

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

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*“I have sojourned with Lavan.” (32:5)*

Life can be divided into two distinct phases: input and output. In one’s childhood, our brains are largely set to “record”, and we record by imitation. A child learns to speak by imitating his mother. A boy starts to learn by imitating his teacher.

Part of raising a child is to encourage positive role-modeling and minimize contact with negative stereotypes.

In this week’s Torah portion, Yaakov sends a message to Esav that he *“sojourned with Lavan.”* The numerical equivalent of *garti*, “sojourned,” is 613. Yaakov was hinting to his brother Esav that Lavan’s negative influence had not rubbed off on him, that he still kept the 613 *mitzvot*.

A similar example is when Yaakov prays to Hashem (28:21) to return him in peace to his father’s house without Lavan’s negative influence. Even though already 75 years old, Yaakov was still concerned that the natural instinct to imitate might lead him astray.

This also explains the Torah’s praise of Rivka. Despite being surrounded from the cradle by evil people, she was able to sense that they were unsuitable role models, and she did not learn from them. Only an inherent holiness could have protected her.

The second phase starts when a child reaches maturity.

At this point, imitation should give way to our motivation. It is not enough for us to do things because “that’s the way we always did it at home.” Lessons learned through imitation must be re-learned and made our own. If not, we will never grow to be truly independent thinkers and doers. Not only that, but our own ability to be role models for our own children and students will be severely limited.

A quarter of an hour a week may be sufficient, but it has to be quality time. If one’s spouse or child were to come and ask for advice, we would make sure to close the door, take the phone off the hook and give them our undivided attention. Should we not give ourselves the same attention?

In a world where the next unwanted distraction is just around the corner, it takes a little effort to create the silence of solitude that is the key to maturity.

▪ *Based on Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## **Bava Batra 164-170**

### **Too Much Praise?**

*Rav Dimi the brother of Rav Safra taught, “A person should never speak words of praise of another person, since his speech about the person’s goodness will lead to speech about the person’s disgrace.”*

What’s wrong with praising someone? The Chafetz Chaim in his *sefer* called “Chafetz Chaim” (9:1) explains as follows: Speaking excessive praise of another is forbidden because this will lead the speaker to eventually speak disparagingly of the person. For example, he will say about the person: “... except for one certain bad trait that he has,” or the listeners of this excessive praise will respond: “Why do you praise him so much? But he has a certain bad trait!”

The Chafetz Chaim notes that the *gemara* is in fact only forbidding speaking *excessive* praise of a person to another person, since we find in the Talmud cases where Sages praise the character traits of others — meaning that *non-excessive* praise is permitted. See, for example, how Rabban Yochanan be Zakkai would recount the praise of each of his five top students (Avot 2:9). The Chafetz Chaim notes that this explanation of the *gemara* as forbidding only excessive praise is also found in the commentaries of Rashi, the Rashbam and the Rif.

▪ *Bava Batra 164b*

### **More for More**

*Rav Amram said in the name of Rav, “There are three transgressions that a person is not saved from each day: contemplating transgression, ‘looking into’ prayer, and a subtle form of evil speech.”*

The actual text of the *gemara* for these transgressions is: *hirhur aveira, iyun tefilla* and *avak lashon hara*. The Rashbam defines the second and third transgressions. He writes that an example of *avak lashon hara* (literally, the *dust* of evil speech) is saying to another person with a negative implication, “Where is there always a fire for cooking? In the home of so-and-so!” This implies that the person is rich and he is cooking food there all day long. *Iyun tefilla* is explained by the Rashbam as: “After a person prays, he judges in his heart that Hashem should pay him reward, fulfill his needs, and answer all his prayers.” Although Hashem certainly hears our prayers, He is also certainly not obligated to give us everything we request. Sometimes the answer to our prayers is “No.”

This reminds me of a story I once heard. A woman was married for ten years without having children, despite her numerous, tearful prayers. She went to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. She cried out with her story to him. He told her, “Hashem doesn’t owe you children.” She began to leave in a state of overwhelming despair. Rav Shlomo Zalman called the woman back, saying, “Hashem doesn’t owe you children, but He can certainly give you more than He 'owes' you — if you take upon yourself more than your basic obligation. Then, maybe He will do for you more than He owes you.”

The woman took these words to heart and started volunteering at three hospitals in her city. Within a few years, she had one child and then twins, and has continued her volunteering to this day.

▪ *Bava Batra 164b*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Esav.

That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the angel of Esav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Esav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav’s offer that they should dwell together.

Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov’s daughter. In return for Dina’s hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov’s sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement. However, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *brit milah*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina’s brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city’s tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister.

G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka’s nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Torah portion concludes by listing Esav’s descendants.

Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by G-d not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 19)

#### 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 continues with chapter 67 of Tehillim: “For the Conductor, upon stringed instruments, a song with musical accompaniment. May Hashem favor us and bless us. May He display His luminous countenance with us, Selah. To make known Your way on earth, among all the peoples Your salvation. Then nations will acknowledge You, Hashem, the nations will acknowledge You, all of them. Nations will be glad and sing for joy because You will judge the nations with fairness, and the nations on earth You will guide, Selah. Then the nations will acknowledge You, all of them. The earth has yielded its produce, may Hashem, our own Hashem, bless us. may Hashem bless us and may all the ends of the earth fear Him.”

This chapter of Tehillim is a part of Kiddush Levanah, in part because it describes how, ultimately, Hashem’s actions will cause the nations of the world to praise Him and to accept His Majesty. However, the main reason it appears in Kiddush Levanah is because of the second verse: “May Hashem favor us and bless us. May He display His luminous countenance with us, Selah.”

Rabbi Eliyahu ben Shlomo Avraham HaKohen HaItamri (1640-1729) was one of the most prominent Rabbis in Izmir in the Ottoman Empire (today’s Turkey). Among the many works that he authored was one titled Tehillot Hashem on Sefer Tehillim. In Tehillot Hashem he writes that the “luminous countenance” refers to the fact that we are created in the “image of Hashem.” And this is our task in this world: to reflect the Divinity of our being to those around us. The way of achieving this goal is by using our Divinely given intellect to permeate our lives with spiritual meaning. By keeping the mitzvot and living Hashem’s Torah we are able to imbue our reality with holiness. We can elevate our existence by changing the mundane into an encounter that transcends the physical. Our obligation is to show ourselves and those

around us that the physical world is simply a vehicle for exposing the myriad spiritual dimensions in this world.

Our Sages teach us (Kiddushin 29) that a father is obligated to circumcise his son, to redeem him [if he is a firstborn], to teach him Torah, to find a wife for him and to teach him a trade. Some add that a father is also required to teach his son how to swim. Rabbi Shmuel Bornstein (1855-1926), the second Rebbe of Sochatchov and author of the masterpiece on the Torah and Chassidic thought called *Shem Mishmuel*, asks a simple question. What possible connection can there be between teaching one's son a trade and teaching him how to swim? He answers that swimming means that a person is completely immersed in the water, moving their arms and legs around vigorously to both stay afloat and to swim. But, points out Rabbi Bornstein, the swimmer has to constantly take their head out of the water so as not to drown.

So, too, when we are engaged in making a living. Rabbi Bornstein teaches us that we should never make the mistake of thinking that there is nothing amiss with being so completely immersed in our profession that we are no longer connected to our spiritual identities. We should not err and imagine that making a living and living a spiritual life are two distinctly separate entities. We must always remember to “keep our heads above the water” in order not to lose sight of what is truly important.

Rabbi Shmuel Schneerson (1834-1882), the fourth Rebbe of Lubavitch, would tell his Chassidim that they should endeavor to think about holy and spiritual concepts while involved in their business dealings. One of the Rebbe's followers, a prosperous manufacturer, told Rabbi Schneerson that, in his humble opinion, what the Rebbe was asking of him was entirely unreasonable. “After all,” he said, “if I don't remain completely focused on all my many dealings, how can I ensure that they will all continue to be profitable?”

The Rebbe responded with a sharp critique. He told his wealthy Chassid, “I assume that if you are capable of thinking mundane thoughts during your spiritually elevated moments, such as when you pray the Amidah, then you must be capable of having elevated spiritual thoughts when you are involved in the mundane!”

What a lesson! Thinking that there are moments in our day that are only physical is a terrible mistake. There is no moment that does not contain within it the most extraordinary spiritual potential. And by recognizing this fact – and by learning how to live it – we are able to reveal Hashem's “luminous countenance” to the world continuously.

*To be continued...*

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Go Camel

When Jacob offered a tribute of animals to his evil brother Esau in order to appease him, the Torah reports that Jacob sent him, among other animals, thirty female camels (gemalim meinikot) and thirty male camels (Gen. 32:16). In this essay we take a close look at the Hebrew word gamal and its etymological basis, before exploring other Hebrew words for the desert beast of burden known as the “camel.” In doing so, we clarify that these words are not actually synonymous with one another but represent different camelids within the family of camels.

The Biblical Hebrew noun gamal in the sense of the humped-back “camel” with which we are all familiar derives from the three-letter root GIMMEL-MEM-LAMMED and appears fifty-four times throughout the Bible. Besides that, the trilateral root GIMMEL-MEM-LAMMED appears another thirty-seven times in verbs in the Bible (according to Even Shoshan’s concordance). Those verbs refer to “weaning [from nursing],” “finishing/ripening,” and “repaying.” Menachem Ibn Saruk collapses the first meanings of those verbs into one category, and thus writes that there are three — seemingly distinct — meanings of GIMMEL-MEM-LAMMED: “growing,” “repaying,” and “camel.”

In the Bible, there are three people whose personal names incorporate this three-letter root: Gamliel (Num. 1:10, 2:20, 7:54, 7:59, 10:12), Gemali (Num. 13:12), and Gamul (I Chron. 24:17). The given name Gamla also appears in the Mishnah (Yoma 3:9, Yevamot 6:4). Whether these names relate to “camels” or to one of the other meanings of the root in discussion seems like an open question. [Rabbi Aharon Marcus (Keset HaSofer to Gen.10:2) actually connects the Biblical name Gomer to this root as well (invoking the interchangeability of LAMMED and REISH).

As is his wont, Rabbi Shmshon Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 12:16, 21:8, 24:17) attempts to connect the noun gamal to the verbs derived from GIMMEL-MEM-LAMMED. He suggests that perhaps gamal relates to that trilateral root in the sense that a camel that fills its hump with water and no longer needs to drink for a long duration makes it seem as though it has been “weaned” from its need to drink.

Rabbi Shmshon Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 21:8) further expands on the meanings of GIMMEL-MEM-LAMMED by explaining the connection between these various meanings of that root as being broadly related to something which has been sufficiently nourished and no longer requires outside assistance. For example, words derived from this root are used when describing a child who has grown up and is “weaned” from their mother’s milk (see Gen. 21:8 I Sam. 1:23, Isa. 28:9, Hos. 1:8). Similarly, when a tree finishes supplying a fruit with the



necessary nutrients and minerals needed to fully grown and ripen on its own, derivatives of this root are once again used (Num. 17:23, Isa. 18:5).

Taking this a step further, Rabbi Hirsch reflects on the idea of looking at all events and occurrences as “fruits” that have matured on the proverbial tree of time. In that sense, a fruit comes to maturity only when the full circle has been completed and a person gets what he deserves. In this sense, cognates of GIMMEL-MEM-LAMMED are used to denote “requitting” or “recompensing” a debt, which likewise brings the matter to its final conclusion. This usage occurs both in the negative sense of somebody repaying good with evil (Ps. 7:5, I Sam. 24:17), or in the positive sense of receiving reward for good deeds Prov. 31:12). It is also used to express gratitude to Hashem, as if to ask how can one repay Him for all the weal He has brought (Ps. 13:6, 116:12).

Although Rabbi Hirsch does not explicitly mention it, perhaps these explanations support the notion that GIMMEL-MEM-LAMMED is related to GIMMEL-MEM-REISH (gamar, “finishing”), via the interchangeability of the letters LAMMED and REISH. It is only when a toddler or fruit has “completed” a specific period of cultivation and growth that it can be weaned from an outside source of nutrients. Similarly, a debt is typically only repaid once the loan reaches maturity by “finishing” the time allotted to the borrower to hold on to the lender’s money (see Bava Batra 5b). Perhaps this relates to camels as well because when the animal “finishes” drinking, it then retains the ability to function for a prolonged time in arid environments without needing to drink more. Moreover, the ideas recompense or completion are possibly reflected in the camel's essential role in providing transportation, sustenance, and trade in harsh desert conditions.

*\*For the rest of this article and to learn more about different Hebrew words for “camels,” visit us online at: [http://ohr.edu/this\\_week/whats\\_in\\_a\\_word/](http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/)*

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Esav?
2. Why was Yaakov both "afraid" and "distressed"?
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Esav?
4. Where did Dina hide and why?
5. After helping his family across the river, Yaakov remained alone on the other side. Why?
6. What was the angel forced to do before Yaakov agreed to release him?
7. What was it that healed Yaakov's leg?
8. Why did Esav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Esav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word nisa in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Esav?
12. Why does the Torah refer to Dina as the daughter of Leah and not as the daughter of Yaakov?
13. Whom should Shimon and Levi have consulted concerning their plan to kill the people of Shechem?
14. Who was born along with Binyamin?
15. What does the name Binyamin mean? Why did Yaakov call him that?
16. The Torah states, "The sons of Yaakov were twelve." Why?
17. How old was Yaakov when Yosef was sold?
18. Esav changed his wife's name to Yehudit. Why?
19. Which three categories of people have their sins pardoned?
20. What is the connection between the Egyptian oppression of the Jewish people and Esav's decision to leave the land of Canaan?



## Answers

1. 32:4 - Angels.
2. 32:8 - He was afraid he would be killed. He was distressed that he would have to kill.
3. 32:9 - He sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for war.
4. 32:23 - Yaakov hid her in a chest so that Esav wouldn't see her and want to marry her.
5. 32:25 - He went back to get some small containers he had forgotten.
6. 32:27 - Admit that the blessings given by Yitzchak rightfully belong to Yaakov.
7. 32:32 - The shining of the sun.
8. 33:4 - His pity was aroused when he saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times.
9. 33:7 - To stop Esav from gazing at her.
- 10.33:12 - It means "travel". It does not mean "we will travel." This is because the letter *nun* is part of the word and does not mean 'we' as it sometimes does.
- 11.33:16 - They slipped away one by one.
- 12.34:1 - Because she was outgoing like her mother, Leah.
- 13.34:25 - Their father, Yaakov.
- 14.35:17 - His two triplet sisters.
- 15.35:18 - Ben-Yemin means "Son of the South." He was the only son born in the Land of Israel, which is south of Aram Naharaim.
- 16.35:22 - To stress that all of them, including Reuven, were righteous.
- 17.35:29 - One hundred and eight.
- 18.36:2 - To fool Yitzchak into thinking that she had abandoned idolatry.
- 19.36:3 - One who converts to Judaism, one who is elevated to a position of leadership, and one who marries.
- 20.36:6 - Esav knew that the privilege of living in the Land of Israel was accompanied by the prophecy that the Jews would be "foreigners in a land not their own." Therefore Esav said, "I'm leaving. I don't want the Land if it means I have to pay the bill of subjugation in Egypt."

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# TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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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)*

## **SENDING AWAY THE MOTHER BIRD**

Mitzvos #544-5 (*Devarim* 22:6-7)

When Yaakov heard that Eisav was approaching with a small army, and with obvious intentions, he prayed to Hashem for salvation, concluding with the words, “lest he come and smite me, mother upon children” (*Bereishis* 32:12). Yaakov appealed to Hashem’s mercy by mentioning the fact that he was not asking solely on his own behalf, as the lives of his four wives and eleven young children were also at stake. To the sensitive ears of the Sages, though, Yaakov’s words, “mother upon children,” intimated a deeper message: “You said [in Your Torah] not to take the mother bird while it is upon its young!” (*Bereishis Rabbah* 76:6). Yaakov was alluding to the fact that Hashem Himself had commanded us in His Torah to send away a nesting bird and not to take it along with its young, and he pleaded that Hashem should have similar mercy upon him for the sake of his “nesting” wives. From the fact that the Torah records these words, we may infer that they successfully aroused Hashem’s mercy and brought salvation to the fledgling Jewish nation.

It appears from the above Midrash that we are commanded to send away the mother bird out of compassion. *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Parashas Emor* §13) similarly implies that Hashem commanded this Mitzvah out of His mercy over living beings. The compassion is twofold: firstly, not to cause the mother bird to suffer by taking away its young before its eyes, and secondly, not to destroy the family completely. By sending away the mother bird, it can produce more children and the family can continue. Correspondingly, the Torah promises a twofold reward: that “Hashem will be good to you,” as you were good to the mother bird, and that “you will live a long life,” that is, eternal life in the World to Come, for having granted continuity to that family of birds (*Ibn Ezra to Devarim* 22:7).

Elsewhere, the Sages seem to understand quite differently. The Gemara of Tractate *Megillah* (33b) cites from the Mishnah that if a *chazan* prays to Hashem, “You Who had mercy on the mother bird should have mercy upon us,” he must be silenced. One explanation the Gemara offers is that such a prayer implies that Hashem commanded so out of mercy, when in truth, all of His Mitzvos are decrees. It is therefore difficult to understand how Yaakov prayed in this very manner.

The Commentators address this apparent contradiction in various ways (see *Chavrusa to Chullin* 138b). We will cite a selection of their words, and then return to Yaakov’s prayer. *Maharal* (*Tiferes Yisrael* ch. 6) explains that even though the Mitzvos are for our benefit, as the Torah emphasizes in numerous places, they are essentially “decrees” of the King that our human minds can never fully understand, and which we must fulfill whether we like it or not.

The fact that we *also* benefit from the Mitzvos does not change their definition as “decrees.” It is therefore improper to pray to Hashem to have mercy because of the mercy He displays in commanding us to send away the mother bird.

We gain further insight into the nature of this “decree” when we note its seemingly contradictory esoteric perspective. The Kabbalists teach that sending away the mother bird also includes an element of cruelty, for the mother bird will soon return and find its nest desolate. Hashem specifically commands us to send it away in this manner to arouse parallel Divine compassion over the entire world (see *Rabbeinu Bechaye*; see also *Tikkunei Zohar* 23a and *Rashi* to *Yonah* 3:8). In fact, the *Vilna Gaon* (*Mishlei* 30:17 and *Imrei Noam* to *Berachos* 33b) goes so far as to say that this Mitzvah is primarily an act of cruelty designed to train us into doing Hashem's will even when it runs contrary to our natural feelings of compassion, for a true servant of Hashem does not fulfill His will only when it coincides with his own. According to this view, this Mitzvah is fulfilled as a “decree” in the fullest sense of the word, for it goes against our nature.

The *Vilna Gaon* illustrates his point by noting that Avraham's final test was to slaughter his son. Until then, one might think that all his acts of kindness and compassion were only his human nature and that he was not truly a G-d-fearing person. The inborn compassion of all human beings, which is shared even by animals to some extent, is not always virtuous and sometimes even results in severe cruelty. For example, if a person is compassionate to criminals and does not exact justice upon them, he has actually been *cruel* — to all their future victims who will suffer the consequences of his “compassion”! The Sages comment to this effect about King Shaul's compassion on Amalek (*Koheles Rabbah* 7:16). Avraham's wholehearted willingness to perform the greatest act of cruelty on the greatest focus of his compassion — his one and only son — proved that his compassion was a reflection of Hashem's finely balanced and truly virtuous compassion. He and his descendants were thus chosen to represent Hashem's will in this world.

In truth, there is no contradiction between the view that sending away the mother bird is an act of compassion and the view that it is an act of cruelty. Hashem's Mitzvos are expressions of His infinite Divine wisdom, and hence, the moral lessons that can and must be gleaned from them are likewise infinitely numerous and faceted. If we send away the mother bird *only* as an act of compassion, it would indeed be contradictory to intend for its suffering as well. However, since we have compassion on it only because Hashem has commanded so, it is surely not contradictory to intend for its suffering because Hashem commanded so. Even this element of cruelty is ultimately compassion, for it serves to bring Divine compassion to the world.

Before concluding this point, it should be noted that there is a view that this Mitzvah primarily refers to when one intends to consume the eggs or young, in which case causing the mother bird suffering is similar to the permitted act of slaughtering an animal for consumption, despite the element of cruelty involved. To send away the mother bird without cause, however, would not be appropriate according to this view (see *Chasam Sofer, Orach Chaim* §100).

We return to Yaakov's prayer. While the Gemara indicates that it is improper for a *chazan* to appeal to the Divine mercy that Hashem displays in this Mitzvah, we may suggest that this is

only so in public, where an unlearned congregant might mistakenly infer from such a prayer that the Mitzvos are no more than insights into how to act morally and that Hashem is subject to human emotions. Yaakov, on the other hand, merely alluded to this idea, leaving no room for the unlearned to err as to his intent. Having shown mercy to his family by raising them under difficult conditions for many years, he turned to Hashem and appealed to this aspect of His Divine compassion, whose light shines eternally through the small crack of this seemingly insignificant Mitzvah: You, Who said not to take the mother bird along with its young, please also have mercy upon these mothers and their children.

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## INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

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### **5785 – The Rarest Year of Them All**

#### **Part III**

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

As detailed in previous installments in our series, our current year, 5785, is not only a rare one, but calendarically speaking, actually the hands-down **rarest** of them all. 5785 is classified as a *HaSh”A* year in our calendars. This abbreviation is referring to Rosh Hashana falling out on Thursday (*hei*), both months of Cheshvan and Kislev being *shalem* (*shin* - 30 day months instead of possibly 29; these are the only months that can switch off in our set calendar), and Pesach falling out on Sunday (*aleph*).

A *HaSh”A* year is the rarest of years, and out of the 14 possibilities in *Tur*'s 247-year calendar cycle, this year type occurs on average only once in about 30.19 years (approximately 3.3 percent of the time). Indeed, at times there are 71 years (!) in between *HaSh”A* years. The last time this year type occurred was 31 years ago in 5754 / 1994. The next time will be 20 years hence in 5805 / 2044. The next several times after that are slated to be 27 years further, in 5832 / 2071 and then a 51 year gap in 5883 / 2122.

The reasons and rules governing the whys and whens this transpires are too complicated for this discussion; suffice to say that when the *Mishnah Berurah* discusses these issues he writes “*ain kan makom l’ha’arich*,” that this is not the place to expound in detail, which is certainly good enough for this author.

Obviously, such a rare calendar year will contain many rare occurrences. This series article sets out to detail many of them. Perhaps as we get nearer to the actual events, we will discuss them in greater detail. Let’s continue on our journey through our unique year.

#### **Cheshvan – Kislev Calculations**

As we currently are in the month of Kislev, a bit of background is in order to explain the significance of Cheshvan and Kislev both being *shaleim* this year.

As is well known from Chazal, and actually millennia later corroborated by NASA, the Lunar Month is 29 days, 12 hours and 793 *chalakim* (or 44 minutes and one *cheilek*; a *cheilik* equals three and one-third seconds, an 18<sup>th</sup> of a minute, or an 1080<sup>th</sup> of an hour). In the times of Chazal, based on eyewitness accounts of the New Moon, any month could have had 30 days (called a *chodesh malei* or *shaleim* - full month) or 29 days (referred to as a *choseset chaseir*). In our 19-year cycle Jewish calendar established by Hillel II (Hillel *Nesiah*; a thirteenth or fourteenth-generation descendant of Hillel *Hazakein*), every other month, alternates between 29 and 30 days. Whereas the Gregorian calendar maxim might be “Thirty Days has September, April, June, and November,” but in the Jewish calendar the colloquialism would probably be “Thirty Days has Tishrei, Shvat, Nissan, Sivan, and Av. However, Teves, Adar, Iyar, Tamuz, and Elul only have 29 days.”

An easy way to tell if the month you are in has 29 or 30 days is by seeing how many days of Rosh Chodesh the **following** month has. If it has two-days of Rosh Chodesh, that means the first day of Rosh Chodesh is actually the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the **preceding** month. This means that the preceding month (the one you are currently in) is a *chodesh malei*. If the following month only has one day of Rosh Chodesh, then the preceding month only has 29 days and is categorized as a *chodeset chaseir*.

For example, the date of the first day

of Rosh Chodesh Elul is actually *Lamed Av*. Hence Av is a *chodeset malei*. Even so, since the last day of Av is connected to the month of Elul, as it is the first day of Rosh Chodesh Elul, there are *halachos* how the date is supposed to be written in official documents. Take our date of *Lamed Av*. *Halachically* it is to be written as “*Rosh Chodeset Elul, Shehu Yom Shloshim L’Chodeset* (which is the thirtieth of the month of) Av.” On the other hand, if it is a one day Rosh Chodeset, the date is simply the 1<sup>st</sup> of that month.

## Wild Cards?

As you probably realized, there were two months missing from the “adage of the months.” Marcheshvan and Kislev were not mentioned. The reason is that there is no hard and fast rule regarding them. They are the only months that can either have 29 or 30 days depending on the year. Some years both are *chaseirim*; other years both are *malei'im*, and others Cheshvan is *chaseir* and Kislev *malei*. What is a given, is that this is one of the changing variables in our set calendar. As mentioned previously, in 5785 both months are *malei* – making this a *shaleim* year.

This actually had interesting ramifications this year.

Our fascinating journey detailing the many remarkable facets of our rare year will IY”H be continued...

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch famously wrote that “the Jew’s catechism is his calendar.” It is this author’s wish that by showcasing the uniqueness of our calendar year and its rare *minhagim*, this series will help raise appreciation of them and our fascinating calendarical customs.

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