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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A World of Potato Peels

“It shall be, that when Hashem gives you rest from all your enemies all around, in the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you as an inheritance to possess it...” (25:19)

In the death camp, for two whole years they hid the little boy in the roof of the hut. All they could give him to eat were potato peels.

One day, the secret trap-door to his hiding place opened up and a smiling face said, “You can come out now! It’s over. The war is over!” The little boy refused to come out. He said, “I’m not coming out until you promise me that if I come out, I will still get my potato peels.”

In a sense, we are that little boy.

We have lived so long in darkness and in captivity that our horizons have shrunk, our aspirations have dwindled. We have no idea what it will be like when the Mashiach comes, but when he arrives, all the things that made us happy and that we clung to will seem no more than potato peels.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Batra 74-80 **The Torah's Warmth**

Rav Yehuda said: All who separate from the words of the Torah are consumed by fire, as is written (in Yechezkel 15:7): And I shall set My countenance against them; from the fire they have emerged, and the fire will devour them.

When Rav Dimi came from Eretz Yisrael to Bavel he said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: Anyone who separates himself from the words of Torah falls into gehinnom, as it is written (in Mishlei 21:): A person who strays from the path of understanding (the Torah) will rest in the congregation of 'refaim' (gehinnom).

Although these two statements sound virtually identical, the Maharsha explains that they refer to two completely different situations, and convey separate messages.

The first teaching refers to two people who were initially learning together, but, inexplicably, ceased learning Torah. At first, they were “heating each other up with the fire of Torah” and “no other fire can consume fire.” But, if they neglect the importance of Torah study, and interrupt each other from their Torah study, they lose the special protective nature of their Torah study. This will result in their likely falling victim to their negative inclinations, which entice them to transgress the Torah, and, as a result, be subject to punishment (e.g., being consumed by fire of idolatry and the like). The plural wording of the verse in Yechezkel indicates that this message refers to a situation involving (at least) two people.

The second teaching, however, is stated in the singular, and is also based on a verse that is in the singular. It refers to a singular individual who is learning Torah, and teaches the effect his separation from Torah study has on his nature. In this case, he separates from Torah study on his own initiative, and not as the result of being persuaded by another Torah student as in the first case. This second case is worse. As an immediate result of this decision, he is not merely tempted to transgress, but has already substantially lowered his spiritual stature to the point that he has “fallen into *gehinnom*.”

▪ ***Bava Batra 79a***

Q & A

Questions

1. Why must a captured woman mourn her family for a month in her captor's house?
2. What fraction of the inheritance does a first-born receive if he has a) one brother? b) two brothers?
3. What will become of a *ben sorer u'moreh* if his parents don't bring him to court?
4. Why is it a degradation to G-d to hang a criminal's body on the gallows overnight?
5. What do you do if you find a lost object that costs money to maintain?
6. Why does the Torah forbid wearing the clothing of the opposite gender?
7. Why does the Torah link the mitzvah of sending away the mother-bird with the mitzvah of making a railing on the roof of your house?
8. When is it permitted to wear wool and linen?
9. What three things happen to a man who falsely slanders his bride?
10. Although the Egyptians enslaved the Jewish People, the Torah allows marriage with their third-generation converts. Why?
11. Why is causing someone to sin worse than killing him?
12. If one charges interest to his fellow Jew, how many commandments has he transgressed?
13. What is the groom's special obligation to his bride during their first year together?
14. When is a groom required to fight in a non-obligatory war?
15. What type of object may one not take as collateral?

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

Answers

1. 21:13 - So her captor will find her unattractive.
2. 21:17 - a) 2/3 b) 1/2
3. 21:22 - He will eventually rob and kill to support his physical indulgences.
4. 21:23 - Because humans are made in G-d's image; and because the Jewish People are G-d's children.
5. 22:2 - Sell it and save the money for the owner.
6. 22:5 - It leads to immorality.
7. 22:8 - To teach that one mitzvah leads to another, and to prosperity.
8. 22:12 - Wool *tzitzit* on a linen garment.
9. 22:18 - He receives lashes, pays a fine of 100 silver *selah*, and may never divorce her against her will.
10. 23:8 - Because they hosted Yaakov and his family during the famine.
11. 23:9 - Murder takes away life in this world, while causing someone to sin takes away his life in the World to Come.
12. 23:21 - Three; two negative commandments and a positive commandment.
13. 24:5 - To gladden her.
14. 24:5 - When he remarries his ex-wife.
15. 24:6 - Utensils used to prepare food.

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 performed by someone who understands its significance” (Meiri, Bava Kamma 17a).

THE MITZVAH TO APPOINT A KING

Mitzvah #497 (*Devarim* 17:14-15)

Since antiquity, mankind has recognized the need for kings. The distinct natures and interests of the individuals that make up every society are a recipe for strife and contention, and only a king can keep law and order while leading the society in a single direction of general interest. In light of this, a Mishna in *Pirkei Avos* advises: “Pray for the welfare of the government, for if not for the dread that it casts upon society, people would swallow each other alive.”

Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah #71) remarks that no group of people can reach any collective decision without a king. That king’s decisions will sometimes be good and sometimes be bad, but the doubtful results of *any* decision are better than the certainty of discord and strife when there is *no* decision. It follows that in a modern-day democracy, in which the people are led by a group of leaders who are subject to the opinions of their co-leaders as well as their followers, the extent of the government’s ability to lead will be limited accordingly. Only a single leader has true leadership and can bring out the best of his followers.

Also, since antiquity, mankind has endured suffering specifically *because* of kings. Tales of corrupt tyrants fill pages of history, and we need look no further than the narratives in Tanach. From the heights of glory in the days of King David and King Shlomo, the nation declined steadily until almost complete ruin, as the majority of kings led them in accordance with their corrupt interests and idolatrous leanings instead of rallying them in the service of Hashem. Even a casual glance at news headlines these days should suffice to lead a person to conclude that democratic countries contribute more to the world’s peace and welfare than do countries that are run directly or indirectly by dictators.

The Torah’s perspective on kings is a rich topic of discussion, which we will only touch upon in this brief article (see *Sanhedrin* 20b; *Rambam*, *Melachim* 1:1-2; *Derashos HaRan* §11; *Abarbanel* and *Rav Hirsch* to *Devarim* 17, et al).

The Torah states in *Parashas Shoftim*: “When you come to the land...and you will say, ‘Let me appoint for myself a king, like all the nations around me,’ you shall surely appoint for yourself a king” (17:14-15). Most Halachic authorities cite the above as a source for a mitzvah to appoint a king. However, when we look a little further, in the eighth chapter of the Book of Shmuel, we find that Hashem was greatly disappointed when the Jewish people demanded that Shmuel provide them with a king.

Many explain that Hashem was not disappointed about their request for a king, but rather because the time was not yet ripe or because of the impure motive behind their request. They

specifically asked for a king "so that they could be like all the nations," which one opinion interprets as a request to be led by a king would lead them according to the idolatrous practices that were popular at that time, and not according to the righteous practices of the Torah.

Another opinion states that their mistake was that they wanted a king to lead them in their battles. Now, while a non-Jewish nation needs the unity imposed by a king in order to conduct warfare effectively, the Jewish people are meant to win their wars with Hashem's assistance, as was the case until that point in history. Hashem is our King, and when we fulfill His precepts, He grants us miraculous victories over our enemies. And when we disobey Him, He places us under the rule of foreign nations until we return to Him. This was the pattern that repeated itself throughout the Book of Shoftim and until the time of the nation's request for a king in the Book of Shmuel. This means that their request for a king to fight their battles was a request for their battles not to be dependent on their righteousness. Instead, they were asking to replace Hashem's kingship with human kingship. Therefore, national ruination followed. When the Torah commands us to appoint a king, it means to appoint someone to enforce the mitzvos. Or, in other words, to appoint a representative of Hashem and not a replacement. *Don Yitzchak Abarbanel* contends that it is not ideal to appoint a king and the Torah does not command us to do so. He elaborates at length about the evils of kings and the folly of placing the reigns of multitudes in the hands of one fallible individual and granting him unlimited power for an unlimited period. Since we cannot trust the righteousness and wisdom of any mortal, we cannot entrust our lives into the hands of any king. He explains that the Torah means to say that *if* the Jewish people should be so foolish as to demand a king, this is how they must appoint one, and these are the mitzvos that he must observe (*Devarim* 17:14-20). He compares this to the mitzvah of *Yefas To'ar* at the beginning of *Parashas Ki Seitzei*.

Very soon, when we become deserving, and when the time arrives for Jewish kingship in its fullest sense, Hashem will appoint as His representative the righteous Messianic king, who will lead us as one soul in the glorious worship of our Creator.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah describes the only permissible way a woman captured in battle may be married. If a man marries two wives, and the less-favored wife bears a firstborn son, this son's right to inherit a double portion is protected against the father's desire to favor the child of the favored wife. The penalty for a rebellious son, who will inevitably degenerate into a monstrous criminal, is stoning. A body must not be left on the gallows overnight, because it had housed a holy soul. Lost property must be returned. Men are forbidden from wearing women's clothing and vice versa. A mother bird may not be taken together with her eggs. A fence must be built around the roof of a house. It is forbidden to plant a mixture of seeds, to plow with an ox and a donkey together, or to combine wool and linen in a garment. A four-cornered garment must have twisted threads *tzitzit* on its corners. Laws regarding illicit relationships are detailed. When Israel goes to war, the camp must be governed by rules of

spiritual purity. An escaped slave must not be returned to his master. Taking interest for lending to a Jew is forbidden. *Bnei Yisrael* are not to make vows. A worker may eat of the fruit he is harvesting. Divorce and marriage are legislated. For the first year of marriage, a husband is exempt from the army and stays home to rejoice with his wife. Tools of labor may not be impounded, as this prevents the debtor from earning a living. The penalty for kidnapping for profit is death. Removal of the signs of the disease *tzara'at* is forbidden. Even for an overdue loan, the creditor must return the collateral daily if the debtor needs it. Workers' pay must not be delayed. The guilty may not be subjugated by punishing an innocent relative. Because of their vulnerability, converts and orphans have special rights of protection. The poor are to have a portion of the harvest. A court may impose lashes. An ox must not be muzzled while threshing. It is a mitzvah for a man to marry his brother's widow if the deceased left no offspring. Weights and measures must be accurate and used honestly. This Torah portion concludes with the mitzvah to erase the name of Amalek, for, in spite of knowing about the Exodus, they ambushed the Jewish People.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 10) UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

"My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever."
(Charles Duke - Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

Kiddush Levanah then continues with the following sentence, which is repeated three times: "David, King of Israel, lives and endures."

The Talmud relates that Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi) sent Rabbi Chiya to a place called Ein Tav to sanctify the new moon. Rashi explains that the Romans, who had conquered the Land of Israel, enacted a series of edicts to try making living a Jewish life impossible. One of their decrees was forbidding the Sages from sanctifying the new month. Rebbi sent Rabbi Chiya to Ein Tav because it was sufficiently out of the way such that the Romans would not bother him there. Rebbi instructed him to give him a sign once the new month had been sanctified. This sign was to send back the words "David, Melech Yisrael, Chai v'Kayam – David, King of Israel, lives and endures."

What is the connection between the sanctification of the new moon and King David? Rashi cites Tehillim (89:37-38), which compares King David's kingdom to the moon: "His seed will endure forever... Like the moon, it will be established forever, and the witness in the sky is faithful, Selah." Rabbi David Kimche writes that the Davidic line will retain the status of royalty for all time. One of the prerequisites for being accepted as the Mashiach is to be a direct descendent of King David. And, just as the light of the moon at times radiates brilliantly, so too, it sometimes dims and even seemingly disappears altogether. In the same way, when we, the Jewish People, do Hashem's bidding, we infuse the world with the purest

and most vivid light of all. Just like the moon does in the middle of the month. But, if we rebel against Hashem, if we turn our backs on Him, we mirror the trajectory of the moon, and the pristine light dims until it is obscured. We descend into darkness.

When we declare, “David, King of Israel, lives and endures,” we are declaring our certainty that with the advent of the Messianic Era we will once again suffuse the entire world with the purest and the most profound light that ever existed. As Rashi writes, the eternal presence of the moon bears witness to the equally eternal character of the Davidic line.

In Tehillim 61:7, King David writes, “May You add days on to the days of the king.” The Brisker Rav points to a disagreement among the commentaries about the identity of the “king” in the verse. It is either referring to King David, or it is a reference to the Mashiach. If the “king” refers to King David, the verse is easy to understand. King David is beseeching Hashem to grant him a long life. But, asks the Brisker Rav, if it is referring to the Mashiach, how are we to understand the verse, since the Mashiach will live forever. How can “days be added” to eternity? The Brisker Rav answers: It is true that Hashem has set a final date for the Mashiach to come. But, it is within our power to bring the Mashiach earlier than that time. If we serve Hashem properly, if we serve Hashem in the way we have been commanded, we can bring about the final redemption right now. And, by doing so, we will be “adding to his days.”

May we all merit to experience it very, very soon.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Getting Drunk

The Torah stipulates that an adolescent may only be eligible for the capital punishment due to a “rebellious son” (*ben sorer u'moreh*), if that young man is *zollel* and *sove*. The Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 8:2) states that the rebellious son is only liable for punishment if he sinfully indulges himself in meat and wine, explaining that *zollel* refers to him overeating meat, while *sove* refers to him filling up on wine. Such gluttony and swilling portend a dark future for that rebellious kid. To put it bluntly, the word *sove* teaches us that the rebellious son is only considered rebellious enough if he “gets drunk” on wine. Another term for “getting drunk” is the Hebrew verb *shachar* and its various inflections (like *vayishkar* used when describing Noah getting drunk in Gen. 9:21). In the essay before you we explore these two synonyms for “getting drunk” in Hebrew, and try to show the nuances that each term brings to the table.

Even though the rabbis interpret the word *sove* as a reference to the rebellious son overindulging specifically in wine, they note that there is no proof to this explication of the verse in Deuteronomy. They do, however, add that there is an allusion to this understanding in a different passage (Prov. 23:20) that juxtaposes a verb form of *sove* with wine (see *Sanhedrin* 71a, *Sifrei Ki Teitzei* §219). This means that the word *sove*, per se, does not have to mean “getting drunk from wine,” but refers to one who was drinking any type of (intoxicating) beverage, albeit in the context of the rebellious son it refers specifically to wine. Indeed, Maimonides (Laws of *Mamrim* 7:1) writes that it is only based on a tradition that we know that the rebellious son needs to get drunk on wine in order to be liable for punishment. This implies that the Bible’s wording of *sove* alone could mean something broader like “getting drunk” even from some other drink.

Indeed, Menachem Ibn Saruk in his work called *Machberet Menachem* defines love as *shichrut* (“drunkenness”). And similarly, Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino in his lexicon of Hebrew synonyms *Ohel Moed* actually lists *sove* as a fourth synonym for “drinking.”

The trilateral SAMECH-BET-ALEPH appears at least eight times in the Bible in the context of one “getting drunk,” or the beverage by which a person achieved that state. For example, when Isaiah criticizes the Jewish People for engaging in questionable business practices, he accuses, “your *sava* is diluted in water” (Isa. 1:22), charging that wine merchants would regularly dilute their wine in water, but would continue to sell it as though they were hawking unadulterated wine. Targum (on that verse), Rashi (to *Bava Batra* 15b), and Rabbi Yosef Kara (to Isa. There) explain that *sava* actually refers to “wine.” Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866–1935) explains that when a person reaches a certain level of drunkenness, then he is no longer sensitive to taste of the wine he is drinking. Such a person can be described as *sava*. In such cases, unsavory wine sellers, sommeliers, or bartenders would serve that person wine that had been diluted in water for the full price of unadulterated wine without the drink buyer ever realizing that he had been cheated.

That *sava* means “wine” is also the opinion of Rashi in his comments to Hos 4:18. Nonetheless, Rashi elsewhere (to Isa. there, Nah. 1:10) seems to understand *sava* as general term for drinks (see also Rashi to *Avodah Zarah* 77a who explains that a cognate of this word, *savyuta*, refers to “wine merchants”). Rabbi Yosef Nechemias (to Prov. 23:20) notes that because drunkards are called *sovim*, the word *sava* came to also refer to “wine” itself.

Interestingly, Malbim in his work *Yair Ohr* on Hebrew synonyms writes that the term *sove* denotes “drinking” things that could make one drunk (whether or not one has actually become drunk), while *shichrut* (discussed below) refers specifically to somebody who has drunk such drinks and has indeed become drunk.

As is his wont, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740–1814) traces the trilateral root SAMECH-BET-ALEPH to the biliteral root SAMECH-BET (with the final ALEPH being extraneous to the core root). That biliteral root gives way to various words that refer to “going around” (like *sivuv*), which Rabbi Pappenheim explains relates to the drunkard's habit of “going around” from store to store, or from tavern to tavern, or to whatever other places alcoholic beverages are found. He adds that such is the way of drunkards to always be going around from place to place in order to get to drink different higher quality wines, so that they may recite the blessing *HaTov V'HaMeitiv* on the upgraded wine (see *Shulchan Aruch Orach*

Chaim §175:2). In his glosses to Rabbi Pappenheim’s *Yeriot Shlomo*, Rabbi Moshe Tzurriel (1938–2023) notes that this last comment was a sarcastic witticism from Rabbi Pappenheim, as in reality drunkards do not care about reciting blessings, but are rather simply looking for new and exciting ways to get their fix.

Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi Ashkenazi (1821–1898) in his work *Otzar Nirdafim* on Hebrew synonyms writes that *sove* relates to the biliteral SAMECH-BET in the sense of people sitting “around” a table and drinking together.

It has been noted by several scholars that the word *sove* (spelled with an initial SAMECH and a final ALEPH) is related to its homonym *sava* (spelled with an initial SIN and a final AYIN), as the latter term refers to something “full/satisfied/content” (*seviah*), and the former refers to a person who continues to drink and intoxicate himself even after he is totally satisfied. This point was made by Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh of Carpentras (in *Aholei Yehuda*), Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (in his comments to Gen. 24:25, Deut. 21:19), Rabbi Shimon Yehuda Leib Goldblit (in *Leshon Chachamim*), and Rabbi Dr. Asher Weiser (in *Mikra V’Lashon*). Rabbi Hirsch also suggests a connection between SAMECH-BET-ALEPH with the root TZADI-MEM-ALEPH, based on the interchangeability of the letters SAMECH and TZADI, as well as the letters BET and MEM.

One of the sons of Kush is given as Sva, or Seba in English (Gen. 10:7, I Chron. 1:9). Sva’s descendants — the Sabeans — are mentioned again later in the Bible when Isaiah refers to them alongside the Kushites (Isa. 43:3, 45:14). In another place, the prophet Ezekiel refers to people called *savaim* (Ezek. 23:42), which Radak (there) explains refers to the Sabean people. Yet, in his *Sefer Shorashim*, Radak writes that these people were actually “drunkards.”

Moving to the word *shachar*, it should be noted that there are different forms of this word in Biblical Hebrew, but all of them ultimately trace back to the trilateral root SHIN-KAF-REISH. As mentioned in the beginning of this essay, some declensions of this root refer to the verb of “getting drunk,” and according to Even Shoshan’s Biblical concordance this usage occurs 19 times in the Bible. In another three cases, there is a noun *shikaron* (Jer. 13:13, Ezek. 23:33, 39:19) that refers to “drunkenness/intoxication,” which also happens to also be the name of a city in the tribal territory of Judah (see Josh. 15:11). Finally, this root also gives way to a noun *sheichar* that refers to a specific beverage that is used to render one “drunk.” That word appears 23 times in the Bible. A post-Biblical inflection of this root is the word *shikur* (“drunkard”), which is the etymon of the Yiddish word *shikir/schicker*.

Regarding the noun *sheichar*, Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi Ashkenazi argues that technically this word refers to any alcoholic or intoxicating beverage, but that when it is used in the Bible it sometimes refers strictly to strong wine. For example, Num. 6:3 forbids the Nazirite from drinking *shechar*, with Targum Onkelos and Rashi (there) explaining that *sheichar* in that context refers specifically to “old wine,” which is more likely to render one who drinks it intoxicated (as opposed to *yayin* in that verse, which refers to “new wine,” which is less intoxicating). Similarly, when the Torah commands that a libation of *sheichar* should accompany the daily *Tamid* sacrifice (Num. 28:7), Rashi (there) explains that this refers to “intoxicating wine.” Interestingly, when Rashi (to *Zevachim* 91a) again mentions this, he

adds that *sheichar* is an expression of *seviah* (“satisfaction”), as though pouring that oenological product down the altar’s pipes is “satisfying” the thirst of those hollow tubes.

But sometimes *sheichar* in the Bible could refer to other intoxicating drinks: for example, Lev. 10:9 forbids one from drinking *sheichar* before entering the Temple, and there is ample reason to understand that even if one partook of other intoxicating substances besides wine, one may be liable for this prohibition (see *Nazir* 4a, *Krisus* 13bm and Nachmanides to Lev. 10:9). That said, *sheichar* in Rabbinic Hebrew refers to what we call “beer/mead” (for example, see *Pesachim* 3:1).

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 13:12) offers a somewhat cryptic comment connecting *shachar* (“intoxication”) with the words *sheger* (“issuing/sending forth”), *shir* (“song”) and *sheker* (“lie/falsehood”). These connections are based on the interchangeability of the letters KAF, GIMMEL, YOD, and KUF. Rabbi Hirsch explains that all of these terms refer to something which is “born from oneself,” but does not give more detail. Dr. Lawrence Resnick in his work *1,000 Words* (which elucidates the word connections made by Rabbi Hirsch) explains that all four words signify a production coming from within — whether mentally or physically: *sheger* refers to one’s live offspring, the handiwork of one’s own reproductive system; *shir* refers to an enthusiastic expression of one’s own mental vision, *shechar* refers to the drunken state wherein the imagination forms a reality of its own making; and *sheker* refers to something made up of cloth, a total falsehood, which consciously presents one’s falsities as true.

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843–1916) proposes that the trilateral root SHIN-KAF-REISH actually derives from the biliteral root KAF-REISH, with the initial SHIN as peripheral to the radical stem. The root KAF-REISH(-KAF-REISH), in turn, refers to “dancing” — like when King David was said to be *micharker* before the Ark (II Sam. 6:14, 6:16). He explains that “getting drunk” causes dizziness as though one’s head was “dancing” around.

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