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# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHT

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

### Invasion of the Mind-Snatchers

*“Come to Pharaoh for I have hardened his heart...” (10:1)*

Ask any teacher of Torah who his greatest enemy is, and chances are he'll tell you that it's a little machine called iPhone or Android.

These little “WMDs” are the negative drive's chief cronies in the battle to educate and elevate. They are the invasion of the mind-snatchers.

The Torah tells us to love G-d *“b'chol levav'cha”* — “with all your heart”.

Grammatically it would have been more appropriate to write *“b'chol lib'cha”*. The added Hebrew letter *“bet”* is to signify that we must love G-d using both “sides” of our hearts, even with our negative drives.

A case in point: In my morning Gemara *shiur* I wanted to share with my students a passage at the back of a large and unwieldy tome. I was about to go copy it when one of my *talmidim* said, “Rebbe, you'll never get that book on the copy machine. The copies will be all black near the center. Why don't I photograph the page and *WhatsApp* it to the whole class?”

Now, my *shiur* is a bit like a page out of the Wild West. Just like in those old cowboy movies where when they come into the saloon they must put their guns on the table, so too I have the same rule for smart phones. If you bring it to class, you have to put it face down on the table.

And now my students were delighted to jump on their phones and have a 100% “glatt-kosher” use for them. They loved it. It was so cool to be able to read the

text on their smart phones. So “techie”! Their level of involvement shot up. I ended the *shiur* by asking them to prepare a lengthy paragraph, which ended the lesson. I doubted that anyone would do so since it was a long and forbidding paragraph. However, the following morning my star student came in having prepared the whole piece.

“It was so cool,” he said. “To just sit on the bus with my iPhone and learn Torah!”

We can, and must, love G-d with both sides of our hearts — with the “negative” and with the “positive”.

*“Pharaoh hardened his heart.” (7:22)*

Up till this week's Torah portion, the Torah repeatedly says of Pharaoh that “he hardened his heart” — meaning that he had a heart to harden. Up to a certain point Pharaoh had the ability to humble himself and accept G-d. He chose, however, not to let his negative drive serve G-d. He hardened his heart.

In spite of this small pedagogical success story, my fairly large cynical side is saying, “Yeah, how long do you think that's going to last until the novelty wears off?” The answer is probably “Not long”. But that's not the point. If we want to reach our distracted and disenchanted youth we're going to have to distract the distractions. We're going to have to learn to tap-dance and pull rabbits out of our hats — yes, even literally — to grab the stage from the mind-grabbers.

BY RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN

### Shavuot 44 - 49

#### Payment for Guarding a Lost Object?

*Rabbi Yosef says, “He is like a paid guard, since he is exempt from giving charity to a poor person while he is involved in caring for the lost object.”*

The Sage Rabba disagrees with Rav Yosef regarding the degree of responsibility of one who finds a lost object that needs returning — a *shomer aveida*. The finder must take active measures, as necessary, to take care of the lost object until the owner identifies it and it is restored to him. Rabba rules that the finder is a *shomer chinam* — an unpaid guard — since he is not receiving payment to guard the object. Therefore, he is obligated to pay for the lost object that he should guard only if something happens to it due to his negligence, as is the law of the “unpaid guard” — but not if it is lost or stolen from him without negligence.

Rav Yosef, however, contends that the finder of a lost object has a greater amount of responsibility than an unpaid guard, that he has the responsibility of a “paid guard” who is obligated to pay in the event of loss or theft, and is exempt only if the object cannot be returned due to circumstances beyond his control — such as its death or being struck by lightning. What is the “payment” he receives? *Rabbi Yosef explains, “The money that he saves since he is exempt from giving charity to a poor person while he is involved in caring for the lost object.”*

This is based on the concept that “one who is performing one mitzvah is exempt from performing a different mitzvah at that time”. While he is involved in doing something to care for the lost object, if a poor person would come to his door for charity, he would be exempt from the mitzvah of giving charity at that time.

A question is raised by Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Chayot (“Maharitz Chayot”, 1805-1855, Eastern Europe) on Rav Yosef’s line of reasoning. The principle that exempts a person from doing *another* mitzvah while doing one mitzvah is an exemption only from a “positive mitzvah”, a *mitzvat aseh*. It is not an exemption that allows transgressing a “negative” command. Giving charity is not only a positive mitzvah, but *also* involves a “negative” mitzvah, a *mitzvat lo ta’aseh*: “You shall not close your hand from your needy brother.” (Devarim 15:7) This great *Acharon* (from the “later” period of Rabbis) leaves his question unanswered.

Perhaps the reason for the exemption is that the mitzvah is, after all, a mitzvah *to do something* — in this case to give *tzedaka* — whether it is stated in the “positive” (open your hand and give) or the “negative (don’t close your hand and not give). Therefore, regardless of how it is stated in the Torah, the mitzvah is to *do something* — a *mitzvat aseh* — to give charity to the needy. (We invite our readers to suggest an alternative solution, with sources if possible, and send it to us at ohr@ohr.edu, and we will *bli neder* share any insights that we feel will be of broad interest with other readers of this column.)

• *Shavuot 44b*

#### Greatness that “Rubs Off”

*The Sage Shimon ben Tarfon says, “If you touch someone who has had oil poured on his body, you will also become oily.”*

*The Yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael teaches, “The servant of the king is like the king.”*

These are, in fact, two “Talmudic tips” and insights that are taught on our *daf*, but the context for them and their message requires explanation.

The Sage Shimon ben Tarfon is quoted on a number of unrelated issues in our *sugya*, one of which helps explain and intriguing verse in Devarim: “Until the *great* river, the Euphrates.” (Dev. 1:7) This statement of this river’s *greatness* seems to be in conflict with another verse in Chumash that describes the four rivers that went out from Eden: “And the *fourth* river was the Euphrates,” indicating that it was smaller and less important than the other

*Continued on page four*

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## PARSHA Q&A?

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1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
  2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
  3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
  4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
  5. *Makat bechorot* took place at *exactly* midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at *approximately* midnight?
  6. Why did the first-born of the animals die?
  7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the first-born?
  8. G-d told Moshe, "...so that My wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was G-d referring to?
  9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
  10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
  11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
  12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti*." What are they?
  13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
  14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot*?
  15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
  16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
  17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
  18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
  19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael*?
  20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?
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## PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's questions! - All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

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1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
  2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
  3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
  4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched for and found the Egyptians' vessels.
  5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
  6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
  7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
  8. 11:9 - The plague of the first-born, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
  9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
  10. 12:5 - One year.
  11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
  12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
  13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
  14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
  15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a first-born.
  16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
  17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
  18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
  19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
  20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.
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## LOVE of the LAND

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

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### Tel Rechov–Bee Honey in the Land of Milk and Honey

Although the Torah’s description of Eretz Israel as the “Land of Milk and Honey” (Ex. 3:17) was a reference to the honey-like date fruit rather than bee honey, it may well be that honey-making from beehives was once a local industry.



Relatively recent archeological excavations at Tel Rechov in the Bet She’an Valley uncovered the oldest known beehive colony in the Middle East. According to Carbon-14 calculations these beehives date back close to 3,000 years.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh’s heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned. G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh’s heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too. Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the first-born, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d again hardens Pharaoh’s heart, and

Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month. The Jewish people are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the first-born of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating *chametz* on Pesach. Moshe relays G-d’s commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first-born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son) and *tefillin*.

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Talmud Tips...continued from page two

three rivers mentioned there (Ber. 2:14 and Rashi on our *daf*). Question: So why does the verse in Sefer Devarim call the Euphrates “great” if it is listed only fourth and last in the first Sefer of the Chumash?

The Sage Shimon ben Tarfon answers that although it was indeed the smallest in size it held a special “claim to greatness” over the other three rivers. The Euphrates is the *only* river mentioned in this verse which refers to the Land of Israel, giving directions to the Jewish People on how to approach the Land of Israel as they prepare to enter it. The key to understanding its greatness is to understand it in the context of its proximity and association with the Land of Israel.

But why does the *gemara* record *two* metaphors to explain its greatness? There are two “levels” of greatness that can be attributed to one who is in the presence of true greatness. By merely being near a great person it is virtually inevitable that some degree of the greatness will “rub off” on the “neighbor,” just as a person’s finger will become oily by touching a completely oiled person. But there is a higher level of greatness. If the neighbor is not only passively there, but is also actively “connected” to the great person — such as the servant of a king to the king (or the King of kings), or the service of water provision to the Land of Israel by the bordering Euphrates — then the “student” attains an even greater degree of the greatness of the “master”. But this requires a “closeness” that is more than a geographical proximity. It must be a closeness of shared goals and values of desiring closeness to the Creator.

• *Shavuot 47b*

BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

## Maneuvering the Louvre

### From: Becky

*Dear Rabbi,  
I will be visiting a European city soon, and I was encouraged to visit the National Art Museum there. I'm wondering if there's any problem with that, or if it's OK. Thanks for your guidance.*

Dear Becky,

Travel is always exciting, and of course there's a natural inclination to want to see and experience the special and unique sites and activities which are characteristic of any given place. This might include sites of natural wonder or beauty, or cultural events and venues. This inclination to explore and experience is particularly strong when one is out of one's regular routine and its restrictions – schedules, family, friends and society.

However, it's obvious that one would not sample local, indigenous cuisine which is not kosher, or partake in pastimes which involve prohibitions, just in order to experience a different country's culinary delights or cultural sites and rites. Similarly, one must ascertain and judge whether any of the other things tourists do may involve anything forbidden, even in the venue of what most might consider “high culture”.

And as innocuous as art museums may seem, there are definitely problems which have to be considered.

First of all, art from the Classical and Renaissance periods is replete with themes and stories from ancient Greek and Roman mythology. However meaningful the message, and however aesthetically beautifully it is conveyed, the bottom line is that this is paganism and it depicts gods and beings that are foreign to Judaism and Jewish beliefs. And while these artistic renditions are not idolatry itself, their visual beauty naturally enamors one to the subject, in addition to perking one's curiosity to learn, read and discuss more about it. And in this way, one becomes

moved by, and thereby integrates within oneself, even if only indirectly, paganism and idolatry.

Secondly, much of the art from these periods also depicts accounts, themes and scenes of a religious nature which are not part of the Jewish religious tradition. This is true even regarding the way events or individuals from the “Old” Testament are presented. All the more so is this applicable regarding themes from the New Testament. And as above, these subjects are intentionally portrayed by artistic masters, whatever their motives might have been, in a way to amaze the viewer and thereby compel him to interact with, and thereby spiritually, intellectually, emotionally and even physically internalize the subject. Obviously, when these events, icons, messages, and spiritual experiences are foreign to Judaism, internalizing them in either an overt or sublime way is not desirable.

What's more, both of these genres, depicting and celebrating the pagan and the Christian, while generally not portraying outright nakedness, most definitely display exposed bodies, and even lay bare certain discreet body parts, particularly of women. Even this partial disrobing of the body is considered inappropriate and immodest by Jewish standards. And this leads to the third major problem with painting and sculpture, which is the portrayal, and even exultation, of nudity. And this is particularly so regarding the later, secular art of the Romantic period, whose subject is often solely and explicitly a study in the nude.

Interestingly, and perhaps ironically or counter-intuitively, art of the modern period is generally less problematic from a Jewish point of view. Its departure from classic pagan and religious themes and true-to-life depiction in favor of abstraction in color, form, substance and subject, or even its boldly stated social critique, renders modern art more compatible with the Jewish palate.

So despite the adage, “When in Rome do as the Romans do”, you'd be better off being more modern as far as art appreciation is concerned.



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## WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

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BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

### Army of Grasshoppers

The eighth of ten plagues which G-d brought upon the Egyptians in the lead-up to the Exodus was the Plague of *Arbeh* — locust. Locust is the word for a Borg-like collective of grasshoppers that swarm about and destroy produce. These flying grasshoppers devastated the Land of Egypt by devouring its remaining crops. About this plague the Torah testifies, “Before it there was never a locust-swarm like it, and after it there will never be so.” (Exodus 10:14) Nonetheless, a similar story appears elsewhere in the Bible and that opens up our discussion about the grasshopper-related synonyms in the Hebrew language.

The prophet Yoel foretells a calamitous famine and grasshopper infestation. He actually uses four different words to describe the invading grasshoppers in his time: first, the *gazam* will come and eat from the produce, then the *arbeh* will come and eat what the *gazam* left over, then the *yelek* will arrive and eat what the *arbeh* allowed to remain, and finally the *chasil* will come and eat what the *yelek* passed over. (Yoel 1:4) Nonetheless, Yoel prophesizes that if the Jewish People will subsequently repent their sins and pray to G-d: “I (G-d) will distance the *tzfoni* from you.” (Yoel 2:20) Rashi and Radak explain that *tzfoni* is also a term that refers to grasshoppers, because those pests usually migrate from north (*tzafon*) of the Holy Land.

With this background information in mind we can now discuss the different terms used in the Bible for grasshoppers. So far we have encountered five different words for grasshoppers: *arbeh*, *gazam*, *yelek*, *chasil*, and *tzfoni*. When the Torah discusses the types of insects that are considered ritually clean and therefore fit for consumption, the Torah lists four species of grasshoppers which fall into that category: *arbeh*, *sal'am*, *chargol*, and *chagav*. (Leviticus 11:22) This adds another three words for grasshoppers to our list. Moreover, in Psalms' retelling of the Ten Plagues, it mentions the word *chanamal*, which Rashi (to Ps. 78:47) explains refers to grasshoppers (although other commentaries explain that it refers to a type of hail). If you haven't been keeping track, we have now a total of nine different words that are used as references to grasshoppers.

It seems that these different words for grasshoppers are not just synonyms, but are actually names of different types of grasshoppers. We don't know for sure, but they are probably different forms of grasshoppers, crickets, katydids (also known as bush crickets), and other orthoptera. The word *arbeh* cannot only be used to denote a certain type of grasshopper, but it is also an umbrella term that includes all types of grasshoppers. Similarly, Rabbi Menachem Meiri (1249-1315) in *Beit HaBechirah*, and Rabbi Shmuel ben Meshullam of Gerona (circa. 1335) in *Ohel Mo'ed* write that the word *chagav* cannot only denote a specific type of grasshopper, but is also a general term for all *kosher* grasshoppers. (For more about this, see Rav Chaim Kanievsky's *Karnei Chagavim* §2).

*Midrash HaGadol* (to Ex. 10:14) records that seven of nine types of grasshoppers comprised the Plague of *Arbeh* in Egypt: *arbeh*, *sal'am*, *chargol*, *chagav*, *gazam*, *yelek*, and *chasil*. Rabbi Menachem Tzoni (a 14th century German Kabbalist) adds that *chanamal* was also one of the species of grasshoppers in Egypt, making the total number eight. He explains that each of these eight types of grasshoppers included one hundred different sub-species, so there were really eight-hundred different types of locust which swarmed over Egypt. (*Midrash Sechel Tov* records the same tradition, but instead of *chanamal*, it mentions *tzlatzel* (see below).) This mirrors the Talmud's assertion (Chullin 63b) that there are eight-hundred types of *chagav*!

Radak gives us some insight into the meanings of the Hebrew words for grasshoppers mentioned by Yoel. He writes that *gazam* are called so because they cut (*gozez*) the grain. *Arbeh* bear that name because of their multitudes (related to the word *harbeh*, “a lot”). The name *yelek* is related to the word *melakek* (“lick”) and focuses on this grasshoppers' habit of licking and chewing grass. The prophet Nachum described *yelek* as a type of grasshopper that “spreads out and then flies away.” (Nachum 3:15) Based on this description, Malbim explains the *yelek* as a type of grasshopper that is originally born as a sort of worm, but then enters a cocoon from which it emerges as winged grasshopper. (After consulting with Ohr Somayach's resident zoologist, Rabbi Richard Jacobs,

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## PRAYER Essentials

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BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

### A Testimony of Faith

**A** great king once announced that he would grant any request. Many came with petitions for silver, gold, and high positions, but there was one wise man who made a unique request. He asked for permission to enter the palace and speak to the king three times each day. The king was delighted with this request, seeing that this wise man valued the king's companionship even more than silver or gold. (*Baal Shem Tov*)

Some see prayer as a chance to approach G-d with a long list of requests. "Give me health, give me wealth, give me this, give me that, and more." Is this all that prayer is? A self-centered meditative grab for the good stuff?

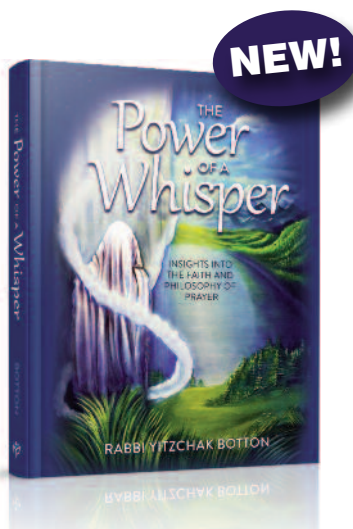
Prayer testifies to our faith and trust in G-d as our Provider. In this light we can understand the true point of prayer: Giving G-d what He desires most — our faith and loyalty. Thus, in Shir HaShirim (2:14) G-d proclaims that He desires to hear our sweet voice in prayer.

The Talmudic Sage Rava expounded on the verse, "I loved when G-d would hear the voice of my supplication." (Tehillim 116:6) The Jewish People said before G-d, "Master of the Universe! When am I beloved to You? When You hear the voice of my supplication." (Pesachim 118b)

Our prayers endear us to G-d when they are sincere and directed to Him, not in order to get what we want, but to draw close to Him. Our Sages teach us that, above all, G-d desires our hearts. (Sanhedrin 106b; Zohar Parshat Ki Teitzei 281b) This is the essence of prayer: to draw close and establish a connection with G-d.

One who sees "prayer time" as an opportunity to be with G-d rather than as a time to ask for things, or worse, as a burden, gains G-d's favor and breaks down the walls that normally separate him from his King.

• Source: "The Power of a Whisper"  
by Rabbi Yitzchak Botton



NEVER UNDERESTIMATE

# THE Power OF A Whisper

INSIGHTS INTO THE FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY OF PRAYER

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

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BY RABBI YOSEF HERSHMAN

## Beyond the Moon

The first national mitzvah to the Jewish People is the sanctification of the new moon: *This renewal of the moon shall be for you a beginning of new moons.* (Shemot 12:2) The new month is to be determined by the actual sighting of the recurring new light.

Some have wondered whether the ancient Jewish people simply lacked astronomical knowledge of the lunar cycle, and therefore depended on actual sightings. But the mitzvah is certainly based on astronomical knowledge: Rosh Chodesh could only have been one of two days: the thirtieth or the thirty-first after the last moon. If the moon was sighted on the thirtieth day, and reported by proper witnesses, the court would declare the thirtieth day to be Rosh Chodesh. If there was no sighting, the thirty-first would mark the beginning of the month. But a closer consideration of the laws of sanctification of the new moon reveals that its significance and purpose are far more exalted than a precise astronomical determination. Now, other halachic determination of time — such as sunrise and sundown, which determine times for prayer and the entry of Shabbat and other holidays — have no parallel procedure. These are determined by astronomical certainty. The new month is different — astronomical certainty is not only not required, it is also insufficient — the month must be consecrated by subjective perception.

The first clue is that the *beit din* procedure has the features of a civil hearing, and has the definite stamp of human social relationship. It must be performed during the day, only by a bench of three judges, and two witnesses are required.

Second, if the new moon was visible to the judges and to all of Israel, or witnesses were examined but the court did not have time to complete the proclamation of “It is consecrated!” before nightfall, the thirtieth day did not become Rosh Chodesh. Instead, the thirty-first day began the new month. Obviously, then, it is not the

actual sighting of a heavenly phenomenon, but rather the sanctifying enactment of the representatives of the community that determined the new month.

Rosh Chodesh, and the festivals that follow it, are referred to as *mo’ed* — a designated meeting time or place. They are meant to be mutual, voluntary meetings between G-d and his people. G-d specifies general terms of the time for these meetings, but it is up to the Jewish community to set the exact date for the meeting. It is not the natural phenomenon of the moon finding the light of the sun that determines the beginning of the month; rather G-d wants His people to find their way back to Him, so that His light may shine on them.

This explains other laws of sanctification as well. In the interests of the community, the representatives of the community may decide to declare the thirty-first day as the beginning of the new month, even if the moon was sighted on the thirtieth day, for example so that Shabbat and Yom Kippur would not fall on consecutive days. Furthermore, even if through error, or by design, or through being lead astray by false witnesses, the court designated the beginning of the month erroneously, the new month is still consecrated, and the festivals are set accordingly. When the details of the law are examined, it becomes evident that the sighting of the new moon is merely an inducement for the community to designate the new month. Once the community has declared it to be *mo’ed* — a meeting time — G-d joins that meeting.

And, the verse comes to life: *This renewal of the moon shall be for you a beginning of new moons.* Our perception of the renewed moon should inspire us to undertake spiritual renewal — not an astronomical calendar, but our own months, our own meeting times with G-d. And may we indeed find our way back to Him, so He may shine His light on us.

• Sources: Commentary, Shemot 12:2

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BY RABBI ZE'EV KRAINES

## Guardian Angel Maven

**T**he Torah itself accentuates the great power of mezuzah observance to guard our lives and the lives of our young offspring:

*You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates. So that your days and the days of your children shall be prolonged...*

Conversely, the Sages derive from this verse an implied warning about the negative consequences that could arise from the neglect of the mitzvah.

Clearly, as with every mitzvah, one's primary intention in affixing a mezuzah should be solely to fulfill G-d's commandment. Nevertheless, our Sages have revealed to us that in the merit of our obedience, special protection will be bestowed upon us. In the words of Rabbeinu Asher:

*...it may seem as if one intends to make for himself a talisman for protection! Rather, he should perform the mitzvah correctly to fulfill the word of the Creator, Blessed be He, and He will guard us and save us by our right hand.*

The Zohar teaches that the mezuzah protects the inhabitants of the house not only in their home but also from the time they leave the house until they return home. *Kol Bo* suggests that the letters of the Divine name **י-ד-ש**, customarily inscribed on the outside of the mezuzah parchment (see the Mezuzah Maven column in Ohrnet Vayetze titled "What's In a Name?"), also allude to the phrase **שומר דלתות ישראל** (Guardian of the doors of Israel). The daubing of the blood of the Pesach offering on the night of the Exodus on the doorposts and lintels of Jewish homes to prevent destructive forces from penetrating is the first instance of this theme.

In a famous story the Talmud relates how the Roman convert Onkelos fell afoul of his uncle, the Roman Emperor, because of his conversion to Judaism. Soldiers were sent to arrest him, but they abandoned their task, indeed converting to Judaism instead. Finally, in exasperation:

*Again he (the Roman Emperor) sent another cohort, ordering them not to enter into any conversation whatsoever with him (Onkelos). So, they took hold of him, and as they were walking on, he saw the mezuzah which was fixed on the door-frame and he placed his hand on it, saying to them: "Now what is this?" They replied: "You tell us, then." He said, "According to universal cus-*

*tom, a mortal king dwells within, and his servants keep guard on him without; but (in the case of) the Holy One, Blessed be He, it is His servants who dwell within while He keeps guard on them from without, as it is written: "G-d shall guard your going out and your coming in, from this time forth and for evermore." Then they too converted to Judaism.*

The nature of this "guarding" is interpreted in several ways by the commentaries. Basing himself on an Aggadic teaching, Rambam writes that the protection is from sin. As we encounter the "angelic" mezuzah and its message on our doorposts, we are reminded of G-d's omnipresence and of our loving commitment to keep His commandments:

*Whoever wears tefillin on his head and arm, wears tzitzit on his garment, and has a mezuzah on his entrance, can be assured that he will not sin because he has many who will remind him. These are the angels who will prevent him from sinning, as the verse states: "The angel of G-d camps around those who fear Him, and protects them."*

Seemingly, according to this approach, the protective blessing of the mezuzah is fully realized only if one heeds its reminder and is spurred to lead a virtuous life.

Rabbi Yehudah Loew (Maharal of Prague) writes that G-d's protection flows logically and naturally from the message of the *Shema Yisrael* and *V'haya im Shamo'a* paragraphs inscribed in the mezuzah's parchment. Since by affixing a mezuzah one is placing his home and family at the service of the King of the universe, it follows that the Divine Sovereign would spread His protective wings over those who have thus taken refuge in Him and guard them from all harm. The Maharal adds that although *tefillin* also contain these same paragraphs as well as two others, the mezuzah stationed on our "shelters" provides this unique protective effect.

The Talmud advises that we should place the mezuzah on the outer handbreadth of the doorpost so that the whole house will benefit from its protection.

- Sources: *Devarim* 11:20-21; *Shabbat* 32b; *Rosh*, *Hilchot Mezuzah* 18; *Avodah Zarah* 11a; *Menachot* 33b, 43b; *Rambam*, *Hilchot Sefer Torah* 6:13; *Tehillim* 34:8; *Maharal*, *Netivot Olam*, *Netiv HaAvodah* 15; *Kol Bo* 90

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What's In a Word...continued from page six

I have been unable to confirm the existence of such a grasshopper.) The word *chasil* is given to another type of locust because those grasshoppers were said to “finish off” the remaining produce in Yoel’s time. (The word *chasal* means to “finish” or “conclude”, like we say at the end of the Passover Seder, “*Chasal siddur Pesach...*” or at the end of a Tractate).

The Targum to Yoel gives us the Aramaic words for the four species of grasshoppers mentioned by Yoel. *Gazam* is translated as *zachala* (which literally means “crawling thing”, see Deut. 32:24 where it means snake), *arbeh* is *govai*, *yelek* is *parcha* (“flying thing”), and *chasil* is *shmota*. The Talmud (Chullin 65a) also offers Aramaic translations, specifically of the four types of kosher grasshoppers: *arbeh* is *govai*, *sal’am* is *rishon*, *chargol* is *nipol*, and *chagav* is *gadyan*. (See also Radak to Amos 7:1.)

I forgot to tell you about another possible word for grasshopper: Rashi (to Deut. 28:42 and Bava Kama

116b) writes that *tzlatzel* is also another type of grasshopper. Rabbeinu Bachaya (to Deut. 28:42) and in the commentary to Chronicles printed under Rashi’s name (I Chron. 13:8) explain that the word *tzlatzel* is related to *mitzaltayim* (“cymbals”) in reference to the clamorous noises associated with this type of grasshopper. *Pirush HaRokeach* adds that grasshoppers are related to the word *tzel* (“shade”) because when these invading pests swarm across the sky they cast a shadow over the earth below them.

Nonetheless, other commentators disagree with Rashi and explain *tzlatzel* differently: Rav Saadia Gaon writes that they are butterflies; Gersonides, that they are worms; and Nachmanides, that *tzlatzel* refer to the clamoring sound of enemy armies.

*Lilyu Nishmat* my mother Bracha bat R’ Dovid  
and my grandmother Shprintza bat R’ Meir

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