

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BESHALLACH · 15 SHEVAT 5777 · FEB. 11, 2017 · VOL. 24 NO. 16

PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

HIGHER THAN THE ANGELS

“The angel of G-d who had been going in front of the Children of Israel moved and went behind them...” (14:19)

The word in Hebrew, *chaya*, has two seemingly opposite meanings. A *chaya* is a wild animal, but it is also one of the names of the most elevated of the angels, as we say in our daily prayers: “And the *Ofanim* and the *Chayot HaKodesh...*”

What possible connection could there be between a beast and a celestial being?

Man is called a “walker”. As it says in the Prophet Zecharia, “I will give you strides (*mehalchim*) amongst the ‘standers’ (the angels) here.” (3:7)

An angel can only stand in its place; it cannot move up or down. It has no freedom to choose. Its perception of G-d is so overwhelming that it can do nothing other than the Will of G-d. A beast is the same. It too has no freedom of

choice. It can only follow its instincts, which is the Will of G-d.

Only man can choose between good and evil, and thus only man can move up or down.

When the Jewish People elevate themselves, when they exercise their freedom to choose to do the Will of G-d, G-d shines His Kindness upon them, and they can ascend to a level above even the holiest angels.

Thus, “*The angel of G-d which had been going in front of the Children of Israel*” — i.e. preceding them in holiness — now “*moved and went behind them*”, because they had elevated themselves higher even than the angels.

• Source: based on the *Kedushat Levi*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

BAVA BATRA 18 - 24

Rav said to Rav Shmuel bar Shilat, “Until the age of six do not accept a student, but from that age on accept the student and feed him like an ox.”

Our *daf* teaches the origins and development of a revolutionary system of establishing schools for Torah study, beginning with young children. Originally, there were limited opportunities for Jewish children, depending on the family resources that were available to each child. However, the Sage Yehoshua ben Gamla, who was a *kohen gadol* during the time of the Second Beit Hamikdash, instituted the first “Torah Public School System”, which began a movement to enable all Jewish children from any location and any financial means to receive a quality Torah education.

Many *halachot* regarding this system and the way it should be managed, including the relationship between the teacher and the student, are taught on our *daf*, and are codified in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 245. One example is the above statement of Rav to Rav Shmuel bar Shilat, “to feed the student like an ox”. Rashi explains that this means to heartily insist that the student “eat and drink the nourishment of the Torah”, similar to the manner that a person puts a yoke upon his ox. Rashi in another place (Ketuvot 50a) explains this phrase in a slightly different manner: “Feed him so much Torah that he will be ‘stuffed with it’, in the same way that you feed an ox a very large amount of food.”

The Maharsha, however, suggests that the *gemara* intends to convey a different, more gentle approach to educating our youth. He writes: “The teacher should learn with the student tenderly and with great sensitivity, just as one feeds an ox with his hands without any force or coercion. The example of an ox is meant to depict an example where there is total lack of force applied, as opposed to feeding a camel or a calf, in which case the animal is forcefully fed without a sense of compassion (think of veal nowadays).” Torah should be taught and transmitted to the next generation in a loving manner, which will not only teach but also demonstrate to the youth the peaceful and pleasant ways of the Torah.

• Bava Batra 21a

And Rav also said to Rav Shmuel bar Shilat, “One who studies, studies; and one who doesn’t study let him remain there in the yeshiva so that he will be company for his friend.”

With this statement Rav teaches one of the numerous rules and guidelines for conducting a Torah educational institution. The reason given for the one who does not study to remain in the yeshiva appears somewhat ambiguous in its meaning, since it does not seem to clearly state who will be the company of whom.

Rashi explains that the one who is not studying but sits there idly does not need to be sent out of the class or yeshiva — rather, he should be allowed to remain there with the others who are actually studying Torah, and eventually the “atmosphere” of Torah study will have a positive effect on him. He will be moved to also pay attention to the classes and to join in with the others in their pursuit of understanding the Torah.

The Maharsha, however, offers a different interpretation for this rule taught in the *gemara*. He claims that the phrase “so that he will be company for his friend” implies that his remaining there is for the friend’s benefit and not for his own benefit. The Maharsha explains that when his friend sees him there, sitting idly, his friend will constantly be reminded how wonderful it is to be learning Torah, unlike the unfortunate person sitting there as “company”, and the one who studies will be encouraged even more to be diligent in his Torah studies.

• Bava Batra 21a

לע"נ
 ר' דוד בן ר' אהרון הי"ד
 מרת לאה בת ר' שמואל הי"ד
 ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

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

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

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

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

Love of the Land, written by Rav Mendel Weinbach, zt"l • *Parsha Insights* written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor and *Talmud Tips*: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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DELAY IN THE DESERT AND PHARAOH'S "HARD-HEART"

The Parsha begins with the words, "It happened when Pharaoh sent out the people, that G-d did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, though it was near, for G-d said: 'Perhaps the people will reconsider when they see a war, and they will return to Egypt.'" After escaping from Egypt, the direct route to the heart of the Land of Israel would have been along the Mediterranean coast, which would lead them directly into Philistine territory after a relatively short journey. Abarbanel, and other commentaries as well, explain that the Torah is telling us that having had no prior experience with warfare, and assuming that no nation would allow such a multitude to pass peacefully through its territory, the people would prefer to return to Egyptian enslavement rather than risk death at the hands of Philistine warriors. Also, the Midrash tells us that some members of the tribe of Ephraim had previously managed to leave Egypt prematurely and were soundly defeated by the Philistines. The people would encounter the bones of their slaughtered brethren and would be frightened into returning to Egypt. By taking them on a much longer, circuitous route, G-d would give them time to overcome and avoid that fear.

Another possible explanation is that since the Torah is emphasizing that "Pharaoh sent out the people" we have to keep in mind that Pharaoh had sent them out only to celebrate a festival to G-d that would require a three-day excursion into the desert. If G-d led them directly on the short route toward Philistine territory, Pharaoh would realize that Moshe had lied to him and was seeking to escape permanently. Initially, then, G-d led them in a way which appeared to be consistent with Pharaoh's intentions.

However, Abarbanel states that the most logical explanation

for not going directly to the Land of Israel was to provide the opportunity for the splitting of the sea and the drowning of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army. The news of this final, overwhelmingly miraculous deliverance would spread throughout the region, instilling the fear of G-d in every nation, and emboldening Bnei Yisrael to confront the powerful inhabitants of the Promised Land. After leaving Egypt, G-d gives Moshe specific instructions to turn back and encamp in such a way that they would give the appearance of not knowing where they were going. When Moshe had consistently asked permission to lead a three-day excursion, Pharaoh had assumed that Moshe had a specific place in mind and would go there directly. Now that they had turned back as a result of apparent confusion, Pharaoh suspected that Moshe had deceived him all along and, as a result, decided to pursue them. Even though G-d says, "I shall strengthen the heart of Pharaoh and he will pursue them", Abarbanel makes it clear that G-d is not depriving Pharaoh of his free will. Rather, He is manipulating specific circumstances so that Pharaoh will feel compelled on his own to change his mind and pursue.

Abarbanel's approach to the phrase "I will strengthen his heart", which appears several times in the narrative of the Exodus, is consistent. He bases his approach on the verse in Proverbs (21:1): "Like streams of water, so the hearts of kings are in G-d's hands." G-d doesn't simply put ideas in their hearts and words in their mouths against their will. Rather, just like farmers direct rainfall into reservoirs, canals and irrigation ditches, G-d directs events in such a way that kings and rulers are compelled to take the kinds of actions that will make a lasting imprint on history.

PLEASE JOIN US...

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

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

TU B'SHEVAT BOUNTY

From: Alison

*Dear Rabbi,
On Tu b'Shevat we celebrate the bounty of the Land of Israel. But if the Land of Israel is supposed to be flowing with milk and honey, why don't we see that kind of abundance in the Land of Israel today?*

Dear Alison,

First of all, while Israel may not be literally oozing with milk and honey, there is definitely an agricultural and material abundance, which in this semi-desert region is unprecedented in the last two millennia, and far exceeds any other country of modern times in the area.

Israel has a thriving, modern, industrial, high-tech based economy as well as a broad, varied, productive, export-oriented agricultural market. This is due to great effort and ingenuity, which is literally "fuelled" by Israel's need to survive.

Still, even if we are to understand the description of milk and honey as referring to material abundance alone, G-d doesn't mean that this abundance is an indigenous, natural quality of the Land. Rather, there is a spiritual connection between the Jewish People on the Land and its bounty.

A proof is that the Land remained desolate for the last two thousand years, because nature alone doesn't sustain it. Even human enterprise could not cajole its growth, and other peoples and empires were not able to procure its blessing. Even the industrious, powerful and modern Great Britain, after extensive geological surveys, concluded that the land was basically useless for the needs of mass settlement and could never sustain a modern nation.

Considering this, the blessing enjoyed in Israel today is miraculous. Israeli effort and ingenuity alone is not enough without G-d commanding the Land to issue its bounty to His children on the Land. But the degree of that blessing also depends on the extent to which the Jewish People are acting as His children while in the Land. An appreciative and loyal son will enjoy the full bounty of his father's table;

a brazen, self-centered son's portion might be limited. Perhaps this is why we don't see, despite the blessing, the Land flowing with milk and honey.

Interestingly, descriptions of the Land in Talmudic sources, written at a time when Jews had an extremely heightened awareness of G-d, portray a land with such bounty. A Rabbi was once walking through the countryside of Israel when he saw hundreds of robust she-goats eating luscious figs from large trees. The nectar that burst forth from the figs mixed with milk oozing from the goats' udders to form rivulets of milk and honey flowing down the valley (Ketubot 111b). In another discussion the Talmud describes the fruits growing on the bank of Lake Kinneret as being so luscious, potent and concentrated, that they were actually intoxicating (Berachot 44a).

This blessing was not only prosaic, but also so palpable that it had halachic implications as well. We find that quantity or volume is relevant in many discussions of halacha (Berachot 41b). These values are calibrated by the standard/average size of fruits such as a pomegranate, fig, date, olive or egg. From the Talmudic discussions of these "standard" volumes it becomes apparent that their olive was the size of our eggs, and their eggs were the size of our tomatoes. And in Biblical times the fruits and produce were even larger, such that among the men sent by Moses to survey the Land of Israel, one's hands were full with a huge pomegranate, another's with a giant fig, and it took eight men to carry one cluster of grapes!

This goes to show that the material quality of "milk and honey" of the Land is a direct function of G-d's willing the Jewish People there, and the extent to which they do G-d's will there. If today that quality seems lacking, it may be because our connection to G-d is lacking. However, if we will endeavor to extract the spiritual milk and honey indigenous to the Land of Israel which is the Torah and the *mitzvot*, and we cause our lives to overflow with their sustenance and sweetness, then will G-d shower upon us both spiritual and material blessing in the Land.

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LEARNING TORAH BEFORE PRAYERS

It is forbidden for someone who prays alone to begin learning Torah once the time of Shacharit (Morning Prayers) arrives (dawn). This is due to a concern that he will become so involved in his learning that he will miss the time for reciting Shema and prayer. However, it is permitted to begin learning before dawn (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 89:6). It is also permitted to learn if one appoints someone to remind him. (Mishneh Berurah)

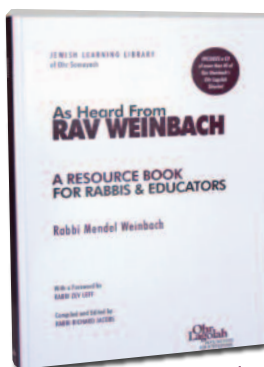
One who already began to learn, even after dawn, is not required to stop as long as there will be enough time for him to pray afterwards. Some say that one who started learning after dawn must at least stop to recite Shema, while others do not require one to stop to say Shema unless there is a concern that the time for Shema will pass. (Mishneh Berurah)

One who will be going to pray in the *Beit Knesset* (and does so regularly) is allowed to learn Torah before praying, since in this case there is no concern that he will forget to pray. (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 89:6)

Even someone who prays alone is allowed to teach oth-

ers, since there is great merit in teaching Torah to others, and if he does not teach at that time they will lose out on the opportunity to learn (Shulchan Aruch *ibid.*). This is only allowed if the time for Shema will not pass while he is learning. If there is a concern that the time for Shema will pass he should recite Shema before beginning to learn (if the time of Shema has already arrived). (Mishneh Berurah)

The Kaf HaChaim explains that although the Shulchan Aruch forbids learning from dawn, since learning before praying is important one can follow the more lenient opinion that permits learning until sunrise nears (see Mishneh Berurah, who cites both opinions). The Piskei Teshuvot writes that people are not stringent about learning before prayers, and that anyone who finds it easier to learn before prayers based on his daily schedule may do so. He adds that according to the Mishneh Berurah and others there is almost no situation when it would be forbidden to learn before prayers. Of course, one must be careful to make sure not to miss the ideal times for Shema and prayer.



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TREE WORDS

This Shabbat is also a little-known holiday called Tu B'Shevat (the 15th of the month of Shevat). The Mishna (Rosh Hashanah 1:1) says that Tu B'Shevat is the Rosh Hashanah (New Year) for Trees. This means that Tu B'Shevat is the halachic cut-off date for delineating between one year's fruits and the next. In honor of the significance of this holiday and its connection to trees we will explore two Hebrew words which mean tree: "eitz" and "ilan".

We might be familiar with the word *eitz* and its various forms from the Bible: *eitz ha'daat* (the Tree of Knowledge), *eitz ha'Chaim* (the Tree of Life), *atzei Shittim* (Shittim wood), *atzei Levanah* (Lebanon wood), and the like. There is, however, another word for tree: *ilan*. We have already shown over and over again that no two words in the Hebrew language mean exactly the same. So then why are there two words for "tree" and what is the difference between those two words?

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) writes that the word *eitz* is related to the Hebrew word *atzum* (strong) and *etzem* (bone), as it denotes the strength and durability of a tree (as opposed to other, flimsy forms of flora, like grass).

The attentive reader might notice that while the word *eitz* appears countless times in the Bible, the word *ilan* does not. Rather, the word *ilan* appears only once in the Bible (Daniel 4:7) and a similar word — *ilana* (which also means tree) — appears several times in the fourth chapter of Daniel (verses 8, 11, 17, 20, and 23). That chapter, like most of the book of Daniel, is actually written in Aramaic, not in Hebrew. This would suggest that *eitz* is a Hebrew word,

while *ilan(a)* is an Aramaic word. The latter word constantly appears in the Mishna and other rabbinic writings, leading us to ask why the Sages of the Mishna preferred to use the Aramaic word for tree, instead of the Hebrew one.

To resolve these difficulties, Rabbi Chaim Hirschensohn (1857-1935) explains that while Biblical Hebrew uses the word *eitz* to mean both a tree and its wood, the Rabbis decided to differentiate between living trees and cut wood by using two different words. To that effect, they took the Aramaic word *ilana* found in the Bible to mean a living tree, Hebraized it to coin the word *ilan*, and adopted that neologism as the new word for a live tree. Concomitantly, they narrowed the definition of the Hebrew word *eitz* to refer only to wood. The advantage of this new linguistic policy was that the Rabbis now had a convenient way of differentiating between a live tree and wood with a simple change in word.

Rabbi Betzalel Stern (1911-1988), the author of Responsa Be'tzel Ha'chachma, was once asked whether the traditional formulation of blessings and prayers were phrased according to the grammar and usage of Biblical Hebrew or of Rabbinic Hebrew. He answered this question by citing the Mishna (Berachot 6:1) which rules, "On the fruits of an *ilan* one blesses *borei pri ha'eitz* ("He who creates the fruit of the *eitz*")." Rabbi Stern explained that although the word for tree in the spoken vernacular was the Aramaic-based *ilan*, the Mishna nonetheless chose to use the word *eitz* in the wording of the blessing before eating fruits. To him, this clearly demonstrates that the Rabbis preferred Biblical Hebrew to their own form of Hebrew when deciding on the exact phraseology of blessings.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

RABBI CHAIM BEN ATAR — THE MIRACLE OF THE FIG TREE

One of the many old Jerusalem synagogues destroyed by the Arabs in the War of Independence was the "Ohr Hachayim Beit Midrash". It was called by that name in honor of the classic commentary on Chumash written by the great sage Rabbi Chaim ben Atar, who arrived in Yerushalayim more than 260 years ago after a long, dangerous journey.

The author of "Ohr Hachaim" spent most of his time studying in this synagogue wrapped in *tallit* and *tefillin*, his

face beaming with an angelic radiance.

There was, however, one obstacle to his intense Torah study. In the courtyard of the synagogue was a fig tree that attracted the local Arab youngsters whose loud activity of picking the fruit greatly disturbed his ability to concentrate. The sage thereupon commanded the tree to cease producing fruit, and this barren tree stood for many years in the courtyard as a monument to the value which Heaven placed on the Torah study of Rabbi Chaim ben Atar.



THE HALACHIC SIGNIFICANCE OF TU B'SHEVAT

BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

The Mishnah says: The first of [the month of] Shevat is the New Year for the Trees, according to Beit Shamai; Beit Hillel says it is the fifteenth [of the month of Shvat] (Rosh Hashana 2a). The reason why Tu B'Shevat is the New Year for the Trees is an argument in the Gemara Yerushalmi. One opinion says that by the fifteenth of Shevat most of the rains for the given year have already fallen, and it is thus the time that fruits begin to emerge. Another opinion says that while all the fruits that grew until this day are mainly a product of the rains from the previous year, the fruits produced from this day onward are essentially a product of the rains of the new year (Yerushalmi, Rosh Hashana 1:2; see also Bavli, Rosh Hashana 14a with Rashi and Tosafot). It is for this reason that many communities customarily eat several different types of fruits to celebrate the day (Mishna Berura 131:31; Kaf Hachaim 131:97). It is also for this reason that many have the custom to pray for a beautiful and kosher *etrog* for the upcoming Succot holiday on this day (B'nei Yisaschar, Shevat 2:2; Lashon Chachamim 1:38).

While many people know that the fifteenth of Shevat is the New Year for the Trees, its halachic implications are not as clear; therefore, it is fitting to understand this point. Tu B'Shevat bears halachic significance for the purposes of *terumot u'maaserot* (tithes), *bikkurim*, *orlah*, and, according to some opinions, for *shemitta*. Let's see how this is so.

Terumot u'Maaserot

The halachah states that before one may benefit from produce, one must separate *terumot* and *maaserot*. First, one must give a portion of the produce to the *kohen*, which is called *terumah gedolah*. While the Torah doesn't prescribe a measurement of how much *terumah* one must give, *Chazal* tell us that one who is generous gives 1/40th, one who is mediocre gives 1/50th, and one who is stingy gives 1/60th of the sum total of one's produce (Terumot 4:3). Following this, one must give one-tenth of the remaining produce to the *levi*, which is called *maaser ris-hon*. The *levi* also separates 1/10th from this portion and gives it to a *kohen*, which is called *terumat maaser*. After that, if it is the third or sixth year of the seven-year *shemitta* cycle, then one separates an additional 1/10th to give to the poor, which is called *maaser ani*. During the other

years of the *shemitta* cycle, however, instead of separating *maaser ani*, one separates the additional 1/10th, and eats it in Yerushalayim (or redeems it on a coin that he takes to Yerushalayim, with which he buys food in Yerushalayim to eat there), which is called *maaser sheni*.

As mentioned above, there is a distinction in the type of *maaser* that is taken in the different years of the seven-year *shemitta* cycle. Regarding fruits of the tree the new year begins on the fifteenth of Shevat. Therefore, fruits that reached the point where they become obligated in tithes (for the exact definition of this see Meiri, Beit HaBechirah on Rosh Hashana 2a; Chazon Ish, Shevi'it 7:12; Ohr Letzion 2:8; Derech Emunah on Rambam Hilchot Maaser 2:4-5) before the fifteenth of Shevat are considered as belonging to the previous year when it comes to determining whether to separate *maaser ani*, which is separated during the third and sixth years, or *maaser sheni*, which is separated on the first, second, fourth and fifth years (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 331:125).

The halacha also states that one is not allowed to separate *terumah* or *maaser* from one year's produce to the next. Regarding fruits of the tree, the new year starts on the fifteenth of Shevat. According to this, fruits that reached the point where they become obligated in tithes before the fifteenth of Shevat, and fruits that reached that point after the fifteenth of Shevat, are considered as belonging to two different years, and *terumot* and *maaserot* may not be taken from one for the other (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 331:57).

Bikkurim

The halacha states that one must bring the first fruits of the seven fruits of Eretz Yisrael to the Beit Hamikdash, and, in certain cases, recite a passage of appreciation, after which he gives them to the *kohen*. Even though there is no measure for how much one must give, *Chazal* assigned a measurement of 1/60th of all of the fruits (*Peah* 1:1). Similar to *terumot* and *maaserot*, one is not allowed to bring *bikkurim* from one year's fruits to the next. Therefore, one may not bring *bikkurim* from fruits that reached the point where they become obligated in tithes before Tu B'Shevat for fruits that reached that state after Tu B'Shevat (Rambam, Hilchot Bikkurim 2:7).

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THE GEMATRIA OF TU B'SHEVAT

BY RABBI YEHUDA SAMET

There is a custom in Eretz Yisrael to eat fifteen different types of fruits on Tu B'Shevat. The Gematria (numerical value) of the word "Tu" — which is "tet" and "vav" in Hebrew — is 15, and the 15th of the month of Shevat is the date of this holiday. It is an opportunity to show our appreciation for all the varieties of fruits with which G-d has blessed us.

This is the interpretation of the *beracha*:

- "Borei nefashot rabot vechesronan": He created many creatures and that which they lack — i.e., basic necessities without which man could not exist, such as bread and water;

- "Al kol ma she'barata": In addition to all that which You created — i.e., all the varieties of foods;

- "le'hachayot bahem nefesh kol chai" — to give life to all living beings...

- In the *beracha* said in the month of Nissan on blossoming fruit trees it says: "V'illanot tovot le'hanot bahem bnei adam" — [G-d created] good trees to bring pleasure to people.

The *Mishna Berurah* (225) quotes the Yerushalmi that it is a mitzvah to eat a little of each new fruit of the year in order to show appreciation for G-d's creation.

These ideas are hinted to in the Gematria:

This is the day to give thanks for all types of fruits of the tree! =

Zeh yom lehodot al kol minei pri haetz =

12 + 56 + 451 + 100 + 50 + 110 + 290 + 165 = **1234**

The 15th day of the month of Shevat =

Chamisha asar Shevat =

353 + 570 + 311 = **1234**

Tu B'Shevat Somayach!

The Halachic Significance of Tu B'Shevat *continued from page eight*

Orlah

The date of Tu B'shvat is also significant regarding the *halachot* of *orlah*. The halacha dictates that one is not allowed to benefit from the fruits of a new tree for the first three years after its planting. Fruits from the fourth year, similar to *maaser sheni*, may only be eaten in Yerushalayim, while the fruits from the fifth year may be eaten anywhere. Also with regards to this halacha, the fifteenth of Shevat is significant. Let's look at an example of how this is so: A tree that was planted in the year 5757 at least 44 days (14 days to take root, and 30 days to be considered a year) before the first of Tishrei of 5758, will be considered to be in its second year in the year 5758, in its third year in the

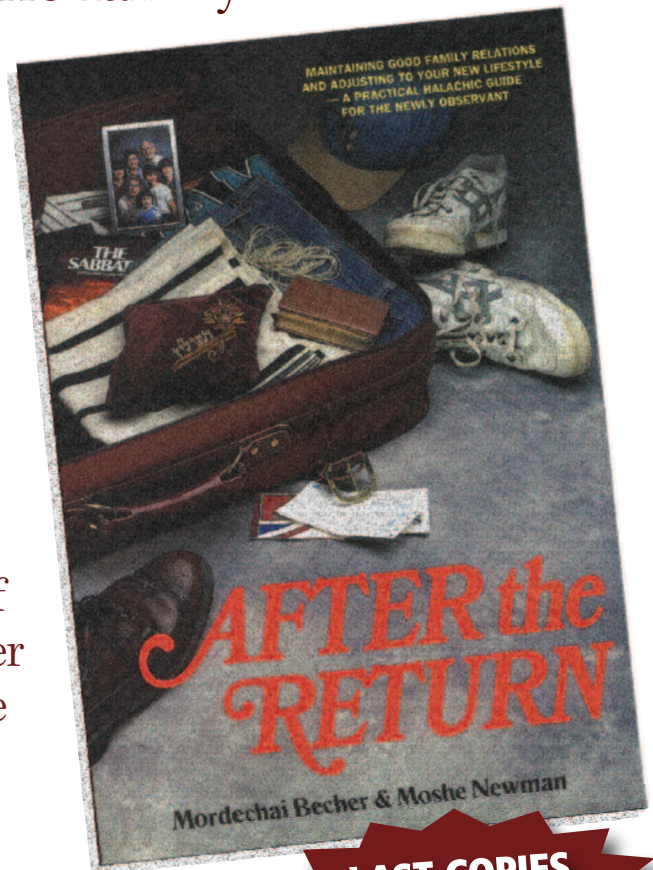
year 5759 and in its fourth year in the year 5760. However, one may not eat its fruits in the year 5760 (in Yerushalayim, as the halacha requires in the fourth year) until the fifteenth of Shevat. From Tu B'Shevat of the year 5761 and on, its fruits may be eaten anywhere. (See Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 294:4-5).

Shemitta

According to some opinions the fifteenth of Tishrei also determines whether fruits belong to the year of *shemitta*. However, the halacha is not in accordance with this opinion (See Chazon Ish, Shevi'it 7:13; Ohr Letzion, Shevi'it 2:8; Derech Emunah on Rambam, Hilchot Shemitta 4:9).

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

BY RABBI MORDECHAI BECHER AND RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN
PUBLISHED BY FELDHEIM PUBLISHERS

TO PURCHASE A COPY CONTACT:

Ohr Somayach Jerusalem (main office)
22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, Jerusalem
Tel: 02-581-0315 ext. 0 • ohr@ohr.edu