

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BESHALLACH · 13 SHVAT 5776 - JAN. 23, 2016 · VOL. 23 NO. 16

PARSHA INSIGHTS

WHICH CAME FIRST?

“G-d did not lead them (the people) by way of the land of the Philistines, because it was near...” (13:17)

The classic question, “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?” is a non-starter. Everyone knows that the chicken came first.

The Book of Genesis tells us so: *“And G-d created ...all winged fowl of every kind.” (1:21)*

Sometimes, however, it’s not so clear which came first.

In this week’s Torah portion, from the above verse it seems that the only reason that G-d led the Jewish People across the Red Sea and through the desert was because of the danger that they would turn back if they would be faced with the warlike Philistines. For the route to Eretz Yisrael through the land of the Philistines was indeed much shorter.

Which is strange, because surely the Jewish People had to go through the desert to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai was already designated as the place of the Torah’s giving before the Exodus, as G-d said to Moshe at the “burning bush”, *“...When you take the People out of Egypt, you will serve G-d on this mountain.” (Ex. 3:12)*

Why, then, does the Torah cite a different reason for the journey through the wilderness?

And this is where we have to do consider “Which came

first?”

It could be that the prime reason to take the Jewish People through the desert was, as we see from this week’s Torah reading, because of the danger of them turning back in the face of the Philistines. For this reason G-d chose Mount Sinai as the site of the giving of the Torah, because it was on their route, and as a result of this He told Moshe that they would serve Him on that mountain.

Or it could be that Mount Sinai was always the place of choice for the giving of the Torah, even without this reason, and had it not been for the Philistines the Jewish People would have taken the short route to Eretz Yisrael, settled it, and only afterwards made the trek to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. However, as it turned out that they couldn’t go the short way, G-d gave them the Torah on Sinai because it was now, so to speak, “on their way.”

In this case, it’s impossible for us to know, “Which came first?”

• Source: Chazon Ish in Tallelei Orot

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

GITTIN 44 - 50

“Captives may not be redeemed for more than their value due to ‘tikun olam’ (lit. “fixing the world”, i.e. for the good of the society).”

The *gemara* on our *daf* asks what the meaning of “*tikun olam*” is in this teaching in the *mishna*. How does the decree of Sages not to redeem captives for more than their value help society?

The *gemara* offers two possible explanations. One is that paying exorbitant ransom would cause undue burden on the community’s resources. The second reason is that paying too much would greatly encourage more prisoner-taking for the sake of large payments. What is the practical difference between these two reasons? Rashi explains that if the hostage has a wealthy relative who wants to free him, according to the first reason the relative should be permitted to do so, but according to the second reason he should not be permitted, since doing so would be detrimental to the safety of the community.

However, asks Tosafot, we find later in our *masechta* that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya paid an excessive ransom to free a youngster, which seems to contradict the second reason taught on our *daf*. Two possible answers are offered by Tosafot. One is that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya saw that the youngster was a blossoming Torah scholar, whose real value was “priceless”. Another possible reason to permit overpayment and not fear that this payment would encourage further kidnappings is that this story took place in the era of the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash, when kidnapping Jews for ransom required no special incentive.

• Gittin 45a

Rabbi Ilish said, “The Jewish People are compared to a dove, so I can trust the dove’s words and I will be saved by a miracle.”

Rabbi Ilish was kidnapped along with the daughters of Rav Nachman. One day he sat with a man who understood the language of birds. First a raven came and “said” something. The man explained to Rabbi Ilish that the raven was saying, “Flee Ilish, flee Ilish!” Rabbi Ilish, however, said that the raven was lying and did not trust it. Later, a dove came and “said”, according to the man who was with Rabbi Ilish, “Escape Ilish, escape Ilish!”

When Rabbi Ilish heard this he said, “The Jewish People are compared to a dove, so I can certainly trust the dove’s words, and I will be saved by a miracle.”

Rashi on our *daf* writes that we learn that the Jewish People are compared to a dove based on the verse in Shir Hashirim (5:2) where G-d says to the Jewish People, “My dove, My perfect one.” One might wonder, however, in what way is the Jewish People compared to a dove?

One explanation for this comparison is taught by our Sages in *Masechet Shabbat* (130a). “The Jewish People are compared to a dove as is stated: ‘the wings of a dove covered with silver, and its pinions with brilliant gold’ (Tehillim 68:14). Just as the wings (rather than its beak — Rashi) of the dove protect it from its enemies, so too do the *mitzvot* of the Jewish People protect them from their enemies.”

Another explanation for this comparison is taught by our Sages in the *Midrash Rabbah* for Shir Hashirim (1:15) where G-d says to the Jewish People, “Your eyes are like doves.” The *Midrash* teaches that we learn from this that “Just like a dove, from the time she meets her mate, is faithful to him, likewise the Jewish People are faithful to G-d from the time they first knew Him.”

• Gittin 45a

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

HAR HAZETIM — TOMB OF THE PROPHET ZECHARIAH

At the bottom of the Jewish cemetery in the Kidron Valley, on the slopes of Har Hazeitim (Mount of Olives), is the tomb of the last of the prophets.

Zechariah lived during the return to Eretz Yisrael from Babylonian exile and was a member of the august *Anshei Knesset Hagedolah* (Members



of the Great Assembly), who played such a major role in rabbinical legislation and leadership.

All who visit his tomb pray for the fulfillment of his prophetic vision of “Elderly men and women will once again sit in the streets of Jerusalem... and the streets of the city will be filled with little boys and girls who are playing.” (*Zechariah* 8:4-5)

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What percentage of the Jewish People died during the plague of darkness?
2. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
3. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
4. Where did the Egyptians get animals to pull their chariots?
5. What does it mean that the Jewish People "took hold of their fathers' craft" (*tafsu umnut avotam*)?
6. How did G-d cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off?
7. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
8. To what future time is the verse hinting when it uses the future tense of "Then Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael* will sing"?
9. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead and straw?
10. The princes of Edom and Moav had nothing to fear from the Jewish People. Why, then, were they "confused and gripped with trembling"?
11. Moshe foretold that he would not enter the Land of Israel. Which word in the parsha indicates this?
12. Why is Miriam referred to as "Aharon's sister" and not as "Moshe's sister"?
13. The Jewish women trusted that G-d would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we see this?
14. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
15. When did *Bnei Yisrael* run out of food?
16. What lesson in *derech erez* concerning the eating of meat is taught in this week's Parsha?
17. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the manna?
18. The Prophet Yirmiyahu showed the Jewish People a jar of manna prepared in the time of Moshe. Why?
19. Which verse in this week's parsha alludes to the plague of blood?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

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

1. 13:18 - Eighty percent (four-fifths).
2. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
3. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
4. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of G-d and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
5. 14:10 - They cried out to G-d.
6. 14:25 - He melted them with fire.
7. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
8. 15:1 - Resurrection of the dead during the time of *mashiach*.
9. 15:5 - The wickedest ones floated like straw, dying slowly. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
10. 15:14 - They felt horrible seeing Israel in a state of glory.
11. 15:17 - "*T'vi-aimo...*" — "Bring them" (and not "bring us").
12. 15:20 - Aharon put himself at risk for her when she was struck with *tzara'at*. (See *Bamidbar 12:12*)
13. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous victory celebration.
14. 15:25 - Shabbat, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
15. 16:1 - 15th of Iyar.
16. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiation.
17. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever manna remained in the fields. This flowed into streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals tasted manna.
18. 16:32 - The people claimed they couldn't study Torah because they were too busy earning a livelihood. Yirmiyahu showed them the manna saying: "If you study Torah, G-d will provide for you just as He provided for your ancestors in the desert."
19. 17:5 - "And your staff with which you smote the river..."
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

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Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

Beshalach

After the entire nation had safely crossed the Red Sea and the entire pursuing Egyptian army had drowned when the waters returned, the verse states “On that day, G-d saved Israel from the hand of Egypt...” (Exodus 14:30). Abarbanel emphasizes that until they saw the complete destruction of the Egyptian army, the people were still afraid that the pursuers would drag them back into slavery, or at least confiscate all the wealth that they had taken from the Egyptians just prior to their departure. True salvation only occurs when the enemy is completely defeated. Moshe himself illustrates this concept when he names his son “Eliezer”, based on the verse “the G-d of my father came to my aid, and he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.” (Exodus 18:4). He gives him this name only after he has been told by G-d, “Go, return to Egypt, for all the people who seek your life have died.” (Exodus 4:19)

Once they were assured of salvation, the verse goes on, “Israel saw the great hand that G-d inflicted upon Egypt, and the people revered G-d, and they had faith in G-d and in Moshe, His servant.” (Exodus 14:31) G-d’s intention was twofold: to redeem the people as He had promised; and to demonstrate to the people the true essence of His abilities and His Divine Providence in order that they should be in awe of Him. This is alluded to by the prophet Tzefania, “I have eliminated nations; their towers have become desolate...I said, ‘just fear me and accept chastisement’.” (Tzefania 3:6-7)

Even though prior to this point the people had a fear of G-d, now, however, all of them witnessed with their own eyes the extent of His omnipotence. Awe and fear of G-d can come through the intellect, but sensory experience is still a requirement. The Torah uses the anthropomorphic expression “the *great hand* that God inflicted...” as a metaphor to

illustrate the enormous impression that this event made on the entire nation. When we see a footprint in snow or mud we know that it was made by a foot, even though the foot is no longer visible. When we see the imprint of a hard slap to someone’s cheek, we can gauge the size of the hand that inflicted the blow. Similarly G-d is telling the people, “Even though the concept of the ‘hand of G-d’ is completely beyond your understanding, you can see its ‘print’ in the destruction of the Egyptians.” The result was that they now believed in G-d and his servant Moshe, meaning that not only did they believe in His abilities right now, but they would also believe in whatever predictions would be made for the future as well.

The splitting of the sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army employed the term “great hand of G-d”. The plague of the cattle epidemic is described as coming about through “the hand of G-d”. This, however, was the “small” hand”. G-d also says in regard to the killing of the first-born, “I will send forth My hand” (Exodus 3:20). This is the “medium-sized” hand. Now, however, the Egyptians have experienced the ultimate plague, since it incorporated the natural elements of many of the previous plagues as well. The drowning Egyptians tasted undrinkable water; the first plague turned the water into undrinkable blood. Their corpses attracted frogs, lice and other crawling creatures. Their horses died just as their herds and flocks had been decimated. Boils appeared on these corpses, they drowned in the darkness of the sea, and the east wind which had brought the plague of locusts had now come to dry out the seabed so that the Jewish People could cross. The plagues that began in the waters of Egypt ended in the waters of the Red Sea.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. With pillars of cloud and fire, G-d leads them toward *Eretz Yisrael* on a circuitous route, avoiding the Pelishtim (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves and chases the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but G-d protects them. Moshe raises his staff and G-d splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by G-d, commands his army to pursue, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song of thanks. After three days’ travel only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain. Moshe

miraculously produces potable water. In Marah they receive certain *mitzvot*. The people complain that they ate better food in Egypt. G-d sends quail for meat and provides manna, a miraculous bread that falls from the sky every day except Shabbat. On Friday a double portion descends to supply the Shabbat needs. No one is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbat. Some manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations. When the Jews again complain about a lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Then Amalek attacks. Joshua leads the Jews in battle while Moshe prays for their welfare.

BLACK AND WHITE IN JUDAISM

From: Ted

*Dear Rabbi,
I am Afro-American and Christian. It is my opinion that the Jewish religion is not racist. But I had a conversation with a Jewish friend of mine who pointed out that Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses for marrying an African woman. Is this so? And what is the Torah perspective on Africans in general?*

Dear Ted,

There are many scattered references within Jewish sources to Africans or “black-skinned” people. I won’t be able to address them all, but will at least try to clarify the one you cite that refers to Moses’ wife Tziporah as a Cushite, where Cush normally means either Ethiopia in particular or Africa in general.

The Book of Numbers in chapter 12 states, “Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses regarding the Cushite woman he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. They said, ‘Has the L-rd spoken only to Moses? Hasn’t He spoken to us too?’ And the L-rd heard [and] suddenly said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, ‘Go out, all three of you, to the Tent of Meeting!’....He said, ‘Listen to My words. If there be prophets among you, [I] will make Myself known to him in a vision; I will speak to him in a dream. Not so is My servant Moses; he is faithful throughout My house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, in a vision and not in riddles, and he beholds the image of the L-rd. So why were you not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?’”

If Tziporah was literally a Cushite, and Moses’ siblings were critical of his marrying her for racial reasons, you see from the verses that G-d actually reprimanded them and defended Moses, such that your friend’s point doesn’t even fit the simple meaning of the verses.

But in fact, even the simple meaning doesn’t make sense. Firstly, the Torah tells us that Tziporah was the daughter of Yitro (Jethro) the Midianite, which means that she wasn’t literally from Cush at all. Secondly, if their criticism was racial, what does it have to do with their complaint that G-d spoke not only to Moses, but also to them? Thirdly, how does G-d’s emphasis on the distinction between Moses’ level and that of the other prophets have anything to do with the Cushite woman he married?

Jewish sources thus explain that the meaning of the verses is not at all “black-and-white”. Rather, it became known to Miriam and Aaron that Moses had separated from intimacy with Tziporah. They disapproved of this separation because they considered her to be outstandingly righteous, as a dark-skinned person stands out among light-skinned people. This is the meaning of the term “Cushite” which is non-pejorative and often used in Jewish sources as a term for someone unique and *outstanding*. Their complaint was therefore not about the *union* between Moses and Tzipora, but about their separation.

The only justification they could think of for Moses’ behavior was a need for celibacy in order to maintain his prophetic state. Thus they complained that G-d spoke not only to Moses but also to them, yet they had not separated from their spouses. Here G-d appeared to them *suddenly*, without their being able to prepare for it, which consumed them with the feeling of burning fire, thereby rebuffing their complaint by demonstrating that Moses was justified, since on his level he had to be prepared at all times for the prophetic influx.

Another oft-misquoted source wrongly associating the Torah with racism is the story of Noach and Ham in Genesis 9:20-27. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 70a) explains that when Noach became drunk and was revealed, his son Ham severely abused him, resulting in Noach’s cursing Ham by committing his son Canaan to the servitude of Ham’s brothers Shem and Yafet. This has been distorted by many non-Jews throughout the ages to justify “Divinely sanctioned” slavery of “morally degenerate” Africans.

This has never been the position of the Torah or Jewish scholarly texts. Firstly, Ham was not African. And even though one of his sons was Cush, who is viewed as the progenitor of the African race, Ham was not. Secondly, neither Ham nor Cush was actually cursed. Rather the Torah singles out another of Ham’s sons, Canaan, identified by Jewish sources as the catalyst for, and an accomplice of, the crime, who was cursed (verse 25).

In fact, the following Midrash (Tanchuma, Emor 6) actually demonstrates the Talmudic view of Africans’ moral superiority over ancient Greece, the most elevated of European cultures at the time:

One of Alexander the Great’s expeditions brought him to Africa where he observed a king presiding over a dispute between two of his subjects. The one claimed, “I bought a field from this man in which I found a buried treasure. Land I bought, a treasure not. Yet he refuses to take it back!” The other litigant claimed in his defense, “A field I sold, and with it gold. The land is yours and the riches too!”

The king turned to the one, “Have you a son?” And then to the other, “Have you a daughter?” When each answered in the affirmative, the king said, “Let the one marry the other and may the treasure be theirs!”

Alexander was shocked by the whole proceeding, and when the king noticed, he queried, “Did I not judge well? How would such a case be judged in your land?” Alexander answered, “You decided very well. But in our realm, such claims would never be made; and even if such a case were ever to be tried, the litigants would both be put to death and the treasure would be confiscated by the State!”

The African king replied to Alexander the Great, “If the sun rises in your Land and if there’s rain and material bounty, it must not be in the merit of the people but rather in the merit of the animals!”

THE PRAYERS OF THE RIGHTEOUS — PART 2

Choni “the Circle Maker”

In the Land of Israel, rain falls only in the winter. One winter there was no rain. Spring had almost arrived. Under the threat of famine the Rabbis decreed days of fasting and prayers to invoke G-d’s mercy, but to no avail.

Finally, the Rabbis turned to Choni “HaMe’ageil”, “the circle-maker”, a leading Torah scholar known for his outstanding piety, and they said to him: “Pray for rain!”

He answered, “Go out and bring in the Pesach ovens so that they do not dissolve [in the rain].” He prayed, but no rain fell. What did he do? He drew a circle, stood in it and said, “Master of the World, Your children have turned to me because I am like a household member before You. I swear by Your great Name that I shall not move from here until You have mercy on Your children.” Rain began to trickle. He said, “Not such rain did I request, but rain that will fill the water holes, ditches and caves” (where drinking water is stored). It began to rain down with fury. He said, “Not such rains did I request, rather rains of good will, blessing and benevolence.” The rains began to fall normally, until the Jews had to leave Jerusalem for the high ground of the Temple Mount because of the rain (Ta’anit 19a).

Master of Miracles

Until today, there are some communities whose High

Holiday prayers include the prayer, “G-d of Rabbi Meir, answer us”. This custom dates back to early times, finding its source in the Talmud:

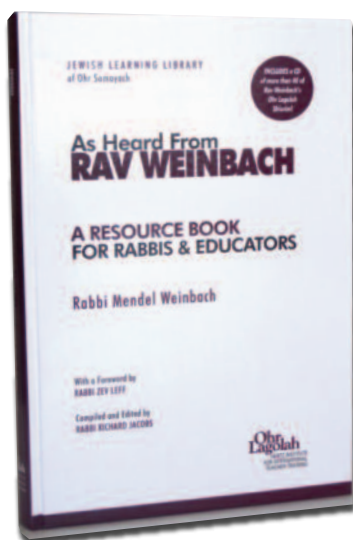
Rabbi Meir’s sister in-law was taken captive. Rabbi Meir went to try to save her. He tried to bribe the Roman guard with a large sum of money, telling him to use half for himself and the other half to bribe his superiors, but the guard asked, “What will I do when this money runs out?”

Rabbi Meir answered: “Just call out: ‘G-d of Meir, answer me!’”

The guard was doubtful that this would help, so Rabbi Meir proved it. He angered some killer dogs that were in the vicinity, and as the dogs lunged to attack him, Rabbi Meir cried: “G-d of Meir, answer me!” The dogs retreated, the guard was convinced, and Rabbi Meir’s sister-in-law went free.

Eventually, the guard was caught for his “crime” of freeing the girl and was sentenced to be hanged. He called out, “G-d of Meir, answer me!” and was saved (Avodah Zara 18a).

From all of the above sources we see just how far-reaching the words of the righteous are. Regarding the power of their prayers our Sages say, “The righteous person decrees and the Holy One, blessed is He, fulfills the request.” (Ta’anit 23a)



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According to tradition, a boy is born with a *yeitzer hara* (inclination to sin) and only acquires a *yeitzer tov* (inclination to not sin) at bar mitzvah. Yaakov Zeligler is a proof to this dictum. He was born into a traditional, although not observant, Jewish family in Toronto. He was blessed with strong influences from his *frum* (religiously observant) grandparents, and when he reached bar mitzvah age, Yaakov became religious.

Although he attended a secular high school, he was a member of NCSY and continued to grow spiritually. He was accepted into the Schulich School of Business of York University, the premier business school in Canada, and studied accounting.

While at university he met Jon Jaffit, then a student, but now a rabbi doing campus *kiruv* (outreach) in Toronto. Jaffit had attended the Center Program at Ohr Somayach and highly recommended it to Yaakov. In the summer of 2007 Yaakov came to the Center Program for the summer. He came back after his second year and stayed for a year at the Center, then finished his degree at the university and came back to Ohr Somayach to learn full-time.

He learned in Ohr Somayach for over five years, graduating from the Center Program to the Beit Medrash, and then eventually learning in the *kollel* of Rabbi Reisman for two years. During that time he got married and had three children. He now has a daughter aged four, a two-year-old son and a two-month-old daughter. He recently moved back to Toronto to get his CPA degree and hopes to find a good job afterwards. He is learning in *kollel* in the mornings and evenings, and is taking courses to prepare him for the CPA exams in the afternoons.

Yaakov recently sent a letter to the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Nota Schiller, summing up his and his friends' experiences at Ohr Somayach, and expressing his *hakarat hatov* (gratitude). With his permission, we quote from his letter:



"I wanted to express a reoccurring feeling, one that has been shared by multiple *chaverim* [friends] who previously and currently are learning in the yeshiva.

First off, we have tremendous appreciation for the work done by all individuals and *rabbanim* who are running the yeshiva in any capacity.

The yeshiva as a whole has changed our lives, both major changes like *Shabbos* and *kashrus* observance, but also less external changes such as overall *hashkafa* [Torah outlook], ability to handle difficult times, ability to handle interacting outside the physical walls of the yeshiva, and overall constant growth in '*avodas Hashem*'. Based on interaction with *talmidim* of other institutions we all feel we have been given clear *hashkafa* and ability to "assimilate" in the '*yeshivashe* world', and not stand out as a sore thumb, and still maintain the ability to interact with the external world.

The Center is full of a team of amazing *rabbanim* who give time, patience and overall stability. It seems clear to me that they are producing *talmidim* who are balanced, self-critical and, therefore, stronger in their beliefs and better able to handle life's vicissitudes.

The Center, Rabbi Y. Dallah, and Rabbi Y. Peretz, completely changed my life and made me feel ready to handle the ups and downs to come.

I am indebted to them all. Thank you for all the hard work on behalf of your *talmidim*.

Hatzlacha rabbah!
Yaakov Zeligler

As one of our *kiruv* rabbis, Rabbi Zalman Corlin, said: "When you have *talmidim* like Yaakov Zeligler, who express their gratefulness so eloquently, all the efforts we make, all the frustrations we suffer and endure, all the doors slammed in the face of our fundraisers — it's all eminently worthwhile."

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TU B'SHEVAT

Tu B'Shevat is generally regarded as the “New Year for the trees,” (Rosh Hashanah 2a). We are told that by the fifteenth day of Shevat most of the rains for the given year have already fallen (Rosh Hashana 14a). As a result, Chazal tell us that until this date all the fruits that grew are a product of the rains from the previous year, and the fruits produced from this day onward are from the rains of the new year. In fact, it is for this reason that many have the custom to pray for a beautiful and kosher *etrog* for the upcoming Succot holiday on this day (see Lashon Chachamim 1:38 of the Ben Ish Chai for a text of the prayer). Tu B'Shevat also bears halachic significance for the purposes of counting the years for *orlah*, *terumot u'maaserot* (tithes), and according to some opinions for determining the holiness of fruits that grow during the Shemitah year. It is for this reason that many communities have the custom to eat several different types of fruits as a means of celebrating the day (see Mishna Berura 131:31, Kaf Hachaim 131:97).

The halacha also states that we refrain from reciting *tachanun* on this day (Orach Chaim 131:6). This custom appears to be a bit puzzling since we generally refrain from saying *tachanun* because of some sort of happiness. On Tu B'Shevat, however, what is the nature of the day's happiness, since most of the rains have fallen due to purely natural means? In order to gain clarity of the significance of the day, as well as the spiritual energy present, we must delve into what is spiritually taking place.

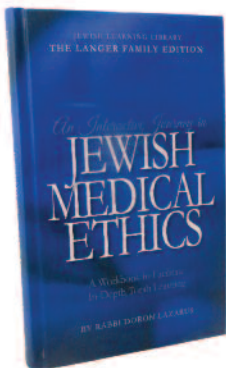
The Maharal of Prague explains that since everything in the physical world is a manifestation of a spiritual root, when one studies the natural world and its seasons he can understand the spiritual energy of that time of year (Gevurot Hashem, 46). The fifteenth of Shevat marks the day on which the rain's potential growth begins to materialize

through the trees producing fruit. The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that rain in this context does not only refer to physical water from above that leads to production and growth on land, but also alludes to spiritual Divine assistance that can aid in producing spiritual fruits, i.e. *mitzvot* (which are often referred to by Chazal as “fruits”; see for example Sotah 46a). The amount and nature of this Divine assistance is decided every Rosh Hashana, as it is on this day that G-d determines a person's riches, health, spouse, etc.

According to this symbolism the tree is also not only referring to physical trees but also to man; as the verse in the Torah says, “for man is like the tree of the field” (Devarim 20:19). The Shem M'Shmuel points out that just like a tree is the medium through which the ground can produce fruit, so too man is the medium through which physicality can be uplifted to produce fruit, *mitzvot*. The only difference between man and a tree lies in where the roots are implanted. Unlike the tree, man's roots are above, they are his intellect. All of his actions — his branches — all stem from his intellect, his roots. A physical tree, however, is rooted in the physical earth, and the rest sprout forth from that physical core. Indeed, as the Maharal explains, man is an upside-down tree (Chiddushei Aggadot, Sanhedrin 91b).

Based on the above we can understand the significance of the day of Tu B'Shevat. Just like the trees begin to bear fruit on this day from the rains of the new year, so too this is the time when we begin to see the results of the spiritual rains that we have received since Rosh Hashana. Because we have completed one-third of the new year, Tu B'Shevat is the opportune time to both harvest and assess the spiritual fruit of our labor. It is the happiness that accompanies this spiritual harvest that results in refraining from the *tachanun* prayer.

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