

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A True Shepherd

“Yosef at the age of seventeen was a shepherd with his brothers by the flock...” (37:2)

“Because Hashem loves only those who love the Jewish People. And the greater the love a person has for the Jewish People, the greater is Hashem’s love for that person. These are the true shepherds of Israel. Hashem desires them greatly because they sacrifice themselves for their flocks and seek out their good. They exert themselves on behalf of the Jewish People, seeking their welfare in every way possible. They stand in the breach to defend them (the Jewish People) by praying for the nullification of harsh decrees against them and open the gates of blessing for them. It’s like a father who loves no one more than someone whom he sees truly loves his son. This is something that experience testifies to.” (*Mesillat Yesharim – The Path of the Just, by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto*)

For forty years and more, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was the address for the most complex and difficult halachic questions. He lived on the Lower East Side of New York City.

One day the sound of a car crash pierced the tranquility of his study. A Torah student flew through the door of his apartment with terrible news. Right outside Rabbi Feinstein’s apartment, a car had run down and killed a young Jewish boy.

“That’s not possible,” said Reb Moshe.

“But I saw him lying there.” said the student.

“It’s not possible that the boy is Jewish,” said Reb Moshe. “Go back and check, please.”

The student returned to the scene of the accident. Ambulances and police were now crowding the street. Clearly beside the motionless boy there was a yarmulke. The yeshiva student returned to Reb Moshe. “It’s true.” “He’s Jewish.” “It’s not possible,” said, Reb Moshe. “Go and check again.”

The student returned once again to the street. A crowd of people had now gathered around. Out of the crowd, a young Jewish boy emerged and asked one of the police officers for his yarmulke. “This belongs to you?” quizzed the policeman. “Yes. This boy was shouting anti-Semitic slogans at me and he chased me across the street. My kippa flew off my head as I was running. The yellow cab that ran him down just missed me.”

The yeshiva student was stunned. He returned to Reb Moshe and told him the story. “But Rebbe, how were you so sure that the dead boy wasn’t Jewish? The age of prophecy ended more than two thousand years ago.”

Reb Moshe looked at him. “For more than forty years I have sat at this desk. My entire life has been involved with the welfare of the Jewish People. It is not possible that a Jewish boy would die in such a way right under my window.”

Questions

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

Answers

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

Q & A - Chanukah

Questions

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

Answers

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

SPECIAL CHANUKAH FEATURE

Chanukah: Celebrating the Oral Torah

by Rav Nota Schiller, Rosh HaYeshiva

The Greeks, the Midrash relates, darkened the eyes of the Jews with their decrees, saying to the Jews, "Write upon the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel." What did the Greeks mean by this quite cryptic decree? How does this decree epitomize their dark designs against the Jewish People?

Approximately 150 years before the Maccabees, a Hellenistic king in Alexandria ordered the translation of the Written Torah into Greek. In a sense, his need to become apprised of the Jewish world view and endow his massive Alexandrian library with Torah wisdom was a compliment to the Jewish People.

Miraculous events attended the translation. Each of the scholars summoned to Alexandria emerged from his private cubicle with an identical Greek translation.

Nevertheless, the translation of the seventy, the Septuagint, was a tragic moment for the Jewish People, a tragedy our Sages describe as "three days of darkness" that descended upon the world. What was the nature of this tragedy?

The Jewish People either exist as a separate entity or cease to exist. Anything mitigating or threatening our monopoly on Torah depreciates our ability to protect our uniqueness as a people. As soon as we share that monopoly with others, the Torah becomes merely another source of wisdom, another culture, another subject in the university catalogue. Ultimately, we are to impact the world community, but only through maintaining the integrity of uniqueness will that impact come about.

One thing diminished the tragedy: Only the Written Torah was shared. The Oral Torah remained the exclusive property of the Jewish People. Its transmission still necessitated the teacher-student relationship.

When I was in yeshiva in Baltimore, many of the boys took courses at Johns Hopkins University. The Semitic Studies Department was then headed by William F. Albright. Clutching a photocopied page of the Talmud, the frustrated Albright once approached one of the yeshiva students and said, "I've translated the text and correctly identified the etymology of every single word on this page, but I can't for the *life* of me understand what it is saying!"

Albright's problem was not accidental. It was anticipated and orchestrated by our Sages. They knew that if an Albright could understand the Oral Torah, then Torah as a product of *transmission* from scholar to disciple, with the particular approach and perspective of the Jewish People, would end. We would not need a Chaim Berlin, a Torah Vodaas, or a Ponevezh. If we are no longer the sole guardians of the Torah, our uniqueness and purpose as a people are eclipsed. To mitigate the quality and specialness of our purpose is counter-productive for the nations of the world.

When, 150 years after the Septuagint, the Greeks said "Write upon the horn of an ox that you have no portion in the G-d of Israel," they were in effect saying "Give us the Oral Torah! Just as you translated the Bible, now write down Torah *she'beal peh* and grant us access to it as well. As long as that part of the Torah remains oral, no one else can approach it!"

The roots of conflict between the Greek world view and the Torah world view can be seen in the Book of Genesis. Emerging after the great flood from the ark, Noah became drunk and compromised himself. Shem and Yefes, seeing their father's shame, took a garment, walked backwards to avoid gazing on Noah, and covered him. The Sages explain that it was Shem who initiated this action, but, walking backwards with a blanket draped over his shoulder was a tricky business, and when Yefes saw that Shem could not take action alone, he helped. At select times in

history, Shem and Yefes cooperate. For most of history, the relationship is defined by conflict. The ideal situation is expressed in the blessing awarded to Yefes: "Yishkon B'ohaley Shem" – "He shall dwell in the tents of Shem." The *aesthetic* should be in the service of the *true*.

Yefes is the progenitor of the Greeks. Yefes perceived his father's indignation on the aesthetic level, as something distasteful and aesthetically base. The action he took to correct the situation was merely cosmetic. He did not see the violation as essentially evil, his action was optional. If necessary, he was available to participate, but he was not the one to initiate the action, because it just was not that important to him.

Shem, on the other hand, is the progenitor of Abraham. Shem experienced his father's indignity as evil, and a suffering to be assuaged through an elementally good act, an act which – in and of itself – positively affects his own soul. Shem wanted the mitzvah, the very execution of which has a nourishing consequence. Hence, he initiated the action.

From ancient Greece through the age of chivalry, and even in the cowboy/hero movies of our generation, you find the following scene: Two protagonists meet in the middle of the street or town square at high noon to duel. As long as one gives the other a fair chance to draw, he may shoot him down. Whether the opponent is evil is irrelevant – a fair chance is all that counts.

The Jew, however, rejects the "fair chance" concept. Rather, if you face an evil opponent, a Stalin or a Hitler, you shoot him in the back. However, when facing a man who is not essentially evil, you have no right to kill him just because you give him a fair chance.

If man is created in the image of G-d, then life has essential value. If man was not created in the image of G-d, however, man must reduce the gnawing emptiness, the absence of right and wrong by instead turning life into a "game," a showdown where "fair chance" resembles truth. Some people play checkers, others chess. Some people play

poker, others bridge. The more involved the game, the deeper man can engage his intellect – but only to focus less upon life's meaninglessness, because life in the godless Greek mind is essentially a game. We simulate a kind of dignity by honoring the *rules* of the game.

The entire world is reduced to aesthetics and a game in this Greek world view. But the Jew says "No." When G-d encountered man through the medium of prophecy, man was charged with the mission to fulfill a universal role, the performance of which is judged at the individual, communal, and national levels.

Historically, at Chanukah, the Jews warred with the Greeks, yet there is no *megillah*, no written work chronicling that battle. Why not? Because it is a story that must be transmitted orally, for at the center of this battle was the Greeks' attempt to destroy the Oral Torah. Instead of being conquered, we persevered and created a new holiday that could only have been orchestrated through the mechanism of the Oral Torah.

The blessing we say when lighting the Chanukah lights is "...Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to light the flame of Chanukah." Where are we commanded? Which verse in the Torah mandates such? The oblique origin of this mitzvah is its very strength: Because the Torah endows our Sages with the initiative in each generation to legislate for the Jewish People, a mitzvah such as Chanukah symbolizes the power of the Oral Torah. Exactly that which the Greeks sought to extinguish is symbolized in the light that illuminates the darkness of exile.

Each holiday that Jews approach is like a way-station along the turnpike of history. The largest distance on the highway had been between Succot and Pesach, between which there was no holiday to stop off and refuel. In the darkness of exile, G-d in His wisdom provided us with two more fueling stations, Chanukah and Purim. When we celebrate Chanukah, we celebrate a holiday that reminds us that it is the wisdom and genius of the Jew, expressed and refined through the Oral Torah, that makes us Jewish.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Seeking Salvation

During the eight days of Chanukah we recite the *Al HaNissim* prayer, which thanks G-d for His miraculous role in bringing salvation to our forefathers in the times of old. In that prayer we refer to the “salvation” as both a *purkan* and a *teshua*. Another common term that refers to “being saved” is *hatzalah*. In this week’s essay we seek out the etymologies of these three terms for “salvation” in an attempt to better understand in what ways they differ from one another.

The word *purkan* is the standard Targumic Aramaic form of the Hebrew word *pidyon*. The word *pidyon*, in turn, refers to the aspect of the salvation that is best translated as “redemption,” by which G-d “bought us back” from the Greeks after having “sold us” to them by allowing them to rule over us. When He saved the Jews in the story of Chanukah, it was as if He redeemed them after they had been sold to another. Although the Rabbis tend to conform to Biblical Hebrew in the phraseology of the prayers that they formulate, here they used the word *purkan* because the root PEH-REISH-KUF already appears in the Bible in the context of “salvation” (see Lam. 5:8 and Ps. 136:24). In Biblical Hebrew that root also means to “slip something off” (*porek*) – which is an apt description of how the Jews in the story of Chanukah shook off the yoke of Syrian-Greek domination and asserted their own political independence.

Given the association of *purkan* with financial transactions, Rabbi Yitzchak Eliyahu Landau of Dubno (1801-1876) explains that in the context of *Al HaNissim* it refers to G-d’s deliverance of the Jews from the hands of financial ruin.

In contrast to this, the term *teshuot*, or *yeshuot*, refers to a different aspect of the “salvation.” These words are related to the idea of “crying out,” so they refer specifically to the aspect of the redemption that was a Divine reaction to our

prayers and efforts. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 14:13) suggests that the verb *shaavah* (“crying out”) refers to the act of yearning for a *teshua*. Meaning, unlike other words for crying out (see “For Crying Out Loud,” February 2016) that might simply denote verbalizations of one’s suffering, *shaavah* is an unmistakable cry for “salvation” – a sort of prayer, as opposed to a complaint.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Brelsau (1740-1814) sees SHIN-AYIN as the root of both *yeshua/teshua* and *shaavah*, explaining that at its core this root denotes “enjoyment” or “pleasure.” Other words derived from this root include *sha’ashua* (“playful” or “delightful”), *mishan* (“leaning/relying,” in reference to the state of enjoyment and satisfaction that one achieves when one is “supported” by another), *sha’ah* (“hour,” i.e. a unit of time that a person dedicates to a specific task he wants to do). Alternatively, we may posit that the core meaning of SHIN-AYIN is “smoothness” (see “Smooth Sliding & Glad Gliding,” November 2019), and in this context recalls the uninterrupted, smooth transition from prayer to salvation.

The Talmud (*Bava Kama* 80a) mentions a ceremony called *Yeshua HaBen*, but offers no clarification as to what this term refers. *Sefer HaAruch* and Rashi explain that this expression refers to the festive meal of a *Pidyon HaBen* (“redeeming of the [firstborn] son”), adducing this understanding from the fact that cognates of the Biblical Hebrew word *yeshua* and cognates of the Biblical Hebrew *pidyon* are both translated into Aramaic by the various Targumim as words related to *purkan* (see also *Tosafot* to *Bava Kama* 80a).

Rabbi Hirsch actually proposes an etymological difference between the words *yeshua* and *teshua*. He explains that *yeshua* derives from the root YOD-SHIN-AYIN, which he sees as related to YOD-SHIN-HEY (through the interchangeability of AYIN and HEY) and ultimately to the biliteral root

YOD-SHIN, which means “has,” “is” or “exists.” Accordingly, he explains that *yeshua* refers to the first-order existence that G-d grants a person. When someone is faced with an existential danger that threatens the very possibility of his continued existence and G-d saves him from this situation, that sort of salvation is referred to as a *yeshua*.

On the other hand, the term *teshua* derives from the root SHIN-VAV-AYIN (“crying out”), which Rabbi Hirsch sees as related to the roots SHIN-BET-AYIN (“seven”) and SHIN-PEH-AYIN (“influence,” “influx”), via the interchangeability of VAV, BET, and PEH. Rabbi Hirsch explains that this set of etymological roots do not refer directly to one’s core existence, but to matters considered to be somewhat periphery to that, like one’s material property. Based on this, he explains that *teshua* does not refer to being saved from something that threatened one’s very existence, but to something that threatened one’s economic freedom. Consequently, Rabbi Hirsch argues that the term *teshua* often refers to “salvation” that comes about through military victory, meaning a win that defeats those outside conquerors who threaten one’s freedoms.

The *Peirush HaRokeach* explains that *yeshua/teshua* implies total and utter salvation from a state of oppression and subjugation, while the term *hatzalah* refers to only a partial or temporary respite from the oppressive situation, but not a total release. The Malbim (to Jer. 15:20) adds that the term *hatzalah* focuses on the element of salvation that releases a person from mortal danger. Perhaps it is because of this implication that the term Hatzolah is used for the paramedic volunteer organizations that have sprung up in places with sizeable Jewish populations.

Rabbi Yechiel Michel Heilpern (1660-1742) and Rabbi Chanoch Zundel of Bialystok (d. 1867) explain that while *hatzalah* can refer to being “saved” from any sort of threat, the terms *yeshua/teshua* refer to salvation from a particularly grave threat, such as murder or crimes of a sexual

nature (see Deut. 22:27). This is why the Midrash (*Shemot Rabbah* 1:32) assumes that when the Bible reports that Moses “saved” (*vayoshian*) Yitro’s daughters from the local shepherds (Ex. 2:17), the latter must have had some machinations to commit sexual crimes against those damsels. The Malbim further argues that *yeshua* refers to mere “salvation” from a dire situation, while *hatzalah* implies being “saved” from the situation, plus being “protected” from future troubles.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *hatzalah* to the biliteral root TZADI-LAMMED, which he defines as “separation for a constructive purpose.” In the sense of “saving” somebody, *hatzalah* refers to extricating, or separating, a person from a perilous situation. Other words derived from this biliteral root include *tzel* (“shadow,” which appears as though it separates from one’s person), *tzli* (“roasting,” which uses heat to extricating the moisture from within an uncooked food), *atzal* (“bestowal,” e.g., when one blesses another).

Similarly, Rabbi Hirsch (to Ex. 3:22, Deut. 32:2) understands the root of *hatzalah* to be NUN-TZADI-LAMMED, which he connects to the roots NUN-SHIN-LAMMED (“remove”) and NUN-ZAYIN-LAMMED (“flow away”) by explaining that *hatzalah* refers to saving somebody by “removing” him or her from a hazardous situation and “separating” them from what which endangers them. Interestingly, while Radak connects the “saving” and “removing” meanings of NUN-TZADI-LAMMED, Ibn Janach fails to see a thematic connection between these two concepts and considers them two different meanings denoted by the same root.

In short: *Purkan* focuses on the redeeming aspect of “salvation,” as though G-d bought us back after having proverbially sold us; *teshua* focuses on the idea that “salvation” is a response to our prayers for help; and *hatzalah* refers to “salvation” as the means of separating us from a dangerous position.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 9)

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

The third blessing begins: “G-d is true and certain, established and enduring, fair and faithful, beloved and cherished, delightful and pleasant, awesome and powerful, correct and accepted, good and beautiful is this affirmation to us forever and ever”

Our blessing opens with sixteen different descriptions to define “this affirmation”. Yet, strangely enough, the verse does not seem to tell us what “this affirmation” actually refers to. The commentaries explain that it is a reference to the verses that we have just recited in the *Shema*. There are sixteen verses from the beginning of the *Shema* until the end of the second paragraph. Thus, the final blessing of the *Shema* begins with sixteen different declarations, each one verifying the validity of its corresponding verse.

I once heard a deceptively simple idea, but an idea that is also exceptionally thought-provoking, from Rabbi Eliyahu Ben Shlomo, one of the leader of the Ohel Yaakov Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. He pointed out that with so many different descriptions, there seems to be one category that is missing from the sixteen. The word “easy” – “*kal*” in Hebrew – is notably absent. Rabbi Ben Shlomo explained that the reason is obvious. There is nothing “easy” about our relationship with G-d. In fact, there *should* be nothing easy about it. Things that come easily have a habit of disappearing just as easily. Our connection to G-d requires continual effort and input. Even when we feel a true closeness to G-d, there is always room for fine-tuning that connection, to enhance it and to make it even more significant.

In the gym there is a phrase that is regarded as being *the* international motif of the exercise world: “No Pain, No Gain.” As with many slogans that conquer the world – or, at the very least, the international marketplace – it actually has its roots in the timeless lessons of our Sages. In Ethics of the Fathers (in the last Mishna of chapter five), Ben Hei Hei teaches, “*L’phum tzara agra*,” which is Aramaic for “The reward is in proportion to the exertion.” Or, in our modern lexicon – no pain, no gain! Rashi explains that the amount of spiritual reward we receive for our actions is in direct proportion to the amount of effort and difficulty that went into performing our actions. Rabbi Shmuel ben Isaac de Uceda, in his classic commentary, Midrash Shmuel, adds the most beautiful clarification to Rashi’s original explanation. G-d’s reward for learning His Torah is not measured simply by how much a person remembers and understands. Nor is it determined solely according to how many innovative concepts a person originates. Rather, G-d bestows reward according to how much toil and determination went into learning it. And, he adds, one who truly strives to learn Torah will receive an abundance of reward even if they, seemingly, did not manage to accomplish very much.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, the revered head of the illustrious Mir Yeshivah in Jerusalem, would point out that Jewish Law instructs us to stand up for Torah scholars as a sign of respect for the vast amount of Torah knowledge they have acquired. But there is no similar directive to stand up for a pregnant woman, despite our Sages’ teaching that a fetus is taught the entirety of the Torah while in the womb (Niddah 30). The reason is that the fetus *does not toil* to understand the Torah; it simply

absorbs the Torah with no effort whatsoever. When we stand up in respect for a Torah scholar, we are doing so not just because of their prodigious knowledge, but also because of the toil and effort that went into their acquiring it.

There is a delightful story told about Rabbi Yehosua Eizik Shapiro, one of the most brilliant Rabbis of the nineteenth century, who is universally known as Rabbi Eizel Charif (*charif* means sharp) because of his acutely sharp intellect and his razor-sharp answers for all facets of Torah. In his quest to find an appropriate husband for his beloved daughter, he travelled to one of the most prestigious yeshivahs at the time and posed an extremely detailed and complex question. He announced that whoever could come up with the correct answer would be a worthy candidate to marry his daughter. The yeshiva students all toiled to find the answer. But, as each one offered a possible solution, Rabbi Eizel Charif explained why that answer was inadequate. After a few days, Rabbi Eizel Charif realized that no one would succeed in arriving at the answer. So, he boarded his carriage to leave the town to go looking elsewhere for a potential son-in-law. As his carriage began to move off, one student raced after it while shouting that the wagon driver should stop. When he finally caught up, he said to Rabbi Eizel Charif, "Rebbe, please tell me the answer. Unfortunately, I did not merit being your son-in-law, but at least tell me the answer to the question, because not knowing it is driving me to distraction!" Rabbi Eizel Charif looked at the young man and with a

broad smile he told him, "Primarily, I was seeking someone *who desires to know the answer*. And you passed that test! The desire to know Torah is more important to me than your level of Torah knowledge itself. I want you to be my daughter's husband!"

This brings us to another "modern" idiom that has been universally embraced and is undoubtedly true. When William Ritter, a contemporary American author, wrote, "failure is not the *opposite* of success – it is *part* of success," he was unwittingly paraphrasing Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch's writings from more than one hundred and fifty years earlier. In his uniquely articulate fashion, Rabbi Hirsch writes, "It is not the quantitative measure of the moral and spiritual goals that a person has actually achieved that constitute the true worth of a life's course. It is the measure of earnest striving, of devoted endeavor, of sacrifices made and privation endured – all for the realization of good purposes – that determine the true worth of both a person and their life. Actual success can come only from the Hands of G-d Himself."

So, no, "easy" is not one of the sixteen definitions that the blessing after the *Shema* starts with. Because if it were easy, then it would not be an accurate reflection of the inner, spiritual yearning that each person has – to bring joy to the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe.

To be continued...

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

Chanukah Somayach!

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Ta'anit 2-8

Our Immortal

While sitting together at a table for a meal, Rav Nachman asked Rabbi Yitzchak to honor them with words of Torah. Rabbi Yitzchak said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "Yaakov Avinu did not die."

What is the context for this statement and is it meant to be understood in a literal sense, a figurative sense – or perhaps in these two apparently contradictory manners?

When Rav Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchak were having a meal together, and Rav Nachman requested a *dvar Torah*, Rabbi Yitzchak replied with a teaching he had learned from Rabbi Yochanan, that Yaakov Avinu did not die. But rather than Rav Nachman questioning the “amazing” possibility of Yaakov Avinu not having passed from this world, his question came from a different angle – the words of the Torah’s narrative. “Was it for naught that the eulogizer eulogized him, the embalmers embalming him!?” (See Ber. 50:26)

Rabbi Yitzchak then replied, seemingly sidestepping this question, saying, “What I am asserting can be derived from a verse in the Torah: ‘And fear not, My servant Yaakov, says Hashem, and do not be dismayed, O Yisrael, for behold I save you from afar and your seed from the land of their captivity, and Yaakov will again be at peace and at ease, with no one to frighten them.’ (Yirmiyahu 30:10) This verse equates Yaakov and his descendants, teaching that just as his descendants are alive, Yaakov too is alive.”

Rashi explains this teaching in a semi-literal manner: Yaakov Avinu lives forever, and the various acts performed after his non-death were done since he appeared as if he had died. Rashi also explains the phrase “Just as his descendants are alive, Yaakov too is alive” to mean the following: “In the future when Hashem gathers in the exiles from the lands in which they are captive, He will gather in those who are alive at the time and not those who have already passed from this world. Likewise, at that time Hashem will bring

Yaakov Avinu to witness this ingathering of the exiles – his descendants – so that they will be saved in his very presence, just as the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt at the time of the Exodus took place in the presence of all of surviving members of Klal Yisrael.”

Another explanation of the message in our *sugya* is suggested by a number of commentaries, and is a more “allegorical” approach, in a sense. Our Sages in Tractate Berachot teach that righteous people are called “alive” even after death, and wicked people are called “dead” even while they are alive. When Rabbi Yitzchak stated that Yaakov Avinu did not die, he was alluding to this concept since Yaakov Avinu was undoubtedly righteous. Therefore, even after his natural, physical death, he is considered alive. Rabbi Yitzchak mentioned Yaakov Avinu, although the same life-principle should certainly also apply to Avraham Avinu and Yitzchak Avinu (and many others) because not only was Yaakov Avinu righteous, but all of his children were righteous as well. In Jewish thought, children are considered and viewed as a continuation of their parents, and as long as the children are alive, their parents are also alive. (The corollary to this concept is that if one’s child is wicked, the parents are also considered not alive, in a sense, because “the wicked are called ‘dead’ even when they are alive.”) Rashi in Chumash (Ber. 18:19) similarly teaches that a parent who dies, leaving behind a righteous child, is considered alive.

According to these more allegorical commentaries, Rabbi Yitzchak derives an extremely important message from the verse comparing Yaakov Avinu to his children. Yaakov Avinu is considered alive because he lives on through his children, who are righteous. Likewise, all parents who – as a result of serious efforts to raise children who are sincere in following the ways of Hashem – merit children who are righteous, are always alive. (See Kli Yakar, Maharsha and Abarbanel)

▪ *Ta'anit 5b*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

The Power of Minority

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Not so for the minority. By virtue of its continuing struggle, it perpetually breathes new life into its cause. Survival of the minority depends on its ability to keep awake within it a vibrant spiritual reserve. Because the

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

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

“There is always still within it a tenth consecrated to G-d. Even though there will be destruction again and again, like the oak and the beech tree, whose trunk remains though they shed their leaves, still the trunk will remain holy seed.” (See *Yeshayahu* 6:13)

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

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF WATER

Water says: “At the sound of His placing bountiful waters in the heavens, then the clouds are raised from the ends of the earth.” (Yirmiyah 51:16)

Water sings of the ingenuity of Hashem's perpetual system of precipitation.

Water is absolutely essential for all living organisms. Drinkable water comes mostly from rainfall. If not for the kindness of the complex water cycle, water and the life it supports would soon disappear. Therefore, each water drop sings of Hashem's repetitive formation of rainclouds to provide for His creations.

Water speaks of "the sound of Hashem's placing bountiful waters in the heavens." This "sound" is the proclamation of Hashem's praise expressed by the formation of the clouds. On a deeper level of understanding, the Midrash relates that on the second day of Creation, when Hashem separated the waters, forcing half to remain on earth, the lower half cried out over its demotion. We may suggest that the lower waters find solace when they are elevated and formed into clouds.

The water cycle has a lesson for mankind: Hashem brings up water from the ends of the earth to the high heavens in order to provide for the needy. We should be willing to make the much smaller effort necessary to help out others.

- Sources: *Ber. Rabbah 5:2; Malbim to Yirmiyah 51:16 and Ber. 1:6*

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

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. info@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva,
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim
Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe
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