
7. 35:27 - The *Nesi'im* reasoned that they would first let the people contribute materials needed for the Mishkan and then they would contribute what was lacking. The Torah shows its dissatisfaction by deleting a letter from their title.
8. 35:30, 35:34 - Bezalel ben Uri from the tribe of Yehuda; Oholiav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan.
9. 36:3 - Morning.
10. 36:14 - It was made into curtains to be draped over the Mishkan.
11. 36:35 - *Cherubim*. (See Rashi 26:31)
12. 37:1 - Because he dedicated himself to its building more than anyone else.
13. 37:7 - On the two extremities of the *kaporet* (cover of the *aron*).
14. 37:23 - Seven.
15. 37:25,26 - Wood overlaid with gold.
16. 38:1-2 - Wood overlaid with copper.
17. 38:8 - These mirrors aided in the proliferation of the Jewish People. The Jewish women in Egypt would look in the mirrors so as to awaken the affections of their husbands who were exhausted by their slave labor.
18. 38:8 - Its waters helped a woman accused of adultery to prove her innocence.
19. 38:8 - To donate to the Mishkan.
20. 38:20 - Copper.

Q & A

PEKUDEI

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.

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WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayakhel/Pekudei: Animal Sounds

“Horses neigh and donkeys bray.” As every English-speaking child knows, roosters say “cock-a-doodle-do.” Yet, Israeli children will tell you that roosters crow, “koo-koo-ri-koo.” Similarly, while American children might imitate a dog by saying “bow-wow” or “ruff-ruff,” an Israeli child would instead say: “hav-hav.” All of these differences can be chalked up to onomatopoeia, which is the notion that some words are derived from the sounds associated with what those words denote. Because societies sometimes perceive sounds differently, they will sometimes refer to those sounds in different ways. What seems to be true across the board, though, is that in all languages the words for animal sounds seem to be derived from onomatopoeia. In this essay we will explore animal sounds in the Hebrew language and show how they are not synonyms in the same way that the English verbs *meow* and *bark* are not synonyms.

In English, we might say that a lion roars or growls, a cow moos, a hart coos, a bird chirps, a horse neighs, a bear snarls, etc... The notion that there are different verbs to denote each animal’s particular sounds is also found in Hebrew. In his epic response to Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970), the early Hebrew grammarian Donash Ibn Labrat (920-990) was one of the first to notice that Biblical Hebrew uses different verbs to denote the sounds that different animals make. Menachem himself makes this point in *Machberes Menachem* when discussing the biliteral root GIMMEL-AYIN, but Donash elaborated on the idea further.

In lines 82–83 of his poem, Donash writes that a hart is *oreg* (Ps. 42:2), a lion is *nohem* (Prov. 19:12, 28:15), a cow/ox is *goeh* (I Shmuel 6:12, Iyov 6:5), a horse is *tzohel* (Jer. 5:8), and a bird is *mitzafzef* (Isa. 10:14, 29:4, 38:14). In his more prosaic comments, Donash adds that a lion is *shoeg* (Amos 3:8, Yechezkel 22:25, Ps. 104:21), a bear is *shokek* (Prov. 28:15), a wild donkey is *nohek* (Iyov 6:5), and

a dog is *novayach* (Isa. 56:10). Each of these different verbs applies to the sound-making of a specific creature. Donash additionally notes that the verb *yehegeh* applies both to the noise that a lion makes (Isa. 31:4) and to the noise that a dove makes (Isa. 59:11). (In the printed editions of Donash, the verb used for the wild donkey is *nohem*, not *nohek*. However, this is most likely a scribal error because the verb *nohem* never appears in the Bible concerning the wild donkey, while *nohek* does. By the way, the Talmud (*Berachot* 3a) also uses the verb *nohem* to denote the sound made by a dove.)

Interestingly, Donash also writes in that passage that a *gever* (“rooster”) is *tzorayach*. However, this understanding seems to be based on a mistaken reading of Tzephania 1:14 and Isa. 42:13, which use the verb *tzorayach* to denote the battle cry of a *gibbor* (“human warrior”), not *gever*.

In the Bible, the verb *noer* appears once — in reference to a lion cub’s roar (Jer. 51:38). Yet, in the Talmud (*Berachot* 3a), the verb *noer* refers to the sound that a donkey makes. Rabbi Nossan of Rome (1035-1106) in *Sefer HaAruch* explains away this discrepancy by noting that this verb primarily refers to the young lion’s roar, and it was used by the Talmud to refer to a donkey’s bray only in a borrowed sense.

In various places, Rashi also cites Donash’s list of different verbs that denote the sounds that animals make (or at least parts of that list). For example, see Rashi’s comments to Isa. 8:19, 29:4, Yoel 1:20, Ps. 42:2, Prov. 28:15, Iyov 6:5, and *Chullin* 53a. Rashi (to *Chullin* 53a) adds that another verb in Biblical Hebrew for a dog’s barking is *charatz* (see Ex. 11:7).

Rashi takes this idea a step further and offers various Aramaic equivalents to some of the Hebrew terms that we have encountered. For example, Rashi (to *Chullin* 53a) writes that the

Aramaic *meuh* is equivalent to the Hebrew *nohem* (lions), and the Aramaic *mikarkar* is equivalent to the Hebrew *goeh* (cows/oxen). When talking about horses, Rashi (to *Chullin* 79a, *Sotah* 42a) writes that the Aramaic *tzarif* is the equivalent to the Biblical *tzohel*. However, elsewhere the verb *tzarif* is used to describe the noise made by a wild chicken (see *Targum Sheini* to Esther 1:2). Needless to say, none of these three Aramaic words ever appear in the Bible.

As an aside though, the word *tzarif* in Biblical Hebrew means “crown” (Isa. 62:3, Zech. 3:5, Iyov 29:14). Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Deut. 25:18) connects the word *tzarif*, which denotes something round whose ends are connected, to the word *zanav* (“tail”), which denotes the back-end appendage of an animal. His justification for drawing this comparison is the interchangeability of TZADI and ZAYIN, as well as PEH and BET.

An apocryphal Midrash describes the colorful sounds made by the enchanted animals etched into King Solomon’s throne. That Midrash associates a few more verbs with the sounds produced by various animals. Most of these words do not appear in the Bible: a hart is *tzohel*, a tiger is *tzorayach*, a sheep is *chonev*, a wolf is *zoror/zored*, a deer is *mifaret*, a bear is *migamgem*, a donkey/ibex is *mavrim/mavris*, an elephant is *nohem/tofes*, a Re’em is *mitzaltzel*, and a giraffe is *milavlev*. This Midrash is cited by the Kabbalistic work *Sodi Razi* (*Hilchos Kisei*) ascribed to Rabbi Elazar Rokeach of Worms (1176-1238), as well as by Rabbi Avraham ben Shlomo of Yemen’s commentary to I Kings 10:18. (See also *Tosefta D’Targum* to I Kings 10:20, and *Targum Sheini* to Esther 1:2.)

As is his way, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) offers etymological insights into some of these words for animal sounds by tracing them to their core biliteral roots. For example, he writes that the word *goeh* for a cow’s moo is derived from the root GIMMEL-AYIN (“exertion to the point of exhaustion”), which gives us such words as *yagea* (“tired”), *yegiyah* (“toiling”), and *geviyah* (“expiration/death”). This is because, as Rabbi Pappenheim explains, a cow exerts much effort in letting out those moos.

In discussing the verb *mitzafetzef* (“chirping”), Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the core root is TZADI-PEH, from which words like *mitzapeh* or *zipui* (“coating”), *tzofeh* (“gaze”), and *tzipiyah* (“anticipation”) are derived. The bird’s chirping expresses its anticipation and hope for the arrival of its mate and/or its food.

Concerning the word *novayach* (“barking”), Rabbi Pappenheim finds that its root is BET-CHET (“sound that travels through the air”), whose only other derivative is the first word in the term *avchat cherev* (Yechezkel 21:2), “the swooshing of a sword.”

When it comes to *shokek* to denote the bear’s roar, the Vilna Gaon (to Prov. 28:15) explains that this word is related to the word *shokek* in the sense of “desire,” because a bear is always hungry and desires food. Other commentators, like Ibn Janach and the Radak, explain that *shokek* does not refer to a bear’s roar, but to its sauntering gait as it walks. The way the Radak explains it, *shokek* is actually related to *shok* (commonly translated as “thigh,” but is more accurately the “calf”), which moves as one walks.

Rabbi Pappenheim argues that *shokek* is derived from the core meaning of the two-letter root SHIN-KUF, which means “making consecutive sounds.” He explains that when a lion is *shokek*, it produces consistent sounds one after the other. From this meaning, the word *teshukah* (“desire”) came about, because when one is in the throes of desire, one’s heartbeat becomes more noticeably consistent and consecutive. A tertiary meaning derived from this root is the word *neshikah* (“kiss”), which relates to SHIN-KUF either because it is the outward realization of one’s *teshukah*, or because kissing produces a distinct sound. Rabbi Pappenheim further explains that the word *neshek* as “weapon” relates to this root because the mechanics of the *neshek* create a certain type of noise, or because two opposing combatants approaching each other on the battlefield to fight resemble two lovers approaching each other for a kiss.

If you’ve been keeping track, there are four Biblical Hebrew words to denote the sound made by a lion: *shoeg*, *nohem*, *yehegeh*, and *noer*. Rabbi Yechiel

Michel Stern (Rav of the Ezras Torah neighborhood of Jerusalem) suggests that these different words reflect the different reasons *why* a lion might make noise. For example, the Vilna Gaon (to Prov. 28:15) explains that a lion “roars” (*shoeg*) when it is hungry. By roaring, the lion tries to show its dominance in order to cause other animals to freeze up in fear and become its prey. Yet, Rashi (to *Sanhedrin* 102a, *Berachot* 32a) writes that a lion is *nohem* when it has a lot of food to eat, such that it becomes especially happy and goes berserk. Rabbi Stern does not explain what causes a lion to be *yehegeh* or *noer*.

Rabbi Pappenheim differentiates between these words for a lion’s roar by tracing them to their core roots. He explains that the word *shoeg* derives from the biliteral root SHIN-GIMMEL, which denotes “inadvertency” (like *shogeg*). He argues that *shoeg* specifically refers to the almost-involuntarily sound of letting out an emotional outburst in response to something painful or joyful.

Additionally, Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *yehegeh* to the root HEY-GIMMEL, which primarily refers to “diligence” and “consistency,” making its derivative *yehgeh* refer to a lion’s consistent crying/sobbing.

In explaining the word *noer*, Rabbi Pappenheim offers a similar explanation. He traces that word to the two-letter root AYIN-REISH, which means “revealing.” Other words that come from this root include *ohr* (“skin,” i.e. the revealed/visible part of one’s body), *ervah* (“nakedness,” when a person’s body is *revealed*), *ta’ar* (“razor” a blade used for cutting hair and *revealing* the skin underneath), and *ar* (an “enemy” who *reveals* his enmity outwardly). *Eir* (“awake”) is also derived from this root because when one sleeps, his or her abilities are not readily apparent, but when they awaken, those abilities are suddenly *revealed*. Building on this last example, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *noer* is an audible outburst that a lion suddenly lets out and *reveals* as being within his repertoire.

Finally, the term *nohem*, according to Rabbi Pappenheim, derives from the two-letter root HEY-MEM, “storminess” or “chaos.” Other words derived from this root include *hamon* (“multitudes,” i.e. masses joined together in a stormy or chaotic gathering) and *tehomot* (“depths of the sea,” where the deep sea waters are wild and stormy). When a lion is *nohem*, this roar is likewise an outward expression of some sort of inner turmoil and storminess (albeit done more deliberately than when a lion is *shoeg*).

Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, argues that the words *nohem* and *nohek* are both derived from the two-letter root NUN-HEY. That root also yields the word *nehi* (Jer. 9:17-19, 31:14, Amos 5:16, Micha 2:4), which is an onomatopoeic interjection that denotes “sighing.” Rabbi Pappenheim, on the other hand, traces *nohek* to the monoliteral root KUF, which denotes “expulsion” and from which the biliteral NUN-KUF (“cleaning”) is derived. He consequently explains *nohek* as audible moaning or sighing intended to “clean/clear” the heart of suffering.

In summation, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) notes that the very word for “animals” in Hebrew – *behemot* (singular: *behemah*) – relates to the different noises that come from them. He explains that the root of the word *behemah* is HEY-MEM(-HEY), which means “incoherent noise” (like Rabbi Pappenheim’s explanation of that root). Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) similarly writes that the word *behemah* derives from the root BET-HEY-HEY, which is an onomatopoeic representation of a common animal sound (“baaaa”). He links this to the ancient Latin and Old Irish word *bo(s)* (an etonym of the English *bovine*, also related to *bous* in Greek and *bol/vol* in various Slavic languages). Either way, the *behemah* differs from the human being – who is sometimes called a *middaber* (literally, “speaker”) – because humans have the unique ability to produce understandable sounds through what we call speech, while animals just make sounds.

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

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 2)

(LAILAH GIFTY AKITA)

“These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come. They are: honoring one’s parents; acts of kindness; early arrival at the study hall in the morning and the evening; hosting guests; visiting the sick; providing the wherewithal for a bride to marry; escorting the dead; praying with concentration; making peace between two people; and Torah study is the equivalent of them all.”

(Tractate Shabbat 127a)

The first mitzvah on this list is honoring parents. There is a fascinating narrative in the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 8:4), which describes how, when G-d began to give the Ten Commandments to the Jewish nation at Mount Sinai, the monarchs of the other nations of the world were not impressed. After hearing each of the first four commandments, they rationalized that any sovereign would put in place such directives since they are directives that emphasize the absolute authority of the ruler. But, on hearing the fifth commandment – honoring parents – they all stood up and praised G-d, admitting that when a human king is crowned, he immediately denies his parents. He thinks that his parents are a distraction and detraction from the offspring’s royal dignity. However, G-d commands for *everyone* to honor their parents. The commentaries explain that the kings of the other nations understood, “retroactively,” that the first four commandments were not given to honor G-d, but rather to benefit mankind.

In his explanation of the mitzvah, *Sefer HaChinuch* writes the reason behind this mitzvah is to emphasize the trait of acknowledging any kindnesses done to a person – what is called in Hebrew *makir tovah* – and to instruct us to reciprocate in kind. The author continues, “A person should not act as if he never received anything from his fellow man, as such an attitude is disgusting before G-d and before man. His father and mother brought him into the world. From when he was a child, they toiled to raise him. He should always remember this and truly honor them in every way possible.”

Interestingly enough, the Jerusalem Talmud (Peah 1:1) describes the mitzvah of honoring parents as being both one of the most exalted mitzvahs and, at the same time, one of the most difficult mitzvahs to fulfill perfectly. In fact, it is so lofty that in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin 30b, our Sages describe honoring parents as being akin to honoring G-d Himself. By honoring our parents we are attaching ourselves to the long and glorious chain stretching all the way back to the Giving of the Torah. The mitzvah is so great in scope that Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter (1898-1992), known as the Lev Simchah and who was the sixth Rebbe of Gur, taught that every person is born with a specific allocation of days and years from Heaven that dictate how long they he will live in this world. However, the amount of time that one devotes to fulfilling the mitzvah of honoring one’s parents is not part of the Divine calculation. In effect, honoring parents is the source of “extra life,” because it is not part of the original reckoning!

Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk (1843-1926), one of the most brilliant and prominent leaders of Ashkenazic Jewry between the two World Wars, points out in his timeless commentary *Meshech Chochmah* on the Torah that the Holy Temple was built on the portion of land belonging to Binyamin. (Each Tribe was assigned a specific portion in the Land of Israel with the exception of Levi.) Why was the Tribe of Binyamin chosen to be the recipient of such an honor? Binyamin was the only brother who was not involved in selling Yosef into slavery. Binyamin was the only one of the brothers who did

not cause his father grief. Therefore, in Divine acknowledgement, the Holy Temple – a place of peace – was built in his portion.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab, in his epic work *Ma'ayan Beit HaShoeva*, explains that the reward that one receives in this world for fulfilling the mitzvah is not physical. Rather, it is a spiritual reward. This means that each of us must work on our awareness that we are attaching ourselves to G-d by performing the mitzvah of honoring our parents – and that by doing so we can reach a sense of tranquility that will carry us through the more difficult times as well.

The Talmud (Tractate Berachot 17a) describes the behavior of students studying Torah taking leave of each other before returning home. They would bless each other with a beautiful but somewhat enigmatic blessing. They would say, “May you see your world in your lifetime.” According to the Rabbis, the simple

understanding of the blessing is that all of a person’s needs should be met here in this world.

However, the Baal Shem Tov had a different explanation of this blessing. He was an 18th century mystic who introduced a revolutionary approach to keeping the Torah and worshipping G-d, called *Chassidut*, which was a synthesizing of the spiritual and the physical realms in a way that enabled every Jew to do the will of G-d through warmth and love. The Baal Shem Tov explained the meaning of the blessing as follows: “May you see your *future* world (i.e. the World to Come) in your lifetime.” When one serves G-d with purity and intent, it is possible to experience the tranquility and the intense clarity that is normally reserved only for the World to Come.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Vayakhel

Moshe Rabbeinu exhorts the *Bnei Yisrael* to keep Shabbat, and requests donations for the materials for making the Mishkan. He collects gold, silver, precious stones, skins and yarn, as well as incense and olive oil for the Menorah and for anointing. The princes of each tribe bring the precious stones for the *Kohen Gadol's* breastplate and *ephod*. G-d appoints Betzalel and Oholiav as the master craftsmen. *Bnei Yisrael* contribute so many resources, such that Moshe begins to refuse donations. Special curtains with two different covers were designed for the Mishkan's roof and door. Gold-covered boards in silver bases were connected, forming the Mishkan's walls. Betzalel made the Holy Ark (which contained the Tablets) from wood covered with gold. On the Ark's cover there were two figures facing each other. The Menorah and the table with the showbreads were also of gold. Two Altars were made: a small incense Altar of wood, overlaid with gold, and a larger Altar for sacrifices, made of wood covered with copper.

Pekudei

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.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Vayakhel

Sanctuary, Sin, Sanctuary

The order of events in the second half of the book of Shemot has much to teach. The sin of the golden calf is flanked on each end by a commandment to build a dwelling place for G-d. First, the people are commanded to build a Tabernacle, a place where the Divine Presence will rest among them. Then, the nation committed what remains the gravest sin in our national history. Upon forgiveness, and re-giving of the Tablets, Moshe again instructs the people in the name of G-d, regarding the construction of that Dwelling Place.

The great betrayal had jeopardized the relation of the command to erect a Dwelling Place, but in the end, these events were of the most far-reaching significance for the command itself, and for the purpose of the Dwelling Place.

Now, the Mishkan would have to be constructed under the impact of this experience. The people had come to realize how weak and imperfect they still were, and how much they needed to improve themselves – how much they needed the uplifting and atonement that the Mishkan could provide. They had also come to experience G-d in the severity of His judgment and rejection, and then, in the fullness of his grace when they regained His favor.

The renewed command to build the Mishkan, then, carried a significant message: The Mishkan would be a place where, at any stage of error and weakness, the Jewish People could find renewed strength to work their way up again on high, find the strength of will to persevere on the lofty heights of their calling, and find G-d's help and blessing. The recording of the sin of the golden calf at a point in time, *between* the command to build the Mishkan and the instruction regarding execution of that command, stands as testimony that it is possible at any stage of error to return to and regain G-d's grace.

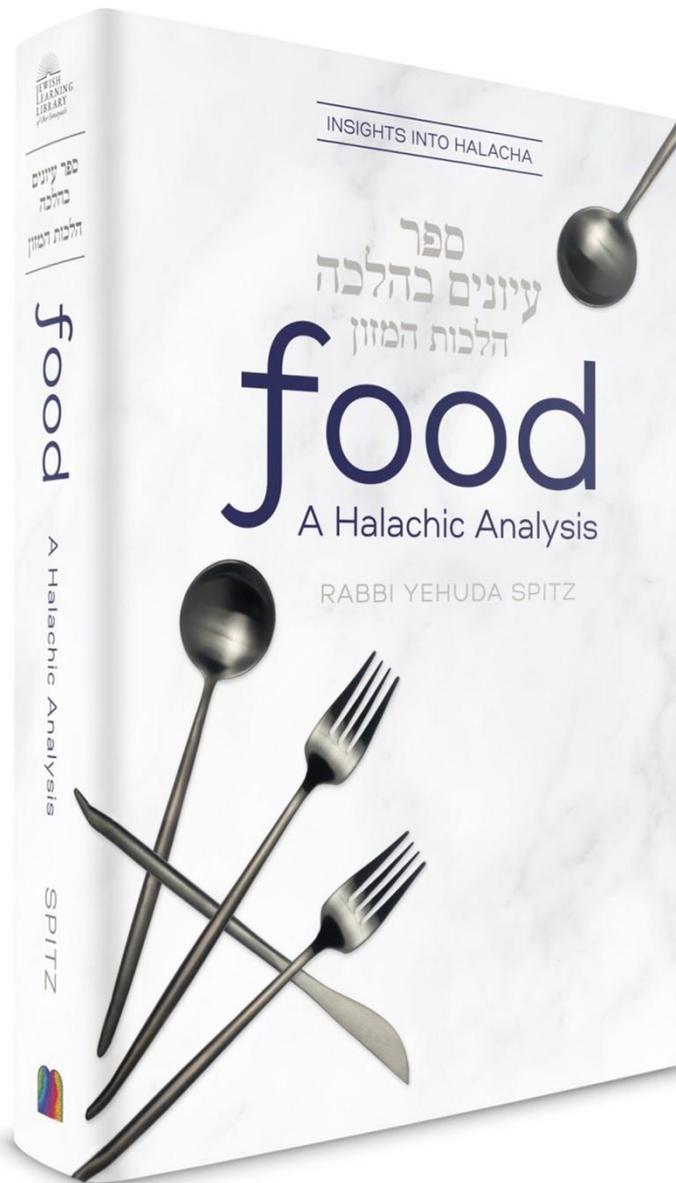
There is another critical lesson to be learned from the forgiveness granted before the building of the Sanctuary. The greatest national crime was committed, and the *highest* grace was attained from G-d – *without* the Sanctuary and *without* offerings. Thus, we learn that the Sanctuary and the offerings do not themselves secure G-d's favor, but are intended only as guides in the process.

- Sources: Commentary, Shemot 35:2

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