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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Power of Prayer

“Hashem will confirm you for Himself as a holy people...” (28:06)

This is a true story whose facts have been verified independently. Just two weeks ago, during the last week of *bein hazmanim*.

Eagle Pass on the Tex-Mex border, a woman farmer is gazing toward the sky, fighting back tears. There has been no rain for almost six months. Not a drop.

She owns some pecan orchards. If it doesn't rain now, the orchards will die. She will go bankrupt and she and her family will find themselves on the road.

Suddenly, a bus pulls up next to the parched orchard, and some fifty yeshiva students from the Tri-State area pile out of the bus. The farmer looks at them. Who are these strange-looking young men? She has never seen anyone with a baseball cap and longish sideburns before.

She goes over to the leader of the group and says to him, “You are Jewish, right?” “Yes,” he says. “I know the Jewish people have a special connection to G-d. Will you pray for me? We are desperate. Pecans have grown here in Texas for five hundred years. My family has farmed this land for generations. We have a deep connection to the land, but the last two years have been terrible. We have prayed and prayed for rain, but nothing has worked. Would you pray for us? Please? I know that G-d listens to the prayers of His Holy People.”

Moved by her plea and thinking it would be an interesting experience for the boys, the leader of the group gathered them into a circle to sing from the Book of Psalms (Tehillim), “I will lift my eyes...” — three times. The leader then made a short prayer in English, asking Hashem for rain to help the farmer, along with everyone else who needed rain. She thanked them for their prayers. The group got back into the bus and continued their trip.

That evening, the leader of the group received a text from the farmer. It said, “It rained for about an hour. This hasn’t happened in four or five months. I feel so loved by G-d. I want to cry. Thank you, and thank G-d! I’m so grateful for meeting you today!”

How great are our prayers! It’s too easy to think, ‘What can I do? What is the power of my actions? What’s the power of my prayers? What’s the power of my mitzvahs? Sure, in the world to come it’s powerful – but in this world?’”

It's just so very hard to feel that what we do makes a difference. And that our actions make all the difference! The reason why our trials are so hard in today's world is because there's so much concealment of Hashem's presence. That's why it can be challenging for someone to pray and it might be trying to make enough effort to connect to the Source.

These young yeshiva students were just regular American boys. But, in a sense, they tore up the world. They tore up the Heavens. They helped reverse a harsh Divine decree!

We all have this power. Even if our sincere thoughts are minimal, even when we just say the words, just “phoning it in,” as some call it. Nevertheless, each one of us, however small we may think we are; has enormous power! Believe it! Use it!

Hashem loves and cherishes our every action.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Batra 82-88

A Theft Worse Than Theft

Rabbi Levi said, “Stealing from a person is worse than stealing from Gevoha’ (from Hashem, meaning stealing property that was sanctified and dedicated for the use and needs of the Beit Hamikdash). Why? Because in the former case, chet (sin) precedes me’ilah (theft via benefit), whereas in the latter case, mei’lah precedes chet.”

The Rashbam cites the relevant verses in the Torah which relate to theft from a *person* and to theft from *hekdesh*, showing that the order of the words *chet* and *meil’ah* are switched in the two cases. He says that *chet* appears first in a “personal” case, indicating that the thief is called a *choteh* (sinner) as soon as he denies the act of unlawful taking of personal property. When it comes to *hekdesh*, however, the word *chet* is mentioned in the verse only after the word *mei’lah*, indicating that the person is not yet called a *choteh*, even after taking the *hekdesh* and denying having taken it, until he uses it and receives benefit from it.

A somewhat different explanation, based on an established Torah principle, can be applied to account for the difference in these two cases in the following manner. Taking the property of another person is considered as theft from that person as soon as the stolen object is removed by the thief from the domain of the victim. However, if one steals property that is *hekdesh*, it is considered as still being “in the domain of *hekdesh*.” Why? Because “it is in the treasury of Hashem wherever it may be.” Therefore, it is not viewed as an act of real theft when it is taken. Rather, it is truly considered “stolen” only after the thief actually uses it to receive benefit from it. (Maharsha)

▪ ***Bava Batra 88b***

Q & A

Questions

1. When did the obligation to bring *bikkurim* begin?
2. *Bikkurim* are from which crops?
3. How does one designate *bikkurim*?
4. Who shakes the basket containing the *bikkurim*?
5. What does "*v'anita v'amarta*" mean?
6. Which Arami "tried to destroy my father?"
7. When during the year may *bikkurim* be brought? Until when are the special verses recited?
8. Someone declaring that he separated *terumah* and *ma'aser* says: "And I didn't forget." What didn't he forget?
9. What were the Jewish People to do with the 12 stones on Mount Eval?
10. Six tribes stood on Mount Eval and six on Mount Gerizim. Who and what were in the middle?
11. Who "causes the blind to go astray"?
12. How does one "strike another secretly"?
13. Eleven curses were spoken on Mount Eval. What is the significance of this number?
14. Why are sheep called "*ashterot*"?
15. How is the manner of expressing the curses in Parshat Bechukotai more severe than in this week's parsha?

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

Answers

1. 26:1 - After the Land was conquered and divided.
2. 26:2 - The seven species for which *Eretz Yisrael* is praised.
3. 26:2 - When he sees the first fruit ripen on a tree, he binds a piece of straw around it to mark it as *bikkurim*.
4. 26:4 - The *kohen* places his hands under the hands of the one bringing it, and they wave the basket together.
5. 26:5 - Speak loudly.
6. 26:5 - Lavan.
7. 26:11 - *Bikkurim* are brought from Shavuot until Chanukah. The verses are recited only until Succot.
8. 26:13 - To bless G-d.
9. 27:2 - Build an altar.
10. 27:12 - *Kohanim*, *levi'im* and the Holy Ark.
11. 27:18 - Any person who intentionally gives bad advice.
12. 27:24 - By slandering him.
13. 27:24 - Each curse corresponds to one of the tribes, except for the tribe of Shimon. Since Moshe didn't intend to bless the tribe of Shimon before his death, he did not want to curse it either.
14. 28:4 - Because they "enrich" (*m'ashirot*) their owners.
15. 28:23 - In Bechukotai the Torah speaks in the plural, whereas in this week's *parsha* the curses are mentioned in the singular.

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when performed by someone who understands its significance” (Meiri, *Bava Kamma* 17a).

THE MITZVAHS OF A KING

Mitzvos #71, 498-503 (*Devarim* 17:14-15)

As explained in the previous article, monarchy has as many risks as benefits. It is only desirable for the Jewish people to have a king if he acts as a representative of Hashem and no more. The Torah commands a series of Mitzvos that give the king the power to lead the nation while remembering that he is no more than a representative of the true King of the Jewish people.

The king must be Jewish. This is because Jews are compassionate by nature (*Chinuch*), and people are especially compassionate toward their brethren. With this Mitzvah, the Torah ensures that the king will not act selfishly and cruelly toward the Jewish people. Secondly, if the king is an idolater, he will lead the Jewish people toward idolatry (*Rashbam*). It is further possible that this Mitzvah ensures that the king’s control over the people will be stable and efficient, for the Jewish people will only be willing to extend their loyalty to a fellow Jew whom they can view as their faithful representative.

We also find elsewhere that the Torah requires us to grant the king supreme power to enable him to control the nation. We are commanded not to curse a king (*Shemos* 22:27), and *Sefer Hachinuch* explains that speaking ill about the king lessens his respect and authority, and therefore his ability to lead.

The king may not have excessive horses. The Torah explains that this is a safeguard against returning to Egypt, where superior Arabian horses are bred. In addition, *Abarbanel* suggests that the Torah means to discourage the king from having too many horses because, in the olden times, military strength depended to a great extent on the number of horses. Since a Jewish king is meant to be no more than a representative of Hashem, and his military victories are linked to his loyalty to Hashem, the Torah forbids him from overinvesting in his armies lest he forget his dependency upon Hashem. A king who relies on his own strength might feel a need to turn to his Egyptian neighbors for support in times of war, so the verse proceeds to warn against going there.

The idea that returning to Egypt implies a lessening of dependency on Hashem is found elsewhere in the Torah as well. In *Parashas Eikev*, the Torah contrasts Eretz Yisrael and Egypt, pointing out that Eretz Yisrael is dependent on Hashem’s willingness to grant rain, while Egypt has a constant stream of water from the Nile (see *Devarim* 11:10-12). The inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael are thus compelled to obey Hashem lest they die of drought, and “His eyes are constantly upon Eretz Yisrael,” judging its merit and seeing to its needs —

while the inhabitants of Egypt receive little Divine attention. By forbidding us to return to Egypt, Hashem compels us to be dependent upon Him.

The king may not have excessive wives. A king would commonly marry multiple wives in order to increase his power, for two reasons: Firstly, he could marry the daughters of other kings and thereby forge solid, familial alliances. Secondly, his sons would be most loyal to him as officers. However, the Torah forbids a king from having excessive wives, which the Sages determined to be eighteen, lest they influence his heart.

A wife tends to influence her husband according to her wishes, and this means that the more wives a king has, the less he can be focused on the welfare of the people under his charge (Sefer HaChinuch). The risk of this occurring increases when many rival wives compete for a greater share of his attention. Another reason is that excessive pleasure dulls the king's mind, saps his strength, and lessens his ability to rule (*Abarbanel*).

The king may not hoard money. The Torah places this prohibition alongside the prohibition against taking excessive wives, which suggests that they share the same general reason: they influence a person's heart. Abundant wealth makes a person haughty, which makes a king forget his total reliance upon Hashem.

The king must have a miniature Sefer Torah that accompanies him at all times, as well as a normal-sized Sefer Torah in his treasury. In order to control the people according to Hashem's will, it is imperative that the king knows Hashem's will and is constantly focused upon it, and this requires constant Torah study. Even when he does not actually read the Torah, its presence is a visible reminder of the invisible God Who is watching the king's every move. The king has no authority above him, so he more than anyone needs to remember Hashem's authority (*Sefer HaChinuch*).

The passage of the king's Mitzvos ends with a blessing: so that he and his descendants reign for lengthy days (14:20). This is a hidden word of caution, that if he does not abide by the above laws, he will not merit a lengthy reign. *Chizkuni* sees in this verse a source for the customary proclamation by a coronation ceremony: "Long live the king!"

In summary, a king must be careful not to let his riches and power cause him to become haughty and forget the true source of power, by exercising measures of restraint and constantly remembering the Torah and its contents. The Sages indicate that that this applies to every Jew, only to a smaller degree (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 3:24). The more Hashem grants us, the more it is incumbent upon us to remind ourselves from Whom it all comes, and what He expects us to do with it.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

When the Jewish People dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the *kohen*. This is done in a ceremony that expresses recognition that it is G-d who guides the history of the Jewish People throughout all ages. This passage forms one of the central parts of the Pesach Haggadah that we read at the Seder.

On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year *shemitta* cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner. With this mitzvah Moshe concludes the commandments that Hashem has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in Hashem's ways because they are set aside as a treasured people to Him.

When the Jewish People cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah. Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster. Half the tribes are to stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the *levi'im* will stand in a valley between the two mountains. The *levi'im* will recite twelve commandments, and all the people will answer "amen" to the blessings and the curses. Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon the Jewish People, blessings that are both physical and spiritual. However, if the Jewish People do not keep the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 11) UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”
(Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

The person reciting Kiddush Levanah then turns to three different people and greets each one individually with the words “Shalom Aleichem – Peace upon you.” They, in turn, reply, “Aleichem HaShalom – Upon you, peace.”

“*Shalom Aleichem – Aleichem HaShalom*” is the traditional and timeless greeting offered when two Jews meet each other. Rabbi Moshe Rosenstein (1881-1940) was the venerated Mashgiach in the famed Lomzhe Yeshiva in Poland. In his youth he learned in the legendary *Beit HaTalmud* in Kelm, Lithuania. Rabbi Rosenstein described the very first time that he stepped through the doorway to *Beit HaTalmud*. Almost as soon as he entered a *bachur*

[student] approached him with his hand outstretched an enormous smile and an equally friendly “*Shalom Aleichem*”. He asked how he was, how his journey had been, when exactly he had arrived in Kelm and whether he had made all the necessary sleeping arrangements. He was so friendly that Rabbi Rosenstein assumed that he must be an old friend of his who, for some reason, he did not recognize. Not even a moment later another *bachur* approached him, smiling just as warmly, offered him a “*Shalom Aleichem*” and asked him if there was anything that he could do to help him settle in. Rabbi Rosenstein was convinced that he must have also been a friend of his when growing up him but, as with the first *bachur*, he just couldn’t put a name to the face. Rabbi Rosenstein was actually beginning to feel frustrated that he seemed to have forgotten the names of some of closest childhood friends. It was only after nearly every single student in the Yeshiva had greeted him with the same heartfelt “*Shalom Aleichem*” that he realized that a sincere and enthusiastic “*Shalom Aleichem*” was the norm in *Beit HaTalmud*! And it was this sense that everyone was so friendly and concerned for his wellbeing that allowed Rabbi Rosenstein to quickly overcome his homesickness and to flourish in *Beit HaTalmud*.

How does “*Shalom Aleichem*” fit into Kiddush Levanah? Rabbi Yehoshua Falk Katz (1555-1614) was the head of the Yeshiva in Lemberg, Ukraine. He also served on the Council of Four Lands and was considered to be one of the greatest authorities in Jewish law in his generation. In his classic commentary on the Tur, titled *Prisha*, Rabbi Falk explains that we have just prayed for the downfall of our enemies. We declare, “May dread and fear befall them, they should be silent like stone.” But there is no indication in the verse as to who “them” in the verse is referring to. So, we turn to the people standing nearby reciting Kiddush Levanah with us, and we greet them with a heartfelt “*Shalom Aleichem*” — to show that they are not included among those whose downfall we seek.

The *Levush Malchut* cites the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 42a), which says that reciting Kiddush Levanah is akin to greeting the *Shechinah*. That is why, he explains, we greet each other with “*Shalom Aleichem*” to show our love for each other at this elevated moment of spiritual delight. Rabbi Elimelech Biderman adds a thought-provoking idea. By greeting others in the middle of Kiddush Levanah, we are teaching ourselves that we should never forget our fellow man. Even at this exalted time – as we encounter the *Shechinah* – when a fellow Jew greets you, they should be answered.

Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov (*Bnei Yissachar, Kiddush HaChodesh*) cites the Ari Zal, who taught that we greet each other with “*Shalom Aleichem*” to counterbalance the very first unfounded accusation in the Torah. The Talmud (*Chullin* 60b) describes how, after the creation of the sun and the moon, the moon approached Hashem and claimed, “It is impossible for two kings to wear one crown.” Hashem, rejecting the moon’s assertion, decreed that the moon should diminish itself in size. Our Sages explain that the moon’s claim was the antithesis of shalom. And this is why, now, as we beseech Hashem that the light of the moon be restored to its original glory, we turn to those around us and greet them

with the words “*Shalom Aleichem*.” To remedy, as it were, the moon’s unfounded accusation and to return Shalom to the world.

But, perhaps, there is another, even simpler, reason why “*Shalom Aleichem*” is included in Kiddush Levanah. As we have learned together, Shalom is the greatest blessing that a person can receive. Accordingly, there is truly nothing more edifying than greeting — and being greeted — with “Shalom.”

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

No More Boils

In one of the scariest passages in the entire Bible, the Torah lists a whole slew of horrible curses set to befall whosoever fails to uphold the Torah’s laws (Deut. 28:15–69). The Talmud (see Megillah 31b) teaches that the rabbis instituted that this passage be publicly read before Rosh HaShanah, as if to say, “may the [current] year and its curses finish, may the [next] year and its blessings commence.” One of the verses within the passage in question states: “Hashem will smite you with Egyptian shechin, and with techorim/afolim [i.e., hemorrhoids], and with garav, and with cheres from which you cannot be healed” (Deut. 28:27). A subsequent verse reads “Hashem will smite you with awful shechin on the knees and on the shank” (Deut. 28:35). And so forth. In this essay we seek to explore the meaning of the different words used here alongside shechin, and attempt to understand how these apparent synonyms may be differentiated from one another.

The word schechin appears thirteen times in the entire Bible: As my readers almost certainly know already, shechin is the name of the sixth plague out of the Ten Plagues with which Hashem smote the Egyptians in the lead-up to the exodus (Ex. 9:8–12). In that context, the word shechin is used four times. There are also types of tzar’at that appear on places where one had shechin (Lev. 13:18–23), which accounts for another four instances of the word shechin in the Bible. Those occurrences, plus the two times that shechin appear in the aforementioned curses (Deut. 28:27, 28:35) and the two times that the Bible reports about Isaiah helping Hezekiah remedy his shechin (II Kgs. 20:7, Isa. 38:21) bring us to twelve cases. And the thirteenth appearance of this word occurs when the Bible reports that Job was struck with “horrible shechin” (Iyov 2:7).

What exactly is shechin? The Mishnah (Negaim 9:1) defines shechin as referring to a wound that was caused by being struck with wood, stone, hot gypsum/peat, or hot springs but not

by fire. This means that shechin does not refer to a mere burn, but to an inflamed or infected wound. Yet, the term shechin is commonly translated as “boil/blister.” We should never know, but boils are painful, pus-filled bumps that form under the skin when bacteria infect and inflame one or more hair follicles. They often start as red, tender areas that become firm and painful as they fill with pus. Over time, the center of the boil softens and may burst, releasing the pus.

Indeed, Rashi (to Ex. 9:9, Lev. 13:18, Chullin 8a) writes that shechin is an expression of "heat," adding that it refers to a cause of a person's flesh becoming "heated" (i.e., inflamed) because of a wound, as opposed to being heated or burnt through an actual fire. As Rashi notes, in Mishnaic Hebrew, the root SHIN-CHET-NUN refers to "heat." For example, the Mishnah (Yoma 5:1) states that the Kohen Gadol would offer a short prayer on his way out of the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, with the Talmud (Yoma 53b) explaining that he would pray to Hashem that the upcoming year be “rainy and hot [shechunah],” with each type of weather falling out in its appropriate time.

In fact, the standard term in Targumic Aramaic for cham ("hot") and its various inflections are related to shechin (see Ex. 16:21, I Kgs. 1:1, Isa. 44:16, Ecc. 4:11, Job 37:17), yet Targum leaves examples of the Biblical Hebrew shechin itself untranslated or at least simply Aramaicizes them into shichana (see Onkelos to Deut. 28:27, 28:35).

Rabbi Yitzchak of Zeldin writes in *Shoresh Yesha* that the word shechin is related to the word shachum (via the interchangeability of the letters MEM and NUN). Shachum is the standard Targumic word for translating the Hebrew chum ("brown") — for example see Onkelos to Gen. 30:32. This would refer to the brownish color of a shechin spot on one's skin.

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