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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

In the Heart of a child

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

Little children find it difficult to do things alone. They need constant help and encouragement. They can be bold when a parent is near, but when out of sight, tears replace bravado until, once again, the child feels the parental hand that comforts.

Our first steps as babies are greeted by parental glee; hands reach out and guide our every step. When we falter, Mom and Dad are there to stop the fall.

A day comes, however, when we stumble and fall. Tears fill our eyes, dismay fills our hearts. We look around: "Mommy? Daddy? Are you there?"

Only when our parents let us fall can we learn to walk. Only when our parents let us become adults can we stop being children. If, as parents, we never let our children fall, they will never learn to stand by themselves. Everything has its season, of course, and a child challenged beyond his capabilities may lose hope in himself, but a challenge at the right time is an opportunity to grow and discover who we really are.

Chanukah celebrates two events: The defeat of the vast Seleucid Greek army by a handful of Jews and the miracle of the one flask of pure oil that burned for eight days. At first glance, the defeat of our oppressors seems the greater cause for celebration; yet our focus rests on the miracle of the lights. Why?

Chanukah occurred after the last of the Prophets - Chagai, Zecharia and Malachi - passed away. Hashem no longer communicated directly with humans. We were suddenly like children alone in the dark. From the darkness, we would need to forge our connection with Hashem in the furnace of our own hearts. We needed to grow up.

But growing up is difficult. "Mommy, Daddy...Are you still there?" The heart can grow a little cold with longing. We needed a little help.

The joy of Chanukah is not so much because we got what we prayed for - the defeat of our oppressors - but that our prayers were answered...with a miracle. From the center of a world where spiritual decay had tainted the holiest places, light burst forth; Hashem was still there.

That little flask would burn and burn, not just for eight days but for millennia. We would take those lights with us into the long dark night of exile and we would know that Hashem is there with us, even in the darkest of nights.

More Jews observe Chanukah than any other Jewish festival. Those lights burned for more than just eight days. They've been burning for over two thousand years. However far one may be from their Jewish roots, a *menorah* still burns in their window. A little spark lingers on; a holy spark hidden in the heart of a child.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Mevarchim HaChodesh
Blessing the New Month (Part 7)

*“The greatest darkness comes just before dawn –
but most people give up one minute before the light.”*

Ba'al Shem Tov

After the “*yehi ratzon...*” prayer, we announce the name of the forthcoming month, and the day (or days) upon which it will occur.

In Israel, *Mevarchim HaChodesh* continues as follows: **May the Holy One, blessed be He, renew it for us and for all His people, the House of Israel, for good and for blessing; for gladness and for joy; for deliverance and for consolation; for livelihood and economy; for life and for peace; for good news and for good tidings; (in the winter we add: and for the rains at the correct times;) and for a complete [medical] recovery; and for the imminent redemption, and let us say “amen”.**

Outside of Israel, according to the Ashkenazic custom, a slightly shorter version is recited: **May the Holy One, blessed be He, renew it for us and for all His people, the House of Israel, for life and peace; for gladness and for joy; for deliverance and for consolation, and let us say “amen”.**

One of the infinite beauties of Judaism is the way it relates to material wealth. There are belief systems that look at an abundance of riches in a negative light; when a person is blessed with “too much” material wealth (how, exactly, is that calculated? And by whom...?) it will, by definition, detach them from their spiritual connections and obligations. And, granted, there is a certain logic to this argument. Judaism, however, teaches that material wealth used properly is a method – just like any other – that can be employed to *further* a person’s connection to Hashem.

The *tefillot* of *Mevarchim HaChodesh*, therefore, repeatedly request that the upcoming month be one of blessed material success, so that we can use our wealth to enhance Hashem’s Majesty in this world.

And whilst each individual detail on our inventory for the new month is absolutely essential, it is the final request that encapsulates our hearts’ genuine desire: We desperately seek a month bursting with goodness and blessing, yes; but what we truly pine for is the Final Redemption.

Rabbi Moshe Aaron Rabinowitz Paller from Kobrin (1784–1858), known simply as Rebbe Moshe of Kobrin, points out that the Hebrew words for exile and redemption – “*Golah*” and “*Geulah*” – are almost identical. The difference is that “*Geulah*” (גאולה) is spelled with the letter ‘*aleph*’ and “*Golah*” (גולה) is not.

Rebbe Moshe explains: When we remember “*The Aleph*” – Hashem who is Number One (‘*aleph*’ is the first letter and represents the number one) – and we incorporate Hashem into every detail of our lives, then the exile and the suffering transform into redemption, “*Golah*” becomes “*Geulah*”!

As the Ba’al Shem Tov so expressively describes, “Remembrance is the secret of redemption.” Only by wholeheartedly embracing – and living – that lesson we will be able to experience the *Geulah*.

But *Mevarchim HaChodesh* also teaches us one of the most fundamental lessons of all. If we want our *tefillot* to be answered, we have to turn to Hashem and *truly* ask Him, not simply recite the words. We must genuinely believe that only Hashem can grant us a month replete with everything good. Otherwise we are no better than the person in the classic joke who beseeches Hashem every day to win the national lottery; after twenty-five years of this, the angels come to Hashem and complain: “We have no more patience for this person asking the same exact prayer over and over again; please, Hashem *please* let him win the lottery!”

“Willingly,” Hashem replies, “but first he has to buy a ticket...”

Mevarchim HaChodesh teaches us that, not only can we ask and ask again, but we *should* ask and ask again. If, however, we do not invest our request with the prerequisite intent, if we don’t *show* Hashem how inspired we are to be completely dependent upon Him, we will be left, just like our “hero” in the joke, with nothing to show for our efforts.

To be continued...

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TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE MENORAH - The Spiritual Illumination of the Torah.

Mitzvah #98 Sefer HaChinuch

Unlike the Aron, which symbolizes the actual Torah that was received by prophecy, the Menorah symbolizes the wisdom of the Torah as attained by the study of the Jewish people (*Rav Hirsch*).

The central branch represents the Written Torah, and the six protruding branches represent the six orders of the Oral Torah (*Arizal*, cited in *Be'er Basadeh*). The Menorah's 7 branches, 22 cups, 11 spheres, and 9 flowers add up to 49 components, corresponding to the 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, the day the Torah was given. This is why, during these days, some have the custom to recite *Tehillim* §67, which has 49 words, written out in the shape of a Menorah.

The Menorah weighed 120 *manah*, corresponding to the three-times-forty days that Moshe spent on Mount Sinai in order to receive the Torah (*Maaseh Rokeach*). The Menorah is positioned in the south of the Mishkan, which is called its "right side," since "*the heart of the wise man is on his right*" (*Koheles* 10:2; *Midrash Tadsheh* §11).

According to the Midrash, the verse "*The beginning of Your words shall illuminate*" (*Tehillim* 119:130) alludes to the Menorah. *Arizal*, *Rama* (*Toras HaOlah* §16), and the *Vilna Gaon* explain this to mean that the opening verses of the Torah's five Books allude to the various components of the Menorah: The opening verse of *Bereishis* has 7 words, alluding to the number of the Menorah's branches; the opening verse of *Shemos* has 11 words, alluding to the number of the Menorah's spheres; the opening verse of *Vayikra* has 9 words, alluding to the number of flowers; the opening verse of *Bamidbar* has 17 words, alluding to its height¹. The opening verse of *Devarim* has 22 words, alluding to the number of cups.

We may suggest that the opening verses of the five Books, as well as the five components of the Menorah to which the opening verses allude, correspond precisely to the **contents** of those Books, as follows:

Bereishis is the Book of Creation, which the verse describes as "*He formed seven pillars for it*" (*Mishlei* 9:1); meaning, Hashem created the world in seven days (*Rashi*). The Menorah thus has seven lamps that correspond to the seven days of Creation (*Tanchuma*), set upon the seven **pillar-like** branches of the Menorah;

¹ Although the Menorah's height is 18 handbreadths, the Commentators explain that **a)** the eighteenth handbreadth corresponds to the base of the Menorah; or that **b)** it is actually only a partial handbreadth and is therefore not counted; or, that **c)** it is alluded to by the *kollel*; or that **d)** it is alluded to by the *beis* of *Bereishis*, or **e)** a combination of the above.

Shemos describes 11 tribes subjugated in Egypt and then redeemed; hence, it begins with eleven words corresponding to the eleven spheres of the Menorah. The twelfth tribe, the priestly tribe of Levi, did not undergo subjugation in Egypt, and are generally regarded separately from the other tribes. The word for sphere, *kaftor*, shares the letters of the word *kafut*, meaning bound, as in slavery.

Levi comprises eight families (Livni, Shimi, Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron, Uziel, Machli, and Mushi), plus Aharon's Kohanite family, for a total of nine. So too, *Vayikra*, the Book that sets forth the special mitzvos that pertain to Levi, begins with nine words, corresponding to the eight flowers along the branches of the Menorah, plus a ninth by its base. The flowers are associated with the Tribe of Levi, as we find that Aharon's staff sprouted blossoms (*VaOlech Eschem Komemiyus*).

Bamidbar describes the Jewish People traveling through the Wilderness in a camp of seventeen elements: the Mishkan in the center; surrounded by four family groups (Gershon to the west, Kehas to the south, Merari to the north, and the families of Moshe and Aharon to the east); surrounded by four groups of three tribes. The encampment as a whole may be regarded as an eighteenth element. This finds expression in the Menorah's height of eighteen handbreadths, which is alluded to in the seventeen words of the opening verse of *Bamidbar*, along with the *kollel*, as explained in the footnote above.

In *Devarim*, Moshe teaches the Torah to the Jewish People, and the Torah is symbolized by its twenty-two letters; hence the Book of Devarim begins with twenty-two words corresponding to the twenty-two cups. A cup, a receptacle, is a fitting symbol for Jewish People's reception of the Torah from their teacher, Moshe, here in the Plains of Moab, whereas on Mount Sinai it was Moshe alone who received the entire Torah.

A Torah scholar is compared to a tree, and so too, the Menorah has a trunk, branches, flowers, cups similar to the ovary of a flower, and spheres shaped like fruit (*Rav Hirsch*). The height of the Menorah is that of an average man (*Alshich*). Measuring eighteen handbreadths, it has the numerical value of the word *chai* (life) because the Torah is the Tree of Life (*Toras HaOlah*). The cups, which contain the spheres, from which blossom forth flowers, allude to the three stages of a Torah scholar's development. First, he must focus on receiving Torah from his teachers, like a cup. Then he must focus on retaining his studies, like a sealed-off sphere. Finally, he becomes capable of blossoming and producing novel Torah-true insights (*Dvar Mikra*, by *Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein*). The seven lamps correspond to the seven gateways to the soul: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, and the mouth (*Midrash Tadsheh* §11). Every Jew is capable of radiating with Divine glory by acquiring Hashem's wisdom that is contained in the Torah, our national heritage.

Q & A

Miketz

Questions

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

Answers

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

Q & A

Chanukah

Questions

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

Answers

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