

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Last in Line

Something that always amazes me when I travel by plane is how competitive people are to get to the front of the line, whether it's for the security check, check-in, passport control or boarding. Human nature wants to be "the first." And even in these days of limited air travel and much shorter lines, people still want to be first in those short lines. When flying out of Tel Aviv the other day, I pointed this out to my wife and asked, "We're all going to get on the same metal tube and leave at the same time, so what does it matter who goes first?" "Well," she said, "they'll have more time for shopping." I said, "But the shops are all closed in the airport." So she said, "Even so, people want to just get through and sit down."

During the prayers of the *Yamim Noraim* – the Days of Awe – we pray to Hashem to put an end to competitiveness. Were it not for competitiveness, a person would be happy to live modestly, dress modestly and behave modestly. But, because we cannot bear the thought of someone being more than us, our lives become dedicated to out-doing our neighbors.

The difference between Capitalism and Communism is the kind of competitiveness their systems produce. The Communist says, "Your car is bigger than mine. I'm going to make sure you don't have a car at all!" The Capitalist says, "Your car is bigger than mine. I'm going to make sure that I have a car so big that I can put your car in my trunk and give you a ride!"

Arguably, the beginning of the Communist approach to competitiveness was in Sodom. The evil of Sodom and Amora was that they usurped a trait of Hashem. The deeper sources teach that their society was based totally on the characteristic of *din* – strict justice. The trait of *din* says, "You get what you deserve, no less, and certainly no more." In such a society there is no room for *chessed*, kindness, because we often receive *chessed* even when we do not necessarily deserve it. *Chessed* is "for those who are good and for those who are evil." When Hashem judges us with *din*, it is always to fulfill the purpose that His *chessed* should be of the best kind.

But, if competitiveness is part of human nature, it must have a positive application. The *Mesillas Yesharim* describes three levels of spiritual motivation. The second level is that we cannot bear the thought of getting to the next world and seeing our friend in a "better seat." The third level is that we cannot bear the thought that when we get to the next world we will see someone in a "better seat" and think to ourselves, "That could have been my seat!" It is not that we are jealous, that we want our fellow *not* to have that seat. It is just that we know that had we tried harder and been more competitive in the things that really matter, we could have the front row in the stalls of the World to Come. And that's significantly more painful than having to join the line at the back of the line at the airport.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Eruvin 93-99

When Exempt is not Excluded

“King Saul’s daughter Michal would put on tefillin, and the Sages did not object; the wife of the Prophet Yonah made regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem during the three Festivals, and the Sages did not object.”

This *beraita* on our *daf* serves as a springboard and gateway for our *Rishonim* and *Poskim* to discuss a fundamental issue in Jewish Law.

We learn elsewhere in *Shas* that women are exempt from fulfilling a mitzvah when the mitzvah is *zman grama*, meaning that it is time-related. For example, the mitzvahs of shofar, lulav and succah are applicable only on specific days of the year – Rosh Hashana and Succot. Therefore, women are exempt from the obligation of fulfilling these mitzvahs.

This exemption raises two intriguing halachic questions. One is if a woman – who is exempt from time-bound mitzvahs – may nevertheless do them. Secondly, if she is permitted to do them. May she say the *beracha* for the mitzvah she is doing? I assume that many readers are cognizant of the fact that many women nowadays are careful to hear the shofar, take the lulav and sit in the succah – and also make the appropriate *berachas*.

From the behavior of Shaul’s daughter wearing tefillin (although it is a time-related mitzvah since it is not always obligatory, such as at night or on Shabbat), it appears clear that although a woman is exempt, she may do the mitzvah anyway. Similarly, the same proof may be brought from behavior of Yonah the Prophet’s wife doing the mitzvah of going up to Jerusalem for the Festivals despite this also being a time-related mitzvah. As the *beraita* notes, the Sages did not object to their deeds, despite a possible concern, explains Rashi, that doing a mitzvah that one is not obligated in might be a transgression of “do not add to the mitzvahs of the Torah.”

However, may a woman who does a time-related mitzvah say the *beracha* that a man would say: “Blessed are You, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His mitzvahs, and has commanded us to do the mitzvah of lulav/succah/shofar etc.”? May a woman say “and has commanded us” if she was not personally commanded to fulfill a time-bound mitzvah?

Rabbeinu Tam’s ruling, taught in *Tosefot* on our *daf*, is that she is permitted to say the *beracha*. Rabbeinu Tam avers that we should correctly assume that Michal said the *tefillin berachas* since the Sages did not object to her actions. The words “and has commanded us” are to be interpreted as her praising Hashem for commanding the Jewish People to perform this mitzvah.

Rabbeinu Tam adds an additional support for women saying a *beracha* when doing a time-related mitzvah despite their exemption from the mitzvah. There is a dispute between Rabbi Yehuda and the Chachamim regarding whether or not a blind person is obligated to fulfill mitzvahs that involve doing something – such as lulav, succah and shofar. Rabbi Yehuda says that the Torah exempts a blind man from doing mitzvahs. However, elsewhere in *Shas* we find that a blind man may say a *beracha* on any mitzvah he does – despite his exempt status. Based on this, it would seem that a woman should have the same “*beracha* rights” when doing a time-bound mitzvah.

Other *Ba’alei Tosefot*, however, challenge this proof. They argue that a blind man – unlike a woman – is obligated by Rabbinical Law to fulfill

the mitzvahs. Therefore, it is appropriate for him to say the *beracha* “and has commanded us.” He says this *beracha* since Hashem has commanded him to obey the Rabbis, who decreed for him to fulfill the mitzvahs. Women, on the other hand, are not obligated in time-bound mitzvahs even according to Rabbinical Law.

According to this distinction, one might ask: “Why did our Sages not obligate women in the time-bound mitzvahs, as they did the blind man in all mitzvahs? One answer that Tosafot offers is that women, at least, are obligated by the Torah to fulfill mitzvahs that are not time-bound. This obligation causes them to stand out as Jews, whereas a blind person, without the obligation decreed by our Sages, would be virtually indistinguishable from non-Jews due to their total exemption.

When it comes to halacha, however, a blind person is, in fact, obligated in all mitzvahs by Torah Law. This is the ruling of the Chachamim, who do not agree with Rabbi Yehuda’s ruling. The

halacha regarding women saying a *beracha* over time-bound mitzvahs is not entirely clear. The Beit Yosef

rules in line with the view of the Rambam that they should not do so. The Rema, on the other hand, rules in accordance with Rabbeinu Tam, that women should say a *beracha*. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 589:6*)

Accordingly, there are differing practices in our various communities. However, it is the wide-spread custom to discourage women from the mitzvah of *tefillin*. Another mitzvah where we find the *Poskim* discouraging women from performing a time-related mitzvah is *tzitzit*, a mitzvah that is related to the day and not the night (see the Rambam and the Rosh). The issue with *tefillin* involves specific halachic requirements for *tefillin*, and the problem with women wearing *tzitzit* is that it is a daily mitzvah – unlike other mitzvahs that women are exempt from but nevertheless do. Therefore, they may be viewed by the community as desiring to “show off” and may appear as being haughty. Haughtiness (*ga’avah* or *y’hora*) is a trait that is extremely negative and is the polar opposite of one of the most desirable traits in existence – humility. (*Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 17*)

• *Eruvin 96a*

WHAT'S IN A WORD

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Elephants Galore

After the story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, the Torah mentions that Avraham received a report of his brother Nachor’s progeny. In the list of Nachor’s children that was communicated to Avraham, the sixth son mentioned is named Pildash (Gen. 22:22). The etymology of this name is somewhat unclear, with some linguists explaining it as a portmanteau of the Hebrew words *pladot*

(“torches”) and *aish* (“fire”) that appear side by side in Nehemiah 2:3. The word *pladot*, by the way, appears only once in the Bible, and is seemingly a metathesized version of the more familiar word *lapidot* (“torches”).

In addition to this etymology of Pildash’s name, there is another tradition concerning its meaning: Rabbeinu Efrayim ben Shimshon (to Gen. 22:22) explains that the name Pildash is a contraction of the Hebrew words *pil* (“elephant”) and *dash* (“threshes”), an allusion to

Pildash's superlative height that allowed him to "thresh" over those shorter than him. Besides this, the word *pil* does not appear anywhere else in the Bible. In fact, Biblical Hebrew seemingly has a different word for "elephant": *shenhav*. In this essay we will explore what, if anything, is the difference between the Hebrew words *pil* and *shenhav*.

The word *shenhav* appears twice in the Bible, both times in verses that list the items that King Solomon imported from overseas: "gold and silver, *shenhabim*, monkeys and parrots" (I Kgs. 10:22, II Chron. 9:21). The first part of this verse lists precious materials, while the second part lists exotic animals. In order to determine the true meaning of the Hebrew word *shenhav*, we must question whether it belongs to the first category or the second. The cantillation of the verses in question suggests that the word *shenhabim* is connected to the second part of the verse. Thus, it would seem that the word *shenhabim* refers to a species of exotic animals.

That said, the commentators do not unanimously agree to this. The Targumim (to both Kings and Chron.) render both instances of *shenhabim* into Aramaic as *shen d'pil* (literally, "the tooth of an elephant") – i.e. ivory. This explanation suggests linking *shenhabim* to the first part of the verse, which listed "gold and silver." Most of the standard commentaries (i.e. the Radak and Metzudos in Kings and Chron., as well as Rashi, Rabbi Yosef Karo, and Ralbag to Kings.) follow this approach. Similarly, Abarbanel (to Kings. 10:22) writes that Christian commentators explain *shenhabim* as "pearls" – again explaining it as something more akin to "gold and silver" than to "monkeys and parrots."

However, the commentary printed under Rashi's name to Chronicles (not actually written by Rashi) explains that the word *shenhav* not only refers to an elephant's tusk, but also to the elephant itself. He thus links the word *shenhabim* in the aforementioned verse to the clauses before and after that word.

Moreover, Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach (990-1055), in his *Sefer HaShorashim*, suggests that the word *shenhav* is a compound word derived from two words stuck together. Although he does not explain himself, it is safe to assume that he means that *shenhav* is derived

from *shen* ("tooth") and *hav* ("gives"). If so, then the term *shenhav* should refer to the beast who "gives" away "teeth" (i.e. tusks of ivory) that can be used for various purposes. Accordingly, he too seems to explain that *shenhav* does not refer to "ivory," but to the elephant itself. In an unpublished *piyyut* for Yom Kippur, HaKallir lists *shenhabim* as animals of exceptional height, implying that the word means "elephant." The 14th century Yemenite sage Rabbi Avraham ben Shlomo (in his commentary to Kings.) also writes that *shenhabim* means "elephants" and not "ivory."

Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) and others parse the word *shenhav* differently. They agree that *shen* means "tooth," but argue that *hav* is related to the Ancient Egyptian word *yev*, which means "elephant". (A famous example of this is the island of Elephantine in the Nile River, which is also known as Yev/Yebu.) Rabbi Dr. Klein also notes that the English word *ivory* is ultimately derived from the Ancient Egyptian word *yev* (by way of the Latin word for "ivory," *ebur*).

Although the word *pil* never appears in the Bible, it is a fairly common word in post-Biblical Hebrew. The word appears once in the Mishna (*Kilyaim* 8:6) in a discussion of which animals are considered a *behemah* and which a *chayah*. *Pil* (or its Aramaic equivalent *pila*) also appears multiple times in the Talmud. For example, when asserting that somebody never sees something in a dream that he has never seen in real life or has never thought about, the Talmud gives the example of "an elephant (*pila*) entering the eye of a needle" (*Berachos* 55b). There is even a discussion over whether seeing elephants in a dream is a good sign or a bad omen (see *Berachos* 56b-57a). If a person sees an elephant in real life, there is a special blessing to recite (see *Berachos* 58b).

As Rabbi Dr. Klein notes, the Mishnaic Hebrew word *pil* is related to the Persian *pil*, the Arabic *fil*, and the Akkadian *piru/pilu*. Dr. Chaim Tawil similarly points out that the Biblical Hebrew term *shenhabim* is a semantic cognate of the Akkadian term *sinni piri*, which means "elephant tusk." Parenthetically, *alfil* (Arabic for "the elephant") is the name of the original chess piece that eventually came to be known as a bishop. This piece was in the shape of an elephant

(hence, the name *alfil*) and, like the modern-day bishop, the *alfil* also moved diagonally (but unlike the bishop, the *alfil* could only move two squares at a time and could jump over any intermediate pieces).

Besides these foreign cognates, where does the word *pil* come from and why does it refer to an elephant?

Rabbi Yehoshua Steinberg of the Veromemanu Foundation notes that the Talmud (*Brachos* 56b, 57b) seems to associate the word *pil* with the Hebrew word *pele* (“wonder”). Of course, elephants certainly fit this bill, as they are “wondrously big.” Rabbi Yechiel Michel Stern (Rav of the Ezras Torah neighborhood of Jerusalem) connects the word *pil* to *nefilim* (“giants”), explaining that both elephants and giants cause fear to “fall” (*nofel*) upon those who behold them (see *Ber. Rabbah* 26:7). Rabbi Steinberg adds that Rabbi Yosef Bechor Shor (to Gen. 6:4 and Num. 14:33) also connects the term *nefilim* to *pele*.

As farfetched as it might sound, I would like to humbly suggest another way to understand the basis of the word *pil*. The root PEH-LAMMED is often associated with death, as *neifel* (Iyov 3:16, Ps. 58:9) refers to a “stillborn baby” who died, and the act of *nefilah/hapalah* (“falling”) in the Bible is commonly a euphemistic way of referring to death (see Ex. 19:21,

Deut. 21:1, Jud. 3:25, 4:22). Now, regarding elephants, Rabbi Menashe ben Israel (1604-1657) writes that when they kill a person, they stand by the corpse until they can bury their victim. In fact, other researchers have noted that elephants bury all sorts of dead animals that they encounter, and seem to otherwise take a special interest in the concept of death. A *BBC World News* headline from 2014 reads, “Kenya elephant buries its victims.” In light of all this, it makes much sense that the Hebrew word for “elephant” would be related to the concept of “death.”

To summarize our findings: The Biblical term *shenhav* means either “elephant” or “ivory.” Even if it means “elephant,” this word focuses specifically on the elephant as the source of ivory. The post-Biblical term *pil*, on the other hand, refers to other properties of the elephant, such as its superlative mass or possibly its knack for burying the dead.

Interestingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites the suggestion that the English word *elephant* ultimately derives from the Hebrew word *elef* (“ox”), which itself might be related to *pil(a)* by way of metathesis. By the way, various common Jewish surnames like Helfand, Gelfand, Elfant all mean “elephant.” Remember these facts and don’t forget them, because an elephant never forgets!

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

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VAYERA

Questions

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matza*. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

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

Answers

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of *mitzvot*.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

RISE & CHOOSE TO SHINE

THE TORAH BLESSINGS: STARTING EACH DAY THE TORAH WAY

To be a religious Jew means that each day is carefully mapped out. We live our days within the framework of Jewish Law and customs. One of the very first things we do after waking up is recite what are known as *Birkot HaTorah* – the blessings over the Torah. In fact, these blessings are considered to be so fundamental that our Sages teach (Bava Metzia 85) that the Second Temple was destroyed because the Jewish People did not recite the “blessings for the Torah” before they commenced their Torah study. The Maharal of Prague, Rabbi Yehuda Loew (1520-1609), explains that our Sages are imparting to us a major principle. All the undesirable and negative actions that the Jewish People were involved in prior to the destruction were founded on the fact that the *Birkot HaTorah* were being neglected and not being recited!

It is clear from this precept that the blessings over the Torah are such an integral dimension of our psyche that they have a direct influence over the way we relate to our spiritual selves. And that, in turn, shapes the way we express ourselves, both verbally and physically. To the point that it became the underlying cause of something as calamitous as the destruction of the Holy Temple and an almost two millennia exile.

Indeed, so essential are *Birkot HaTorah* that we are instructed not to commence learning any Torah after waking up in the morning until they have been recited. For example, a person who gets up early to learn Torah before the morning prayers must recite these blessings upon arising. Even a person who wakes up while it is still dark outside to learn Torah must recite the Torah Blessings, despite the fact that he might be planning to pray only a few hours later.

With the help of G-d, over the next few weeks we will investigate the Torah Blessings together. We will endeavor to plumb the depths of their profundity and enhance our appreciation for these beautifully composed blessings. These blessings are both thought-provoking and intriguing in their construction and meaning.

While it is true that the blessing over washing hands and the blessing recited after having been to the bathroom are not an integral part of the Torah Blessings, these other blessings directly precede them in the order in which the blessings appear in the Siddur. Consequently, next week it is with them that we plan to embark on our voyage.

*Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet
on The Morning Blessings
by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
www.ohr.edu/morning-blessings*

THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 2 of a new mini-series)

5781 is year that is chock-full of rare calendar phenomena that we will *iyH* be witnessing, or, more accurately, taking an active part in. Let us continue exploring what is in store for us.

Five YaKNeHa”Zes

A record-breaking occurrence specifically this year is that there will be five (!) *YaKNeHa”Zes* over the course of the year for those in *Chutz La’aretz* (but only two for those of us in Eretz Yisrael). *YaKNeHa”Z* refers to the special hybrid *Kiddush-Havdalah* that is only recited when a Shabbat exits directly into a Yom Tov. This occurs more frequently in *Chutz La’aretz* than in Eretz Yisrael due to the prevalence of two-day Yamim Tovim.

In *Chutz La’aretz* this year these are the:

- Second night of Rosh Hashana
- Second night of Succot
- Night of Simchat Torah
- First night of Pesach (*Leil HaSeder*)
- Last night of Pesach

Yet, in Eretz Yisrael, there are only two *YaKNeHa”Zes* occurring, on the:

- Second night of Rosh Hashana
- First night of Pesach (*Leil HaSeder*)

The reason for this discrepancy is due to Yom Tov *Sheini*, which is observed in *Chutz La’aretz* but not in Eretz Yisrael.

Of course, along with each *YaKNeHa”Z* is the special *Havdalah beracha* addition recited in the Yom Tov Maariv Shemoneh Esrei when Shabbat is departing – *Vatode’ainu*,” which concludes with the not-too- common “*HaMavdil Bein Kodesh L’Kodesh*.”

The word *YaKNeHa”Z* is an acronym of the proper order of blessings in this Kiddush/Havdalah. It stands for *Yayin* (*Borei Pri Hagafen*), *Kiddush* (*Mekadeish Yisrael V’Hazmanim*), *Ner* (*Borei Me’orei Ha’Aish*), *Havdalah* (*Hamavdil Bein Kodesh L’Kodesh*), *Zman* (*Shehechyanu*).

To help facilitate this special Kiddush that needs its own Havdalah candle(s) that will go out by itself/themselves (in order not to unwittingly transgress the prohibition of ‘*Kivui*’, extinguishing), several companies have recently started making “*YaKNeHa”Z Candles*” (a.k.a. “*avukalehs*”) – small candles containing several wicks (to be classified as an ‘*avuka*,’ a torch, for *Havdalah*, as opposed to the traditional one-wick candle) that go out by themselves after several minutes and are made to facilitate *YaKNeHa”Z* performance. It is reported that Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv’s “face lit up with joy” the first time someone brought him one of these *YaKNeHa”Z* candles, as it enabled him to properly perform this *Kiddush/Havdalah* without any potential halachic concerns. *Mi K’Amcha Yisrael!*

Wabbit Season?

All of these *YaKNeHa*”Zes in one year makes this author ruminant about what is possibly the oddest connection to it. In what appears to be an interesting turn of phrase, many classic Ashkenazic Illuminated Haggadahs over the centuries, including the Cincinnati, Ashkenazic, Prague, Venice, and Augsburg Haggadahs, depict an interesting phenomenon next to the hybrid *Kiddush-Havdalah* of *YaKNeHa*”Z: A rabbit hunt! Yes, you read that right. Not even remotely related to either *Kiddush* or *Havdalah* (or in fact anything else in Yiddishkeit except possibly the *Noda B’Yehuda*’s famous responsum regarding hunting for sport or pleasure), a full-fledged rabbit hunt. Scholars theorize that the reason this picture is placed specifically at this point of the Haggadah is the similar-sounding German phrase “Jag den Häs,” which translates to “Chase the Rabbit” or “Hunt the Hare.” Apparently, this was an easy, albeit whimsical way to remind the various locales in their vernacular of the proper order of the blessings of this *Kiddush-Havdalah* on Seder Night.



YaKNeHa”Z depiction in the famous Illuminated 1629 Venice Hagaddah.

This author has recently heard a similar-type of explanation for the “*minhag*” to eat stuffed cabbage on Hoshana Rabba: “*Kraut Mit Vasser*” – “Cabbage (cooked) with Water” – sounds similar to the special prayer recited on Hoshana Rabba that is associated with the *klopping* of *Hoshanahs*: “*Kol Mevasser.*”

Megillah Mystery

Our unique calendar setup also means that this year there is no Shabbat Chol HaMoed, which ordinarily means more time for Chol HaMoed trips. (This was not too applicable under the Israeli *Chagim* lockdown, but hopefully we will have better luck over Pesach.) Yet, this also means that the Yom Tov days of both Succot and Pesach had/will have longer prayers. This is due to the special “Megillah readings” of *Kohelet* on Succot and *Shir HaShirim* on Pesach. As both of these Megillahs are ordinarily read on the Yom Tov’s respective Shabbat Chol HaMoed, when there isn’t one, they get pushed off to other days of Yom Tov. But there is another fascinating divergence between Eretz Yisrael and *Chutz La’aretz*. Without Shabbat Chol HaMoed, in Eretz Yisrael *Kohelet* gets pushed forward to Yom Tov *Rishon* of Succot, whereas in *Chutz La’aretz* it gets pushed off further to Shemini Atzeret. Meaning, although Ashkenazim all read *Kohelet* on a Shabbat Yom Tov day of Succot, in Eretz Yisrael it was read a full week (!) before it was read in *Chutz La’aretz*.

On the other hand, regarding Pesach, in lieu of Shabbat Chol HaMoed, everyone will be united in pushing *Shir HaShirim*’s reading off to *Shevii shel Pesach* – which will also be the only Shabbat during Pesach this year.

To be continued...

Written l’zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v’chol yotzei chalatzeha l’yeshua sheleimah teikif u’miyad.

This author wishes to acknowledge Rabbi Shea Linder’s excellent article on this topic.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

The Tzaddik Missing from Sodom

G-d deems Avraham worthy of being privy to His verdict regarding Sodom. And while he tries with all his soul to fathom the depths of G-d's judgment, there is one question that gnaws at him. It is *not* the question – as may be misunderstood from a superficial reading of the text – of why G-d would punish the righteous along with the wicked. Avraham has not the slightest doubt that the innocent will be saved from calamity – even the thought that it might be otherwise would be a defamation of G-d's name. *It would be a profanation for You to do such a thing, to kill the righteous along with the guilty*, Avraham declares. Even if there is complete annihilation, Avraham is certain that any innocent person – even one in a million – would be saved.

What, then, is his entire negotiation with G-d? *Will You save the city for 50 righteous people? 45? 40? ...10?* And moreover, if Avraham was certain that no innocent man would perish, what is the meaning of his opening question, *Will You also sweep into ruin (tispeh) the righteous along with the wicked?*

Avraham knows the nature of the righteous. He knows how *he* would feel were he to stand in the place of the individual who merited saving himself from destruction that befalls the rest of the community. Anyone might experience survivor's guilt, but a *tzaddik's* pain in witnessing the destruction of his surrounding community is far greater. Avraham imagines that, had he been living in Sodom, he would have spared no effort and would have worked unceasingly to improve his fellow citizens who had deviated from the path. He would have suffered agony over the loss of every soul he had hoped and worked to save.

Avraham's question to G-d is this: *Shouldn't the pain of the righteous, in witnessing the tragic plight of their neighbors, be taken into consideration? Should the righteous*

also be swept into this ruin, as tormented witnesses? Isn't this consideration strong enough to bring G-d, for the sake of the righteous, to spare them the unbearable anguish – to pardon the whole community?

We see that Avraham regarded the salvation of the whole community as the reward of the righteous who share in the suffering of the community. The *tzaddik* whom Avraham imagines in Sodom does not look on the moral ruin of his fellow countrymen with apathy. He does not isolate himself and say, *What have I to do with others' troubles? I have to spare my own soul.* Such a person would not merit the salvation of the entire community on his behalf, since the fate of the community is essentially, according to his own thinking, not his concern. If he had already abandoned them and separated himself, then their suffering and destruction do not touch his heart. He may even feel satisfaction at having escaped the harsh judgment by virtue of his seclusion.

Not so Avraham's *tzaddik* – whom he describes as dwelling “in the midst of the city.” For *that tzaddik* – who lives connected with his environment and never ceases to teach and hope and aim for its rectification – the community would be saved.

- Sources: Commentary, Ber. 18:23-25

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham "bargains" G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases Avraham.

As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar's son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him.

In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham's unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The Torah portion concludes with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

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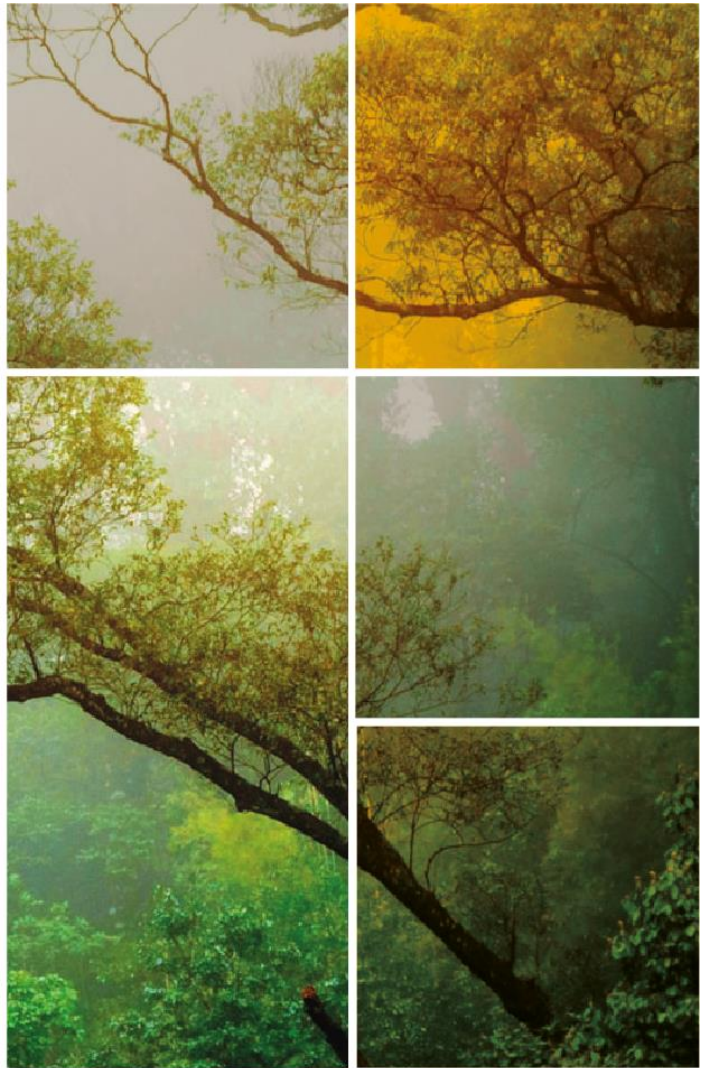
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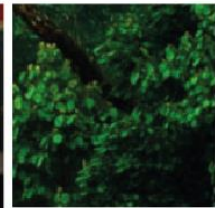
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