

# OHRNET

PARSHAT SHMOT 18 TEVET 18 JANUARY 2025

• VOL 32 NO. 10

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

After witnessing the wondrous sight of the burning bush, Moshe receives his first prophecy. G-d calls out to him, “Moshe, Moshe,” and Moshe responds: “*Hineni!* [Here I am!].” The Almighty proceeds to tell Moshe that the time has come to save the people from their suffering and affliction in Egypt, and to bring them to the Promised Land. “Now,” says G-d, “go, I will send you to Pharaoh and you shall bring My people... out of Egypt.” But this time, “*heneni*” is much less forthcoming. It would be seven days of negotiation before Moshe would agree to assume the position of leader.

Moshe’s immediate response to the directive is, *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the Children of Israel out from Egypt?* Moshe in effect said, “You set for me two formidable tasks: to defeat Pharaoh and to lead Israel. But I feel that I possess not the slightest strength or aptitude for either of these tasks —*Who am I that I should be assigned such a mission?*”

Now, Moshe is later described as “extremely humble, more than any other man on earth.” He knew now that he possessed none of the stuff of which demagogues, leaders, generals, heroes and rulers are made. It was only natural that a man of Moshe’s humility would recoil from such a mission, even though the call came from Hashem, Himself. Considering his own inadequacy, he feared he would be timid and weak in Pharaoh’s presence, and fail in the mission. It was also quite natural for Moshe to doubt whether he had the imposing, overpowering strength of personality required to transform a nation of slaves into a people of Hashem.

Indeed, in Hashem’s response, we see that Moshe may not have had these traits. Instead of reassuring him of his own ability, Hashem responds, “Because I will be with you! Precisely this will be the sign for you that it is I Who have sent you.” Those traits that in Moshe’s view made him unsuited for this task are the very ones that make him most qualified to carry it out. Precisely because Moshe sensed that he lacked the capacity to accomplish this mission by human power, Moshe was the one best-suited to accomplish Hashem’s mission. This very inadequacy will be the “sign” that this leader is Hashem-sent to carry out a Divine mission. Without this proof, the salvation of the people of Israel would be regarded as another event in world history, explicable by human forces, and contributing to human glory.

At the end of the seven days, Moshe remains unconvinced of his ability, and begs Hashem to send another man, more worthy, wise and capable. This utter lack of confidence in himself and in his ability is, in itself, the most vivid proof of the Divine origin of all that was done and spoken by Moshe. It is living testimony that the Torah was *not* given *by* Moshe, the charismatic leader, but rather *through* Moshe, the humble emissary.

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## TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

### **Sanhedrin 44-50**

#### **Angels and Prayer**

*Reish Lakish said, "One who makes an effort in his prayer here below will not have 'troublemakers' from Above." Rabbi Yochanan said, "A person should always ask for mercy that all should make an effort for his strength, and then he will not have 'troublemakers' from Above."*

These two interpretations are taught in our *gemara*, with the Maharsha explaining the textual basis for this dispute. These Sages offer two possible ways of learning the following verse: "Will you set up your prayer so that no trouble befall you, or any forces of strength?" (Iyov 36:19)

Rashi states that Rabbi Yochanan is including the efforts of the Administering Angels in helping a person's prayer prevent troubles. However, it seems that Rabbi Yochanan is teaching that a person should pray to these angels when he prays to Hashem, in order to maximize the effect of his prayers in preventing tragedy. This understanding would pose a great dilemma in how we are taught to pray, as explained by the Rambam (in his Thirteen Principles of Faith) and other Rishonim and Achronim. We are taught to pray only to Hashem, and not to any other entity — including an angel.

One approach is that Rashi means that a person should pray to Hashem alone, but request that Hashem allow His angels to help provide for his needs and protect him from troubles, and not allow His angels to be opponents to the prayer's wellbeing. (Maharal)

Another approach differs from Rashi's explanation. Rabbi Yochanan is teaching that a person should ask that *other people* should pray for him, and not that he should pray to angels to assist him. (Meiri)

This entire subject of directing prayers towards angels is one of vast scope and practical consequence, and is discussed at length by the commentaries, especially those on the Siddur and Machzor. One common controversy is singing *Barchuni l'Shalom Malachei HaShalom* (Bless us for Peace, O Angels of Peace) on Friday nights. Although the widespread custom is to include these words, there are some people who have the custom not to say these words since they appear to be a plea of prayer to angels.

▪ *Sanhedrin 45b*

### **No Delay of Burial**

*Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: "One who unnecessarily delays the burial of the deceased transgresses a Torah violation."*

The Torah states, "If a man commits a sin for which he is sentenced to death, and he is put to death, you shall then hang him on a pole. But you shall not leave his body on the pole overnight. Rather, you shall bury him on that same day, for a hanging human corpse is a blasphemy of G-d, and you shall not defile your Land that the L-rd, your G-d is giving you as an inheritance." (Deut. 21:22-23)

The *mishna* (45b) teaches that according to the *Chachamim* a man who curses the Almighty or worships idols and is sentenced to death by stoning is also hung afterwards. The verse above, however, teaches that after this capital punishment process the person should be buried without delay, and whoever is in charge of the burial violates a Torah prohibition if he fails to do so.

The next *Mishna* (46a) explains the reason for burying him on the same day: "for a hanging human corpse is a blasphemy of G-d." This means that since the person was punished for cursing G-d, it would be a desecration of G-d's Name to leave his body hanging too long since it would be a reason for people to say, "That's the person who blasphemed the Name of G-d." This *mishna* also states that if the burial is delayed in order to bring a coffin and shrouds, the prohibition of "not delaying" is not transgressed.

▪ *Sanhedrin 46b*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

Years later, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and Moshe kills the Egyptian. Realizing his life is in danger, Moshe flees to Midian where he rescues Tziporah, whose father Yitro approves their subsequent marriage. On Chorev (Mount Sinai), Moshe witnesses the burning bush where G-d commands him to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael, the Land promised to their ancestors.

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

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## **KRIAT SHEMA AL HAMITAH (PART 1)**

“The amount of sleep required by the average person is five minutes more.”  
Wilson Mizener – American Playwright

### **Introduction: Waking Up with a Spiritual Attitude**

As our day draws to a close, there is one final blessing to be recited together with a series of beautiful prayers called “Kriat Shema al Hamitah.” The Talmud teaches us (Brachot 4b) in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, “Even though a person recited the Shema in the synagogue, it is a mitzvah to do so again on one’s bed.” The Talmud goes on to ask, “What is the verse [that this ruling is derived from]?” Our Sages answer, “Tremble and sin not, reflect in your hearts while you are on your beds, and be completely silent” (Tehillim 4:5).

King David is teaching us that just the mere thought of sinning should be enough to make a person tremble. As the Kotzker Rebbe told his chassidim, “Your sins don’t bother me as much as the fact that you had time for sins!” A person who is busy learning Torah, davening, giving tzedakah and doing kind deeds should not have time to sin.

What is the connection between this verse and going to sleep for the night? Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein (1829-1908) was the Chief Rabbi of Navardok and one of the greatest Halachic authorities in his generation. In his magnum opus, Aruch Hashulchan (231:6), he writes this about going to sleep for the night: “One should have the intention that one is going to sleep in order to have strength to serve Hashem with energy tomorrow.” Accordingly, when we go to sleep in order to be able to serve Hashem with renewed vigor the next day, we are fulfilling a mitzvah.

However, there is more to sleep than “just” replenishing our strength for the next day. The Chofetz Chaim teaches us that when we go to sleep with spiritual thoughts, they will influence our nocturnal thought-process. That, in turn, will cause us to arise the next morning in a spiritual frame of mind, allowing us to serve Hashem with a greater sense of purpose.

Subsequently, in order to “upgrade” our tomorrow, the Chofetz Chaim rules (Mishnah Berurah 239:2.) that it is proper for a person to review their entire day before they go to

sleep, in order to see how they can improve themselves. And, after identifying the sins that they did, they should accept upon themselves not to do them anymore.

Accordingly, one of the central themes of Kriat Shema al Hamitah is introspection – what is called *chesbon henefesh* in Hebrew. Before we bring our day to a close, we should spend some time going over it, to see what we did right and what needs rectification. After identifying the mistakes that we may have made, we can then try to work out how we are going to improve ourselves for tomorrow. To make tomorrow an even more successful day than today.

As Rebbe Nachman from Breslov teaches, “If a person is no better tomorrow than they were today, then what good is tomorrow to them?”

And, for this reason, we are commanded to bring our day to a close by falling asleep while saying words of Torah. The concept of influencing our sleep by focusing on the spiritual is an idea that was paraphrased by a non-Jewish Dutch philosopher who wrote, “Before you sleep, read something that is exquisite and worth remembering.”

There is nothing more exquisite than the Torah. And there is nothing more effective that has the potential to turn us into better people than the Torah. As we go to sleep with words of Torah on our lips, we are preparing ourselves for tomorrow. Our nocturnal thoughts are revolving around Hashem. They are subconsciously preparing us to begin the new day with a sense of spiritual purpose. Because, as our Sages teach us, we dream about what we think about, and we think about what we dream about.

Or, in the words of the legendary artist Vincent van Gogh, “I dream of painting and then I paint my dream.” Kriat Shema al Hamitah is the first stroke on the canvas of a tomorrow that will ultimately become the unique masterpiece of today.

*To be continued...*

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# Q & A

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## Questions

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

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



## Answers

1. 1:5 - This verse adds that despite being in Egypt as a ruler, Yosef maintained his righteousness.
2. 1:10 - Pharaoh said it, meaning that the Egyptians would be forced to leave Egypt.
3. 1:10,22 - He hoped to escape Divine retribution, as G-d promised never to flood the entire world. Also, his astrologers saw that the Jewish redeemer's downfall would be through water.
4. 2:2 - When he was born, the house was filled with light.
5. 2:13 - Datan and Aviram.
6. 2:14 - *Lashon hara* (evil speech).
7. 2:17 - Because a ban had been placed on Yitro for abandoning idol worship.
8. 2:20 - The well water rose towards Moshe.
9. 3:12 - Just as the bush was not consumed, so too Moshe would be protected by G-d.
- 10.3:12 - That they were destined to receive the Torah
  
- 11.3:16,18 - "I surely remembered (*pakod pakadeti*)."
- 12.4:3 - It symbolized that Moshe spoke ill of the Jews by saying that they wouldn't listen to him, just as the original snake sinned through speech.
- 13.4:10 - He didn't want to take a position above that of his older brother, Aharon.
- 14.4:14 - Moshe lost the privilege of being a *kohen*.
- 15.4:20 It was used by Avraham for *akeidat Yitzchak* and will be used in the future by *mashiach*.
- 16.4:23 - Death of the firstborn.
- 17.5:1 - The elders were accompanying Moshe and Aharon, but they were afraid and one by one they slipped away. Hence, at the giving of the Torah, the elders weren't allowed to ascend with Moshe.
- 18.5:5 - The tribe of Levi.
- 19.5:6 - a) Egyptian taskmasters; b) Jewish officers.
- 20.5:14 - They were chosen to be on the Sanhedrin.



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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Here We Go

When the miraculous occurrence of the Burning Bush piqued Moses' curiosity and he approach the bush to get a closer look at the intriguing spectacle, Hashem called out to him saying, "Do not approach here [*halom*], remove your shoes from upon your feet..." (Ex. 3:5). In that verse, the Bible uses the relatively-rare word *halom* to mean "here," instead of the more common word *poh* which also means "here." In fact, the word *halom* is so rare that it only appears eleven times in the Bible, while the word *poh* is much more common as it occurs a total of 82 times. In this essay, we explore the synonyms *halom* and *poh*, as well as other Hebrew terms that mean "here" — attempting to trace the respective etymologies of these words and honing in on the unique connotations borne by each word.

In expanding on the Burning Bush incident, the Talmud (*Zevachim* 102a) explains that Moses wished that Hashem would grant him the "kingship" (i.e., a form of leadership that would be inherited by his children), but that Hashem denied that request by responding, "do not approach here [*halom*]." The Talmud buttresses its assertion that the "kingship" was under discussion here by postulating that the term *halom* always connotes something to do with royalty. This postulate is based on a verse in which King David wonders why he merited to be anointed king, saying: "Who am I, O Hashem the God? And who is my household that you have brought me until here [*halom*]" (I Sam. 7:18). Just as the word *halom* in the context of David refers to the kingship, so does that word in the context of Moses refer to the kingship. Maharsha (to *Zevachim* 102a) adds that this exegesis is also supported by the fact that in the Burning Bush narrative, the Torah uses the irregular term *halom* to mean "here," instead of the more common word *poh*. A similar exegesis is also found in *Bereishit Rabbah* (§45:1) regarding the appearance of the word *halom* concerning Hagar's vision (Gen. 16:13).

Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzatto extrapolates from this Talmudic discussion that the word *halom* differs from its ostensible synonyms in that it connotes "here" as an important, special place — as opposed to the other words discussed in this essay which could also connote "here" as a more banal or prosaic place. (See Maharsha to *Zevachim* 102a and *HaKtav VeHaKabbalah* to Gen. 16:13, who go into detail in explaining different examples of how the word *halom* in the Bible connotes something related to "kingship" or something otherwise "royal/important" about the place referred to by the word "here.")

In a similar vein, Rabbi Shmshon Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 16:13) explains the word *halom* by comparing it to its semantic counterpart *pa'am*. Just the verb *po'em* refers to the rhythmic

beat of a foot as one “walks” on the ground, and the noun *pa’amon* refers to a “bell” with the potential for a rhythmic sound (produced by the clapper banging against the shell), so does *halmah* refer to “breaking” or “beating” something as with a hammer.

Following that parallel, Rabbi Hirsch explains that just as a *pa’am* (“instance/time”) refers to a single step in the overall continuum of time, so does *halom* refer to a single step in the overall continuum of space, meaning *halom* marks a specific place to which one may be marching as finally “here.” As Dr. Lawrence Resnick fabulously sums up Rabbi Hirsch’s explanation of this word, “*halom* never means ‘here’; it means ‘hither’ (to here)... *halom* denotes a single spatial step forward, up to here.” The truth is that, as my colleague Rabbi Eliezer Cohn has pointed out, Rabbi Hirsch actually follows his great-uncle Rabbi Yehuda Leib Shapira-Frankfurter (1743–1826) who already wrote in *HaRechasim LeVikah* (to Gen. 16:13) that *halom* always means “to here.”

While the classical lexicographers like Ibn Saruk, Ibn Janach, and Radak see the word *halom* as a derivative of the trilateral root HEY-LAMMED-MEM, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim takes a different approach. He sees the final MEM as extraneous to the ultimate root, thus arguing that the word actually derives from biliteral HEY-LAMMED. He further explains the core meaning HEY-LAMMED as relating to “spreading out,” leading him to a whole listing of words that derive from that root that relate to that theme. For our purposes, that list includes the word *halah* (“there/so forth”), which refers to a distant place that covers a wide region that could be viewed as “spreading out” over a large space. In a similar sense, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *halom* refers to “here” as a narrower region that spreads from a single point (“you are standing here”) and encompassing only its immediate environs, but nothing farther away.

Rabbi Yosef Grayever of Ostrow (1808–1898) sees the core meaning of HEY-LAMMED as “separation,” and sees *halom* in the sense of someplace important as related to that because it is “separated” from the rest. To give Rabbi Grayever’s explanation justice, we will need to devote a full article to treating his understanding — something I hope to do in the future.

Let’s now turn our attention to the word *poh*. The funny thing about that fairly common word is that it is sometimes spelled PEH-HEY (as in most of its occurrences), sometimes spelled PEH-VAV (twenty times in Ezek. 41–42), and once spelled PEH-ALEPH (Job 38:11). Because of this, there is a dispute among the early trilateralist lexicographers as to the word’s root: Rabbi Yonah Ibn Janach (in his *Sefer HaShorashim*) and Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Parchon (*Machaberet HeAruch*) trace the word to the biliteral root PEH-VAV, while Radak (in his *Sefer HaShorashim*) traces it to the biliteral root PEH-HEY. Menachem Ibn Saruk in *Machberet Menachem* takes a third approach, tracing *poh* to the monoliteral root PEH (as that letter is the lowest common denominator among all spellings of the word).

Like Radak, Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *poh* to the biliteral root PEH-HEY, whose core meaning is “mouth” (*peh*). The way he explains it, the place denoted as “here” is metaphorically similar to a mouth in that it is an opening or means for one to reach another place, just as the mouth is an opening by which things can enter or exit the body.

As we mentioned earlier, the Biblical Hebrew uses a few more terms to express the concept of "here," each with its own nuances and contexts of usage. The term *heinah* in the sense of "here" appears when Joseph tells his brothers, "you shall bring my father down here [*heinah*]" (Gen. 45:13), emphasizing a distinct destination. Similarly, David is warned by the Jebusites, "you shall not come here [*heinah*]" (II Sam. 5:6), and Abraham's descendants are promised a future return after their exile, "in the fourth generation, they shall return here [*heinah*]" (Gen. 15:16). *Heinah* also appears in poetic or descriptive contexts, such as when Elisha splits the water, causing it to divide "here and there [*heinah v'heinah*]" (II Kgs. 2:14), or when Jeremiah describes exiles seeking the path "here" (*heinah*) to Zion (Jer. 50:5). The word *zeh* has a broader meaning of "this," but is occasionally used to mean "here" (i.e., "this place") in specific contexts. For instance, Balaam invites Balak's messengers to "stay here [*zeh*]" (Num. 22:19), and Moses instructs the spies to "go up here [*zeh*]" (Num. 13:17). In another example, King Saul commands the people to slaughter their cattle "here" (I Sam. 14:34), emphasizing that action should be performed on the spot and not elsewhere. Finally, *koh* typically means "so/thus" or "such/like," but occasionally functions as "here" in specific contexts. Examples abound: Jacob directs his household to "set here [*koh*]" the items before him (Gen. 31:37), and the Israelites travel "a day's journey here [*koh*]" (Num. 11:31). Like *heinah* and *zeh*, *koh* also connects to broader meanings, illustrating its versatility.

As we will explain, these additional words, while overlapping in meaning, reflect different shades of "here" in Biblical Hebrew, shaped by context and connotation. Rabbi Avraham Bedersi (a 13<sup>th</sup> century Spanish scholar), in his book *Chotam Tochnit* on Hebrew synonyms, writes that while the words *po* and *halom* mean "here" in the strictly *spatial* sense, the word *heinah* differs in that not only does it refer to "here" in a *spatial* sense, it is also often borrowed to mean "here" (i.e., "now") in a *temporal* sense. For example, when Hashem tells Abraham that after the Egyptian exile, his descendants will conquer the Holy Land, He says: "and the fourth generation will return *heinah* [here] because the sins of the Amorites have not been filled until *heinah* [now]" (Gen. 15:16). Although in that verse, the first time *heinah* appears it means "here" in the spatial sense, the second time the word appears it means "now," not "here." Hashem's point was that the Amorites' sins had not yet reached a critical mass that made them deserving of being removed from the Holy Land. Similarly, when Jacob said that he had not seen his son (Joseph) "until *heinah*" (Gen. 44:28), he means that the entire time since Joseph's disappearance, he had not seen him. Rabbi Bedersi also notes that the word *heinah* in this context should not be confused with its homonym *heinah* (found for example in Gen. 6:2, 21:29, II Sam. 17:28), which is a form of the word *hein* ("they/them" in feminine form).

To differentiate between the words *poh* and *zeh* in the sense of "here," Rabbi Luzzatto draws a semantic distinction between a general term for a given place (*qua*) and a more specific spot within a general location (*qui*). Given that paradigm, he explains that the word *poh* refers to a more specific place. Examples of such usage in the Bible include when Abraham tells Eliezer before the Binding of Isaac to return "here" with the donkey (Gen. 22:5), when Hashem tells Moses to stand "here" with Me on Mount Sinai (Deut. 5:27), and when Moses declares that the Covenant at the Plains of Moab applies not only to those "here" but also to

those who are not “here” (Deut. 29:14). In all these cases, *poh* is used to denote “here” because the antecedent refers to a very specific place. In contradistinction to this, he explains that the word *zeh* when meaning “here” refers to a less specific place, for example, when Judah wished to pay the “prostitute” that he visited, but was told “there was no prostitute in *zeh* [“this general area”]” (Gen. 38:21–22).

With this distinction in place, Rabbi Luzzatto offers an intriguing explanation of a word-switch in the Bible that occurs when describing Balak’s attempts to persuade Balaam to curse the Jews. At first, Balak sends a group of emissaries to Balaam to convince him to accept the devious mission, and Balaam seems open to their request saying “sleep over the night here [*poh*]” so that he may confer with Hashem in a nocturnal prophecy (Num. 22:8). When Balaam then declines Balak’s request, Balak sends another, larger and more prominent, envoy to Balaam. This time, when Balaam tells them to stay the night “here,” he uses the word *zeh* instead of *poh* (Num. 22:19). Why does Balaam switch from *poh* to *zeh*?

Rabbi Luzzatto accounts for this change in verbiage by explaining that when the original emissaries arrived at Balaam’s home, he was able to host them and they were lodged within his home, so the more specific *poh* is used as the referent is a more specific place (i.e., Balaam’s home within the city where Balaam lived). However, when the second envoy arrived, they were too numerous and too posh for him to host in his own house, so they were hosted elsewhere in the city wherein Balaam lived. For this reason, the less specific word for “here” — *zeh* — is used in this context.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer offers a similar explanation when sharpening the difference between *poh* and *heinah*, arguing that *po* denotes a more specific “here,” while *heinah* denotes “here” in a more general way. Moreover, he writes that the word *po* is more appropriate in dialogue when speaking to another person who is “here” with the speaker, while the word *heinah* is more fit to be used when the listener himself is not yet “here.”

Rabbi Luzzatto further sharpens the differences between the words *heinah*, *poh*, and *zeh* when used to specify a location as “here.” He asserts — and offers various Biblical prooftexts to that effect — that *heinah* is only used when referring to “here” as the end-point of something that had travelled from elsewhere until it has reached “here.” It is often used when referring to somebody *coming* “here,” ostensibly from somewhere else (for examples, see Josh. 2:2, Jud. 16:2, II Sam. 5:6, II Kgs. 8:7, Ezek. 40:4, and I Chron. 11:5). By contrast, the terms *poh* and *zeh* refer to “here” in a more static context and do not necessarily imply any comparison or contrast with a different location. [It should be noted that Rabbi Luzzatto’s take on the words mentioned in this article is cited by the Malbim in his work *Yair Ohr* on Hebrew synonyms.]

As mentioned above, another word that sometimes means “here” in Biblical Hebrew is *koh*. For example, when Balam told Balak to stand “here” (near his burnt-sacrifices), he used the word *koh* (Num. 23:15, see also II Sam. 18:30). Rabbi Luzzatto claims that the Biblical *koh* differs from the other terms in discussion in that it does not quite refer directly to “here,” but to somewhere which is very close to “here” (seemingly based on the prefix KAF in the sense of “like/as”). Either way, the standard word for “here/now” in Mishnaic Hebrew is *kan*,



which is understood to be a cognate of *koh*. Rabbi Chaim Yehoshua Kasovsky explains that the letter ALEPH in the word *kan* is simply there to differentiate it from the word *kein* (“yes/indeed/likewise”).

Targum often uses the word *kah* (spelled KAF-ALPEH) to render *koh*, while Targum uses the word *halcha* to render *halom* (Ex. 3:5, Jud. 18:3) and *heinah* (Gen. 45:5, Josh. 2:2, 3:9). A cognate of *halcha* famously appears in the Talmud (*Bava Metzia* 4a), when a person responds to the claim that he owes the claimant money by replying that he only owes part of the money claimed “and here [*heilach*] it is.” The discussion centers around whether or not this on-the-spot-payment constitutes a partial admission to the claimant’s initial claim.

Targum also uses the word *hacha* (which is also common in Talmudic Aramaic) as an Aramaic rendering of the Hebrew words *poh* (Gen. 19:12, 22:5, Ruth 4:1) and *heinah* (Gen. 15:6, Joshua 2:2). Interestingly, in his work *Cheshek Shlomo*, Rabbi Pappenheim writes that Rabbinic Hebrew collapses the two Biblical Hebrew words *po* and *halom* into one Rabbinic Hebrew word *kan* by using the word *kan* instead of *po* and *l’kan* instead of *halom*.

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## TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

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

### JUDGING FAVORABLY

#### Mitzvah #235

The Torah commands us: *Judge your fellow man justly (Vayikra 19:15)*. This is primarily an obligation for a judge to administer fair justice, but it also includes an obligation for every Jew to judge his fellow man favorably. This is called judging “justly” because every righteous Jew deserves to be considered innocent until proven guilty (see *Torah Temimah*). The halachic obligation to judge others favorably depends on their level of righteousness and the circumstances (see *Chafetz Chaim, Pesichah, Be’er Mayim Chaim §3*).

*Sefer HaChinuch* writes that the two parts of this mitzvah, judging justly in a court and judging people favorably, are complimentary, for the former upholds the justice of society and the latter upholds the peace of society. When people are willing to give others the benefit of the doubt, they do not feel resentment toward others, for they assume that anyone

who has slighted them must have done so unintentionally, or that he must have subsequently regretted his actions (*Ahavas Yisrael* §5).

*Semak* (§8) includes the mitzvah to judge others favorably within the mitzvah to love one's fellow Jew like himself. The *Chafetz Chaim* explains (*Shemiras HaLashon, Shaar HaTevunah* §5) that just as a person would want others to see his actions in good light, he should do the same for others. *Chassid Yaavetz* (1:6) calls this the greatest of kindnesses.

*Maharil Diskin* (Vol. I pg. 54b) notes that judging others favorably is also beneficial for oneself, because a person tends to act according to the standards of his society. Thus, if he thinks that everyone around him is acting incorrectly, he will not restrain himself from doing the same, but if he judges others favorably and considers them righteous, he will be ashamed to lower himself in their eyes (cited in *Maadanei Yom Tov*, pg. 62).

When we judge others favorably, Hashem judges us favorably (*Shabbos* 127b). Although Hashem has no doubts as to the circumstances of a person's sins, there is nevertheless room for Him to judge him leniently and focus on his good intentions, as long as that person regularly does the same when he judges others (see *Sifsei Chaim, Mo'adim* Vol. I pg. 219). It emerges that when we judge others favorably, we ultimately benefit ourselves.

In *Parashas Shemos*, Moshe told Hashem that the Jewish people would not believe that Hashem was about to redeem them, and He struck him with *tzaraas* (leprosy) as a punishment for suspecting them falsely. The Sages derive from this that whoever suspects his fellow Jew falsely is stricken on his body (*Shemos Rabbah* 3:13). His own body deserves to be blemished as a punishment for blemishing his fellow Jew's character (*Yefeh Toar*). From the fact that Hashem exacted this punishment upon a man as great and saintly as Moshe, we should take to heart how important it is to Him that we see the good in our fellow Jews.

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions, POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. [info@ohr.edu](mailto:info@ohr.edu)

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