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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

One Story, Two Messages (at least)

“I will provide peace in your Land, and you will lie down with none to frighten you...” (26:6)

In this week’s Torah portion, we read the ‘Tochacha’ in which Hashem repeatedly sends the Jewish People ‘messages’ to repent, and the dire consequences of ignoring those messages.

In fact, Hashem is sending us messages all the time. But often the message can be understood differently by different people.

Case in point: My wife and I were sitting on a plane waiting to take off on a flight out of Tel Aviv Airport. The departure time came and went. The captain announced: “Ladies and Gentlemen, I’m sorry but we have to change one of our tires. It’s going to take an hour.”

About half-an-hour later, a middle-aged fellow made his way to the front of the plane, and started to complain to the Chief Stewardess: “I’ve been looking out of the side of our plane, and there’s another plane just sitting there. Look! There it is! Why don’t we all just go over to that plane, take all the bags and off we go? Why are we wasting time just sitting here!”

She tried to explain to him, but he became very insistent. “Why are we just sitting here? No one is using that plane. All we need to do is take the bags and we can be on our way! I don’t understand your problem.” He seemed a little ingenuous. Maybe this was the first time he had flown?

By this time, the Chief Stewardess was doing a good job hiding her laughter, which several passengers around us were not managing to do. I thought at first that he was joking, but I soon realized he was absolutely serious. Both myself and my wife make videos. She, for South American ladies, and I, for Ohr Somayach, so we’re always looking for parables to turn into lessons, and she asked me what I learned from this episode. I said, quoting a statement of our Sages in Yoma 38b:

“No one can touch what is prepared for another, even by a hairbreadth.”

That plane is for them. And this plane is for us. What is for me is for me, and what is for you is for you. To think otherwise is the mistake of all jealousy. A jealous person thinks to himself, “If it weren’t for that guy being in the world, I could have what he has. “Hey buddy! You’re driving my car! You’re married to my wife! You’re breathing my air!” The truth is that if ‘buddy’ didn’t deserve that car, it would never have rolled off the assembly line in Detroit, (or more probably nowadays, Guangzhou, in China.) His wife may never have been born, and the total volume of air in the world would have been proportionately smaller.

My wife said, “I think the message is that we should always ask Hashem for things, even if they seem impossible for us, for if we approach Hashem with simplicity and total faith, sometimes the unlikely can become likely and the impossible, possible.

Hashem sends us messages every day. We just have to hear them.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Metzia 89-95

Eating While You Work

The Sages say, “But we teach him (the worker who is permitted to eat from food with which he is working) to not eat more than the amount of his wages, so that the ‘door should not be closed in front of him’ (meaning: so that his excessive eating should not cause him to be undesirable to hire as a worker – Rashi).”

This statement is part of a three-way dispute in a *mishna*, regarding how much a worker may eat from the food with which he works. The *gemara* explains that the Tana Kama permits him to eat as much as he wants without any requirement to advise him to limit the amount for his own benefit. Rabbi Elazar Chasma permits him to eat only up to the value of his wages. And the above-quoted opinion of the Sages is that he may eat as much as he wants, but we advise him to not overdo it, and not eat more than his wages, in order to remain being a desirable person to hire. The halacha is in accordance with this concluding opinion.

The right of a worker to eat from the food with which he works is taught in the Torah (Devarim 13:15): “When you enter your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat as many grapes as you desire, until you are sated, but you shall not put any into your vessel.” The *gemara* explains earlier (87b) that this verse is speaking about a worker who is rightfully in his employer’s vineyard to work there. And it is important to note, that just as an employee has certain rights, he also has certain responsibilities to his employer. The Rambam codifies the responsibility of the employee toward his employer as follows: “He must not deprive the employer of the labor due him by idling a bit here and there, thereby dishonestly wasting the day, and he must also work with all his might. The saintly Yaakov said of his service to his father-in-law: ‘I served your father with all my might.’ He therefore gained his spiritual reward in this world, as well by being blessed with great wealth.” (Laws of Hiring 13:7)

▪ *Bava Metzia 92a*

Q & A

Questions

1. To what do the words "*bechukotai telechu*" (walk in My statutes) refer?
2. When is rain "in its season"?
3. What is the blessing of "*v'achaltem lachmechem l'sova*" (and you shall eat your bread to satisfaction)?
4. What is meant by the verse "and a sword will not pass through your land"?
5. Mathematically, if five Jewish soldiers can defeat 100 enemy soldiers, how many enemy soldiers should 100 Jewish soldiers be able to defeat?
6. How much is "*revava*"?
7. Which "progression" of seven transgressions are taught in Chapter 26, and why in that particular order?
8. What is one benefit which the Jewish People derive from the Land of Israel's state of ruin?
9. What was the duration of the Babylonian exile and why that particular number?
10. How many years did the Jewish People sin in Israel up till the time the northern tribes were exiled?
11. In verse 26:42, the name Yaakov is written with an extra "*vav*." From whom did Yaakov receive this extra letter and why?
12. What positive element is implied by the words "and I will bring them into the land of their enemies"?
13. In verse 26:42, why is the word "remember" not used in connection with the name of Yitzchak?
14. Why does the Torah say in 26:46 "Torot" (plural) and not "Torah" (singular)?
15. What happens when a poor person dedicates the value of a man to the *Beit Hamikdash* and doesn't have sufficient funds to fulfill his vow?
16. If a person says, "The leg of this animal shall be an *olah* offering," the animal is sold and sacrificed as an *olah* offering. What is the status of the money received for the animal?
17. If a person dedicates his ancestral field to the *Beit Hamikdash* and fails to redeem it before *Yovel* what happens to the field?
18. Where must "*ma'aser sheini*" be eaten?
19. When a person redeems "*ma'aser sheini*" what happens to the food? What happens to the redemption money?
20. How does a person tithe his animals?

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

Answers

1. 26:3 - Laboring in Torah learning.
2. 26:4 - At times when people are not outside (e.g. Shabbat nights).
3. 26:5 - You will only require a little bread to be completely satisfied.
4. 26:6 - No foreign army will travel through your land on their way to a different country.
5. 26:4 - Two thousand.
6. 26:4 - Ten thousand.
7. 26:14, 15 - Not studying Torah, not observing *mitzvot*, rejecting those who observe *mitzvot*, hating Sages, preventing others from observing *mitzvot*, denying that G-d gave the *mitzvot*, denying the existence of G-d. They are listed in this order because each transgression leads to the next.
8. 26:32 - No enemy nation will be able to settle in the Land of Israel.
9. 26:35 - 70 years. Because the Jewish People violated 70 *Shemitta* and *Yovel* years.
10. 26:35 - 390 years.
11. 26:42 - In five places in the Torah, Yaakov's name is written with an extra "*vav*" and in five places the name Eliyahu is missing a "*vav*." Yaakov "took" these *vavs* as a pledge that Eliyahu will one day come and announce the redemption of Yaakov's children.
12. 26:41 - G-d Himself, so to speak, will bring them into their enemies' land. This means that even when the Jews are in exile, G-d will supply them with leaders who inspire them to keep the Torah. This guards the Jews from assimilating into the host culture.
13. 26:42 - Because the image of Yitzchak's ashes (who was prepared to be brought as an offering) upon the altar is always before G-d.
14. 26:46 - To teach that both the Written Torah and the Oral Torah were given to Moshe on Har Sinai.
15. 27:8 - The person whose value was donated goes before the *kohen*, who sets the obligation according to the poor person's ability to pay.
16. 27:9 - The money is "*chullin*," meaning it does not have "holy" status, except for the value of the animal's leg which does have "holy" status.
17. 27:16 - It becomes the property of the *kohanim* who are on rotation at the beginning of *Yovel*.
18. 27:30 - In Jerusalem.
19. 27:31 - The food becomes permissible to him outside of Jerusalem. The redemption money must be brought to Jerusalem and used to purchase food to be eaten there.
20. 27:32 - He passes them through a door individually and he marks every tenth animal with a rod smeared with red dye.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 25)

BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

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

As we have learned together, Birkat HaMazon has so many beautiful aspects. Each new detail adds another sparkling dimension, and together they weave the most magnificent tapestry. In fact, Birkat HaMazon is such a foundational component of our relationship with Hashem that Rabbi Yoel Sirkis (1561-1640), in the commentary Bayit Chadash (commonly known by the acronym Ba'Ch) on the Tur, quotes the Sefer haChinuch: “Whoever is careful regarding the recitation of Birkat HaMazon will merit to receive his livelihood in a dignified manner all the days of his life.”

Rabbi Moshe Alshich (1508-1593), in his commentary on Megillat Rut (3:7), writes that Boaz, the righteous and selfless leader of the Jewish nation, merited success in all of his communal endeavors, managing to sustain the entire nation during many years of famine, due to his careful recitation of Birkat HaMazon.

Rabbi Sirkis points out that every single letter of the Aleph Bet is found in the text of Birkat HaMazon, except for one. The only letter that does not appear is the ‘final peh.’ Its lack is such an anomaly that he feels a need to explain why it is missing. He points out that many words that revolve around anger end with a ‘final peh.’ For example, ‘af’ and ‘ketzef’ end this way. He writes that the ‘final peh’ represents anger, and then says that whoever recites Birkat HaMazon with concentration and intent will be protected from all manner of anger and destruction.

He also relates a story from Sefer Chassidim about a man who passed away and appeared in a dream to one of his relatives. He told him that every day he is judged anew because he did not recite Birkat HaMazon with the correct concentration and intent.

I, personally, was inadvertently persuaded by one of my sons to treat the way I relate to Birkat HaMazon more seriously. One summer, a few years ago, my son was visiting family in London. One day, he phoned and said that they had gone out sightseeing and they had taken sandwiches for lunch. After finishing eating, he started getting himself ready to recite Birkat HaMazon, when he realized that he did not have the text with him. My son is an up-and-coming Torah scholar and certainly knows Birkat HaMazon by heart. But, as part of his Avodat Hashem – his approach to his spiritual growth – he had made a commitment to always recite Birkat HaMazon from a text. In that way, he hoped to fine-tune his intent when reciting it and to imbue his Birkat HaMazon with more meaning. And, now, he found himself on a beautiful summer afternoon in a park in central London - textless! So, he phoned home and asked me to read out the text to him so that he could write it out. And that is exactly what we did. I read out the text, word by word and he wrote it down. And then he recited Birkat HaMazon slowly and carefully. As he always does.

Recognizing the wisdom behind his actions, I also took upon myself to recite Birkat HaMazon from a text. And it makes all the difference. It makes me slow down. It makes me pay more attention to what I am saying. And it allows me to savor each word. At least as much, I hope, as I savored each mouthful of whatever I have just eaten!

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Bechukotai

The Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow G-d's commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of being the Chosen People, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed. These punishments, whose purpose is to bring the Jewish People to repent, will be in seven stages, each more severe than the last. *Sefer Vayikra*, the book of Leviticus, concludes with the details of *erachin* – the process by which someone vows to give the Beit Hamikdash the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal or a property.

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WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

All About Money

Even though back in ancient times, they may not have had all the complex financial instruments that we use nowadays, people were certainly well-aware of the concept of “money,” and its use as legal tender. In this essay, we look at several terms in Mishnaic Hebrew that refer to the idea of “money,” and try to differentiate between these apparent synonyms. Those words include *mammon*, *damim*, *maot*, *zuzim*, and more. In doing so, we will touch on issues of etymology, history, and much more.

We begin the discussion with the word *mammon*. This word does not appear even once in the Bible, but already appears with much frequency in the Mishnah. For example, the Mishnah (*Brachot* 9:5) interprets Deut. 6:5 as

saying that one ought to love Hashem “with all of your money [*mammon*].” Similarly, *mammon* appears when giving a possible reason as to why somebody would be kidnapped (*Ketubot* 2:9), and when relating the Halachic rule of double jeopardy whereby a person liable for the death penalty is exempt from “monetary” payment (*Ketubot* 3:2). In one particularly fascinating passage in the Mishnah (*Bava Batra* 10:8), Rabbi Yishmael states that one who wishes to become wise should engage in the laws of *mammonot* (“monetary/financial law”).

Besides appearing in the Mishnah, the word *mammon* also appears in the Targumim (that is, the Aramaic translations of the Bible). To that end, Rabbi Natan of Rome in *Sefer HeAruch* and Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (in *Sefer Tishbi* and *Meturgaman*) write that the Biblical Hebrew words *hon* (“wealth”) and *rechush* (“property”) are typically translated by Targum into Aramaic as *mammon*.

The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* §22:8) expounds on the word *mammon* as an allusion to the phrase *mah atah moneh – eino kelum* (“what are you counting? It is nothing”). This exegesis partially suggests that the root of the word *mammon* lies in the Hebrew root MEM-NUN-(HEY), which refers to “counting” (see below). However, Rabbi Ernest Klein in his etymological dictionary of Hebrew (and also in his etymological dictionary of English) writes that the word *mammon* most probably derives from the word *ma’amon* (“trust” or “deposit”), which is, in turn, derived from the trilateral root ALEPH-MEM-NUN (“true/trustworthy”), with the initial MEM being radical to the core root.

The word *mammon* also appears in the Christian Bible as the personification/deification of the greedy pursuit of money/wealth. The way Rabbi Yitzchok Schmelkes of Lvov (1827–1905) explains it in responsa *Beis Yitzchak* (*Yoreh Deah* vol. 1 §152), Mammon was originally the name of the pagan god of silver/money, but then eventually came to be a regular word for “money.”

On a more esoteric plane, Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai (known as the Chida) points out that the name of each letter in the word *mammon* (MEM, VAV, NUN) is spelled by doubling that letter. This alludes to the fact that “those who love money are never satisfied with money” (*Ecc.* 5:9), so when they have one MEM they want another MEM, and when they have one VAV, they want another VAV, and so forth.

It is generally understood that the Hebrew term *damim* in the sense of “money” does not occur in Biblical Hebrew, but is nonetheless a mainstay of Rabbinic Hebrew. In other words, even if this usage of *damim* does not occur in the Bible, it certainly occurs in the Mishnah. To that end, we find the plural form *damim* in the Mishnah in multiple places (*Maaser Sheini* 1:5, *Pesachim* 7:3, *Kiddushin* 1:6, *Bava Metzia* 5:3, *Bava Batra* 2:7, *Arachin* 5:2, *Temurah* 5:5), plus we encounter the construct form *dmei* in even more cases (*Terumot* 5:1, 6:3–4, 9:2–3, *Maaser Sheini* 1:4, 2:1, *Pesachim* 9:8, *Ketubot* 12:1–2, *Nazir* 4:4, *Bava Kamma* 5:4, 8:1–2, 9:1, 9:4, 10:4, *Bava Metzia* 3:5, 3:12, *Zevachim* 8:1–2, *Bechorot* 5:6, *Arachin* 5:2–3, *Meilah* 3:2, *Kinnim* 1:4). Interestingly, HaBachur (in *Sefer Tishbi* and *Meturgaman*) points out that the word *damim* in the sense of “money” always appears in plural form and never as the singular *dam*. As such, it sometimes makes this difficult for a novice to differentiate between *damim/dmei* (“money”) and its homonym *damim/dmei* (“blood”), which appears both in the Bible and the Mishnah.

HaBachur also points out that *damim* appears in the Targumim as the standard Aramaic translation for the Biblical Hebrew word *mechir*, usually translated as “price” (for examples, see II Sam. 24:24 and Isa. 45:13) and *mecher* (“sale [price]” in Num. 20:19). Interestingly, in one particular verse, the words *kesef* (literally “silver,” but

also more generically as “money”) and *mechir* appear in tandem (Isa. 55:1), with Targum Jonathan (there) translating *keseif* as *damim* and *mechir* as *mammon*.

In offering translations of *damim* into the European vernaculars, HaBachur writes in *Sefer Tishbi* that this Rabbinic Hebrew term means *gelt* (in Yiddish/German) and *dinero* (in Spanish). By the way, the word *dinero* is derived from the name of the Spanish Dinero, which was a Medieval currency used in Spain that was modeled after two earlier coins – the Arabic Dinar and the Roman Denarius. As my learned readers probably already know, *dinarim* are also mentioned by the rabbis many times in the Mishnah.

Although I wrote earlier that it is generally understood that *damim* is not used in the sense of “money” in the Bible, there are two possible examples of precisely such usage: The Torah states that if a homeowner finds a robber in an underground tunnel and kills him, “he has no *damim*” (Ex. 22:1). Rashi understands that *damim* in this context literally means “blood,” as in this case since the homeowner was standing his own ground and defending himself from a potentially deadly robbery, he is not considered to have spilled the robber's blood like an ordinary murderer. On the other hand, Rashi's grandson Rashbam (there) sees the word *damim* in this case as referring to “money,” explaining that the Torah means that the homeowner is exempt from paying any monetary compensation to the estate of the robber whom he killed. A similar dispute amongst Medieval exegetes comes up with the word *dam* in Ps. 72:14, which Ibn Ezra explain as “blood,” while Ibn Janach and Radak (in their respective *Sefer HaShorashim*) interpret as “[monetary] worth/value.”

Rabbi Ernest Klein in his etymological dictionary of Hebrew writes that *damim* in the sense of “money” probably derives from the Biblical Hebrew root DALET-MEM-(HEY), which refers to the state of “being like/equal” to something else. In elaborating on that particular root, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim explains that its core meaning refers to the concept of “similarity/resemblance.” Other words he explains as derived from this root include *domeh* (“resembles”), *demut* (“likeness”), and *dimyon* (“imagination,” which may be *similar* to reality, but does not truly reflect it). Moreover, he explains that man is called *adam* since man was created “in the image of Hashem” (Gen. 1:27) in the sense that he *resembles* Hashem in some ways. Additionally, Rabbi Pappenheim writes that “similarity” implies “incongruency” because if two things are said to be only *similar*, then this precludes them from being exactly equal. Because of this, he relates the word *dom/domem* (“quiet/inactive”) to this root, as stopping activity creates an “incongruency” between the goings-on that continue to be active in one's mind and one's outer activity which one has paused. Taking this a step further, Rabbi Pappenheim writes that *adamah* (“ground”) also derives from this root because it is a space where plants are active and grow, while the *adamah* itself remains passive and sedentary. Although Rabbi Pappenheim does not explicitly link any of this to the term *damim* as in “money” (because his work focuses exclusively on Biblical Hebrew, and not Rabbinic Hebrew), we can easily understand how “money” likewise *resembles* commodities as its monetary value can stand in for the actual commodity.

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich offers another way of understanding the term *damim*, seeing it as related to the Biblical Hebrew *dom* (“silent/quiet”) in one of two ways: Firstly, he explains that when a person commits a sin, one has “acquired” a prosecuting angel which will argue against oneself in the Heavenly Court (*Avot* 4:11). One of the ways of atoning for sin and “quieting” the accusation of a prosecutor angel is by sacrificing one's own money (*damim*) by giving to the poor and/or to Torah Scholars. Secondly, he explains that its well-known that conspicuous opulence on the part of Jews is one of the factors that leads to anti-Semitism, as when the nations of the world see Jewish wealth, they seethe in jealousy. For this reason, it is most advisable for a Jew to keep his wealth hidden and be “silent” about it, rather than to flaunt it for the world to see.

Other commentators explain the word *damim* in the sense of “money” as related to its homonym *damim* in the sense of “blood.” In that spirit, Rabbi Chaim of Friedberg (a brother of the Maharal) in *Iggeret HaTiyul* writes that “money” is called *damim* – which also means “blood” – because a person “lives off” of their money. Indeed, the Talmud states (*Nedarim* 64b) that a pauper is tantamount to a dead person. Similarly, Rabbi Yaakov Emden in *Ezer Ohr* (glosses to *Sefer Tishbi*) explains that the word for “money” is related to the word for “blood” because just as a person's physical life depends on his blood, so does a person's livelihood depend on his finances. Indeed, the rabbis alluded to such a connection when they said (*Bava Kamma* 119a) one who illegally takes even a *perutah* from another person is as if he has taken his soul. Rabbi Azaria Figo finds it incredulous to believe that the rabbis used the word *damim* to refer to “money” simply because the ignorant masses see “money” as important as one's actual blood, see his *Binah L'Itim* (*drush* #69).

Rabbi Chaim of Friedberg adds a moralistic teaching that argues that just as if one's blood becomes partially infected or otherwise corrupt, it ruins a person's entire body, so too if a person accrued some money illicitly, this will not only cause that money to disappear from his wealth, but will actually bring his total financial ruin. He additionally writes that just as sometimes a person needs to lose some blood for their overall health (in earlier times this referred to bloodletting, although nowadays we can understand this as undergoing a blood test), so does one need to let go of some of his money by giving charity and alms for the sake of one's overall fiscal success.

If *mammon* means “money” and *damim* also means “money,” that makes the two words synonymous. Nevertheless, as we will see, several writers have already explained how these two terms actually differ from one another.

Rabbi Eliezer Herstik wrote in *Ragli Mevasser* (his glosses to *Sefer HaTishbi*) that *damim* denotes the value or price of something, while *mammon* refers in a more general way to any property or money that may comprise one's assets.

Along these lines, Rabbi Yosef Teomim-Frankel (1727–1792), author of the *Pri Megadim*, writes in one of his letters that *mammon* refers to “cash” or *mabilia* (whose value is already known,) while *damim* refers to moveable property whose value is unknown and therefore must be evaluated in order to be used as currency.

Alternatively, Rabbi Teomim-Frankel argues that the word *damim* must be Hebrew (explicitly pointing to Rashbam's aforementioned comment that explained *damim* in Ex. 22:1 as referring to “money”), while its semantic counterpart *mammon* is Aramaic. Building on this, he relates the word *damim* to the Hebrew term *dimyon/demot*, which refers to something which only *appears* to resemble something else. This ostensibly fits with his understanding of *damim* as property whose value must be evaluated, as in the meantime it only “appears” or “resembles” capital, but cannot yet be actualized as such until an estimation has been carried out.

In a similar way, Rabbi Shimon Yehuda Leib Goldblit in *Leshon Chachamim* writes that *damim* relates to the word *dimyon* (“imagination”), as a person “imagines” that the value of money equals that of all possible commodities. This reflects the popular conception that “money answers everything” (Ecc. 10:19).

Another generic term for “money” used in Rabbinic Hebrew is *maot*. For example, think of the phrase *maot chitim* (literally, “money of wheat”), the name of the traditional alms given to the poor before Passover. This

word for money is the plural form of the coin *maah*, which is the equivalent to the Biblical *geirah* (see Targum to Ex. 30:13), and was then borrowed as a general term for “money.”

The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* §22:8) expounds on the term *maot* as a portmanteau comprised of *mah* (“what”) and *l’eit* (“for a time”), alluding to the ephemeral nature of material wealth as something that could easily pass with time. A student of Ritva (cited by *Midrash Shmuel* to *Avot* 2:8) cites this Midrash slightly differently, as saying that *maot* is related to the word *ivut* (“crookedness”), as money can cause man to become “corrupt” and ultimately be purged from This World before his time. The Tosafists (*Da’at Zekanim* to Num. 32:1) cite yet another version of this Midrash, which states that money (or at least the avaricious pursuit of it) causes justice to become “corrupt/perverted.”

Another general term for “money” in rabbinic parlance is *zuz*, which originally referred to a specific coin, but then expanded to refer to “money” in general. The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* §22:8) explains that *zuzim* are called so because – as liquid assets – they can “move” (*zaz*) from their owner's hand to somebody else's very quickly.

A similar thing probably happened to the word *kesef*, which originally referred to the metal that we call “silver,” but then actually became another word for “money.” I used to think that the word *gold* in German/English was related to the German/Yiddish word *gelt* (via Grimm's Law about the interchangeability of the *d* and *t* sounds) in a way that parallels how “silver” in Hebrew became a general word for “money.” However, upon further research, it seems that the consensus of linguists is to trace the word *gold* to the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root *ghelh* (which is the more direct ancestor of the English word *yellow* and the German/Yiddish word *gelb*), while they trace *gelt* to the PIE root *gheldh* (“to pay/award,” an ancestor of the English word *yield*).

Before we conclude, I want to discuss the etymology of the English word *money*. Again, when I was younger, I used to think that this word somehow derived from the Mishnaic Hebrew term *mammon*. However, a cursory look at the *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals that the English words *money* and *mint* both derive from the Latin *moneta*. *Moneta*, in turn, was the name of a Roman goddess in whose temple money was coined in classical times. It is also often stated that *Moneta* was actually just an epitaph for the Roman goddess Juno.

But my original connection between *money* and *mammon* might not be that far off: One of the currencies often mentioned in the Mishnah is the *maneh* (“mina”), which is a coin valued at 100 *zuz*. The word *maneh* ostensibly derives from the same Hebrew root as the words *moneh* (“counting/appointing”), *manah* (“portion/lot”), *minyan* (“number/quorum”), and – as I wrote earlier – *mammon*. They also seem related to the name of the idolatrous deity Meni (Isa. 65:11), who was said to “allot” to man his destiny. Professor Theo Vennemann Nierfeld actually proposes that the Latin term *moneta* is a cognate of the name of the god Meni, which means that the English words *money* and *mint* in fact have a Hebrew origin.

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

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

Evaluating the Four Stages of Life Mitzvos #350 (Vayikra 27:1-8)

The Torah sets forth that if someone makes an oath to give the value of a specific person to the *Beis HaMikdash*, the amount due depends on that person’s age and gender. For a male from age one month until five years, the amount due is five Biblical *shekalim*; from the age of five until twenty, twenty *shekalim*; from twenty until sixty, fifty *shekalim*; from sixty onward, fifteen *shekalim*. For a female, from age one month until five years, three *shekalim*; from five until twenty, ten *shekalim*; from twenty until sixty, thirty *shekalim*; from sixty onward, ten *shekalim*.

It is common for someone going through a time of danger or distress to make this type of oath (*Abarbanel*). A Jew blames his troubles on his own shortcomings because “there is no suffering without iniquity and there is no death without sin” (*Shabbos 55a*), and he seeks to atone for himself by donating his value to the *Beis HaMikdash*. If it is someone else who is in danger or distress, one might choose to donate that person’s value as a merit for salvation. In His mercy, Hashem is willing to accept a meaningful monetary donation of this type as a redemption. He proclaimed: “If you donate to Me your monetary value, I will consider it as if you offered your souls before Me and I will spare you from Gehinom” (*Midrash Tanchuma §6*). We lost this avenue of redemption with the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, but acts of charity can accomplish a comparable effect. For each stage of life, the Torah indicates the value that Hashem is willing to accept as a symbolic representation of the person, even though that person might actually be worth a lot more. To illustrate this point, Moshe himself was over sixty at the time when he spoke this mitzvah, and the amount of his actual worth is too large to type on a calculator. Yet, the Torah accords him a value of only fifteen *shekalim*, for that is the standardized amount for his age group.

Hashem did not require an actual evaluation of the person’s worth in the manner one might evaluate slaves because many would find this degrading, especially when two people are evaluated and one is accorded a higher value. Moreover, a person would be willing to give all of his money and more for his life! Hashem therefore chose to evaluate people in a general and impersonal manner, based on categories that are divided by age and gender (*Abarbanel*).

A verse in *Tehillim* (90:10) states that a person generally lives between seventy and eighty years, and it follows that the center and prime of a person’s life is approximately between 20 and 60. We therefore find that whenever the Torah counts the Jewish people, it focuses on this age group. Within this age group, a person’s physical strength peaks at thirty and begins to wane at fifty, and we thus find that the Leviim served in the Mishkan only when they were between these ages (*Bamidbar 4:3*). Since a person’s intellectual faculties increase with age, it appears that fifty is the combined physical and intellectual peak. Sixty is the beginning of the final quarter, and it is then that old age begins to set in (*Avos 5:21*). The above will help us understand the Torah’s four age groups and their redemption values.

A newborn does not have a set value until the age of a month because until then his viability is considered uncertain (see *Shabbos* 135b). From one month until age five, his value is five *shekalim*, and then it increases to twenty until age twenty. The division of age groups at five years is in line with the Gemara's caution against intense Torah studies until that age, for health reasons (*Emek Davar*). Regarding the age groups one month until five years and five years and until twenty years, we may suggest that the Torah accorded a value corresponding to the maximum age of the category, five *shekalim* and twenty *shekalim* respectively. Between ages twenty and sixty though, a male's value is fifty *shekalim* and not sixty, because the body deteriorates between fifty and sixty. For the category that extends from sixty until very old age, the Torah deducts a majority of a person's value, decreasing from fifty to fifteen. *Alshich* explains this to be a decrease of two-thirds, rounded down to the nearest unit of five.

In general, the Torah accords a female a redemption value that is a bit more than half of that which it accords a male of the same age group (see *Chizkuni*). The approximately doubled amount reflects the male's additional strength (*Abarbanel*), Torah and mitzvos (*Alshich*), and influence on society (*Rav Hirsch*). We may add that since a male has more mitzvah obligations, in the event that he fails to meet those greater obligations, he requires a greater amount for redemption. Accordingly, until age five, a female's redemption value is three *shekalim* instead of five, and between twenty and sixty, her redemption value is thirty instead of fifty, which is sixty percent. It emerges that both males and females are valued as children until age five at a tenth of their value as fully-grown adults between ages twenty and sixty (*Abarbanel*), for the number ten symbolizes completion (*Maharal, Bava Metzia* 84a).

Beyond sixty, we encounter an apparent discrepancy in the proportion of decrease in redemption value: a man's value decreases from fifty to fifteen, which is a seventy percent decrease, and a woman's value decreases from thirty to ten, which is only a sixty-six percent decrease. *Rashi* explains that an old woman's redemption value is close to that of an old man because as the saying goes, "An old man at home is a burden; an old lady at home is a treasure." Meaning, when a man becomes old and loses much of his physical strength, his ability to work and contribute to the household diminishes in parallel, and he is not accustomed to applying himself to housework that is still within his capacity. An old woman, on the other hand, will largely continue performing her household chores despite her lessening of vigor. In addition, *Alshich* observes that old age seems to take a greater toll on men than it does on women.

That which the Torah accords a female most of the redemption value it accords a male appears to suggest an element of equality, in accordance with the Talmudic rule, "the majority is like the whole" (*Nazir* 42a). In other words, although a man has more strength, Torah and mitzvos, and social influence, a woman's value is comparable even in those respects. However, between the ages of five and twenty, the redemption value of a female is ten *shekalim* while a male's is twenty *shekalim*, which is fully double. Hashem seems to be indicating that in this particular age group, the redemption value of males is on an entirely different level. How can we understand this?

The Mishnah in *Avos* (5:21) sets forth that a Jewish boy begins his Torah studies at age five, and it designates eighteen as the age for marriage and twenty as the age when the responsibility for his growing family generally compels him to pursue a livelihood. It emerges that between five and twenty, a Jewish male should be entirely and purely dedicated to attaining knowledge of Hashem by acquiring the wisdom of His Torah. Girls do not carry this great responsibility. We may therefore suggest that on account of the supreme importance of the Torah studied by males during their formative years between five to twenty, the Torah doubles their redemption value.