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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

There is Life on Mars

“And all the nations of the world will say, ‘Why did Hashem do so to this Land? Why this wrathfulness of great anger?’ And they will answer: ‘Because they forsook the covenant of Hashem, the G-d of their Fathers, which He sealed with them when He took them out of the land of Egypt.’” (29:23)

Richard Rhodes writes in “The Making of the Atomic Bomb”: “Out of the vulnerable Hungarian Jewish middle class came no fewer than seven of the twentieth century’s most exceptional scientists: in order of birth, Theodor von Kármán, George de Hevesy, Michael Polanyi, Leo Szilard, Eugene Wigner, John von Neumann and Edward Teller. All seven left Hungary as young men; all seven proved unusually versatile as well as talented and made major contributions to science and technology; two among them, de Hevesy and Wigner, eventually won Nobel Prizes. The mystery of such a concentration of ability from so remote and provincial a place fascinated the community of science. Recalling that ‘galaxy of brilliant Hungarian expatriates,’ Otto Frisch remembers that his friend Fritz Houtermans, a theoretical physicist, proposed the popular theory that “these people were really visitors from Mars; for them it was difficult to speak without an accent that would give them away and therefore they chose to pretend to be Hungarians whose inability to speak any language without accent is well known.”

However refined the accent of a Jew, he will always sound like a Hungarian to the world. But the problem begins when we start to sound like Hungarians to ourselves – when we start to think that we are just the same as everyone else. But,

more so, when we forget that we really are from Mars.

The Jews “fell from Mars,” three thousand years ago with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

From the birth of Adam until Mount Sinai, all mankind had an equal role in the purpose of Creation. With the giving of the Torah, the Director invited the Jewish People to step out of the chorus line, to go up to the mic and perform mankind’s soliloquy to its Creator. But being a star needs more than just star-quality. There’s a massive gap between potential and performance.

Our Sages teach that Sinai is connected to the word in Hebrew *sinah* – which means “hatred.” When Moshe came down from the mountain, along with the Torah he brought anti-Semitism.

But that anti-Semitism is not absolute. It is conditional on how well we perform our starring role.

“And all the nations will say, ‘Why did Hashem do so to this Land? Why this wrathfulness of great anger?’ And they will say, ‘Because they forsook the Covenant of Hashem, the G-d of their Fathers, that He sealed with them when He took them out of the land of Egypt.’”

There is no privilege without responsibility. Even in Hungary.

Q & A – Nitzavim

Questions

1. What is the connection between the verse "atem nitzavim" and the curses in the previous parsha?
2. Who were the wood-choppers and water-carriers?
3. Why can Hashem never "swap" the Jewish People for another nation?
4. One who ignores the Torah's warnings "adds drunkenness to thirst." What does this mean?
5. What two cities were destroyed along with S'dom and Amorah?
6. "The hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d, and the revealed things are for us..." What does this mean?
7. According to Rashi, how will the day of the ingathering of the exiles be "great and difficult"?
8. Where is the Torah not to be found? Where is it to be found?
9. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other's sins?
10. How do the earth and sky remind us to keep the mitzvahs?

Answers

1. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, "Who can survive such curses?" Moshe responded, "You've done a lot to anger Hashem, and yet 'atem nitzavim'— you are still standing before Him."
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who joined the Jewish People under false pretenses.
3. 29:12 - Because Hashem swore to their ancestors that He would never do so.
4. 29:18 - He causes Hashem to reckon his unintentional sins alongside his intentional ones, punishing him for all.
5. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
6. 29:28 - There is collective culpability only for "open" sins, but not for "hidden" ones.
7. 30: 3 - It will be as if Hashem needs to take each individual by the hand and lead him out of exile.
8. 30:12-15 - The Torah is not found in Heaven, nor is it across the ocean. Rather, it is "very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart."
9. 30:28 - When they crossed the Jordan and accepted the oath on Mount Eval and Mount Grizim.
10. 30:19 - The earth and heavenly bodies, although receiving neither reward nor punishment, always obey Hashem's will. How much more so should we, who stand to receive reward or punishment, obey Hashem.



Q & A – Vayelech

Questions

1. Moshe said, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in..." How do we know this does not refer to physical inability?
2. Which of Moshe's statements to Yehoshua was later contradicted by Hashem's command?
3. Why does the Torah refer to Succot of the eighth year as though it occurred during the shemita year?
4. Why does the Torah command that babies be brought to the Torah reading?
5. What does it mean that Hashem "hides His face?"
6. What function does the song Ha'azinu serve?
7. Which verse promises that the Torah will never be totally forgotten?
8. What is the difference of opinion regarding the placing of the Torah scroll which Moshe gave the levi'im?
9. On the day of Moshe's death, why didn't Moshe gather the people by blowing trumpets as he normally would have?
10. Moshe said, "For I know that after my death you will act corruptly," but, in fact, this didn't occur until after Yehoshua's death. What does this teach us?

Answers

1. 31:2. Because verse 34:7 says "His (Moshe's) eye never dimmed, and his (youthful) moisture never departed."
2. 31:7 - Moshe told Yehoshua to share his leadership with the Elders. Hashem later commanded Yehoshua to rule alone.
3. 31:10 - Because the laws of the seventh year still apply to the harvest.
4. 31:12 - To give reward to those who bring them.
5. 31:17 - He ignores their distress.
6. 31:21 - It warns what will befall the Jewish People if they abandon Torah.
7. 31:21 - "For (the Torah) will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring."
8. 31:26 - Whether it was placed outside but adjacent to the Ark, or inside next to the Tablets.
9. 31:28 - Blowing the trumpets expressed Moshe's dominion, and "there is no dominion on the day of death." (Kohelet 8)
10. 31:29 - That a person's student is as dear to him as himself. As long as Yehoshua was alive it was as though Moshe himself was alive.

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Q & A – Ha'azinu

Questions

1. Why were heaven and earth specifically chosen as witnesses?
2. How is the Torah like rain?
3. How is G-d "faithful without injustice"?
4. Why is G-d called "tzaddik"?
5. How many major floods did G-d bring upon the world?
6. What group of people does the Torah call "fathers"? Cite an example.
7. Why did G-d separate the world's nations into exactly 70?
8. Why is the merit of the Jewish People's ancestry called a "rope"?
9. How is G-d's behavior toward the Jewish People like an eagle's behavior toward its offspring?
10. Regarding the Jewish People's punishment, G-d says, "I will spend my arrows on them." What is the positive aspect of this phrase?
11. How does the idea of "chillul Hashem" prevent the nations from destroying the Jewish People?
12. What will happen to the nations that conquer the Jewish People?
13. When G-d overturns a nation that persecutes the Jewish People, His attribute of Mercy is "replaced" by which attribute?
14. When G-d punishes the heathen nations, for whose sins does He exact punishment?
15. How will G-d's punishment change the way the nations view the Jewish People?
16. On what day was Ha'azinu taught to the Jewish People?
17. Verse 32:44 calls Yehoshua "Hoshea." Why?
18. In verse 32:47, what does "it is not empty from you" mean?
19. Why did G-d tell Moshe that he would die a similar death to that of Aharon?
20. If Moshe had spoken to the rock rather than striking it, what would the Jewish People have learned?

Answers

1. 32:1 - They endure forever.
2. 32:2 - The Torah gives life and promotes growth like rain.
3. 32:4 - He is "faithful" by rewarding the righteous, and "without injustice" by rewarding even the wicked for any good deeds.
4. 32:4 - All will agree that His judgments are righteous.
5. 32:7 - Two. One in the time of Adam's grandson Enosh and one in the time of Noach.
6. 32:7 - The Prophets. Elisha called the Prophet Eliyahu "My Father." (Melachim II 2:12).
7. 32:8 - To correspond to the 70 Bnei Yisrael who entered Egypt.
8. 32:9 - Their merit is "woven from" the merits of the Avot.
9. 32:12 - He mercifully wakes them gently, hovering over them, and carrying them on His "wings".
10. 32:23 - "The arrows will be spent" implies that the afflictions will cease but the Jewish People will not.
11. 32:27 - The nations would attribute their success to their might and the might of their gods. G-d would not let His name be desecrated like this.
12. 32:35 - They will eventually be punished.
13. 32:41 - His attribute of Justice.
14. 32:42 - For their sins and the sins of their ancestors.
15. 32:43 - They will view the Jewish People as praiseworthy for cleaving to G-d.
16. 32:44 - The Shabbat upon which Moshe died.
17. 32:44 - To indicate that although he was the Jewish People's leader, he still maintained a humble bearing.
18. 32:47 - That you will receive reward for studying Torah and that there is nothing meaningless in the Torah.
19. 32:50 - Because Moshe wanted this.
20. 32:51 - The Jewish People would have reasoned as follows: If a rock, which receives neither reward nor punishment, obeys G-d's commands, all the more so should they.

Q & A - Bereishet

Questions

1. Why does the Torah start with the account of Creation?
2. What happened to the light that was created on the first day?
3. Why isn't the word "good" associated with the second day?
4. How were the trees supposed to taste?
5. On which day were the sun and moon created?
6. Hashem blessed the birds to be fruitful and to multiply. Why did He not do so with the beasts?
7. In whose likeness was man fashioned?
8. What kind of food did Adam eat?
9. Why is "the sixth day" written with the definite article?
10. At the end of the sixth day what was the world still lacking?
11. Why was man made from dust gathered from the entire earth?
12. How is man superior to the animals?
13. Why was it not good that man be alone?
14. Where do we learn that one must not add to a commandment from Hashem?
15. What does it mean that Adam and Chava "knew that they were naked"?
16. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd?
17. What was the marital practice of the generation who lived before the flood?
18. What did Tuval-Cain invent?
19. Why did Chanoch die at a young age?
20. What was the sign that Shem was born with great propensity for righteousness?

Answers

1. 1:1 - So that when the nations accuse us of stealing Eretz Canaan from the Canaanites, we can respond that Hashem, as Creator, has the right to give the land to whomever He sees fit, and He gave Eretz Canaan to us.
2. 1:4 - Hashem saw that the wicked would be unworthy of it so He hid it for the righteous.
3. 1:7 - Because the work with the water wasn't completed until the third day. Anything that is incomplete is not "good."
4. 1:11 - The wood was to have the taste of the fruit.
5. 1:14 - They were created on the first day and suspended in the firmament on the fourth day.
6. 1:22 - He did not want the serpent, who was to be cursed, to receive a blessing.
7. 1:26 - In the likeness of the angels.
8. 1:30 - Vegetation.
9. 1:31 "The" in Hebrew is the letter hey, which has a numerical value of five. Hashem created the world on the condition that it will endure only if the Jewish People accept the Five Books of the Torah.
10. 2:2 - Rest.
11. 2:7 - So that wherever he might die, the earth would receive his body.
12. 2:7 - He was given understanding and speech.
13. 2:18 - If he were alone, he would appear to be a god. The creation of woman emphasized man's dependence.
14. 3:3 - From Chava. Hashem commanded not to eat from the tree but she added not to touch it. Because she added to the command she eventually came to transgress it.
15. 3:7 - They had been given one commandment and they had stripped themselves of it.
16. : 4:2 - Since the ground had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.
17. : 4:19 - They married two wives, one with whom to have children. The other one was given a potion which prevented her from bearing children.
18. 4:22 - Murder weapons.
19. 5:22 - Though he was righteous, he was easily influenced; therefore Hashem took him before his time to protect him from sinning.
20. 5:32 - He was born already circumcised.

Q & A – Noach

Questions

1. Which particular sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
2. Why did Hashem tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
3. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
4. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?
5. Why did Hashem postpone bringing the flood for seven days?
6. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
7. What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did Hashem do to protect him?
8. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
9. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
10. What did the olive branch symbolize?
11. How long did the punishment of the flood last?
12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?
13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to "be fruitful and multiply" directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared.
17. Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

Answers

1. 6:13 - Robbery.
2. 6:14 - So that people would see Noach building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noach would answer, "Hashem is bringing a flood," it might encourage some people to repent.
3. 6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.
4. 7:2 - Hashem told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. "Kosher" and "non-kosher" are Torah concepts.
5. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Metushelach.
6. 7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.
7. 7:13,15 - People said, "If we see him going into the ark, we'll smash it!" Hashem surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.
8. 7:22 - The fish.
9. 8:4 - Eleven amot.
10. 8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that its better to eat food "bitter like an olive" but which comes directly from Hashem, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)
11. 8:14 - A full solar year.
12. 8:14 - Eleven days.
13. : 9:3 - After the flood.
14. 9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.
17. 9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noach's disgrace to Cham. And because Cham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Cham's fourth son, Canaan.
18. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against Hashem.
19. 11:9 - They lived together peacefully.
20. : 11:29 - The word "Yiscah" is related to the Hebrew word "to see." Sarah was called Yiscah because she could "see" the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

Q & A – Rosh Hashanah

Questions

1. Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?
2. Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tisrei is Rosh Hashanah?
3. We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?
4. What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?
5. Which Book of Tanach does the beginning of the Tashlich prayer come from?
6. What three barren women were "remembered" by Hashem on Rosh Hashanah?
7. A person's yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashanah, except for three types of expenses. What are they?
8. We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: "Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah..." What was Abraham's prayer on Mount Moriah?
9. Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashanah, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?
10. What halacha applies to the shehechyanu blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashanah which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

Answers

1. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah. (*Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*)
2. Nowhere. The Torah calls it "a day of shofar blowing." (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai). (*Bamidbar 29:1*)
3. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed..." (*Bereishis 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this "field" as an apple orchard. (*Ta'anis 29b, Biyur Hagra*)
4. "Blessed are You... who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar," and the shehechyanu blessing. (*Orach Chaim 581:2*)
5. The Book of Micha (7:18-20).
6. Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashanah it was decreed that these barren women would bear children. (*Tractate Rosh Hashanah 10b*)
7. Expenses for Shabbos, Yom Tov, and the cost of one's children's Torah education. (*Ba'er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1*)
8. He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations (*Onkelos 22:14*). Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac. (*Rashi 22:13*)
9. Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah Court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The "two-day festival" arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashanah. Since Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.
10. On the second night of Rosh Hashanah it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the shehechyanu blessing. Thus, the shehechyanu blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no shehechyanu blessing be said on the second night of Rosh Hashanah.) (*Taz 600:2*)

Q & A – Yom Kippur

Questions

1. Passover commemorates the going out of Egypt. Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah. What historical event can Yom Kippur be said to commemorate?
2. For what kinds of sins does Yom Kippur not atone?
3. What should someone do if the person he wronged does not forgive him the first time?
4. Why is the vidui confession included during the mincha prayer the afternoon before Yom Kippur?
5. On Yom Kippur we refrain from: working, eating, drinking, washing, anointing, family relations and wearing leather shoes. Which three of these prohibitions are more severe than the others?
6. In what two ways does the prohibition against eating food on Yom Kippur differ from the prohibition against eating pork the entire year?
7. Who wrote the prayer "Unesaneh Tokef" said during the chazan's repetition of musaf?
8. Why do we read the book of Yona on Yom Kippur?
9. In what two ways does havdalah after Yom Kippur differ from havdalah after Shabbos?
10. Ideally, what mitzvah should one begin immediately after Yom Kippur?

Answers

1. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai on the tenth of Tishrei with the second set of Tablets, signifying forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. Yom Kippur can be said to commemorate this event, the first national day of forgiveness for the Jewish People.
2. Sins committed against other people, including hurting someone's feelings. Yom Kippur does not atone for these sins until the perpetrator gains forgiveness from the victim himself. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
3. He should try at least two more times to gain forgiveness. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
4. Lest one choke while eating the pre-Yom Kippur meal and die without atonement, or lest one become intoxicated and unable to concentrate on the prayers at night. (*Mishna Berura 607:1*)
5. Eating, drinking, working. (*Mishna Kritut 1:1*)
6.
 - a. Although any amount is forbidden, eating on Yom Kippur is not punishable by a Sanhedrin until one has eaten food equal in volume to the size of a date. Eating pork, on the other hand, is punishable for eating even an olive-sized piece, which is smaller than a date. (*Mishna Berura 612:1*)
 - b. Eating on Yom Kippur incurs the punishment of karet - spiritual excision, whereas eating pork does not.
7. "Unesaneh Tokef" was written by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany about 1000 years ago.
8. The repentance of the people of Ninveh serves as an inspiration to us to repent, and shows us that repentance can overturn a Divine decree. (*Shelah Hakadosh*)
9. After Yom Kippur, the blessing over spices is omitted from havdalah. Also, the source of the flame used for havdalah after Yom Kippur must be a fire kindled before Yom Kippur. (*Orach Chaim 624:3,4*)
10. Building the succa. (*Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5*)

Q & A – Succot

Questions

1. According to the Torah, what three basic requirements define a material as valid for use as a succa roof?
2. If the succa causes discomfort (e.g. it's too cold) to the extent that under similar conditions you would leave your very own house, you are exempt from the mitzvah. Why?
3. What two things are forbidden to do outside of the succa all seven days of the festival?
4. What is the absolute minimum number of meals a person is required to eat in the succa during the seven day holiday?
5. Besides referring to the tree and its fruit, what does the word "esrog" mean literally?
6. What is the minimum length of a lulav?
7. What is the maximum percentage a person is required to add to the purchase price of his esrog in order to obtain an esrog of greater beauty?
8. On the Shabbos that occurs during Succos, we read the Book of Koheles, in which King Solomon refers to himself as "Koheles." Why is King Solomon called Koheles?
9. What prohibition could a person transgress simply by sitting in the succa on the eighth day of Succos?
10. We hold a tallis over the heads of the people who read the end of the Torah and the beginning of the Torah. Why?

Answers

1. It must grow from the ground, no longer be connected to the ground, and not be receptive to tumah (ritual defilement).
2. Because the commandment of living in a succa is to dwell in the succa for seven days the same way you dwell in your house the rest of the year. (*Mishna Berura 640:13*)
3. Eat (an 'established' meal) or sleep. (*Orach Chaim 639:2*)
4. One. Eating a meal in the succa the first night of Succos is a requirement. The rest of the festival, a person can eat 'snacks' which are not required to be eaten in a succa. (Outside Israel, one must eat a meal the second night of Succos as well. However, there is no requirement to live outside Israel!) (*Orach Chaim 639:3*)
5. Beauty. (*Ramban Vayikra 23:40*)
6. Its spine must be at least 4 tefachim (halachic handbreadths).
7. 33.3% (*Orach Chaim 656:1*)
8. Because he gathered (kihale) vast wisdom, and because he, as king, gathered the nation on Succos after the Sabbatical year. (*Rashi, Koheles 1:1*)
9. Bal Tosif - "Do not add to the mitzvos." The commandment to live in the succa applies for only seven days. To sit in the succa on the eighth day with intent to fulfill the mitzvah transgresses "bal tosif." (*Orach Chaim 666:1*)
10. It represents the wedding canopy, symbolizing that through the Torah we wed ourselves to Hashem.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Nitzavim / Rosh Hashanah

Seasoning the Land (Part 2)

A *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* (version #1, ch. 37) teaches that just as there are Seven Heavens, so are there seven words for the "Earth": *eretx*, *adamah*, *arka*, *charavah*, *yabashah*, *taivel* and *cheled*. Even though all of these words appear to be synonyms for "the land" as we know it, each word connotes a different aspect of the land and has its own etymological basis. This series of essays will explore these apparent synonyms, seeking to find out how they differ from one another and trying to derive some meaning from this whole discussion. In our previous essay, called *Seasoning the Land* (Part 1), we focused our attention on the word *eretx* and how it differs from the word *adamah*. In this essay we will deal with the rest of the words.

A Psalm ascribed to none other than Moses describes G-d as having been all-powerful since the beginning of time: "Before the mountains were born and the *eretx* and *taivel* were fashioned, from eternity unto eternity, You are G-d" (Ps. 90:2). A similar statement is found in another Psalm attributed to King David: "To Hashem [belongs] the *eretx* and its contents, the *taivel* and those who dwell within it" (Ps. 24:1). The *Metzudat Tzion* clarifies that when the terms *eretx* and *taivel* are juxtaposed to one another, each one bears a specific meaning, with *eretx* referring to the uninhabited parts of the world and *taivel* referring to the inhabited lands. Malbim similarly explains that *eretx* refers to the entire globe, while *taivel* only refers to inhabited places. Rashi (to Ps. 24:1) takes a different approach, postulating that *eretx* refers specifically to *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel) and *taivel* refers to the rest of the planet.

Avot d'Rabbi Natan (version #1) offers two cryptic statements about why the land is called *taivel*: "Why is it called *taivel*? Because it is 'spiced' (*metubal*) with everything. Alternatively, because its way is for things to enter it and not for things to exit it." Both of these statements relate to the connection between *taivel* and the root BET-LAMMED. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim explains that root as referring to something losing its independent existence either by being "mixed in" to something else or by "wearing out/rotting away." The Mishnaic Hebrew word for "spices/seasoning" is *tavlin*, which derives from the second meaning of BET-LAMMED in the sense of something typically "mixed in" to food to make it taste better. The way *Avot d'Rabbi Natan* (version #2, ch. 43) records this statement, that the world is called *taivel* because it is "spiced up" (*metubal*) with Torah. In this way, the Midrash relays to us the importance of Torah and Torah study, because the entire world is called *taivel* simply because there is Torah "mixed into" the goings-on of the planet.

The second comment about why the land is called *taivel* refers to the fact that the nature of the world is that people "enter" the ground (that is, they are buried there when they die), but do not emerge from that grave – at least until the miraculous Resurrection of the Dead will reverse that trend. Consequently, the land is viewed as the place where bodies "decompose" and "rot," thus connecting *taivel* to the second meaning of BET-LAMMED.

The word *taivel* should not be confused with the word *tevel* (“abomination”). Although both words are spelled the same, they are vowelized differently. Nonetheless, they bear a shared root because both derive from BET-LAMMED. Rabbi Yom Tov Tzahalon (1559-1638), sometimes known as Mahari Tatz, explains that the word *tevel* at its core means “mixing.” This refers to the idea that one who commits the sorts of destructive abominations labeled *tevel* is usually a “mixed-up and confused” individual or is somebody who is “mixing up” the regular order of nature by doing something unnatural. Parallel to this, *taivel* refers to the populated parts of the world, which are characterized as “melting pot” admixtures, with many different types of people, flora and fauna all occupying the same space.

The word *arka* (“land”) appears only once in the entire Bible. When Jehoiachin and other prominent Jews from Judah were exiled to Babylonia before the destruction of the First Temple, Jeremiah wrote them a letter in Aramaic to tell them how they should respond to Babylonian pressures to worship idolatry. This is the only verse in the Book of Jeremiah that is written in Aramaic: “So shall you say to them, ‘The gods whom the Heavens and the Earth (*arka*) do not serve will be destroyed from the land (*ara’a*) and from beneath these heavens’” (Jer. 10:11).

Rabbi Shmuel Yaffe-Ashkenazi (1525-1595) explains that although the rest of this passage is in Aramaic, the word *arka* itself is Hebrew, because the Aramaic form of *eretz* is *ara’a* (with the Hebrew TZADI morphing into an Aramaic AYIN, as often happens) – a word which also appears in this same verse. The connection between the Hebrew words *eretz* and *arka* is unclear, but perhaps the TZADI of *eretz* somehow became a KUF because those two letters appear one after another in Hebrew Alphabet.

Midrash Mishlei (ch. 8) explains that the land is called *arka* because it “fled” from before G-d when He wanted to give the Torah to the Jewish People at Mount Sinai. I am not sure what this means, but the basis for this exegesis seems to be the similarity between the Hebrew *arka* (with an ALEPH) and the Aramaic word *arka* (spelled with an AYIN), which means “to flee.”

So far we have seen four Hebrew words that mean “land”: *eretz*, *adamah*, *taivel*, and *arka*. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel (*Ber. Rabbah* 13:12) expounds on these four words by explaining how each one alludes to a different one of the four seasons: *eretz* refers to spring when the land presents forth (*ratz*) its produce; *taivel* refers to the summer when the land's produce rots; *adamah* refers to autumn when the ground starts dividing into patches/clumps; and *arka* refers to winter when the land is bereft (*reik*, “empty”) of its produce.

Cheled (Ps. 49:2) and *chedel* (Isa. 38:11) seem to be metathesized forms of the same term (see Ibn Ezra to Ps. 39:6). Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* understands both CHET-LAMMED-DALET and CHET-DALET-LAMMED to be synonyms for *zman* (“time”), presumably understanding that it refers to the ephemeral, temporary nature of This World and its inhabitants. The Jerusalem Talmud (*Shabbat* 14:1) similarly explains that when the Torah calls mankind “inhabitants of *cheled/chedel*,” this alludes to the way in which people are similar to “weasels” (*chuldah*). Just as a weasel drags food from one place and leaves it in another without knowing beforehand whom he is benefitting with that food, so too people work hard to produce and leave things in This World without the foreknowledge of who exactly will reap their benefits in the future. This is reminiscent of how Choni the Circle-Maker asked a farmer why he bothered to plant a tree that would take seventy years to bear fruit (see *Taanit* 23a).

Continuing with this somewhat morbid theme, Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, explains *cheled* as a portmanteau of CHET-LAMMED (“beginning”) and LAMMED-DALET (“birth”). He explains that the word reminds us that one can be cognizant of the day of one’s beginning-birth, but one cannot know ahead of time the day of one’s death.

The root CHET-DALET-LAMMED also means “to stop/withhold” (*chadal*) and the root CHET-LAMMED-DALET gives way to the Mishnaic Hebrew term *chaludah* (“rust”). Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 11:8, Ps. 17:14) explains that both of these terms highlight man’s frailties and shortcomings. In other words, at a certain point in time, no matter how active a person is, he will eventually show signs of wearing down and will prove mortal. He will eventually be forced “to stop.” The same is even true of metals, which are typically the strongest materials available, but yet after prolonged exposure to the elements they will rust and show their frailty. According to this, *cheled/chedel* focuses on “land” as an element of creation subject to the whims of time, just like man’s deficiencies and short-comings show that man too is subject to the confines of time.

Avot d’Rabbi Natan (version #2) explains that the land is also called *charavah* and *yabashah*, which are synonyms for “dry-land,” because of the land’s role in absorbing the water of the Deluge after the flood ended (or absorbing Abel’s blood after he was buried, according to *Midrash Mishlei*).

Avot d’Rabbi Natan (version #2) adds three more words for “land” that the standard edition found to be too farfetched: *reishit*, *gay*, and *sadeh*. See also *Vayikra Rabbah* 29:11 for a different list of seven words for “land.” Finally, Rabbi Avraham Bedersi notes that the word *karka* represents a totally different concept from the list of words that we discussed in this essay. He clarifies that in Biblical Hebrew *karka* does not mean “land,” but rather it denotes the floor underneath a building or sea (although he admits that in Rabbinic Hebrew the term came to be almost synonymous with *eretz* and *adamah*).



Vayelech / Yom Kippur

Calling the Defender

The great Tannaitic sage Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov said: “A person who performs one mitzvah acquires for himself one *praklit*. A person who violates one transgression acquires for himself one *kategor*” (*Avot* 4:11). In other words, if a person does a good deed, he gains a Heavenly defender (*praklit*), while when a person sins, he gets a Heavenly accuser (*kategor*). In other cases, the antonym of *kategor* is *sanegor* (“defender”). Rashi (to *Avot* 4:11, to *Zevachim* 7b, *Bava Batra* 10a), *Machzor Vitri* (*Avot* 4:11), and Maimonides (to *Avot* 4:11) define *praklit* as *meilitz yosher* or *meilitz tov*, while Rashi (to *Chagigah* 13b) and Rabbeinu Chananel (to *Rosh Hashanah* 26a, *Kiddushin* 5a) similarly define *sanegor* as *meilitz yosher*. What is the difference between the seemingly synonymous terms *praklit*, *sanegor*, and *meilitz yosher* if they all mean “defender”? In the coming paragraphs we seek to address this question and further sharpen our understanding of the etymologies behind this trio of words.

What is a *meilitz yosher*? The Torah states that that when Joseph's brothers mentioned their lost brother in front of the Egyptian viceroy, they did not realize that Joseph actually understood what they were saying, “because there was a *meilitz* between them” (Gen. 42:23). In this context, the term *meilitz* refers to a sort of “translator” or “interpreter” who interfaces between two parties speaking different languages. More broadly, a *meilitz* is a “middleman” who serves as a go-between to mediate between interlocutors.

The particular verbiage *meilitz yosher* is derived from *Iyov* 33:23-24: “If there is a single defending (*meilitz*) angel from among one-thousand [who speak about a person's sins] to tell about a man's straightness (*yashro*), [then] G-d will favor that man and say, ‘He has been redeemed from descending to the pits. I have found atonement [for him through his upright deeds].’” Thus, a *meilitz yosher* is a “defender” who emphasizes a person's “good” and “straight” deeds, as opposed to a “prosecutor” who emphasizes a person's “evil” and “criminal” deeds. The Targum (there) renders the verse as referring to “a single *praklit* from among one thousand *kategor*.” In this case, the *meilitz yosher* interfaces between the judge and the defendant in order to highlight the defendant's worthiness and save him from an unfavorable verdict.

The word *meilitz* can be traced to either the root MEM-LAMMED-TZADI or LAMMED-(VAV)-TZADI. Ibn Janach and Radak see the former as related to the root MEM-REISH-TZADI, *meretz* (“fluency,” “persistency”), based on the interchangeability of LAMMED and REISH. In the case of the translator or defender, *meilitz* seems to refer to the requisite smoothness and consistency of one's oratory skills. Alternatively, Ibn Janach and Radak also trace *meilitz* to the root LAMMED-VAV-TZADI (“thinking,” “explaining,” and “elucidating”), explaining that the *meilitz* uses his logic skills to expand on an argument and explain why it makes sense.

Rabbi Pappenheim sees the core meaning of LAMMED-TZADI as “logical verbalizations,” explaining that this can be used for good – like a *meilitz* who tries to defend the accused – or for bad. Hence, the term *leitzanut* (“scorn” or “mockery”) can also be derived from this root to mean the misuse of logical expressions for evil purposes. Elsewhere, Rabbi Pappenheim writes that the letter MEM at the beginning of many three-letter roots serves to switch the meaning of the core two-letter root to its exact opposite. In that way, the two-letter root LAMMED-TZADI (*leitz*) means “scorn/mockery,” while MEM-LAMMED-TZADI (*meilitz*) means just the opposite: “justification” or “defense.” (In Modern Hebrew, the related word *leitzan* – “clown” – is derived from *leitz*, but in this sense, takes on a more positive connotation.)

The Hebrew word *meltzer* (“guard” or “waiter”) appears twice in the Bible (*Dan*. 1:11, 1:16). This word might be derived from the same core root as the word *meilitz*, with an additional REISH appended as a suffix to mean the same thing that the English suffix *-er* does. In other words, the added REISH might serve to form an agent noun from a verb or another noun, such that the *meltzer* is the person who engages in being *meilitz*, in the same way that a *baker* (noun) is one who *bakes* (verb), or a *butler* (noun) is one who deals with *bottles* (noun). The *meltzer* as a “waiter” interfaces between the kitchen and those participating in a meal, while a “guard” also interfaces between that which falls under his protection and those who seek to harm his charge.

There is some precedent for this explanation in the case of Rabbi Yochanan HaSandler, who was said to be a shoemaker. The word *sandal* in Greek and Mishnaic Hebrew refers to a type of shoe, just like it does in English. The Rashbatz, Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (1361-1444), in his commentary to *Avot* 4:11, explains that the added REISH to the appellation *HaSandler* denotes Rabbi Yochanan's occupation of *shoemaker* (noun), as someone who deals with *shoes* (noun). Rashbatz offers another example by noting that the word Mishnaic Hebrew word *palter* ("professional baker") – found in *Demai* 5:4 and *Avodah Zarah* 4:9 – is derived from the Greek word *plateia* ("open street"), because a professional baker would typically sell his goods on the street. *Plateia*, by the way, is the etymological ancestor of the English words *place* and *plaza*.

Alternatively, Rabbi Yaakov Yehuda Zilberberg (1914-2003) explains that a *meilitz* can manipulate verbal expressions and can produce a sweet-sounding rhetorical trope (see Ps. 119:103 and Rabbi Hirsch there). In the same way that the *meilitz* is occupied with making sure his words are "tasty," the *meltzer* also taste-tests food before serving it. Dr. Chaim Tawil actually understands *meltzer* to be unrelated to the Hebrew *meilitz*, arguing that *meltzer* is borrowed from the Akkadian word *massaru/mansaru* (with the letters NUN and LAMMED interchanging). (The Ashkenazic Jewish surname Meltzer is unrelated to the Biblical *meltzer*, but rather derives from German/English word *malt*, and refers to the occupational maltster who prepares grains for brewing.)

Of the three terms that this essay discusses, only *meilitz yosher* is truly Hebrew. The other two words that we will discuss – *praklit* and *sanegor* – are actually loanwords that come from Greek. The word *praklit* appears in the Targum as the Aramaic rendering of the Hebrew word *meilitz* (Targum to *Iyov* 16:20, 33:23). Although the word is typically pronounced *praklit*, *Melech Shlomo* (to *Avot* 4:11) actually vowelizes it as *paraklet*, and MS Kaufmann (the oldest vowelized manuscript of the Mishna) similarly vowelizes it as *parakilit*. In fact, Rabbi Yisroel Lipschutz (1782-1860) in *Tiferet Yisrael* (to *Avot* 4:11, *Yachin* 51) connects this Mishnaic Hebrew word to the Greek word *parakletos* (*paraclete* in Latin).

Praklit/parakletos is often understood as a Greek legal term that variously means "supporter," "helper," "sponsor," "advocate," and "intercessor." This Greek term is comprised of *para* ("outside"/"beside") and *kalein* ("to call"), making the *praklit* a person from outside whom one calls upon to defend him. Historians explain that this term does not refer to the sort of lawyer-for-hire that we might be familiar with in contemporary times. Rather, it refers to one's patron, who also doubled as one's standing *counsel* who would intercede on one's behalf in court when needed. Some scholars even argue that in contrast to the *sanegor*, who would typically have a speaking role in defending his client, the *praklit* would silently help by simply showing up to a hearing and providing moral support. The *praklit*'s mere presence already helps make a litigant's case. Others explain the *praklit* as a sort of character witness who attests to the defendant's virtue, but does not directly argue about the case at hand. (In Modern Hebrew, the term *praklit* means "state attorney," who is actually a prosecutor, not a defense lawyer.)

With this in mind, we can have a better appreciation of the following Talmudic passage: "Anyone who is taken to the gallows to be sentenced, if he has great *praklitim*, he can be saved. But if he does not, he will not be saved. These are a person's *praklitim* – repentance and good deeds" (*Shabbat* 32a). In this case, repentance and good deeds serve as "character witnesses" to show a person's true disposition and allow him to be saved from harsh judgment, even if he is actually guilty of what he is accused. Similarly, the Talmud says that one's acts of righteousness and kindness serve as one's *praklitim* before G-d (*Bava Batra* 10a) because they similarly attest to his good character and worthiness. Additionally, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai explains that when one is obligated to bring a sin-offering and a burnt-offering, the former is always brought first, because "a sin-offering resembles a *praklit* who enters [the king or judge] to appease" and only once the *praklit* achieves that appeasement does the "gift" of a burnt-offering become appropriate (*Zevachim* 7b, *Tosefta Parah* 1:1, and *Torat Kohanim* to Lev. 14:20).

The Greek word *sanegor* might be more accurately spelled *synagor*, as it is comprised of the Greek roots *syn* ("together"/"same") and *agor* ("gathering place"/"assembly"). English words that contain the Greek *syn* include *synonym*, *syntax*, *synagogue*, and *synthesis*, while the word *agor* is possibly related to the Hebrew *agur* ("gathering"). The *synegoros* in Ancient Greece was a legal expert who would argue before the assembly on a defendant's behalf.

From an exegetical perspective, many sources explain the word *sanegor* as a contraction of *sani* (“to despise/hate”) and *tigra* (“fighting/argument”), in reference to the *sanegor*’s role as a peacemaker in trying to quell the accusations of the prosecutor. This explanation is cited by Rashi (on *Ein Yaakov Chagigah* 13b), *Machzor Vitri* (to *Avot* 4:11, and to *Laws of Rosh Hashanah*), Rabbeinu Elyakim (quoted by *Imrei Noam* to *Lev. 16:4*), and *Moshav Zekanim* (to *Lev. 16:4*).

Both the Babylonian Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 36a) and the Jerusalem Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 3:2) explain that one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah by blowing a cow’s horn because “the *kategor* cannot become a *sanegor*.” Meaning, because the bovine beast represents the sin of the Golden Calf, which causes Heavenly accusations to be leveled against the Jewish People, its horn cannot be used for the protective mitzvah of *shofar*. The same explanation is given for why the Kohen Gadol does not wear his Golden Vestments when performing the holiest Temple services on Yom Kippur: since gold invokes the sin of the Golden Calf, which causes Heavenly accusations, that metal cannot be used for the performance of the especially sacred rites on Yom Kippur (Babylonian Talmud *Rosh Hashanah* 36a and Jerusalem Talmud *Yoma* 7:3).

Something would be amiss if we discussed the etymologies of the words *praklit* and *sanegor*, but not the word *kategor* (“accuser”). This word also comes from Greek and is comprised of the Greek root *kata* (“down,” “reverse,” “against”) and *agora* (“assembly”). The “accuser” is one who speaks *against* somebody else in front of an assembly. *Encyclopedia Britannica* explains that although *kategoria* originally referred to an “accusation,” the early Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC) already began to use this word in the philosophical sense of an “assertion.” It is an early term from which the English word *category* (“class,” or “group”) is derived, into which one can “assert” that an item belongs.

Many commentators understand the word *kategor* to mean “slanderer,” as the prosecutor/accuser essentially snitches/informs on people to get them in trouble (see Rabbeinu Chananel to *Rosh Hashanah* 26a and *Kiddushin* 5a, Maimonides to *Avot* 4:11, Rashbatz and Rabbi Yaakov bar Shimshon to *Avot* 4:11). Based on this, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) in *Sefer Tishbi* claims that *kategor* is related to the Latin word *interrogator*. However, from an etymological perspective this does not quite pan out because *interrogator* is comprised of the Latin roots *inter* (“between”) and *rogare* (“to ask”), which has nothing to do with the origins of the word *kategor*.

Machzor Vitri interprets *kategor* as a portmanteau of *ketata* (“dispute”) and *tigra* (“fighting/argument”), while others explain the term as a contraction of *magur ketat*, which means “instigator of dispute” (*Sefer Kushyot* 346, *Moshav Zekanim* to *Lev. 16:4*), or *kara tigra* (“calling for a fight”). The later Hebrew word *kitrug* (“accusation”) seems to be a metathesis of *kategor*, with the REISH and GIMMEL consonants switching places.



The Judgment of Rosh Hashanah

by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

The Siftei Chaim points out a few fundamental questions surrounding the holiday of Rosh Hashanah that can help enrich our understanding of the judgment that takes place on this day. There is a well-known principle in Jewish thought that says names always express essence. By studying the depth behind names a person can get an understanding of the spiritual nature of the person, object, etc. bearing that name. Similarly, the names of the holidays reflect their core. According to this, since the primary notion of Rosh Hashanah is judgment, then why isn't "Yom HaDin" ("Day of Judgment") the primary name of the holiday? After all, the name "Rosh Hashanah," "Head of the Year," seems to hint at nothing more than the mere date of the day. Furthermore, since Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment, wouldn't it be more fitting to celebrate it at the end of the previous year, the year from which our actions are being judged, rather than the beginning of the upcoming year? Finally why is a new judgment necessary every year?

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 10b) tells us that the first day of Tishrei marks the creation of man, which in turn marks the completion of the creation process. It was on this day that man was given his first commandment to refrain from eating from the Tree of Knowledge, and the job of working and guarding the land. It was also on this day that Adam was given the tools he needed to accomplish this goal. He was placed in the ideal environment for growth (Garden of Eden), given the ideal spouse as a helpmate, and the fruits of all the trees – except for the Tree of Knowledge – as food. Ultimately, he wasn't missing anything he needed to accomplish his assigned role. However, Adam was unable to succeed, and sinned on the very day he was given the commandment. He was judged on this day, and given a second chance, but under different conditions. His ultimate job in the world had changed, and therefore the tools he was

given also changed. His environment was no longer the same since he was expelled from Eden; he then had to work for his food, Chava then had to endure childbirth pains, etc.

What can we learn about Rosh Hashanah from this? The Maharal explains that the Hebrew word for "year," "shana," has the same root as the Hebrew word for "change," "shinui." The meaning behind this is that with every New Year there are changes in both the details of the goals that need to be met, and purposes that need to be brought to fruition in the world. Just like every generation faces new trials to overcome and jobs to accomplish, so too every year the details of what is expected of you change. In this sense every year is like a new creation unto itself and mirrors the original creation process.

Based on the above, the commentaries suggest that everything that happened at the original creation of the world takes place every year on Rosh Hashanah. Just like on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem created and judged Adam, and determined the ultimate job that would be given to him, so too, on this day, Hashem judges us to see what, if any, job we will be allotted in the undertaking for the New Year. Furthermore, just as Adam was given everything he needed to carry out the job he was expected to accomplish (both before and after his sin), so too, every year on this day, riches, health, marriages, births, deaths, etc. are decided, based on the personal job given to every individual. A person may be given wealth to accomplish his goal to use it for good causes, while a person may live in poverty to test his level of trust in Hashem. Every person's tools are decided based on his personal tests and goals for the upcoming year. There is, however, one major difference between the original day of creation and what takes place every year on Rosh Hashanah. Hashem's original decision to create Adam was not dependent on

Adam's actions, simply because Adam was yet to be created. Conversely, the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is based solely on one's individual merits.

Based on the above, we can answer the questions we started with. Since every year brings with it changes in the goals that need to be met, a judgment is needed once a year to determine the role of each individual with its changes. Also, since the purpose of the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is not to hand out punishments for the past, but rather it is a judgment for the upcoming year, the

judgment is on the first day of the *new year* rather than on the last day of the previous year. Finally, the name "Rosh Hashanah," "head of the year," is more essential than the name "*Yom Hadin*," "Day of Judgment," since this energy of *newness*, which demands new obligations and roles, prompts the judgment of Rosh Hashanah. Therefore the name "Rosh Hashanah," like all other holidays, elegantly encapsulates the essence of the day.

YOM KIPPUR SPECIAL FEATURE

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL BABY!

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

The arrival of every Yom Tov brings with it a particularly precious moment: the recitation of the blessing "*Shehechyanu v'kiymanu v'higyanu lizman hazeh* – Blessed are You, Hashem, King of the Universe, Who has granted us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this season." In a certain sense, the *Shehechyanu* blessing encapsulates our anticipation and excitement for the Yom Tov at its nascent beginning. The Yom Tov candles are lit and Kiddush is being recited as we take the opportunity to thank Hashem for having brought us to this momentous time. We show our appreciation that we are able to celebrate Yom Tov and allow its spiritual joy to become a part of us.

But there is one exception: Yom Kippur. Obviously the *Shehechyanu* blessing is not pronounced over a cup of wine on Yom Kippur, but it is nevertheless recited. After the haunting melody of *Kol Nidre* comes to an end, the congregation recites *Shehechyanu* all together. Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year. It is also the most solemn and serious day of the year. A day spent in prayer, fasting and introspection. A day of both physical discomfort and spiritual discomfort as we contemplate the wrongs we have done over the year and try to rectify them through remorse and pledging to try not to make the same mistakes

again. Yom Kippur cannot be described as a day of joy like the other Yamim Tovim, so why do we proclaim "*Shehechyanu v'kiymanu v'higyanu lizman hazeh*"?

For this very reason, Rabbi Yissachar Dov Rokeach, (1854-1926), the third Belzer Rebbe, points out that Yom Kippur might not seem to be the right time to say *Shehechyanu*. The Belzer Rebbe explains that the *Shehechyanu* that we recite as Yom Kippur begins is over ourselves! On entering into Yom Kippur after an intensive and demanding period of repentance, it is as if we have become new people. The potential for change is so enormous that our Sages describe a person who has been through the process of atonement as being akin to a new-born baby. As an American author once put it, "You know what the great thing about babies is? They are like little bundles of hope. Like the future in a basket."

And this is exactly what our Sages are conveying. On Yom Kippur our entire future is spread out in front of us – pristine, and just waiting for us to embrace it. For this reason alone we should recite the blessing of *Shehechyanu* with great intent and concentration. To show our love for Hashem and our gratitude for the inestimable opportunities

that He gives us to spiritually cleanse ourselves and to be able to start anew.

But it comes with a condition. Maimonides rules (*Hilchot Shgagot* 3:10) that the essence of Yom Kippur and our ability to completely cleanse ourselves of our sins is *emunah* – faith. Maimonides further writes that if a person does not believe in the power of atonement, Yom Kippur cannot atone for their sins. We have the incredible ability to undergo transformative change on Yom Kippur. To internalize the knowledge that we can change our inner self. But we need to believe that it is possible to do so in order for it to happen.

A Torah scholar once got on the bus in Jerusalem and sat down next to an elderly Russian man. After being stuck in heavy traffic for a while, the Russian turned to his seatmate and said to him in Yiddish, “*Ich bin a Yom Kippur Yid* – I am a Yom Kippur Jew.”

Not being quite sure how to react, the Torah scholar waited for an explanation. The Russian said to him, “Look at me. Do you see how many teeth I am missing? Six. I was drafted into the Russian army during the Second World War. We worked and fought, day in and day out, every single day of the year. There was no vacation, no leave of absence, no Shabbat and no Yom Tov. Even sick leave was given at the barest minimum. The army medics had their orders for calculating how many days of sick leave each wound or illness was to be allotted. For example, for a pulled tooth, one day of sick leave was allowed, and then back to the front line.

“During my first year in the army, when Yom Kippur drew close, I began to think of ideas of how to exempt myself from service in order to avoid desecrating the holy day. Finally, I had a moment of inspiration. In the afternoon before Yom Kippur, I went to the medic and complained of an excruciating toothache. I pointed to one of my teeth and asked him to pull it out. The medic had no way of knowing if what I was saying was true or not, so he gave me a swig of vodka and pulled out

the tooth with a pair of pliers. The pain was excruciating but my plan succeeded. I was free from army duty for the day. The next year, when Yom Kippur came, I tried the same thing again and it worked. For six Yom Kippurs I served in the Red Army, and six times I had a tooth pulled. That is why I tell you that *Ich bin a Yom Kippur Yid* – I am a Yom Kippur Jew!”

Each one of those “Yom Kippur Jew’s” missing teeth was a tribute to his unsullied purity and innocence. To his belief in Hashem and in the power of atonement on Yom Kippur. Each tooth was testament to his being born anew each year. Our Sages teach us (Tractate Pesachim 54a) that the concept of atonement came into being before our physical world was created. The source of atonement belongs to an existence that precedes the physical. Through Yom Kippur, and through the immeasurable intensity of atonement, we are presented with the opportunity to unite with a “world” that transcends the here-and-now. To a reality that is not constricted and restricted by the physical world that we live in.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 17:2) relates that as Yom Kippur comes to an end, a Heavenly voice calls out, (Kohelet 9:7), “Go eat your bread in joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, because Hashem has already approved your deeds.” Perhaps this is why the Code of Jewish Law (Orach Chaim 624:5) says that after the fast on Yom Kippur it is correct to eat a joyous meal. This joyous meal shows that we believe in the power of atonement. After having spent the last twenty-five hours immersed in the delight of Yom Kippur, we have reached a level of purity and spiritual cleanliness that reflects the fact that “Hashem has already approved our deeds.”

Please accept my blessing that we all be signed and sealed in the Book of Life. And may we all be blessed with a year of good health and an unwavering attachment to our Father in Heaven with a bond that is as pure and unsullied as that of a new-born baby.

SUCCOT SPECIAL FEATURE

Perek Shira: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

The Date Palm

*The date palm says: "The righteous man will sprout like a date palm,
like a cedar in Lebanon he will grow sturdily."
(Tehillim 92:13)*

The date palm sings of how Hashem's nation towers spiritually since they love only Him.

The date palm is a symbol of the Jewish People. It has only one heart in its center, and it therefore grows in only one direction – heavenward. So too, the Jewish nation has only one heart – for their Father in Heaven. Other trees, however, have multiple hearts and grow in all directions. The single-minded devotion of the date palm empowers it to tower over other trees. So too, the righteous people rise proudly and produce date-like nutritious fruits full of sweetness.

An additional symbolism of the date palm is that all of its parts have beneficial uses. Its *lulavim* are used to laud Hashem, its branches for *schach*, its tough fiber can be used to fashion ropes, its wood for building, and its remainder for firewood. So too, the Jewish People have no waste products. All Jews are Torah scholars to some extent, performers of mitzvahs, givers of charity, and more. Indeed, Jews may vary, and may even disagree, but all are essential, and all are headed in the same heavenward direction.

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

SPECIAL FEATURE

Hero or Thief?

by Rabbi Gavriel Rubin

The case: It was a sunny Friday afternoon, June 20th, 1997, to be exact, at approximately 1:40 p.m. Suddenly, Motti Ashkenazi burst into the Savoy Hotel in Tel Aviv, rushed over to the reception desk and blurted out hysterically, "There's a suspicious bag in the entrance to number 6 Geula Street!" – referring to an apartment building not far away.

The clerk wasted no time in calling the police and a patrol car arrived shortly. After examining the

object in question, the officers confirmed Motti's suspicions – it was a bomb.

Reinforcements headed by the precinct captain soon arrived to close off all the surrounding streets and the sappers went to work. Fortunately, with the help of a robot, they were able to disarm the device before any harm was done, other than to the bag of course.

“The charge was found in a black bag,” reported one of the policemen, “which also contained bottles of liquor, a large hairbrush, a bundle of keys, a beret and a plastic box filled with cookies. Concealed beneath these items was a six-and-a-half pound explosive device, comprised of over two pounds of plastic explosives, plus four pounds of nails, shot and dum dum bullets.”

According to a senior officer, if the device had exploded on a crowded beach, as are all beaches in Israel on a Friday afternoon in the beginning of the summer, it would have cut short the lives of dozens of people within a radius of a hundred feet.

At first, Motti claimed that he just “happened” to enter the apartment building when he spied the bag. But, after he was sent home, a routine background check revealed that Motti had a “colorful” past, which prompted the investigators to call him back in for further questioning.

This time, Motti confessed that he himself had taken the bag from “Jerusalem Beach” in Tel Aviv, where it was sitting on the ground next to the lifeguard’s tower. In his words, he took it “just out of curiosity,” after first making sure that it did not belong to any of the people around, of course. When he reached number 6 Geula Street, Motti ducked into the courtyard of the building to examine his find. That is when he heard the ticking....

Motti’s action saved the lives of many people. “I hope this is my last ‘bag,’” he told an interviewer.

“When I heard it was a bomb on the verge of exploding, I began to tremble. I was in shock. I couldn’t believe I had just been saved from death. I have a custom of asking the One above to protect me every day before I leave the house,” Motti the thief added, parenthetically. I feel that I was born anew.

“The truth is that if I had known what the bag contained, I would have run the other way. But now I’m glad that because of me so many lives were saved. They told me at the end of the investigation that I would receive a certificate of merit from the police department. They also promised me a free treatment program for my...uh...‘problem.’”

Do we say that although he did an act of stealing, the result was the saving of human life, and so the reward he received was deserved?

Or, perhaps, Motti should really be seen as nothing but a lowly thief, through whom something good happened by chance, and what he really deserved is punishment.

(*Editor’s note: See the answer in Rabbi Rubin’s new *sefer* available via Amazon: *The Bomb Thief and Other Curious Cases: Leaves from the Jewish Logic Tree*)

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Chagim 5782

Succah 48 - Beitzah 34

A Greater Good

Our Sages taught in a *beraita*, “*Gemilut chassadim* (acts of kindness) are greater than *tzedakah* (charity) in three ways. *Tzedakah* can be extended only with money, only to the poor and only to the living. *Gemilut chassadim* can be extended with money and with the body, to the rich and the poor, and to the dead as well as the living.”

While *tzedakah* is financial aid, *chessed* can be done not only with money but also with an act of kindness, such as visiting the sick and comforting mourners. And *chessed* would include also the burial of someone who was wealthy.

- *Succah* 49b

Setting a Bad Example

“Abayei explained, ‘The reason for the penalty is based on a popular folk saying: The manner of a child’s speech in public is a reflection of what the child heard from the parents.’ ”

The mishna teaches that Bilgah and the shift of kohanim which he headed were punished and disgraced in three ways. Why? Bilgah’s daughter Miriam became a heretic, and blasphemed when she saw the Altar in the Beit Hamikdash: “Wolf, wolf! Until when will you consume the property of the Jewish People and not be there to help them when they are in dire need?!” The *gemara* asks why her father was punished for his daughter’s disgraceful words. Abayei answers that it must have been that her father had spoken at home with great disrespect for the service in the Beit Hamikdash. And what the father said was heard and internalized by his daughter, who felt no shame in publicly speaking with contempt for the Beit Hamikdash.

This folk saying quoted by Abayei reminds me of my first taste of anti-Semitism as a youth. I was on a baseball team that included twin brothers whose parents had immigrated from Lithuania shortly after World War II. The twins and I were also in the same school one year. In the hallway one day, as one of the brothers passed by me, he said “dirty Jew!” slightly under his breath. It shook me momentarily but I shook it off. Anyway, it was only one of the twins, and their father showed great love for me as a “star” on the championship team that he coached. He even offered to head my campaign when I ran for a minor public office. But, despite the affection and praise he always showered on me, I was never really sure about his true feelings after hearing one of his sons say to me what he said.

- *Succah* 56b

Love Is Stronger Than Fear

“A positive mitzvah overrides a negative mitzvah.” (“*Aseh docheh lo ta’aseh.*”)

In a situation where there is a mitzvah to refrain from a certain act, but at the same time there is a different mitzvah to do that particular act, the rule is to do the act based on the principle of *aseh docheh lo ta’aseh*. A possible example would be wool *tzitzit* on a linen garment. Although the Torah forbids mixing wool and linen in a garment (*shatnez*), in certain cases and according to certain opinions the positive mitzvah to put *tzitzit* on a four-corner garment would override the *shatnez* prohibition, permitting the linen garment to have wool *tzitzit*.

The Ramban in his commentary on the Chumash explains the reason for this principle. An act done to fulfill a mitzvah (*aseh*) shows a person’s love for Hashem. Refraining from an act due to a mitzvah to refrain shows a person’s fear of Hashem. Showing love for Hashem is a loftier way for a person to be close to Hashem than by refraining from certain acts due to fear of Him. Therefore, a positive mitzvah is “stronger” than a “negative mitzvah” – and will push it off and override it.

- *Beitzah 8b*

The Affectionate Informant

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, “A person who gives a gift of food to a child should inform his parents and let them know the identity of the giver.”

Rashi explains the reason for this. By informing the child’s parents of the identity of the giver of the gift of food to the child, the parents will be aware that he has an affection for them. This will lead to increased friendship and closeness among the Jewish People. (However, this does not mean that a child should accept candy from a stranger!)

- *Beitzah 16a*

Be Bold Like a Leopard

Rabbi Meir said, “Why was the Torah given to the Jewish People? Because they are the boldest of all of the nations.”

The Maharsha explains that although our Sages teach us that Hashem offered the Torah first to all of the other, only the Jewish People was the nation chosen to be urged into acceptance, by placing a mountain – Mount Sinai – over their heads.

- *Beitzah 25b*

Mercy as a Family Trait

Shabtai bar Marinas said, “One who does not feel and show mercy towards people is not a descendent of Avraham Avinu.”

One need only mention the presence in Jewish communities of the *Gemach* system – free loan services of everything from money to medical equipment to clothespins – to see the desire of the Jewish People to be extremely merciful to others. Just as Avraham Avinu showed great hospitality in difficult circumstances to the visitors who came to him in the desert, so too should a Jew treat others at all times. My mother, of blessed memory, was born to a family in a Czechoslovakian village shortly before World War II. Her parents’ home was known as the place to go for both travelers and locals who needed anything: food, lodging, and much more. And I merited seeing her – and her two sisters who miraculously survived the horrors of Auschwitz – open their homes to others in need of food, lodging, kindness. No one ever walked out of our home hungry, without shelter and without a parcel of food to take with them (a home-made *lukshen kugel* at the very least!). And, whenever she heard that a tragedy had happened somewhere in the world, I could see that she could “feel their suffering.” It was part of her moral and passionate DNA. When the decision was made to go to war with Iraq, I will never forget the pain in her eyes, voice and being when she said, “Oh no! Why are they going to war? How much suffering and tragedy will it lead to!” It was an instinctual reaction of mercy, based purely on humanitarian (not political) concern for the wellbeing of others – often at the expense of her own needs. Countless books could be written with stories depicting the merciful traits of my mother, her sisters and, certainly, all of the Jewish People.

- *Beitzah 32b*



LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Nitzavim

This Torah portion opens with the next installment of Moshe's last testament to the Jewish People. In these verses, which follow the depiction of suffering that would be the lot of Jewish history if the Torah is not observed, Moshe refutes two notions, with the intent of keeping commitment to Torah alive for generations. First, he refutes the erroneous notion that Israel's covenantal commitment to fulfillment of Torah is limited to certain classes of the nation, to certain generations, or to a certain period of time. Next, he refutes the notion that the blessings and curses apply only to national defection. Instead, the individual must also see to it that Torah is upheld personally.

The address begins, *Atem nitzavim hayom, kulchem* – "You are standing today, all of you." The word for "standing" is not the term normally used – *amad* – but rather *nitzav*. This choice of language denotes not simply standing, but standing *firmly*, standing *powerfully* with energetic perseverance.

Our Sages cogently explain the choice of this expression here, instead of the usual word for standing, which is used in a subsequent verse. In the face of all the dreadful suffering described here, you remain *nitzavim*, standing firm and upright. All the suffering will pass over your heads, and you will outlast them all. While Hashem says, "I will use My arrows up against [the Jewish People]," the Sages teach, "My arrows will be finished, but they [the Jewish People] will not be destroyed." This is because the suffering itself ensures everlasting endurance, for it will lead to the betterment of the Jewish nation:

You will stand firm; You will live on and endure forever. Even after Moshe departs, and subsequent leaders will come and go, through trials and suffering, the Jewish People will stand with eternal perseverance.

- Sources: Commentary, *Devarim* 29:9-10

Vayelech

The Great Assembly

At the end of seven years – at the conclusion of the Shemittah year, on the "mo'ed" – which is understood as the holiday of Succot – there was a public reading of the Book of Devarim at the Sanctuary. This commandment was not intended as a means of making the Law known to the people. The duty of study exists every day of the year, in all years. The septennial nature of this event indicates that it seeks to attain a special purpose.

The timing of this gathering is significant. It was the time of the "mo'ed" (lit. *appointed meeting time*), the time when Jewish souls are invited to meet and connect with Hashem. This time is at the conclusion of the Sabbatical year, when the agricultural and commercial cycle is resumed after a year of release. It is on the festival of Succot, in which we remember the wilderness period, where there was neither agriculture nor commerce, but only Hashem's grace that kept the people alive and they were protected with His cloud.

The entire nation was to appear before Hashem – men, women, and children. As the new cycle of agriculture and commerce began, the supreme representative of the people would read the Torah to the assembly, proclaiming that the Torah is the only condition for the continued vitality and protection of the nation.

This mitzvah is unusual in that it obligates women, who are ordinarily exempt from time-bound obligations, and also obligates the bringing of children. The purpose of this assembly and reading is so that all present will "hear" and "learn" and "fear Hashem." They will hear of the Divine origins of the Torah (in the passages read). This consciousness shall have the effect of spurring constant growth and study in Torah. Both the momentous event and the learning will bring the people to the fear of Hashem.

The children, who have not yet attained understanding to be brought to study and observance

of Torah, “shall hear and learn to fear Hashem.” When they listen to the reading together with their parents and grandparents at the great assembly, the occasion will leave an imprint on their souls. Seeing the multitudes listening with reverence will move them, too, to the fear of Hashem.

In the case of even younger children, who will not remember the event, the Sages explain the purpose is to give reward to those who bring them. When the parents assemble before Hashem and gather around the Torah with their babes, they express the yearning for the Torah to later win over these children so that Torah should never be forgotten in Israel.

- Sources: Commentary, Devarim 31:10-11

Yom Kippur

A Lot to be Desired

The focal point of the great month of Tishrei is undoubtedly Yom Kippur, the day on which our return, bestirred by Rosh Hashana, ripens into atonement and purity, clearing away the sins of our past and creating a pure vessel to hold our future. On this day, the new Tablets were brought down to the people as a pledge of the renewal of Hashem’s covenant with His people. It was appointed for all time as a day in which His mercy is restored, and the Covenant renewed. The high point of the day is the Sanctuary service, which gave symbolic expression to this renewed Covenant, resulting from renewed independent life, and a rejection of sacrifice and devotion. It appears to be the path to life, but in fact it is the way to a miserable death. He who has escaped the sacrifices demanded by the Sanctuary stands tall upon the dizzying height and looks down triumphantly upon the place where his undiscerning companions appear to be bleeding to death. But he does not see the abrupt precipice that will open behind him and doom him to death.

No one’s path is predetermined. The goats were of the same appearance and value, and stood at the same spot, in the same direction. No one’s fate is determined by his standing, material circumstances, upbringing, or position in life. Each and every person

dedication. Chief among these symbolic acts was the service of the two he-goats. After the Kohen Hagadol has leaned his hands upon the head of his bull of atonement and confessed upon it his own sins, he steps back to the portal of the court of the people, and there awaiting him at the entrance to the Sanctuary are two he-goats. The heads of both of them are turned to the Holy of Holies. The animals are of identical appearance, size, and value, and were acquired for the Sanctuary at the same time. While their circumstances could not be more identical, their fates could not be more different. Two lots (akin to what is known nowadays as “lottery tickets”) of identical size and material are placed in the urn. One of these is “for Hashem” and the other is “for Azazel.”

The animal marked for Hashem will become an offering. Its blood immediately represents atonement and consecration. The animal marked for Azazel does not meet its death for atonement. It stands untouched, while its companion is offered. It is led away from the Sanctuary into the open, to a high rock. It stands free and erect... until it suddenly topples backward down a precipice, to its demise.

These are the symbols of the two paths between which we are to choose. The gift of free will allows us to mark ourselves either as for Hashem or for Azazel. The path to Hashem begins with self-sacrifice and abdication of ego. But what appears to be a loss of self is in fact an entry into a higher and more genuine form of existence. The path to Azazel, on the other hand, begins with apparent preservation of

is endowed with the free will to draw his lot as for Hashem or for Azazel. Indeed, the lot *could not* designate an animal for Azazel if it was not *also fit* to be an offering to Hashem. A man’s sinful deeds are deemed sinful (Azazel) only because he had the capacity to choose good. By the same token, virtue would not be virtue if evil had no attraction. Actions are significant only because we can *choose*.

This is one of the great lessons of Yom Kippur, which the Service imparted. On Yom Kippur we are placed between these two goats. Fortunate is he who marks himself “for Hashem.”

- Sources: Collected Writings, II, Tishrei V, pp. 105-112.

PARSHA OVERVIEWS

Nitzavim

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers all the people, young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women, in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because despite having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality.

Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel that will result from failure to heed Hashem's mitzvahs. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all – that the Jewish People have forsaken the One Who protects them, in favor of powerless idols. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. And, however assimilated they will have become among the nations, Hashem will eventually bring them back to the Land of Israel. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility, but rather that its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. This Torah portion concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death, with Moshe exhorting the people to choose life.

Vayelech

On this, the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent throughout the camp, bidding farewell to his beloved people, encouraging them to keep the faith. Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, Hashem is with them and will vanquish their enemies. Then he summons Yehoshua, and, in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as the leader of the Jewish People. In this manner, he strengthens Yehoshua's status as the new leader. Moshe teaches them the mitzvah of *Hakhel*: That every seven years on the first day of the intermediate days of Succot, the entire nation, including small children, will gather together at the Temple to hear the king read from the Book of *Devarim*. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to Hashem, the covenant, and reward and punishment.

Hashem tells Moshe that Moshe's end is near, and that he should therefore summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the Mishkan, where Hashem will teach Yehoshua. Hashem then tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful to Him, and begin to worship other gods. Hashem will then completely hide His face, so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, and that they will be hunted by all. Hashem instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song – *Ha'azinu* – which will serve as a witness against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to the Jewish People.

Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah and instructs the *Levi'im* to place it to the side of the *Aron* (Holy Ark), so that no one will ever write a new Torah scroll that is different from the original – for there will always be a reference copy.

Ha'azinu

Most of the portion of Ha'azinu is a song, written in the Torah in two parallel columns. Moshe summons heaven and earth to stand as eternal witness to what will happen if the Jewish People sin. He reminds the people to examine world history and note how the Jewish People are rescued from obliteration in each generation – that Hashem "pulls the strings" of world events so that the *Bnei Yisrael* can fulfill their destiny as Hashem's messengers. Hashem's kindness is such that Israel should be eternally grateful, not just for sustaining them in the wilderness, but for bringing them to a land of amazing abundance, and for defeating their enemies. But, this physical bounty leads the people to become self-satisfied and over-indulged. Physical pleasures corrupt their morals. They worship empty idols and indulge in depravity. Hashem will then let nations with no moral worth subjugate Israel and scatter them across the world. However, the purpose of these nations is to act as a rod to chastise the Jewish People. When these nations think that it is through their own power that they have dominated Israel, Hashem will remind them that they are no more than a tool to do His will. The purpose of the Jewish People is to make mankind aware of the Creator. Neither exile nor suffering can sever the bond between Hashem and His people, and in the final redemption this closeness will be restored. Hashem will then turn His anger against the enemies of Israel. Hashem then gives His last commandment to Moshe: That he ascend Mount Nevo and be gathered there to his People.

Bereishet

In the beginning, Hashem creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, Hashem rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbat, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava – the human pair – are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil," and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing "sin" into themselves, Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain in childbirth. Now begins the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the subject of the history of the world.

Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to Hashem. Hevel gives the finest of his flock, and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel, and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain until the birth of Noach. After the death of Sheit, mankind descends into evil, and Hashem decides that He will blot out man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one person, Noach, finds favor with Hashem.

Noach

It is now ten generations since the creation of the first man. Adam's descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and Hashem resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth's inhabitants except for the righteous Noach, his family and sufficient animals to re-populate the world. Hashem instructs Noach to build an ark in which to escape the flood. After forty days and nights, the flood covers the entire earth, including the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days the water begins to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, this ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends forth a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. A week later, Noach again sends the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive leaf in its beak. After seven more days, Noach once again sends forth the dove, which this time does not return. Hashem tells Noach and his family to leave the ark. Noach brings offerings to Hashem from the animals which were carried in the ark for this purpose. Hashem vows never again to flood the entire world and gives the rainbow as a sign of this covenant.

Noach and his descendants are now permitted to eat meat, unlike Adam. Hashem commands the Seven Universal Laws: The prohibitions against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder and eating the meat of a living animal, and the obligation to set up a legal system. The world's climate is established as we know it today.

Noach plants a vineyard and becomes intoxicated from its produce. Ham, one of Noach's sons, delights in seeing his father drunk and uncovered. Shem and Yefet, however, manage to cover their father without looking at his nakedness, by walking backwards. For this incident, Canaan is cursed to be a slave. The Torah lists the offspring of Noach's three sons from whom the seventy nations of the world are descended.

The Torah records the incident of the Tower of Babel, which results in Hashem fragmenting communication into many languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Torah portion concludes with the genealogy from Noach to Avram.

The Ohr Somayach family wishes our students, alumni, friends and all of Klal Yisrael a meaningful and fruitful New Year holiday season.

May you and your families be written and sealed in the Book of Life, enjoy a festive Succot, and be blessed from Above with much good health, happiness and success in the coming year — and for many more years to come.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA: (PART 2)

“The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
– they must be felt with the heart.”

(Helen Keller)

The first blessing ends: “May You shine a new light on Zion and may we all speedily merit its light. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who fashions the luminaries.”

Which new light is being spoken about? In the Book of Isaiah (30:26), Isaiah prophesizes that in the Messianic Era the light of the moon will be as strong as that of the present sun, and that the sun will be seven times more powerful than it is now. The verse also says that the sun and the moon will be as significant as they were during the seven days of Creation. The Malbim explains that the symbolism of light being analogous to good and clarity (as we have previously explored) is applicable here as well. The final redemption is described as being the “great light,” and, as the final redemption begins, the light will become increasingly stronger and more powerful until it reaches its greatest intensity with the culmination of the redemption. This explains why the verse mentions the light of the seven days of the Creation. The light that existed then was the purest most spiritual light to have ever been created. Our Sages teach that when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Hashem took the sublime light of the Creation and stored it away for the future. It is for *that* light we are waiting. That is the “new light” we refer to in our blessing – a light that will illuminate our lives and reveal to us the most transcendent and powerful connection to Hashem. And this is the message the prophet Zechariah conveys (14:7) when he says, “It will be a unique day... it will happen toward evening time that there will be light.” The uncertainty and the indecision of the “night” – of our prolonged and arduous exile – will be banished forever by the exquisite light and clarity of the Messianic Era.

But even before that time, our blessing is telling us to recognize and to cherish the life and the warmth that the sun affords us. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter was the founder of the Mussar movement, a methodology of learning Torah that places great emphasis on becoming deeply ethical and moral. Rabbi Salanter was one of the

most prominent leaders of Orthodox Jewry in the nineteenth century, and his influence is still keenly felt throughout the Jewish world today. He lived with a great appreciation of Hashem’s Creation. Therefore, when he felt the warmth of the sun on his face, he would momentarily stop what he was doing and contemplate Hashem’s beneficence.

Rabbi Salanter’s approach sounds deceptively simple. “All” we need to do is to acknowledge Hashem, and we too will be warmed and uplifted by His presence. But despite the fact that Hashem’s abundant blessings are continuously flowing down from the Spiritual Realms into our lives, we may seem to experience moments when it is agonizingly difficult to connect to Him. Why is that?

Just as the sun radiates throughout the world, and yet there are areas of darkness where the sunlight does not reach, so too Hashem’s blessings cannot reach places where there are barriers that do not allow them to enter. Barriers that we have erected in our hearts by thoughts and actions that are contrary to what Hashem lovingly demands from us. We may sometimes be left with the feeling that our “personal” sun seems to have set early in our private lives. Within the despair, all appears dark. But, if we would only stop to assess the situation clearly, we would recognize that we can make the sun shine once again by reconnecting to Hashem. And then we will be able to bask in Hashem’s warmth anew.

Therefore, just prior to accepting upon ourselves Hashem’s Kingship by reciting the Shema, we bless the One Who “fashions the luminaries” – to remind us that the only entity that is blocking the Divine warmth from embracing me is me.

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