

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BESHALACH • 13 SHVAT 5782 JANUARY 15, 2022 • VOL 29 NO. 15

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Playing G-d?

“...for I, Hashem, am your Healer.” (15:26)

Today, many religious groups routinely reject some or all mainstream health care on theological grounds, including Christian Scientists, Jehovah Witnesses, Amish, and Scientologists.

Somewhere along the line, in some people’s minds Judaism got lumped together with these groups.

The current debate about gene-editing technologies that have the potential to cure a vast array of genetic diseases including Tay-Sachs, Fragile X, cystic fibrosis, different forms of cancers, Alzheimer’s disease and auto-immune diseases show that, in point of fact, Judaism is more ‘lenient’ than many secular views.

The ethical issue of applying this technology to a fertilized egg highlights a fundamental difference between the secular and halachic perspectives. Secular bioethicists have expressed concern about, and opposition to, the tampering by scientific research with evolutionary processes. In the view of halacha, there is no ‘magic’ evolutionary process that must not be tampered with. Human beings

serve as partners with Hashem in the creation process (but do not have absolute autonomy in utilizing medical interventions). Moreover, these bioethicists do not favor medical procedures that “violate” the autonomous rights of the child. Halacha, by contrast, emphasizes the need to improve health care as a vital factor in allowing gene editing technologies to be performed on the fertilized egg or fetus, and views the development of gene editing as a positive activity by humans as partners in the creation process.

In the Jewish community, many potential *shidduchim* fail to materialize when genetic testing reveals that both parties are carriers for Tay-Sachs, cystic fibrosis or other recessive-linked genetic diseases. If gene-editing procedures are proven to be safe, these couples could now choose to get married and have healthy children by applying these biotechnologies to their in vitro-generated embryos. “*Dor Yesharim*” and other gene testing services may happily become a footnote in Jewish history.

- Sources: *Tampering with the Genetic Code of Life: Comparing Secular and Halakhic Ethical Concerns*, By John D. Loike and Moshe D. Tendler (*Hakirah*, the Flatbush Journal of Jewish Law and Thought)

Q & A

Questions

1. What percentage of the Jewish People died during the plague of darkness?
2. Why did the oath that Yosef administered to his brothers apply to Moshe's generation?
3. Why did the Egyptians want to pursue the Jewish People?
4. Where did the Egyptians get animals to pull their chariots?
5. What does it mean that the Jewish People "took hold of their fathers' craft" (*tafsu umnut avotam*)?
6. How did G-d cause the wheels of the Egyptian chariots to fall off?
7. Why were the dead Egyptians cast out of the sea?
8. To what future time is the verse hinting when it uses the future tense of "Then Moshe and Bnei Yisrael will sing"?
9. Why are the Egyptians compared to stone, lead, and straw?
10. The princes of Edom and Moav had nothing to fear from the Jewish People. Why, then, were they "confused and gripped with trembling"?
11. Moshe foretold that he would not enter the Land of Israel. Which word in the parsha indicates this?
12. Why is Miriam referred to as "Aharon's sister" and not as "Moshe's sister"?
13. The Jewish women trusted that G-d would grant the Jewish People a miraculous victory over the Egyptians. How do we see this?
14. Which sections of the Torah did the Jewish People receive at Marah?
15. When did Bnei Yisrael run out of food?
16. What lesson in *derech erez* concerning the eating of meat is taught in this week's Parsha?
17. How did non-Jews experience the taste of the manna?
18. The Prophet Yirmiyahu showed the Jewish People a jar of manna prepared in the time of Moshe. Why?
19. Which verse in this week's parsha alludes to the plague of blood?
20. Why did Moshe's hands become heavy during the war against Amalek?

Answers

1. 13:18 - Eighty percent (four-fifths).
2. 13:19 - Yosef made his brothers swear that they would make their children swear.
3. 14:5 - To regain their wealth.
4. 14:7 - From those Egyptians who feared the word of G-d and kept their animals inside during the plagues.
5. 14:10 - They cried out to G-d.
6. 14:25 - He melted them with fire.
7. 14:30 - So that the Jewish People would see the destruction of the Egyptians and be assured of no further pursuit.
8. 15:1 - Resurrection of the dead during the time of Mashiach .
9. 15:5 - The wickedest ones floated like straw, dying slowly. The average ones suffered less, sinking like stone. Those still more righteous sunk like lead, dying immediately.
10. 15:14 - They felt horrible seeing Israel in a state of glory.
11. 15:17 - "*T'vi-aimo ...*" ~ "Bring them" (and not "bring us").
12. 15:20 - Aharon put himself at risk for her when she was struck with *tzara'at*. (See Bamidbar 12:12)
13. 15:20 - They brought musical instruments with them in preparation for the miraculous victory celebration.
14. 15:25 - Shabbat, Red Heifer, Judicial Laws.
15. 16:1 - 15th of Iyar.
16. 16:8 - One should not eat meat to the point of satiety.
17. 16:21 - The sun melted whatever manna remained in the fields. This flowed into streams from which animals drank. Whoever ate these animals tasted manna.
18. 16:32 - The people claimed they couldn't study Torah because they were too busy earning a livelihood. Yirmiyahu showed them the manna saying: "If you study Torah, G-d will provide for you just as he provided for your ancestors in the desert."
19. 17:5 - "And your staff with which you smote the river...."
20. 17:12 - Because he was remiss in his duty, since he, not Yehoshua, should have led the battle.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Piles and Piles

In the miraculous spectacle known as the Parting of the Sea, the Red Sea's waters stopped their normal flow and instead began to pile up, so that the Jewish People could cross the river as though it were dry land. When the Song of the Sea describes this aspect of the miracle, it says *ne'ermu mayim* (Ex. 15:8), using a cognate of the word *areimah* ("pile/heap") to denote the amassing of water. In this essay we consider the possible etymological connection between the word *areimah* and a similar word – *chamar*. The latter word also appears in the Exodus story, as the Bible relates that when the Plague of Frogs finished, the dead frogs were gathered in "piles and piles" – *chamarim chamarim*. (Ex. 8:10)

The trilateral root AYIN-REISH-MEM, from which *areimah* derives, has multiple meanings (see below), but appears eleven times in the Bible (besides for Ex. 15:8) in the sense of "pile." Although a plurality of these occurrences is in the Book of Chronicles (II Chron. 31:6-9), the word is also found in Jeremiah (3:26), Haggai (2:16), Ruth (3:17), Nehemiah (3:34, 13:15), and Song of Songs (7:3). This word also occurs in the Mishna (*Terumot* 2:1, *Maaserot* 1:5-6, 5:7, *Beitzah* 4:1).

The word *chamarim*, which seems to derive from trilateral root CHET-MEM-REISH, appears in the Bible in the sense of "piles" three times (twice in Ex. 8:10 and once in Num. 11:32). A related form also appears once in the Mishnah (*Uktzin* 2:5), when referring to a heap of onions that had been amassed into one grouping (*chamran*). In commenting on that Mishnah, Rabbi Sherirah Gaon (906–1006) notes that the verb used to denote the amassing of onion cognates with the Biblical term *chamarim chamarim* (as does Maimonides in his commentary there).

Although I have not been able to locate any source that explicitly takes note of a connection between the words *areimah* and *chamarim*, such an

etymological connection does seem tenable in two steps: First of all, the root AYIN-REISH-MEM appears to be related to the root AYIN-MEM-REISH ("bundling") by way of metathesis. Indeed, when Maimonides (in his commentary to *Peah* 6:2 and *Eduyot* 4:4) defines a *gadish* as an *areimah* of *amarim*, he purposely used these two related terms because they are indeed synonymous (see Rabbi Yaakov Emden's *Mishneh Lechem* to *Peah* 5:1). Secondly, the root AYIN-MEM-REISH seems related to CHET-MEM-REISH by way of the interchangeability of the letters AYIN and CHET. Thus, through this two-stage process, we can see that *areimah* and *chamarim* are actually related to each other. As noted, I have not yet seen any commentators who explicitly link these two words to each other, nor have I found anybody who offers a way of differentiating between the meanings of these apparent synonyms.

Our explanation of *ne'ermu mayim* as referring to the waters of the sea piling up into "heaps" follows *Mechillta* (to Ex. 14:16) that writes on this verse that the waters became *areimot areimot*. This understanding is echoed by Rashbam, who writes that the waters "piled up high like a heap of wheat."

However, there is an alternate way of understanding what exactly *ne'ermu mayim* means. Besides referring to "piles," the root AYIN-REISH-MEM can also refer to "cleverness" (for example, see Gen. 3:1, Job 5:12, Prov. 19:25). Based on that, Targum Onkelos translates *ne'ermu mayim* into Aramaic as *chakimu mayim* - "the waters became smart." This also seems to be Rashi's preferred explanation.

As Chizkuni clarifies, "smart waters" means that the waters of the Red Sea were intelligent enough to pursue the Egyptians and drown them (and has nothing to do with added electrolytes). Rabbi Chaim Paltiel similarly explains that it refers to the

waters being able to differentiate between Jew and Egyptian, thereby allowing the Jews to cross safely and the Egyptians not. On the other hand, the Tosafistic compilation *Sefer HaGan* explains that this means that the water suddenly accrued the knowledge to sing of G-d's praises (alongside the Jews who sang *Az Yashir* in response to the miracles on the sea).

Like the *Mechilta*, Rabbi Saadia Gaon (892-942), also known as Rasag, also defines *ne'ermu* in this context as an inflection of the word *areimah*. Yet, in his objections to Rasag's commentary, Donash Ibn Librat (920-985) disagrees with Rasag's understanding – although regrettably there is an omission in the printed version of Donash's work, and so his preferred explanation is not presented. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra gives somewhat of a clue as to Donash's understanding, as Ibn Ezra wrote a work which defends Rasag from Donash's objections (published under the title *Sefat Yeter*). Regarding this specific case, Ibn Ezra simply notes that Donash differs with Rasag, and comments that Donash's preferred explanation should be considered *drash* rather than *pshat*. In both of his commentaries to Exodus, Ibn Ezra follows *Mechilta* and Rasag. It is quite possible that Donash, for some reason, preferred the approach taken by Targum Onkelos and Rashi in explaining *ne'ermu* as referring to “cleverness.”

Fascinatingly, the Midrash (*Esther Rabbah* 3:15) states that when G-d punishes the wicked in Gehinnom, He strips them of their external clothes. Another opinion in the Midrash adds that when G-d punished the Egyptians, He similarly did so while they were naked, as alluded to in the first word of the phrase *ne'ermu mayim*, which seems to be a cognate of *arum* (“naked”).

If you've been keeping score, you'll notice that the root AYIN-REISH-MEM has three seemingly disparate meanings: “pile,” “cleverness,” “nakedness.” *Machberet Menachem* mentions these three senses of that root, but does not intimate a connection between these concepts.

However, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), in his commentary to Gen. 2:25, explains the connection between “cleverness” and “pile” by noting that a pile is typically comprised of multiple items that have been heaped together. Each of

these items on its own has no major value, but when grouped together in a pile, can become something important. In the same way, “cleverness” is like a “pile” of thoughts that the intelligent person has considered. While one thought or action on its own may not seem important, when all of these are joined together, they show how the smart person is indeed smarter than the average bear.

It is most noteworthy that Rabbi Hirsch (to Gen. 1:22–23, 11:3) uses a similar idea to explain the meaning of *amar* (with an ALEPH), *chamar*, and *amar* (with an AYIN) – all of which are related through the interchangeability of the letters ALEPH, CHET, and AYIN. Rabbi Hirsch sees the underlying definition of CHET-MEM-REISH (as in *chomer*, “matter/material”) to be the unification and conglomeration of multiple components. He compares this concept to *amar/omer*, which refers to “bundling” many stalks; *chamarim* which are “piles” of like items; and *amar* (“speech/statement”), which is composed of many ideas/words that are focused on one all-encompassing theme. Rabbi Hirsch also notes that the word *cheimar* (“mortar”) refers to that material which is used to “unify” bricks and hold them together (see Gen. 11:3, 14:10, Ex. 2:3).

After explaining the above-mentioned two meanings of AYIN-REISH-MEM (“pile” and “cleverness”), Rabbi Hirsch admits that he does not know how “nakedness” fits into the picture, instead arguing that the word for nakedness is actually derived from a different root, AYIN-VAV-REISH (*ohr*, “skin/hide”). Elsewhere, Rabbi Hirsch (to Gen. 13:13) explains that “nakedness” is connected to “cleverness” in that the clever person is unencumbered by the worldly considerations that often cloud a person's intellect. In being “naked,” he is bereft from such external forces of confusion and can therefore think straight. Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) in *Keset HaSofer* (to Gen. 3:1) makes a similar point.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Brelsau (1740-1814) traces the trilateral root AYIN-REISH-MEM to the biliteral AYIN-REISH (whose core meaning is “revealing/unconcealed”) and uses that to explain the connection between these various meanings. The concept of “nakedness” obviously relates to the core meaning of AYIN-REISH because being

in the nude exposes/reveals one's body. Rabbi Pappenheim explains that this meaning also relates to "piles" because in the typical agrarian model, putting one's grain in piles is only done after the kernels of grain have already been taken out of their sheaves, and thus "revealed" (as opposed to a *gadish* which refers to piles of grain that are still within the sheaf, contra Maimonides who seems to equate *gadish* and *areimah*). Interestingly, Rabbi Pappenheim notes that *armon* (Gen. 30:37) refers to a type of tree (possibly the *Platanus orientalis*) that that only has branches on the top, but not

along its length, thus giving it the appearance of being "naked."

Finally, Rabbi Pappenheim connects the "cleverness" meaning of AYIN-REISH-MEM to AYIN-REISH by first explaining that *eir* ("awake") derives from this root, because when one awakens, one's abilities (that are not readily apparent as he sleeps) are suddenly *revealed*. Based on this, he explains that "cleverness" refers to a person whose intellectual acumen remains sharp and aware, as though he is always "awake."

A Future of Freedom

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

The first verse in the Torah portion of Beshalach seems to contradict the previous verse, which concluded the Torah portion of Bo. Here, in Beshalach, the Torah states, "And it was when Pharaoh sent out the Jewish People." Pharaoh sent them out. But the previous verse, in Bo, states regarding *tefillin*, "And it should be a sign upon your hand and *totafot* between your eyes that Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand." It says that Hashem took us out and not that Pharaoh sent us out.

So, which was it? Did Pharaoh send us out or did Hashem take us out? Or are we able to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory statements? (It should be noted that the event of Hashem taking us out of Egypt is stated numerous times in the Torah, including in the verses of the *Shema Yisrael* prayer, and is central to the history and essence of the Jewish People.)

The first verse of Megillat Esther begins, "*Vayehi b'yemi Achashverosh* – And it was in the days of Achashverosh." Rabbi Levi, or some say Rabbi Yonason, said, "We have a tradition from the men of the Great Assembly that anywhere it says *vayehi* is an expression of *tzar* – pain. I have heard in the name of the Vilna Gaon that taking the future tense of *yehi* – "it will be" – and turning it into the past tense with a prefixed *vav* signals that the past is being projected into the future. That is sad and painful. The future is being limited and confined by the past. Good does not come from that.

Applying this to the beginning of Beshalach, one could say that the Jewish People were looking at their future freedom with the perspective of their past, from their previous point of view as slaves. Just as they were slaves to Pharaoh, they were freed from bondage by Pharaoh. And if he could free them, he could enslave them again. So, their freedom was freedom with trepidation. Only when they lost all hope of escape on the Egyptian banks of the Reed Sea, with the sea before them and the Egyptian army behind them, and chose to follow Nachshon into the Sea with their total faith in Hashem – only then did they become truly free from the mentality of slavery and ready to accept a new Master at Mount Sinai – the One Who truly took them out of Egypt.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH: INTRODUCTION

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”
(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

We have reached the most central and possibly most potent prayer in the *Siddur* – the *Amidah*. It is so essential that it is prayed three times a day on a regular weekday, four times on Shabbat and the Festivals, and five times on Yom Kippur. During the week it is recited in the morning, in the afternoon and at night. Why three times? Our Sages introduced the recitation of the *Amidah* in the morning and in the afternoon to parallel the daily offerings that took place in the Holy Temple each morning and afternoon. The third *Amidah* corresponds to the nightly burning of the fats and the limbs of the afternoon service. Rabbi Yehuda HaLevy (1075-1141) was one of the most profound and eloquent philosophers in the era known as the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry. He writes in his seminal work called *Sefer HaKuzari* that “prayer is the spiritual food of the soul.” Just as the body cannot live without physical nourishment, the soul cannot survive without spiritual nourishment. Subsequently, we need to pray three times a day just as we need to eat three times a day.

Composed with Divine inspiration by the Men of the Great Assembly, the *Amidah* is a truly astonishing work. Its final format was established by the court of Rabban Gamliel in Yavneh after the destruction of the Second Temple. The Talmud (*Brachot* 28b) identifies Shimon HaPekoli (“the cotton merchant”) as being the arranger of the blessings in the order we use today.

The Rambam (*Hilchot Tefillah* 1), in explaining why the Men of Great Assembly composed the *Amidah*, writes that after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the

Holy Temple in Jerusalem in the Jewish year 3338 he sent the remnants of the Jewish People into exile. Due to the variety of languages they were exposed to, the younger generations was not able to articulate their needs or praise G-d clearly through prayer. They found themselves unable to express themselves in *Lashon Hakodesh* – the holy language of the Torah – as there was not yet any formalized prayer to help them convey their requirements and aspirations in an appropriate and acceptable manner. Subsequently, the Men of the Great Assembly felt compelled to compose a series of prayers to restore a sense of purpose to those who were reciting them.

From where did the Men of the Great Assembly understand that it was possible to substitute, in a sense, the lack of Temple services with prayer? A verse in Hoshea (14:3) states: “And let our lips substitute for bulls (i.e. Temple offerings).” This concept is indeed stated in the prayers in the *Siddur*, where we declare, “Master of the Universe, You commanded us to bring the *Tamid* (continual) offering ... the *Tamid* was discontinued and we have neither a *Kohen* serving, nor a *Levi* on his platform, nor a *Yisrael* at his station. But, You said, ‘Let our lips substitute for bulls.’” Consequently, the *Amidah* was established, to assist us in articulating our needs and desires in the most effective way possible.

It may seem, at first glance, that the function of the *Amidah* is to enable us to ask G-d for all of our personal requests. But in his far-reaching and indispensable work called *Chovot Halevavot* – Duties of the Heart – the brilliant ethicist and

philosopher Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Paquda of Zaragoza (1050-1120) explains that the *Amidah* is so much more. When we beseech G-d to grant us our wishes, he explains, it is not to make G-d aware of our needs. G-d, being Omniscient, certainly does not need us to reveal to Him our hearts' desires. Rather, by articulating our needs we are actually reinforcing to *ourselves* our complete dependency on G-d. We are placing our absolute trust in Him, acknowledging that it is only He who can grant us our requests.

In discussing the *Amidah*, the beginning of chapter five of Tractate *Brachot* (30b) says, "One should not stand to pray (the *Amidah*) unless it is with a sense of reverence. The pious individuals would prepare for one hour and only then pray, in order that they might direct their hearts to their Father in Heaven." Rabbeinu Yonah explains that they would first meditate on the Omnipotence of G-d as compared to the frailty of mankind, and only then would they begin the recitation of the *Amidah*. However, the Vilna Gaon understands the *mishna* slightly differently. He observes that there seems to be a grammatical nuance in the *mishna*'s wording that suggests that the hour of preparation was not only dedicated contemplation. Rather, it was also a time for all of the preparatory prayers that are recited before the *Amidah*.

Due to its great significance, our Sages instruct us to introduce the recitation of the *Amidah* with the

following declaration: "My L-rd, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise." (*Tehillim* 51:17) Regarding this declaration, Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer quotes his revered father-in-law, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter (1915-2001), one of the heads of the famed Telz Yeshiva in Cleveland and one of the acknowledged spiritual leaders of his generation. Rabbi Gifter points out that the Ramban understands the Hebrew word used in this verse for "my lips" – *sefati* – as alluding to "*sefat hanahar*," the banks of the river. Riverbanks stop the water from overflowing and they also ensure that the water flows only in the direction which the riverbanks define. According to Rabbi Gifter, the soul is analogous to the water, and the human body is akin to the riverbank in that it stifles and suppresses the spiritual aspirations of the soul by "forcing" it to adapt itself to the demands of the corporeal at the expense of the transcendent. But, when a person stands in supplication before his Creator, in complete subjugation and with a pure heart, the soul surges past the "riverbanks" of the body, leaving behind its physical confines as it stretches upwards to join together with its Father in Heaven.

That moment is called the *Amidah*.

To be continued...

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

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 Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, Mrs. Helena Stern.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Megillah 23-29

Returning the Blessing

Rav said (to Rav Huna), “When I gave you a *brachah*, why did you fail to reply to me in kind, also with a *brachah*, by saying, ‘And the same to (you) my master?’ ”

Rashi explains this complaint/rebuke as Rav saying to his Torah student that the moment when he offered him the *brachah* may have been a moment of Divine favor. And if only Rav Huna would have offered Rav a reciprocal *brachah*, Hashem would have blessed Rav with a glorious wardrobe and great wealth. Rashi points out that although Rav’s *brachah* was *not* subsequently fulfilled in the manner desired by Rav Huna (although it was indeed fulfilled in a technical sense), the “return *brachah*” that Rav Huna should have offered may have resulted in Hashem blessing Rav with the finest clothing and riches, in accordance with the intent of the *brachah*.

The *gemara* tells of this *brachah*-encounter between Rav and Rav Huna in detail in the context of people going to extraordinary lengths in order to have wine for the Kiddush cup on Shabbat. Rav asked his student, Rav Huna, “Where is your fine belt that you normally wear, instead of the shoddy one you are wearing now?” Rav Huna answered, “I used it as collateral to secure a loan in order to be able to afford to buy wine for Shabbat Kiddush.” His explanation made a very favorable impact on his Torah teacher, Rav. Rav saw that his student would forgo his normal respectable appearance for the sake of fulfilling a mitzvah. As a result, Rav gave his student a *brachah*: “In the merit of your dedication and sacrifice, may you be covered with clothes.” Rav’s intent was clearly to offer a *brachah* that Hashem would enrich Rav Huna (despite Rav’s somewhat vague wording of “being covered with clothes”).

The story picks up at a later point in time. Rav Huna made a wedding ceremony and festive meal for his son, Rabbah. The preparations were finally made after much hustle and bustle. While waiting for the guests to arrive, Rav Huna took a few minutes to rest on a bed to “recharge his batteries.” Friends and family arrived for the celebration, taking off their coats and handing them to Rav Huna’s children to put in a safe place. But these coat handlers did not notice their father, Rav Huna, on the bed, and they in fact placed the coats on the bed on top of Rav Huna, completely “covering him with clothes.” Hashem fulfills the *brachah* of a *tzaddik*, such as Rav, and this was clearly a fulfillment of the words of Rav’s *brachah* for Rav Huna to be covered in clothes.

The *gemara* relates that when Rav heard of this fulfillment of his *brachah*, he rebuked and complained to Rav Huna, saying, “When I gave you the *brachah*, why did you fail to reply to me in kind, also with a *brachah*, by saying, ‘And the same to (you) my master?’ ”

Many ask why Rav was upset that Rav Huna did not also return his *beracha* by replying with “And the same (*brachah*) to Mar (i.e. you, Rav, the Torah master).” Here is one explanation of what Rav was thinking that prompted him to rebuke his student. Rav was in effect saying to Rav Huna, “Perhaps if you had returned the *brachah* for me, Hashem would fulfill it by granting me great wealth, with which I could afford to cover myself with clothing.” The words of Rav’s *brachah* were somewhat vague, and Rav Huna for some reason did not merit a very positive fulfillment of these words. Rather, for Rav Huna the *brachah* came to fruition merely by

the coats being strewn atop his resting person at his son's wedding. However, Rav thought that if that exact same *brachah* had been initially echoed back to him by Rav Huna, perhaps Rav would merit fulfillment of the *brachah* in a manner more in line with his intent – to be blessed with riches with which he could purchase clothing he needed to accompany his Torah greatness. (This is the explanation of why Rav was upset according to the commentary of Rabbi Yoel Sirkis, often referred to as the Bach, although other explanations can also be found in the writings of the great Torah commentaries).

Although our *gemara* teaches what Rav told Rav Huna about Rav Huna's negligence in not giving the same *brachah* to Rav as well, this practice of "blessing the blesser" is apparently not cited as halacha in the Rambam, Tur or Shulchan Aruch. It is nevertheless deserving of being called a "Talmud Tip." Whenever it is appropriate, a person who receives a *brachah* from another person should not only answer "Amen" but should also have the courtesy and integrity to reciprocate by "returning" the *brachah*. Doing so expresses one's gratitude for receiving a *bracha* and exhibits *chessed* and loving-kindness towards others.

▪ *Megillah 27b*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Pharaoh finally sends the *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. With pillars of cloud and fire, Hashem leads them toward *Eretz Yisrael* on a circuitous route, avoiding the *Pelishtim* (Philistines). Pharaoh regrets the loss of so many slaves, and chases after the Jews with his army. The Jews are very afraid as the Egyptians draw close, but Hashem protects them. Moshe raises his staff, and Hashem splits the sea, enabling the Jews to cross safely. Pharaoh, his heart hardened by Hashem, commands his army to pursue, whereupon the waters crash down upon the Egyptian army. Moshe and Miriam lead the men and women, respectively, in a song of thanks.

After three days of travel, only to find bitter waters at Marah, the people complain. Moshe miraculously produces potable water. In Marah they receive certain mitzvahs. The people complain that they ate better food in Egypt. Hashem sends quail for meat and provides manna, miraculous bread that falls from the sky every day except Shabbat. On Friday, a double portion descends to supply the Shabbat needs. No one is able to obtain more than his daily portion, but manna collected on Friday suffices for two days so the Jews can rest on Shabbat. Some manna is set aside as a memorial for future generations.

When the Jews again complain about a lack of water, Moshe miraculously produces water from a rock. Then Amalek attacks. Joshua leads the Jews in battle, and Moshe prays for their welfare.

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PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE MOON

The Moon says: “He created the Moon for festivals; the Sun knows its [time of] setting.”
(*Tehillim* 104:19)

The moon’s light is but a dim reflection of the sun that is only significant when the sun sets. It waxes and wanes in a monthly cycle that forms the lunar calendar necessary for the sanctification of the festivals. The moon sings that it was created not for its own light, but rather to indicate the meetings between Hashem and His nation. It thus teaches of self-effacement and of humble dependency upon Hashem.

On a metaphoric level, the moon is symbolic of the Jewish nation, whose calendar it conducts. Like the moon, our brilliance is only to the extent that we reflect Hashem’s light and teachings. Our history, therefore, has ups and downs corresponding to our relationship with Hashem. Although we all but disappeared when we were exiled, we will yet wax to a full moon and radiate the world with Hashem’s light.

- Sources: *Radak*; *Bereishis Rabbah* (6:1); *Succah* 29a

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

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Authenticating Doubts

The anticipated moment of redemption has finally arrived. After two hundred and ten years of servitude, of grueling and dehumanizing slave labor, the Jewish People are finally set free. They have followed Moshe’s instructions regarding the *korban Pesach* to precision and they are freed from the Egyptian grasp, led by a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. The future, it seems, is bright.

But then, Pharaoh has a change of heart and directs six hundred chariots with the finest crews to chase and retrieve the Jewish People. The Jews, camped by the sea, watch in horror as the Egyptian army appears, marching in hot pursuit. In view of the situation, one can easily understand their misgivings about Moshe’s mission. They had no basis to assume that G-d would perform such an extraordinary miracle as the splitting of the sea. They doubt Moshe, saying to him, “*Is it for lack of graves in Egypt that you brought us here, to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us to take us out from Egypt?*”

These doubts, which persistently reemerge in the people’s minds, points out Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (*Kuzari* 1:49, 41

87), are an important testimony of the authenticity of Moshe’s mission. Ten times throughout their sojourn in the wilderness, the people challenge Moshe’s leadership. This is a clear indication that the Jewish people were of lucid mind, and were not easily duped or bought. They were not fogged by fanciful notions, nor willing to accept any alternative to their miserable lot in Egypt. If this people, full of challenge and doubt – a *stiff-necked* people – ultimately commit themselves to Moshe and the Law he transmits to them, this is proof that the impact of the events created an unshakeable belief in the authenticity of Moshe and the Torah. The Torah records these doubts to underscore that the mission of the Jewish People was not accepted by the unvarnished whimsical masses. Indeed, the same sentiment is expressed by our Sages when they describe how all the blind, deaf, and lame were cured at Mount Sinai. The Law was not given to the disabled, feeble misfits of society. It was presented to, and accepted by, the strong and lucid – who recognized its power and truth.

- Sources: *Commentary*, *Shemot* 14:11