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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Rattled by Ritalin

"...and you will eat it (the Pesach offering) in haste." (12:11)

Today, a prescription for Ritalin is about as common as a prescription for reading glasses. When I was young there was no Ritalin. Now, many people will tell you that had there been Ritalin back then, many kids would have done much better at school. They will tell you that ADD has always been there but it was just undiagnosed. But, maybe the reason there has been a large increase in ADD is that kids' minds are processing information faster, and that as teachers and communicators we are just too slow and too boring for today's generation. And rather than using medication to get the brains of children to better "focus," our presentation and delivery will have to be much faster and stimulating. Today, even very young children grasp technology with a speed and comfort that terrifies their elders. How can they understand the language and interface of these machines so intuitively?

Maybe the answer is Moore's Law? In 1982, an Osborne Executive portable computer weighed 100 times as much, was 500 times as big, cost approximately 10 times as much, and had about 1/100th the clock frequency of a 2007 Apple iPhone. "Moore's Law" is the observation that, over the history of computing hardware, the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit doubles approximately every two years. In like fashion, microprocessor prices, memory capacity, sensors and even the number and size of pixels in digital cameras, all are improving at exponential rates as well. Moore's Law has been applied not just to technology but also to accelerating change in social and cultural progress throughout history. I was thinking to

myself that maybe it also applies to the processing speed of our minds. What if our minds can process information at much faster speeds than, say, 30 years ago? Much has been written about attention deficit "disorders." Maybe the human brain is "evolving". Futurists tell us that we should expect more and more profound changes in the future, leading to a point of what's called "singularity," where the pace of change becomes so accelerated that it leads to an apocalyptic event where the world as we know it metamorphoses into something beyond our imagination. Now, this "singularity" event sounds very much like an event that Jews have been waiting for a very long time. It's called "*biat hamashiach*" – the coming of the Messiah.

It says in this week's Torah portion, "*And you will eat it (the Pesach offering) in haste.*" The mystical sources explain that the Exodus from Egypt was experienced as a moment of "singularity" – a moment faster than time itself, a total rupture with the past, racing to meet a new reality. As it was in the beginning, so it will be in the end. The Rambam - Maimonides - says that one should not speculate too much about what things will be like in the Messianic Era because "No one knows what it will be, until it will be." The world is accelerating faster and faster to its moment of climax. A world impossible to visualize. A world of singularity when all mankind will proclaim, "*Hashem Echad*" – G-d is One. As it says in Shir HaShirim, The Song of Songs: "*The voice of my Beloved! Behold, it came suddenly to redeem me, as if leaping over mountains, skipping over hills.*"

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bo: Berachot 23-29

Entry and Exit Prayers

The mishna teaches: “Rabbi Nechunya ben Hakaneh would recite a short prayer upon entering the Beit Midrash and upon exiting. He was asked, ‘What is the nature of this prayer?’ He said, ‘When I enter I pray that no mishap should be caused by me, and when I exit I give thanks for my portion.’”

This concept of saying a prayer when entering and exiting the Beit Midrash for Torah study immediately follows our being taught in the previous *mishna* the suitable times for daily prayers. The juxtaposition of these two *mishnayot* teaches that it is ideal to go to the Beit Midrash for Torah study immediately after completing the morning prayers. (With a breakfast break as needed, of course, which is recommended.) This halacha is taught in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim (155), “After one goes out from the Synagogue, one should go to the Beit Midrash and set a time for Torah study.” Elsewhere in the *gemara*, it states, “One who exits the Synagogue and enters the Beit Midrash and learns Torah, merits receiving the Divine Presence.” (Berachot 64a)

A *beraita* in our *sugya* expands the wording of the prayers to be said when entering or exiting the Beit Midrash. Although, based on the wording of the *mishna*, it is not clear that these prayers are obligatory, from the wording of the *beraita* it is unmistakable that there is an obligation to say them. (Rambam, Bartenura, Tosefot Yom Tov and Mishna Berurah 110:36) There are minor variations of the text as based on rulings of the *Rishonim* and *Poskim*.

What is the essence of these two prayers? The one said upon entering the Beit Midrash is a prayer for Divine guidance to not err in deriving halacha during one’s Torah study. The prayer said when leaving the Beit Midrash is one of thanks to Hashem for the Torah and for the opportunity to enjoy the study of it in the Beit Midrash.

These prayers are often posted in the back of the Beit Midrash so that one will see them immediately upon entering and also right before exiting, and be able to read them at those times in a manner that is consistent with the manner taught in our *mishna*: “Upon his entrance... and upon his exit.” The text of these prayers is also often found in the front of volumes of *Gemara*, so that, alternatively, one can read it from there before he “enters his Torah study.”

Although the Mishna Berurah and other halachic authorities rule that these prayers are an obligation, the Aruch Hashulchan writes that the custom in our days is that these prayers are not said. The reason he gives to explain this custom is that nowadays those who learn in a Beit Midrash are not arriving at halachic decisions, and the Rav who issues halachic rulings is located in his home.

It would seem that according to the reasoning of the Aruch Hashulchan there may be a distinction between the before and after prayers. Despite not saying the first prayer for Divine guidance since the halacha is not being ruled upon in the Beit Midrash, the second prayer, a prayer of thanks to Hashem, should nevertheless be said upon exiting. This prayer is purely one of praise and gratitude to Hashem for giving us the Torah to study and live by.

This second prayer states, “I thank You Hashem that You gave me a place with those who dwell in the Beit Midrash... that I get up early... I rise to words of Torah... I toil and they toil (i.e. others not involved in Torah study)... I toil and receive reward; they toil and don’t receive reward... I run to life in the World-to-Come.”

The Chafetz Chaim (author of the Mishna Berurah and many other Torah works that are an essential part of our *Batei* Midrash and our homes today) told a parable to help us understand this prayer. He asks, “Doesn’t someone who works and toils in something else, other than Torah, also receive reward (lit. “*sachar*,” meaning “compensation”)? The answer is “No.” Let’s say the person is a tailor who was hired by someone to make him a suit. The tailor took measurements, bought material, and cut and sewed until it was ready. But when the customer returned to take-and-pay, lo and behold – it didn’t fit right and the person refused to accept it. And he refused to pay anything for it. The work and toil of the tailor turned out to be all for naught. His reward is for his final product, not for his effort.

But this is not the case regarding learning Torah, explained the Chafetz Chaim. One who is involved in Torah study receives reward from Hashem for the very act and effort of his study, even if he somehow misunderstands (hopefully only temporarily) or completes his session of Torah study with unanswered questions. There is great reward for his toil and speaking words of Torah.

• Berachot 28b

Q & A

Questions

1. What was Pharaoh's excuse for not releasing the Jewish children?
2. How did the locusts in the time of Moshe differ from those in the days of Yoel?
3. How did the first three days of darkness differ from the last three?
4. When the Jews asked the Egyptians for gold and silver vessels, the Egyptians were unable to deny ownership of such vessels. Why?
5. *Makat bechorot* took place at exactly midnight. Why did Moshe say it would take place at approximately midnight?
6. Why did the first-born of the animals die?
7. How did Moshe show respect to Pharaoh when he warned him about the aftermath of the plague of the first-born?
8. G-d told Moshe: "So that My wonders will be multiplied" (11:9). What three wonders was G-d referring to?
9. Why did G-d command the mitzvah of Rosh Chodesh to Aharon, and not only to Moshe?
10. Up to what age is an animal fit to be a Pesach offering?
11. Prior to the Exodus from Egypt, what two *mitzvot* involving blood did G-d give to the Jewish People?
12. Rashi gives two explanations of the word "*Pasachti*." What are they?
13. Why were the Jews told to stay indoors during *makat bechorot*?
14. What was Pharaoh screaming as he ran from door to door the night of *makat bechorot*?
15. Why did Pharaoh ask Moshe to bless him?
16. Why did the Jewish People carry their matzah on their shoulders rather than have their animals carry it?
17. Who comprised the *erev rav* (mixed multitude)?
18. What three historical events occurred on the 15th of Nissan, prior to the event of the Exodus from Egypt?
19. What is the source of the "milk and honey" found in *Eretz Yisrael* ?
20. The only non-kosher animal whose first-born is redeemed is the donkey. What did the donkeys do to "earn" this distinction?

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

Answers

1. 10:11 - Since children don't bring sacrifices there was no need for them to go.
2. 10:14 - The plague brought by Moshe was composed of one species of locust, whereas the plague in the days of Yoel was composed of many species.
3. 10:22 - During the first three days the Egyptians couldn't see. During the last three days they couldn't move.
4. 10:22 - During the plague of darkness the Jews could see and they searched for and found the Egyptians' vessels.
5. 11:4 - If Moshe said the plague would begin exactly at midnight, the Egyptians might miscalculate and accuse Moshe of being a fake.
6. 11:5 - Because the Egyptians worshiped them as gods, and when G-d punishes a nation He also punishes its gods.
7. 11:8 - Moshe warned that "All these servants of yours will come down to me" when, in fact, it was Pharaoh himself who actually came running to Moshe.
8. 11:9 - The plague of the first-born, the splitting of the sea, the drowning of the Egyptian soldiers.
9. 12:1 - As reward for his efforts in bringing about the plagues.
10. 12:5 - One year.
11. 12:6 - Circumcision and *Korban Pesach*.
12. 12:13 - "I had mercy" and "I skipped."
13. 12:22 - Since it was a night of destruction, it was not safe for anyone to leave the protected premises of his home.
14. 12:31 - "Where does Moshe live? Where does Aharon live?"
15. 12:32 - So he wouldn't die, for he himself was a first-born.
16. 12:34 - Because the commandment of matzah was dear to them.
17. 12:38 - People from other nations who became converts.
18. 12:41 - The angels came to promise that Sarah would have a son, Yitzchak was born, and the exile of the "covenant between the parts" was decreed.
19. 13:5 - Goat milk, date and fig honey.
20. 13:13 - They helped the Jews by carrying silver and gold out of Egypt.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

That's a Flogging

In the lead-up to the Jews' exodus from Egypt, G-d had smitten the Egyptians with the Ten Plagues, forever immortalized in Jewish lore as the *Eser Makkot*. In general, the word *makkah* in Hebrew means "hit," so *Eser Makkot* literally means "ten hittings." There is also a tractate of the Mishna called *Makkot* that deals with the *halachot* of judicial floggings. Nonetheless, elsewhere in rabbinic literature those flogging are usually referred to as *malkut* (or in plural *malkuyot*), instead of *makkot*. In this essay we will seek to understand the difference between the word *makkot* and *malkut* by examining the etymology of both words, and carefully deducing what they truly mean.

Turning to the etymology of the words in question, Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970) and Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) understand that the word *makkah* can be traced to the single letter root KAF, which means "hitting." However, many Hebrew grammarians (like Ibn Chayyuj, Ibn Janach, and Radak) reject the notion of monoliteral roots, instead arguing that the root that means "hitting" is NUN-KAF-HEY, but that the letter NUN is often dropped in conjugations of this root. From the primary meaning of "hitting" or "striking" another, the word *makkah* also came to mean "a wound" (the product of such physical contact), and from there it was further expanded to also mean "plague."

The word *malkut* or its cognates (like *lakah*) do not appear anywhere in the Bible, but do appear in Mishnaic Hebrew. The prominent linguist Avraham Even-Shoshan (1906-1984) writes in his dictionary that this word (commonly mispronounced as *malkot*) is actually derived from the Aramaic root LAMMED-KUF-HEY, which means "hit" or "damage". He compares it to the Akkadian word *laku*, which means "weakened." According to Even-Shoshan, *malkut* and *makkot* essentially mean the same thing, just in different languages.

[The English word *lick* in the expression "to lick one's enemies" (based on Num. 22:4) means to smite or defeat, and to "lick the whip" means to taste punishment. Thus, the Germanic word *lick* refers to both smiting another, and to the act of passing one's tongue over something to taste it, moisten it, or clean it. Nonetheless, linguists would say that it is simply by chance that this word resembles the Semitic

roots LAMMED-KUF-HEY ("hitting") and LAMED-KUF-KUF ("licking").]

Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1468-1549) writes in his works *Meturgaman* and *Sefer HaTishbi* that whenever the Torah uses an expression of *makkah* in the sense of "hitting" somebody as a means of punishing him or chastising him, then the Targum there translates that *makkah*-based word into a *lakah*-based word. However, when somebody "hits" another simply to hurt him or even to kill him, then the *makkah*-based word is translated into Aramaic words unrelated to *lakah*. HaBachur also notes that the verb *lakah* is not a perfect translation of *makkeh* because the latter refers to one who "hits" another, whereas *lakah* refers to one who "was hit" by another.

The great Kabbalist Rabbi Naftali HaKohen Katz of Frankfurt (1649-1718) in his work *Smichas Chachamim* asks why the aforementioned tractate is called *Makkot* and not *Malkut*, and offers two answers. Firstly, he proposes that the tractate's name is derived from the verb used in the Torah to refer to flogging the sinner (Deut. 25:2-3). In that passage, cognates of *makkah* are used five times, so the name of the tractate understandably becomes *Makkot* (and, as mentioned above, the word *malkut* never appears anywhere in the Bible). Secondly, Rabbi Katz explains that the name *Makkot* has the same letters as the word *ka'mavet* ("like death"), which alludes to the halachic principle that in some ways the punishment of flogging is like a mini-death (*Sanhedrin* 10a). In order to create this allusion, the tractate is named *Makkot* instead of *Malkut*.

Rabbi Shmuel Taieb (d. 1956) in *Shemen Tov* explains Rabbi Katz's opening question by noting that in many instances the Talmud uses the term *malkut* to refer to lashes ordained by the Torah, and the term *makkot* (as in *makkot mardut*, "lashes of rebellion") to refer to flogging ordained by rabbinic decree. Accordingly, he explains that since the Mishna elaborates on the rules of Biblically-ordained lashes, then one would expect that the tractate devoted to those laws should be called *Malkut*, not *Makkot*. Because of this, Rabbi Katz sought to explain why the tractate is actually called *makkot* as opposed to *malkut*, and offered the explanations cited above.

In light of HaBachur's and Even-Shoshan's understanding, we may posit that the name of the tractate in question is *Makkot* in Hebrew and *Malkut* in Aramaic. In fact, many Hungarian/Hassidic Jews actually have a custom to refer to the Tractate *Makkot* as Tractate *Malkut*. This is similar to another tractate which also has two names: *Beitzah*. *Beitzah* means "egg" or "testicle" in Hebrew, and the tractate that bears that name is sometimes also called *Beiyah*, which means the same thing in Aramaic. Like *Makkot-Malkut*, some people have a custom of calling this tractate by its Aramaic name instead of its Hebrew name.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipshutz (1782-1860) wrote in *Tiferes Yisrael* that *lakah* does not exclusively mean "hit" but can serve as a general expression of "breaking," "damaging," or "rendering defective." "Hitting" is just one way of achieving those effects. Indeed, in rabbinic literature a solar eclipse or lunar eclipse is described as those luminaries being *lakah* (*Sukkah* 29a), and several pages later the Talmud (*Sukkah* 33b) describes black blood as really red that was *lakah*. In both of these cases, and many more like them, the word *lakah* does not literally mean "hitting," but rather it refers to some

other sort of defect or imperfection. According to his understanding, the term *Makkot* is more appropriate than *Malkut* because it is more specific and directly refers to "flogging."

Rabbi Elazar Rokeach of Amsterdam (1665-1742) in his Kabbalistic commentary to the Mishna *Maase Rokeach* actually takes the exact opposite approach. He understands that *malkut* only refers to physical "hitting," while *makkot* refers to any sort of painful ordeal through which one might have to suffer. Accordingly, he explains that since the tractate in question not only discusses the laws of flogging, but also goes into the details of the laws of exile (i.e., if somebody kills another Jew by mistake, he must be exiled to a City of Refuge), then the tractate was named *Makkot* as a way of including that punishment in its name.

In Modern Hebrew, to "hit" somebody, "spank" him, or "beat him up" is *leharbitz* or *marbitz*. The root of this word is REISH-BET-TZADI, which actually means "crouching," "stretching out" and "lying down" in Biblical Hebrew. This meaning was later expanded to beating somebody down such that he is left "spread out" or "lying" on the floor.

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

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe that He is hardening Pharaoh's heart so that through miraculous plagues the world will know for all time that He is the one true G-d. Pharaoh is warned about the plague of locusts and is told how severe it will be. Pharaoh agrees to release only the men, but Moshe insists that everyone must go. During the plague, Pharaoh calls for Moshe and Aharon to remove the locusts, and he admits he has sinned.

G-d ends the plague but hardens Pharaoh's heart, and again Pharaoh fails to free the Jews. The country, except for the Jewish People, is then engulfed in a palpable darkness. Pharaoh calls for Moshe and tells him to take all the Jews out of Egypt, but to leave their flocks behind. Moshe tells him that not only will they take their own flocks, but Pharaoh must add his own too.

Moshe tells Pharaoh that G-d is going to bring one more plague, the death of the firstborn, and then the Jews will leave Egypt. G-d again hardens Pharaoh's

heart, and Pharaoh warns Moshe that if he sees him again, Moshe will be put to death. G-d tells Moshe that the month of Nissan will be the chief month.

The Jewish People are commanded to take a sheep on the 10th of the month and guard it until the 14th. The sheep is then to be slaughtered as a Pesach offering, its blood put on their door-posts, and its roasted meat eaten. The blood on the door-post will be a sign that their homes will be passed-over when G-d strikes the firstborn of Egypt. The Jewish People are told to memorialize this day as the Exodus from Egypt by never eating chametz on Pesach.

Moshe relays G-d's commands, and the Jewish People fulfill them flawlessly. G-d sends the final plague, killing the first-born, and Pharaoh sends the Jews out of Egypt. G-d tells Moshe and Aharon the laws concerning the Pesach sacrifice, *pidyon haben* (redemption of the first-born son) and *tefillin*.

ASK!

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Jewish Life

Question

Dear Rabbi,

I am Jewish, but not Orthodox. I do not follow all 613 commandments all the time. I do not say all the prayers. I don't keep completely kosher and I occasionally speak improper words and think improper thoughts.

As a first born male I was redeemed from a kohen by my father. I did have a brit milah and pidyon haben (redemption of the first-born), and I was bar-mitzvah at 13. I try to attend synagogue regularly for Shabbat on Friday nights, and all Jewish holidays. I fast for most of Yom Kippur. I do not celebrate non-Jewish holidays with my non-Jewish friends, and would not ever consider changing to a different religion.

At synagogue we do not say all the traditional prayers, and we add a few "new" English prayers. I avoid pork, eating meat with milk, and other such kosher rules, but I don't necessarily eat only kosher food. I rarely say a blessing over the food I eat, mainly because it's rarely kosher, and I don't know all the appropriate blessings.

My question is this: Am I doing any good at all? Do abbreviated prayers, selective mitzvahs, and acknowledged Jewish identity reap any reward at all? Or by being "Jewish Lite" am I no "better" than someone who is completely non-observant?

I just need to feel that somehow I am contributing the greater good of Judaism by being somewhat observant instead of non-observant. Please let me know if I am making any difference by doing the little I do. Thank you.

Answer

You and I have a lot in common. I am also Jewish. I also had a brit, (but not a pidyon haben – redemption of the first-born – my parents only did that for my older brother). I was also bar-mitzvah at age 13.

Like you, I also don't think of myself as "Orthodox" (although most people would call me that). Rather, I think of myself as a Jew who tries to observe the Torah

which G-d gave us. But, like you, I often succumb to the inexorable onslaught of human failings – laziness, desire, convenience, etc.

You wrote that you occasionally speak improper words. Did you know that more than one-third of the Yom Kippur penitential prayers are devoted to asking G-d to forgive us for sins committed through speech? Regarding proper thoughts, King David prayed: "Create within me a pure heart, G-d."

The bottom line: Everyone fails. Nobody is perfect.

So, I think my answer to your question should be evident by now. Any mitzvahs which you perform are certainly praiseworthy and should be encouraged. (Obviously, a mitzvah shouldn't be done at the expense of a transgression. Examples: Friday night after sunset, lighting Shabbat candles is no longer a mitzvah but rather a transgression. The same goes for driving to synagogue. In such a case, the way to express your Jewish identity is to stay home!) Furthermore, your deeds can influence others, without your even knowing it; for example a Jewish friend may stop eating pork because of your example. Or, he may simply tell another person "I have a friend who doesn't eat pork," and that third party, whom you may never even meet, may decide to re-think his own level of observance.

There is a danger of being "Jewish Lite," however. It could furnish you with a feeling of being "comfortable" with your observance level. That should never happen to anyone. We all need to continually strive to grow, study and learn more and more about the Torah. Therefore, you should feel happy about the Jewish things that you do, but you shouldn't think of yourself as being at a *fixed* level of observance. Realize that you can add, if even just one mitzvah a year. Example: Get a *tzedaka* (charity) box in your house and put in a coin (even a small one) every day (except Shabbat and Holidays). Perhaps the most important thing for you now is to study Torah on a daily, or at least weekly, basis. If you tell me where you live I can try to suggest some possible study partners for you.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Kerem Maharal

Near the Carmel Coast is this settlement, named for the great Torah philosopher and author, Rabbi Livo of Prague. He is often referred to as the “Maharal” – an acronym for *Moreinu Harav Livo*.

Although there are some doubts about the authenticity of the legends of the "golem" he is reputed to have created for protecting his people from hostile anti-Semites, the Maharal occupies a very special place in Jewish history thanks to the much studied volumes of Torah thought which he authored.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Payment of Honor

In the final preparations to leave Egypt, G-d tells Moshe, *Please speak in the ears of the people, that each man may ask from his friend and each woman from her friend articles of silver and gold. (Shemot 11:2)* The word *please* indicates a reluctance on the part of the person addressed. Moreover, Moshe was urged to “speak to the ears of the people” – who, apparently, needed urging themselves. What about this request of their Egyptian neighbors was so difficult for the Jews to make, that in its instruction G-d anticipates a two-tiered resistance from Moshe and from the people?

This request comes after a period of three days of darkness so thick that the Egyptians were completely immobilized. They were at the mercy of the Jews, who were graced with light and mobility. For three days, all of the Egyptians' possessions were in plain view, unprotected in their homes. But despite their impoverished state, and temptation to take revenge for all the horrors inflicted on them by their former taskmasters, not a single Jew took advantage of the situation. Not one touched an Egyptian or even the least of his possessions. When they emerged from the darkness, the Egyptians were in disbelief that their possessions were in order and unscathed. The people had proven their moral worth in the most brilliant and astounding manner.

Here, the Torah tells us *G-d let Egypt see that the people was worthy of favor*. By revealing their impeccable character, generations of antipathy and stereotypes were eradicated. At this moment, they were struck by the moral nobility of the people they had mistreated for so many years.

It is no wonder, then, that Moshe and the people were reluctant to compromise this moral victory by requesting from the Egyptians the very possessions which they dared not touch without permission. They needed to be persuaded and urged to ask for these gifts. Nevertheless, G-d commands they make this request; He did not want his people to leave empty-handed. More, He wanted the prosperity of the fledgling nation to be founded upon and consecrated through the recognition of their moral greatness – the willing donation of their former oppressors who now felt impelled to be generous and make amends.

Sources: Commentary Shemot 11:2-3

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