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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

In The Heart Of The Child

“So Pharaoh sent and summoned Yosef, and they rushed him from the dungeon...” (41:14)

Little children usually find it very difficult to do things by themselves. They need a constant helping hand, constant encouragement. They can be bold, but only when a parent is close by. When out of sight, tears quickly replace bravado until once again they feel the hand that comforts.

As babies, our first faltering steps are greeted by parental glee. Hands reach out to guide our every step. When we stumble, Mom and Dad are always there to stop us from falling.

There comes a day, however, when we stumble, but we find no helping hand. We fall to the ground. Tears fill our eyes and dismay fills our hearts. We look around in amazement. "Where are you? Mommy? Daddy? Are you still there?"

Only from the moment our parents let us fall can we learn to walk by ourselves. Only from the moment that our parents are prepared to let us become adults can we stop being children. If, as parents, we never give our children the possibility of falling down, they will never learn to stand by themselves. Of course, to everything there is a season. Everything has to be in its time. If a child is challenged beyond his capabilities, he may assume that he will never be able to achieve what is being

asked of him, and suffer from this negative programming for life.

A challenge in its correct time is always an opportunity to grow, an opportunity to get to know who we really are.

The festival of Chanukah celebrates two events: The defeat of the vast Seleucid Greek army by a handful of Jews, and the miracle of the one flask of pure oil which burned for eight days in the Menorah. If you think about it, our joy at Chanukah should center on the deliverance from our enemies. However, our main focus seems to be the miracle of the lights. Why should this be so?

Chanukah took place after the last of the Prophets - Chagai, Zecharia and Malachi - had passed from this world. After they passed, Hashem no longer communicated directly with humans. Suddenly, we were like children left alone in the dark. The Parental Hand had gone. With prophecy taken from the world, we would need to grow by ourselves, to become like adults. No longer could we depend on Hashem to reach down to us. Now, we would need to stretch our arms upward to Him. We had been given a chance to grow. To find out who we were. In the darkness of a world without prophecy, we would need to forge our connection with Hashem in the furnace of our own hearts.

But it is difficult. Sometimes we feel "Mommy, Daddy...where are you? Are you still there?" The heart grows a little cold with longing. Sometimes we need a little extra help.

The joy of Chanukah is not so much because we got what we prayed for, that we were delivered from the Greeks, but the fact that G-d let us know that He was still there. He answered our prayers with a miracle. In a world where spiritual decay had tainted the holiest places, a light burst forth in the center of the world to tell us that He was still there. A light that told us that darkness had not extinguished the light. It was only hiding it.

Hashem communicated with us through the darkness of a world without prophecy. He let us know that He was still with us even in the dark. Even though the channel of prophecy had fallen silent, our Father was still there, watching over us.

That little flask of oil would burn and burn. It would burn not just for eight days. It would burn for thousands of years. We would take those lights with us into the long, long night of exile, and we would know by the very fact of our survival against all odds that He was with us even in the darkest of nights. He was always there. He has always been there.

Sometimes it seems that the darkness cannot get any darker.

More Jews observe Chanukah than any other Jewish festival. Those lights did not burn for just eight days. Those little lights have been burning for more than two thousand years. However far someone may be from their Jewish roots, you can still find a Menorah burning in the window. A little spark that lingers on. A holy spark hidden in the heart of a child.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

Q & A

Questions

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

Answers

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

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Cans of Oil

The Talmud relates that when the Syrian-Greeks entered the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, they defiled all the containers of olive oil used for the Temple rituals, rendering them ritually impure. When the Hasmoneans later overpowered them and reclaimed the Temple, they were able to find only one “container” (pach) of oil whose seal was yet unbroken. From that one container, they lit the Menorah in the Temple, and that small quantity of oil miraculously lasted for eight days. This, in a nutshell, is the story behind the establishment of Chanukah (Shabbat 21b, Megillat Taanit to 25 of Kislev, Sheiltot D’Rav Achai Gaon Vayishlach 26, and Maimonides’ Laws of Chanukah 3:2).

However, one of the signature highlights of Chanukah is the recitation and singing of the epic poem Maoz Tzur (“Rock of Ages”). The stanza that discusses the miracle of Chanukah reads: “The Greeks gathered up against me / Then, in the days of the Hasmoneans / And they breached the walls of my tower / And they defiled all the oils (shemanim) / And from the remnant of the containers (kankanim) / A miracle was done for the roses (shoshanim) / The children of understanding (i.e., the Jewish People) / Eight days, they established for song and praise.” In this retelling of the story, the word used to denote “container” of oil is kankan, not pach. This raises two related questions: Why did the poet decide to replace the word pach used by Chazal with the word kankan? Moreover, are the words pach and Kankan synonymous?

Regarding the first question, there is an obvious answer: The author of Maoz Tzur used his poetic license to take liberties with his wording. This allowed him to switch out the expected word pachim for kankanim, because kankanim rhymes with the final word of the next line (shoshanim), while pachim does not. However, Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dinov (1783-1841) rejects this line of reasoning, arguing that if the poet was so worried about rhyme, then he could have just as easily replaced the expected word pachim with the word shemanim (“oils”), which also rhymes with shoshanim to read “and from the remnant of the oils...”

So we are back to the original question: Why did the poet insist on using the word kankanim, which is not found in Chazal with respect to the miracle of Chanukah, instead of pachim or at least shemanim? I still think the answer about poetic license is the correct approach. To briefly address Rabbi Shapiro’s observation, I would say that the poet did not want to use the word shoshanim because that word was already used to end the previous line and it is considered tacky to rhyme a word with itself.

At this point, I do not have a clear answer as to whether pach and Kankan are actually synonyms, but after a discussion about these words, it will become clear that it is a real possibility.

*To read the rest of this article, visit us online at: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

Q & A - Chanukah

Questions

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

Answers

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

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

The Amidah (Part 30) – The Final Paragraph: Personally Speaking

“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 Avraham Chaim Feuer)

“My Hashem, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent, and let my soul be like dust to everyone. Open my heart to Your Torah, then my soul will pursue Your commandments. As for all those who design evil against me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design. Act for Your Name’s sake, act for Your right hand’s sake, act for Your sanctity’s sake, act for Your Torah’s sake. That Your beloved may be given rest, let Your right hand save and respond to me. May the expressions of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart find favor before You, Hashem, my Rock and my Redeemer. He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us and upon all Israel. And let us say: Amen.”

The Torah relates that Avraham Avinu prepared tongues to give to the three angels who came to visit him (Bereshet 18:7). Rashi cites our Sages (Bava Metziah 86b) that Avraham served the tongue together with mustard. Why does the Torah go to the trouble of telling us exactly what kind of food was served to the angels? The Rabbis teach that the angels were trying to understand what it was about human beings that makes them so precious in the Eyes of Hashem. In answer, Avraham gave them tongue with mustard, implying that sometimes the tongue is hot and wants to say something sharp (as hinted to by the mustard), especially when someone has been insulted. But we are being taught that we have been imbued with the ability to hold back and remain silent even when it is so difficult to do so. And that is why Hashem loves us so much. As a wise person once pointed out, the same letters that spell out the word ‘listen’ also spell out the word ‘silent.’ Even when a person listens to derogatory things being said about them, the best course of action is nearly always to remain silent and to not react.

Why does this appear now at the very end of our recitation of the Amidah? Chovovt Halevavot explains that when approached properly, prayer is supposed to elevate us to an exalted level of serenity. Therefore, it is at this juncture, when we approach the final moments of the Amidah, and after having invested so much spiritual energy into gaining the correct perspective, it is now possible to pray for the strength to remain silent in facing verbal abuse. Perhaps now it is possible to understand the inference behind what we say next. After having worked on reaching a level of serenity we are able to declare, “And may my soul be as dust” because only someone who recognizes just how treasured they are in the Eyes of Hashem can understand that their preciousness stems from their humbleness.

The Sefat Emet points out a fascinating fact. The Amidah opens with the blessing of our forefather Avraham, who was the epitome of selflessness. In Bereshet (ibid. 27), Avraham with his trademark self-effacing modesty, tells Hashem, “I am but dust and ashes.” And the Amidah concludes with a plea that we will all be able to relate to ourselves just as Avraham related to himself. Hashem promised that we, Avraham’s descendants, will be as compassionate and altruistic as he was. It was a promise that we too, like Avraham Avinu, will be like “the dust of the earth.” (ibid. 13:16)

To be continued...

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The Song of the Chasil Locust

The Chasil Locust says: “Hashem, You are my G-d, I will exalt and thank You, for You have performed wonders, faithfully fulfilling prophecies of long ago.” (Yeshayah 21:1)

A large swarm of locusts can consist of billions of locusts spread out over an area of thousands of square kilometers. The Chasil species is the most damaging of all locusts, destroying crops entirely. Therefore; its name is “Chasil,” which is related to the Hebrew word for “annihilation.”

They sing how Hashem should be exalted and thanked for fulfilling the wonders He promised the prophets to the very last detail. He did so when He saved us from the Egyptians through the plague of Chasil locusts, and He will likewise redeem us in the future. In the same way that unnoticed locusts can proliferate into billions at a designated time, so too Hashem’s salvation will one day quickly fill a horizon previously empty of hope.

Some maintain that the Chasil is not a species, but rather the wingless nymph phase of any locust. This would explain why Hashem had to bring them into Egypt with a wind.

Hashem sends locusts to fulfill His will in other ways as well. The Talmud teaches that on account of the sin of theft, locusts proliferate and crops are destroyed. Theft in itself is a relatively small crime, but if committed repeatedly within a whole society, it corrupts the social order entirely. It is therefore fitting that theft is punished by insects that are individually insignificant, but which altogether devastate a country. A further reason may be that although locusts swarm in large groups, they function individually, with no leader to guide them. They are thus fitting to punish a society of thieves that steal individually. In this way, even the damaging elements of the universe contribute to its Divine song.

Sources: Yerushalmi 3:6; Li Lishua; Perek B’Shir; Otzar Lashon HaMikra; Shabbos 32b; Mishlei 30:26; Otzar Lashon HaMikra; Rashi; see also Re’em.

*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. info@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, Mrs. Helena Stern.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Nedarim 44-50

Dispossession

“A person can make his property ownerless (hefker) in front of one person according to Torah law. And why did the Rabbis require making it ownerless in front of three people? So that one person can acquire it, and the other two people are witnesses.”

This is the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi on our daf, which is cited as the ruling in the Shulchan Aruch. (Orach Chaim 273:7) This need to declare the property ownerless in the presence of one or three other people seems to not be in accord with what we do regarding chametz before Pesach. When we do “bitul chametz” – nullification of the chametz – there is no requirement to do it in the presence of anyone else at all.

One approach to understand bitul chametz is that it is not a declaration of hefker, but rather a mental process of renouncement. As the Rambam writes, “One annuls it in his heart, considers it as dust, and should think in his heart that he has no chametz whatsoever. Any chametz in his possession is as dust and is purposeless.” (Laws of Chametz and Matza 2:2) Another approach is that any chametz does not really belong to the “owner” once it becomes forbidden for him to have any benefit from it on erev Pesach. The prohibitions against having “your chametz” on Pesach mean to not have chametz that “you want.” If a person does bitul, saying it in solitude or even via thought, he then does not “want the chametz” and therefore does not transgress. (Rabbeinu Nissim)

Nedarim 45a

Working for Torah

“Rabbi Shimon took a basket on his shoulder and said, ‘Great is work, that it honors its owner’.”

The “Rabbi Shimon” mentioned in this statement in our gemara is “Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai”. However, Rabbi Shimon teaches elsewhere (Berachot 35b) that work is to be avoided since it takes away time and energy from Torah study. Perfection is achieved only through Torah. So, how can he praise the importance of work in our gemara when he carried a basket?

Answer: He was on his way to the Beit Midrash to learn Torah and he took the basket to sit on while he was learning instead of sitting directly on the ground. He would be able to learn Torah better in this way. His physical exertion of shouldering the basket was not for the sake of work, but rather for the sake of the Torah and for the honor of the Torah. (Maharitz Chiyos; also see Rabbeinu Nissim and Rabbeinu Asher)

Nedarim 49b

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Restoring Brotherly Love

The drama in this week's *parashah* is spellbinding. Upon recognizing his brothers, Yosef designs an elaborate plan to test their allegiance, and seemingly bring about the realization of the dreams of his youth. But, how are we to understand Yosef's behavior? He has been viceroy in Egypt for nine years – did it not occur to him to send a message to his grieving father that he was alive and well? Or at least now, reveal himself to his brothers immediately, if only for his father's sake? Surely, a man of Yosef's intelligence could not have believed that he was obliged to put himself at the service of his dreams; if the dreams had fateful significance, their realization could have been left to the One Who sent them. And a man of Yosef's character surely could not have intended senseless harassment in retaliation for his brothers' wrongs.

If Yosef wished only superficial restoration of the family relationship, this could have been achieved immediately, even years earlier. But Yosef wished to restore a warm and healthy family relationship. For this, two things would be required: he would have to change his opinion of his brothers, and they would have to change their opinion of him.

After experiencing the shocking callousness which met his entreaties from the pit, the only way for Yosef to overcome his natural feelings of resentment to his brothers was to be convinced that they had changed. Only if he could prove that their hearts had been warmed and their souls had been moved could he erase those feelings. And so, he devised the test:

when faced with the real prospect of life imprisonment and their families' starvation, would they still choose not to deprive their father of another son? When their actions proved their allegiance and change of heart, Yosef could banish from his heart the bitterness that remained.

But what about their feelings towards him? The feelings that led to his alienation in the first place? Yosef *remembered his dreams* (Ber. 32:9). He remembered how they had caused his brothers to suspect him of lust for power, how they had felt so threatened by him that they were driven to sell him. These feelings would be magnified tenfold now, if, as viceroy, with good reason to take his revenge, he revealed his identity to them. The rift of their youth would have become an unbridgeable gulf.

First, Yosef makes known to them the extent of his governing power in Egypt. It must be made abundantly clear to them that this man can do with them as he wishes. Then, through the course of events, Yosef reveals his true character. When he deals kindly with them and repays evil with good, he hopes they will change their view of him. With all of the pieces in place, the stage is set for his revelation in next week's *parashah*. At that moment, when the blindfold would drop, it would be possible for both Yosef and his brothers to restore the warm, brotherly relationship that would be essential to the survival and flourishing of this emerging nation of Bnei Yisrael, *the sons of Israel*.

- *Source: Commentary, Bereishet 42:9*