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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Allegiance to the Crown

“...you shall read this Torah before all Yisrael, in their ears.” (31:11)

An interesting synchronicity takes place this year: When the holy Beit HaMikdash stood, on the first day of Chol HaMoed Sukkot following the *Shemitta* year (as is this year) the entire nation was commanded to come together at the Beit HaMikdash to hear the king read from the Torah. The theme of the passages that the king reads firstly reflects allegiance to G-d, secondly, G-d's covenant with the Jewish People, and thirdly, reward and punishment.

The theme of all three is loyalty: Allegiance and loyalty are synonymous; a covenant is none other than a formalized expression of an allegiance; and reward and punishment express the outcome of that allegiance.

At some time in the coming year, King Charles III, will be crowned in an elaborate ceremony.

The entire nation will pledge allegiance to the new monarch.

The enormous outpouring of grief and love for the late Queen Elizabeth II showed how much a people need a focus for its nationhood, to show allegiance to the person of the monarch. The Jewish People also has a focus of its national allegiance in the king, but the king expresses his kingship through this mitzvah of Hakhel - the reading of the Torah at the Beit HaMikdash.

The eternal allegiance of the Jewish People to each other and with G-d is through the Torah. This is what makes us unique among the nations. When a nation bonds through allegiance to its monarch, it is only through him or her as a figurehead of the nation. A Jewish king bonds that nation to the Torah in an eternal allegiance to the King of Kings.

Q & A – Nitzavim

Questions

1. What is the connection between the verse "atem nitzavim" and the curses in the previous parsha?
2. Who were the wood-choppers and water-carriers?
3. Why can Hashem never "swap" the Jewish People for another nation?
4. One who ignores the Torah's warnings "adds drunkenness to thirst." What does this mean?
5. What two cities were destroyed along with S'dom and Amorah?
6. "The hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d, and the revealed things are for us..." What does this mean?
7. According to Rashi, how will the day of the ingathering of the exiles be "great and difficult"?
8. Where is the Torah not to be found? Where is it to be found?
9. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other's sins?
10. How do the earth and sky remind us to keep the mitzvahs?

Answers

1. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, "Who can survive such curses?" Moshe responded, "You've done a lot to anger Hashem, and yet 'atem nitzavim'— you are still standing before Him."
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who joined the Jewish People under false pretenses.
3. 29:12 - Because Hashem swore to their ancestors that He would never do so.
4. 29:18 - He causes Hashem to reckon his unintentional sins alongside his intentional ones, punishing him for all.
5. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
6. 29:28 - There is collective culpability only for "open" sins, but not for "hidden" ones.
7. 30: 3 - It will be as if Hashem needs to take each individual by the hand and lead him out of exile.
8. 30:12-15 - The Torah is not found in Heaven, nor is it across the ocean. Rather, it is "very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart."
9. 30:28 - When they crossed the Jordan and accepted the oath on Mount Eval and Mount Grizim.
10. 30:19 - The earth and heavenly bodies, although receiving neither reward nor punishment, always obey Hashem's will. How much more so should we, who stand to receive reward or punishment, obey Hashem.

Q & A – Vayelech

Questions

1. Moshe said, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in..." How do we know this does not refer to physical inability?
2. Which of Moshe's statements to Yehoshua was later contradicted by Hashem's command?
3. Why does the Torah refer to Succot of the eighth year as though it occurred during the shemita year?
4. Why does the Torah command that babies be brought to the Torah reading?
5. What does it mean that Hashem "hides His face?"
6. What function does the song Ha'azinu serve?
7. Which verse promises that the Torah will never be totally forgotten?
8. What is the difference of opinion regarding the placing of the Torah scroll which Moshe gave the levi'im?
9. On the day of Moshe's death, why didn't Moshe gather the people by blowing trumpets as he normally would have?
10. Moshe said, "For I know that after my death you will act corruptly," but, in fact, this didn't occur until after Yehoshua's death. What does this teach us?

Answers

1. 31:2. Because verse 34:7 says "His (Moshe's) eye never dimmed, and his (youthful) moisture never departed."
2. 31:7 - Moshe told Yehoshua to share his leadership with the Elders. Hashem later commanded Yehoshua to rule alone.
3. 31:10 - Because the laws of the seventh year still apply to the harvest.
4. 31:12 - To give reward to those who bring them.
5. 31:17 - He ignores their distress.
6. 31:21 - It warns what will befall the Jewish People if they abandon Torah.
7. 31:21 - "For (the Torah) will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring."
8. 31:26 - Whether it was placed outside but adjacent to the Ark, or inside next to the Tablets.
9. 31:28 - Blowing the trumpets expressed Moshe's dominion, and "there is no dominion on the day of death." (Kohelet 8)
10. 31:29 - That a person's student is as dear to him as himself. As long as Yehoshua was alive it was as though Moshe himself was alive.

Q & A – Ha'azinu

Questions

1. Why were heaven and earth specifically chosen as witnesses?
2. How is the Torah like rain?
3. How is G-d "faithful without injustice"?
4. Why is G-d called "tzaddik"?
5. How many major floods did G-d bring upon the world?
6. What group of people does the Torah call "fathers"? Cite an example.
7. Why did G-d separate the world's nations into exactly 70?
8. Why is the merit of the Jewish People's ancestry called a "rope"?
9. How is G-d's behavior toward the Jewish People like an eagle's behavior toward its offspring?
10. Regarding the Jewish People's punishment, G-d says, "I will spend my arrows on them." What is the positive aspect of this phrase?
11. How does the idea of "chillul Hashem" prevent the nations from destroying the Jewish People?
12. What will happen to the nations that conquer the Jewish People?
13. When G-d overturns a nation that persecutes the Jewish People, His attribute of Mercy is "replaced" by which attribute?
14. When G-d punishes the heathen nations, for whose sins does He exact punishment?
15. How will G-d's punishment change the way the nations view the Jewish People?
16. On what day was Ha'azinu taught to the Jewish People?
17. Verse 32:44 calls Yehoshua "Hoshea." Why?
18. In verse 32:47, what does "it is not empty from you" mean?
19. Why did G-d tell Moshe that he would die a similar death to that of Aharon?
20. If Moshe had spoken to the rock rather than striking it, what would the Jewish People have learned?

Answers

1. 32:1 - They endure forever.
2. : 32:2 - The Torah gives life and promotes growth like rain.
3. 32:4 - He is "faithful" by rewarding the righteous, and "without injustice" by rewarding even the wicked for any good deeds.
4. 32:4 - All will agree that His judgments are righteous.
5. 32:7 - Two. One in the time of Adam's grandson Enosh and one in the time of Noach.
6. 32:7 - The Prophets. Elisha called the Prophet Eliyahu "My Father." (Melachim II 2:12).
7. 32:8 - To correspond to the 70 Bnei Yisrael who entered Egypt.
8. 32:9 - Their merit is "woven from" the merits of the Avot.
9. 32:12 - He mercifully wakes them gently, hovering over them, and carrying them on His "wings".
10. 32:23 - "The arrows will be spent" implies that the afflictions will cease but the Jewish People will not.
11. 32:27 - The nations would attribute their success to their might and the might of their gods. G-d would not let His name be desecrated like this.
12. 32:35 - They will eventually be punished.
13. 32:41 - His attribute of Justice.
14. 32:42 - For their sins and the sins of their ancestors.
15. 32:43 - They will view the Jewish People as praiseworthy for cleaving to G-d.
16. 32:44 - The Shabbat upon which Moshe died.
17. 32:44 - To indicate that although he was the Jewish People's leader, he still maintained a humble bearing.
18. 32:47 - That you will receive reward for studying Torah and that there is nothing meaningless in the Torah.
19. 32:50 - Because Moshe wanted this.
20. 32:51 - The Jewish People would have reasoned as follows: If a rock, which receives neither reward nor punishment, obeys G-d's commands, all the more so should they.

Q & A – Bereishit

Questions

1. Why does the Torah start with the account of Creation
2. What happened to the light that was created on the first day?
3. Why isn't the word "good" associated with the second day?
4. How were the trees supposed to taste?
5. On which day were the sun and moon created?.
6. Hashem blessed the birds to be fruitful and to multiply. Why did He not do so with the beasts?
7. In whose likeness was man fashioned?
8. What kind of food did Adam eat?
9. Why is "the sixth day" written with the definite article?.
10. At the end of the sixth day what was the world still lacking?
11. Why was man made from dust gathered from the entire earth?
12. How is man superior to the animals?
13. Why was it not good that man be alone?
14. Where do we learn that one must not add to a commandment from Hashem?
15. What does it mean that Adam and Chava "knew that they were naked"?
16. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd?
17. What was the marital practice of the generation who lived before the flood?
18. What did Tuval-Cain invent?
19. Why did Chanoch die at a young age?
20. What was the sign that Shem was born with great propensity for righteousness?

Answers

1. 1:1 - So that when the nations accuse us of stealing Eretz Canaan from the Canaanites, we can respond that Hashem, as Creator, has the right to give the land to whomever He sees fit, and He gave Eretz Canaan to us.
2. 1:4 - Hashem saw that the wicked would be unworthy of it so He hid it for the righteous.
3. 1:7 - Because the work with the water wasn't completed until the third day. Anything that is incomplete is not "good."
4. 1:11 - The wood was to have the taste of the fruit.
5. 1:14 - They were created on the first day and suspended in the firmament on the fourth day.
6. 1:22 - He did not want the serpent, who was to be cursed, to receive a blessing.
7. 1:26 - In the likeness of the angels.
8. 1:30 - Vegetation.
9. 1:31 "The" in Hebrew is the letter hey, which has a numerical value of five. Hashem created the world on the condition that it will endure only if the Jewish People accept the Five Books of the Torah.
10. 2:2 - Rest.
11. 2:7 - So that wherever he might die, the earth would receive his body.
12. 2:7 - He was given understanding and speech.
13. 2:18 - If he were alone, he would appear to be a god. The creation of woman emphasized man's dependence.
14. 3:3 - From Chava. Hashem commanded not to eat from the tree but she added not to touch it. Because she added to the command she eventually came to transgress it.
15. 3:7 - They had been given one commandment and they had stripped themselves of it.
16. : 4:2 - Since the ground had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.
17. : 4:19 - They married two wives, one with whom to have children. The other one was given a potion which prevented her from bearing children.
18. 4:22 - Murder weapons.
19. 5:22 - Though he was righteous, he was easily influenced; therefore Hashem took him before his time to protect him from sinning.
20. 5:32 - He was born already circumcised.

Q & A – Noach

Questions

1. Which particular sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
2. Why did Hashem tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
3. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
4. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?
5. Why did Hashem postpone bringing the flood for seven days?
6. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
7. : What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did Hashem do to protect him?
8. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
9. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
10. What did the olive branch symbolize?
11. How long did the punishment of the flood last?
12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?
13. : When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to "be fruitful and multiply" directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. : Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared.
17. : Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

Answers

1. 6:13 - Robbery.
2. 6:14 - So that people would see Noach building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noach would answer, "Hashem is bringing a flood," it might encourage some people to repent.
3. 6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.
4. 7:2 - Hashem told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. "Kosher" and "non-kosher" are Torah concepts.
5. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Metushelach.
6. 7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.
7. : 7:13,15 - People said, "If we see him going into the ark, we'll smash it!" Hashem surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.
8. 7:22 - The fish.
9. 8:4 - Eleven amot.
10. 8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that its better to eat food "bitter like an olive" but which comes directly from Hashem, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)
11. 8:14 - A full solar year.
12. 8:14 - Eleven days.
13. : 9:3 - After the flood.
14. 9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.
17. 9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noach's disgrace to Cham. And because Cham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Cham's fourth son, Canaan.
18. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against Hashem.
19. 11:9 - They lived together peacefully.
20. : 11:29 - The word "Yiscah" is related to the Hebrew word "to see." Sarah was called Yiscah because she could "see" the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

Q & A – Rosh Hashanah

Questions

1. Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?
2. Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tisrei is Rosh Hashanah?
3. We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?
4. What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?
5. Which Book of Tanach does the beginning of the Tashlich prayer come from?
6. What three barren women were "remembered" by Hashem on Rosh Hashanah?
7. A person's yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashanah, except for three types of expenses. What are they?
8. We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: "Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah..." What was Abraham's prayer on Mount Moriah?
9. Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashanah, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?
10. What halacha applies to the shehechyanu blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashanah which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

Answers

1. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah. (*Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*)
2. Nowhere. The Torah calls it "a day of shofar blowing." (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai). (*Bamidbar 29:1*)
3. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed..." (*Bereishis 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this "field" as an apple orchard. (*Ta'anis 29b, Biyur Hagra*)
4. "Blessed are You... who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar," and the shehechyanu blessing. (*Orach Chaim 581:2*)
5. The Book of Micha (7:18-20).
6. Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashanah it was decreed that these barren women would bear children. (*Tractate Rosh Hashanah 10b*)
7. Expenses for Shabbos, Yom Tov, and the cost of one's children's Torah education. (*Ba'er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1*)
8. He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations (*Onkelos 22:14*). Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac. (*Rashi 22:13*)
9. Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The "two-day festival" arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashanah. Since Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.
10. On the second night of Rosh Hashanah it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the shehechyanu blessing. Thus, the shehechyanu blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no shehechyanu blessing be said on the second night of Rosh Hashanah.) (*Taz 600:2*)

Q & A – Yom Kippur

Questions

1. Passover commemorates the going out of Egypt. Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah. What historical event can Yom Kippur be said to commemorate?
2. For what kinds of sins does Yom Kippur not atone?
3. What should someone do if the person he wronged does not forgive him the first time?
4. Why is the vidui confession included during the mincha prayer the afternoon before Yom Kippur?
5. On Yom Kippur we refrain from: Working, eating, drinking, washing, anointing, family relations and wearing leather shoes. Which three of these prohibitions are more severe than the others?
6. In what two ways does the prohibition against eating food on Yom Kippur differ from the prohibition against eating pork the entire year?
7. Who wrote the prayer "Unesaneh Tokef" said during the chazan's repetition of musaf?
8. Why do we read the book of Yona on Yom Kippur?
9. In what two ways does havdalah after Yom Kippur differ from havdalah after Shabbos?
10. Ideally, what mitzvah should one begin immediately after Yom Kippur?

Answers

1. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai on the tenth of Tishrei with the second set of Tablets, signifying forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. Yom Kippur can be said to commemorate this event, the first national day of forgiveness for the Jewish People.
2. Sins committed against other people, including hurting someone's feelings. Yom Kippur does not atone for these sins until the perpetrator gains forgiveness from the victim himself. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
3. He should try at least two more times to gain forgiveness. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
4. Lest one choke while eating the pre-Yom Kippur meal and die without atonement, or lest one become intoxicated and unable to concentrate on the prayers at night. (*Mishna Berura 607:1*)
5. Eating, drinking, working. (*Mishna Kritut 1:1*)
6.
 1. Although any amount is forbidden, eating on Yom Kippur is not punishable by a Sanhedrin until one has eaten food equal in volume to the size of a date. Eating pork, on the other hand, is punishable for eating even an olive-sized piece, which is smaller than a date. (*Mishna Berura 612:1*)
 2. Eating on Yom Kippur incurs the punishment of karet - spiritual excision, whereas eating pork does not.
7. "Unesaneh Tokef" was written by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany about 1000 years ago.
8. The repentance of the people of Ninveh serves as an inspiration to us to repent, and shows us that repentance can overturn a Divine decree. (*Shelah Hakadosh*)
9. After Yom Kippur, the blessing over spices is omitted from havdalah. Also, the source of the flame used for havdalah after Yom Kippur must be a fire kindled before Yom Kippur. (*Orach Chaim 624:3,4*)
10. Building the succa. (*Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5*)

Q & A – Succot

Questions

1. According to the Torah, what three basic requirements define a material as valid for use as a succa roof?
2. If the succa causes discomfort (e.g., it's too cold) to the extent that under similar conditions you would leave your very own house, you are exempt from the mitzvah. Why?
3. What two things are forbidden to do outside of the succa all seven days of the festival?
4. What is the absolute minimum number of meals a person is required to eat in the succa during the seven day holiday?
5. Besides referring to the tree and its fruit, what does the word "esrog" mean literally?
6. What is the minimum length of a lulav?
7. What is the maximum percentage a person is required to add to the purchase price of his esrog in order to obtain an esrog of greater beauty?
8. On the Shabbos that occurs during Succos, we read the Book of Koheles, in which King Solomon refers to himself as "Koheles." Why is King Solomon called Koheles?
9. What prohibition could a person transgress simply by sitting in the succa on the eighth day of Succos?
10. We hold a tallis over the heads of the people who read the end of the Torah and the beginning of the Torah. Why?

Answers

1. It must grow from the ground, no longer be connected to the ground, and not be receptive to tumah (ritual defilement).
2. Because the commandment of living in a succa is to dwell in the succa for seven days the same way you dwell in your house the rest of the year. (*Mishna Berura 640:13*)
3. Eat (an 'established' meal) or sleep. (*Orach Chaim 639:2*)
4. One. Eating a meal in the succa the first night of Succos is a requirement. The rest of the festival, a person can eat 'snacks' which are not required to be eaten in a succa. (Outside Israel, one must eat a meal the second night of Succos as well. However, there is no requirement to live outside Israel!) (*Orach Chaim 639:3*)
5. Beauty. (*Ramban Vayikra 23:40*)
6. Its spine must be at least 4 tefachim (halachic handbreadths).
7. 33.3% (*Orach Chaim 656:1*)
8. Because he gathered (kihale) vast wisdom, and because he, as king, gathered the nation on Succos after the Sabbatical year. (*Rashi, Koheles 1:1*)
9. Bal Tosif - "Do not add to the mitzvos." The commandment to live in the succa applies for only seven days. To sit in the succa on the eighth day with intent to fulfill the mitzvah transgresses "bal tosif." (*Orach Chaim 666:1*)
10. It represents the wedding canopy, symbolizing that through the Torah we wed ourselves to Hashem.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Nitzavim/Vayelech/RH: The Shofar's Horn

The Mishnah (*Rosh Hashanah* 3:2) rules that a bovine horn (i.e., from a cow or bull) is unfit for use in the commandment of blowing a *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah. The Talmud (in both the Babylonian and Jerusalemic Talmud there) explains that this is because a bovine horn is called a *keren* (Deut. 33:17, see also *Gittin* 2:3, *Keilim* 11:7) and not a *shofar*, while an ovine horn (i.e., from ram) is called both a *keren* and a *shofar* (or at least is not called a *keren*). This leads us to the obvious question: If *shofar* and *keren* both mean “horn,” then why is something called a *keren* disqualified from the commandment of *shofar*? In this essay, we will explore these two apparent synonyms and attempt to show the differences between them. By doing so, we will eventually be able to answer that question.

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (1194–1270), better known as Ramban or Nachmanides, explains that there are two types of animal horns. As long as a horn is still attached to the animal, both types are called a *keren*. But once they are detached, there is a difference in terminology: The first type of animal horn is technically hollow, but is naturally stuffed with a sort of filling that needs to be removed in order for the horn to be useful for sounding. This type of horn is called a *shofar* when detached from the animal. Rabbi Nissim of Gerona (1320–1376) identifies *shofar* as a cognate of the Hebrew word *shfoferet* (“hollow tube”), which appears numerous times in the Mishnah (*Shabbat* 2:4, *Keilim* 14:5 17:17, *Parah* 5:4, 5:8, 6:1, 9:2, *Mikvaot* 2:10, 4:5, 6:1-2, 6:5-7, 6:9). The second type of animal horn is comprised of one solid keratin block. In order to use this horn for making sounds, one must drill into that block; there is no filling that can simply be removed to render the horn useful for making sounds. This type of horn is called a *keren* even when detached from the animal.

Based on this, Nachmanides explains that any animal horn that is a *keren* and not a *shofar* is disqualified from the commandment of *shofar*. Yet, when the Mishnah says that a bovine horn is unfit, this is not because it is a *keren* and not a *shofar*. Rather, this disqualification stems from the fact that the bovine horn is called a *keren*, even though it is materially a *shofar*. Why this nomenclature should disqualify the bovine horn from the commandment of *shofar* will be addressed after we discuss the etymologies of *shofar* and *keren*.

The Hebrew root SHIN-PEH-REISH yields words that mean “pleasant, beautiful, good” (Gen. 49:21, Ps. 16:6, Job 26:13). They are cognate with the Aramaic word *shfar*, which occurs thrice in the Bible (Dan. 3:32, 4:24 6:2). The Targumim often use the word *shapir* or variants thereof in translating the Hebrew words *yafeh* (“beautiful”) and *tov* (“good”). Traditionally, the word *shofar* is understood as derived from this particular root. Indeed, the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* §29:6) expounds on the word *shofar* (in the context of it being sounded on Rosh Hashanah, see Ps. 81:4) as related to *shipper/shapir*, as though along with the commandment of *shofar*, Hashem also commanded us *shapru ma’asechem* (“better your deeds”) during the month of Tishrei. This exegesis is rooted in the understanding that the Hebrew word *shofar* derives from the trilateral root SHIN-PEH-REISH.

When Jacob blessed his son Naphtali before he died, he likened Naphtali to a speeding gazelle “who provides words of *shefer*” (Gen. 49:21). The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* §98:17) understands the word *shefer* (derived

from the same root as *shapir*) here as reference to the judge Deborah, who descends from Jacob's son Naphtali. As the Midrash teaches, *shefer* alludes specifically to either the “beautiful” song that Deborah sang after leading the Jews to victory against the Canaanite general Sisera, or to her scholarly prowess in making the words of the Torah appear more clear and “beautiful” in her role as judge, with the Midrash adding that this connection is especially germane because the Torah itself was given with *shofarot* (Ex. 19:19). Here again, we see the rabbis connecting the word *shofar* to *shapir*.

Interestingly, a variant of *shapir* actually appears in the Bible as a personal name: One of the Jewish midwives during the Egyptian bondage was named Shifrah (Ex. 1:15) – often identified as Jochebed, the mother of Moses. The Midrashim (*Sifrei Behalotcha* §78, *Shemot Rabbah* §1:13, *Kohelet Rabbah* §7:3, and *Midrash Shmuel* §23) explain this name on account of Shifrah's role in “beautifying” newly born infants after they emerged from the womb all covered in blood, or her role in the “betterment” of the Jewish People through Torah and Mitzvot (because she gave birth to Moses).

As an aside, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (1935–2017) explains that the Hebrew/Aramaic word *shapir* itself reflects the *shiph* form, so the letter SHIN is not actually part of the root. Instead, he connects the word *shapir* to the trilateral root PEH-ALEPH-REISH, which gives us words like *tiferet/pe'er* (“glory” or “beauty”). According to this, the initial SHIN serves a grammatical function to denote an action that leads to the creation of *pe'er*. Fascinatingly, a popular folk etymology connects the early Ashkenazi surname Shapiro to the word *shapir*, although historians argue that it more likely derives from the name of the German town Speyer.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 5:1, 49:11) finds a connection between the Hebrew terms *shefer/shapir* and the words *sefer* (“book”), *mishpar* (“number”), *sofer* (“counting”), and *shover* (“breaking”). All of these connections are based on the interchangeability of SHIN and SIN, plus BET and PEH. Rabbi Hirsch explains that *sefer* denotes a composite creation, made up of various sub-parts all brought together in a coherent way. Similarly, he explains that counting and numbers refer to the highlighting of individual units within a greater holistic mathematical system. Based on this, he explains that *shover* refers to “breaking” that overarching system by detaching the individual parts from the holistic whole.

Rabbi Hirsch builds on this to surmise that *shefer/shapir* focuses on “beauty” as the overarching aesthetic property of a multipartite entity, whose constituent pieces have been brought together in an orderly and pleasing way. In light of this, Rabbi Hirsch notes that *shefer* differs from *yofi* (“beauty”) in that *shefer* focuses on inward beauty (i.e., the harmonious way that something's various parts work together), while *yofi* focuses on the outward, superficial beauty (i.e., the way others perceive something as beautiful). With this focus on inwardness, Rabbi Hirsch implies that it makes sense that the word *shofar* would also specifically focus on the *inside* of a hollow tube.

Let us now segue into a discussion of the word *keren*, after which we will bring together the various ideas to sharpen the difference between *shofar* and *keren*. The classical lexicographers (i.e., Menachem Ibn Saruk, Yonah Ibn Janach, and Radak) trace the word *keren* to the trilateral root KUF-REISH-NUN, which means both an animal's “horn” and a “ray” of light. The connection between these two meanings is obvious: a ray/beam of light projects outwards from its source of light, just like a horn juts out from an animal's forehead.

From the “horn” meaning, *keren* also came to refer to something's “power/strength” (e.g., Ezek. 29:21, Ps. 132:17, 148:14), as the horn gives power to an animal's gore. *Keren* also came to mean a horn-shaped “container” (e.g., I Sam. 16:1, 16:13, I Kgs. 1:39). Likewise, the word *shofar* in the Mishnah also means a sort of “container” that was narrow on top and wide on the bottom, like the shape of a *shofar* horn (see *Shekalim* 2:1, 6:1, 6:5, and Maimonides' commentary). In the Mishnah, *keren* maintains its Biblical meaning of “horn” (*Rosh Hashanah* 3:2, *Ketubot* 13:2, *Gittin* 2:3, *Keilim* 11:7), but also refers specifically to an animal's horn damaging something by way of “goring” (*Bava Kamma* 2:5).

The word *keren* in the Bible also refers to horn-like protrusions at the four corners of an altar (Ex. 38:2, Lev. 8:15, Ezek. 43:20). In the Mishnah, the word *keren* expanded to refer to any “corner,” but also maintained the Biblical meaning of an altar’s corner (see *Kilayim* 6:7, *Yoma* 5:5, *Zevachim* 5:3, 6:2, 6:5, 11:3, *Tamid* 2:5, 4:1, 7:3, *Middot* 3:2-3, 4:3, 4:5, *Keilim* 17:9-10). Interestingly, Radak even insinuates a connection between the Hebrew *keren* and the Latin *cornu* (from which the English word *corner* is derived via French, see below).

Moreover, in the Mishnah the term *keren* also refers to the “principal capital” of an investment (*Peah* 1:1, *Kiddushin* 4:12) or the “principal value of a monetary obligation,” as opposed to an added penalty (see *Terumot* 6:1-4, 7:1-4, 8:1, 11:2, *Maaser Sheni* 4:3, *Pesachim* 2:4, *Yevamot* 11:5, 11:7, *Ketubot* 3:9, *Bava Kamma* 9:6-12, *Shevuot* 8:3-4). [By the way, Rabbi Ernest Klein innovatively connects *keren* in the financial sense to the Akkadian *qerenu/qaranu* (“pile/heap” or “threshing floor”), which seems related to the Hebrew *goren* (via the interchangeability of KUF and GIMMEL).]

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740–1814) traces the word *keren* to the two-letter root KUF-REISH, which refers to the “strong impact” that results from extreme weight or velocity. One group of words derived from this root include *korah* (“wooden beam”) and *tikrah* (“ceiling”), because the weight of the horizontal beams that comprise the ceiling weigh down on a building’s support, thus creating a point of “impact.” Other related words include *kir* (“wall”), vertically-positioned wooden beams that bear the weight of a structure (borrowed to refer to any sort of wall); *kiryah* (“city”), a community comprised of multiple walled structures; *kurei* (“spider web”), a wall-like structure used for capturing small insects; and *krum* (“covering”), a ceiling-like membrane that covers one’s internal organs.

Rabbi Pappenheim similarly explains the words *kor/kar* (“coldness/cold”) as relating to this root because the biological process of homeostasis ensures that one’s body always remains warm, such that encountering the chill of something cold causes a crash/clash of conflicting temperatures, resulting in a sort of “strong impact.” He similarly explains the words *mikrah/keri* (“occurrence,” “happenstance”) as referring to the sudden collision of a person and his new set of circumstances. Finally, Rabbi Pappenheim explains the word *keren* in the sense of an animal’s “horn” as related to this biliteral root in light of the horn’s potential for “high-impact” goring.

Without explicitly mentioning all of this, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro addresses why the Torah disqualifies a bovine horn from the commandment of *shofar* because it is called a *keren*. A *keren* describes the point of intersection/impact of two opposing forces moving in opposite directions. When the term *keren* is used to describe damage by goring, it does not just refer to the physical limb used in the act, but also represents the point of departure from which an animal may stray and act out inappropriately. Thus, *keren* represents the crossroads at which one is faced with the choice of going in one of two possible ways. *Keren* as a “corner” also relates to the concept of an “impact” because it denotes the meeting place of two sides.

Similarly, Rabbi Shapiro teaches that this explains why *keren* in a financial context describes the principal capital originally invested in a given venture: When monies are invested into a potential endeavor, the undertaking can go in one of two possible directions – the principal can be lost, or it can produce profit.

On Rosh Hashanah, we galvanize all our energies to focus them in a single direction, for one single goal: the proclamation of Hashem’s kingship. In that context, there are no other valid possibilities, so the very fact that something is simply called a *keren* – which implies a fork in the road that leads to various possibilities – disqualifies it from being used as a *shofar*. The very word *keren* is incompatible with what the *shofar* represents. Although Rabbi Moshe Shapiro does not make this point explicitly, per Rabbi Hirsch (cited above) we may add that the *shofar* represents the exact opposite; it conjures the unification of all the constituent parts of something working together in harmony. Indeed, Rabbi Yom Tov of Seville (1250–1330), known as the Ritva, notes that the term *shofar* implies something “beautiful and copacetic” (like the SHIN-PEH-REISH words

discussed above). Thus, the very word *shofar* functions as the antithesis to the *keren*, because it implies unification that precludes all other possibilities, just like we strive for when we proclaim Hashem's universal kingship.

Linguists like Avraham Even-Shoshan (1906–1984) and Rabbi Ernest Klein (1899–1983) claim that the Hebrew word *shofar* cognates with the Akkadian word *shapparu* ("wild sheep"). That Akkadian word, in turn, seems to be related to the late Biblical Hebrew word *tzfir* (Dan. 8:5, 8:8, 8:21, Ezra 8:35, II Chron. 29:21) – based on the interchangeability of SHIN and TZADI – and perhaps the earlier Biblical Hebrew word *se'ir* (with the possible interchangeability of PEH and AYIN).

Similarly, the word *yovel* also means "horn" (Ex. 19:13), although in some instances it actually refers to the animal from which the horn was taken (see Josh. 6:4–13). The Torah commands that after counting seven cycles of the Sabbatical Year, the fiftieth year should be consecrated and the *shofar* should be sounded. Because of this, the fiftieth year of the Shemitta Cycle became known as *yovel* (Lev. 25:10–15, 25:50, 27:17–31), from whence the English word *Jubilee* ("fiftieth anniversary") is derived. Because the primary use of the *yovel* horn was to inform the travelling Jews when they should begin to travel or to tell the army when to attack, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim suggests that the word is derived from the biliteral root BET-LAMMED ("mixing"), as the *yovel* causes an intermingling of domains in its role as the catalyst for moving from one place to another.

Another word for rams' horns is *chatzotzrot*. Even though the *chatzotzrot* mentioned in the Torah were made of silver (Num. 10:2), the Mishnah (*Kinnim* 3:6) uses that term when discussing the usefulness of a ram's horn after the animal had already died. This suggests that *chatzotzrot* ought to be understood as synonymous with *shofarot*. Indeed, the Talmud (*Shabbat* 36a, *Sukkah* 34a) reveals that what were originally called *shofarot* in the times of the Temple, were later renamed *chatzotzrot* after the Temple's destruction (see *Chatam Sofer* and *Aruch L'Ner* to *Sukkah* 34a who discuss the reasons for this). Nonetheless, Rabbi Moshe of Trani (1505–1585), known as *Mabit*, points out that nowadays we went back to using the older word for a ram's horn, so we call it a *shofar*.

The English word *horn* derives from the Latin words *cornu* and Greek *keras*, which originally meant something like "pointy" or "protruding." English words for horned-animals (like *unicorn*, *capricorn*, and *rhinoceros*), *cornet* (the head ornament and musical instrument), and *cornea* (the horny external coating of the eye) are all derived from those classical words. While it is tempting to argue these terms actually derive from the Hebrew *keren* (as some have argued), linguists understand the relevant Latin and Greek as tributaries of the Proto-Indo-European root *ker*, so the *n*-sound does not seem to be integral to the original root, making it harder to connect these words to the Hebrew *keren*. Nonetheless, according to Rabbi Pappenheim, the NUN of *keren* is likewise not part of the core root, so maybe there is something to this connection after all.¹

¹הרמב"ן (חידושי הרמב"ן ר"ה נו., דרשה לר"ה, ריטב"א ר"ה נו.), חשק שלמה (ערך בל), ר"ן (ר"ה ו. בדפי הרי"ף), שו"ת המבי"ט (ח"א סי' קכה ד"ה השני).

ROSH HASHONAH SPECIAL FEATURE

The Judgment of Rosh Hashanah

by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

The Siftei Chaim points out a few fundamental questions surrounding the holiday of Rosh Hashanah that can help enrich our understanding of the judgment that takes place on this day. There is a well-known principle in Jewish thought that says names always express essence. By studying the depth behind names a person can get an understanding of the spiritual nature of the person, object, etc. bearing that name. Similarly, the names of the holidays reflect their core. According to this, since the primary notion of Rosh Hashanah is judgment, then why isn't "Yom HaDin" ("Day of Judgment") the primary name of the holiday? After all, the name "Rosh Hashanah," "Head of the Year," seems to hint at nothing more than the mere date of the day. Furthermore, since Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, wouldn't it be more fitting to celebrate it at the end of the previous year, the year from which our actions are being judged, rather than the beginning of the upcoming year? Finally why is a new judgment necessary every year?

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 10b) tells us that the first day of Tishrei marks the creation of man, which in turn marks the completion of the creation process. It was on this day that man was given his first commandment to refrain from eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and the job of working and guarding the land. It was also on this day that Adam was given the tools he needed to accomplish this goal. He was placed in the ideal environment for growth (Garden of Eden), given the ideal spouse as a helpmate, and the fruits of all the trees – except for the Tree of Knowledge – as food. Ultimately, he wasn't missing anything he needed to accomplish his assigned role. However, Adam was unable to succeed, and sinned on the very day he was given the commandment. He was judged on this day, and given a second chance, but under different conditions. His ultimate job in the world had changed, and therefore the tools he was

given also changed. His environment was no longer the same since he was expelled from Eden; he then had to work for his food, Chava then had to endure childbirth pains, etc.

What can we learn about Rosh Hashanah from this? The Maharal explains that the Hebrew word for "year," "shana," has the same root as the Hebrew word for "change," "shinui." The meaning behind this is that with every New Year there are changes in both the details of the goals that need to be met, and purposes that need to be brought to fruition in the world. Just like every generation faces new trials to overcome and jobs to accomplish, so too every year the details of what is expected of you change. In this sense every year is like a new creation unto itself and mirrors the original creation process.

Based on the above, the commentaries suggest that everything that happened at the original creation of the world takes place every year on Rosh Hashanah. Just like on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem created and judged Adam, and determined the ultimate job that would be given to him, so too, on this day, Hashem judges us to see what, if any, job we will be allotted in the undertaking for the New Year. Furthermore, just as Adam was given everything he needed to carry out the job he was expected to accomplish (both before and after his sin), so too, every year on this day, riches, health, marriages, births, deaths, etc. are decided, based on the personal job given to every individual. A person may be given wealth to accomplish his goal to use it for good causes, while a person may live in poverty to test his level of trust in Hashem. Every person's tools are decided based on his personal tests and goals for the upcoming year. There is,

however, one major difference between the original day of creation and what takes place every year on Rosh Hashanah. Hashem's original decision to create Adam was not dependent on Adam's actions, simply because Adam was yet to be created. Conversely, the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is based solely on one's individual merits.

Based on the above, we can answer the questions we started with. Since every year brings with it changes in the goals that need to be met, a judgment is needed once a year to determine the

role of each individual with its changes. Also since the purpose of the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is not to hand out punishments for the past, but rather it is a judgment for the upcoming year, the judgment is on the first day of the *new year* rather than on the last day of the previous year. Finally, the name "Rosh Hashanah," "head of the year," is more essential than the name "Yom Hadin," "Day of Judgment," since this energy of *newness*, which demands new obligations and roles, prompts the judgment of Rosh Hashanah. Therefore the name "Rosh Hashanah," like all other holidays, elegantly encapsulates the essence of the day.

The Ohr Somayach family wishes our students, alumni, friends and all of Klal Yisrael a meaningful and fruitful New Year holiday season.

May you and your families be written and sealed in the Book of Life, enjoy a festive Succot, and be blessed from Above with much good health, happiness and success in the coming year — and for many more years to come.

YOM KIPPUR SPECIAL FEATURE

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL BABY!

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

The arrival of every Yom Tov brings with it a particularly precious moment: the recitation of the blessing “*Shehechyanu v’kiymanu v’higyanu lizman hazeh* – Blessed are You, Hashem, King of the Universe, Who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this season.” In a certain sense, the *Shehechyanu* blessing encapsulates our anticipation and excitement for the Yom Tov at its nascent beginning. The Yom Tov candles are lit and Kiddush is being recited as we take the opportunity to thank Hashem for having brought us to this momentous time. We show our appreciation that we are able to celebrate Yom Tov and allow its spiritual joy to become a part of us.

But there is one exception: Yom Kippur. Obviously the *Shehechyanu* blessing is not pronounced over a cup of wine on Yom Kippur, but it is nevertheless recited. After the haunting melody of *Kol Nidre* comes to an end, the congregation recites *Shehechyanu* all together. Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year. It is also the most solemn and serious day of the year. A day spent in prayer, fasting and introspection. A day of both physical discomfort and spiritual discomfort as we contemplate the wrongs we have done over the year and try to rectify them through remorse and pledging to try not to make the same mistakes again. Yom Kippur cannot be described as a day of joy like the other Yamim Tovim, so why do we proclaim “*Shehechyanu v’kiymanu v’higyanu lizman hazeh*”?

For this very reason, Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rokeach, (1854-1926), the third Belzer Rebbe, points out that Yom Kippur might not seem to be the right time to say *Shehechyanu*. The Belzer

Rebbe explains that the *Shehechyanu* that we recite as Yom Kippur begins is over ourselves! On entering into Yom Kippur after an intensive and demanding period of repentance, it is as if we have become new people. The potential for change is so enormous that our Sages describe a person who has been through the process of atonement as being akin to a new-born baby. As an American author once put it, “You know what the great thing about babies is? They are like little bundles of hope. Like the future in a basket.”

And this is exactly what our Sages are conveying. On Yom Kippur our entire future is spread out in front of us – pristine, and just waiting for us to embrace it. For this reason alone we should recite the blessing of *Shehechyanu* with great intent and concentration. To show our love for Hashem and our gratitude for the inestimable opportunities that He gives us to spiritually cleanse ourselves and to be able to start anew.

But it comes with a condition. Maimonides rules (*Hilchot Shgagot* 3:10) that the essence of Yom Kippur and our ability to completely cleanse ourselves of our sins is *emunah* – faith. Maimonides further writes that if a person does not believe in the power of atonement, Yom Kippur cannot atone for their sins. We have the incredible ability to undergo transformative change on Yom Kippur. To internalize the knowledge that we can change our inner self. But we need to believe that it is possible to do so in order for it to happen.

A Torah scholar once got on the bus in Jerusalem and sat down next to an elderly Russian man.

After being stuck in heavy traffic for a while, the Russian turned to his seatmate and said to him in Yiddish, “*Ich bin a Yom Kippur Yid* – I am a Yom Kippur Jew.”

Not being quite sure how to react, the Torah scholar waited for an explanation. The Russian said to him, “Look at me. Do you see how many teeth I am missing? Six. I was drafted into the Russian army during the Second World War. We worked and fought, day in and day out, every single day of the year. There was no vacation, no leave of absence, no Shabbat and no Yom Tov. Even sick leave was given at the barest minimum. The army medics had their orders for calculating how many days of sick leave each wound or illness was to be allotted. For example, for a pulled tooth, one day of sick leave was allowed, and then back to the front line.

“During my first year in the army, when Yom Kippur drew close, I began to think of ideas of how to exempt myself from service in order to avoid desecrating the holy day. Finally, I had a moment of inspiration. In the afternoon before Yom Kippur, I went to the medic and complained of an excruciating toothache. I pointed to one of my teeth and asked him to pull it out. The medic had no way of knowing if what I was saying was true or not, so he gave me a swig of vodka and pulled out the tooth with a pair of pliers. The pain was excruciating but my plan succeeded. I was free from army duty for the day. The next year, when Yom Kippur came, I tried the same thing again and it worked. For six Yom Kippurs I served in the Red Army, and six times I had a tooth pulled. That is why I tell you that *Ich bin a Yom Kippur Yid* – I am a Yom Kippur Jew!”

Each one of those “Yom Kippur Jew’s” missing teeth was a tribute to his unsullied purity and innocence. To his belief in Hashem and in the power of atonement on Yom Kippur. Each tooth was testament to his being born anew each year. Our Sages teach us (Tractate Pesachim 54a) that the concept of atonement came into being before our physical world was created. The source of atonement belongs to an existence that precedes the physical. Through Yom Kippur, and through the immeasurable intensity of atonement, we are presented with the opportunity to unite with a “world” that transcends the here-and-now. To a reality that is not constricted and restricted by the physical world that we live in.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 17:2) relates that as Yom Kippur comes to an end, a Heavenly voice calls out, (Kohelet 9:7), “Go eat your bread in joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, because Hashem has already approved your deeds.” Perhaps this is why the Code of Jewish Law (Orach Chaim 624:5) says that after the fast on Yom Kippur it is correct to eat a joyous meal. This joyous meal shows that we believe in the power of atonement. After having spent the last twenty-five hours immersed in the delight of Yom Kippur, we have reached a level of purity and spiritual cleanliness that reflects the fact that “Hashem has already approved our deeds.”

Please accept my blessing that we all be signed and sealed in the Book of Life. And may we all be blessed with a year of good health and an unwavering attachment to our Father in Heaven with a bond that is as pure and unsullied as that of a new-born baby.

PEREK SHIRA

The Song of the Sparrow

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The sparrow says: "Even the sparrow found a home and the free bird a nest for herself; she placed her chicks upon Your altars, Hashem Lord of Legions, my King and my God." (Tehillim 84:4)

The sparrow chooses a nest far away from predators, lays there its eggs, and sings incessantly. This verse metaphorically describes the Jewish people's building of the Beis HaMikdash in the same way. Like a bird, which dwells primarily in the air but must feed on the ground, we are a primarily spiritual people who live in an earthly world. We escaped from Egypt and built the Beis HaMikdash, "the House of our Lives," on the top of a mountain. There we would lay our "eggs," our offerings, upon Hashem's altars, the Levites would sing to the Creator every day.

Whenever the sparrows chirp, from wherever they choose to nest, they are echoing *our* song. They remind us to gather in our own Shuls, each which is miniature Beis HaMikdash, a nest in exile, and to sing Hashem's praises there. And in those prayers, we express our yearning to return to our true nest and home, where our song will join the earth to the Heavens, and will not cease evermore.

Sources: This is the song of the "tzipor." Depending on its context, this term may refer specifically to the sparrow, or to all song-birds, or to all birds, as is its general usage (see *Midrash Shocheh Tov* and *Radak* ad loc., *Shemos Rabbah* 20:6, and *Ramban* to *Vayikra* 14:4). For our commentary, we have translated as "sparrow," as is apparent from its position in Perek Shirah and its singular form, "tzipor." As one of the most common birds, its cheerful chirp is a standard feature in the background music of our world. Its song certainly applies to other birds as well, but to a lesser extent.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Ketuvot 79-85

Rav Nachman tore up her document.”

The document involved was one written by a widow to her daughter prior to the mother’s remarriage. The mother had property from before, and did not want her new husband to have any rights of usage or ownership in them. When it transpired that the mother’s new marriage ended in divorce, the mother asked her daughter to return her property. The daughter refused and presented the document of acquisition as proof that she was the true owner. Rav Nachman, however, understood that the document was only written in order to prevent the mother’s husband from having rights and not with complete intent to give the property to her daughter. He therefore tore up the daughter’s document, returning the property to the mother. Rashi explains that when the document was written the mother had informed witnesses that she did not really mean give her daughter a gift, but rather to prevent her new husband from rights to her property. (This explanation makes Rav Nachman’s ruling appear obviously correct and begs explanation for the opinion of Rava in the *gemara* who argues with Rav Nachman’s ruling. Tosefot, therefore, explains that the mother didn’t actually *inform* witnesses of her intent, but that it was clear from the situation that she did not have proper intent to give away her property as a gift.)

▪ *Ketuvot 79a*

“Since he (the lender) could have said ‘I bought the item’, he’s believed when he says ‘I grabbed it while he (the father) was still alive’.”

This is the ruling of Rav Nachman in our *gemara* in a case presented on our *daf*. A father who had borrowed money died, leaving behind orphans and a lender. The lender claimed that he took the father’s ox while the father was still alive (to ensure repayment of the debt) and should be allowed to keep it as payment for the loan. The orphans had a guard for their animals who claimed that the lender grabbed the ox “too late” – only after the death of the father – and must return it. Rav Nachman asked the guard if he could present witnesses to prove that the lender had *taken* the ox. His answer was “No”. Based on this lack of evidence, Rav Nachman issued his ruling that the lender was to be believed, on the basis that he could have easily denied ever taking it.

▪ *Ketuvot 84b*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Bereishet

Be Fruitful and Educate

Man, the crown of creation, is introduced as *Adam*. The term *adam*, explains Rav Hirsch, is not derived from the word *adamah*, earth. It is not man's earthliness that defines him. In fact, this is the characteristic which he shares with the rest of creation. The uniqueness of man is that he is not created entirely from earth. The breath of G-d, breathed into his earthly frame, is what makes him man.

Instead, the name *adam* can be understood in its relation to the word *adam*, red. Red light is the least refracted of all light. *This* captures the essence of man: He is the closest manifestation of the Divine; the least "refracted" of G-d's creations. *Adam* is also related to *hadom*, footstool, and *chatam*, seal. Man is both the 'footstool' of G-d's presence in the world and the seal through which the world can recognize G-d as Creator. His humanity is defined by his ability to freely choose morality, by his *likeness* to G-d. He is *domeh* – similar to G-d. *Adam* indicates the individualized purpose of man, as if to say, *I will resemble [G-d]*.

The very first command given to newly created *adam* was that of procreation: *P'ru u'rvu*, translated as "be fruitful and multiply." But these two words seemingly imply the same concept: fruitfulness implies numerosity. What does *r'vu* (multiply) add?

According to Rav Hirsch the instructions *p'ru* and *r'vu* are separate and distinct. *P'ru* refers to marriage: the union for production of human fruit. But the mere perpetuation of humanity is only the beginning. This human fruit must also be worthy of the name *adam*. After a child is formed, the parents are instructed: *R'vu! Multiply!* Even in the case of many species of animals, increase in the breed is dependent on care of the young; in the case of humans, such physical care is absolutely critical. Our young, by design, cannot survive without physical care. It is not the *birth*, but the *care* of human offspring which is the true cause of increase.

But the word *r'vu* connotes much more than physical sustenance and care. The linguistic root, *r.v.h*, implies instruction. For example, the Torah refers to Yishmael as *roveh keshet* – a shooting instructor. The words Rabbi, Rebbe, Rav – teacher – also derive from this sense. The main task of a parent – *r'vu* – is to *instruct*. For *reproduction* includes producing fruit that resembles the tree. It is not sufficient to physically care for our young. Instead we are instructed to also form and educate them spiritually and morally. Only then do children recur in the image of their parent and fulfill the mitzvah *r'vu*.

Another semantic cousin of this root *r.v.h*. – *r.f.h*. – reveals insights into the process of spiritual and moral education of the young. *Rafeh* means weak or loose. Rav Hirsch understands this 'weakness' to be self-limitation. Education in general, and in the family in particular, always entails devotion to others through self-limitation. Parenthood forces the parent out of self-centeredness – his ego becomes *rafeh*, weak. The greater this devotion, the greater – the more *rabah* – is the blessing.

The two commands form a single whole: *p'ru* attains its high moral import only when accompanied by *r'vu*. Only with selfless and loving guidance may we reproduce true human beings.

- Sources: Ber. 1:26-28

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Noach

Post-Deluvian Education

The flood is over, and Noach, his family and all living creatures emerge from the ark. G-d reflects on the destruction of the land, and promises that never again will He bring such destruction upon the world. *The days of the earth shall be forever*, we are told. *Seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall never cease.* (Ber. 8:22)

According to the plain meaning of the text, this refers to a return to the regular course of the seasons and the daily cycle, which were disrupted during the flood. But the *midrash* states that the seasons of the year mentioned here were instituted only *after* the flood. Further opinions in the *midrash* recite how, before the flood, people would sow fields only once in forty years, how it was always springtime with moderate temperature, and how the earth was not yet split into continents, enabling rapid transportation from one end of the world to the other.

Our verse speaks of the climactic conditions as we know them after the flood – the nature and position of earth will be such that all times of the day, and all seasons of the years, all gradations of temperature and climate, will always be present simultaneously in the various parts of the earth – summer here, winter there, midnight here, noon there.

According to Rav Hirsch, the post-deluvian arrangement of geographic and climactic phenomena introduced a new method of educating mankind. It is no longer sufficient for man to sow once in forty years. Climate and weather patterns interfere with his efforts, and he is no longer independent as he once was. The changes – continental shifts as well as climactic differences – led to great diversification among people, who came to differ in their virtues, vices and values.

In addition, the lifespan of man was greatly shortened. For example, Noach lived 950 years, Avraham lived 175, Moshe 120 and David calls 70 the average life span. This reduction ensured that even the mightiest of despots cannot wield his power for much longer than fifty years. When men lived for eight centuries, the younger generation could not express itself. But when the lifespan was shortened, the wicked would die off quickly, leaving room for a pure, innocent, youthful and upright generation to take its place. In this way, the hope for the future can rest in the next generation.

Likewise, the division of earth into continents and countries obstructed the spread of evil. These climactic and geographical changes would dictate profound differences in human experience across the globe. Instead of a single family or community, where corruption at one end would quickly infect the whole, humanity is dispersed so that it may be able to rejuvenate itself: a corrupt branch, after it has passed through all stages of human delusion, will make way for a hardier, more robust one, which will start a new life.

In this light, the mention of the seasonal changes right after the promise to never again destroy the world makes sense. Although man's heart may aspire to evil, the response will no longer be destruction; rather the new seasonal and geographic realities will usher in a new phase in the education of mankind.

- Sources: Commentary, Bereishet 8:22, The Nineteen Letters, Letter Six

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 21) – BLESSING FOR THE TEMPLE SERVICE

Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man's paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man's weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.
(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The seventeenth blessing reads: **Be favorable, our Hashem, toward Your people Israel and their prayers and restore the Temple service to the Holy of Holies of Your Temple. The fire offerings of Israel and their prayer accept with love and favor, and may the service of Your people Israel always be favorable to You. May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in compassion. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who restores His Presence to Zion.**

We have concluded the blessings for our personal entreaties and we now begin the final three blessings of the Amidah which are described as the blessings of thanksgiving (*Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah* 1:4). Interestingly enough, this is despite the fact that they, too, are requests. The final three blessings ask that Hashem reinstate the Temple services and that He establish peace. The *Rosh*, Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel explains (*Brachot* 34a) that the final blessings actually *are* blessings of thanksgiving because they emphasize our complete and absolute national and individual dependence on Hashem. And there is no greater reason than that to thank Hashem.

Our blessing asks that Hashem accept our “fire offerings with love and favor.” However, it is somewhat unclear as to which “fire offerings” the blessing is referring to as the Third and Final Holy Temple has not yet been rebuilt. The *Tur* explains (*Orach Chaim* 187) that it is our prayers that are recited in place of the Temple service, that are the “fire offerings”. Thus, we ask Hashem to accept our prayers with “love and favor” as if we had offered up sacrifices in the Holy Temple. The *Tur* then cites a *Midrash* that describes the souls of the righteous who pray with complete intent and concentration. These pure souls, full of fiery passion and a true love for Hashem, ascend to the Spiritual Realms where they are placed, as it were, on the Heavenly altar and are regarded as being akin to fire offerings.

The classic Chassidic interpretation takes a slightly different approach. The “fire offerings” are not just a reference to the prayers of the pious and the righteous. Rather, every single Jew's prayers can reach the Heavenly altar if they are said with passion and fervor. Our prayers should be infused with such incredible fiery enthusiasm that they are able to “burn” their way through the physical layers that conceal the Spiritual Realms and to arrive directly on the Heavenly altar.

The prophet *Yishayahu* declares (2:3), “From Zion [Yerushalayim] the Torah will come forth”. *Tosafot* (*Bava Batra* 21a) ask what it is specifically about Zion that causes the Torah to pour forth from within it. *Tosafot* answer that it was not the city itself that was the source of inspiration. Rather, when the people would come to Yerushalayim and the Holy Temple they would see the *kohanim* busy with the Temple service and it would encourage them to reach new levels of connection to Hashem and it would spur them on to even greater diligence in their Torah learning and mitzvah observance. Rabbi Aharon Kotler (*Mishnat Rabbi Aharon*) writes that because we have no Temple today every single person needs to look at themselves as a living Temple. Just

as the *kohanim* inspired others and embodied the essence of the Temple, so should we inspire others and embody the essence of the Holy Temple.

Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshitz (*Ya'arot Devash*) points out that the structure of the phrase, “May our eyes behold” – *techezena einenu* – is a little strange as it literally means, “May we see with our eyes”. As there is no other way to see other than with our eyes it sounds almost superfluous. Rabbi Eibeshitz explains that when the Final Redemption arrives – may we all merit to experience it very, very soon – there may be many people whose behavior and actions throughout their lives were not terribly praiseworthy and they may not deserve to witness the redemption. Therefore, we ask Hashem that we be counted among those who are able to *see* the redemption.

The blessing ends with the words, “Blessed are You, Hashem, Who restores His Presence to Zion.” Interestingly, the blessing is written in the present tense even though we are still awaiting the redemption. So compelling is our belief that Hashem will restore His presence to Zion it is as if we can see it in front of us – as if it had already happened!

Rabbi Aharon haKohen of Lunil was born at the end of the thirteenth century in Provence, France. He was exiled from Provence together with the Jewish community in the year 1306. He spent many years wandering from community to community until he finally settled in the island of Majorca where he remained until his passing. He was considered to be one of the most distinguished experts in Jewish Law in his generation and he authored a legal treatise entitled *Orchot Chaim* which is cited extensively by Rabbi Yosef Karo in *Bet Yosef*. Rabbi Aharon haKohen writes that there are thirty-four words in our blessing asking for the restoration of the Temple and its service. He explains that the thirty-four words correspond to the thirty-four *kohanim* (priests) who took part in the offering of the ox, goat and ram on Yom Kippur.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 22) – BLESSING OF THANKSGIVING (i)

Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man's paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man's weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.
(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The eighteenth blessing begins: **We gratefully thank You, for it is You Who is our Hashem and the Hashem of our forefathers for all eternity; Rock of our lives, Shield of our salvation, are You from generation to generation. We shall thank you and relate Your praise – for our lives, which are committed to Your power and for our souls that are entrusted to You; for Your miracles that are with us every day...**

We thank Hashem for giving us the *Avot*, Avraham Yitzchak and Yaakov, the founding fathers of the Jewish Nation. It is due to the *Avot*, through their spiritual investigations and explorations, that we have the ability to connect to Hashem. In his fundamental work, *Ruach Chaim* on *Pirkei Avot*, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explains that the “spiritual DNA” of every Jew is inherited from our forefather Avraham. It is because Avraham invested his entire being into identifying Hashem and determining the optimal way to serve Him that we can aspire to the most elevated and sublime connection to Hashem.

Our blessing continues, “We shall thank you and relate Your praise”. For what, exactly, are we thanking Hashem? Although it is possible to understand that we are thanking Him for granting us everything that we have just asked for in the Amidah, that would be somewhat presumptuous. It implies a sense of entitlement. As if we are thanking Hashem in advance because we assume that we will receive it. But that is not accurate at all. We all of us ask Hashem over and over again to grant us our heartfelt desires seemingly with little success. Rather, we are thanking Hashem for being the only Entity in our existence who has the power and the ability to give us what we long for. For that alone we must acknowledge and give thanks to Hashem. If we actually receive what we have asked for that is certainly a reason to rejoice. But that is not what determines our obligation to thank Him.

We then thank Hashem for “miracles that are with us every day”. Not necessarily the obvious life-changing miracles that occur rarely in a person’s life. But, rather, the myriad miracles that happen to each person so frequently that they are often ignored. Occurrences that are looked at as being so “natural” that we overlook their Source. Someone once approached the Chazon Ish and complained bitterly about the dire state of his finances. The man told the Chazon Ish, “I need a miracle, but our Sages teach (*Pesachim* 50b) “*Lav kol yoma mitrachesh nissa* – miracles don’t happen every day.” The Chazon Ish corrected him, and said that the phrase that he was citing should be read as follows: “*Lav* – it isn’t so. Period! *Kol yoma mitrachesh nissa* – every day miracles occur!”

Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer (*Shemoneh Esrei*) cites Rabbi Avaraham Dovid Lavut (1814-1890), the Chief Rabbi of Mykolaiv in the Ukraine and the author of several scholarly works, one of which is *Sha’ar Hakollel* on the siddur, which focuses on differing customs that can be found in prayer. Rabbi Lavut points out that all the various communities agree that there are eighty-six words in our blessing. The number eighty-six corresponds to the numerical value of one of Hashem’s main Names – *Elohim*. The Name illustrates the concept that since Hashem is the creator of everything in the universe; everything in the universe is unified through Hashem. The Hebrew word for nature (with the definitive article) is *hateva* which also equals eighty-six. Thus, the word *Elohim* as a name of Hashem in the Torah, expresses that all the individual things in the world, that seem separate and autonomous, are all unified through the One Source. Including all the seemingly ordinary and regular things that happen throughout our lives. Our Sages teach (*Niddah* 31a), “One who experiences a miracle is not aware of it.” Therefore, we must thank Hashem for all the “mundane” miracles that occur on a daily basis – both those that affect each person and for those that affect the entire community. Perhaps that is why the very first word of our blessing – *modim* – is in the plural, meaning “we give thanks”.

In the immortal words of Rabbi Yaakov Emden (*Siddur Beis Yaakov, Sulam Beit Keil*):

“When we contemplate our situation in the history of the world, we realize that we are a nation exiled, like scattered sheep. After all the thousands of years of hardship that have befallen us, there is no nation as oppressed as ours. Our enemies are numerous. With hatred and jealousy, they have raised their heads to uproot and destroy us. Even so, they have been unable to fulfill their plans. The most powerful of nations have risen against us and long ago fallen, their memory forgotten like a passing shadow, but we who cling to Hashem survive today. Despite all the torments of our exile, we have not forsaken even one letter of the Written Torah, and the words of our Sages still stand strong. They have been impervious to the hand of time. What could the clever philosophers possibly say to explain this? That it is a coincidence?

By my life, I swear that this is a greater miracle than those that Hashem performed for our forefathers in Egypt, in the desert and in the Land of Israel. The longer the exile lasts, the more the miracle becomes obvious and Hashem’s Might is revealed. Everything that we undergo today was already foreseen by the Prophets, who bemoaned the terrible length of the exile long before it began. From all their words, not one has fallen aside. He who would dispute this, his words are like smoke and the passing clouds.”

To be continued...