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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Nuclear Fusion

“And you, son of man, take to yourself one piece of wood and write upon it 'For Yehuda and the Children of Israel, his associates,' and take another piece of wood and write upon it, 'For Yosef, the stem of Ephraim and the whole House of Israel, his associates.'” (Haftarah, Yechezkel 33:16)

One of the fascinating facets of the A-bomb story is that the vast majority of the players were Jews. Albert Einstein’s Theory of Relativity paved the way for investigation into nuclear fission. In 1939 he urged President Roosevelt to build an atomic bomb before Nazi Germany did so. Leo Szilard (1898-1964), born in Budapest, helped Italian Enrico Fermi (married to a Jew) conduct the first controlled nuclear chain reaction. Niels Bohr (1885-1962) was the first to apply quantum theory to explain nuclear structure. Born in Denmark to a Christian father and Jewish mother, Bohr won a Nobel Prize in 1922, and narrowly escaped Denmark in 1943, pursued by the Nazis. He worked on the Manhattan Project with his son Aage. Lise Meitner (1878-1968) was born in Vienna and became a pioneer of research into nuclear fission. She analyzed her results with her nephew, Otto Frisch. Walter Zinn and Fermi directed the first controlled nuclear chain reaction in 1942 at the University of Chicago. Hungarian-born Edward Teller led the US team that developed the first hydrogen bomb. And the list goes on.

But maybe the most fascinating of the all those who built the atom bomb was J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967), the US-born theoretical physicist who was chosen to direct the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos in 1942. It was his team that, on July 16,

1945 exploded the world’s first atomic bomb. Three months later he resigned as project director and opposed development of the H-bomb. Oppenheimer was accused of being a Communist, he was vilified in public, and, although exonerated, the experience broke him. Oppenheimer came from a wealthy, assimilated New York Jewish family. He was an aesthete, an intellectual and a philosopher. His colleague I. I. Rabi once wrote about him:

“He reminded me very much of a boyhood friend about whom someone said that he couldn’t make up his mind whether to be president of the B’nai B’rith or the Knights of Columbus. Perhaps he really wanted to be both, simultaneously. Oppenheimer wanted every experience. In that sense, he never focused. My own feeling is that if he had studied the Talmud and Hebrew, rather than Sanskrit, he would have been a much greater physicist.” (From "Dark Sun: The Making of the Hydrogen Bomb" by Richard Rhodes)

Commenting on this week's Haftara, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch bewails the continuing strife between the "Ephraim" Jew and the "Yehuda" Jew. The “Ephraim” Jew, “by his systematic disavowal of the Divine Torah, seeks salvation in political greatness and tries to find a substitute for the lack of protection from G-d by vain efforts to obtain alliance with the nations, among whom it hopes to ‘blossom out in brotherhood’ (Hoshea 23:15) by complete

assimilation. But, for giving up all Jewishness, he only experiences contempt and repulsion."

On the other hand, "Yehuda, who in principle certainly acknowledges Hashem as its G-d... is still far off from unreserved trust in G-d." Rabbi Hirsch criticizes the "Yehuda" Jew for failing to apply the same standards in his relation with his fellow man as he does with regard to his *kashrut*.

"And you, son of man, take to yourself one piece of wood and write upon it, 'For Yehuda and the Children of Israel his associates,' and take another piece of wood and write

upon it, 'For Yosef, the stem of Ephraim and the whole House of Israel, his associates.' And bring them near... and they will become united to one union in your hand."

The two chips of wood representing the two tribes will eventually be united, not in a watered-down compromise but in a genuine elevation "in an everlasting faithfulness towards G-d."

When we look at our divided nation, how we long for that "nuclear fusion" that will bathe the whole world in Hashem's light!

PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin's sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin's release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of G-d's plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived.

Yaakov, together with all his family and possessions, sets out for Goshen. G-d communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative spiritual

consequences, because it is there that G-d will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation although they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption.

The Torah lists Yaakov's offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that, in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests, who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

*Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet on
The Morning Blessings
by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Pesachim 37-43

What are “Bitter Herbs”?

Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rabbi Yonatan: “Why are the ancient Egyptians compared to maror? (In the verse that states, “Va’yimararu [the Egyptians embittered their [the Bnei Yisrael’s] lives.” (Shemot 1:14 - Rashi) To teach that just as the Egyptians were “soft” at first (they paid for the Jewish labor as their hired workers - Rashi) and “hard” at the end (they made the Bnei Yisrael do back-breaking labor without pay - Rashi), so too is the maror [vegetable for the mitzvah of maror] “soft” at the beginning and “hard” (at the end (with time, its stalk becomes stiff like wood).”

Although the *mishna* lists five different vegetables that are suitable to eat at the Pesach Seder to fulfill the mitzvah of eating *maror* (“bitter herbs”), the halacha is stated by Rabbi Oshia in the *gemara*: “The mitzvah is to use *chazeret* for *maror*.” (*Chazeret*, although translated as horseradish in Modern Hebrew, in the context of Rabbi Oshia’s halachic statement it is traditionally understood to be Romaine lettuce. *Chazeret* is called *litige* in Rashi’s commentary here, which sounds to my ear like “lettuce.”) This ruling by Rabbi Oshia is the source for the widespread practice to eat Romaine lettuce – bug-free of course! – to fulfill the mitzvah of *maror*, which is a Rabbinic mitzvah nowadays, although it was a Torah mitzvah at the time of the Beit Hamikdash.

Why is it that of all the candidates listed in the *mishna*, the mitzvah of choice for *maror* is *chazeret*? One reason is based on the technical style of the *mishna*, that since *chazeret* is mentioned at the top of the list, it is the preferred vegetable to use for the mitzvah of *maror*. (Aruch Hashulchan) However, Rashi writes that two reasons for choosing *chazeret* for *maror* are taught in our *sugya*.

Rashi cites that one reason for using *chazeret* is hinted to in the teaching of Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani in the name of Rabbi Yonatan regarding the changing nature of *maror* with time. Apparently, *chazeret* best fits the description of a vegetable that starts soft and ends hard. (Although Rashi explains “hard” to mean “hard like wood,” other commentaries explain it in the context of the verse in terms of bitterness: It is a vegetable that begins its growth as being a sweet vegetable, but as it stays longer in the ground, and especially if it stays “too long,” it becomes less sweet and can even become bitter.)

Rashi explains that the other reason for choosing *chazeret* is based on the statement of Rava: “*Chazeret* is what we call *chasa* (which means ‘mercy’), and we use it as *maror* as a reminder and sign that Hashem had *mercy* on us in taking us out of the slavery of Egypt (Rashi).”

Our *sugya* takes a step back, so to speak, and Rabbi Rachumi examines why it is, in fact, that *maror* refers to a bitter herb, as taught in the *mishna* – and does not refer to something else. He suggested other bitter items as possibilities, and each time Rava explained why those other objects would not qualify as the required *maror*.

“Why not the bitter bile of a fish?” Abayei: “Because *maror* is connected to matzah in the verse, and just as [the grain for] matzah grows from the ground, so too must *maror* grow from the ground.” This would disqualify fish bile since it does not grow from the ground.

“Why not ‘*hirduf*,’ the bitter wood of a type of tree that Moshe Rabbeinu used in sweetening the bitter waters for the Bnei Yisrael at a place called Marah?” Rashi cites *Chazal*’s words that this was a “miracle inside a miracle,” being that the *bitter* waters were *sweetened* by adding to them *bitter* wood from a tree. Abayei answers this question as well: “Just as matzah is made from grain that must be planted each year, so too must *maror* be a vegetable that requires yearly planting.” This excludes wood of a *hirduf* tree, since a tree is planted “once and done.” (Apparently Rabbi Rachumi thought that eating *maror* could actually mean eating wood from a tree and not eating actual “food” – not unlike certain personalities promoting the consumption of certain tree bark for good nutrition in the ’70s as the “health food movement” began to gain steam in the States, especially in California where I was living at the time. Or he perhaps thought that that it could be made edible by cooking or some other processing method.)

And for Rabbi Rachumi’s third suggestion: “What about a bitter vegetable called *harzifo* (a type of bitter vegetable that is poisonous to animals – Rashi)?” Abayei: “Just as matzah is something which may be bought in Jerusalem with *ma’aer sheini* money, so too does *maror* need to be something which is permitted to be purchased with *ma’aser sheini* funds.” This excludes *harzifo* since it is not considered “food.” Only proper food may be bought in Jerusalem with *ma’aser sheini* money, a halacha that is taught by *Chazal* as being based on a verse in the Torah, as Rashi explains. (Perhaps Rabbi Rachumi thought that this was indeed considered as food, although people were not likely to eat it since it was poisonous to animals.)

The bottom line: *Maror* should be Romaine lettuce although it is not actually bitter to eat. Some authorities recommend eating the lettuce with a small amount of ground horseradish, for the “bitter experience.” But, by no means should one try eating a *k’zayit* measure (approximately 30 grams) of horseradish without lettuce – since it is dangerous. (Aruch Hashulchan) The mitzvahs of the Torah are ways of pleasantness and mitzvahs of life!

• *Pesachim 39a*

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qualified halachic authority for a ruling.

Q & A

VAYIGASH

Questions

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?
2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?
3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?
4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers, "Go up to my father"?
5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?
6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?
7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?
8. What did Yosef mean when he said, "Don't dispute on the way"?
9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?
10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt"?
11. "I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?
12. What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?
13. Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?
14. When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?
15. Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?
16. Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?
17. Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?
18. What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?
19. Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?
20. Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

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

Answers

1. 44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham. Alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.
2. 44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.
3. 44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.
4. 45:9 - We learn that *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than all other lands.
5. 45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke *lashon hakodesh*.
6. 45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of *Mishkan Shilo* built in Yosef's territory.
7. 45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.
8. 45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.
9. 45:27 - His *ruach hakodesh* (prophetic spirit) returned.
10. 46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.
12. 46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.
13. 46:10 - Dina *bat* Yaakov.
14. 46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.
15. 46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.
16. 46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.
17. 47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.
18. 47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.
19. 47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.
20. 47:22 - The Egyptian priests.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayigash: Coming Close

The Torah (Gen. 44:18) uses the word *vayigash* (“and he approached”) when reporting that Judah “approached” the Egyptian viceroy to plead for Benjamin’s release. In the Hebrew language there are two different words that denote “coming closer”: *gishah* (from whence *vayigash* is derived) and *kiruv*. The latter word – *kiruv* – is used colloquially in the sense of “community outreach” because it entails bringing people “closer” to G-d and religion. If *kiruv* means “coming closer” just like *gishah* does, then why does the Torah specifically use a conjugation of *gishah* to describe Judah approaching the viceroy instead of a cognate of *kiruv*? We will see in this essay that the two terms in question are not actually complete synonyms, and are not necessarily interchangeable. Once we better appreciate the nuances connoted by *gishah* and *kiruv*, then we can see why it says *vayigash* about Judah.

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Shapira-Frankfurter (1743-1826), who was Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch’s great-uncle, explains that *gishah* implies approaching with trepidation, such as when one approaches a king or a dignitary. With this in mind, he accounts for an inconsistency in the Bible’s wording: When a person approaches a judge for adjudication, the verb used is a conjugation of *gishah* (Deut. 25:1), yet when G-d says that He will approach us to judge us, the Bible uses a cognate of *kiruv* (Mal. 3:5). When a person appears before a judge, he does so with trepidation, and therefore the Bible uses a cognate of *gishah*, but when G-d approaches us for judgement, He does not hesitate nor does He fear us, and so the word *kiruv* is more appropriate. It is also for this reason that when Abraham “approached” G-d to dispute His decision to

destroy Sodom, the Torah uses the verb *vayigash* (Gen. 18:23).

The Malbim similarly explains that *gishah* implies “coming close” to something that one would otherwise be scared to approach or would be in awe of. *Gishah* is most appropriate when there is otherwise a power imbalance between the party who is approaching and the party whom one approaches. (The case of Judah and Joseph is a perfect of example of this.) On the other hand, *kiruv* implies a situation of two equals, with one person simply coming closer to the other.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) offers another way of spelling out the difference between *gishah* and *kiruv*. *Kiruv* implies “approaching” while one is still on the way, but *gishah* implies the completion of an “approach” (i.e. one has already come *as close as possible* and cannot “approach” any further). Thus, *kiruv* means “coming closer,” while *gishah* actually means “nearing as close as possible.” The same approach is taken up by Rabb Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935), who offers various proof-texts from the Bible to support this understanding.

To illustrate this dynamic, Rabbi Pappenheim cites a verse that uses both words together: “And he [the donor] brings it [the meal-offering] closer to the Kohen (*hikrivah*), and he [the Kohen] brings it close (*higishah*) to the altar” (Lev. 2:8). In this verse, the Torah uses both a cognate of *kiruv* and a cognate of *gishah*. Since the donor’s ultimate goal is to offer the sacrifice at the altar, when he brings it to the Kohen, this act brings it *closer* to the altar but it still has a way to go. Therefore, the Torah uses a *kiruv*-based word. Subsequently, when the Kohen actually brings the offering to the altar, he reaches the donor’s goal by bringing it *as close as possible* to

the altar – so here a conjugation of *gishah* is most appropriate.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the term *gishah* to the biliteral root GIMMEL-SHIN, which refers to such “closeness” that the parties involved are actually “touching.” For example, when a blind man is said to grope about in an attempt to touch things that he cannot see, the Bible uses the word *nigshashah* (Isa. 59:10). Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) adds that since *gishah* denotes coming as close as possible, the term also came to denote “touch” or “direct contact” between two parties. Thus, the term for an ox “goring” in Targum Yerushalmi (Ex. 21:25) is *yigash* (literally, “impacting”). Similarly, when a boat is in shallow waters such that its bottom drags along on the seabed, this is called *goshesh* (*Bava Kama* 116b and *Bava Metz'ia* 79b), a clear reference to the direct contact between the boat and the floor.

In the Bible, a *gush* of dirt (Iyov 7:50) refers to a clump or cluster of dirt whose components are all “closely compact” together. Rabbi Pappenheim theorizes that perhaps the Land of Goshen got its name from the fact that that fertile area had much compact dirt, as opposed to the rest of Egypt, which was sandier.

From this, Rabbi Pappenheim argues that the term *geshem* (in Medieval Hebrew) came to refer to any solid object whose particles are tightly bound together. (Hence, *gashmiyut* refers to “physicality”.) He also explains that *geshem* in the sense of “rain” is related to this core meaning because *geshem* refers specifically to when thick rain drops fall as the result of a higher concentration of water in the rain clouds. (Interestingly, Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh of Carpentras writes in *Ohalei Yehuda* that *geshem*, “rain,” is related to the word *gishah*, alluding to the fact that separate drops of rain never “approach” each other as they fall from the sky.)

Using Rabbi Pappenheim’s discussion as his point of departure, Rabbi Mecklenburg writes that while *gishah* refers specifically to physical closeness, *kiruv* implies a more abstract “meeting of minds” than physically coming together. He explains that when

the Torah mentions a litigant “approaching” (*nikrav*) the court (Ex. 22:7), this refers to the litigant altering his mindset to prepare himself to stand before a judge. It does not refer to the physical act of approaching the bench. Similarly, the term *korban* (commonly translated as “ritual sacrifice” or “offering”) refers to “coming closer” to G-d by seeking to align one’s own will with His. The closeness of a *korban* certainly cannot refer to “coming closer” to Him in a physical sense, because He is incorporeal and thus has no physical body to which one can approach.

Following this logic, it seems that when Judah approached Joseph, the Egyptian viceroy, he came extremely close to Joseph’s person – perhaps even in a threatening way, as is implied by certain Midrashic sources. Judah did not just “approach” Joseph (*kiruv*). Rather, he came up close and personal (*vayigash*).

As Nachmanides (in his objections to Maimonides’ *Sefer HaMitzvos*, *Negative Commandment* #353) correctly notes, both terms for “closeness” are also used in the Bible to imply intimacy (*kiruv* in Deut. 22:14, Isa. 8:3; and *gishah* in Ex. 19:15). However, Rabbi Mecklenburg explains that when the Torah forbids “coming close” to a woman whom one is forbidden from marrying, it uses the term *kiruv* (Lev. 18:6) because that implies that simply coming “closer” to the woman is forbidden (i.e. even without actually engaging in full intimacy, which would rather be termed *gishah* – “coming as close as possible”). As Rabbi Mecklenburg puts it, the Torah’s word choice serves as Maimonides’ source for ruling that Biblical law already forbids hugging or kissing such a woman.

That said, Rabbi Mecklenburg admits that even though *kiruv* implies coming “closer” without coming “closest,” that term can still sometimes serve as a stand-in for one’s ultimate goal in a borrowed sense. Meaning, the Bible sometimes uses conjugations of the *kiruv*-verb to mean “approaching” food *in order to eat it* (Lev. 22:3), “approaching” a person *in order to damage him* (Ps. 32:9), or “approaching” a woman *in order to engage in intimacy* (Gen. 20:4).

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Lev. 21:17) takes the opposite approach. He explains that *kiruv* refers to “absolute nearness,” the antonym of *richuk* (“absolute farness”). In that way, *karov* (“near”) simply refers to the mathematical difference between the coordinates of one location versus another, and the act of *kiruv* simply refers to bridging that distance. Rabbi Hirsch notes that the term *kiruv* in the Bible applies to animals as well as to people, because that verb simply denotes decreasing the distance between two spatial points.

By contrast, Rabbi Hirsch explains that cognates of *gishah* appear in the Bible only in respect to human beings. This is because *gishah* does not simply denote closing a distance, but it represents a step forward in reaching a specific goal. Only human beings have the independent ability to think and make decisions for themselves, so only they can be said to engage in *gishah* when they “approach” something/someone to further their goals (see also

Abarbanel’s commentary to Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed* 1:18).

In line with Rabbi Hirsch’s take on this, it seems that when Judah “approached” Joseph, he did so very deliberately, as he was trying to convey a certain message. His act of approaching Joseph was not simply intended to bring himself physically closer to where Joseph was, but to go one step further in his campaign for Benjamin’s release.

Interestingly, all of these nuances are lost in Aramaic, as the Targum typically renders cognates of both *gishah* (e.g., Gen. 18:23, 33:6, 44:18) and *kiruv* (e.g., Gen. 20:4, Ex. 14:10, Lev. 1:2) as cognates of *kiruv*. This shows us that the mystique and secrets of the Hebrew language remain tied to the Holy Tongue, and do not necessarily show up elsewhere.

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

@ OHR –The students alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

The Beit Midrash on Holiday

We firmly believe in *Hashgacha Pratis*, Divine Providence. From the path taken by the ant gathering his food for the winter, to the most cataclysmic earth-shaking events, nothing in the world happens unless Hashem wills it to happen. As *Bnei Torah*, our job is to notice and to learn. The Coronavirus pandemic is raging around the world, and Israel was not granted an exemption. I would not claim to truly understand the reasons for anything, but I can, at least, observe.

The Yeshiva, since before last Purim has been in a situation of *tzimtzum* that adds a protective element of confinement. The students have been confined to capsules of forty, and restricted in their movements, both outside the Yeshiva and within its walls. To say that it has been a challenge would be a gross understatement.

When one student in a capsule tested positive for coronavirus, the whole program had to go into quarantine. And the restrictions then became even more confining. Each apartment, consisting of ten or so students, was made to quarantine by itself for fourteen days, with all the learning, *shiuirim* via Zoom, exercise and meals taking place in the close quarters of their bedrooms.

One might think that under such difficult conditions, harmony among the roommates and within the program would break down, raw emotions emerging at every little irritation. At least that is what I would have thought. And so it gives me great pleasure to relate to you the following story.

After a few students in the Beit Midrash program (which is a capsule) tested positive shortly after Succot, all members of the program were quarantined for fourteen days. During this period, a few of the students were not feeling well and the Yeshiva arranged for *Magen David Adom* to come to test the entire group. Of the thirty-two who were in the program, twenty-six of them tested positive. And so another period of quarantine began.

When they finally ended their quarantine after almost a month and were now able to leave their rooms and return to the Beit Midrash – they were elated! Their *rabbeim* wanted to do more for them and organized for them a three-day trip to the northern part of Israel.

According to the rules of the Health Ministry, the capsule had to stay together and not mix with any other group. They needed a place to rent that would accommodate them exclusively. A facility was located in Sdei Eliezer, a settlement north of Rosh Pina. The owner was hesitant at first because he had just hosted another institution the week before and they were extremely rowdy, disturbing the neighbors and incurring visits by the police. The owner told Rabbi Uriel Goodwin, who had organized the trip, that he should find another place. He had decided that the absolute maximum number of young men who could be controlled on his estate was twenty-five. The Ohr Somayach group was thirty-seven, including the *rabbeim* and the bus driver. Rabbi Goodwin assured the owner that he would vouch for the good behavior of the students, and the owner reluctantly relented – but insisted on strict rules for the pool use and the maximum noise level.

The property is beautiful. It has acres of grassy land, a basketball court, a soccer pitch, a very large swimming pool and a fruit orchard with pomegranates, tangerines, grapefruits and pomelos. With permission of the owner, they took *terumah* and *maaserot* on the ripe fruit with a *beracha* – a first for many of them. They disposed of the *terumah* appropriately and gave the *maaser rishon* to a *Levi*.

The weather for all three days was quite warm. They really enjoyed the swimming pool and the sports facilities, while also setting aside fixed times for *davening* and learning Torah.

After their first day at the estate, the owner came over to Rabbi Goodwin and told him: “I’ve never seen *bochrim* (yeshiva students) like your *bochrim*. They have real *derech erez* (good manners and good character). They speak beautifully to one another. They are very refined. They even play sports like *Bnei Torah*. In fact, I’m so impressed that I am going to make you an offer that you won’t believe. It’s a *zechus* (merit) for me to have them on my property. I’d love you all to stay another day for free.”

On the evening of the second day, after a *schmooze* and a *siyum*, they had a barbeque, a bonfire and a *kumsitz* with music, singing and telling stories of our great and righteous ancestors. The owner joyously participated. He again repeated his offer, this time with even more earnestness. The group stayed for an additional afternoon. They then continued on to Amuka, where they *davened* for *shidduchim*, and then returned home to the Yeshiva in *Yerushalayim*.

It is clear to me that their experience during their quarantines only increased their love and respect for one another, and created a sense of unity that can only be admired and emulated. One might perhaps say that if this alone was the purpose of their group bout of coronavirus – it was well worth it.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

LEARNING TORAH (PART 1)

LIFE IS SHORT, AND IT IS UP TO YOU TO MAKE IT SWEET!

(SARAH LOUISE DELANY)

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to occupy ourselves with words of the Torah. Please, Hashem, our G-d, sweeten the words of Your Torah in our mouth and in the mouth of Your people, the family of Israel. May we and our offspring and the offspring of Your people, the House of Israel, all of us, know Your Name and study Your Torah for its own sake. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who teaches Torah to His people, Israel.”

The word that the blessing uses in Hebrew for “being occupied” (in learning Torah) is “*la’asok*.” Rabbi David HaLevi Segal, known as the Turei Zahav (or the *Taz* for short) after his seminal work on the Code of Jewish Law, and one of the most eminent authorities in sixteenth century Poland, explains that the word “*la’asok*” carries with it the inference that it is something that requires much toil to achieve. Due to its incomparable depth and breadth, learning Torah in a comprehensive and thorough fashion requires extraordinary levels of concentration and an intensity that is second to none. The wording of the blessing is teaching us that learning Torah successfully requires an ability to block out the countless distractions that are forever encroaching on our lives. The word “*la’asok*” emphasizes that it is not easy to reach such exalted levels. But the word “*la’asok*” is also teaching us that such singular focus is a *requirement* for reaching proficiency in understanding Torah.

The essential concept of toiling over Torah study can be seen in G-d commanding us to toil over it “day and night.” (Joshua 1:8) The Maharal of Prague explains that the Torah is the essence of the Creation, and one therefore should be careful to use

one’s time wisely for the study of Torah – and not for superfluous matters.

Without both an overwhelming desire to learn Torah, and the power to block out every single extraneous distraction, there is no way that a person can reach the kind of levels of scholarship that create the potential for becoming an acknowledged Torah leader. Binyamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, related that on several occasions he came to discuss extremely weighty and sensitive matters with Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef (1920-2013), one of the greatest Torah authorities in the generation. Among many other things, Rabbi Yosef was renowned for becoming so engrossed in his studies that he was completely unaware of what was happening around him. Mr. Netanyahu, who was always accompanied by close aides and a significant security contingent that was always the cause of much tumult, said that when they arrived, they would wait until Rabbi Yosef became aware that he was there. Sometimes it would take a few minutes, and, often, much longer, but the Prime Minister would not interrupt the Rabbi’s studies because he felt that Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef was dealing with the past, present and future of the Jewish People as he learned the precious Torah!

To be continued.....

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Tears – Then and Now

The long-awaited reunion between Yaakov and Yosef is most unusual in one regard: Yosef cries, but Yaakov does not. Yaakov had ceased to weep, but Yosef continued to weep while Yaakov was talking with him.

Throughout all of the years of Yosef's absence, Yaakov was overcome with mourning. The few sentences recorded in the Torah during this time show the grief that occupied his heart and mind. His emotions were spent. Yosef, on the other hand, had led a most eventful life in Egypt. He does not mourn his loss. In fact, in the naming of his first child, Yosef evidences a certain gratitude for his losses.

Yosef names his first child *Menasheh* – “for G-d has ‘*nashani*’ all of my troubles and all of my father’s house.” This verse is ordinarily translated as “G-d made me *forget* all my trouble and all of my father’s house.” But Rav Hirsch shudders at the suggestion that Yosef is grateful for the ability to forget his aged father and his entire father’s family. That rendition would force us to conclude that Yosef was a heartless man who took no interest in his father’s fate. Instead, Rav Hirsch understands the word as its alternate meaning – to be a creditor – rendering the statement as “G-d has turned all of my trouble and all of my father’s household into my creditors.” What had seemed to be misfortune and tragedy, G-d turned into an instrument to shape my happiness, so that I find myself deeply indebted to my trouble and to my family.

This is the attitude that accompanies Yosef throughout his travails in Egypt, and upon the first opportunity he expresses this to his brothers: “*Do not be troubled... that you sold me here, for G-d sent me ahead of you, to preserve life... G-d sent me ahead of you to establish for you a remnant in the land, to preserve it for you, for your great deliverance. So it was not you who sent me here but G-d! And He has appointed me as a father to Pharaoh, master of his entire household and ruler of the whole land of Egypt.*” (Gen. 45:5-8)

But here we see Yosef's pent up sadness pouring out – he surrenders completely to the pain of separation for his father. Only now, in his father's embrace, did he feel all the pain of the separation, reliving the twenty years that had already passed.

- Sources: Commentary Bereishet 46:29; 41:51

*Ohr Somayach announces a new booklet
Harmony of a Nation – Overcoming Baseless Hatred
by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh https://ohr.edu/Sinat_Chinam.pdf*

THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 8 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.

No Shabbat-Rosh Chodesh Haftarah?

An interesting issue that will arise is that for most of world Jewry, the special haftarah for Shabbat Rosh Chodesh will not be read during the entirety of 5781, notwithstanding that Shabbat Rosh Chodesh technically occurs three times this year. The first Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, technically Rosh Chodesh Tishrei, was Rosh Hashana, which as the *Yom HaDin* trumps anything Rosh Chodesh-related (except for a brief, perfunctory mention of the Rosh Chodesh offerings in *Mussaf*). The second Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, Rosh Chodesh Adar, will be *Parshat Shekalim*, which, as one of the *Arba Parshiyot*, knocks off any other haftarah. Yet, the third occurrence of Shabbat Rosh Chodesh, on Rosh Chodesh Av, is when it gets interesting.

As we know, most haftarahs share some similarity with at least one core concept that is present in the Torah reading. The Gemara in *Masechet Megillah* discusses the proper haftarah readings for the various holidays throughout the year. The Gemara states that whenever Rosh Chodesh falls out on Shabbat, a special haftarah is read: *Hashamayim Kisi*, as it mentions both the topics of Shabbat and of Rosh Chodesh.

Head-To-Head Haftarahs

Our dilemma arises when that rule goes head-to-head with another rule. The *Pesikta* (an early Midrash cited by many early authorities including *Tosafot* and the *Abudraham*) continues the teachings of *Chazal* as to the proper haftarah readings, starting with the Fast of *Shiva Assur B'Tammuz*.

During the 'Three Weeks' from 17th of Tammuz until Tisha B'Av, we read '*Tilasa D'Paranusa*,' 'The Three Readings of Misfortune.' After Tisha B'Av, starting with *Shabbat Nachamu*, dubbed so due to its haftarah being *Nachamu Nachamu Ami*, until Rosh Hashana, there are '*Shiva D'Nechemta*' –

'Seven Haftarahs of Consolation' are read. This is followed by a reading of *Teshuva* during the Shabbat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, aptly named '*Shabbat Shuva*' for its repentance-themed haftarah that begins with '*Shuva Yisrael*.' The *Abudraham* and *Rabbeinu Tam* both conclude that these special haftarah readings are so important that they are never pushed off!

The \$64,000 question is: What happens when Rosh Chodesh Av falls out on Shabbat? Which ruling trumps which? Do we follow the Gemara or the *Pesikta*? Do we stick with the '*Tilasa D'Paranusa*' or do we go with the special Rosh Chodesh reading?

The answer is that there is no easy answer! The *Beit Yosef* writes that the main halachah follows the *Abudraham*, as he was considered the expert in these topics. Consequently, in the *Shulchan Aruch* he only mentions that during the "Three Weeks," the '*Tilasa D'Paranusa*' haftarahs are read. Hence, on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Av, the Sefardic custom is to read only the regularly scheduled haftarah of "Misfortune" – *Shimu* (along with the first and last verse of *Hashamayim Kisi*).

Yet, figuring out the Ashkenazic *minhag* is not so simple. Aside from this being a divergence of *minhag* between the cities of Prague and Posen, as well as a halachic dispute among the Rishonim, it is also a *machloket* between *Tosafot* in different *Masechtot* (*Pesachim* vs. *Megillah*). And, although several *Poskim* conclude that whichever of the two haftarahs is read is fine, nevertheless, the majority consensus seems to be that the *minhag* to read *Shimu* is most prevalent, following the *Mishnah Berurah's* citing of the Vilna Gaon's position as the final word on the matter. Accordingly, to most of the world, the special Shabbat Rosh Chodesh haftarah of *Hashamayim Kisi* will not be read in 5781.

In fact, for most of Ashkenazic Jewry, *Hashamayim Kisi* won't be read until Shabbat Rosh Chodesh in Elul 5782, almost two years from now! And Sefardim will wait an additional eight months, until Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5783!

This is due to Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Tevet 5782 being on Chanukah, so Chanuka's haftarah trumps it due to *Pirumei Nissa*, and the next possibility, Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Nissan being *Parashat Hachodesh*, which also trumps *Hashamayim Kisi* since it is one of the *Arba Parshiyot* (as previously mentioned). The next Shabbat Rosh Chodesh – Elul 5782 – Ashkenazim will read *Hashamayim Kisi*, due to doubling-up another of the *Shiva D'Nechemta*. Sefardim, on the other hand, as mentioned previously, will not push off any of the *Shiva D'Nechemta* and will have to wait even longer to read *Hashamayim Kisi* – Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5783.

Contrast this with *Machar Chodesh*, the special haftarah ordinarily read on a Shabbat directly preceding a Sunday Rosh Chodesh, which was recently *leined* as the haftarah this past *Parshat Bereishet* (5781), and will not be read again until Iyar 5782, a mere year-and-a-half from now.

Double-Header Haftarah?

Yet, there are those who opine, based on the mainstream Ashkenazic ruling regarding Shabbat Rosh Chodesh Elul (of doubling up haftarahs that are consecutive in the Navi to enable all readings), that there is a potential solution available to satisfy all opinions. As noted by Rav Noach Isaac Oelbaum, the haftarahs of the first two of three of the *Tilasa D'Paranusa* (*Divrei Yirmiyahu* and *Shimu*) are actually back-to-back in the original *Navi* (*Yirmiyahu* Ch. 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-28). As such, they posit that when Rosh Chodesh Av falls on Shabbat, on the preceding week, the first of the *Tilasa D'Paranusa*, both *Divrei Yirmiyahu* and *Shimu* should be read, thus freeing up the next week for the regular Shabbat Rosh Chodesh reading of *Hashamayim Kisi*.

Although, certainly a bit of a novel approach, nonetheless, in this manner all opinions are satisfied and all necessary readings are read. Rav Oelbaum concludes that in 5765/2005 there was a *Kol Koreh M'Gedolei Rabbanim* that this was the preferred way to follow when Rosh Chodesh Av falls on Shabbat. So, although this may not (yet) be the mainstream Ashkenazic *psak*, nevertheless, this potential double-header haftarah certainly has merit.

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.

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