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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Traitor to Whom?

Pharaoh said, "Come let us deal cleverly with it (the People of Israel), lest it become numerous, and it may be that if a war will occur, it too may join our enemies and wage war against us and go up from the land." (1:10)

A couple of weeks ago, I wrote that the majority of the scientists who built the American atom bomb were Jewish. Among others: Leo Szilard, Niels Bohr, Aage Bohr, Lise Meitner, Rudolf Peierls, Otto Frisch, Walter Zinn, Edward Teller and J. Robert Oppenheimer. It's interesting that more than one or two of the atom spies for the Soviet Union were also Jewish. Even though Klaus Fuchs was the son of a Lutheran pastor and John Cairncross, one of the "Cambridge Five" wasn't a Jew, Morris and Lona Cohen, Theodore Hall, George Korval, Saville Sax, Oscar Seborer, Morton Sobell, Irving Lerner, Arthur Adams, David Greenglas, Harry Gold and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were all Jewish.

Sometimes we are faced with a choice that makes us a traitor no matter what we decide. This type of decision will make us either a traitor to our country or a traitor to our principles. Before Stalin murdered his millions, many looked towards Russia as a Utopia. To the mind of a Jew, much was right about Communism. Typically, Jews have been at the front of every social revolution in history. The idea of a social contract, the idea of equality under the law, of society's responsibility to care for the poor and sick, the downtrodden and the dispossessed, are some of

the Torah's most outstanding gifts to mankind – and to Socialist thought. In addition, these spies also saw the exclusive American possession of atomic weapons as a threat to world peace in the post-World War II world.

Typically, the Jewish atom spies received no financial reward except for their expenses. (Mind you, several received the Red Star and a lifetime pass to travel on Moscow's public transport – not too much use in Brooklyn...)

Pharaoh said, "Come let us deal cleverly with it (the People of Israel), lest it become numerous, and it may be that if a war will occur, it too may join our enemies and wage war against us and go up from the land." (1:10) Pharaoh sensed that the Jews march to a different drum – the drum of conscience, even when the drum may lead to treachery.

True, there have been few whose conscience has led to such tragic mistakes. But, how many incomparably more is the number of those who have used that gift of conscience, a gift from Above, to serve their country, society and humanity with total loyalty and fidelity!

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Pesachim 51-57

Degrees of Danger

Reish Lakish taught that when Yaakov Avinu called his children to his deathbed to reveal their future, the Shechina suddenly departed from his presence. When he expressed concern that this was due to perhaps one of his offspring being unfit, his children assured him that “Hear O Israel (their father’s name), Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One! Just as in your heart there is only one Hashem, likewise in our hearts there is only one Hashem!” When Yaakov heard their words of loyalty to Hashem, he responded with the words, “*Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuto L’Olam Va’ed – Blessed is the Name of His glorious Kingdom for all eternity!*”

The *gemara* relates that our Sages were faced with a dilemma regarding the saying of *Baruch Shem Kavod* immediately after we say *Shema Yisrael* in our daily prayers. They deliberated: “Should we say it? Perhaps not, because Moshe Rabbeinu did not write it in the Torah. Should we not say it? Perhaps yes, because Yaakov said it upon hearing his children say *Shema Yisrael*.” Our Sages reached a decision and decreed that we should indeed say *Baruch Shem Kavod* – but that we should say it quietly. And, this is, in fact, the manner that we say the *Shema* with *Baruch Shem Kavod* nowadays, everywhere.

The conclusion in our *gemara* to say *Baruch Shem Kavod* quietly is qualified by Rabbi Abahu. He said that there is a difference when the *Shema* is being said in a place where heretics are prevalent. In such a place, *Baruch Shem Kavod* should be said aloud, and not quietly, so that a person would not be suspected of making a quiet disclaimer to his previous announcement that “Hashem is One.” The *gemara* adds that in a place such as Nahardai, where heretics did not exist, it should be said quietly, in accordance with the conclusion of our Sages’ deliberation.

The classical Torah commentaries raise a question on what is taught on our *daf* from another teaching that we learn elsewhere in *Shas* (*Berachot 12a*). There we are taught that the Sage Ameimar wanted make a decree for the people of (this same place called) Nahardai to say the Ten Commandments each day, in addition to the *Shema*, as part of the public prayer service. However, he decided *not* to institute it, out of his concern that the heretics would claim that only these commandments – which the Jewish People heard when Hashem gave us His Torah at Mount Sinai – constitute the entirety of the Torah.

This apparently contradicts what we learn on our *daf*. If, in Nahardai (and other non-heretical places), due to the lack of heretics there, *Baruch Shem* could and should be said quietly, why was Ameimar concerned about saying the Ten Commandments in Nahardai out of fear of what the heretics might claim?

One answer to resolve this question is to distinguish between the degrees of danger of heresy that exist in these two cases. Singling out the Ten Commandments posed the danger of being misleading about the essence of the Torah and the truth of the entire Torah. This concern was so great that this practice was banned everywhere. However, the concern that quietly saying *Baruch Shem*... might be wrongly seen as a heretic’s disclaimer is relatively remote. It is a lesser degree of danger, as it were. Therefore, this whispered praise was not banned in Nahardai and the like, but only in places that were ripe with heresy, where it needed to be said aloud. (*Rashash*)

It is worthwhile to note that, in addition to the reason cited in our *gemara* for saying *Baruch Shem Kavod* quietly, we find another reason for this practice in the Midrash. Moshe Rabbeinu heard this beautiful prayer from the angels and taught it to the Jewish People. However, we do not say it aloud since we are sinful and thus unworthy of uttering this angelic formula. But, on Yom Kippur, when the Jewish People is elevated to the sinless nature of the angels, we may say *Baruch Shem Kavod* aloud. (*Devarim Rabbah* 2:36)

PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the death of Yosef, the Book of Bereishet (Genesis) comes to an end. The Book of Shemot (Exodus) chronicles the creation of the nation of Israel from the descendants of Yaakov. At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Pharaoh, fearing the population explosion of Jews, enslaves them. However, when their birthrate increases, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all newborn males.

Yocheved gives birth to Moshe and hides him in the reeds by the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts him, although she knows he is probably a Hebrew. Miriam, Moshe's sister, offers to find a nursemaid for Moshe and arranges for his mother Yocheved to be his nursemaid.

Years later, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and Moshe kills the Egyptian. Realizing his life is in danger, Moshe flees to Midian where he rescues Tziporah, whose father Yitro approves

their subsequent marriage. On Chorev (Mount Sinai), Moshe witnesses the burning bush where G-d commands him to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael, the Land promised to their ancestors.

Moshe protests that the Jewish People will doubt his being G-d's agent, so G-d enables Moshe to perform three miraculous transformations to validate himself in the people's eyes: transforming his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprous one, and water into blood. When Moshe declares that he is not a good public speaker, G-d tells him that his brother Aharon will be his spokesman. Aharon greets Moshe on his return to Egypt and they petition Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh responds with even harsher decrees, declaring that the Jews must produce the same quota of bricks as before but without being given supplies. The people become dispirited, but G-d assures Moshe that He will force Pharaoh to let the Jews go.

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Q & A

SHEMOT

Questions

1. Why does the verse say "And Yosef was in Egypt"?
2. "...And they will go up out of the land." Who said this and what did he mean?
3. Why did Pharaoh specifically choose water as the means of killing the Jewish boys? (Two reasons.)
4. "She saw that he was good." What did she see "good" about Moshe that was unique?
5. Which Hebrew men were fighting each other?
6. Moshe was afraid that the Jewish People were not fit to be redeemed, because some among them committed a certain sin. What sin?
7. Why did the Midianites drive Yitro's daughters away from the well?
8. How did Yitro know that Moshe was Yaakov's descendant?
9. What lesson was Moshe to learn from the fact that the burning bush was not consumed?
10. What merit did the Jewish People have that warranted G-d's promise to redeem them?
11. Which expression of redemption would assure the people that Moshe was the true redeemer?
12. What did the staff turning into a snake symbolize?
13. Why didn't Moshe want to be the leader?
14. "And Hashem was angry with Moshe..." What did Moshe lose as a result of this anger?
15. What was special about Moshe's donkey?
16. About which plague was Pharaoh warned first?
17. Why didn't the elders accompany Moshe and Aharon to Pharaoh? How were they punished?
18. Which tribe did not work as slaves?
19. Who were the: a) *nogsim* b) *shotrim*?
20. How were the *shotrim* rewarded for accepting the beatings on behalf of their fellow Jews?

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

Answers

1. 1:5 - This verse adds that despite being in Egypt as a ruler, Yosef maintained his righteousness.
2. 1:10 - Pharaoh said it, meaning that the Egyptians would be forced to leave Egypt.
3. 1:10,22 - He hoped to escape Divine retribution, as G-d promised never to flood the entire world. Also, his astrologers saw that the Jewish redeemer's downfall would be through water.
4. 2:2 - When he was born, the house was filled with light.
5. 2:13 - Datan and Aviram.
6. 2:14 - *Lashon hara* (evil speech).
7. 2:17 - Because a ban had been placed on Yitro for abandoning idol worship.
8. 2:20 - The well water rose towards Moshe.
9. 3:12 - Just as the bush was not consumed, so too Moshe would be protected by G-d.
10. 3:12 - That they were destined to receive the Torah.
11. 3:16,18 - "I surely remembered (*pakod pakadeti*)."
12. 4:3 - It symbolized that Moshe spoke ill of the Jews by saying that they wouldn't listen to him, just as the original snake sinned through speech.
13. 4:10 - He didn't want to take a position above that of his older brother, Aharon.
14. 4:14 - Moshe lost the privilege of being a *kohen*.
15. 4:20 It was used by Avraham for *akeidat Yitzchak* and will be used in the future by *mashiach*.
16. 4:23 - Death of the firstborn.
17. 5:1 - The elders were accompanying Moshe and Aharon, but they were afraid and one by one they slipped away. Hence, at the giving of the Torah, the elders weren't allowed to ascend with Moshe.
18. 5:5 - The tribe of Levi.
19. 5:6 - a) Egyptian taskmasters; b) Jewish officers.
20. 5:14 - They were chosen to be on the Sanhedrin.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Shemot: Hard Work and Hard Hearts

The late 15th century Italian scholar, Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino (a student of Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura) writes in *Ohel Moed* (his lexicon of synonyms) that there are three terms for “hard” in the Hebrew Language: *kashah*, *kashiach* and *perech*. In fact, the Bible uses both the words *kashah* (Ex. 1:14, 6:9) and *perech* (Ex. 1:13, 1:14) to describe the “hard” work that the Jews enslaved in Egypt were expected to perform. The *Haggadah Shel Pesach* even defines *avodah kashah* as *perech*. Targum Onkelos (to Ex. 1:13-14, Lev. 25:53) similarly translates *perech* as *kashyu* – an Aramaic cognate of *kashah*. This suggests that those two terms are more or less equivalent. However, the essay before you seeks to explore the possible differences between the three terms in question by studying their respective etymologies and surveying how the words are used.

The Hebrew word *kashah* means “hard” in both senses of the English term *hard*. Meaning, it refers to both an object/item that is physically “hard” (i.e. something solid, stiff, rigid or inflexible) and an action which is “hard” (i.e. difficult, challenging, or tough) to do. In the context of the Exodus, G-d promises that He will “harden” (*akasheh*) Pharaoh’s heart, so that He will have a chance to perform many miracles in Egypt (Ex. 7:3). Most commentators explain that this refers to G-d empowering Pharaoh to continue in his obstinate refusal to release the Jews from bondage, such that he will remain unbudged by the various plagues destined to befall him and his people. This follows from the first meaning of *kashah* – something rigid or inflexible.

However, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) prefers to explain that *kashah* here actually refers to something “difficult” and “challenging.” By promising that He will “harden” Pharaoh’s heart, G-d conveyed to Moses that He will ensure that Pharaoh will face a particularly traumatic and

difficult ordeal, something “difficult” for his heart to endure.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) offers two fascinating insights into the root of the word *kashah*, based on the interchangeability of the letters KUF, YOD, and GIMMEL. Firstly, he notes that since KUF interchanges with YOD, the word *kashah* can be understood as related to the word *yesh* (“is” or “exists”). This is because from man’s perspective, the more tangible something is, the more “real” it is considered to be. As a result, the more “concrete” or “hard” an item is, the more its physical palpability lends it credence or realness in our eyes. Thus, the very word for “hard” is related to the word for “existence.” Secondly, Rabbi Hirsch notes that because KUF can be interchanged with GIMMEL, *kashah* is also related to *gishah/gashash* (“approaching”, “impacting”). This again flows from the notion that only an object described as *kashah* has a solid basis in our perception of reality. Because of that, most people only consider solid (i.e. “hard”) objects to be substantial enough to “approach” or even cause an “impact,” while less tangible things are considered non-existent. (Physicists, on the other hand, are well aware that stuff exists in the world that is not “hard” enough to be felt with the physical senses.)

With this in mind, we can understand why the Torah refers to the Golden *Menorah* (ritual candelabra) as made of a *mikshah* (Ex. 25:31, 37:22, Num. 8:4). G-d commanded to fashion that item from a single hunk of gold. This is because shaping out an object from a single hunk of metal results in a “harder” object than does pouring molten metal into a mold and shaping the item that way. Moreover, Rashi (to Ex. 25:31) explains that the *Menorah* was created by hitting the chunk of gold with a hammer until it was in the desired shape. Thus, the *Menorah* was banged into existence with

the sort of “physical impact” described by Rabbi Hirsch as related to the word *kashah*.

Talmudic literature is replete with references to a rabbinic hermeneutical rule known as a *hekesh*. This rule allows the rabbis to compare the details of two different areas of halacha if they are juxtaposed to one another in a given verse in the Bible. In this way, the term *hekesh* refers to the “impact” or “collision” of two different realms in one Biblical passage. The Arabic term *qiyas* refers to a process in Islamic Law whereby one may deduce new legal rulings by drawing analogies to existing laws and applying them to other circumstances. In Medieval Hebrew – under the influence of the Ibn Tibbon family, who translated many important Judeo-Arabic works into Hebrew – the Hebrew word *hekesh* assumed this meaning as well. Thus, the term *hekesh* ultimately came to mean using any sort of deductive analogy, or syllogism, to proffer an argument.

The word *kashah* (or *kushya*) also appears in rabbinic literature in the sense of a logical “difficulty.” When the Talmud raises a problem with a specific opinion or statement, it sometimes concludes by leaving the matter as a *kashya*. According to a tradition dating back to the Geonim, the term *kashya* does not mean that the opinion or statement in question has been thoroughly refuted. Rather it means that a difficulty with that opinion remains and the matter requires further exploration. In this sense, a *kashya* refers to the “clash” between a specific opinion/statement and what logic might otherwise dictate. (A *kashya* differs from a *sheilah* in that the former is a “difficulty” that seeks to undermine a given assertion, while the latter is simply a request for more information.)

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) offers a list of words derived from the biliteral root KUF-SHIN, which are all related to “hardness”:

Kash (“straw”) is the *hard* part of a stalk of grain that grows closest to the ground and is not even fit for animal fodder.

Kishu (“gourd”) is a vegetable that has a particularly *hard* peel.

Keshet (“bow”) is the unbendable part of an archer’s implement used for shooting arrows.

Mokesh (“trap”) refers specifically to a trap made of a *hard* substance (as opposed to a bendable “net”) and is *hard* to escape.

Rabbi Pappenheim’s list does not include the word *kashiach* because his classification system recognizes biliteral roots only, with the possible addition of a third radical letter that can only be HEY, ALEPH, MEM, NUN, TAV, YOD, or VAV. In the case of *kashiach*, the third letter would be a CHET, which does not fit Rabbi Pappenheim’s system.

What does *kashiach* mean? And where does it appear in the Bible?

The word *kashiach* appears in the Bible only twice: When revealing Himself to Iyov, G-d explained that He always takes care of His creations. In doing so, He contrasts Himself with the ostrich and stork, which may lay eggs, but then might callously abandon those eggs and leave them to be trampled upon. Such a mother bird can be said to “harden (*kashiach*) herself against her children, as if they were not hers” (Iyov 39:16). Similarly, Isaiah complained of G-d’s role in the Jews’ sins: “Why, G-d, do You allow us to stray from Your path [and] harden (*kashiach*) our hearts from fearing You?” (Isa. 63:17).

Ibn Ezra (to Iyov 39:16) and Radak (in *Sefer HaShorashim*) explain that the Hebrew word *kashiach* means “cruelty.” Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Melech (*Michlal Yoffi* to Isa. 63:17) adds that *kashiach* specifically denotes “cruelty” as a form of “estrangement” from something/someone that one would otherwise have been expected to love. This approach supports the notion that *kashiach* does not share a grammatical root with *kashah*.

Nonetheless, *Metzudat Tzion* (to Isa. 63:17, Iyov 39:16) writes that *kashiach* is a portmanteau of the words *kashah* (“hard”) and *sach* (“remove”). He explains that *kashiach* denotes a certain type of “cruelty” whereby one is particularly harsh/difficult with others, but also coldheartedly “removes” their harshness from their own thoughts (as in: *hesech hadaat*), as if they had done nothing out of the ordinary. According to this, *kashiach* is

indeed related to *kashah*, albeit its etymology is comprised of *kashah* along with *sach*. (Modern Hebrew uses the term *disk kashiach* as a calque from the English term *hard-drive*. In that neologism, the English *hard* is translated into Hebrew as *kashiach*. This, of course, has nothing to do with “cruelty” or “estrangement.”)

Work described as *perch* entails performing hard labor – that is, “heavy” or “difficult” tasks. However, *perch* literally means “to break.” For example, according to halacha, if an animal’s lung is so dry that it is brittle (*nifrechet*, i.e. easily broken), this renders the animal moribund (*Chullin* 46b), and if a *lulav* is dry enough that it is brittle (*nifrechet*), this fragility likewise renders the *lulav* disqualified (see *Tosafot* to *Succah* 29b). In Talmudic parlance, a *pircha* is the sort of question that “breaks” a logical sequence, causing a chasm between an ostensible precedent and a case to which it might otherwise be applied.

Rashi (to Ex. 1:13) thus explains that when the Egyptians imposed on the Jews *avodat perch*, this refers to back-breaking labor. Similarly, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 1:13, 26:31) that *avodat perch* refers to the Egyptians drafting the Jews as laborers in order to “break” the homogeneity of Egyptian society and create a class difference between themselves and the Jews. In this sense, *perch* refers to a type of “breaking” that is more closely linked with “separating.” Indeed, Rabbi Hirsch connects the word *perch* to *parochet* (“curtain”), which was used to *separate* the Holy from the Holy of Holies.

Another way of understanding the word *perch* is that it relates to “uselessness” – just as something brittle crumbles away to waste and can no longer serve any utilitarian purpose. The Torah forbids engaging a Jewish bondsman in *perch*-work (Lev. 25:43), which the *Toras Kohanim* (there) defines as work that has no limit or work that is needless. Accordingly, Rabbi Saadia Gaon (882-942) explains that the term *avodat perch* refers to the pointless labor which the Egyptians imposed on the Jews.

Rabbi Pappenheim masterfully merges these explanations of *perch* by explaining that the core meaning of the word is to “break” a routine by interrupting it to start anew. Thus, *perch* both “breaks” and “separates.” The curtains of the *parochet* served as a barrier that screamed “Until here it is Holy, from here onwards is the Holy of Holies!” In terms of labor described as *perch*, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that this refers specifically to the unfair labor practice of interrupting a worker in the middle of one project to demand that he begin a new project. This sort of cruel ethic never allows the laborer the satisfaction of finishing one project before he is forced to do something else. It makes him feel like all his work just crumbles away to waste and that he is totally unproductive. It is precisely this type of arrangement that the Torah forbids a Jew from imposing on a Hebrew bondsman, and it was this type of work that the Egyptians imposed on the Jews whom they enslaved.

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

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

LEARNING TORAH (PART 3)

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 in the 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 blessing then continues with a plea that we “know Your Name” and that we merit studying Torah “for its own sake.” Rabbi Shimon Schwab elucidates that the first request is that we become completely conversant with the Written Torah. In the Kabbalistic texts, the Written Torah is described as being composed of numerous combinations of different Names of G-d. That is why we ask G-d to allow us to “know Your Name.” The second part – that we learn Torah “for its own sake” – is a reference to the Oral Torah.

However, the more traditional understanding of studying Torah “for its own sake” is that it is a description of the optimal way that the Torah should be learned. In Ethics of the Fathers (6:2) Rabbi Meir teaches, “Whoever occupies himself with Torah study for its own sake merits many things. Additionally, the entire Creation is justified for his sake alone.” What an extraordinary statement!

Fascinatingly enough, the exact definition of studying Torah “for its own sake” is the source of great debate among the authorities. What links the various opinions is that “for its own sake” means learning Torah in such a way that it draws us closer to G-d. That is why Rabbi Chaim from Volozhin (1749-1821), the undisputed leader of Lithuanian Jewry in his generation, writes in his commentary on Ethics of the Fathers, *Ruach Chaim*, “The more one learns, the more one wants to learn. By means of the light that

one has already realized, one can see that there is even more light – and one can hope to realize that, too.”

And that, perhaps, is the most beautiful dimension of all with regards to Torah learning. There is no end to what can be studied and internalized. The Torah is truly infinite, both in its depth and its breadth. It is wondrous to watch the absolute delight and desire as an accomplished and universally acclaimed expert in the entirety of the Talmud opens a volume – any volume – and begins to plumb its profundities again. Notwithstanding the fact that he has reviewed and deliberated the timeless pages countless times in the past, it is studied with a freshness and an eagerness as if it is being learned for the very first time. Because, as our Sages teach, it is inconceivable that there will not be a new and novel idea that will surface as it is being studied yet again (see Tractate Chagigah 3a).

In fact, so all-encompassing is the study of Torah that Rabbi Gershon Edelstein, the venerated head of the legendary Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, explains that it even has an influence on a person’s face. He related that his Rabbi and mentor, Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (1892-1953), one of the most prominent Jewish thinkers in the previous generation, used to say that he could tell, *just by looking at a person’s face*, whether that person had learned Torah that day or not. Rabbi Edelstein recounted that his brother once asked Rabbi Dessler

whether he could see if he had learned that day. Rabbi Dessler answered that he saw that he had. Surprisingly, his brother responded that it was not so, and that he had not yet had the opportunity to learn that day. Rabbi Dessler told him to think carefully about everything he had done so far that day. As his brother started reviewing his day, he suddenly remembered that he had spent a few fleeting moments, much earlier in the day, sharing a Torah thought with someone. Incredibly enough, those few moments had left a spiritual impression on his face that Rabbi Dessler was able to identify.

Our blessing closes with the words, “Blessed are You, Hashem, Who teaches Torah to His people, Israel.”

Why is G-d described here as the “Teacher of Torah”? The Talmud clarifies that when a person learns Torah “for its own sake,” G-d, Himself, helps that person to understand (see Tractate Sanhedrin 99b). Rashi, the foremost commentary on the Talmud, points out that it is the words of Torah themselves that beseech G-d to allow the person who is learning them to be granted insights into their deeper and more esoteric meanings. And this is why the blessing describes G-d as the “Teacher of Torah.” Ultimately, it is G-d Who is imparting the eternal lessons.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

The Staff-Serpent Sign

Even though Moshe was told by G-d that his mission would succeed, he was also told that before the dawning of success, there would be repeated failures. Therefore, he understood that doubts would arise in the minds of the people and asked for a sign to reassure them that it was indeed G-d who sent him.

In the first of these signs, G-d told Moshe to throw his *mateh*, his staff, on the ground. Once on the ground, it turned into a serpent, whereupon Moshe fled from it. Then, upon G-d’s instruction, he took hold of the tail of the serpent and it turned back into a staff in his hand. How was this a sign to the people that the G-d of their forefathers sent Moshe?

On a simple level, it is a sign because any act that evidences the power to set aside the natural order is a sign of a Higher Power – a Power Who establishes and operates the laws of nature.

A more penetrating analysis, however, should also explain why G-d chose this particular sign instead of some other one. The staff – *mateh* – is a most natural symbol of man’s mastery over nature. It has a dual function, corresponding to the dual meaning of its root, *nateh*. One meaning is to lean or incline, and the other meaning is to stretch

one’s hand over something. Correspondingly, *mateh* denotes an extension of the hand, upon which man can lean for support as he stands on the ground, as in a cane, and an extension of man’s sphere of power, as in a scepter – a symbol of his authority.

This sign in Moshe’s hand will show the people that if G-d so desires, the thing on which a person leans for support and with which he wields authority can turn into the very opposite – a serpent which causes man to recoil.

The message to Moshe is: You have been sent by G-d, Who, if He so desires, can cause the very thing on which man relies for support, and which serves him as an instrument of his authority, to turn against him. Conversely, if He so desires, G-d can take a hostile form that is feared and shunned by man and place it into his hand as an accommodating support and tractable tool. He can make Pharaoh a slave and you are the ruler. He can turn Pharaoh’s staff into a whip for his own back. For nothing inherently supports or inhibits man – it is only G-d Who assigns such roles as staff and serpent.

- Sources: Commentary Bereishet 4:2-5

THE RARE CALENDAR PHENOMENA OF 5781

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

(Part 10 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.

Sunday Night Havdalah

In the previous installment we discussed how this year Tisha B'Av commences directly after Shabbat, and hence Havdalah is pushed off to Sunday night. But there is still an unanswered question: What should the cup contain for this Motzei Tisha B'Av Havdalah? Many of the Nine Days' restrictions are still in effect until the next day, including not eating meat or drinking wine. However, Havdalah still needs to be recited. So what do we do? It turns out that this is actually a three-way dispute among the authorities.

Three-Way Dispute

There is an interesting *machloket* (dispute) between the *Mishnah Berurah* and the *Aruch Hashulchan* as to whether the Sunday night-Motzei Tisha B'Av Havdalah is more relaxed vis-à-vis drinking wine for Havdalah. The *Mishnah Berurah*, citing the *Dagul Mervavah*, writes that it is not as restrictive as the rest of the Nine Days for this purpose, and one may therefore personally drink of the Havdalah wine without needing to find a child to drink it.

Yet, the *Aruch Hashulchan* disagrees, maintaining that the Nine Days restrictions are still fully in effect, and it is therefore preferable to make Havdalah on *Shaar Mashkin* (i.e. other liquids that are considered important and are also known as *Chamar Medina* – such as beer) and not on wine. A third opinion, that of the *Elyah Rabba* and *Pri Megadim*, is that one may use wine but should give it to a child to drink, just like the *Rema's* ruling on a standard Motzei Shabbat *Chazon* (due to Nine Days' restrictions).

Even more interesting is that all of these opinions are actually based on the Maharil, Rav Yaakov Moelin (1365-1427), an early Ashkenazic codifier. In his *Sefer HaMinhagim*, the Maharil writes regarding *Tisha B'Av HaNidcheh* (Tisha B'Av that is pushed off to Sunday) that “*kishehichshich beireich Borei Pri HaGafen V'Havdalah* – when the sky becomes dark following Tisha B'Av on Sunday, recite the blessings of *Borei Pri HaGafen* and Havdalah,” which, the *Dagul Mervavah* notes, implies that Havdalah may be/should be made on wine on this Sunday night.

Yet, the *Aruch Hashulchan*, as well as the *Elyah Rabba* and the *Pri Megadim*, follow the explicit ruling of the *Rema*, which is based on a responsum of the Maharil, that regarding *Tisha B'Av HaNidcheh*, wine is still prohibited until the next morning. Apparently, the *Mishnah Berurah* understood the Maharil as maintaining that in a case of a mitzvah, such as Havdalah, one needn't have to be so stringent on *Motzei Tisha B'Av HaNidcheh* regarding drinking wine.

Most contemporary authorities seem to follow the *Mishnah Berurah's* ruling that one may make this Havdalah with wine and personally drink it. Certainly, those who follow the *Shulchan Aruch's* ruling of drinking the Havdalah wine during the Nine Days would do so here as well, as Havdalah is the same as “a case of mitzvah” that the *Shulchan Aruch* ruled is an exception to the Nine Days' restrictions. As with all cases in halacha, one should ascertain from a knowledgeable rabbinic authority which opinion he should personally follow.

Choleh on Tisha B'Av: Havdalah

Many ask what a *choleh* (ill or sick person) should do if he or she has a halachic dispensation to eat on Tisha B'Av itself. The halacha is that if a *choleh* or *cholah* is required to break his or her fast on a Sunday Tisha B'Av, he or she is *required* to make Havdalah before he or she eats. Nevertheless, the vast majority of contemporary authorities maintain that this Havdalah should be made on beer or other *Chamar Medina* (which some authorities, in this case, specify as including 100% orange juice), and not with wine, so as not to violate the exhortation of the *Gemara* in *Taanis* (30b), “Whoever eats meat and drinks wine on Tisha B'Av, the Torah states about him, ‘*V'tehu ovonosam al atzmosam*’”, explaining the grave sin that befalls one who eats meat or drinks wine on Tisha B'Av.

On the other hand, the Steipler *Gaon* is quoted as maintaining wine's preference for Havdalah even on Tisha B'Av, as the *Chazon Ish* held that beer and other drinks do not maintain *Chamar Medina* status nowadays. There are those who hold that, as so, there is still a preference for grape juice over wine in this scenario. It goes without saying that if there is no *Chamar Medina* available, then one should still make this Tisha B'Av Havdalah with wine, as, either way, Havdalah is indeed mandated.

If one needs to break his fast only to drink water, then Havdalah would not actually be mandated, as one is normally technically permitted to drink water before Havdalah anyway on a standard Motzei Shabbat.

On a side point, and quite interestingly, and although not the normative halacha, there are several contemporary *Poskim* who maintain that a woman need not make Havdalah to break her fast. Other solutions include that the husband, who is still fasting, should recite the Havdalah on Tisha B'Av itself, and she or a child should drink it. On following this, an additional Havdalah on Sunday night is not needed, as the Havdalah obligation was already fulfilled. In case of an actual halachic question, one should ask their *posek* which opinion to personally follow. As an aside, it is important to note that the consensus is that a minor child (*katan*) does not make Havdalah when breaking his or her fast.

Either way, just like the Sunday night Motzei Tisha B'Av Havdalah, this Havdalah for a *Choleh* on the fast itself should start from the *beracha* on the cup, and only consists of that *beracha* and *Hamavdil Bein Kodesh L'Chol*.

To be continued...

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