

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHIOT NITZAVIM-VAYELECH-HAAZINU · TISHREI 5777 - SEP. 2016 · VOL. 23 NO. 54

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Nitzavim

SUBTLE AS A BRICK

“You are standing today...” (29:9)

Rashi comments on this verse: “For when Israel heard a hundred curses minus two (in the previous parsha), their faces turned green. They said, ‘Who can stand these (curses)?’ Moshe began to mollify them (with the first words of this week’s parsha) ‘You are standing...’”

If the purpose of the curses was to arouse the fear of Heaven in the hearts or the Jewish People, why did Moshe seek to mollify their effect and dilute the impression they made on the Israel?

An unsophisticated individual is affected by bald threats and explicit warnings. The more intelligent and sophisticated the person, the more subtle can be the reproof, and the greater can be the appeal to logic and reason.

The Jews who left Egypt were the “Generation of Knowledge” — *Dor de’ah*. Never was there a generation on such an exalted plane. When they heard such graphic and bare-faced curses and threats, their faces “turned green”. This means that they were very hurt that they were considered to be on such a low level that they required such overt and explicit physical threats.

Thus Moshe started to placate them and told them that these threats were not directed at them: “You are standing all of you in front of the L-rd, your G-d.” You are still standing on the highest level, close to G-d, and these warnings are not directed at you. However, “not with you alone do I make this covenant... but also with those who are not here today,” — with those future generations who will sink to the level that only the most explicit warnings will speak to them.

• Sources: Kehillat Yaakov in Mayana shel Torah

Vayelech

THE “I” OF SINAI

“...One hundred and twenty years old I am today.” (31:2)

Moshe first ascended Mount Sinai for forty days to receive the Torah from G-d. He spent another forty days on the Mount, praying to save the Jewish People from destruction as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf. Then he went up again for a third time for yet another forty days to receive the second set of Tablets.

The years of Moshe’s life parallel the days he spent on the Mount — one hundred and twenty.

Moshe’s days in this world were inspired and powered by his out-of-this-world experience on the mountain.

“...one hundred and twenty years old I am today.”

For this reason, in this verse, when Moshe says “I” he uses the Hebrew word *anochi* instead of the more usual Hebrew word for “I”, *ani*, for it is with the word “Anochi” that G-d began the Ten Commandments: “I (Anochi) am the L-rd, your G-d...”

Ha’azinu

A SILVER LINING

“...with a vile nation I shall anger them.” (32:21)

Rashi comments: *These are the unbelievers (the vile nation). And similarly it says, “The vile one says in his heart, ‘There is no G-d.’”*

The People of the Torah have suffered much through the millennia at the hands of those who deny G-d. But every cloud, as they say, has a silver lining.

“...I will scatter them; I will cause their memory to cease from man” (32:26)

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

NITZAVIM

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers all the people, young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women, in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship because, in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will result from failure to heed G-d's *mitzvot*. Descendants of that generation and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all — the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them in favor of powerless idols. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually G-d will bring them back to *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe tells the people to remember that fulfilling the Torah is not an impossibility; rather it's within the grasp of every Jew. The *parsha* dramatically concludes with Moshe comparing the Jewish People's choice to follow the Torah to a choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

VAYELECH

On the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent bidding farewell to his people, encouraging them to “keep the faith.” Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, G-d is with them. He summons Yehoshua, and, in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as leader of the Jewish People. Thus, he strengthens Yehoshua's status. Moshe teaches the *mitzvah of hakhel*: Every seven years on the first of the intermediate days of Succot, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather at the Temple to hear the king read from the Book of Devarim. The sections read deal with faithfulness to G-d, the covenant and reward and punishment. G-d tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the *Mishkan*, where G-d will teach Yehoshua. G-d tells

Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land the people will be unfaithful and worship other gods. G-d will then completely “hide His face”, so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, hunted by all. G-d instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song — *Ha'azinu* — which will serve as “witness” against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to *Bnei Yisrael*. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah and instructs the *levi'im* to place it to the side of the Holy Ark, so that no one will ever write a new Torah Scroll different from the original, for there will always be a reference copy.

HA'AZINU

Almost all of *Ha'azinu* is a song, written in the Torah in two parallel columns. Moshe summons the Heavens and the earth to stand as eternal witnesses to what will happen if the Jewish People sin and do not obey the Torah. He reminds the people to examine the history of the world and note how the Jewish People are rescued from obliteration in each generation — that G-d “pulls the strings” of world events so that *Bnei Yisrael* can fulfill their destiny as His messengers in the world. G-d's kindness is such that Israel should be eternally grateful, not just for sustaining them in the wilderness, but for bringing them to a land of amazing abundance and for defeating their enemies. But this physical bounty leads the people to become over-indulged. Physical pleasures corrupt the morals of the people. They worship empty idols and powerless gods and indulge in all kinds of depravity. G-d will then let nations with no moral worth subjugate Israel and scatter them across the world. However, their only purpose is as a rod to chastise the Jewish People. When these nations think that it is through their own power that they have dominated Israel, G-d will remind them that they are no more than a tool to do His will. The purpose of the Jewish People is fundamental — that man should know his Creator. Neither exile nor suffering can sever the bond between G-d and His people, and, eventually, in the final redemption this closeness will be restored. G-d will then turn His anger against the enemies of Israel, as though they were His own enemies, showing no mercy to the tormentors of His people. G-d then gives His last commandment to Moshe: That he should ascend Mount Nevo and be gathered there to his people.

שמע ישראל

The Ohr Somayach Family wishes you and yours and all of Israel a year filled with happiness, health and peace.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Nitzavim

1. Why did Moshe gather the Jewish People together on the day of his death?
2. Who are the wood-cutters and water-drawers mentioned in verse 29:10?
3. How do two parties “pass” into a covenant?
4. What is the connection between the verse “*Atem nitzavim*” and the curses in the previous parsha?
5. Why can't G-d disassociate himself from the Jewish People?
6. How many curses were listed in *Parshat Ki Tavo*?
7. Which two leaders followed Moshe's example and assembled the people at the end of their rule?
8. With whom did Moshe make the covenant and oath?
9. Why did the Jewish People see only idols of wood and stone in Egypt?
10. What is meant by the punishment of “adding drunkenness to thirst (29:18)”?

Vayelech

1. How old was Moshe when he died?
2. Why was Moshe unable “to go out and come in”? (31:2)
3. What happened to Moshe's Torah knowledge on the day of his death?
4. How did Moshe foresee the relationship between Yehoshua and the Elders?
5. What did G-d tell Yehoshua concerning his relationship with the Elders?
6. How often does the *hakhel* (assembly of the Jewish People) take place?
7. Why does the Torah call the year of the *hakhel* the “*shemita* year”?
8. What sections of the Torah does the king read at the *hakhel*?
9. In what physical location does the king read at the *hakhel*?
10. Why were the men commanded to come to the gathering?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

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

Nitzavim

1. 29:9 - To initiate them into the covenant with G-d.
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who came to join the Jewish People.
3. 29:11 - The two parties place objects in two parallel lines and pass between them.
4. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, “Who can survive such curses?” Moshe comforted them, saying, “You've done a lot to anger G-d, and yet — ‘*Atem nitzavim*’ — G-d didn't destroy you ...you're still standing before Him.”
5. 29:12 - Because He told them He wouldn't and because He swore to the *Avot* (Patriarchs) that the Jewish People would always remain His nation.
6. 29:12 - Ninety-eight.
7. 29:12 - Yehoshua and Shmuel.
8. 29:14 - With the people standing before him and all future generations.
9. 29:16 - Because these were exposed openly. The idols of gold and silver, however, were locked away by their owners for fear of theft.
10. 29:18 - Even unintentional sins will be considered by

G-d as if they were committed intentionally.

“Drunkenness” refers to sins committed unintentionally. “Thirst” refers to sins committed intentionally.

Vayelech

1. 31:2 - Exactly 120.
2. 31:2 - G-d did not let him because the power of leadership was being transferred to Yehoshua.
3. 31:2 - The well-springs of knowledge were closed up for him.
4. 31:7 - He foresaw that they would work in partnership.
5. 31:7 - That he alone would be the leader — for there can only be one leader in each generation.
6. 31:10 - Once every seven years, in the first year of the new *shemita* period.
7. 31:10 - Because the laws of *shemita* still applied to the harvest.
8. 31:11 - From Devarim: 1:1-6:9; 11:13-21; and 14:22-28:69.
9. 31:11 - On a wooden platform erected in the *azara*.
10. 31:12 - In order to learn.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Ha'azinu

1. Why were heaven and earth specifically chosen as witnesses?
2. How is the Torah like rain?
3. How is G-d "faithful without injustice"?
4. Why is G-d called "tzaddik"?
5. How many major floods did G-d bring upon the world?
6. What group of people does the Torah call "fathers"? Cite an example.
7. Why did G-d separate the world's nations into exactly 70?
8. Why is the merit of the Jewish People's ancestry called a "rope"?
9. How is G-d's behavior toward the Jewish People like an eagle's behavior toward its offspring?
10. Regarding the Jewish People's punishment, G-d says, "I will spend my arrows on them." What is the positive aspect of this phrase?
11. How does the idea of "chillul G-d" prevent the nations from destroying the Jewish People?
12. What will happen to the nations that conquer the Jewish People?
13. When G-d overturns a nation that persecutes the Jewish People, His attribute of Mercy is "replaced" by which attribute?
14. When G-d punishes the heathen nations, for whose sins does He exact punishment?
15. How will G-d's punishment change the way the nations view the Jewish People?
16. On what day was *Ha'azinu* taught to the Jewish People?
17. Verse 32:44 calls Yehoshua "Hoshea." Why?
18. In verse 32:47, what does "it is not empty from you" mean?
19. Why did G-d tell Moshe that he would die a similar death to that of Aharon?
20. If Moshe had spoken to the rock rather than striking it, what would the Jewish People have learned?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Ha'azinu's Questions!

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

1. 32:1 - They endure forever.
2. 32:2 - The Torah gives life and promotes growth like rain.
3. 32:4 - He is "faithful" by rewarding the righteous, and "without injustice" by rewarding even the wicked for any good deeds.
4. 32:4 - All will agree that His judgments are righteous.
5. 32:7 - Two. One in the time of Adam's grandson Enosh and one in the time of Noach.
6. 32:7 - The Prophets. Elisha called the Prophet Eliyahu "My Father." (*Melachim II 2:12*)
7. 32:8 - To correspond to the 70 *Bnei Yisrael* who entered Egypt.
8. 32:9 - Their merit is "woven from" the merits of the *Avot*.
9. 32:12 - He mercifully wakes them gently, hovering over them, and carrying them on His "wings".
10. 32:23 - "The arrows will be spent" implies that the afflictions will cease but the Jewish People will not.
11. 32:27 - The nations would attribute their success to their might and the might of their gods. G-d would not let His name be desecrated like this.
12. 32:35 - They will eventually be punished.
13. 32:41 - His attribute of Justice.
14. 32:42 - For their sins and the sins of their ancestors.
15. 32:43 - They will view the Jewish People as praiseworthy for cleaving to G-d.
16. 32:44 - The Shabbat upon which Moshe died.
17. 32:44 - To indicate that although he was the Jewish People's leader, he still maintained a humble bearing.
18. 32:47 - That you will receive reward for studying Torah and that there is nothing meaningless in the Torah.
19. 32:50 - Because Moshe wanted this.
20. 32:51 - The Jewish People would have reasoned as follows: If a rock, which receives neither reward nor punishment, obeys G-d's commands, all the more so should we.

REB GEDALIA SHAYA LICHTENSTEIN, ZATZAL

It is with great sadness that we note the recent passing on the 10th of Tammuz of our alumnus, Reb Gedalia Shaya Lichtenstein, zatzal. Reb Gedalia was also the father of another alumnus, l'badel bein chaim l'chaim, Reb Chaim Lichtenstein.

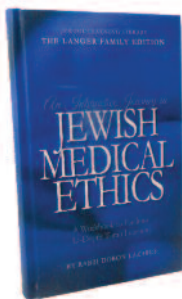
Reb Gedalia was a man who succeeded in *ruchnius* and *gashmius* throughout the many chapters of his life, and he left a legacy to his family of love and devotion to Hashem and to the Jewish People. He was a man who believed in excellence and perseverance. He started his working career as a NYC public school math teacher. To supplement his income he worked as a Good Humor ice cream man. Soon, his entrepreneurial nature kicked in, and he started his own accounting practice, hiring CPAs and growing and expanding his tax preparation service business. As his reputation grew he expanded his office, and soon opened up new offices all under the name Witt Tax Centers, which he took public in the 1960's while yet a young man.

He then moved into real estate, buying buildings in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Reb Gedalia was a lifelong Zionist. When he was in his late 50s he fulfilled his dream of making *aliyah* and moved to Israel with his wife Yocheved. In Nahariya, where he first lived in Israel, he was often asked: Why would a New Yorker move to Israel and not stay in New York and make money? He decided to

move to the Holy City of Jerusalem, where that question is seldom asked. He rented an apartment in Ma'alot Dafna, and began to receive many invitations for Shabbos meals. He wanted to explore Judaism, and when it was suggested to him that he attend classes at Ohr Somayach Yeshiva, he agreed. His holy *neshama* was ignited by the words of Torah he heard, and by the spirituality and the happiness of the *talmidim* and *rabbeim* there. He developed relationships with the *Roshei HaYeshiva* — Rabbi Weinbach (*zatzal*), Rabbi Bulman (*zatzal*) and, *l'badel bein chaim l'chaim*, Rabbi Nota Schiller (*shlita*), and many other members of the staff. He had a young and inquiring mind and was constantly growing. For various reasons he had to move back to the States to Crown Heights in New York, where he served as a teacher and a coach of young children, and was an integral member of the Chabad community. He leaves a wife, two sons, two daughters and many grandchildren, who are all following in his footsteps, seeking accomplishments in this world and the next.

May his memory be for a blessing.

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BAVA METZIA 2-43

“It is assumed that whatever is in one’s possession is his.”

Similar to the well-known adage that “possession is nine-tenths of the law”, Tosefot cites this logical reasoning to explain the distinction between the law taught in the first *mishna* of Bava Metzia and the law taught in an apparently “identical” case in Bava Batra 34b.

In our *mishna* we are taught that two people who are holding a garment and each person claims that he bought the entire garment, or found the garment first, they divide the garment equally after making an oath of Rabbinical origin. However, in Bava Batra a case of two people claiming ownership of a boat is discussed, and the law in that case is “*kol d’alim gavar*” (literally “whoever is stronger wins”, which is explained in various manners by the Rishonim in that *sugya*) — but not that the court rules that they divide the boat equally. What’s the difference between this case and the case when they both hold a garment? Tosefot explains that when the claimers are in possession of the disputed item it is different, since “It is assumed that whatever is in one’s possession is his.” Being that they both are holding the garment and are both in possession of it — unlike the boat — they divide it equally.

• Bava Metzia 2a

Rav Nachman and Rav Chisda said, “When one seizes money from a debtor on behalf of a particular creditor, his collection is not valid — since it is detrimental to the remainder of the other creditors.”

• Bava Metzia 10a

Rav Yitzchak said, “It is the nature of a person to frequently feel for his wallet of money to check that he still has it.”

The *gemara* cites this teaching of Rav Yitzchak regarding human behavior to explain why we are taught that a finder of lost money may keep it for himself. Why shouldn’t he be concerned with the possibility that the person who lost the money may not be aware that it fell from him, and therefore did not actually consciously give up hope of getting the lost money back? (The halacha is according to Abayei who requires a “conscious” giving up of hope, as opposed to Rava who accepts an “assumed” giving up of hope had the loser known that he lost the money in order to rule “finders keepers”.)

Years ago, when I was sitting near a great Rabbi in Jerusalem who was teaching Torah to our group of students, I noticed that he was reaching inside his suit jacket quite often and seemed to be feeling his heart. I was worried that he wasn’t well, and asked him after the lecture if he was feeling okay. He replied, “Baruch Hashem”, he was feeling fine. When I explained that I was concerned due his frequent reaching inside his jacket, he said, “Today I am carrying a wallet inside my jacket, and the *gemara* says that it is the way of a person to frequently feel for his wallet.” He concluded: “I want to be considered a person!”

• Bava Metzia 21b

Rava said, “The obligation to return a lost object to a person who claims and describes the object that he lost with proper ‘signs’ is a Torah obligation.”

There is both a positive mitzvah and a “negative command” to return a lost object to its owner, as the verses state, “You shall return it to him” and “You shall not ignore it”. (See Devarim 22:1-3)

The *gemara* asks if the obligation to return the lost object based on *simanim* (signs that identify the object) is of Torah origin or is a Rabbinical decree. Rava explains that it is of Torah origin since there is a verse that teaches to return the lost object to one who gives proper signs: “It shall be with you until your fellow person seeks it out” (Dev. 22:2). “Would I ever think

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to return it to someone who *doesn't* seek it out?" asks Rava rhetorically. Rather, the words in the verse "*ad drosh achicha oto*" need to be understood in a manner that is different than at first glance. The intent of these words is that the finder "seeks out and checks out" the person who claims he lost it, by demanding proper identification of the object. In this way the finder is certain that he is not giving the lost object to a fraud, but that in fact he is returning the lost object to its true owner.

• Bava Metzia 28a

We learn in beraita: "There is no part of Torah study which is as valuable as gemara."

Rashi elucidates the extra-special value of *gemara* study stemming from the fact that the *gemara* explains the *mishnayot* and reconciles the apparent conflicts between them.

• Bava Metzia 33a

Rav Kahana said, "A person prefers to have one 'kav' of his own produce to nine 'kavim' belonging to someone else."

This is one explanation cited in the *gemara* on our *daf* to explain the statement of the Tana Kama in the *mishna*: "If one gives his fruit to another person to guard them, even if they begin to rot the guard may not touch (sell) them." Rav Kahana reasons that since the owner personally toiled to succeed in bringing them into existence, the fruits that he produced are especially dear to him. Therefore, he would prefer having *them* rather than "nine times" such items that came from someone else. (Rashi)

(A tangential note: The word "*kav*" is a measure mentioned in the Torah in Melachim II 6:25. It is equal to four "*lug*", and is somewhat more than a liter in volume. The measure of a "*revi'it*" that we often speak about as the size of a "kiddush cup", or the amount of liquid drink that requires an "after-blessing", is one-quarter of a *lug*, or one-sixteenth of a *kav*.)

• Bava Metzia 38a

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

THE SEVEN SPECIES — FRUIT OF THE LAND

“For the L-rd, your G-d, brings you to a good land a land of wheat and barley, of grape and fig and pomegranate; a land of oil-rich olive and sweet date.” *Devarim* 8:7-8

This is how the Torah introduces the seven species of grain and fruit with which Eretz Yisrael is blessed.

These species are mentioned in a number of places throughout Tanach. In many cases there is a comparison between them and our people to whom G-d gave this Land.

Our Sages (*Mesechta Succah* 5b) even saw in these seven species hints to the various measurements of substance and time which play a crucial role in halachic matters.

We pay special tribute to G-d after consuming any of these species by making a special blessing, different from the

one we make after all other food and drink. Whether it is the *birkat hamazon* (grace after meals) we say after eating bread made from wheat or barley and their three sub-species, or the condensed version (*m'ein shalosh*) said after partaking of cake, wine or the rest of the species, we offer thanks to G-d not only for the food but also for the Land with which it is identified.

Regardless of whether these species grow in Eretz Yisrael or elsewhere, this special blessing is made simply because a species which is described in the Torah as one of the blessings of Eretz Yisrael. This sets these species apart from other types of food, just as the Torah sets the Land and the Jewish People apart from the rest of the world.

This is the ultimate expression of our people's love of the Land.



Nitzavim

THERE SHOULD BE NO DOUBT

This section of the Torah begins with the renewal of the Covenant between G-d and the Jewish People, which first took place at Mount Sinai 40 years earlier. Here, Moshe emphasizes that the entire nation is gathered together for that renewal: "...the heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers...all the men of Israel, your small children, your women and your proselytes...from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water." By contrast, in the description of the first covenant, the Torah states that "the people" accepted the covenant, but individual groups are not specified.

The difference can be explained as follows: In Nitzavim, Moshe is reminding them that they have seen a wide variety of idolatries in Egypt, Midian, Moav and the kingdoms of Sichon and Og. They have encountered individuals of great wisdom and understanding. As a result he cautions them, "There may be among you individuals who, deep inside, have been influenced by these experiences, contacts and ideas, and may have doubts about your commitment to the Torah." Moshe did not want these issues to fester in private. Rather, he wanted them to be aired in public so that he could remove these doubts from their minds.

The first words of this Parsha are: "You are standing today, all of you, before G-d." The Hebrew for standing — *nitzavim* — connotes a gathering for debate, discussion and argument. The same word is used several other times in the Torah with the same connotation. Moshe's intent was clear. Everyone, regardless of age, status or level of learning, was encouraged to voice his or her opinions and doubts publicly, before G-d and Moshe. Moshe was eager to listen, respond, and convince them of the truth. Moshe knew that there were doubts and issues. He did not want the people to feel that they were coerced into accepting the Covenant. He wanted them to choose it freely after having had their doubts addressed properly.

If Moshe was concerned about the doubts of a nation that had just experienced 40 years of direct Providential guidance, and he encouraged debate and discussion, how much more relevant is his insight in today's world where the truth and relevance of the Torah is under unremitting assault!

Vayalech

COMMITMENT, BELIEF & BEHAVIOR

As the time of Moshe's death approaches, G-d says to him, "...the people will rise up and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the land... and they will forsake Me and annul My covenant...I will conceal My face

from them...and many evils and distresses will encounter them." Then G-d tells him that the people will repent and will say, "Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?" But, strangely enough, even after they have repented G-d says that they will not be forgiven — "But I will surely conceal My face on that day because of all the evil that they did, for they had turned to gods of others."

All the commentators are puzzled by G-d's refusal to accept the repentance of the nation. Abarbanel offers a unique insight into the behavior of the people that is certainly relevant today as well. He says that the people were guilty of two transgressions:

1. The idolatrous practice of serving other gods.
2. Drifting away from the Covenant and their essential connection to G-d.

When the nation was punished as a result of these transgressions they repented by reaffirming their connection to G-d and the Covenant but did not give up their idolatrous practices. They felt that they could serve G-d in a manner of a 'partnership' with idolatrous practices. However, G-d makes it clear that this misconception is even more egregious than moving away from their Covenant with G-d in the first place. Therefore, G-d says that he will *surely* conceal His face from them.

This misconception has been repeated throughout Jewish history. One cannot separate commitment, belief and attachment from specific behavior. One's attachment to G-d and Torah cannot be in 'partnership' with practices that are antithetical to the Torah.

Ha'azinu

DIVINE CONCERN FOR THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Abarbanel relates that this Parsha consists of 6 separate sections:

1. General introduction
2. The benefits that G-d has granted to the Jewish People
3. The transgressions of the Jewish People
4. The punishments that will follow these transgressions
5. G-d's initial intention to annihilate the Jewish People
6. Consolation and G-d's revenge against the enemies of the Jewish People

In reference to G-d's benefits, Chapter 32 verse 6 alludes to four specific types of kindness: "Is He not your *Father*, your *Master*? Has he not *created* you and set you up

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ABARBANEL on the Parsha

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as a firm *foundation*? The verses that follow proceed to explain this verse:

1. 'Your Father' is a reference to the fact that G-d is the ultimate father. Just as He created the universe, He also created Mankind. This is what is meant in verse 7, "Remember the days of yore, and understand the years of generation after generation." G-d tells us to trace back through human history all the way to its very beginning and to recognize Him as Mankind's ultimate Creator.

2. 'Your Master' is a reference to the Exodus from Egypt, when G-d 'acquired' us as His people. Even though succeeding generations did not experience the Exodus, verse 7 continues, "Ask your father and he will relate it to you, and your elders and they will tell you."

3. 'Has he not created you' is a reference to the Torah as a possession of the Jewish People. Verse 8 relates that G-d granted each of the nations of the world its particular portion. But the Jewish People received 'G-d's portion'. This refers to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, as it says in verse 10, "He discovered him in a desert land...He granted him discernment." By giving us the Torah, G-d has 'created' the Jewish People, a new creation, unique and distinct from the other nations.

4. The final kindness is giving the Land of Israel to the Jewish People. This is the meaning of verse 13, "He will make him ride on the heights of the Land." This refers to the conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel.

In Chapter 32, verse 13 G-d's concern for the Jewish People is compared to an eagle's concern for her young. A mother eagle shows concern for her young in four specific ways, as the verse says: "He was like an eagle arousing its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings and taking them; carrying them on its limbs."

1. When the eagle approaches the nest, it signals with a

distinctive whistling sound, so as not to startle the young.

2. The eagle does not descend suddenly on the young, lest she injure them with her talons. Rather, she hovers and descends slowly.

3. When she wants to move the young, she takes the entire nest at once in order to minimize the disturbance.

4. When she carries them, she doesn't carry them on any protruding feathers. Rather, she carries them on her body to minimize the risk of falling.

This is exactly how G-d dealt with the Jewish People during the Exodus. As the verse states, "You have seen what I have done to the Egyptians and I carried you on the wings of eagles."

1. When G-d decided to take us out of Egypt, He first sent Moshe and Aaron who functioned as an initial signal.

2. G-d did not immediately demonstrate His strength and power, as He did at Mount Sinai. Rather, like the eagle, He 'hovered' over Egypt.

3. Just like the eagle, who takes the entire nest at once, G-d took out the entire nation, with all of its possessions, at one time.

4. G-d prevented the Egyptians from harming us by placing the Clouds of Glory between us and the Egyptian army.

Finally, verse 12 states: "G-d alone guided them, and no other power was with them." Just as the eagle can carry its young on its back, since there is no other bird that flies higher and could threaten them from above, so too there were no other powers or intermediaries other than G-d Himself who could provide these benefits to the Jewish People.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

Because of our sins, G-d wanted to decree complete destruction on the Jewish People. What held His Hand, so to speak, was that the unbelievers would not see this as Divine retribution but rather as result of their own strength and power.

Thus it was really a great kindness that G-d delivered us into the hands of unbelievers, for it was this that prevented the destruction of Yisrael.

• Sources: Rabbi Simcha Zissel Zaleznik in *Iturei Torah*

Rosh Hashana

BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

U'NETANE TOKEF

From: Phillip

*Dear Rabbi,
There is clearly a lot of trepidation and enthusiasm surrounding the U'netane Tokef liturgy in the Rosh Hashana prayer service. I'm wondering what it means and why it seems to be treated with extra-special reverence.*

Dear Phillip,

Indeed the *U'netane tokef* prayer is considered to be one of the more beautiful and moving *piyutim* poems in the liturgy of the High Holy days.

While it is beyond our scope to translate the prayer word for word, it is amply available in translation in all standard High Holiday prayer books. Some of its major themes include: The awesome holiness of the day; G-d's judgment of the entire world such that even the angels tremble with fear; His precise reckoning of every deed for reward or punishment; who and how many people will be born or die during the year, and how; the power of repentance, prayer and charity to mollify Divine judgment; and the frailty of mankind and the greatness of G-d and His mercy for those who repent.

According to tradition, *U'netane tokef* is a very old prayer, dating to the early Middle Ages, c. 1100 CE. It introduces the *kedusha* of *musaf* for the High Holiday prayers, and is chanted responsively while the Torah ark is open and the congregants are standing in awe and anticipation of sanctifying G-d's name together with the angels.

In addition to the very moving and heart-piercing words and message of the prayer, the story behind its composition and inclusion into the liturgy greatly adds to the emotional

reverence and trepidation with which it is recited, chanted and tearfully offered before G-d.

According to tradition (brought in Ohr Zarua on Rosh Hashana), a great and pious Torah scholar of his times, Rabbi Amnon of Meins, was pressed upon by the local ruler to convert to Christianity, but to no avail. One day, when the ruler's pressure was particularly pernicious, Rabbi Amnon requested to deliberate on the matter for three days, intending to push him off. Afterward, he bitterly regretted giving the impression of a possibility that he might deny G-d, so he fasted the three days and refused to appear until the ruler had him brought to him by force. There, he pleaded that as punishment, the tongue which expressed doubt in G-d be cut out. But the ruler, insisting that Rabbi Amnon spoke well, ordered that he be dismembered limb by limb for not coming forward to convert — until he would concede. However, Rabbi Amnon was steadfast until, maimed and mutilated, he was sent home with his severed limbs at his side.

This occurred shortly before Rosh Hashana, and on that holy day Rabbi Amnon asked to be brought to the synagogue together with his severed limbs. When the cantor neared the recitation of *kedusha* for *musaf*, Rabbi Amnon cried out the *U'netane tokef* prayer which he had composed in his misery and repentance. As he concluded it, he breathed his last breath and expired. Three days later he appeared in a dream to Rabbi Klonimus ben Meshullam, one of the great scholars and liturgists of Mainz, taught him the prayer and bade him to include it in the text of the High Holiday services. Thus *U'netane tokef* became a part of the standard liturgy, and this moving, tragic story of penitence serves as backdrop to its inspiring recitation.

Yom Kippur

REPENT WHILE ALIVE

From: Mattis

*Dear Rabbi,
Nobody's perfect, but as people get older they get better. Why repent when we're young and we're still likely to do wrong? Wouldn't it be better to wait till we're older and naturally stop transgressing?*

Dear Mattis,

This reasoning may seem sound, but it's totally wrong and false. Firstly, nobody knows when they'll die. So if one waits, it may be too late. Secondly, there's no reason to think people become better with age. On the contrary, most people become even more fixed in their ways.

The following Midrashic teaching illustrates the first reason.

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continued from page ten

In his youth, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish was a bandit. But he returned to G-d wholeheartedly, and for the rest of his life he was engaged in the study of Torah and the practice of *mitzvot*, and his *teshuvah* was accepted. The Midrash relates that on the day of his death, two of Rabbi Shimon's erstwhile friends who had remained robbers all their lives also died. While Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish was granted entry to Eden, the other two were consigned to the abyss. They cried, "G-d, is there favoritism before You?" G-d replied, "He repented before he died." They retorted, "Spare us punishment and we'll also repent!" G-d answered, "Now it's too late. *Teshuva* is only possible till the day of death." (Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 43)

The Midrash explains this with a parable. To what might

the matter be compared? To a person who departs to sea. If he fails to bring along bread and water, he will not find them at sea. Or to a person who traverses a desert. Should he fail to make provision before departing, he'll find no food or drink in the wilderness. Likewise, if a person fails to do *teshuvah* during his lifetime, it is no longer possible for him to do so after death.

Our Sages taught (Shabbat 153a), "Rabbi Eliezer said, 'Repent one day before your death'. His disciples asked him, 'Does a person then know on what day he'll die?' So he said to them, 'All the more so. Let him repent today lest he die tomorrow, so that all his days may pass in *teshuvah!*'"

Succot

JOY ON SUCCOT

From: Anna

Dear Rabbi,
Would you please elaborate on the *mitzvah* of rejoicing on Succot?

Dear Anna,

When the Temple stood there was a special ceremony of rejoicing called "*simchat beit hashoeva*" which was associated with the drawing of water for the purpose of the special Succot water-libations, and involved dancing by firelight throughout the night. All of Israel rejoiced to a point where Divine inspiration flowed down upon the participants celebrating in the Temple courtyard, and many experienced prophecy.

Now that the Temple is in ruins as a result of our sins, we have neither the altar, nor sacrifices, nor libations. Nevertheless we are commanded to *rejoice* in the festival of Succot, as in the verse, "And you shall rejoice in your Festival" (Deut. 16:14). Therefore it is customary in many Jewish communities to gather during the nights of Succot in the synagogues to sing and dance together in memory of the *simchat beit hashoeva*. This is usually accompanied by live music, attended by men, women and children, and continues

into the wee hours of the morning. Customarily, the festivities are preceded with a recital of the fifteen "Songs of Ascent" composed by David in Psalms 120-134. These correspond to the fifteen steps in the Sanctuary upon which the Levites stood as they played music and sang during the *simchat beit hashoeva* of Temple times.

Another form of rejoicing on the holiday is through festive meals. However, when one eats and drinks, he is obligated to provide for the needs of the stranger, the orphan, the widow and the poor (ibid). One who indulges in food and drink with his family but does not invite the lonely and the needy to join in the festivities is not considered as "rejoicing in the holiday" but rather "rejoicing in his belly". In addition, while making festive meals in the name of rejoicing in the holiday, he must not be drawn through food and drink to frivolity and levity. Indulgence and intoxication bring foolishness, and not the type of pure and holy joy appropriate for the holiness of the festival. Rather, one must direct the pleasure of the meals to delighting in G-d and the *mitzvot* by sharing words of Torah at the table, singing songs of praise to G-d and acting in a way becoming of the holy succah.

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THE BOOKS OF LIFE AND DEATH

BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

Rabbi Kruspedai said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: Three books are opened on Rosh Hashana. One [book] for the completely wicked, one for the completely righteous, and one for the intermediate. The completely righteous are written and sealed right away for life, the completely wicked are written and sealed right away for death, and the intermediates are held in balance from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are written for life, and if they don't merit, they are written for death.

(Tractate Rosh Hashana 16b)

At face value, the above *gemara* is problematic. After all, we see many righteous people who don't live out the year, and many wicked people who do. How should we understand this *gemara*? Tosefot addresses this question, and answers that the *gemara* here is referring to life in the World-to-Come — and not to life in this world.

This explanation answers our original question on the *gemara*. However, according to this new understanding, we are faced with a few other questions. First of all, the *gemara* tells us in many places that the judgment of Rosh Hashana is with regards to *this* world as opposed to the World-to-Come. As the *gemara* says: *Rav Nachman Bar Yitzchak said regarding judgment, it (the verse) says, "From the beginning of the year until the end of year," (this means) from the beginning of the year there's a judgment about what will be at the end (of the year) (Rosh Hashana 8a)*. There are also other inferences elsewhere, such as *"The income of a person (for the upcoming year) is set from Rosh Hashana"* (Beitza 16a), that clearly indicate that the judgment of Rosh Hashana is with regards to *this* world. How are we to understand Tosefot's answer that the judgment of Rosh Hashana is for the World to Come?

Furthermore, why is it that a person is judged for his share in the World-to-Come on Rosh Hashana? After all, as long as a person is alive he can lose his good deeds by regretting having done them, or, conversely, rid himself of his bad deeds by doing *teshuva*. Wouldn't it make more sense to delay one's judgment for the World-to-Come until after a person dies? What, then, is the purpose of being judged for the World-to-Come once a year?

Chazal tell us that a person's spiritual standing has the power to determine how G-d will deal with him in this world. For example, at times G-d may let a wicked person live out a prosperous year to repay him for the good deeds he performed in this world so that he will be left without reward in the World-to-Come (Kiddushin 40b); as it says in the *pasuk*: *And He [G-d] repays His enemies to their faces in order to destroy them (Devarim 7:10)*. Similarly, G-d may decree that a righteous person should suffer for his transgressions in the upcoming year so that in the World-to-

Come he will have only merits. The opposite may be true as well. At times G-d may decide that a wicked person should suffer for his evil deeds while a righteous person should prosper in order to allow him to continue in his righteous ways. All these decisions are made by G-d's detailed, meticulous, and mysterious calculations. (See *Mishnat Rabbi Aharon, Ma'amarim v'sichot Mussar* II, p. 179, "Shelosh Sefarim".)

The amount of spiritual help that is given, or the lack thereof, is also determined based on one's spiritual standing. For example, G-d may save a righteous person from accidental sin, or give him opportunities to improve himself even more, while on the other hand making it harder for the evil person to do *teshuva*; as the *gemara* says: *In the way that a person wants to go is where he is led*. Furthermore a person's spiritual standing can also determine the outcome of a person's actions. For example, *Chazal* tell us that when G-d wants to bring good things into the world He uses the righteous as the conduit through which the good will flow. The same is true about the opposite, as the *Gemara* says: *From the wicked sprout wickedness (Maccot 10b)*.

Based on the above, the Ba'al HaLeshem says that the reason why there is judgment on Rosh Hashana for one's share in the World-to-Come is because the results of that judgment affect what the person will get *in this world* for the upcoming year. Based on this we can understand why it is relevant to be judged for the World-to-Come on Rosh Hashana. Really, as implied in many places, the main judgment of Rosh Hashana is for life in the upcoming year *in this world*. However, for that to be determined, G-d first judges whether we will merit having a place in the World-to-Come. Based on the outcome of that judgment, G-d then decides our fate for the year to come in this world. This is the essence of the judgment that takes place on Rosh Hashana.

May we all merit being written for life in this world and in the World-to-Come, and live to see the coming of Mashiach speedily in our days.

YOM KIPPUR, DAY OF REST

BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

In describing the prohibitions of the day, the Rambam says: There is a positive commandment to *rest* from work on the tenth day of the seventh month, as it says, “a Shabbat of Shabbatot it shall be to you...”

Anything that one is prohibited to do on Shabbat one is prohibited to do on Yom Kippur...

There is another mitzvah on Yom HaKippurim: to rest from eating and drinking... it is (also) a mitzvah to rest from these (washing, anointing, wearing shoes, and marital relations), the same way that one rests from eating and drinking. (*Hilchat Shevitat Asor 1:1-5*)

Being that every word the Rambam writes is precisely and accurately chosen, we must question the Rambam’s use of the peculiar term of “resting” from eating and drinking. After all, the Rambam could have simply written that it is prohibited to eat and drink on Yom Kippur.

Furthermore, the title that the Rambam chose for the *halachot* that pertain to Yom Kippur is “*Shevitat Asor*” (the resting of the tenth). Once again, we see that the Rambam opted for the term “rest” over the term “prohibition.” What lesson can we learn from this understanding of “resting” on Yom Kippur?

As is evident from the above, the Rambam first uses the term “rest” when it comes to refraining from work on Yom Kippur. The Rambam then says that the same way one rests from *melacha* (work) on Yom Kippur, he is meant to rest from eating and drinking, washing, anointing, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations. Since the Rambam compares resting from *melacha* on Yom Kippur to Shabbat, and also because the *pasuk* refers to Yom Kippur as “Shabbat Shabbaton,” we first need to delve into the idea of resting on Shabbat to understand the essence of resting on Yom Kippur.

Describing the prohibition of working on Shabbat, the Torah says, “Six days you shall work and accomplish all your work.” The Midrash elaborates on the *pasuk* and says, “When Shabbat comes, it shall be in your eyes as if all your work is done so that you shouldn’t think about work” (see Rashi to Shemot 20:9). On Shabbat it is not enough to refrain from work. Rather, one must see all of his work as if it is already done. This means that the ideal way of fulfilling the mitzvah of resting on Shabbat is not through overcoming the urge to work, but rather, it is through being so involved spiritually that work is no longer on one’s mind. This is the definition of true rest with regards to Shabbat. What can we

learn from this idea with regards to Yom Kippur?

The commentaries explain that one idea behind the five prohibitions on Yom Kippur is to help us separate ourselves from physicality so that we can do real *teshuva* without being dragged down by our physical lusts. Just like one is obligated to rest from *melacha* performance on Shabbat by immersing himself in the spiritual, one is obligated to rest from physical indulgence by becoming spiritually elevated on Yom Kippur. Furthermore, similar to the idea of not even thinking about work on Shabbat, on Yom Kippur it is not enough to refrain from eating and drinking. One must try to reach the level where he is so far removed from physicality that eating and drinking are no longer on his mind. This is what the Rambam means when he says that one must rest from eating and drinking on Yom Kippur.

It follows from the above that a person who spends Yom Kippur continuously thinking about how hungry and tired he is, has, in a way, missed the point of the day. To be concerned with one’s physical needs on Yom Kippur is the exact opposite of what should engulf a person on this day. In a practical sense, though, we must still ask: How is it physically possible not to feel hunger at all when one has not eaten for over 24 hours?

Every person has times when he is so focused on the task at hand that he forgets his physical needs altogether. This can happen when one is engrossed in a good book, is in the midst of a conversation with someone he admires, is faced with a certain feeling of stress or pressure, or is simply in awe of a grand sight, and the concentration on the task at hand simply overshadows all thoughts of bodily desires. This is where we should be on Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur our entire beings have to be so engrossed in the spiritual nature of the day that our physical bodily needs should not even be felt. Though this is a lofty level to attain, we should still be striving to reach it since this is how we can truly fulfill the mitzvah of “resting” from physicality on this holy day.

• Sources: based on *Avnei Nezer; Pachad Yitzchak, Yom Kippur, p. 44-45; Ohr Gedalyahu, Moadim, Yom Hakippurim b’bechinat Shabbat;*

Rav Moshe Shternbach shlita’s Mo’adim u’Zmanim.

This is also based on a shiur from Rav Moshe Shapiro, shlita.

AVINU MALKEINU - OUR FATHER OUR KING

Though the long year may take us to far-off places, like a son or daughter returning home we all seem to return to begin the New Year together with G-d. From Rosh Hashana through Yom Kippur is one of the most special and intense periods of the calendar year. On the one hand it is a time of celebration and rejoicing. Yet it is also a time of great fear and trepidation – a time of Divine judgment.

On the first Rosh Hashana, life was given to Mankind. Yet on that very same day it was also taken away. And so, from that faithful day we are judged each year. Life itself, the most precious of gifts — though granted to many — will be taken from some. The “books” of the righteous and upright are opened. The books of *parnasa* and sustenance are opened. Will we merit G-d’s favor, or will we be judged harshly as a result of our transgressions?

It is well known that during the Rosh Hashana and the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah, the Ten Days of Repentance, G-d sits as King on His throne of judgment. Now, if even a righteous *tzaddik* cannot stand before the King free of transgression, certainly we, the “common people”, should be fearful. Our very lives are weighing in the balance. Wouldn’t it be nice to feel the warm embrace of a loving father in this time of need? As we stand in judgment before “*Hamelech Hamishpat* - The King of Judgment” who will

hear our cry for help?

One of the well-known prayers recited during the High Holiday period is “*Avinu Malkeinu*”, “Our Father Our King. A father generally elicits emotions of love, while a king elicits fear and trepidation. Thus, the question arises, what is the purpose of referring to G-d as both father and king, two seemingly opposite ideas, in one statement?

G-d is our King, yet He is also our Father. So we call out to our Father in Heaven to be there in our time of need. In this way we hope to temper G-d’s attribute of strict judgment with love and mercy so that G-d will look at us with the loving eyes of a father as He judges us. The juxtaposition of father and king can thus be seen as representing a fusion of these two opposite attributes, with kindness and mercy dominating.

This is also why we blow the shofar during this time. It represents the cry of the heart, which is beyond words. Within the shofar lies the power to cause G-d to rise from His seat of harsh judgment, and sit on His throne of mercy, going beyond the strict letter of the law and judging us with favor and mercy. May we all merit G-d’s warm embrace this year as we stand before Him in judgment. Amen.

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:

אחינו כל בית ישראל

“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.”

OF OATHS AND PROMISES

BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

The Torah exhorts man to “keep his word” and identifies two types of verbal utterances which must be followed: a *neder* and a *shevuah* (Numbers 30:3). The word *neder* is commonly translated as a “promise”, while *shevuah* is commonly translated as an “oath”. This rendering implies that the two words are basically synonymous, with a *shevuah* being a more serious type of *neder*. However, the Talmud (*Nedarim* 2b) understands that *neder* and *shevuah* are two different types of verbal expressions, and each must be dealt with on its own terms. In fact, the Mishnah has two separate tractates in two separate Mishnaic Orders which deal with these laws: *Nedarim* is in the Order of *Nashim* and *Shevuot* is in the Order of *Nezikin*.

A *shevuah* is an oral statement that generally invokes the name of G-d, and focuses on the person who makes the statement. These statements may take positive or negative forms, and may refer to either the past or the future. For example, in a *shevuah* a man says, “I swear I will do such-and-such”, “I swear I will not do such-and-such”. Similarly: “I swear I did do such-and-such”, or “I swear I did not do such-and-such”. Additionally, in the course of civil litigation a Jewish court may impose two more types of *shevuot*: One type of *shevuah* is imposed on a litigant in order to substantiate the veracity of his argument(s), and the other type of *shevuah* is imposed on potential witnesses who were subpoenaed by the court, but claim they have nothing to testify. All of these *shevuot* must be fulfilled or must refer to something that is already true.

There is also an illegal type of *shevuah* outlawed by the third of the Ten Commandments. That commandment forbids one from taking G-d’s name in vain, and refers to four types of vain oaths: Swearing about something which is patently false (“I swear that this marble column is gold”), swearing about something which is blatantly obvious (“I swear that the heavens are the heavens” and other examples of reflexive redundancies), swearing to violate the law of the Torah (“I swear that I will not wear *tefillin*”), and swearing to do something impossible (“I swear I will refrain from sleeping for three full days”).

A *neder* is a verbal declaration which creates a halachic status shift, and focuses on an *object* instead of on the per-

son making the declaration. For example, a *neder* can be used to create a prohibition from deriving benefit from another thing or person, or from eating a particular foodstuff. The mechanics of a *neder* essentially renders the object of one’s verbal declaration into quasi-consecrated property, thereby marking it as forbidden. In other words, a *neder* mimics the procedure for making an object into the holy property of the Temple. This type of *neder* is called a *konam* (a purposefully bowdlerized form of the word *korban* — sacrifice). Case in point: If one makes a *neder* that he will not smoke, he has essentially said, “I promise that benefits derived from cigarettes shall be forbidden to me, just like the use of a consecrated animal is forbidden to me”. Indeed, when one promises to donate a sacrifice or other component to the Holy Temple, that pledge is also called a *neder*.

Another type of *neder* is called a *nedava*, which is essentially one statement that includes the promise to offer a sacrifice (sometimes only implicitly), plus the designation of a specific animal as said sacrifice. E.g., if one points to his ram and says, “This ram shall be a burnt-offering”, he is essentially obligating himself to bring a burnt-offering, and is also designating *that* ram as the consecrated item.

In short, both a *neder* and a *shevuah* refer to oral pronouncements that have legal standing in the Torah, but their points of foci are on different aspects. The *neder* focuses on a specific object, rendering forbidden that object or the benefits which can be derived from it. The *shevuah* focuses on the party pronouncing the oral declaration, and obligates him to do or not do a specific action. All in all, man’s power to create these types of legal realities by way of words shows the influence and importance granted to the concept of speech. Indeed, King Solomon said, “*Death and life are in the hands of the tongue*” (Proverbs 18:21). Because of the gravity of such matters, it is customary to render null and void all *nedarim* and *shevuot* on the eve of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur in order to save people from potentially violating their own verbal utterances.

ROSH HASHANA Q&A ?

1. Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?
2. Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tisrei is Rosh Hashana?
3. We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?
4. What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?
5. Which Book of *Tanach* does the beginning of the *Tashlich* prayer come from?
6. What three barren women were 'remembered' by G-d on Rosh Hashana?
7. A person's yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashana, except for three types of expenses. What are they?
8. We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: "Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah..." What was Abraham's prayer on Mount Moriah?
9. Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashana, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?
10. What halacha applies to the *shehechyanu* blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashana which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

ROSH HASHANA Q&A!

Answers to Rosh Hashana's Questions!

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

1. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah.
 - *Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*
2. Nowhere. The Torah calls it "a day of shofar blowing." (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai).
 - *Bamidbar 29:1*
3. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which G-d has blessed..." (*Bereishis 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this "field" as an apple orchard.
 - *Ta'anis 29b, Biyur Hagra*
4. "Blessed are You... who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar," and the *shehechyanu* blessing.
 - *Orach Chaim 581:2*
5. The Book of Micha (7:18-20).
6. Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashana it was decreed that these barren women would bear children.
 - *Tractate Rosh Hashanah 10b*
7. Expenses for Shabbat, Yom Tov, and the cost of one's children's Torah education.
 - *Ba'er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1*
8. He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations (*Onkelos 22:14*). Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac.
 - *Rashi 22:13*
9. Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The "two-day festival" arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashanah. Since Rosh Hashana occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.
10. On the second night of Rosh Hashana it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the *shehechyanu* blessing. Thus, the *shehechyanu* blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no *shehechyanu* blessing be said on the second night of Rosh Hashana.)
 - *Taz 600:2*

1. Passover commemorates the going out from Egypt. Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah. What historical event can Yom Kippur be said to commemorate?
2. For what kinds of sins does Yom Kippur not atone?
3. What should someone do if the person he wronged does not forgive him the first time?
4. Why is the vidui confession included during the mincha prayer the afternoon before Yom Kippur?
5. On Yom Kippur we refrain from: Working, eating, drinking, washing, anointing, family relations and wearing leather shoes. Which three of these prohibitions are more severe than the others?
6. In what two ways does the prohibition against eating food on Yom Kippur differ from the prohibition against eating pork the entire year?
7. Who wrote the prayer "Unetaneh Tokef" said during the chazan's repetition of musaf?
8. Why do we read the book of Yona on Yom Kippur?
9. In what two ways does havdalah after Yom Kippur differ from havdalah after Shabbos?
10. Ideally, what mitzvah should one begin immediately after Yom Kippur?

Answers to Yom Kippur Questions!

1. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai on the tenth of Tishrei with the second set of Tablets, signifying forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. Yom Kippur can be said to commemorate this event, the first national day of forgiveness for the Jewish People.
2. Sins committed against other people, including hurting someone's feelings. Yom Kippur does not atone for these sins until the perpetrator gains forgiveness from the victim himself. (Orach Chaim 606:1)
3. He should try at least two more times to gain forgiveness. (Orach Chaim 606:1)
4. Lest one choke while eating the pre-Yom Kippur meal and die without atonement, or lest one become intoxicated and unable to concentrate on the prayers at night. (Mishna Berura 607:1)
5. Eating, drinking, working. (Mishna Krisus 1:1)
6. Although any amount is forbidden, eating on Yom Kippur is not punishable by a Sanhedrin until one has eaten food equal in volume to the size of a date. Eating pork, on the other hand, is punishable for eating even an olive-sized piece, which is smaller than a date. (Mishna Berura 612:1)
Eating on Yom Kippur incurs the punishment of kares - spiritual excision, whereas eating pork does not.
7. "Unetaneh Tokef" was written by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany about 1000 years ago.
8. The repentance of the people of Ninveh serves as an inspiration to us to repent, and shows us that repentance can overturn a Divine decree. (Shelah Hakadosh)
9. After Yom Kippur, the blessing over spices is omitted from havdalah. Also, the source of the flame used for havdalah after Yom Kippur must be a fire kindled before Yom Kippur. (Orach Chaim 624:3,4)
10. Building the succa. (Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5)

גמר חתימה טובה

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SUCCOT — UTILIZING THE PHYSICAL

BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

The *gemara* tells us that according to Rabbi Eliezer the succah commemorates the Clouds of Glory that surrounded the Jewish People in the desert (Succah 11b). These clouds appeared for the first time in the month of Nissan when the Jewish people left Mitzrayim. The obvious question that is asked by the commentaries is: Why is the mitzvah to dwell in a succah commanded during the month of Tishrei instead of the month of Nissan, which is when the clouds appeared for the first time? (Tur, Orach Chaim 625; Vilna Gaon on Shir Hashirim 1:4)

The Midrash explains that from every part of Creation Adam HaRishon was the only one whose makeup was a mixture of the spiritual and physical worlds. His body was made from lowly dirt, while his *neshama* (soul) came from the highest of places (see Rashi to Bereishet 2:7). What was expected of Adam HaRishon, and what is expected of each and every one of us today, was to utilize this unique makeup through enabling the *neshama* to influence the body in such a way that the body also became holy. This is precisely why almost every single act that we do is dictated by halacha. From eating and sleeping, to even the act of going to the bathroom, everything is guided by halacha. This is also why, other than a handful of *mitzvot*, all of the 613 commandments require a physical action to be done to fulfill them. All this is meant to enable us to refine everything physical to such an extent that it will also become spiritual (see Derech Hashem 1:3:7, 1:4:4, 1:4:7).

Based on this we can begin to understand why the mitzvah of dwelling in a succah is in the month of Tishrei, although the Clouds of Glory, which the succah represents, appeared for the first time in the month of Nissan. The Vilna Gaon explains that the Clouds of Glory were removed from the Jewish People after the sin of the golden calf that took place on the 17th of Tammuz. It took nearly three months, until the tenth of Tishrei, the day of Yom Kippur, to be forgiven for that sin. The following day, Moshe Rabbeinu instructed the people to bring the different materials needed to build the Mishkan. On the 11th, 12th, and the 13th of Tishrei, the people brought their gifts, and on the 14th the materials for the construction were brought to the worksite. The Clouds of Glory made their return on the 15th of Tishrei, the first day of Succot,

which is when the Jewish People finally began working on the Mishkan.

The Clouds of Glory were a sign of G-d's love for the Jewish People. Even though the Jewish People did *teshuvah* and were given a second chance on Yom Kippur when Moshe brought the second set of *luchot*, the Clouds didn't actually make their return until the people began to build the Mishkan, which was the intermediary through which G-d's presence could be tangibly felt in the physical world. The Jewish people's *teshuvah* was only completed when they began to use the physical world to create a dwelling place for the *Shechina* (the Divine Presence). That's why the Clouds of Glory returned then. According to this we dwell in the succah in Tishrei because that was the day when the Clouds of Glory returned and represented G-d's concern and love for us. It symbolically told the Jewish People that G-d was pleased with them (Vilna Gaon on Shir Hashirim 1:4).

The Cycle Repeats

This is also what we do every year during the holiday of Succot. Following Yom Kippur, the day on which we completely abstain from the physical world, is Succot, the holiday that is full of physicality. From the building material for the walls and *schach* of the succah to the *arba minim* (four species), the *mitzvot* of Succot all revolve around using a big spectrum of the physical world. Furthermore, the mitzvah of dwelling in the succah is also a very physical act. Firstly, the mitzvah of sitting in a succah is unusual in that it is done with the entire body. Additionally, the main mitzvah of dwelling in the succah consists of the physical acts of eating and sleeping in the succah (Orach Chaim 639:1).

The abstinence from physicality on Yom Kippur is meant to enable us to see the spiritual potential of our soul without the distortion caused by physical desires. However, this is not meant to be an end goal. On Succot we are meant to take the inspiration we received by being in touch with our souls, and begin to apply it to our bodies — and the physical world at large. Through all this we take the *teshuvah* of Yom Kippur one step further by uplifting the physical world through utilizing it correctly, thus fulfilling the reason for which we were created.

SUCCOT Q&A ?

1. According to the Torah, what three basic requirements define a material as valid for use as a succah roof?
2. If the succah causes discomfort (e.g., it's too cold) to the extent that under similar conditions you would leave your very own house, you are exempt from the mitzvah. Why?
3. What two things are forbidden to do outside of the succah all seven days of the festival?
4. What is the absolute minimum number of meals a person is required to eat in the succah during the seven-day holiday?
5. Besides referring to the tree and its fruit, what does the word "etrog" mean literally?
6. What is the minimum length of a lulav?
7. What is the maximum percentage a person is required to add to the purchase price of his etrog in order to obtain an etrog of greater beauty?
8. On the Shabbat that occurs during Succot, we read the Book of Kohelet, in which King Solomon refers to himself as "Kohelet." Why is King Solomon called Kohelet?
9. What prohibition could a person transgress simply by sitting in the succah on the eighth day of Succot?
10. We hold a tallit over the heads of the people who read the end of the Torah and the beginning of the Torah. Why?

SUCCOT Q&A!

Answers to Succot Questions!

1. It must grow from the ground, no longer be connected to the ground, and not be receptive to tumah (ritual defilement).
2. Because the commandment of living in a succah is to dwell in the succah for seven days the same way you dwell in your house the rest of the year. (*Mishna Berura 640:13*)
3. Eat (an 'established' meal) or sleep. (*Orach Chaim 639:2*)
4. One. Eating a meal in the succah the first night of Succot is a requirement. During the rest of the festival a person can eat 'snacks' which are not required to be eaten in a succah. (Outside Israel, one must eat a meal the second night of Succot as well. However, there is no requirement to live outside Israel!) (*Orach Chaim 639:3*)
5. Beauty. (*Ramban Vayikra 23:40*)
6. Its spine must be at least 4 tefachim (halachic hand-breadths).
7. 33.3% (*Orach Chaim 656:1*)
8. Because he gathered (*kihale*) vast wisdom, and because he, as king, gathered the nation on Succot after the Sabbatical year. (*Rashi, Kohelet 1:1*)
9. Bal Tosif - "Do not add to the *mitzvot*." The commandment to live in the succah applies for only seven days. To sit in the succah on the eighth day with intent to fulfill the mitzvah transgresses "bal tosif." (*Orach Chaim 666:1*)
10. It represents the wedding canopy, symbolizing that through the Torah we wed ourselves to G-d.

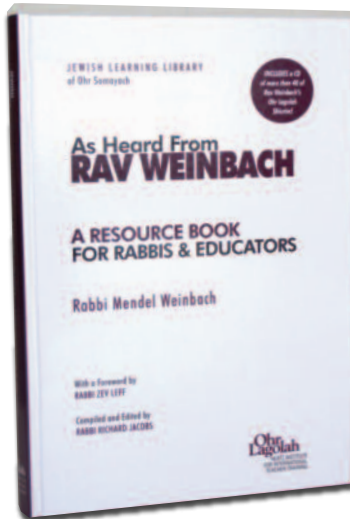
תג שמח

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Abarbanel offers several insights into the holiday of Succot and the succa itself. First of all, the temporary nature of the succa is a reminder of our temporary life on earth. The seven days of the festival correspond to the seven decades of the average lifespan. The number of bulls which were brought as sacrificial offerings decreases with each day of the festival. This is to remind us that each passing decade brings us closer to the inevitable end, and encourages us to make the best use of our time to develop our spiritual potential. The first and last days of the festival represent the first and last decades of life. In the first decade — the years of our youth — we revel in the delights and pleasures of the physical world. This is to remind us that we are not prohibited from enjoying those delights. However, in the last decade we are enjoined to make the physical world secondary to spiritual accomplishments. The eighth day, the separate festival of Shemini Atzeret, reminds us that if we have merited living into an eighth decade we have attained a special level of holiness and spiritual purity.

Abarbanel offers a unique insight into the deeper meaning of the four plant species which we use on Succot. The Torah prescribes that the citron, palm branch, willow and myrtle be held together on the first day of Succot. (According to

Rabbinical law they are held together on the intermediate days of the festival as well.) Each of these species, as they are named and described by the Torah, hints at the sweetness and pleasures of the physical world as previously indicated by the first decade of life. The citron is described as the “fruit of a beautiful tree” — which is pleasing to the eyes of all who gaze upon it. The palm tree is also beautiful and pleasing to the eye. The myrtle is described as the “branches of a braided tree”. The Hebrew word “*avot*” is normally translated as “braided” since on each branch there is a series of three leaves that grow closely together like a braid. Abarbanel, however, states that the word “*avot*” is actually derived from the word “*aveit*” which means fat or corpulent, and is a reference to the beautiful, dense arrangement of the leaves on each branch. Finally, the Hebrew word for the willow, “*arava*”, has the same root as the word “*arav*” which can mean pleasant and sweet. After describing the four species the Torah states immediately that “You shall celebrate it as a festival for G-d.” This is a clear indication that the pleasures and delights of the physical world are to be enjoyed only according to the parameters of the Torah in order to serve G-d properly.



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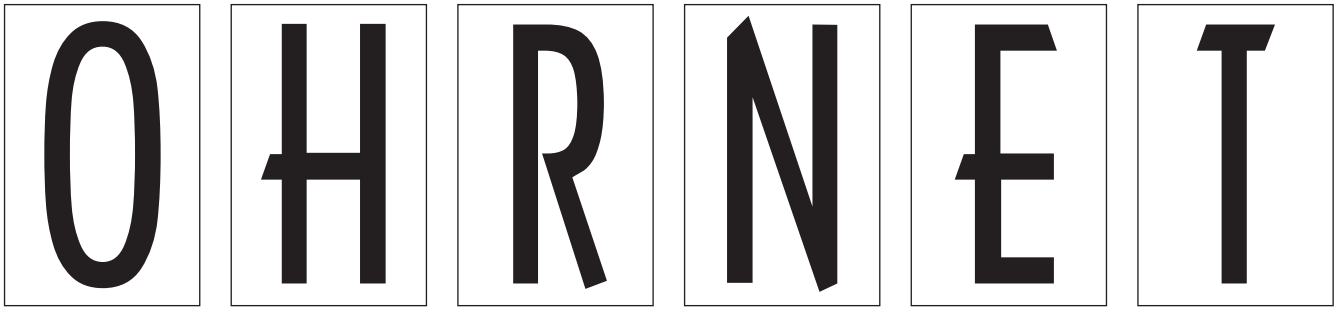
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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Bereishet

IDLE WORSHIP

“Let’s make man...” (1:26)

Our Sages teach, “Anyone haughty is like one who worships idols.” (Sotah 4) Ostensibly it’s difficult to see the connection between pride and idol worship, but with Rashi’s commentary in this week’s *Parsha* we can offer an answer:

The Torah says, “*Let’s make man...*”

From this verse, it sounds as though G-d had help when He created man, which is an absurd idea. Rashi addresses the problem: “*Although (the angels) did not assist G-d in man’s creation, and there is room for the heretics to claim that the Torah itself indicates that many gods participated in the creation of man, the verse did not refrain for teaching us proper*

conduct — to act with the trait of humility. The greater should consult and take permission from the lesser.”

By his behavior, a haughty person implies that he doesn’t believe that G-d used the word “We” to teach us this importance of humility, that the greater should ask the lesser. Therefore, a haughty person will understand the word *na’aseh* — “*Let’s make,*” — according to its more “obvious” meaning, that there exist multiple independent powers (G-d forbid!).

And the result of this trait of haughtiness is tantamount to idol worship.

• Sources: *Parshat Derachim in Mayana shel Torah*

Noach

SAVED FROM THE FLOOD

“A window you will make for the Ark...” (6:16)

The Mishna says the word in Hebrew for “ark” — *teva* — can also mean “a word.” The word for “window” — *tzohar* — can also mean “to shine.”

In other words, you can read this verse as follows: “Make your word shine!”

Each one of us has the power and responsibility to illuminate our words, to make them words of positive force, of

prayer, of encouragement, and of Torah. When we do this we raise the world around us above the deluge of physicality and selfishness that looms.

Even one word of prayer or Torah can save us from the “flood.”

• Source: *based on the Sefat Emet*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

BEREISHET

In the beginning, G-d creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, G-d rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbat, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava — the human pair — are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing “sin,” Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain bearing and raising children. Now begins the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the main subject of world history. Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to G-d. Hevel gives the finest of his flock, and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain, until the birth of Noach. After the death of Sheith, Mankind descends into evil, and G-d decides that He will blot out Man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noach, finds favor with G-d.

NOACH

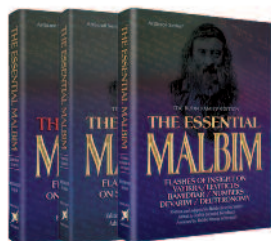
It is ten generations since the creation of the first human. Adam’s descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and G-d resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth’s inhabitants except

for the righteous Noach, his family and sufficient animals to re-populate the earth. G-d instructs Noach to build an ark. After forty days and nights, the flood covers even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days the water starts to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, the ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends out a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. A week later Noach again sends the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive leaf in its beak. After another seven days Noach sends the dove once more; the dove does not return. G-d tells Noach and his family to leave the ark. Noach brings offerings to G-d from the animals which were carried in the ark for this purpose. G-d vows never again to flood the entire world and designates the rainbow as a sign of this Covenant. Noach and his descendants are now permitted to slaughter and eat meat, unlike Adam. G-d commands the Seven Universal Laws: the prohibition against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder, eating meat torn from a live animal, and the obligation to set up a legal system. The world’s climate is established as we know it today. Noach plants a vineyard and becomes intoxicated from its produce. Ham, one of Noach’s sons, delights in seeing his father drunk and uncovered. Shem and Yafet, however, manage to cover their father without looking at his nakedness, by walking backwards. For this incident, Canaan is cursed to be a slave. The Torah lists the offspring of Noach’s three sons from whom the seventy nations of the world are descended. The Torah records the incident of the Tower of Babel, which results in G-d fragmenting communication into many languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Parsha concludes with the genealogy of Noach to Avram.

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Bereishet

1. Why does the Torah start with the account of Creation?
2. What happened to the light that was created on the first day?
3. Why isn't the word "good" associated with the second day?
4. How was the wood of the trees supposed to taste?
5. On which day were the sun and moon created?
6. G-d blessed the birds to be fruitful and to multiply. Why did He not do so for the beasts?
7. In whose likeness was man fashioned?
8. What kind of food did Adam eat?
9. Why is "the sixth day" written with the definite article "the"?
10. At the end of the sixth day what was the world still lacking?
11. Why was man made from dust gathered from the entire earth?
12. How is man superior to the animals?
13. Why was it not good that man be alone?
14. Where do we learn that one must not add to a commandment from G-d?
15. What does it mean that Adam and Chava "knew that they were naked?"
16. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd?
17. What was the marital practice of the generation who lived before the flood?
18. What did Tuval-Cain invent?
19. Why did Chanoch die at a young age?
20. What was the sign that Shem was born with great propensity for righteousness?

Answers to Bereishet's Questions!

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

1. 1:1 - So that when the nations accuse us of stealing *Eretz Canaan* from the Canaanites, we can respond that G-d, as Creator, has the right to give the land to whomever He sees fit, and He gave *Eretz Canaan* to us.
2. 1:4 - G-d saw that the wicked would be unworthy of it so He hid it for the righteous.
3. 1:7 - Because the work with the water wasn't completed until the third day. Anything that is incomplete is not "good."
4. 1:11 - The wood was to have the taste of the fruit.
5. 1:14 - They were created on the first day and suspended in the firmament on the fourth day.
6. 1:22 - He did not want the serpent, who was to be cursed, to receive a blessing.
7. 1:26 - In the likeness of the angels.
8. 1:30 - Vegetation.
9. 1:31 - "The" in Hebrew is the letter *hey*, which has a numerical value of five. G-d created the world on the condition that it will endure only if the Jewish People accept the Five Books of the Torah.
10. 2:2 - Rest.
11. 2:7 - So that wherever he might die, the earth would receive his body.
12. 2:7 - He was given understanding and speech.
13. 2:18 - If he were alone, he would appear to be a god. The creation of woman emphasized man's dependence.
14. 3:3 - From Chava. G-d commanded not to eat from the tree, but she added not to touch it. Because she added to the command she eventually came to transgress it.
15. 3:7 - They had been given one commandment and they had stripped themselves of it.
16. 4:2 - Since the ground had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.
17. 4:19 - They married two wives, one with whom to have children. The other one was given a potion which prevented her from bearing children.
18. 4:22 - Murder weapons.
19. 5:22 - Though he was righteous, he was easily influenced; therefore G-d took him before his time to protect him from sinning.
20. 5:32 - He was born already circumcised.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Noach

1. Parshat Noach begins by describing Noach as “perfectly righteous.” Yet later in the parsha, G-d says to Noach “For I have seen that you are righteous” but not “perfectly” righteous. Why not?
2. What sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
3. Why did G-d tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
4. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
5. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?
6. Why did G-d postpone bringing the flood for seven days?
7. The flood began “in the second month.” What is the second month?
8. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
9. What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did G-d do to protect him?
10. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
11. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
12. What did the olive branch symbolize?
13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to “be fruitful and multiply” directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared.
17. Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Noach’s Questions!

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

1. 7:1 - Because one should not tell the entire praise of a person in his presence.
2. 6:13 - Robbery.
3. 6:14 - So that people would see Noach building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noach would answer, “G-d is bringing a flood,” it might encourage some people to repent.
4. 6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.
5. 7:2 - G-d told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. “Kosher” and “non-kosher” are Torah concepts.
6. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Mesushelach.
7. 7:11 - Rabbi Eliezar says Marcheshvan; Rabbi Yehuda says Iyar.
8. 7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.
9. 7:13,15 - People said, “If we see him going into the ark, we’ll smash it!” G-d surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.
10. 7:22 - The fish.
11. 8:4 - Eleven *amot*.
12. 8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that it’s better to eat food “bitter like an olive” but which comes directly from G-d, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)
13. 9:3 - After the flood.
14. 9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.
17. 9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noach’s disgrace to Ham. And because Ham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Ham’s fourth son, Canaan.
18. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against G-d.
19. 11:9 - They lived together peacefully.
20. 11:29 - The word “Yiscah” is related to the Hebrew word “to see.” Sarah was called Yiscah because she could “see” the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

Bereishet

CAIN AND ABEL

The narrative of Cain and Abel (Kayin and Hevel) presents numerous difficulties. Why did they choose their respective professions? Why was only Hevel's sacrifice accepted? Why does G-d challenge Kayin's justifiable anger? Why does Kayin murder his brother, and why does he lament his punishment of being forced to wander? He should have been executed for murder!

Kayin, the farmer, saw that the ground was the source of all life. His name, which means "acquisition", indicates that he was rooted in materialism. Hevel, as a shepherd, pursued the less material objectives of leadership, honor and power, as the shepherd is the leader of his flocks. The word "hevel", which connotes the ethereal, is an indication of his lack of concern for materialism. Kayin, the firstborn, chose farming, since plant life precedes animal life, just as acquisitions precede honor. Hevel, on the other hand, viewed shepherding as a higher and more honorable profession, as evidenced later by the Patriarchs.

Each brought a sacrifice in order to substantiate his claim to superiority, not in order to give thanks to G-d. Kayin felt that farming was most important since it was the foundation of man's physical existence, providing food, clothing and shelter. He felt that shepherding was without substance and required little effort. Hevel, however, felt that it was much more honorable to deal with animals, whereas Kayin was dealing with the ground which had been cursed to produce thorns and thistles. He brought his offering from the choicest of his flocks to show the absence of this curse.

G-d's acceptance of Hevel's offering was an indication that his life was on a higher plane. His pursuit of honor actually brought him to a level which shielded him from other negative characteristics. He was in control of his occupation while Kayin was enslaved to the ground and its material products. There is no honor in material possessions, and when one is not concerned with his own honor he is more likely to lapse into dishonesty and theft. Kayin was constantly involved with the demands of working the ground, while Hevel was free from the hazards of materialism and able to concentrate on higher contemplations.

Kayin was upset as he saw himself subservient and inferior to his younger brother. But G-d tells him that the actual problem is his failure to fulfill his own potential. G-d tells him that he does not have to be a slave to the material world, but that he can rise above it and conquer it. G-d also tells him that Hevel was not a paragon of perfection; he had a desire for power and fame. Kayin was afraid that Hevel, having chosen a life of control over others, would also exercise that control over Kayin and his descendants, even to the point of usurping his land. He felt that he had no choice but to kill Hevel to prevent this from happening. Kayin would then be left alone to do G-d's work.

In terms of Kayin's complaint that his punishment was more than he could bear, Abarbanel relates that he actually means just the opposite. He is actually referring to the fact that his transgression was so heinous that G-d cannot bear to forgive him, even though G-d's power to forgive can overcome even the

most grievous transgressions. Furthermore, when Kayin complained that someone was likely to kill him during his wanderings from place to place, he was actually expressing his desire to be killed because of the severity of his act of premeditated murder.

Noach

THE GREAT FLOOD

At the end of Parshat Bereishet the Torah states, "And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth... I will blot out man, whom I created, from the face of the ground" (Ber. 6:5-7). G-d is stating clearly that man's evil nature is the cause of the destructive flood. However, in Parshat Noach, at the conclusion of the flood, G-d says, "I will not continue to curse again the ground because of man, since the nature of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I continue to smite every living being." (Ber. 8:21). Here G-d is saying that man's evil nature is the reason for *not* bringing another flood.

Abarbanel explains that man's being "evil from his youth" is not a reason to be forgiven for transgressions. Rather, the punishments will take place over the course of a lifetime, beginning in his youth and extending into his old age, instead of being one cataclysmic event. Additionally, the verse concludes "...seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter... shall not cease." This indicates that future punishments will occur in the context of earth's natural cycles of drought, famine, and extremes of heat and cold.

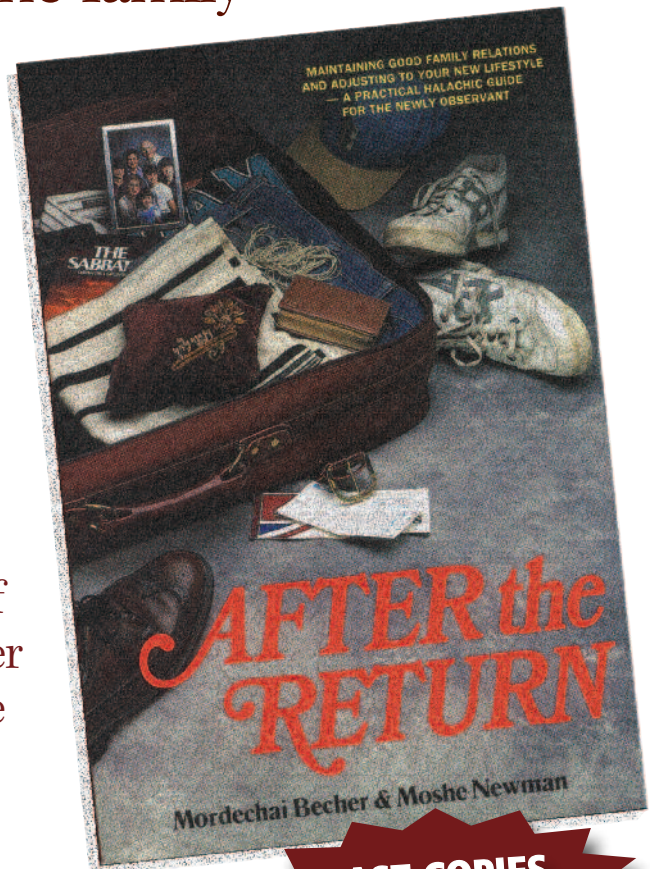
Prior to the flood, the earth's rich physical environment led to gross materialism. Just as the first stage of an individual's life is characterized by spiritual emptiness, so too the first stage in the development of mankind was characterized by spiritual emptiness, materialism and sensuality. The phrase "man's heart is evil from his youth" is a reference to this first stage. The flood obliterated this first stage and led to an attachment to spiritual pursuits, obviating the need for another flood.

The rainbow is then presented as the sign of the covenant that G-d will not bring another flood. Abarbanel points out a difficulty in understanding this narrative. First of all, a rainbow is a natural phenomenon which must have existed prior to the flood. If G-d is promising a new relationship with mankind, the sign should be something new as well. He answers that after the flood there was a change in the physical nature of the clouds themselves. During the flood they were so dense that no sunlight could penetrate to produce a rainbow. From this point onward they will no longer be so dense as to envelop the entire atmosphere in cloud. This would allow for the refraction of light necessary to produce the rainbow. This new atmospheric reality hints to the new status of mankind. There will no longer be one unified, immoral society. Some societies will sink into immorality, others will not. Just as rain will now fall in some areas and not in others, so too some regions will suffer due to the behavior of their inhabitants and others will not.

The rainbow is a reminder to mankind that G-d has modified nature and diluted the density of the atmosphere, precluding the possibility of another catastrophic deluge.

An old friend's wedding, an uncle's funeral, Passover at the family homestead — these are but a few of the challenging real-life events that are fraught with conflict and anxiety for the newly observant.

After returning to the faith of their ancestors, many re-enter the secular world without the tools to respond to the inevitable challenges to their newly adopted set of beliefs.



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After the Return

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