

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYISHLACH • 19 KISLEV 5781 DECEMBER 5, 2020 • VOL 28 NO. 7
SHABBAT PARSHAT VAYESHEV / CHANUKAH • 26 KISLEV 5781 DECEMBER 12, 2020

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Vayishlach

Air Thin

"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother."

Seeing is believing, but there is far more to see in this world than meets the human eye. Take the air that surrounds you, for example. The air seems empty enough, but take a not-so-powerful microscope and you'll be amazed at how the emptiness of the air teems with all manner of minute particles.

And if you could go further than that, beyond the microscopic, if you'd go beyond the limits of human vision itself, you'd be even more amazed and possibly more than a little frightened.

The fact is that we are all surrounded by myriad incorporeal spiritual beings. Some of these beings are benevolent and others, well, let's just say, they're less than benevolent.

"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother."

Why does the Torah include the phrase *"before him"*? Ostensibly, the sentence could have equally well been, *"And Yaakov sent angels to Esav, his brother."*

The Mishna (*Avot, Chapter 4*) tells us that if we do even one mitzvah, we acquire for ourselves a defending angel, and if we do one transgression we acquire a prosecuting angel. The mitzvah itself creates that spiritual entity (so inadequately translated into

English by the word "angel"). Every mitzvah literally begets a holy angel.

As in the world beneath, so too it is in the world above.

A defense lawyer will do everything he can to show off his client in a good light, and, similarly, the angel born of a mitzvah pleads for his "client" before G-d's throne in the Heavenly Realms. This angel tries his hardest to advance his client's welfare, not only spiritually but materially too. This angel is really more like a son pleading on behalf of his father, for, like a son, he was created by his "father."

Rabbi Yosef Karo, the *Beit Yosef* and author of the Shulchan Aruch, the standard compendium of Jewish law, would regularly learn the entire six orders of the Mishna by heart. It is well known that, as a result of this prodigious achievement, an angel would come and learn Torah with him. The book *"Magid Meisharim"* (*lit. The Speaker of Straight Things*) details what the angel taught him, and more. This book is still readily available to this day.

The *Shelah Hakadosh* in his commentary on Tractate Shavuot recounts an amazing story. One Shavuot, he and nine other Torah sages stayed up all night on both nights of Shavuot and they witnessed how the

angel spoke with the Beit Yosef. It started speaking as follows: "I am the Mishna speaking in your throat."

The name of that angel was "Mishna," since that was the mitzvah that gave it life.

At the end of this lengthy testimony, all ten Sages, including Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz (the composer of the famous Shabbat song *Lecha Dodi* that is sung in

synagogues every Friday night the world over) signed an authentication of what they had seen and heard.

"And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav, his brother"

Yaakov didn't want to employ the services of those angels who stand before G-d's throne. He sent only angels that were the offspring of his good deeds, the ones that were "before him."

- Source: *Lev Eliyahu*

Chanukah

The Dreidel's Secret

The Dreidel

A children's game, played in the firelight of a cold winter night, the Chanukah Menorah silently glowing in the window... The dreidel. Its four sides spinning around the still point in the turning circle; spinning so fast that its sides blur into nothingness... The dreidel. So seemingly insignificant - and yet this little dreidel contains the story of the Jewish People; the history of the whole world...

Our story starts not with the miracle of Chanukah, but 1,437 years earlier, with Jacob's ladder. Jacob had a prophetic dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder that reached from the ground to the heavens. These angels weren't Hollywood extras with fluorescent tubes over their heads - they were, in fact, incorporeal spiritual messengers - the protecting forces of four great kingdoms. Four kingdoms that would in the future dominate and exile the Jewish People: Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

At first, Yaakov saw the angel of Babylon ascend the ladder 70 steps and then he came down: The Jewish People were in the Babylonian exile for 70 years. The protecting angel of the Empire of Persia and Media then climbed up the ladder 52 steps before he descended: The Jewish People were in exile in Persia 52 years. Then the angel of the Empire of Greece climbed 180 rungs - the domination of Greece lasted 180 years. Finally, the protecting angel of the Roman

Empire climbed up the ladder, but *he didn't come down*. Yaakov feared that this final exile would never end, until Hashem promised Yaakov - *If he will rise up like an eagle and make his nest among the stars - even from there I will bring him down*.

We are still in that final exile, in the softly asphyxiating embrace of Rome's spiritual heirs....

The Four Kingdoms

BABYLON

In the year 3338 (587/6 BCE), the first of our Holy Temples was razed to the ground by the Babylonian Emperor *Nebuchadnezer*, and the majority of the Jewish People led into exile by the Assyrian Emperor *Sancheriv*. Why was it such a tragedy that the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple) was destroyed? The Beit Hamikdash represents a unique pipeline between Hashem and Man. When it was destroyed, this flow of spiritual energy was severed. The level of this connection is linked to the word "*nefesh*" - soul ("*When a soul will bring an offering*"... *Vayikra 2:1*). *Nefesh* begins with the letter *Nun*, and *Nun* represents the kingdom of Babylon.

PERSIA

As we know from the story of Esther, Haman was interested in finding the final solution of the Jewish

problem - genocide. The exile of Persia and Media represents the threat to the "guf" - the body of the Jewish People, the physical threat of annihilation. *Guf* begins with *Gimmel*, which stands for the kingdom of Persia and Media.

GREECE

Greece, on the other hand, represents the attack on the Torah itself - *the sechel* - the wisdom of Israel. The Greeks weren't interested in the physical destruction of the Jewish People; rather they wanted to destroy the spiritual core of Judaism - the Torah - and leave a Hellenized hulk that would conform to the Greek norms of aesthetics - drama and the superficial wisdoms. *Sechel* begins with the letter *Sin* - that's the letter of the kingdom of Greece.

ROME

The fourth kingdom, Rome, is a summation of all the other exiles. At the beginning of their domination, the Romans, like the Babylonians, stopped the bringing of offerings in the Temple. Then, they destroyed the second Holy Temple and inflicted unthinkable carnage on the "guf," the body of Jewish People: After the massacre of Betar, they used Jewish blood as fertilizer for seven years.

At first, Rome was the intellectual scion of Greece, but with the conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity in 313 CE, the Catholic Church became the spiritual heir of the Roman Empire. After the demise of the influence of the Church, the mantle of Rome was subsequently worn by secularism and materialism - the spiritual incarnation of Rome in our own times. Rome is all the exiles rolled into one and thus it is represented by the Hebrew word "*HaKol*," meaning "all." Its first letter is the letter *Heh*.

Where is the point at the center of a circle?

Can you define it? And yet it exists. Just like the letter 'yud' in the Hebrew alphabet - a single dot - from which the whole universe was created - the threshold of existence. The still point in the turning circle - and around that dot turns the whole world.

The Jewish People are that little dot - so infinitesimally small, and yet around this dot, the world turns. What is the opposite to that little dot?

What is the opposite of the central point that occupies no space? Direction. North, South, East and West. Expansion in four directions. Four is the antithesis of the One. Four is the number of the kingdoms who stand eternally opposed to the Jewish People. Eternally opposed to He who is One. And to His reflection in this world - the Jewish People.

Take another look at our dreidel spinning.

What do you see? Four sides. Spinning around a central point that occupies no space. And when those sides spin - they themselves cease to have direction anymore. Now, in the blur of their whirling - *they are a circle, a reflection of the still small point at its center.*

What is it that is carved on the sides of our dreidel?

Nun, Gimmel, Sin, Heh... On the surface, those letters stand for "*Nes Gadol Hayah Sham - A great miracle happened there*" - the commemoration of a miraculous victory of a faithful few over the might of the Greek Empire. But on a deeper level, the dreidel is a microcosmic representation of the four kingdoms, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome spinning around the center, the Jewish People.

And the Hand that spins the dreidel comes from Above...

Every empire thinks that it will last forever, but the Hand that spins only spins the dreidel of history for predetermined time. And then each Empire, despite its vainglorious boasting, falters on its axis... finally crashing.

Sources:

- *Ramban, Ber. 28:12*
- *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 35*
- *Maharal, Ner Mitzvah*
- *Bnei Yisasschar, Kislev/Tevet, Essay 2:25*
- *Ibid. - Commentary on Bnei Yisasschar; Rav Nachman Bulman, zatzal*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Vayishlach and Vayeshev

Pesachim 16-22 and 23-29

Is Almost Good Enough?

We learned in a beraita: Shimon Ha'Amsoni, and others say it was Nechemia Ha'Amsoni, would explain the meaning of every appearance of the word 'et' in the Torah. When he reached, "Fear [et] Hashem, your G-d," he stopped. His students asked him, "Rebbi, all appearances of the word 'et' in the Torah that you already explained, what is their fate?" He answered, "Just as I received reward for explaining them, likewise I receive reward for stopping to explain them." Rabbi Akiva came and explained: In the verse "Fear [et] Hashem, your G-d," the word 'et' comes to include Torah scholars.

In our Hebrew language studies nowadays we are accustomed to understand the word *et* as a part of speech without real meaning, but as serving the purpose of introducing a definite direct object. However, in Torah studies it is assumed that everything in the Torah has meaning. Every word, every letter and even the crowns on the letters. So what does the word *et* mean in the Torah? The simple answer is that the word *et* appears in the Torah to include something that is not explicitly mentioned in the verse, but is similar in nature to the definite direct object that follows it in the verse.

With this in mind, one of our Sages (Rabbi Shimon Ha'Amsoni or Rabbi Nechemia Ha'Amsoni) initially explained the meaning of the word *et* in various places in the Torah. In one place, he said, it means one thing and in another place it means something else – but each time the attributed meaning is similar to the definite direct object word that appears explicitly in the verse. However, the word *et* in the verse, "Fear [et] Hashem your G-d," posed an impasse. The Sage rhetorically asked, "What can be included by the word *et* that should also be feared in the same way that Hashem is to be feared?" Therefore, he did not assign the word *et* in this verse any special meaning.

When his students asked him regarding the status of every other *et* in the Torah that he had already successfully explained, he told them, "Just as I received reward for initially explaining their meanings, likewise I will now receive reward for retracting my original teachings", concluding that nothing new is included from any *et* in the entire Torah.

Rabbi Akiva, however, reasoned otherwise. He taught that every *et* in the Torah includes something new, including the one in the verse that teaches the mitzvah of fearing Hashem. Here, says Rabbi Akiva, the word *et* comes to include Torah scholars. This means that just as there is a mitzvah to fear Hashem, there is likewise a mitzvah to fear Torah scholars. Although, of course, the equation of Torah scholars to Hashem is not exact, we should be in awe of their greatness in a manner that is similar to – but not equal to – our awe and fear of Hashem. As the Mishna in Pirkei Avot (4:12) teaches, "Rabbi Eliezer the son of Shamua would say: The

dignity of your student should be as precious to you as your own; the dignity of your colleague, as your awe of your Torah teacher; *and your awe of your Torah teacher as your awe of Heaven.*" (Rashi)

Maharsha explains the different views of the first Sage and Rabbi Akiva in the following manner. The impetus for first Sage to offer interpretations for every *et* in the Torah was to honor Hashem and His Torah by showing that not even one word in the Torah is superfluous. Since this Sage's purpose was to honor Hashem in this way, he reasoned that he would achieve that same goal by avoiding any interpretation of the word *et* that would include anyone in the same category with Hashem.

Rabbi Akiva, explains the Maharsha, reasoned that it was indeed correct and appropriate to include Torah scholars from the word *et* – not in the sense of fear of retribution, but rather in the sense of awe and respect. He viewed this not as disrespect to the honor of Hashem, but rather as a tribute to Torah scholars, who learn Hashem's Torah.

- *Pesachim 22b*

With All Your Might

Rabbi Eliezer says, "If the Torah says '[And you will love Hashem, your G-d...] and with all your life,' why does the Torah also say, 'And with all of your might'? And, if the Torah says, 'And with all of your money,' why does the Torah also say, 'And with all your life'? Rather, the Torah is saying to you: If there is a person whose life is more dear to him than his money, therefore the Torah says, 'And with all your life;' and if there is a person whose money is more dear to him than his life, therefore the Torah says, 'And with all your money?'"

The basis for this teaching is a verse in the Torah that is part of our daily prayers in the first paragraph of the Kriat Shma: "And you will love Hashem, your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul (i.e. life) and with all your might (i.e. money). This is one way that *Chazal* explain the words in the verse. There is a mitzvah to love Hashem, even in certain situations – such as being faced with choosing idol worship or sacrificing his life or all of his money. Rabbi Eleizer explains why the Torah specifies this expression of love as being willing to part with both his life and his wealth, and does not just state the greater sacrifice (presumably giving up his life), from which we would logically know that he would of course need to make the lesser sacrifice in order to show his love for Hashem by not transgressing.

He explains that the Torah addresses a person of any mindset: A person who values his life more than his money must choose to forfeit his life, and a person who values his money over his life must be prepared to forgo all of his money to show his love for Hashem, if needed.

It may perhaps sound strange to some people to hear that there are people (or even one sane person) who values his money more than his life. However, the commentaries explain this value system of life versus money is not necessarily a general one, the way a person thinks throughout his life. Rather, the verse deals with only one relevant point for making the ultimate sacrifice that is required by this verse to fulfill the mitzvah of loving Hashem without a limit. This point in time is the moment if and when a person is faced with the choice of giving up all of his money (or his life, depending on the specific demand) in order not to worship the idol. What is more important to him *then*?

Perhaps he is *very* elderly and *very* infirm and he greatly desires to leave his wealth to his wife, children, charitable organizations, places of Torah study, and other worthy and needy causes? If, at that moment and under those circumstances in his lifetime, he is given the choice of relinquishing all his wealth or be killed, it is not unreasonable that he would find his money dearer to him than his life. At that point in time, the money might very well be his priority – perhaps by a long shot. In this case, the mitzvah to love Hashem requires him to part with his money, despite it being that which is truly what is most dear to him.

[*Note: Please skip the following paragraph if you are not a fan of renowned Jack Benny stories. One of the longest laughs in radio history occurred during the Jack Benny show. Mr. Benny, who was notoriously parsimonious, was late in arriving at the studio. His sidekick asked him why he was so late. He told him that he was mugged on the way. The questioner continued to wonder how that accounted for his extreme lateness. “Does it really take that long to be robbed?” Jack Benny answered in his deliberate manner, “The robber threatened me with the ultimatum, ‘Your money or your life’?! And, I was thinking...”]

• *Pesachim 25a*

Ohr Somayach wishes all of our friends, alumni and readers of Ohrnet Torah Magazine a festive and luminous Chanukah that will light up our lives with good health, much happiness and success.

Chanukah Somayach!

Q & A

VAYISHLACH

Questions

1. What sort of messengers did Yaakov send to Esav?
2. Why was Yaakov both "afraid" and "distressed"?
3. In what three ways did Yaakov prepare for his encounter with Esav?
4. Where did Dina hide and why?
5. After helping his family across the river, Yaakov remained alone on the other side. Why?
6. What was the angel forced to do before Yaakov agreed to release him?
7. What was it that healed Yaakov's leg?
8. Why did Esav embrace Yaakov?
9. Why did Yosef stand between Esav and Rachel?
10. Give an exact translation of the word *nisa* in verse 33:12.
11. What happened to the 400 men who accompanied Esav?
12. Why does the Torah refer to Dina as the daughter of Leah and not as the daughter of Yaakov?
13. Whom should Shimon and Levi have consulted concerning their plan to kill the people of Shechem?
14. Who was born along with Binyamin?
15. What does the name Binyamin mean? Why did Yaakov call him that?
16. The Torah states, "The sons of Yaakov were twelve." Why?
17. How old was Yaakov when Yosef was sold?
18. Esav changed his wife's name to Yehudit. Why?
19. Which three categories of people have their sins pardoned?
20. What is the connection between the Egyptian oppression of the Jewish people and Esav's decision to leave the land of Canaan?

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

Answers

1. 32:4 - Angels.
2. 32:8 - He was afraid he would be killed. He was distressed that he would have to kill.
3. 32:9 - He sent gifts, he prayed, and he prepared for war.
4. 32:23 - Yaakov hid her in a chest so that Esav wouldn't see her and want to marry her.
5. 32:25 - He went back to get some small containers he had forgotten.
6. 32:27 - Admit that the blessings given by Yitzchak rightfully belong to Yaakov.
7. 32:32 - The shining of the sun.
8. 33:4 - His pity was aroused when he saw Yaakov bowing to him so many times.
9. 33:7 - To stop Esav from gazing at her.
10. 33:12 - It means "travel". It does not mean "we will travel." This is because the letter *nun* is part of the word and does not mean 'we' as it sometimes does.
11. 33:16 - They slipped away one by one.
12. 34:1 - Because she was outgoing like her mother, Leah.
13. 34:25 - Their father, Yaakov.
14. 35:17 - His two triplet sisters.
15. 35:18 - *Ben-Yemin* means "Son of the South." He was the only son born in the Land of Israel, which is south of Aram Naharaim.
16. 35:22 - To stress that all of them, including Reuven, were righteous.
17. 35:29 - One hundred and eight.
18. 36:2 - To fool Yitzchak into thinking that she had abandoned idolatry.
19. 36:3 - One who converts to Judaism, one who is elevated to a position of leadership, and one who marries.
20. 36:6 - Esav knew that the privilege of living in the Land of Israel was accompanied by the prophecy that the Jews would be "foreigners in a land not their own." Therefore Esav said, "I'm leaving. I don't want the Land if it means I have to pay the bill of subjugation in Egypt."

Q & A

VAYESHEV

Questions

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

Answers

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

Q & A

CHANUKAH

Questions

1. Which miracle do we celebrate with the lighting of candles?
2. How did they know that the oil found was uncontaminated?
3. Who led the battle against the Hellenites?
4. During which of the "four exiles" did the miracle of Chanukah take place?
5. Name two non-halachic customs connected with Chanukah.
6. How many blessings are made before lighting candles?
7. Why do we light the extra candle known as the "shamash"?
8. What is added to our regular prayers at least three times a day?
9. What is the special reading of the Torah each day?
10. Is it obligatory to eat a meal like on Purim?
11. When do we have occasion to use three Sifrei Torah on Chanukah?
12. What three *mitzvot* did the Hellenites decree against?
13. What damage did the Hellenites do to the Beit Hamikdash?
14. What two military advantages did the Hellenite army have over the Jews?
15. Is it permissible to do work on Chanukah?
16. Why is there no Mussaf prayer on Chanukah except for Shabbat and Rosh Chodesh?
17. How does the name Chanukah indicate the date when this holiday begins?
18. What special prayer do we add to the morning services?
19. What did the Jews do after victory that explains the name Chanukah?
20. Which regular prayers in the morning service do we omit on Chanukah?

Answers

1. The oil for lighting the menorah in the Beit Hamikdash after the victory over the Hellenites was only enough for one day and it miraculously lasted for eight days until a new supply of pure oil was available. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
2. Its container had the seal of the *kohen gadol*. (*Mesechta Shabbat* 21b)
3. Matityahu, the *kohen gadol* and his sons. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1, and the "Al Hanissim" prayer in the Siddur)
4. The third exile under Hellenite oppression during the era of the second Beit Hamikdash. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
5. Eating either donuts or potato pancakes made with oil and playing with the *sivivon* (dreidel).
6. Three blessings the first night and two the other nights. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:4)
7. Since it is forbidden to benefit from the light of the candles we light an extra one so that if we do benefit it will be from that one called the *shamash* because it is sometimes used to serve as the lighting agent. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 673:1)
8. The prayer "Al Hanissim". (Ibid. 682:1)
9. The gifts of the *nesi'im* (heads of the twelve tribes at the inauguration of the Sanctuary as recorded in *Bamidbar* 7:1-8). (Ibid. 684:1)
10. No. But if the meal is accompanied by songs of praise to Heaven it is considered a *seudat mitzvah*. (Ibid. 670:2)
11. When Rosh Chodesh Tevet is on Shabbat and we read selections for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and Chanukah. (Ibid. 684:3)
12. Shabbat, circumcision and Rosh Chodesh. (*Midrash*)
13. They made breaks in the walls and contaminated the sacred items. (Rambam, Laws of Chanukah 1:1)
14. They were stronger and more numerous. ("Al Hanissim" Prayer)
15. It is permissible to work but women have a custom of refraining from work for the first half hour that the candles are burning. (*Mishna Berurah* 670:1)
16. Because there were no additional sacrifices in the Beit Hamikdash during Chanukah. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 682:2)
17. If we break up the word into two parts — *Chanu*, and the letters *chaf* and *hei*, we read that they rested from the war on the 25th day of the month.
18. Hallel. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)
19. They rededicated the altar in the Beit Hamikdash, which the Hellenites had defiled. ("Chanukah" means inauguration.)
20. Tachanun and Psalm 20 before *Uva Letzion*. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 683:1)

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayishlach - Chanukah

Pick your Wax

With Chanukah just around the corner, people are already thinking about how exactly they will light their Menorah and what sort of candles they will use. Of course, ideally one should opt for using olive oil to light Chanukah lamps, but, nonetheless, for various reasons, using wax candles remains a popular choice as well (see *Rema to Orach Chaim* 673:1). In this essay we will encounter four different words for “wax” – *donag*, *shaava*, *kira*, and *nechot*. In doing so we will seek out the etymologies of these words to figure out if/how they differ from one another.

The word *donag* appears four times in the Bible (Mic. 1:4, Psalms 22:15, 68:3, 97:5), but never in the Mishna or Talmud – except for the fact that Rav Nachman’s wife was named Donag (*Kiddushin* 70a). Whenever *donag* appears in the Bible it denotes “wax” as something that easily melts in fire.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 29:20) connects the word *donag* to the Biblical Hebrew word *tenuch* (“ear lobe”), ostensibly invoking the interchangeability of DALET and TAV, as well as GIMMEL and KAF. Rabbi Hirsch explains that wax is similar to an ear lobe because wax is malleable and pliable, just like the fatty ear lobe is.

Rabbi Yehoshua Steinberg writes in *Shorashei Leshon HaKodesh* (Warsaw, 1897) that the word *donag* is a portmanteau of the words *dei* (“enough”) and *nogah* (“light”), an allusion to wax’s usefulness in lighting candles and providing light.

More scholarly-oriented etymologists are at a loss to explain the origins of the word *donag*. The prominent linguist Avraham Even-Shoshan (1906-1984) suggests in his dictionary that this word is derived from the Akkadian word *dumqu*, which means “clear” or “shiny” – a clear reference to wax’s translucence. Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) concludes that *donag* is of uncertain etymology, mentioning Even-Shoshan’s theory as just a possibility. He then cites Dr. Heinrich Leberecht Fleischer (1801-1888) who compares the Hebrew *donag* to the Arabic word *danj* which means “the remainder of the honeycombs.”

In Mishnaic Hebrew the common word for “candle wax” is *shaava* (typically pronounced *shayva* in more Yeshivish circles). This word appears six times in the Mishna, thrice in *Shabbat* (2:1, 8:4, 22:3) and thrice in *Keilim* (10:2, 17:17, 24:7), but it never appears in the Bible. When the Talmud (*Shabbat* 20b) discusses the Mishnaic word *shaava*, it explains that *shaava* refers to the “refuse of honey” (*pesulta d’duvsha*). In other words, the Talmud explains that *shaava* refers to the honeycomb, which is the source of bees’ wax – a by-product of the honey-making process.

All three times that the word *donag* appears in Psalms, the Targum renders the term in Aramaic as *shaava*. However, the one place it appears outside of Psalms (Mic. 1:4), the Targum translates it into a slightly different word, *she’ei’ita* (which Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur in *Metrugaman* suggests is actually a mistake and should really say *shaavita*). Either way, both *shaava* and *she’ei’ita* seem to be

derived from the two-letter root SHIN-AYIN, which means “smooth” (see our essay “Smooth Sliding & Glad Gliding” about the word *shua/shiyya*). This, of course, relates to the silky smooth texture of hardened wax.

When the Midrash (*Ber. Rabbah* 85:4) teaches that Judah’s father-in-law Shua (Gen. 38:2) was a prominent figure in his locale, it highlights this point by referring to him as a “The Candle of the City.” Rabbi Matisyahu Strashun (1817-1885) explains that this appellation is actually a pun on the name Shua, which is spelled with the same letters as *shaava* – the material from which the best candles are made.

The Talmud (*Shabbat* 20b) actually translates the Mishnaic word *shaava* into the seemingly Aramaic word *kerosa*. However, the truth is that this word and its variations, such as *kira* (*Bava Metzia* 40a, *Berachot* 56b, *Shabbat* 110b, 133b) and *kiri* (*Pesachim* 8a, *Yevamot* 76a) are not actually Aramaic words, but rather are loan-words derived from *cera* in Latin and/or *keros* in Greek.

Interestingly, according to some commentators there might be another word for “wax” in Biblical Hebrew. When the Torah describes Joseph’s brothers seeing an Ishmaelite caravan heading to Egypt, it mentions that this caravan was transporting, *inter alia*, *nechot* (Gen. 37:25). Later in the Joseph story, when Jacob sent his sons with gifts to appease the Egyptian viceroy, one of the special delicacies from Canaan that Jacob sent was *nechot* (Gen. 43:11). Now, the word *nechot* is generally understood to be a sort of spice, often identified as “ladanum” (although Ibn Janach writes that *nechot* are “carobs”). However, according to the Midrash (*Ber. Rabbah* 91:11), *nechot* is *shaava* – “wax.” Professor Zohar Amar adds that in the list of things that Jacob sent the viceroy, the item that immediately precedes *nechot*

is “some honey” (*me’at dvash*), which may have led to the supposition that *nechot* is something related to honey (i.e. beeswax).

In fact, Targum Jonathan and Targum Neophyti (to Gen. 37:25, 43:11) translate *nechot* as *shaava*. Moreover, Rashi (to Gen. 37:25) cites Targum Onkelos (there) as also rendering *nechot* as *shaava*. This assertion is somewhat difficult because our editions of Targum Onkelos (Gen. 37:25, 43:11) actually translate *nechot* as *shaaf*, which apparently means “smear” (see *Chullin* 111b). Nachmanides (to Ex. 30:34) takes Onkelos’ translation to mean that *nechot* refers to “olive oil.” The Vilna Gaon’s son, Rabbi Avraham Vilner, reads Onkelos as saying *saaf*, which he connects to the Biblical Hebrew word *seif* (“branch”) that appears in *Yechezkel* 31:8. Despite all of this, we can validate what Rashi writes in the name of Targum Onkelos, based on what Rabbi Yosef Teomim-Frankel (1727-1792) suggests in *Iggros Pri Megadim*, that *shaaf* is just a variant of *shaava* – presumably because the letters PEH and VAV represent phonetically similar sounds and can thus be interchangeable.

To summarize: Everybody agrees that there are two Hebrew words for “wax”: *donag* in Biblical Hebrew and *shaava* in Mishnaic Hebrew (and Targumic Aramaic). These two words seem to focus on different properties of wax. *Donag* focuses on either wax’s malleability, its role in bringing light or its translucent appearance; while *shaava*, on the other hand, seems to emphasize wax’s smooth texture. The word *kira* and the variations thereof are not really Hebrew or Aramaic words, but come from Greek/Latin. Finally, the Biblical word *nechot* is typically understood to refer to “spices,” but some commentators explain it as another term for “wax.”

*We wish all of Ohrnet Magazine’s readers - and all of
Ohr Somayach’s alumni and friends - a healthy
winter.*

WHAT'S IN A WORD? cont.

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayeshev – Chanukah

To Be a Wise Guy (part 1 of 2)

Jewish tradition has long viewed the Menorah – eternally associated with the holiday of Chanukah – as a symbol of wisdom (see Bava Batra 25b). The Menorah illuminates and enlightens us both in the literal sense and in the proverbial sense. It therefore befits us to offer a discussion of the different forms of knowledge and wisdom as an ode to the festival of lights. In this essay we will explore three Hebrew words associated with knowledge (*chochmah*, *tevunah/binah*, and *daat*), and explain how altogether these three words form the basis of Jewish epistemology.

We begin our discussion with the term *chochmah* (“wisdom”), a form of knowledge associated with a *chacham* (“wise man” or “sage”). The Mishna (*Avot* 4:1) asks, “Who is a *chacham*?” before answering, “One who learns from all people.” Thus, the *chacham* casts a net as wide as possible, looking to accrue wisdom from all possible sources of information. The Talmud (*Tamid* 32a) says that a *chacham* is somebody who can foresee future consequences that had not yet come to fruition. In this explanation as well, the *chacham* holds wide-ranging wisdom, which allows him to be sensitive to all possible consequences of a given course of action. The Talmud (*Chagigah* 14a) further asserts that a *chacham* is defined as a student who makes his teachers wiser, again showing that the *chacham* typifies broadening one’s scope of wisdom.

Rabbi Avraham Bedersi HaPenini explains that *chacham* denotes the opposite of “simpleton,” as *chacham* can refer to anyone who has mastered as certain body of knowledge. That body of knowledge could be something as trivial as

carpentry (Isa. 3:3, 40:20), snake-charming (Psalms 59:6), or other technical/engineering skills (see Ex. 31:6). Even cunningness and political ingenuity can be considered a form of *chochmah* (see II Sam. 13:3) – even if used negatively (Jer. 4:22). That said, Rabbi Bedersi clarifies that when the Bible speaks of a *chacham* (especially in the Book of Kohelet), it refers specifically to a *religious scholar* – a sage who has mastered the Torah and the Divine Arts.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the words *chacham* and *chochmah* to the two-letter root CHET-KAF, which refers to “waiting” or “delaying.” The word *michakeh/choche* (“waiting” or “anticipating”) in Hebrew (see Isa. 30:18, Hab. 2:3, Dan. 12:12, Iyov 32:4) is derived from this root, as is the word *chakah* meaning “fish net” (Iyov 40:25, Isa. 19:8, Hab. 1:15), a trap which one sets and then “waits” for the fish to enter. In the same way, a *chacham* is a wise man who is not hasty or rushed in his studies, but rather patiently “waits/delays” to deliberate over the material more thoroughly. (Rabbi Pappenheim also argues that the word *cheich*, “palate,” comes from the word *chakah*, because the open fish net resembles a person’s mouth opened wide in anticipation of food.) The Aramaic verb *chayach* (“to smile”) and the Modern Hebrew noun *chiyuch* (“smile”) are likely also derived from the word *cheich*.)

The term *tevunah/binah* refers to the form of knowledge acquired by the *navon*, whom the Talmud (*Chagigah* 14a) says is *meivin davar m’toch davar* (“understands one matter from within [another] matter”). This connotes a deep comprehension that allows the learner to derive

new ideas from a lesson he or she had previously learned.

Rabbi Bedersi relates *tevunah/binah* to the word *bein* (“between”). This is because a *navon* must equally be able to apply relevant data to whatever he is considering, and, at the same time, exclude irrelevant information. The discerning *navon* is thus expected to be able to tell the difference “between” this datum and that datum, allowing him to efficiently analyze all relevant data and derive new conclusions.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the term *tevunah/binah* to the biliteral root BET-NUN, which refers to “building.” The verb *boneh* (“builds”) refers to building a physical structure; *even* (“rock”) and *teven* (“straw”), to materials used for building a physical edifice; *ben* (“son”) and *bat* (“daughter”) are the result of building one’s progeny; *avnayim* (“birthing stool”), to the place on which that building can come, and so on. *Binah* relates to this core meaning because it essentially refers to the ability to “build” on a given idea by applying it to something else and extrapolating further. (The English word *maven* in the sense of “expert” actually derives from the Hebrew *meivin*, “he understands,” by way of Yiddish.)

Most authorities use the term *tevunah* and *binah* almost interchangeably. While Rabbi Pappenheim admits that he has not seen other sources that address the difference between these two words, he proffers his own explanation, based on his understanding of the implications of an initial TAV. In a nutshell, Rabbi Pappenheim argues that *binah* refers to the ability to understand the big picture even if it is comprised of many different components, while *tevunah* refers to the ability to break down the overarching big picture into its smaller components.

The Vilna Gaon (to Proverbs 2:2-3, 2:6) differentiates between *binah* and *tevunah* by explaining that *tevunah* refers to the “reflection” that qualifies one’s *chochmah* or *binah*. The Vilna Gaon in *Chemdah Genuzah* (to Proverbs 1:1) writes that *binah* refers to understanding something on

one’s own terms, while *tevunah* refers to understanding something so thoroughly that one can explain it to others (see also Zohar, *Vayakhel* 201a). Rabbi Shlomo Brevda (1931-2013) points out in *Leil Shimurim* (p. 26) that this latter source runs counter to the aphorism often cited in the “Yeshiva World” in the name of Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk (1853-1918): “A deficiency in being able to explain something is a sign of a deficiency in one’s actual understanding.”

Let’s summarize what we have learned until now. *Chochmah* refers to the intake of knowledge or raw data as it comes from many different sources. On the other hand, *tevunah/binah* refers to the intellectual acumen required to process that knowledge and the ability to understand information in such a way that one can induce further. In the next article, part 2, we will learn how *daat* is the offspring of the “marriage” between *chochmah* and *tevunah/binah* (see Ramchal’s introduction to *Klach Pischei Chochmah*). For now, we will focus on sharpening the differences between *chochmah* and *tevunah/binah*.

The Malbim explains that *chochmah* refers to a practical form of wisdom, while *tevunah/binah* connotes a more abstract form of understanding. He explains that the term *chochmah* applies only when the opposite of *chochmah* is also a possibility. In other words, when there is something that can be done in two ways, such that one way is the “smart” way of doing it while the other way is the “dumb” way of doing it, the intelligence needed to choose the “smart” approach is called *chochmah*. In line with this, the Malbim explains that *chochmah* primarily refers to that which can be experienced. It refers to the “smart” way of acting/behaving.

That said, the Malbim explains that true *chochmah* can come only by way of Divine revelation, because with anything less it cannot be known for certain that it is the “smartest” of all options. When we speak of non-revelatory *chochmah*, it is only a borrowed term to refer to what we can only assume to be the “smartest” possibility.

By contrast, the Malbim explains that *binah* refers to a more abstract form of cleverness. When a person can understand complex allegories or solve riddles, this draws on his or her *binah*. One who acquires *binah* has the ability to take into account everything that he or she has perceived – either through their senses or intellect – and use all of that information to arrive at intelligent, logically sound conclusions. *Binah* is thus the ability to think through and process what one has beheld. In the Malbim’s model, the term *daat* refers to the “certainty” of the resultant knowledge and conclusions that come through *binah*.

Another way of putting it: *Chochmah* represents the raw information found in the Written Torah and its limitless planes of interpretation, *binah* represents the Oral Torah that processes and elucidates that information, and *daat* is the careful balance between the infinite wisdom of the Written Torah and the more concrete lessons of the Oral Torah. This approach is found in the *Zohar* (see *Matok M’Dvash* to *Yisro* 85a), the Vilna

Gaon’s *Biurei Aggados* (*Bava Kama* 92b), and the Vilna Gaon’s commentary to Proverbs (1:8, see also the glosses to his comments on Proverbs 10:13).

Using this paradigm, Rabbi Eliyahu Tzion Sofer explains that the Hellenistic Syrian-Greeks specifically opposed the concept of *binah*, because they denied the significance of the Oral Torah. They essentially had the Written Torah in front of them in the form of the Septuagint, but to them the Oral Torah was nothing worth pursuing. We may add that this is why the poem *Maoz Tzur* refers to the Jewish People as “the Children of *Binah*” when describing their victory over the Greeks and the establishment of Chanukah as a special holiday. The Jewish People’s commitment to the Oral Torah (*binah*) turned the tide against Hellenism and led to the Hasmonean victory.

To be continued....

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



COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

COMING BACK TO LIFE EVERY DAY – PART 2

“My G-d, the soul You placed within me is pure. You created it, You fashioned it, You breathed it into me, You safeguard it within me, and eventually You will take it from me, and restore it to me in Time to Come. As long as the soul is within me, I gratefully thank You, Hashem, my G-d and the G-d of my forefathers, Master of all works, L-rd of all souls. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who restores souls to dead bodies.”

The text of our blessing is acknowledging that our souls belong to G-d. Not just that, but each soul is unique and it has been embedded within us by G-d. Its function is to give us the capability to fuse the disparate concepts of spirituality and physicality together during our time in this physical world. But the blessing also reminds us that our time here is transient and that at some point we will return our precious soul to its Maker. It is as if the blessing is imploring us to use our time wisely and not allow ourselves to become distracted by the physical to the point that we lose sight of our spiritual selves.

The words, “You safeguard it within me” are a stark reminder that the soul is able to coexist with the body only because G-d allows it to. And that we are in this world to fulfill a purpose. Additionally, we have each been allotted a specific amount of time in this world by G-d. The blessing is reminding us that we must endeavor to maximize our lives, so that when the time comes to return our souls to our Maker we are able to do so in the most accomplished way possible.

Therefore, the blessing emphasizes the fundamental idea that we must spend our time in the pursuit of spiritual goals because, ultimately, it is only the spiritual that can make the transition from this world to the next.

In 1920 in communist Russia, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson was hauled up in front of the “All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering and Corruption” – commonly known as the Cheka, the precursor to the dreaded and loathed GDU – for his religious activities. All religious endeavors were regarded as being anti-establishment, and, therefore, seditious. It was an especially serious accusation, which carried with it a punishment of exile or even execution, depending on the whims of the “judges” who heard the case. When confronted by a “court” that was comprised of rabidly atheist communists, Rabbi Schneerson was not in the least bit intimidated and he would not back down from his intent to continue teaching Torah. He stated, absolutely and clearly, that he would not abandon his goal regardless of any threats they made against him. One of the “judges” was so enraged by his remarks that he drew his pistol and pointed it straight at the Rabbi. “This little toy has made many a man change his mind,” he said with an arrogant sneer. Rabbi Schneerson looked at him and calmly replied, “Your little toy can only intimidate the kind of man who has many gods and but one world. I, however, have only one G-d and two worlds, and, therefore, I am not impressed by your little toy!” *To be continued...*

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

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Vayishlach

Returning home, Yaakov sends angelic messengers to appease his brother Esav. The messengers return, telling Yaakov that Esav is approaching with an army of 400. Yaakov takes the strategic precautions of dividing the camps, praying for assistance, and sending tribute to mollify Esav.

That night, Yaakov is left alone and wrestles with the Angel of Esav. Yaakov emerges victorious but is left with an injured sinew in his thigh (which is the reason that it is forbidden to eat the sciatic nerve of a kosher animal). The angel tells him that his name in the future will be Yisrael, signifying that he has prevailed against man (Lavan) and the supernatural (the angel). Yaakov and Esav meet and are reconciled, but Yaakov, still fearful of his brother, rejects Esav's offer that they should dwell together.

Shechem, a Caananite prince, abducts and violates Dina, Yaakov's daughter. In return for Dina's hand in marriage, the prince and his father suggest that Yaakov and his family intermarry and enjoy the fruits of Caananite prosperity. Yaakov's sons trick Shechem and his father by feigning agreement. However, they stipulate that all the males of the city must undergo *brit milah*. Shimon and Levi, two of Dina's brothers, enter the town and execute all the males who were weakened by the circumcision. This action is justified by the city's tacit complicity in the abduction of their sister.

G-d commands Yaakov to go to Beit-El and build an altar. His mother Rivka's nurse, Devorah, dies and is buried below Beit-El. G-d appears again to Yaakov, blesses him and changes his name to Yisrael. While traveling, Rachel goes into labor and gives birth to Binyamin, the twelfth of the tribes of Israel. She dies in childbirth and is buried on the Beit Lechem Road. Yaakov builds a monument to her. Yitzchak passes away at the age of 180 and is buried by his sons. The Torah portion concludes by listing Esav's descendants.

Vayeshev

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's Chamberlain of the Butchers.

In the Parsha's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the Mashiach.

Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His extreme beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In prison, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Vayishlach

Humanity Prevails

Already in the womb, Yaakov and Esav had drawn out their battle lines. Their vigorous movements in utero, which propelled Rivka to seek answers from G-d, gave expression to a struggle that would endure for the rest of time. Rivka is told *there are two nations in your womb, and two states; they will be different from each other, starting from your innards one state will become mightier than the other, and the mighty one will serve the lesser.*

Rivka is informed that she carries two nations who represent two different social systems. One state will be built on spirit and morality, on man's human soul. The other will be built on cunning and power. Spirit and strength, morality and power will oppose each other. From the day of their birth, the two will go their separate ways. When one state will strengthen, the other will weaken, the scales constantly rising and falling between these two states. All of history is but one struggle to determine who will gain the upper hand: the book or the sword.

In this week's Torah portion, the fateful encounter between the now adult brothers – each with a tribe of wives and children – teaches us more about this struggle. Yaakov has spent the last twenty years raising his children. He is the hard-working family man. Esav has spent this time becoming a political force, the leader of an army, a chief of his tribe. Yaakov represents family life, serving others, and seeing to their welfare and happiness. Esav represents the glitter of political power and might. The struggle between them and the outcome of this struggle foreshadow a raging battle that has haunted humanity for thousands of years. In the words of Rav Hirsch:

Is it sufficient just to be a human being, and are political power and social creativity of no significance unless they lead to the loftiest of all human aspirations, or, on the contrary, does everything that is human in man, in home, and in family life exist only to serve the purposes of political triumph?

The night before this fateful encounter, Yaakov experiences an even more fateful encounter – with his brother's angel. This adversary wrestles with Yaakov the entire night, as Yaakov attempts to protect himself. The angel realizes that he cannot prevail against Yaakov, and he is able only to injure his thigh. The angel then asks to be released, for the dawn is breaking, but Yaakov refuses let him go until the angel blesses him: "You will no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have become the commanding power before G-d and men, since you have prevailed."

The goal of history – realized at daybreak – is the recognition that happiness and progress depend on those principles which Yaakov has lived by throughout the ages. No longer shall he be known as "Yaakov" – he who holds on to the heel – but rather, "Yisrael" – he who shows the world that G-d towers above all.

There is one highlight of the brothers' encounter which hints to Yaakov's ultimate triumph. After sending several delegations with gifts, Yaakov himself sees Esav from the distance, approaching with 400 men. Yaakov arranges his wives and children and goes ahead of his camp to greet his brother and bows to

him. Esav ran to meet Yaakov, *embraced him, fell upon his neck, and kissed him; and they [both] wept*. Here we see that Esav was overcome by genuine human emotion. A kiss can be an affected gesture; not so tears that flow at such moments. The kiss *and* the tears show that Esav too is a grandson of Avraham.

These tears foretell that Esav too will gradually and eventually lay down his sword. Brute force will give way to humaneness. Yaakov will be the one to provide him with the opportunity of showing to what extent the principle of humanness has prevailed in his heart. When the strong respects the rights of the strong, this is merely discretion, but when the strong, as Esav here, throws himself on the shoulders of the weak and casts away the sword of aggression, it is clear that justice and humanness have prevailed in his heart. The *mightier* will serve the *lesser*, as Rivka was told.

- Sources: Commentary, Ber. 25:23; 32:8; 32:27-32; 33:4

Vayeshev

Chanukah: The Power of Minority

We Jews represent a mere .02% of the world population. A minute minority indeed. Not for naught has this been the case since the inception of our history. The fact of our minority was revealed as an essential feature of our mission. *Not because you are more numerous than any other peoples did G-d take delight in you and choose you; for you are the smallest among all the peoples.* (Devarim 7:7).

What better time than Chanukah, when we celebrate the victory of the few over the many, to reflect on this unique aspect of our nationhood?

Our minority status begins way back with our forefather Avraham the *Ivri*. He was called *Ivri* – the one from over there – our Sages note, because the entire world stood at one side, championing polytheism, and Avraham stood alone, on the other side, resolute in His monotheistic truth and piety. Within our people too, it was the minority that preserved Hashem's Will against rebellion of the masses. After the debacle of the golden calf, Moshe called out, "Whoever is for G-d, join forces with me!" Only a single tribe, the Levites, responded to the call. Out of the twelve spies sent to assess the Land, only Yehoshua and Calev remained loyal to G-d, standing firm against a panicked people prepared to return to Egypt. The events recorded in the books of the Prophets repeat this phenomenon over and over again. One man, with firm conviction and passionate commitment, stood up for the Law of G-d and saved the people: Gidon, Ovadiah, Eliyahu, Elisha – each resisted the misguided masses and set the nation straight.

In the Chanukah story, this hallmark of our history is most apparent. The nation was rapidly assimilating to the Hellenistic culture surrounding it. One man, Matisyahu, raised five sons so mighty in spirit and so staunch in their commitment that they took on G-d's cause *alone*. It is the victory of these few great and pure souls – the victory won for the loyalty to G-d's Law – that we celebrate on Chanukah.

Our history of three-and-a-half millennia attests time and again to the triumphant perseverance of a tiny, powerless minority. Every page of our history reminds us: the fate of truth and right can never be hopeless, even if their cause is supported only by a minority.

But what *advantage* does a minority confer? Is there no merit and power in numbers?

A minority is likely the most fertile ground for cultivating spiritual truth. A victorious majority will all too often become unfaithful to its own cause. Once its struggle is a matter of the past, the members of the majority lend their minds and spirits to new aspirations. The core values which were once the fuel of its life, now immune from challenge, are left to wither – no further development or nurturance are pursued. A majority often imagines that its cause owes its victory to its numbers, when in fact its numbers were once won on account of its cause. Because the focus is on numbers, a majority is often content to preserve its numbers, or perhaps increase them. But the underlying cause remains just that – underlying. It lies, buried under new ambitions, often of a different character. This may explain why some of the largest religions are underdeveloped theologically.

Not so for the minority. By virtue of its continuing struggle, it perpetually breathes new life into its cause. Survival of the minority depends on its ability to keep awake within it a vibrant spiritual reserve. Because the numbers and power of the majority always beckon, the minority is impelled to immerse itself, over and over again, in the content of its cause. A minority must educate its ranks not only to the truth of its cause, but to the character required to defend its cause. This, in turn, requires that each individual have access to knowledge and research – to make these truths personal ones. There can be no mindless masses if a minority is to survive. Hence, in our Jewish minority, the teaching and dissemination of our cause – the Torah, G-d's truth – occupies the most splendid and prominent place in life. The mind and spirit of the Jew are so immersed in this fountain of truth that there is not one house of study without new insight. The result is a rich and ever-growing reservoir of spiritual thought and strength. And, precisely because membership in the minority often requires sacrifice – material wealth and prosperity usually reside in the majority – the minority will likely be composed of more purely motivated supporters.

The fact of our minority is hardly a cause of despair. Its unique features have enabled us to live a noble existence for millennia. We are assured:

There is still within it a tenth consecrated to G-d; even though it will be destroyed again and again, as the oak and the beech tree whose trunk remains though they shed their leaves, still the trunk will remain holy seed.

(Yeshayahu 6:13)

- Sources: *Collected Writings II, Kislev IV, pp. 233-248*



THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 6 of a new mini-series)

5781 is a 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.

Generally speaking, there are several separate “Unknown Days” that occur during the month of Iyar. I refer to them as such as they do not seem to have much in the way of observance, and even that observance is minimally observed by much of Klal Yisrael.

Pesach Sheini

The 14th of *Iyar* is dubbed *Pesach Sheini*, “a second *Pesach*.” This commemorates the day when those who were unable to bring the annual *Korban Pesach* (special *Pesach* sacrifice of a Pascal lamb) at its proper time, on *erev Pesach*, were given a second chance to offer this *Korban*. Although technically not considered a true holiday, and despite the fact that it is (astonishingly!) not listed in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days when *Tachanun* is not recited, nevertheless, the custom for many is not to recite *Tachanun* on *Pesach Sheini* in order to ‘tap into’ the merit this particular day had during the times of the *Beit Hanikdash*. Although the *Pri Megadim* maintains that *Tachanun* should be recited on *Pesach Sheini*, as the original day it commemorates was meant only for individuals in unique circumstances, and its absence of mention in the traditional halachic sources as one of the days that *Tachanun* is not recited speaks volumes – nevertheless, most later authorities rule that one should not say *Tachanun* on this day.

There is an interesting common custom associated with *Pesach Sheini*: eating matzah. But this is not something noticeable in a *shul*, and many simply take it on as an addition for the day, but certainly not as a mandated observance.

BeHa”B

There is a semi-annual period of three days of fasts that many are not aware of: a series of “Days of *Tefilla*” colloquially known as *BeHa”B*. This acronym stands for Monday (*Beit*, referring to the 2nd day of the week), Thursday (*Hei*, the 5th day of the week), and the following Monday (*Beit*). These days are generally observed on the first Monday, Thursday, and Monday following the earliest *Rosh Chodesh* after *Pesach* (*Rosh Chodesh Iyar*), and likewise after *Succot* (*Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan*).

The custom of utilizing these specific days for prayer and supplication is already mentioned almost 900 years ago by the *Baalei Tosafot* and its importance is reiterated by the *Tur*. Unbeknownst to many, this practice is actually codified in halacha by the *Shulchan Aruch* as a proper *minhag* custom.

Whose Minhag Is It, Anyway?

Both the Tur and the Rema refer to *BeHa”B* as a German-French custom, and the *Shulchan Gavoah* (and seconded by the *Kaf Hachaim*) writes that this was not the *minhag* in Spain, implying that Sefardim are not beholden to keep *BeHa”B*. Although the Shulchan Aruch dedicates an entire, albeit brief, chapter to *BeHa”B* in Orach Chaim 492, in other writings he refers to public fasting on *BeHa”B* as an “Ashkenazic *minhag*.”

Yet, it is not just the general Sefardic populace who does not recite *BeHa”B*. Already in his time the Taz noted that even among Ashkenazic communities *BeHa”B* observance was not widespread. But, nowadays, among many Yeshiva communities, and especially in Eretz Yisrael, reciting *BeHa”B* twice annually is de rigueur.

Why Now?

The reason most commonly mentioned by the *Poskim* for these days of prayer following the holidays of Pesach and Succot is that over the extended holidays, when there is a mitzvah of feasting and *simcha*, it is more likely that people may have “stumbled” in some area due to improper behavior and inadvertent sin – and *BeHa”B* is meant to help rectify any possible offense. This idea is based on *Iyov* (in Ch. 1:5) who would offer sacrifices after “*Yamei Mishteh*,” or “Days of Feasting.” These sins might be due to a variety of probable offenses, including: mingling at a festive meal or even at a Torah lecture in the Shul (!), Yom Tov and Chol Hamoed related transgressions, *Chillul Hashem*, or the overabundance of merriment and gastronomical pleasures.

Other explanations offered to explain why *BeHa”B* was established include:

1. To entreat Hashem to strengthen our bodies, especially at the time of changing seasons when many are likely to get ill.
2. To beseech Hashem that we should have abundant harvests after Pesach and plentiful rains after Succot.
3. To commemorate Queen Esther’s original 3-day fast (which actually was at Pesach time, and not Purim time). This is pushed off until the first opportunity after Chodesh Nissan. (The *Taanis Esther* that we observe before Purim is not really due to Esther’s actual fast as recorded in the Megillah, but rather to commemorate that when the Jews went to war against the anti-Semites of their day, they fasted.)

Yet, interestingly, although *BeHa”B* is traditionally meant to be a fast day, still, very few actually fast due to the fact that in our generations people are considered weaker. Instead, we make do with *Selichot* supplication prayers (and perhaps words of *Mussar*), with the majority also reciting *Avinu Malkeinu*. This rationale is cited in many authoritative *sefarim*. This certainly holds true with *BeHa”B*, as it is based on a *minhag* and not an actual Biblical source.

Monday, Thursday, Prayer Days...

Monday and Thursday are considered especially potent days for prayer, as Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah on a Thursday and returned with it on a Monday. A mnemonic to showcase this is the first verse read on a public fast day *Haftara* (*Yeshaya* 55:6), “*Dirshu Hashem B’Himatzo*” – “Seek out Hashem when He is to be found.” The letters *Beit* and *Hei* show that an auspicious time when Hashem may be found is on Monday and Thursday. Therefore, Mondays and Thursdays are preferable for fasting and prayer. For whichever reason *BeHa”B* was established, we certainly should not let this golden opportunity for *tefilla* pass us by.

But what happens when there is a convergence of Pesach Sheini and *BeHa”B*? During this exceptional year, 5781, the third and final day of the “Chodesh Iyar *BeHa”B*” is on Pesach Sheini. So what does Klal Yisrael do? Which holiday do we observe?

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.



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 • General Editor: RABBI MOSHE
NEWMAN • Design: RABBI ELIEZER SHAPIRO z”l / DANIEL FREEDMAN
© 1992 – 2020 Ohr Somayach Institutions - All rights reserved • This publication contains words of Torah.
Please treat it with due respect. Editor’s disclaimer: Ohrnet Magazine is not intended to be a source for
halachic rulings. In any real and specific case one should consult a qualified halachic authority for a ruling.