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Insights and Analyses
of Torah Topics

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INTRODUCTION

After a year immersed in תורה study in ארץ ישראל, basking in the “sun” of the light of תורה, it is only natural to become concerned – or even scared – about what awaits us in חוץ לארץ. For even if one realizes, as hopefully she does, that תורה is meant to be learned, lived and loved in all places and at all times, it still is only natural to feel that that light of תורה in חוץ לארץ is, at best, like the “rays of the moon”. כי מציון מירושלים – תצא תורה ודבר ה' – How is one supposed to return to a world that is a mere reflection of the main attraction?

After 40 years of משה רבנו's leadership, it is only natural for עם ישראל (and יהושע himself) to be concerned about the transition to being led by יהושע. No matter how great יהושע might be, “The elders of that generation said: משה's countenance is like the sun, and יהושע's countenance is like the moon. Woe for that shame, woe for that disgrace” (בבא בתרא עה). In response to these human concerns, ה' reassures יהושע (and the people) that “No man will challenge you all the days of your life, and as I was with משה so shall I be with you. I will neither forsake you nor abandon you” (יהושע א:ה).

Just as with יהושע, ה'’s reassurance of חזק ואמץ rings true for our students as they leave the walls of the MMY בית מדרש. Although the rays of the sun were very bright and it may have been relatively easy to bask in their glory compared to the challenges that lie ahead, success is out there for the taking with G-d's support and help.

Rav Soloveichik points out that the הלכות of פרק א' in רמב"ם תורה seems to be repetitious. In the first seven הלכות, the רמב"ם talks about who has to learn תורה and who has to teach תורה. Then in הלכה ה' the רמב"ם once again says “Everyone in Israel needs to learn Torah”. Why is the רמב"ם going back to the beginning and repeating the very basics that “everyone needs to learn תורה”? The Rav

answers, in classic Brisker fashion, that there are two components to תלמוד תורה. In the first seven הלכות, the רמב"ם is talking about the **educational-information** necessity of תלמוד תורה – who needs to learn, who needs to teach, how one decides who gets to learn when there are limited resources for hiring teachers, etc. But starting with הלכה ה' the רמב"ם is referring to the **emotional-spiritual** side of תלמוד תורה. This needs to be done consistently, no matter how limited the resources of time or money may be. In the first seven הלכות the quantity of תלמוד תורה is stressed. In the last six הלכות the consistency or spiritual quality is what is stressed. In the first section it is obvious that the person who is less intellectually capable is going to be able to accomplish less. After all, learning תורה is an intellectual exercise. However in the second section the רמב"ם emphasizes that all people have to set aside consistent time for learning; all are equal when it comes to the need and ability to grow spiritually from the process. And that process is based on daily, consistent study, even if in small doses.

The main source for an obligation for consistent “daily even if short” doses of תלמוד תורה was beautifully explained in connection to יהושע. יהושע is the 5-star general, the head of the Armed Forces עם ישראל, the one completely and totally focused on conquering and settling ארץ ישראל. It is specifically יהושע who is commanded והגית בו יומם וליילה (יהושע א:ח) – you should study it day and night. יהושע, who is assumedly completely engrossed in battle plans and strategy of war, is the one who is told that the secret to his success is twice daily commitment to bits of תלמוד תורה. The גמרא in נדרים (ח) tells us that this תלמוד תורה can be fulfilled minimally by קריאת שמע at night and during the day. Small doses, but consistent doses, even when one is pressured for time and there are other priorities, seem to be the secret to ואז תשכיל ואת דרכיך ואת תצליח – and then you will succeed.

As our students go out to a world of יהושע – where the light may be dimmer than משה's and the tug for one's time may be more difficult to balance, the messages of חזק ואמץ, the promise that ה' will not abandon nor forsake, and the secret to success of והגית בו יומם וליילה,

of setting aside consistent daily time for תורה study, sets them on a path for continued success.

יְהוֹשֻׁעַ may be compared to the moon, a mere reflection of prior greatness. But it is also יְהוֹשֻׁעַ who merits having the sun stand still for him when needed. This journal is small reflection of all of the sunlight that shone in the מדרש MMY בית מדרש in 5774. But it serves as a reminder of what can be accomplished in relatively short amounts of time, as well as a way to bring a little bit of that sun back with our students to חוץ לארץ. I pray, as they learn from their friends' articles and bask once again in the rays of the sun, that they allow the sun to stand still just for a little while and let their learning remind them of their time in the מדרש MMY בית מדרש. We are also honored to share our students' hard work and allow the public to get a taste of the אור מן האור that exists in that בית מדרש.

As we say in קידוש לבנה, ויהי אור הלבנה כאור החמה, May we merit the day that the light of the moon be like the light of the sun.

חזקו ואמצו!

Rabbi David Katz

תנ"ך

Moshe, Noach, Avraham and Yonah: Advocates and Agents

There are many details in the פשט of the stories of Noach and Moshe that beg us to look deeper into the connection between them. In specific, there are similarities in the story of Hashem informing Noach of the flood and of Hashem consulting Moshe about His threat to wipe out עם ישראל after the חטא העגל. As well, Avraham's story with S'dom and Yonah's encounter with Ninveh shed light on the whole issue of attempting to change Hashem's decree.

When Moshe is born, his mother puts him in a תבה¹. This לשון should immediately draw us back to the תבה that Hashem instructs Noach to build². Further, Rashi comments on the the fact that both תבות were waterproof with כפר³. The 40 days that Noach was in the תבה⁴, and the 40 days that Moshe spends beseeching Hashem for mercy on Bnei Yisrael also draw the two characters, and specifically these stories, together. Even further, both of them wait seven days before entering the 40 days. With Noach⁵, the hesitation seems to be because Noach doubted that Hashem would bring the flood, so he waits to go in to his תיבה

¹ שמות ב:ג

² בראשית ו:יד

³ שם ו:יד

⁴ שם ז:יב, יז

⁵ שם ז:ד

– מפני מי המבול –⁶ Moshe⁷ waits because he is waiting for Hashem to call him up to the mountain.

There are many similarities pertaining specifically to the stories of Moshe's תפילה for Bnei Yisrael after חטא העגל and the mabul. In both narratives, it says that Hashem 'sees' what was going on⁸, וירא ה' כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ, Hashem **sees** the abundant evil caused by man in the land. By Bnei Yisrael at חטא העגל, Hashem tells Moshe⁹, ראייתי את העם הזה והנה עם קשה עורף הוא, I have **seen** this nation, and they are a stubborn people. As well, in both stories we are informed that Hashem, כביכול, feels regret. By Noach, He regrets creating mankind וינחם¹⁰. Regarding the חטא העגל we see that the same לשון וינחם is used to tell us that Hashem reconsidered his decree of destroying עם ישראל. Lastly, after the flood ends and Noach leaves the תיבה, it says ויחל נח איש האדמה¹¹. Rashi explains that Noach made himself unholy – חולין – by busying himself with work of the field. But when Moshe begins to beseech Hashem, we have a similar לשון of ויחל משה את פני ה' לשון¹². Moshe's ויחל is used for a noble purpose.

From all these similarities, it is clear that we can look at Noach as a foil for Moshe. Moshe, upon hearing that Hashem is going to wipe out עם ישראל and start a new nation from him, prays fervently to remove the decree, and succeeds! Noach, who is also

⁶ ברכת פריץ

⁷ שמות כד:טז

⁸ בראשית ו:ה

⁹ שמות לב:ט

¹⁰ בראשית ו:ו

¹¹ שם ט:כ

¹² שמות לב:יא

told that the world is about to be destroyed, remains completely passive and is seemingly complacent with just saving himself and his family. There is much ground to use Moshe's incredible success and piety as a means to look down upon Noah's passivity and many of the meforshim pick up on this. We see in the מדרש¹³ that Moshe is considered better than Noah. While Noah merely saved himself from destruction, Moshe had the זכות of saving his entire generation from destruction. Another מדרש that emphasizes Moshe's superiority over Noah¹⁴, points out that Noah, who was originally called איש צדיק, in the end of his life becomes איש האדמה. While Moshe, who was originally called איש מצרי, over the course of his life becomes איש האלוקים. Clearly there is a progression of growth that Moshe underwent that surpasses the level of Noah, and perhaps the stories of the מבול and הטא העגל highlight that difference between them.

It is no question that Moshe is a greater character than Noah. He was the greatest person in history! Based on the פשט, it is possible to suggest that Noah is not at fault for not praying on behalf of his generation, even though Moshe did pray. Noah and Moshe both served the exact purpose that Hashem intended for them. In the story of Noah, Hashem's decision to destroy the world happens before Noah is even introduced¹⁵. Hashem sees that not only have the people sinned, but their very nature is evil¹⁶; וירא ה' כי רבה רעת האדם בארץ וכל יצר מחשבות לבו רק רע כל היום. This is not just one sin; this is the very essence of the generation; "only evil, all day." How could Noah argue with Hashem on this? Further,

¹³ דברים רבה יא:ג

¹⁴ בראשית רבה לו:ג

¹⁵ בראשית ו-ה-ה

¹⁶ שם ו:ה

why would Noach want the world to be continued through people whose deepest essence is evil?

The way Hashem presents the sin of Moshe's generation to Moshe is much calmer¹⁷. סרו מהר מן הדרך אשר צייתם עשו להם עגל מסכה. "They have strayed from the path in one aspect; they have made an idol," but nowhere does Hashem proclaim them utterly and inherently evil. As well, with Noach, Hashem makes His decision before Noach is even mentioned. By Moshe, Hashem's first expression of anger is in His words to Moshe! The decree of the דור המבול seems much more solid than that of חטא העגל. However, this does beg the question of why Hashem is seemingly so much angrier by the חטא העגל than by the דור המבול. By the דור המבול, it says that Hashem is sad¹⁸, ויתעצב ה'. But by the חטא העגל, חטא, of לשון אף, ויחר אף, anger, is used time and time again. I think the answer lies in the fact that one was a sin of mankind, and the other was specifically עם ישראל. By דור המבול, it was sad for Hashem to see that mankind had failed in being moral people. But it makes sense that Hashem has, כביכול, more extreme emotions when His very own עם סגולה has rebelled against Him and not acted properly, despite the fact that it was 'less of a big deal.' Hashem is somewhat dispassionate towards the דור המבול, as well as Ninveh and S'dom.

The fact that Hashem's first reaction to the חטא העגל is to tell Moshe, shows us that perhaps it is a decree that Hashem wants to be changed. Hashem and Moshe are כאילו partners in this decree. Rashi, quoting מדרש תנחומא¹⁹ explains that ועתה הניחה לי is an opening for Moshe to daven on behalf of the nation. Hashem is clearly telling him that this matter is dependent on him, so of course Moshe prays! As well, the content of Moshe's תפילה helps us

¹⁷ שמות לב:ח

¹⁸ בראשית ו:ז

¹⁹ שמות לב:י

understand why perhaps Noah could not pray. Moshe's תפילה requests mercy for Bnei Yisrael by mentioning the history of the אבות and יציאת מצרים. Noah had absolutely no history to discuss! All that preceded him was אדם וחווה and קין והבל, none of whom has merits worthy of saving the world. Even if Noah did attempt to pray, he would have had very little to say and perhaps he calculated that it would not have been a strong enough תפילה to affect Hashem's decree.

In addition, there were 120 years from the time Hashem made His decree until the mabul actually happened²⁰. Within these years, Noah builds the huge תבה. Over these many years, Hashem is giving mankind a chance to see the תבה, inquire and repent! Perhaps Hashem never intended Noah to daven because he gave him a tool to actually fix the problem and inspire everyone to do teshuva. Noah's role was not to advocate on behalf of the people but rather to be an agent to effect change. In contrast, by חטא העגל, Hashem was prepared at that very moment to destroy the whole nation and start it again through Moshe. Hashem's quick decision that was going to be carried out right away was an impetus for Moshe to pray immediately. The גמרא²¹ tells us that the חטא העגל had to happen in order to teach בעלי תשובה for generations that no one can ever say that they have sinned too immensely to repent. בני ישראל at סיני הר סיני built עבודה זרה, and Hashem still forgives them. This גמרא indicates that forgiveness was all part of Hashem's plan and Moshe's תפילה was just the means in which Hashem was able to bestow forgiveness upon them. Noah was merely an agent in helping the people achieve תשובה while Moshe was an advocate.

Avraham's story with S'dom adds another layer of depth into the contrast between Moshe and Noah. Again, there are

²⁰ סדר עולם, כח

²¹ עבודה זרה ד:

has not made up his mind yet and is perhaps waiting for a תפילה, so too here we have a similar occurrence. ארדה נא ואראה ... ואם לא, אדעה. "Let us go down and see the cries of S'dom ... If they are not what I thought, I will know."²⁷ Radak and Ibn Ezra both pick up on the anomaly of this פסוק. It seems that Hashem is uncertain about the deeds of S'dom and is therefore uncertain as to whether He will destroy it. Even though all is known to Hashem, He makes it seem like there is a chance to save S'dom. Perhaps this is what provoked Avraham to pray. Rashi points out that the לשון used for Avraham's תפילה is the לשון of war, ויגש,²⁸ meaning his תפילה was incredibly strong and powerful, yet it does not change the decree against S'dom. From this it can be deduced that Hashem's decree against עמ ישראל was not finalized. As well, it is not shocking that Avraham takes on the position of an advocate just like Moshe does. He was just promised to be אב המון גוים.²⁹ He has deep compassion for people, and we know his entire life mission is to bring people close to monotheism, so of course he advocates for the people by praying for even the worst of cities.

The last character I would like to analyze is Yonah. He is drawn into the comparison by other undeniable parallels in the פשט. The sin of Ninveh is חמס³⁰, which is the same sin as the דור המבול³¹ ותמלא הארץ חמס – המבול. Why is it though that Ninveh was saved from destruction but דור המבול was not, if the sin was the same? Rav Norman Lamm answers that Ninveh was doing חמס because they had a תאוה for it, but in Noach's generation, חמס is the very essence

²⁷ שם יח:כא

²⁸ שם יח:כג

²⁹ שם יז:ד

³⁰ יונה ג:ט

³¹ בראשית ו:יא

of the people. This goes back to the same argument mentioned previously of the evil core versus an external expression of evil. Additionally, when Hashem tells Yonah about the sin of Ninveh, He uses a similar לשון that He did by דור המבול³² – כי עלתה רעתם לפני. The word רע is used by Noach as well. It is also no coincidence that the dove (yonah) is a huge symbol in the story of Noach and that both characters are saved from water. The תנ"ך is begging us to draw out a lesson from both of them. Perhaps Yonah perceived Noach's lack of prayer as 'running away' from Hashem so he followed suit. In the end, Yonah is forced to fulfill Hashem's word despite his greatest efforts to escape. In my opinion, Yonah is very different from Noach. Noach simply follows his own destiny based on who he is and what Hashem wanted in that situation. Yonah blatantly denied his destiny and attempted to escape the situation he was placed in.

These monumental events with these four undeniably incredible personalities in תנ"ך teach us about תשובה; in particular, the difference between Jews and the rest of mankind, and the difference between having an evil root and doing an evil deed. In terms of the evil root and the evil deed, it is evident from these stories that those with the evil core do not prevail. It is because of this fact that Moshe and Yonah were each 'successful' in saving the people while Noach and Avraham were not. It is easily justifiable to say that of course Bnei Yisrael does not have an evil core. It is well known that despite our sins, עם ישראל will always have a נקודה גבוהה³³ that remains pure and holy³⁴. As well, the people of Ninveh, although deeply immersed in sin, were not corrupt at their core because they managed to come back and do תשובה. On the other

³² יונה א:א

³³ שפת אמת, חנוכה

³⁴ נתיבות שלום, שמות

hand, Noach's generation was one that was impure and corrupt at their very essence וכל יצר מחשבות לבו רק רע כל היום³⁵. By S'dom we have evidence to say that their essence is evil. Many מפרשים say that the sin of S'dom was that they were against אורחים. The מדרש tells us that their legal system was enacted to punish those who did חסד. Lot had to be מוסר נפש to have guests in his home in S'dom. Rashi in Vayikra³⁶ points out that S'dom was exceedingly evil and wished to rebel against Hashem. S'dom had a backwards moral system in which anything good was seen as bad. A society that sees immorality as moral and morality as immoral is deeply disturbed. Even if the people of S'dom and דור המבול repented from their ways, they would still have the impure, evil root within them.

In terms of גוים and עם ישראל we learn that Hashem is not indifferent towards Bnei Yisrael. He cares about our sins and therefore, cares about our teshuva. When it comes to Bnei Yisrael, Hashem enables us to do teshuva, as we see with Moshe. Hashem opened up an opportunity for him to pray on our behalf. For the גוים, Hashem merely provides an agent to effect change. Everyone is judged on ראש השנה, but יום כיפור עם ישראל, the ultimate day of תשובה in which תפילה is the central mechanism of attaining repentance. This day was established commemorating the result of Moshe's תפילה at העגל. That event creates an intrinsic reality on this day forever³⁷.

³⁵ בראשית ו:ה

³⁶ רש"י ויקרא כו:יד

³⁷ קיצור שלחן ערוך קכח

The Role of Physical Beauty in Analyzing our Leaders in תנ"ך

The presence of physical beauty is paramount throughout תנ"ך. The text describes the beauty of many of our leaders and role models, such as תמר and אדוניה, אבשלום, דוד, שאול, יוסף, רחל, רבקה, שרה and אסתר, using terms like *יפת מראה* or *מראה טוב*. Outer beauty, while a *ברכה*, must be viewed and perceived as very much secondary to a righteous inner core. And yet, the תורה still makes it a point to explicitly declare many of Judaism's leaders as outwardly beautiful; it must be therefore, that the physical description the תורה is giving us serves as an insight into the character, deeper "personality" and nature of the person. Even when there is little else, if anything at all, describing the character, the פסוק still takes out words and time to make certain the reader understands the character's beauty, proving the importance of beauty in aiding to analyze the characters and their situations.

אדוניה and אבשלום, דוד, יוסף, aside from sharing the quality of beauty and physical attractiveness, were all royalty. However, the means through which they became, or attempted to become king, contain essential differences and aid in highlighting their dissimilar natures. It is clear that beauty attracted followers to these figures, but the way in which each individual chose to handle their blessing of good-looks shows the reader their true nature. It is not a coincidence that these kings are all handsome; handsomeness and charisma naturally draw and attract people. It is also not a coincidence that only the kings with inner beauty became celebrated leaders of עם ישראל.

שמואל ב' פרק י"ד is mentioned in י"ד's son, אבשלום, is explicitly described as uniquely handsome. It is his good

looks and charisma that help draw followers to him when he attempts to take the throne and kingship from his father. He is renowned for his physical attractiveness; he is equally well-known, however, for being מורד במלכות, rash, impulsive, arrogant and power-hungry. His impulsiveness and rashness is evident when he orders his servants to have his brother, אמנון, killed after he rapes תמר instead of having his father handle it. His arrogance is marked when he tries to steal the throne when it is not entitled to him. The גמרא (סוטה י.) states that there were five people who were created with outstanding features, and it is that very uniqueness that ultimately led to their untimely demise. שמשון was endowed with great strength, שאול had his “neck”, (that is to say, his height,) and אבשלום had long, flowing, beautiful hair. (The other two were צדקיהו (eyes) and אסא (legs).) אבשלום's hair was caught in a tree while fleeing after he was deemed “worthy of death” for being מורד במלכות. His beauty was what eventually led his downfall; it was this very blessing that became his “fatal flaw”. In the נביא, he is described as handsome and that is all. There is nothing else defining him. His negative qualities, arrogance and rashness, are inferred from his poor choice of actions. He was defined by his beauty, and he was blinded by his beauty, essentially taking his ברכה and using it to bring himself down.

Furthermore, another example of the potential negative effects of physical beauty, is אדוניה. אדוניה is also דוד המלך's son, and like his elder brother, he too was מורד במלכות when he attempted to name himself king when his father was dying. And, like his elder brother, he is described as handsome. It is possible, if not probable, that it was his good looks which helped rally supporters to his side, since he had no other discernible attractive qualities about him to otherwise draw followers. (This is also known as the “halo effect”, the theory that claims that people attribute positive qualities to people who are good-looking, even though in both of their cases, those assumptions could not have

been more incorrect). אדוניה too, had only his outward beauty working for him. He relied solely on his looks and charisma to carry him to the kingship. It can be extrapolated from the fact that the only description of each of them is in regards to their looks, that this is all they had to offer, or rather, all they were offering. The physical beauty they had to offer was not enough to sustain and maintain followers.

On the other hand, the תורה also presents us with leaders that possessed an attractive outer appearance who are role models. יוסף הצדיק, for instance, can serve as the perfect foil to אדוניה and אבשלום. Like אדוניה's sons, he possessed an innate charisma and was physically beautiful as well. In his youth, he was consumed by his good looks, and his brothers despised him because of it. The פסוק נער elaborates and explains that he would curl his eyelashes and put effort into his appearance. He was pre-occupied by his ברכה of a good physical appearance. However, unlike the others, יוסף ultimately matures and understands what אדוניה and אבשלום could not: that he has more to offer than his beauty, and that an effective leader cannot rely on vanity alone. He also does תשובה for his vanity when he does not sin with אשת פוטיפר and thus demonstrates his strong character and morals. Eventually, he becomes viceroy in Egypt. And again he demonstrates his benevolence when he gives food to his brothers during the famine, despite the fact that they had sold him. יוסף's good looks and his charm no longer defined him. Rather, he used his charm along with his ability to interpret dreams, to rise to a high position of power to help those in need during a famine. This depicts the way beauty can aid or destroy a person and it is up to a person's strength of character to utilize it, or to be consumed with it.

דוד המלך is also described by the נביא as handsome. However, unlike the previously mentioned people, before the פסוקים describe his outward appearance, he is first declared a shepherd. This

small detail teaches us more than first meets the eye. When he is introduced, his father ישי says he is in the fields tending to his sheep; affirming he is primarily a shepherd. Only after the בויא makes it clear that he is a shepherd, is he described as handsome as well. This offers incredible insight into his character. Shepherding is a job that connotes the trait of humility in a person who performs it, because it is hard and unpretentious work. משה רבנו, who is also described as a shepard, embodied the quality of humility. It follows that דוד, too, was incredibly humble. Unlike his elder brothers, he was not standing and waiting to hear from שמואל if he is the next king, since he assumed his brothers would surely get the job before he was considered. דוד's appearance is secondary to his righteous nature. While he was handsome, he never defined himself by his looks, and his subjects and people do not define him by his looks. While physically beautiful, he was not arrogant about it, not even in his youth (like יוסף).

An effective leader must be someone who embodies a good self and a good character. He must be able to give back, be gracious and care about others. דוד, for instance, cared about his best friend, יונתן. יוסף, too, helped his brothers during the famine. We see with יוסף, to a certain degree, that he presents somewhat of a transition from the way אבשלום and אדונייה handled their physicality to the way דוד did. In the beginning he was blinded by his looks; he was a נער. But he ultimately matures and sees that he needs to be gracious too, in order to be a leader, and that it is dangerous to be consumed by looks. אבשלום and אדונייה however, were not able to put others before themselves. They were just physical bodies, without "beautiful insides".

From these characters in תנ"ך we learn that it's critical to use your outward beauty and your inward beauty together to create the "full package" and to embody the ultimate leader. It is when you define yourself by your physical appearance that you endanger yourself to losing your good character. We learn from יוסף

and דוד that you need your inner goodness to work with your attractiveness and charisma. It is clear from אבשלום and אדונייה, that good looks and charisma alone are a dangerous mix and a recipe for disaster. The ברכה of physical beauty is just that – ברכה א'. It's extra. Good מידות and a strong moral character however, are not extra; they are indispensable.

שירת הים

ל say (מכילתא, פ' בשלח) that those who crossed the ים סוף experienced a greater revelation of ה' than יהווקאל himself. Now that's a big statement! What was so great about ים סוף קריעת, as opposed to all the מכות that took place right beforehand? One might assume that after ה' took us out of מצרים, we wouldn't want to hear about מצרים anymore. Assumedly, the servitude in מצרים wasn't a positive experience, and one would want to leave it in the past. However, the דעת מקרא explains that the opposite is true. בני ישראל thought to return to מצרים, and the מצריים were pursuing בני ישראל. The מצריים, however, didn't chase בני ישראל to return them as slaves. Rather, they wanted to destroy בני ישראל as a nation and take all their belongings. Therefore, only after ים סוף קריעת was complete and the מצריים were dead on the shore was the גאולה complete. ים סוף קריעת was, in a sense, a continuation of the מכות. The דעת מקרא finds many similarities between the מכות and ים סוף קריעת, connecting the events. These include the hardening of פרעה's heart, ה' "hand" hitting מצרים, Moshe's hand and his staff initiating the מכות, and a special wind starting the punishment. Interestingly, the מכות begin at the יאר, a body of water, and end at ים סוף, another body of water. שירת הים therefore can be seen as praise to ה' for all the מכות, concluding with ים סוף קריעת.

Even though פרעה was the one who demanded that בני ישראל leave מצרים, he suddenly regretted his decision. This is not the first time that one of בני ישראל's enemies reacted in a surprised way to בני ישראל escaping. The דעת מקרא points out how ים סוף קריעת closely parallels בני ישראל's past. פרעה finding out that בני ישראל left is very similar to the way לבן finds out that יעקב left. The לשון in the פסוקים and their reactions are almost identical! This is one example of מעשה אבות סימן לבנים.

Before the *ישועה* it says that בני ישראל cried and screamed to ה'. Now, after the *ישועה*, they are giving thanks in the form of a *שירה* to parallel the crying out from before the *נס*. It's a *מהלוקת* (ל: סוטה) how the *שירה* was said. Some say everyone recited it together, while others believe that it was first recited by a *שליח ציבור* and then everyone else answered.

Why was it necessary to have a *שירה* about the falling of *נפש*? Is it not enough that *פרעה* was thrown in the sea? The *נפש שמשון* suggests a beautiful answer. When we are happy about *פרעה*'s falling, we're happy about our *תורה* and our *יראת שמים*. Since ה' defeated *פרעה* and his army, it gave ישראל עם the ability to reach *מתן תורה*. If *פרעה* was still alive in this world, we would never have made it to *סיני*. By saying *שירת הים* we show how happy we are over the nullification of the forces of evil that are preventing us from seeing ה's revelation.

The *זוהר* explains that from the phrase "וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר," we learn that when בני ישראל sang *שירת הים*, they wanted to be sure that the song would continue with their future descendants. But why is this specific *שירה* necessary to be recited every morning for all future generations? The *נפש שמשון* explains that *קריעת ים סוף* was a *נס* for the whole world, and for all generations. We have to feel as if we were there! This *שירה* is *שבה* for what we saw with our own eyes – it's not just any *נס*! It's different than other *שירות* in *זמרא*: The *נפש שמשון* says that every Jew is willing to risk his life based on the simple fact that *קריעת ים סוף* happened. When we say *או ישיר* we tell a story that we saw with our own eyes and are ready to testify! The *זוהר* (*פרשת בשלח*) says that anyone who says *שירת הים* every day with *יד ה'* will be *זוכה* to say it in *הבא*. From this *שירה*, we learn that ה' and ה's rule in the world are prevalent and are really felt by people. We saw *משה* split the sea. We saw the horses and chariots in the sea! בני ישראל really saw ה' *יד ה'* at *סוף ים סוף*, and as an expression of *אמונה* it is only appropriate to give *שירה* to ה'. The *חיי אדם* (*נא:יז*) *משנה ברורה* (*יה:ג*) and *חיי אדם* (*נא:יז*) say that if one says it with true *כונה* and *שמחה*, his sins are forgiven.

Rav Schwab (Rav Schwab on Prayer) questions why the first שירה in the תורה is placed at the end of פסוקי דזמרא after the songs composed hundreds of years after the תורה. He answers that the שירה itself was part of the נס, and reciting it last elevates the level of פסוקי דזמרא. The communal recitation of the שירה was a miracle. Either the miracle was that everyone was able to hear משה well enough to repeat each line after him, or that they all received רוח הקודש and recited it as it was being written. By reciting it in פסוקי דזמרא, we are raising the praise of ה'. The focus of the שירה is the returning of the sea and not the splitting. The parting of the water is supernatural; it is beyond בני ישראל's comprehension and therefore cannot be described in human terms in a שירה. The returning of the water is returning to the laws of nature. That aspect is readily comprehensible and is the real theme of the שירה. Each day as we recite the same words as our ancestors, we are expressing our thanks to הקדוש ברוך הוא for the relatable aspects of the miracle, making us more aware of the daily miracles in our everyday lives.

Perspective

Life presents itself very differently depending on a person's vantage point. An architect perceives a school building very differently from a student who attends classes there. An individual's education, occupation, experiences and philosophy all play a part in forming the lens through which they view the world. The ability to incorporate multiple perspectives like these is one I strive to attain, often through works of literature which present new angles on aspects of existence. One such work is the biblical book of קהלת.

Easily the most philosophical tract of the תנ"ך, קהלת is a book of perspectives. The narrator, קהלת (traditionally understood as שלמה המלך), records his search for the ideal lifestyle – “the good life” – so that he can share his discovery with the world. In this quest for the proper approach, he considers a number of alternative philosophical views. The first mentioned is that of the הנהגה, the hedonist. This individual, explains קהלת, is someone who understands that all is from G-d. Building on this belief, the hedonist believes that man should enjoy what G-d has given him before it is taken away and given to someone else. Accordingly, the הנהגה's philosophy calls for each man to live life for himself.

He is followed by the עמל, the collectivist, who believes the very opposite – that the best life is one spent working for others. Consequently, the עמל spends his life worrying about the oppressed and seeking companionship, with the view that “two is better than one.” He argues that someone who is raised in a wealthy lifestyle will never understand the poor and thus that the world must be ruled by those who began as mere peasants. He spends his life in open revolt against the status quo.

The עמל is followed by the ירא אלקים, the G-d fearer. He speaks not about working for others, but about working for G-d.

He argues that even if someone is terribly poor, he or she will sleep well knowing that they are serving their Creator. As a result, the *ירא אלקים* does not worry about the oppressed, but rather believes that G-d is watching and will ensure that everyone is treated deservingly.

Lastly, the *חכם*, the wise one, dissents from these opinions. He strives to discover truth, and claims that it is found in man's transient nature. He scorns birth in favor of death and celebrations in favor of houses of mourning. Truth, he explains, is spoken only in times of death, when men acknowledge their finitude.

While none of these philosophies are viewed by most traditional commentators as correct, I believe a contemporary seeker can take a message from each. As a Modern Orthodox Jew, I try to engage with many different philosophies, and incorporate their insights into my traditionally-grounded existence. This is how I read *קהלת*.

From the *נהנה*, we can learn to appreciate the gifts that G-d has given us and to enjoy them in moderation. The *עמל* teaches us the value of looking out for our fellow man and to remember the concept of *כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה* ("All of Israel is responsible for each other"). The *ירא אלקים* ensures that we never forget that, ultimately, everything we do is for G-d and that G-d has expectations of us. The *חכם* encourages us to search for knowledge and truth. He instills in us the value of intellectual honesty.

Just as each personality in *קהלת* has a unique perspective on life, so too different personalities view the world differently. In *פרק ו* *שמואל ב* *מיכל* disapproves of *דוד*'s dancing in the street with the *ארון קדוש*. *דוד*, who grew up as a humble shepherd, finds no fault in his celebration of G-d. *מיכל*, on the other hand, clearly grew up as a princess and frowns upon *דוד* for his lack of dignity in public. Their respective upbringings impact what they perceive to be proper behavior.

While realizing that every person has a different view based on his personal upbringing, environment, and nature it is

often overlooked that, so too, G-d “sees” the world differently than we do. In קול דודי דופק, the Rav describes how humans cannot attempt to grasp the workings of this world. Humans cannot fathom צדיק ורע לו and cannot begin to understand the ways of G-d. He brings an example comparing the world to a tapestry. Here, in this world, the tapestry is backwards. Humans don’t see the beauty of the art. It is only G-d in his ultimate greatness that “sees” the splendor of the tapestry. In a word, humans do not see the full picture. Only G-d in his omnipotence knows all. Humans must wander along trusting that G-d “paints” a beautiful painting.

Through my study of קהלת, my own personal perspective was complicated and enriched. By combining the insights of its different paradigms into my approach, I closed the book more philosophically mature than when I opened it. I now understand that I must combine multiple perspectives to create my own. And from קהלת himself, I learned the importance of placing value in a variety of ideals, rather than a single narrow approach. My learning of קהלת piqued my interest in the way perspectives impact how an individual views the world. It has inspired me to search out diversity in my attempt to learn of new perspectives. Whether it be enjoying G-d-given gifts, helping others, serving G-d, or striving for knowledge and truth – all have a place in a fulfilling Jewish lifestyle.

מחשבה ומעשה

מידת ענוה

From the very first words we say each morning, a Jew is taught that in order to live a full life and have complete שמים, he must humble himself. When one wakes up, the first thing he thinks of is usually whatever is closest to him. The words מודה אני לפניך, *I gratefully thank You* are usually uttered in a sleep like trance, but even then one must realize that ה' comes above and beyond everything else. As a Jew, one must realize that he has a G-d and that one needs to fulfill the רצון ה' at all times. The syntax of the words in this תפילה are a prime example of this. Rather than saying אני מודה, as would be said in conversational Hebrew, מודה אני is said, giving our first moments awake each day to ה', rather than to one's own desires. By doing this, one is reminded throughout the entire day that everything done is for ה', because the רצון ה' trumps one's own רצון at all times (נפש שמשון סדור התפילה).

What is ענוה? In אורחות צדיקים, it says that ענוה is the opposite of גאווה. The root of ענוה is to think: "What am I? Why am I at all deserving of what I get?" We have to be submissive and realize our lowliness; that we are like nothing. We have to come to realize how small our abilities are compared to what we are חייב to do. And even though we are so small and insignificant, our מצוות are desired by ה' [קהלת ט:ז]. In תהלים כה: ט it says וילמד ענוים דרכו that *he leads the humble with justice and will teach the humble His way.* ה' assists the humble people in their spiritual perfection. One can see from this that being humble is the way that ה' wants everyone to be. Therefore, one needs to strive to reach this goal.

In talking about ענוה, the (שער שני, שער ענוה) lists six things one should and can do in order to perfect and humble himself. These include; controlling one's anger even when publically embarrassed, seeing everything for the good even when

bad things happen, not letting compliments get to one's head, not taking credit for something one did not do, using gifts from ה' in a humble way (recognizing and respecting ה' more because of said gifts), admitting to doing wrong and asking for forgiveness, and speaking softly. Living one's life by these guidelines will lead someone to become a proper ענו. Once a person is living to his utmost humble potential, he can become a proper ה' ירא as well. In (כב:ד) it says משלי (כב:ד) עקב ענוה יראת ה'. One who suffers quietly is also considered to be an ענו. We see this quality in Moshe who didn't care that Aharon and Miriam spoke הרע לשון about him and in Aharon who remained silent and accepted his suffering when his two sons, Nadav and Avihu, died.

The (אגרת הרמב"ן) writes in a letter to his son that an angry man cannot be a humble man. Anger is due to resentment of life failing expectations, and it leads man to an ultimate display of arrogance. Distancing oneself from anger, over time will lead towards humility. He, too, writes of six ways one can humble himself. This includes: gentle speech, response to success, accepting praise, making amends, avoiding revenge, and acceptance. He writes of the endless cycle between ענוה and יראת ה'. Humility fosters ה' יראת which gives you more humility. This concept is also referred to in Majesty and Humility by Rav Joseph B. Soloveichik. The Rav speaks about how man has a מצוה to strive to emulate ה', so man has to be creative and majestic like ה'. But he, also, has to be humble like ה' is, when He engages in ultimate contraction, צימצום, and retreats from this world. Man's job is to realize that he is living in ה' world. He must retreat to do ה' רצון, as he is reminded each morning when he says מודה אני. He must know when to step back and just fulfill his תפקיד in ה' world.

In order to achieve full humility, one must recognize his place in this world and his job in life. He should be influenced by people who serve ה' properly and be humble in the presence of everyone, yet striving to be like those greater than him. The ספר המידות writes that when the world witnesses a renaissance of the

quality of humility, we can begin to expect משיח. Through our saying אני מודה with the proper כוונה each morning, may we each bring ourselves closer to the ultimate level of humility and bringing of משיח במהרה בימינו.

Balance in Torah

“Being on a tightrope is living; everything else is waiting.”¹ I always viewed the concept of balance as an ideal state in every area of life, but does the Torah also view this as a value? I will examine how the Torah approaches this idea and then explain how balance manifests itself within תנ"ך, תנ"ך, השקפה, תנ"ך, מוסר, הלכה, השקפה, תנ"ך, מידות.

Amongst the many stories in תנ"ך, the story that stood out in my mind was בני ישראל's journey in the מדבר. Throughout the forty years, ה' tested them several times. The word for “test” in Hebrew is נסיון. R' Hirsch² explains the שרש of נסה means to habituate; when one practices something, he is attempting to accomplish something he has yet to do. Throughout the course of their stay in the מדבר, בני ישראל were brought into countless dire trials in order to practice the necessary traits to fulfill G-d's תורה. For example, when בני ישראל reach סין מדבר, they complain *if only we had died in the מדבר where we had food to eat rather than in the מדבר to die by famine!* In response, ה' says “הנני, I’m about to make מן for you. But you have to go out *every day* to gather it.”³ ה' made this decree to assess whether or not בני ישראל would listen to Him.

R' Hirsch⁴ then continues on to explain that הנני is not just a response to בני ישראל's complaint, but also a statement saying, “I am already prepared.” ה' decided beforehand to provide food in the מדבר in this specific way in order to build a foundation of faith for

¹ Karl Wallenda

² שמות טו:כה

³ שמות טז:ד

⁴ שם

those who would receive ה' Torah. In other words, בני ישראל were meant to learn how to enjoy today, leaving the worry of any other needs for tomorrow, and trust in G-d without the concern of other necessities. Only this trust would ensure בני ישראל's fulfillment of G-d's תורה. But if בני ישראל haven't learned to trust G-d to support them on the next day, ultimately they are lead astray from G-d and His תורה.

בני brought ה' expounds on this idea explaining that through the מדבר in order to test them. The נסיון was that food wasn't in their hands, and all they had was the מן that rained down from שמים every day. They were tested every day so that they would have everlasting אמונה in ה'. Similarly, the פרש"ם adds that they were dependent on G-d every day for food so that they would have אמונה and follow the תורה.

Therefore, while בני ישראל traveled through the מדבר, surrounded by miracles on all sides (literally), the message that the מן was meant to instill was complete אמונה in ה'. This was a quality that בני ישראל needed for when they would leave the נס environment of the מדבר and enter the world of טבע in ארץ ישראל. אמונה is easy to have when G-d is standing right in front of one's face; ה' wanted בני ישראל to take that אמונה from נס into the טבע world, where ה' is not outrightly revealed. Bringing the אמונה based on נס into the world of טבע hopefully leads to an ultimate balance of both נס and טבע that takes advantage of both.

The concept of having balanced נס and טבע sounds ideal. However, בני ישראל failed to integrate the two together. This is what חטא המרגלים was all about; בני ישראל didn't want to leave the bubble of נס and enter the scary world of טבע. Honestly, I think the majority of us would have felt the same at the time. However, the

⁵ שם

⁶ שם

ideal is meant to be the balance between the אמונה of נס in the טבע world. No doubt about it that it is a hard balance, but this is the way G-d wanted it.

In conjunction with that idea, in Rav Kook's השקפה,⁷ there are two different perspectives of observing the world: נבואה and חכמה. נבואה, which represents seeing the bigger picture, existed while בני ישראל were growing as a nation. However eventually, the world evolved and therefore the perspective shifted to חכמה, which represents focusing on the smaller picture.

By glancing at בני ישראל's history, one can understand these concepts in context. During the age of נבואה, through publicizing many נבואות, the נביאים were able to fill בני ישראל with the spirit of G-d in order to help everyone see the bigger picture. And yet, sin was highly prevalent, many were transgressing left and right. The Divine Providence of נבואה was so great; it provided clarity of G-d's existence. Yet the tiny details of everyday life, such as sins, were hidden from נבואה.

The חכמים, on the other hand, were extremely focused on the minute details of life (i.e. הלכה) and as a result were able to target the individual sins of בני ישראל. For years the נביאים screamed about עבודה זרה, but the חכמים in בית שני succeeded in eradicating it. Despite the ability to focus in and completely destroy specifics, חכמה still has its downfall. People go off the דרך in small increments; small details can open up a destructive path.

Whether it's meriting to "see" G-d through נבואה or fulfilling all the complicated details of הלכה through חכמה, one type can seem better than the other, depending on which angle one chooses to focus on. But in truth, the best of both worlds is a combination of both נבואה and חכמה, like משה רבנו had. His נבואה was אספקלריא המאירה, he had the big picture of נבואה *with* the details of חכמה, as opposed to אספקלריא שאינה מאירה, when one can't see the details. נבואה had its time

⁷ אורות, זרעונים ב', חכם עדיף מנביא

in history and eventually faded into the background. The big picture was weakened and now the world is *extremely* focused on the small details, making it difficult to focus on anything beyond the here and now.

During *אחרית הימים*, *נבואה* will begin to come back and people will be able to focus on the big picture again. However at that point it will not be at the expense of *חכמה*, rather *נבואה* and *חכמה* will be combined. People will then learn the big and small picture simultaneously; the ultimate balance of the two.

Furthermore regarding *הלכה*, we have the *מצוה* of *שבת*, that *מדאורייתא* one is forbidden to transgress in almost all cases. Yet when it comes to *נפש*, *פיקוח נפש*, one can be *שבת*. Why is this? ⁸שמואל comments on the *פסוק* *והי ושמרתם את חקתי ואת משפטי אשר יעשה אותם האדם וחי*, *פסוק* ⁹בהם that “you should *live* by them,” not that you should *die* by them! The *שלחן ערוך* ¹⁰explains that it’s a *מצוה*, and the one who hesitates and first asks a *Rav*, is as if he’s spilling blood!

In truth, it’s not about overriding *שבת*, it’s about balancing between the two *מצוות*. The ultimate reason why *מצוות* were created is to be a guide system for our lives. The *חורה*’s halachic system is not unrealistic; G-d is *not*, *חס ושלום*, about to strike us with a lightning bolt every time we do not listen to Him. On the contrary, G-d is Kind and Merciful. He knows when to have *רחמים* and when to have *דין*, and that’s how He runs the world, with a balance between the two.

Regarding *מוסר*, the *רמח"ל* ¹¹discusses the concept of *חסידות*. If one desires to be a *חסיד*, he has to understand what the result of

⁸ יומא פה:

⁹ ויקרא יח:ה

¹⁰ סי' שכח סע' ב

¹¹ מסילת ישרים פרק כ

each חומרה is in every situation. If being מחמיר ultimately leads to a קידוש ה', then great, do it! But if it leads to a קולה on something else, then he should not. If someone wants to be a חסיד, he has to be very thought through. חומרות can go wrong, such as in the גמרא¹² when there was a man who tried being מחמיר like בית שמאי and said קריאת שמע while lying down. However, he was lying down outside, and in doing so put himself in danger. The גמרא says about him that he went against בית הלל, and it would have been more of חסידות to go according to בית הלל and say קריאת שמע while standing. In short, there is definitely a place for חומרות, but it's all about balance. One needs to make sure to look at the big picture and make sure that being מחמיר won't lead to being מקיל.

Lastly, the רמב"ם¹³ famously elucidates that a person should balance every מידה of his in the middle, based on the idea of והלכת בדרכיו.¹⁴ Therefore we're חייב to train ourselves, until it's regular to act according to this דרך. Accordingly, if one has an inclination towards a certain מידה, he has to go to the opposite extreme to reach the middle ground, the מידה הבינונית.

Nonetheless, there are two exceptions to this rule; it is אסור to be a בינונית with גאווה and כעס. With both of these מידות, one has to go as far as possible to the opposite extreme. For גאווה, one has to act completely humble, be an ענו, and with כעס, one cannot get angry over something not proper to get angry about.

Therefore, there is no question that the תורה believes in balance as an ideal. However, just as the name implies, there is a time and place for balance too. Sometimes, such as with the examples above of גאווה and כעס, one should דוקא pass the middle ground to an extreme place. Across the board, balance is definitely

¹² ברכות י'.

¹³ הלכות דעות פרקים ראשון ושני

¹⁴ דברים כח:ט

needed. But one needs to keep in mind that there some situations which call for the extreme and not just the middle ground.

Through תנ"ך, השקפה, הלכה, מוסר, and מידות, one can see how balance manifests itself in תורה. Through examining the above examples of balance in תורה, I think there is one common lesson of how to truly keep the תורה: to tread between the different lines of truth within the realm of תורה. Though it may not be easy, ultimately that is what balance is all about.

Discovering the Real You

In (טו:א-ג), שמות, it says *הזאת את השירה הזאת*. The מדרש comments that this is the first time in history that בני ישראל sang *ה'ה*. Why? What is *שירה*? In (צא:), מסכת חולין, there is a ברייתא which debates the status of the song of מלאכים and the song of man. The ברייתא states three points: firstly, man can sing whenever and wherever he pleases while מלאכים cannot; secondly, man can say *ה'ה*'s name after two words (*שמע ישראל ה')* while מלאכים can say *ה'ה*'s name only after three words (*קדוש קדוש קדוש ה')*; and lastly, מלאכים cannot sing in the Heavens until man sings on Earth. Clearly, we are being taught that song is quite important. But what is the importance of song? And more specifically, why does man's song take precedence over the song of the angels?

Rav Hirsch (טו:א) defines what he thinks true *שירה* is: "to express thoughts and feelings that have been called into existence within oneself ... an inspired or rapturous expression of what some external event has revealed to the inner self, that which the physical eye cannot see, but which has become clear to the mind's eye." What is the significance of Rav Hirsch's definition? In order to understand the role that *שירה* plays in the תנ"ך, we need to look at times that it has been used and the purpose it was serving at that particular instance. In (כא:ז-כ), במדבר, בני ישראל were singing *שירה* to *ה'* thanking Him for providing them with water. In (ה:א-ב), שופטים, בני ישראל sing *שירה* after the war was won, a song thanking *ה'* for saving them from the enemy. In (כב:א), דוד sang *שירה* when he was saved from the enemy. Lastly, in (כג:טו), ישעיהו, *שירה* is used as a tool in the salvation and redemption of צור. Given this information we know about *שירה*, what is the connection between that which is so deep in oneself that the eye cannot see it and salvation?

The moment that בני ישראל saw the נס of סוף ים קריעת, their immediate reaction was to sing שירה to ה' (שמות טו:א). How does it make sense that the reaction to the most national and revealed (it was surely a נס גדול!) miracle was something so personal and נסתר?! Wouldn't we think that the reaction to such an open miracle would be something equally open and revealing? What can we learn from this? I would like to offer an original idea as a possible answer to this question. We needed to learn what שירה is through something so clearly deserving of this form of לה' שבה. On the other hand, the juxtaposition of שירת דבורה (the הפטרה) to פרשת בשלח teaches us the role that שירה plays in our everyday lives. שירת דבורה teaches us about our relationship with today's "real life miracles" – that we must tap into our inner שירה, even when we cannot necessarily see it. If we are looking for true music in our lives, we have to choose to see the miracles in the world.

The perfect example of one of today's hidden miracles is שבט. From my understanding of ט"ו בשבט, this holiday helps us relate to the message of שירה. The first מסכת ראש השנה in משנה א states the מחלוקת between בית הלל and בית שמאי. בית שמאי says that the ראש השנה for trees should be on the first of שבט while בית הלל says that it should be on ט"ו בשבט. גמרא explains that according to בית הלל, by the 15th of שבט, most of the season's rain has already passed. The מאירי writes that the 15th marks the day that the general strength of the winter has passed. We learn here that ט"ו בשבט is the turnover of the season. One may think: shouldn't the celebration of plant life take place when you can actually see nature's beauty?! No. The celebration of trees takes place specifically when you cannot see the beauty, but rather at a time when you know that underneath the ground, the roots are preparing themselves to become beautiful. In essence, the celebration is one of hidden potential.

The כלי יקר (שמות טו:ב) comments that the word זמרת in the phrase עזי וזמרת קה connotes the word "pruning" from the פסוק: וכרמך: ניגון, and the זמר is the melody, the ניגון, and the שירה is the lyrics. Rav Shmuel Brazil says that a ניגון can be

separated into two words: נס יגון, the “depression will run away.” Through זמירות and ניגונים and זומר ourselves – we are spiritually pruning ourselves.

In שמש בגבעון דום, ספר יהושע (י:יב) stops the sun: שמש בגבעון דום. רש"י says that דום means “silence” in this context. What does it mean that he silenced the sun? יהושע told the sun to stop singing its song so that he could sing his own song. Why did the sun have to stop singing? What was so special about יהושע’s song that it could replace the song of the sun?! In the Artscroll introduction to פרק שירה, it addresses the reason as to why man’s שירה is not included in the פרק. Animals do exactly what they are commanded to do. They do not have free will! Therefore, they are always on “pitch,” singing their song correctly. Man, on the other hand, does have free will. This allows and causes him to act out of bounds, and sometimes “go off key.” But what does man have that animals do not? What does he have that the sun and the angels do not? Potential. The animal kingdom, the sun, and the מלאכים do not have potential because they have no ability to choose. They have no choice but to do what they were created to do, and therefore have no potential to be anything more than that. Man’s song takes priority because potential is one of ה’s greatest gifts to man in this world.

The common question asked on שמות טו:א is: why does it say אז ישיר, “then they will sing”, instead of אז שר, “then they sang”? Wouldn’t the latter make more grammatical sense? To me, this teaches us that in life, we live by a model of “we will.” We should always be looking towards the future, anticipating all of the זמירות and שירות that we have yet to experience and bring into the world.

This turns every minute of sleep into a מצוה! It is our job to make sure everything we have and everything on our “private soil” is of service to ה'.

This idea can go even further. The שפת אמת says that the phrase in the מגילה ויקר, ומחה וששון ויקר, מגילה has special significance. The גמרא says (מגילה טז:) that this פסוק refers to the מצוות of תורה, מילה, יום טוב, and תפילין. If this פסוק is supposed to teach us that בני ישראל accepted these מצוות on פורים, why does it only hint to it? The answer is because בני ישראל always had the מצוות, just without enthusiasm. They did actions out of routine but not with any feeling. Now, בני ישראל accepted the תורה with enthusiasm. Now the תורה became אורה, יום טוב became שמחה, מילה became ששון and תפילין became יקר. We celebrate פורים because we defeated the עמלק inside of us who tried to get rid of the enthusiasm we have toward מצוות. Now we don't just go through the motions; we have the attitude of enthusiasm! Not just our physical things that seem to have no holiness can be elevated to serve ה', but our מצוות (which are inherently קדוש) that lack meaning and excitement can be infused with enthusiasm to serve ה'!

Orthodoxy, Conservatism, and טעמא דקרא

When people ask what the difference is between Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, the answer is often that it is a matter of observance. Many hold that Orthodox Judaism adheres to Jewish law with greater loyalty than Conservative Judaism does. However, it is not that simple. Conservative Jews may very well think that they are observant. A Conservative Jew who lives miles away from the nearest shul might ask himself: Would G-d rather have me sit at home on שבת and not daven, or would He want me to get in the car and go to shul? This Conservative Jew truly believes that staying at home is in violation of G-d's will and that it's preferable to drive to shul. Conservatives believe this is observance, and the fervent Conservative toes the line according to what the conservative tradition is. In his mind, the Conservative Jew is 100% observant.

Orthodoxy would say that the above reasoning is not proper observance. One of the critical differences between Orthodox and Conservative Judaism is the methodology by which a topic is approached and Orthodoxy's belief in the importance of the Talmud – Oral Law. For centuries, Jewish religious and cultural life has been rooted in the Talmud, and the Talmud has played an integral role in the scheme of Jewish thought. In his article, "*Talmudic Judaism*," Rabbi Yisroel Chait explains the importance of the Talmud in Jewish life. Rabbi Chait says that contemporary religious ideas are irreconcilable with the basic method of Talmud investigation – modern religious thinking has totally different goals and objectives than those of the Talmud.

Today, most modern religious practice focuses on finding meaning and spirituality in an attempt to evoke religious feelings. When people approach Talmud learning, they expect the same thing: spiritual emotions. They want the Talmud to conform to their own preconceived religious notions, but it is an attempt doomed to failure. Why is this so? An analogy to the world of physical phenomena may be helpful in elucidating the concept. The question can be asked: Why do we fall back to the ground when we jump up? There are two different answers. One possible answer, the practical “what,” is that gravity exerts a force that attracts our body towards the center of the earth. A second possible answer is the deeper “why” answer – because can you imagine what would happen if we jumped up and never came back down?

People expect religion to focus on the “why,” but the Talmud looks at the “what,” and maintains that there is a deep “what” in the Talmud just like there is in science. The Talmud learner bases decisions off the “what” and not the “why.” The Talmudic Rabbis do not try to decide Jewish law by intuiting what G-d would want (the “why”). The Talmud learner uses intellect: he studies the data of the written and oral law, draws halachic/legal principles from them, and then proceeds to utilize these principles in the resolution of his problems. The Talmudist is not guided by personal feeling. The point is not which conclusion *he* finds more proper, but which is verifiable in view of the evidence. Rabbi Chait explains that Judaism is a religion of the mind, and that only the dictates of reason may be followed. Intellect, he says, which is usually the adversary of religion, is the Talmud’s ally.

While Orthodox Judaism believes in the importance and legitimacy of the methodology of the Talmud, Conservative Judaism is trying to figure out what is the spiritually important thing: would G-d want us to be stuck at home because we can’t drive, or to go to shul on שבת? In the pursuit of this approach, common sense is employed as a key determinant.

Today, many Conservatives claim the right to exercise their own common sense in determining the relevance and format of contemporary Judaism. They try to reformulate Judaism to fit with modern thought and base decisions on their own common sense. They decide which laws we need not follow anymore because they are no longer relevant. If there is no spiritually emotional meaning behind an act we don't need to do that act anymore. Rav Soloveitchik, in his שיעור "The Common Sense Rebellion Against תורה Authority," explains that this is not a new phenomenon. The Rav compares the situation now to the rebellion led by קרה in במדבר (פרק טז).

קרה implied that משה wanted to replace משה as the teacher and leader of Israel, publicly challenging the halachic competency of משה. רש"י, citing the מדרש תנחומא, writes about several of קרה's ploys with which he tried to debunk משה. In one situation, קרה had all of his men wear completely blue shirts, and then asked משה if the shirts still required ציצית. משה said that they did, and קרה used his "common sense" to explain why the shirts *did not* need ציצית. He decided that the whole point of ציצית is to make you think about G-d, and that the completely blue shirts make a person think about the sky and heaven and infinity – so of course they do not need ציצית. It fulfills the same purpose. In his second ploy, קרה filled a house with תורה scrolls and asked משה if the house still needed a מזוזה. משה, of course, said yes. קרה again used his "common sense" to prove משה wrong. He explained that the מזוזה was on the doorpost so that there would be some תורה in the house, and also as protection. Surely 100 scrolls was better than 1 scroll, קרה explained, and a מזוזה would not need to be put onto such a house.

קרה, like many Conservative Jews today, chose a slogan that would appeal to everyone: "common sense." קרה said that all reasonable people should have the right to interpret Jewish law according to their best understanding: ויקהלו על משה ועל אהרן ויאמרו אלהם: רב לכם כי כל העדה כלם קדשים. This way of thinking is appealing because

it promises freedom from centralized authority, and it flatters people's basic intelligence.

Here the Rav takes issue: Today, he says, reasonable people will concede to the authority of scientists and those who have specialized in a field. The common man has no problem accepting that the studied mathematician is more knowledgeable than he is about advanced math – so why are there so many people who question the authority of the תורה scholar who has specialized knowledge in his field? קרה, like many people today, claimed that only sound practical judgment was needed in application of הלכה. קרה and today's Conservatives believe that in judging the relevance and beneficial effects of the מצוות, all intelligent people are qualified to render judgment. קרה and the Conservatives are dedicated to the religious subjectivism: the belief that one's personal feelings are primary in the religious experience. מצוות are physical acts which help us find our hidden feelings of religious emotion. According to קרה and those who think like him, the value of the מצוה relies on its subjective impact to a person. Observing a מצוה is only justified if it brings an emotional experience. If the מצוה no longer impacts the people, it is subject to new rules and may be modified for times and individuals.

What unites different groups under the banner of Orthodox Judaism is the belief that Jewish law can only be determined through the proper halachic analysis of the "what" through the data found in the תורה. The other way of thinking is not valid. The Rav says that it is important to reaffirm the traditional Jewish position that there are two levels in religious observance: the objective outer מצוה and the experience that accompanies it. One without the other is an imperfect gesture, but the subjective emotional experience is not the primary concern. Religious inspiration is generated by the מצוות – not the reverse. The only solid reality is the מצוה, because emotion is always changing, and what inspires one person may not inspire other people. This was a source of major contention between משה and קרה, as indicated in

the מדרש תנחומא quoted by רש"י. Communal worship must be constant. משה contended that דקרא's emphasis on emotion would destroy the religious identity of the people and fragment them into sects.

Both The Rav and Rabbi Chait explain that the halachic legal system has its own methodology, mode of analysis, and rationale, just like math and science. The Oral תורה can only be understood by someone who has mastered the Talmud's methodology and material. הלכה is not just law – it is a complicated system that has a methodology all of its own. Those who don't know about it can find Oral Law confusing and unintelligible, so one cannot simply use subjective common sense and emotion to make a ruling. דקרא's approach would not be tolerated in the world of science, and it should not be accepted in the world of הלכה either.

In summary, Orthodox Judaism holds that it is not legitimate to decide for oneself when a הלכה no longer applies and is outdated, and that this is the fault of Conservative Judaism. But this conversation still has an issue that needs to be addressed. As Orthodox Jews, we have concluded that it is not okay to decide when a הלכה does not apply to us. But in the גמרא, the concept of דרשינן טעמא דקרא is an accepted notion.

In דברים כד:ז it says ולא תחבל בגד אלמנה בגד אלמנה. In the גמרא (בבא מציעא קטו), it says: The Rabbis taught that whether a widow be rich or poor, no pledge may be taken from her. There is a debate between Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon. Rabbi Yehuda says that one can never take a pledge from a widow, whereas Rabbi Shimon says if she is a rich widow then you can take a pledge. Why does he pasken this way? Because Rabbi Shimon expounds on טעמא דקרא: He explains that the reason one cannot take a pledge from a widow is because you might need to return it to her. If she is a poor widow, people will make up rumors about an illicit relationship. However, if the widow is rich, the pledge will not need to be returned to her, and thus there will be no rumors.

Rabbi Shimon is דריש טעמא דקרא – he is saying that the rule only applies if x is true (the rule only applies if the widow is poor).

In this case, Rabbi Yehuda does not interpret the reason of the law and Rabbi Shimon does. However, the גמרא raises the point that their opinions are really the reverse. About the פסוק that a king may not have too many wives, (*neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart not turn away*) Rabbi Yehuda says that the king may have multiple wives so long as they do not turn his heart away and Rabbi Shimon is the one who says the king cannot take a single woman who is likely to turn his heart away. Says Rabbi Shimon in the גמרא, “what then is taught by the verse, *Neither shall he multiply wives to himself?* Even such as אביגיל.”

The גמרא says that Rabbi Yehuda is not דריש טעמא דקרא. He is not interpreting the reason; the reason is given in the תורה itself. Rabbi Yehuda argues that in this case the verse makes it explicitly clear, “why shall he not multiply wives to himself? So that his heart not turn away.” Rabbi Shimon argues that as a general rule, we are דריש טעמא דקרא. Then the תורה should have written *neither shall he multiply wives...* and the *that his heart not turn away* is superfluous. Rabbi Shimon would have come up with the reason behind not having multiple wives on his own, explaining that obviously it is so that the king’s heart is not turned astray. Rabbi Shimon says that the תורה states the reason to teach that the king must not marry even one single woman who may turn his heart away, and the instruction not to take multiple wives must be forbidding multiple wives no matter how righteous they may be.

There is yet another example of דריש טעמא דקרא in מסכת יומא (מב:), which discusses the פסוק in במדבר about the פרה אדמה. The פסוק says ונתתם אתה and ויקחו אליך פרה אדמה תמימה אשר אין בה מום אשר לא עלה עליה על ונתתם אתה. In this גמרא, there is a rule that the פרה אדמה must be brought outside of the camp by itself: it cannot be brought out with a black cow or another red cow. There is a first opinion brought that says the reason for this is to avoid suspicion that the כהן will slaughter the black cow or

both red cows, which is incorrect procedure. Rebbi says that we must accept the law as it is without giving a reason for it. The *גמרא* says that this first view is the view of Rabbi Shimon, who is *דריש טעמא דקרא*. Because Rabbi Shimon does expound the reasons of mitzvot, he would allow one to take out a donkey with the red cow because there is no suspicion in that case. Rebbi says we must follow the rule and bring out the cow alone. He would not even allow a donkey to be brought out, because he is not *דריש טעמא דקרא*. Again we have a philosophical analysis of a detail in a technical *חוק* procedure.

In (כא:) מסכת סנהדרין, Rabbi Yitzchak says: “Why were the reasons of some *תורה* laws not revealed? Because in two verses they were revealed, and they caused the greatest in the world (שלמה המלך) to stumble.” Shlomo was *דורש טעמא דקרא*. Explains the *גמרא*, Shlomo said, “I will multiply wives yet not let my heart be perverted.” Yet we read that when Shlomo was older, his wives turned his heart astray. Continues the *גמרא*: *גמרא*: וכתוב לא ירבה לו סוסים ואמר שלמה אני ארבה ולא אשיב: וכתוב ותצא מרכבה ממצרים בשש וגו' Shlomo “fell prey” to *דריש טעמא דקרא* – by applying his own reasons for the laws, he ended up violating them.

I will leave off with these questions: Why is *דריש טעמא דקרא* an accepted notion in the *גמרא* when it is a rejected view of Conservatism?¹ How and where do the rabbis draw the line with *דריש טעמא דקרא*, and how is this different from what today's Conservative Jews do? We see that Shlomo thought it was okay to marry many wives because his heart would not turn astray. But would he agree with *קרה* that a house with *ספרי תורה* doesn't need a *מזוזה*?

¹ It is important to note that although *דריש טעמא דקרא* is used in the *גמרא*, in a debate between Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon, we almost always go with Rabbi Yehuda, who is not typically *דריש טעמא דקרא*.

The Role of Food in *Yahadut*

Overview and the Korbanot

From time immemorial, food has been part and parcel of Jewish culture. It manages to find its place in almost every ritual. The famous line “They tried to kill us, we won, now let’s eat,” playfully pokes fun of what seems to be the ongoing narrative of our history. Food is the focus of so many of our holidays that commemorate our victories over our enemies. To name just a few examples: we eat latkes as a remembrance of the miracle of חנוכה, have a סעודה on פורים as a celebration of the rise and (ultimate) demise of המן and sit down to a סדר פסח filled with many symbolic foods to remember our Exodus from Egypt. For each of these תהגים, our main observance seems to emphasize food. We see this trend beginning early on in our history, when the Jewish people are commanded by G-d to sacrifice and eat the קרבן פסח.¹ We should ask ourselves: what is the underlying message of this commandment to essentially eat some shwarma, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread? Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch comments on שמות (יב:מג),

In the Pesach offering, the Jewish nation asserts all its members, assembled in family groups, as being G-d’s flock and at his disposal, and then, in eating the same, it receives itself back, freed from physical and civic death. This is the bond between G-d and Yisrael, which has eternally to be renewed ... only those may take part in it who belong to this Jewish bond with G-d both by nationality and conviction.

¹ שמות יב:ג-יא

Rav Hirsch clarifies to us the purpose of this process of the *קרבת פסח*, that through this physical endeavor, we have created a spiritual connection between us and G-d as well as have aided in the preservation of *בני ישראל*.

Alternatively, the *מהר"ל* offers a different approach. He explains that the purpose of *קרבת* in general is to demonstrate to us that we live in a physical world, which is depicted by the animal that we are slaughtering; However, we need the fire of spirituality to come down to sanctify the physicality of *עולם הזה*. The burning of the sacrifice teaches man that nothing has an eternal existence, besides G-d Himself. As Man watches his animal being consumed by a heavenly fire, he comes to the realization that G-d, who is the source and master over both the realities of the physical and spiritual world, has accepted his *קרבת*.² Of course, G-d does not need our sacrifice; rather, he allows us to offer him the *קרבת* as a means through which we can relate to Him on a higher level. The word *קרבת* is derived from the *שורש* of *קרב* – the *קרבת* brings a form of closeness and intimacy between man and his Master.

According to *רמב"ם*, the *תורה* sanctioned *קרבת* for religious purposes to “wean” *בני ישראל* off of serving *זרה*. This was extremely prevalent in Egypt during *גלות מצרים*.³ The focus was not on the actual *קרבת*, but rather was a tactic to distance *בני ישראל* from idolatry.

שבת, שמחות, and חגים

We know that part of the ritual of our *חגים* and *שמחות* is the sanctification of wine through *קידוש*. What is so significant about wine? Is there some intrinsic holiness in the grapes? The *גמרא* in

² גבורות ה': פרק מ ופרק סז

³ מורה נבוכים ג:מו

סנהדרין teaches us an important lesson about the complexity of wine. The גמרא quotes from (קד:טו) תהלים, תהלים (קד:טו) "Wine that gladdens man's heart, to make the face glow from oil." The גמרא points out that the word ישמח in this context can be read as ישמם – to make desolate. This teaches us that like anything, wine has the potential to either bring a man closer to G-d, or to create a distance from Him. Wine is a beverage which on the one hand can serve as man's medium for sanctification; alternatively, it can unfortunately bring man into a lowered state of desolation and drunkenness.⁴

Wine also plays a role in life cycle שמחות. רמב"ם explains that there is מצוה מדרבנן to make a חתן and כלה happy as part of the מצוה מצוה מדרבנן. ואהבת לרעך כמוך.⁵ The שדי חמד adds that this מצוה lasts for the entire seven days of שבע ברכות and not just the night of the wedding.⁶ This explains why, at the conclusion of each meal of שבע ברכות for a חתן and כלה, a series of seven blessings is recited to honor the occasion. Just like we learned above that celebrating with wine lends importance, so too here we are making the newly married couple happy by showing the importance of their שמחה through the wine of the שבע ברכות.

Central to יהדות is the weekly observance of שבת. On שבת, we are given an obligation of קידוש – זכור את יום השבת לקדשו – Remember the שבת day to sanctify it.⁷ רמב"ם explains that the תורה obligation is merely for one to say the words of קידוש. But the מצוה מדרבנן is to say קידוש on a cup of wine. According to the ספר ההנוך, a man can connect and stay focused on the religious significance of his words

⁴ סנהדרין ע.

⁵ הלכות אבל יד:א

⁶ שדי חמד מערכת חתן וכלה, יג

⁷ שמות כ:ה

only when they are connected to a concrete action. Therefore, we are Rabbinically mandated to recite קידוש over a full cup of wine. The גמרא in פסחים states: זכור את יום השבת לקדשו וזכרהו על היין בכניסתו. "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Remember it over the wine at its commencement." One is supposed to consider the wine a means of lending importance to the declaration of קידוש.⁸

In שמות משה, says, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field."⁹ This is referring to the commandment of ה' to take a double portion of מן on Friday so they will have for שבת. ל. ה"ז learn from the fact that the word "today" is mentioned three times that we have an obligation to eat three meals on שבת. In the times of the תלמוד, generally only two meals were eaten on a regular day, but this was an additional meal that was unique to שבת. In גמרא שבת בן פזי, גמרא שבת, tells us that someone who fulfills the מצוה of having three meals on שבת is spared from three tribulations: (1) The birth pangs of משיח, (2) judgment in גהנום, and (3) The war of גוג and מגוג.¹⁰ We clearly see that this מצוה carries weight based on the great שכר which one receives by fulfilling it. So what is the significance of the three meals eaten over the course of שבת? Perhaps the reason we have the מצוה of eating three meals on שבת is because ה' wants us to enjoy the food he has given us especially on שבת, so that we can appreciate and come to enjoy the day He has set aside for us through the מצוה of שבת. עונג שבת.

The origin for the concept of עונג שבת is based on a passage found in ישיעיה על ה' והרכבתך על במתי ארץ והאכלתיך נחלת יעקב אביך: ¹¹ספר ישיעיה כי פי ה' דבר.

⁸ פסחים קן.

⁹ שמות טז:כה

¹⁰ שבת קיח.

¹¹ ישיעיה נח:יד

מועדי ה' אשר תקראו explains that since in פרשת אמור it says: ¹²אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ שֶׁבַת עֹנֵג שֶׁבַת is also included based on the words מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ. He elaborates that this is done by eating special foods to honor שֶׁבַת.

We can use the concept of עֹנֵג שֶׁבַת to allow us not only to increase our food intake, but also to decrease it. When it comes to increase our food intake, especially on a short שֶׁבַת in the winter months, we are frankly not that hungry. שלחן ערוך states, that לכתחילה one should eat לחם משנה.¹³ However, some פוסקים say that one can fulfill the מצוה by eating other foods. The רא"ש is quoted in שלחן ערוך that it is permissible to eat מזונות.¹⁴ The שלחן ערוך goes on to explain that תוספות paskins that one can substitute meat or fish instead. The ר"ן is even more lenient and says one can get away with eating just fruit. Therefore in a כדאי situation, one does not have to put themselves through anguish to eat bread, because the מצוה is for one's enjoyment of עֹנֵג שֶׁבַת.

Closing Thoughts

You may have heard the line that “you don’t gain weight on שֶׁבַת” as an excuse to indulge more on שֶׁבַת. This myth is falsely derived from the גמרא in ביצה since ריש לקיש says there that on שֶׁבַת ה' grants man an enlarged soul called נשמה יתירה.¹⁵ Many think that this soul can “absorb” the extra calories eaten on שֶׁבַת.

As we see, the food we are commanded to eat is another means for us to connect to Him. We may not know all the specific

¹² ויקרא כג:ב

¹³ שו"ע או"ח רצא:ד

¹⁴ שו"ע או"ח רצא:ה

¹⁵ ביצה טז.

reasons of why we do and don't eat certain things, but we do it because G-d commanded us. At the same time, knowing the reason ה' commands us to engage in physical acts such as eating can help us relate to G-d in a greater way and can give our actions meaning and significance while fulfilling the רצון ה'.

An overall approach to food within our עבודת ה' can be gleaned from גמרא פסחים in a discussion of the observance of שבועות.¹⁶ The question there is how much emphasis of שבועות (and other holidays) is לה' and how much is לכם. There are some holidays which one might think should be all spiritual and for ה'. This might lead one to either fast or eat in a very minimal way. The conclusion is there needs to be a correct balance of the two. חצי לה' and חצי לכם is appropriate even for holidays where spirituality is more important. This should be a model for us, not only for שבועות but for the way that we approach food in general in the service of G-d. It has been said that it is easier to “fast לשם שמים than to eat לשם שמים.” So, let us all strive to use the food we eat on the חגים and throughout the year as a means to an end in our עבודת ה'.

¹⁶ פסחים סה:.

יהי כבוד

The תפילה of יהי כבוד can be found in פסוקי דזמרא directly before אשרי. The תפילה סידור explains that this תפילה, an introduction to אשרי, is a gathering of 18 פסוקים by חז"ל in which the name of ה' is mentioned in each one. These 18 פסוקים are corresponding to the 18 vertebrae in the spine. This relationship of the body to the spine is important because the spine connects the brain to the rest of the body, and its job is to give the body the ability to stand straight. The תפילה continues to explain that this תפילה is an introduction to אשרי and the פסוקים following because before we elevate the creation with song, we must connect the existence of creation to ה'. Just like limbs cannot fulfill their purpose until they are connected to the brain which give them life, so too, as humans we cannot fulfill our purpose until we are connected to ה' who gives us life.

What is the meaning of יהי כבוד? When the creations connect to ה', they feel His greatness and His connection to them, and therefore want to honor Him. כבוד is an outcome of connection. In addition, the 18 פסוקים correspond to the 6 combinations of the 3 letters of the name of ה', ש-ק-י ($3 \times 6 = 18$). This name of ה' is the name that shows us that ה' created the laws of nature and is outside of them, not guided by them. So, in this תפילה, there are 18 פסוקים that speak about יהי כבוד in our world, but not in the usual way it is today. We are asking for a time when מבורך מעתה ועד עולם, ממזרח יהי שם ה' מבורך מעתה ועד עולם, שמש עד מבוא מהולל שם ה' יהי מלך, ה' מלך, גילוי כבוד מלכות שמים in our world and that ה' ימלוך לעולם ועד. We are asking that through using the name ש-ק-י He will break the course of nature.

Rav Schwab (Rav Schwab on Prayer) adds that the name of ה' is mentioned 19 times in 18 פסוקים – just like עשרה went from 18 ברכות to 19 ברכות. He says that this paragraph is of an

extremely elevated nature and should not be skipped. The entire תפילה reflects the state of the world in the time of משיח when the height of development will be reached and everyone will recognize ה'. The paragraph continues with פסוקים הלל which is the universal recognition of ה'. Then the prayer has a description of the happiness of everyone and then finally a declaration of ה' permanent rule ועד ה' ימלוך לעולם. Afterwards is a description of the disappearance of "nations" – separate ruling entities from the world. At the end, we realize that because of our shortcoming we haven't reached the days of משיח so we call out to ה' – והוא רחום יכפר עון ולא ישחית, והרבה להשיב אפו ולא יעיר כל חמתו ה' הושיעה המלך יענגו ביום קוראנו.

The שבה and הלל speaks about the central idea of הלל and תפילה and the feelings that a person has of how great, high, and respected ה' is, combined with a feeling of closeness that ה' has with His creations. Because of this always important message, there is no time limit to this תפילה. In addition, the תפילה talks about ה' being above the world of the other nations, about נצחיות ה', the choosing of בני ישראל as ה' chosen nation, and most importantly, our inability to help ourselves without ה' יושעת and our hope that ה' will help us.

The מהר"ל explains how the פסוקים are all of ה'. A few examples are:

ממזרה שמש עד מבוא – from שמים comes praise of ה' because the sun shows the strength and power of ה' and brings praise of ה' into this world

רם על כל גוים – although there are separate nations, ה' rules over all of them and does what he desires with them

ה' is King and all of the creations are for His glory

כי בחר ה' בציון אוה למושב לו – ירושלים is watched over by ה' and בני ישראל will be gathered there

ה' is the three dotted vowel. Just like each dot is always between two others, בני ישראל, who are prized and special, have a value of הבא, which is always hidden.

In conclusion, this תפילה is powerful because of its messages, structure, and hidden meanings. The פשט understandings and messages of the power, strength, and praise of ה' are extremely important. When combined with the hidden meaning based on the 18-פסוק structure and the use of the name of ה', the תפילה reaches its fully elevated status. Only a תפילה of such elevation could serve as the introduction to כתר כל מזמורים.

A Holiday of Hope

I've been asked before to choose a favorite **הג** and I responded that **פסח** is definitely my favorite one. It's right by my birthday, and I like **מצה**, especially with gefilte fish and chicken soup! There's nothing wrong with the **הג**! But there's another reason why I consider it to be my favorite **הג**. This holiday gives me hope concerning the future of **עם ישראל**. At this point in Jewish history, we once again find ourselves in **גלות** waiting for our **גאולה** to come. This is exactly what the Jews went through when they were slaves in **מצרים**. Therefore, I find it comforting that just like they were liberated from their **גלות**, G-d willing, we too will be liberated from our **גלות**.

What is so special about the miracle of **יציאת מצרים** as compared to other **נסים** that gives us so much hope? The **נתיבות שלום** suggests the following answer. **יציאת מצרים** is a **נס** that is everlasting. It is 3000 years later, and we are still celebrating it. He explains further and writes that in each **דור**, we have a mini-**מצרים** or **גלות**. Therefore, it was necessary that **ה'** Himself took **בני ישראל** out, not a **מלאך** or **שליח**, because that is what makes it so everlasting. In turn, we need to really see ourselves as if we left **מצרים**, and to learn how to see the bad as if it is good. This ability is granted to us on every **ליל הפסח** because **בני ישראל** were taken from complete bondage into freedom, from bad to good.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his introduction to the **מחזור פסח**, explains another reason why **יציאת מצרים** is such a huge foundation for **אמונה**. Not only did the exodus happen when **בני ישראל** left **מצרים**, but an exodus also happened five times before to the **אבות** (four journeys and a prophecy). Each case was accompanied with the message that they would survive and return. So, too, another

exodus happened after it already happened. משה gave a נבואה that they would be sent into גלות in order to remind them that it's not just an act of history that will send them into misery. Rather, it is because of their lack of אמונה. ה' in אמונה משה was telling us, that when we will eventually be sent into גלות, we need to return to ה' in order to be redeemed. Only then will He return to us. Throughout נביאים, we see בני ישראל in distress, yet they always had hope that was grounded in historical and theological experience. Just as ה' saved us in the past, so too, He will do so now and in the future. We need to hold onto this hope and come close to ה' so we can reach the final redemption.

It is known that the Jews were supposed to be enslaved for 400 years yet they were redeemed after 210. Why were they redeemed so early? בני ישראל in מצרים were in danger of losing their Jewish identity so ה' had to take them out בחפזון, in a hurry. Because they were taken out prematurely, their גאולה was incomplete and would have to wait for a future redemption to be completed. Yet even though it wasn't complete, it was a most amazing miracle. קל וחומר the future, and final redemption, will be that much greater.

Rav Soloveitchik, in his הגדה של פסח, explains an aspect of the redemption that can give us hope for the state that ישראל is in now. He explains that deep inside the heart of each Jew, there is the imprint of Judaism that can never be erased. In מצרים, ה' had to look really hard to find it and the people were saved. Now too, we hope that ה' can look deep inside each Jew and find that “pintele yid” and through that bring us to our ultimate redemption.

Throughout the הגדה, there are passages that give us hope for the final גאולה.

Rabbi Sacks interprets the passage of הא לחמא עניא as if we're saying, yes we are in exile now but we've been through it before and we've returned, so too we shall return again. Rav Soloveitchik explains differently. In מצרים, each Jew was enslaved in a different

way yet each of them felt the pain of their friend and that is what made them merit the redemption. We start off the סדר with breaking the מצה and then expound on how they used to share it with others if someone didn't have. If we emulate this, and really feel the pain of each other, then hopefully we will merit redemption.

A popular passage in מגיד is מה נשתנה. It shows the importance of questioning and searching, and the effort man has to make in order to make a relationship with ה'. If we don't search for ה' and keep in mind that He is our ultimate goal, we won't ever merit the final redemption. Perhaps this is why we read שיר השירים because it symbolizes the search for one's beloved. This concept of searching is necessary to bring out the גאולה.

In response to מה נשתנה, we answer עבדים היינו which shows us another reason why we merited גאולה. By saying עבדים היינו, we show that we were slaves to פרעה but we never were פרעה's slaves and that mindset helped us get through the slavery. Slavery to them was extrinsic; they never let it destroy their inner self. בני ישראל were spiritually free which allowed the exodus to happen. בני ישראל in מצרים were like the burning bush that ה' showed to משה. From the outside it looked dull and dead; they were dead from the slavery. But in the inside, it was burning with fire. Deep down, בני ישראל were burning with desire to serve ה'. Inside each Jew there is a burning bush that we need to tap into now so we too can be זוכה to the גאולה.

Saying והיא שעמדה gives us a lot of hope. We don't only celebrate פסח because it happened to our ancestors, but we can truly experience it because it is an occurrence that happens in every דור. Yet each time, ה' has saved us. The story of יציאת מצרים is the story of the Jewish destiny which gives us comfort for all future troubles we might encounter.

Lastly, we end the סדר with ברושלים הבאה בירושלים not just because we hope to be there but because we know that if we learn the message from the סדר this year, we WILL be in ירושלים next year!

Perhaps these are all explanations for why Rabbi Sacks labels פסה as “the master narrative of hope”. Its story is the basis for all future hopes of עם ישראל.

I hope all these ideas help explain why I chose פסה as my favorite חג.

יעלה ויבא

יעלה ויבא is recited in the ברכה of רצה on holidays when the קרבן מוסף was brought as a sacrifice. In that blessing, we hope and pray for the return of the actual עבודה in the בית המקדש.

The main theme of יעלה ויבא is זכירה, with the form of the word זכרון mentioned five times. We are acknowledging that all of our actions are remembered and recorded. In פרקי אבות (ב:א) it says, כל דיבור ודיבור שיצא and in (מצורע א) וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבים – every word that leaves your mouth is recorded. When our actions are remembered, they are permanent, although recording our מצוות has limitations. עבירה מכבה מצווה (סוטה כא.) חז"ל. Since a מצווה can be extinguished by an עבירה, יעלה, it should rise up to ה' to be recorded. Although ה' doesn't forget, we are asking him to be זוכר, remember a person's מצוות, even if he does עבירות.

The עץ יוסף comments on the reason it says זכרון five times and פקדון one time. We find in the תורה: חמישה זכרונות לטובה ופקדון אחד: תורה. לברכה. The word ואזכור appears once in פרשת וארא, and זוכרתי is mentioned four times in פרשת בהקתי. The פקדון comes from פרשת שמות: פקד פקדתי.

Rav Schwab suggests that זכרונינו refers to the צדיקים who might have forfeited מצוות because of their sins, and פקדונו refers to the "special attention" to be paid to תשובה בעלי תשובה.

The נתיב בינה breaks down the structure of יעלה ויבא in a very precise way. It begins with eight verbs: יעלה, ויבא, ויגיע, ויראה, וירצה, וישמע, ויפקד, ויזכר. Then come six ways we beg ה' to remember us using six nouns: זכרוננו, ופקדוננו, וזכרון אבותינו, וזכרון משיח בן דוד עבדיך, וזכרון ירושלים עיר קדשך, וזכרון כל עמך בית ישראל. Then we say the seven purposes of why we want ה' to remember us: לפליטה, לטובה, לחן, ולחסד, ולרחמים, לחיים ולשלום. We then mention the special day we are reciting this for and then

we ask for four בקשות for the future: והושיענו, ופקדנו בו לברכה, וזכרנו בו לטובה, and ויראה. We end with two praises of ה': כי קל מלך חנון ורחום אתה: ה'.

We specify in יובא that we want ה' to remember us משיח בן דוד and עבדיך. We're remembering the holy ירושלים filled with מצוות where we can learn to have יראת שמים because it's designed for the purpose of אלוהים. In addition, according to the תלמוד ירושלמי (ברכות ב:ד): ביום שחרב בית המקדש נולד הגואל:

The עין יוסף compares the part of the reasons we ask ה' to remember us to ברכת כהנים.

We say לטובה, לחן, ולחסד, ולרחמים, לחיים ולשלום

יברכה ה' refers to חיים

וישמך refers to חסד

יאר ה' refers to טובה

ויחנך refers to חן

ישא ה' פניו אליך refers to רחמים

וישם לך שלום refers to שלום

Each time we are blessed by the כהנים we are brought together as one nation in front of ה'. Similarly, each ראש חדש we come before ה' as a nation and ask ה' to bless us the way the כהנים are given the ability to bless us.

The Vilna Gaon explains that ויזכר, ויפקד, וישמע, וירצה, ויראה, ויגיד, ויבא relate to the 7 heavens named: ערבות, מכון, מעון, זבול, שחקים, רקיע, וילון. וילון means curtain. It refers to the physical sky which separates us from the spiritual רקיעים. The שמים has a physical connotation (the sky) and also refers to the spiritual heavens of which we have no understanding. Similarly, the seven reasons we ask ה' to remember us ולשלום, לחיים, ולרחמים, ולחסד, ולחן, ולטובה, ולפליטה also correspond to the seven skies.

We daven that our מצוות will be accepted and come – יובא – and reach – ויגיע, and receive special attention – ויפקד – and be heard – וישמע – and be willingly received – וירצה – and be seen – ויראה. The 7th level is ויזכר hopefully our מצוות can reach כסא הכבוד and get to ה'.

After we mention these seven reasons, we hope our good deeds are remembered. We mention the special day, מעין המאורע – the halachic requirement (שבת כד.) to always make note in תפילה of a special day on the Jewish calendar. יום הזכרון ראש השנה is called because both good and bad deeds go before ה' and we want ה' to remember our good deeds that may have been forgotten because of our sins.

When we have the opportunity to say יעלה ויבא we are really asking ה' to remember His promises to בני ישראל. In ויקרא (כ:ד) it says – “I will remember the ברית of the ancients; those whom I have taken out of מצרים.” In יחזקאל (טז:ו) it says – “I remember him more and more I will simply take pity on him.” Lastly, in ויקרא (טז:ו) it says – “I will remember my ברית with you in the days of your youth and I will establish for you an everlasting ברית.”

Each month and special holiday we have the opportunity to remind ה' of these promises. We ask ה' to accept our תפילות and בעזרת ה' we will be able to see the days of the המקדש and a rebuilt ירושלים and we will no longer need to remind ה' that we are waiting for our lives to be rebuilt.

הכרת הטוב through the Story פסח

פסח is a holiday when Jews remember the Exodus from מצרים that occurred so many years ago. The סדר night is the epitome of this remembrance when we read the הגדה which narrates the miracles that ה' performed for us in מצרים. However, this need for remembrance isn't limited to פסח. In fact, one of the six events that one should recount every day is that of יציאת מצרים.¹ One may ask: What is the significance behind this commemoration? What about any other miracle that ה' performed for us throughout the generations? Why shouldn't those impactful events also be recounted in a הגדה which we would use yearly to commemorate the wonders that ה' did for us? What makes the story of the שעבוד מצרים and ultimate redemption from מצרים so fundamental that it is supposed to be a part of our daily lives as Jews? The answer I would like to suggest is that the story of פסח teaches us about one of the most critical and important traits there is: הכרת הטוב.

We may not realize it, but הכרת הטוב is an all-encompassing מידה; this means that it involves מצוות in מקום בין אדם לחבירו, בין אדם לעצמו and בין אדם לעצמו.

בין אדם לחבירו's relationship to הכרת הטוב is probably the easiest to explain. A sincere "thank you" to a friend, teacher, co-worker, or family member will instantly create a positive bond between those two people. Feeling appreciated means to feel acknowledged – and humans crave positive acknowledgement. It's clear how הכרת הטוב, or a lack of it, can have a significant and lasting effect on a human relationship. The power of הכרת הטוב is so strong that the שעבוד מצרים began because of an instance of כפוי טוב (the opposite of הכרת הטוב).

¹ דברים טז:ג

One of the first פסוקים of שמות begins with ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים אשר לא ידע יוסף explains who this “new king” was by quoting the opinions of רב and שמואל. One said he was in fact a new king, while the other held it was the same king just with renewed decrees.³ According to the second opinion, פרעה is an example of a כפוי טוב. This king witnessed and experienced all that יוסף had done to help save מצרים from starvation. Now, this same king suddenly “forgot” all the help that he received and put יוסף’s family into slavery instead of showing the proper amount of appreciation. הרב אביגדור הלוי proposes (4שיחות לספר שמות) that the first opinion also reflects the lack of הכרת הטוב found in the Egyptian culture at that time; It’s hard to believe that this new king never heard of יוסף who saved all of מצרים! As the king, surely he had learned the recent history of his own nation! אונקלוס comments on this saying, דלא מקים גזרת יוסף, פרעה chose not to recognize the decrees that יוסף put in place in order that Egypt would survive the famine. Because the מצריים expressed such כפוי טוב, יוסף, this led to the horrific שעבוד that מצרים endured in בני.

בין אדם לחברו is not only limited to the arena of הכרת הטוב. It also has its place in our relationship with and connection to G-d. בין אדם למקום is showing our appreciation to ה' for all that He gives us. There are many things we say in תפילה that are placed in the category of הודיה, or giving thanks to G-d, including everything from מודה אני as soon as we wake up in the morning, to עשרה מודים of ברכה to thank ה' for what he has given us. In fact, the גמרא tells us that

² שמות א:ח

³ רש"י שם ד"ה ויקם מלך חדש

⁴ דף יג

⁵ אונקלוס שם

someone who eats without reciting a ברכה is like a person who committed מעילה (the sin of taking something from the בית המקדש to use for personal benefit).⁶ It is crucial for us to understand that all in this world comes from ה' and from that we gain appreciation for all that is around us. As Rebbetzin Tzipporah Heller puts it, “blessings are exercises in appreciation”⁷. Once our awareness is concentrated in our verbalization of ה'’s presence in this world, we are able to access the מידה of הכרת הטוב. On פסח, we read the הגדה that recounts all that ה' did for בני ישראל. Everyone is encouraged to participate in מגיד by reading aloud. This shows our הכרת הטוב to Him by remembering what He did for our nation so many years ago. A crucial element of הכרת הטוב is focusing on what you do have, rather than on what you are lacking. Therefore, during מגיד we sing דיינו. The words of דיינו convey the message that “it would have been enough”; When one is able to say wholeheartedly, “If He had smitten their firstborn, and not given us their wealth – דיינו, it would have sufficed,” then he has reached a level of complete appreciation of what he does have and won’t complain about what he does not have.

The tragedy of בני ישראל in the מדבר is that they became complainers; from complaints about the מן, to the water being too bitter. בני ישראל had forgotten all that was provided for them by focusing on what they didn’t have. As the דברים in פסוק אל, זכר אל תשכח את אשר הקצפת את ה' אלקיך במדבר למן היום אשר יצאת מארץ מצרים עד באכם עד המקום הזה ממרים הייתם עם ה'.

ה' was very angry with בני ישראל for complaining right after יציאת מצרים. This display of כפוי טוב began right before בני ישראל witnessed ים סוף. When they reached the mouth of the ים סוף, with

⁶ ברכות לה

⁷ Let’s Face It, pp. 63-64

⁸ דברים טז

the deep and seemingly threatening waters before them and the ferocious and angry מצריים behind them, בני ישראל cried out, המבלי אין? ⁹קברים במצרים? One can ask: Hadn't בני ישראל just seen all of the wonders that ה' did for them in מצרים during the מכות? How could it be that they had such little faith to believe that ה' would save them once more? Additionally, once בני ישראל were in the מדבר, the complaining began once more, this time about not having free fish like they had in מצרים¹⁰. Did בני ישראל **really** believe that they were receiving free fish from the same people who were enslaving them?¹¹ ליקוט שמעוני says that there were supernatural occurrences where there'd be a multitude of ready fish when בני ישראל drew from the water. But how could בני ישראל possibly have thought this was normal and not have realized that this was יד ה'? This is a clear lack of הכרת הטוב directed at ה'. Therefore, we counteract the כפוי טוב that בני ישראל had shown in the past by praising ה' during the סדר פסח for the wonders He performed for us.

The power of הכרת הטוב manifests itself in a בין אדם לעצמו relationship as well. עניו מאד מכל האדם was known as an משה רבינו.¹² When ה' delegated him to be the leader of בני ישראל, he at first shied away from this great responsibility. However, once he accepted his new role, his fierce determination to do רצון ה' came to the forefront. In fact, most of the מכות were initiated by משה, except for the first three. Why? The מדרש שמות רבה¹³ explains that משה could not hit the יאר because it had saved him when he was a baby from the decree

⁹ שמות יד:יא

¹⁰ שמות יא:ה

¹¹ א:תשלג

¹² במדבר יב:ג

¹³ שמות רבה ט:י

of, כל הבן הילוד היארה תשליכהו,¹⁴ Additionally, משה could not hit the sand during מכת כינים because when he killed the איש מצרי, the sand saved him when he buried the body so that no one would see.¹⁵ In this way, משה showed הכרת הטוב to inanimate objects that didn't really need the recognition. The lesson learned out from here is that הכרת הטוב is not just for the benefit of the recipient. It has tremendous power to enhance one's recognition of the good all around them and can improve one's personal life. These examples attested to the גדלות of משה רבינו and how he enriched his לעצמו בין אדם relationship through this high level of הכרת הטוב.

The Jewish people have a very close connection with the מידה of הכרת הטוב. In fact, Rabbi Shalom Arush explains, the Hebrew word for Jews – יהודים – means those who give thanks. Thanking ה' is our national spiritual task. The very essence of a Jew is thanksgiving.¹⁶ This “thanksgiving”, as illustrated through the various examples above, is beautifully expressed through our understanding of the פסח story. While explaining why יציאת מצרים is included in one of the six remembrances all Jews should remember each day, Rabbi Arush writes about the need “To remember ה'’s loving-kindness and all the miracles and wonders that He performed when He redeemed the Jewish people from slavery, made us a nation, gave us the תורה, and more. The remembrance of the exodus from Egypt is the fundamental remembrance upon which all others and our entire existence as a nation are founded. As such, every person must thank G-d for the exodus from Egypt with all his heart.”¹⁷ With this said, it is interesting to note the

¹⁴ שמות ב:ג

¹⁵ רש"י שמות ת:יב

¹⁶ The Garden of Gratitude, p. 77

¹⁷ The Garden of Gratitude, p. 59

following commandment to בני ישראל as it says, וגר לא תונה ולא תלחצנו כי, ¹⁸גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים

This פסוק reflects on how בני ישראל should treat any stranger with kindness. The reason behind this מצוה is that we were once strangers ourselves in מצרים. There are two examples of הכרת הטוב from this source. רמב"ן brings forth the idea of מידה כנגד מידה here: Because ה' had רחמנות on בני ישראל during their time in מצרים, it is important to appreciate that mercy and try to emulate מידה'ה of mercy when we encounter גרים. Secondly, this seems to imply that we have a responsibility to show gratitude because of the מצריים who allowed us in their land. From here we can learn that we must show appreciation even when it is difficult, and even when their bad deeds outshine their good deeds. A well-known idea of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov tells us as follows, "Seek the good in everyone, and reveal it, bring it forth."¹⁹ This "everyone" includes people who may have wronged us in the past. True, הכרת הטוב is about looking past the bad to be able to recognize the good. For these reasons, it seems that פסח is the perfect catalyst for which we model many different forms of הכרת הטוב. The theme of ניסן is redemption as it says, ובניסן נגאלו ובניסן עתידין להיגאל, ²⁰זוכה May we all be to be able to fulfill greater heights with our הכרת הטוב and experience the final redemption through our actions.

¹⁸ שמות כב:כ

¹⁹ ליקוטי מוהרן

²⁰ ראש השנה יא.

צור: Rock Solid
אמונה and בטחון in Hashem,
Through Nature, Miracles,
and the Unknown

Ever since I was a young girl, I always had a particular fascination with imagery and משלים in תנ"ך. I have no idea why this obsession started but my curiosity in this area only continued to flourish as I was exposed to more and more תורה. There was one image in particular that always sparked my interest: the image of the צור, the rock. Any time I read a פרק of תהלים, a story in תנ"ך, or a piece of our תפילה that referred to ה' as צור, questions would bottle up inside of me. Why are we referring to our one and only all-powerful G-d as a rock?! Rocks sit around and do nothing but ה' does it all! What kind of comparison is that? I knew that it must be that I was looking at it on a superficial level and that there had to be a deeper meaning to this image. Allow me to share my adventure of unraveling the layers behind this imagery and how it can strengthen our relationship with G-d.

Almost every time that it says צור in תנ"ך, the מצודת ציון comments and says that it refers to ה'’s strength, just like a rock is strong. It is written in (יה:לב) תהלים, תהלים “Who is a Rock except for our G-d?” expressing that ה'’s strength is unique. Additionally, one interpretation of ישעיהו (מד:ה) in וּאִין צֹר בִּל יֵדַעְתִּי is that there is no strength that ה' doesn’t know about because everyone else’s strength comes from ה'. Not only does everyone else’s strength come from ה', but in essence, everything in our lives comes to us from ה'. Building on the knowledge that ה' is compared to a צור and therefore possesses the ultimate strength, and that all

Rav Soloveitchik in ובקשתם משם (Chapter 2): The Yearning Heart, talks about the need for our אמונה in ה' to be steadfast and unable to be shaken up in any way. He defines it as an intimate knowledge that cannot be changed. He asks a question that I think many people have struggled with before: How can we be faulted for not having אמונה? He answers that it is because if you really took a look at the world and looked at nature, it would be completely clear to you that there is a G-d. To quote the Rav himself,

If the experience of G-d in man's confrontation with reality is expressed not by demonstrations based on the complexities of the act of abstraction, but rather by a feeling of the sudden revelation of a direct, unmediated fact within our consciousness of being, then perception of the world itself becomes perception of G-d, and all the demonstrations resurface in a new form... The world is nothing but the glory emanating from the Infinite.

The world is there for us to look at it simply and understand with crystal clear clarity that ה' is there and He must be the creator of it all. Thank G-d we have senses that allow us to find ה' through nature, through טבע, if we look at the world with the right lens. If we do, we will see that even the simplest things in the world have ה' השגחה on them. ואין צור בל, says (מד:ח) ישעיהו that ה' said, – “There is no Rock that I do not know.” The אלשיך comments on the spot and explains that this פסוק shows that השפעה ה' extends to every single thing in this world, there is not even one little pebble that is left out. A צור, a rock, should act as a mnemonic device for us. Every time we walk past a rock on the ground, it should trigger the remembrance of our steadfast אמונה in ה' and everything that it represents based on his constant and all inclusive השגחה on the world. This model of אמונה in ה' based off of nature, can be found dating way back to אברהם אבינו who found G-d by observing the world. וטעיהו talks to בני ישראל and tells them that ה'

will comfort ציון (נא:א). He tells them ה'ביטו אל צור הצבתם – “Look to the rock from which you were hewn.” רד"ק and other מפרשים say that this צור הצבתם is referring to אברהם אבינו. Just like אברהם found G-d through observing the world and realized that there must be a G-d, so too if we look around the world and observe nature, we will come to this same belief and be at rest that ה' will indeed take care of us.

However, since this world is complex, there is a big twist. At first glance, ה' doesn't always seem to operate within the realm of טבע, nature. And ironically, even when ה' acts outside the realm of nature, the word צור is still used! In שמואל א (ב:ב) א חנה expresses her gratitude to ה' in the form of a שירה for the miracle that He performed for her. In relaying her praise and thanks, she says, ואין צור כאלוקינו – “There is no Rock like our G-d.” The רד"ק comments on this פסוק and says that ה'’s strength is like none other in that He has the ability to change nature whenever He wants. חנה was an עקרה, a barren women for whom it was not natural to give birth, and yet, through a נס, she gave birth to a healthy baby, שמואל. The מלבי"ם on this פסוק asks, how can ה' just change nature to do a miracle? Doesn't that make it seem like ה' isn't eternal and ה' is really changing? The מלבי"ם explains that when חנה was praising ה' as ואין צור כאלוקינו, she was stating the uniqueness of ה' as compared to other gods in terms of His involvement with the world. Whereas other creators create and then leave their creations to survive on their own, ה' never leaves his creatures. ה' is always upholding what He created, and therefore sometimes He will operate with טבע which seems “normal” to us and sometimes he will operate with נס. In reality, when it comes to ה', the טבע is also a נס because ה' is always upholding it with His השגחה. Therefore, there is no issue of ה' changing nature being a contradiction to His consistency and steadfast nature because it is all under the umbrella of ה'’s constant השגחה on the world.

Building on this מלבי"ם, I think it is incredibly interesting to note that the word יוצר which means creator has the same שרש as

the word צור. ה' is the ultimate and true יוצר because He is also צור, he is צור היוצרים who is not just a creator, but He is eternal and steadfast, just like a rock. The miracle in the מדבר when ה' let water flow from the rock is another fascinating one to look at in this context. ולא צמאו בחרבות ישעיהו (מח:כא) recounts the miracle and says, "They did not thirst, though He led them through parched deserts; He made water flow for them from a rock; He split a rock and water flowed." The אלשיך explains that ישעיהו is telling over this story because He is asking ה' that just like ה' did a miracle and changed nature in the past, so too now He should implore His power and do a miracle. However, I think there is an ironic caveat here that is implied which needs to be met in order for us to merit this השגחה. Originally, when משה wanted water to come from the rock, he hit the rock. When משה hit the rock, he was showing that he did not have enough אמונה in ה'. He was trying to prove this "צור eternity" theory wrong. However, really ה' proved משה wrong and we see that משה was punished for his misdeed. In order for us to merit the constant השגחה and השפעה of ה' in our lives, we must be full מאמינים in the "צור eternity" theory.

Being that we are limited human beings, we must discuss one more reality. Often times we don't understand G-d's ways. However, the image of the צור also comes to teach us that even when we don't understand G-d's ways and why He acts sometimes with nature and sometimes with miracles, sometimes with seeming רחמים and sometimes דין, that should not shake our אמונה even for one second. It is okay for us to have questions sometimes but that shouldn't agitate our אמונה and בטחון on a practical level. דרך נחש עלי צור describes a snake crawling on a rock, מרדכי (ל:יט) in משלי says that a person cannot see a snake's path on a rock. I think that perhaps this can be an analogy to us not always being able to understand ה' ways. Rav Soloveitchik in the same text as before says, "The Deity is not subject to the intellect of His creatures, and the experience of G-d, infinity, and eternity is not confined to the particular extent of the finite, temporal mind." Just

because we, as mere human beings, cannot comprehend G-d and His intricate way of running the world, it does not mean that He does not exist! Even though sometimes ה' operates through נס, and sometimes through טבע, and we may not understand why He chooses to act with one over the other in each situation, at the end of the day, we know with certainty that it is all ה' and therefore we can still trust Him and turn to Him at all times.

In קלי צורי ה' is described as תהלים (יח:ג). The רד"ק comments that ה' is our stronghold and we can run to Him whenever we are faced with enemies. – אך הוא צורי וישועתי משגבי לא אמוט (סב:ז). “He alone is my Rock and my salvation; my stronghold, I shall not hesitate.” – על אלוקים ישעי וכבודי צור עוזי מחסי באלוקים תהלים (סב:ח). “Upon G-d rests my salvation and my glory, the Rock of my strength, my refuge is in G-d.” Time and time again, we turn to the eternality of ה' as our Savior. It is particularly interesting to note that the words מצור meaning defense and תיצור meaning to protect have the same שרש as the word צור. It all comes back to the same idea. As it says in – כלה שארי ולבבי צור לבבי וחלקי אלוקים לעולם, תהלים (עג:כו) in “My flesh and my heart yearn; G-d is the rock of my heart and my portion forever.” If we keep close the knowledge of ה'’s ultimate strength and divine intervention in every level of nature and every level of our lives, we will be able to trust in G-d FOREVER no matter what life throws at us. Our “rock solid” אמונה and בטחון in ה' must be the “rock bottom” foundation to our lives.

FACULTY

no longer sufficient. Today we need to rise to greater heights, and tomorrow even more.

There is one exception. When a person leaves this world, he leaves behind his ability to achieve greater spirituality. He can no longer perform מצוות. He will merit reward for all that he managed to accomplish, but what was postponed for some later date is now beyond his grasp. That is why we place a מצבה, a one stone pillar on a grave. On the one hand, it is testimony about the deceased, praising all that he has accomplished. But it is also serves as a reminder to the rest of us that now (and only now) is our opportunity to add to our spiritual achievements.

Having spent a year of serious עבודת ה' ארץ ישראל here in תלמידה, there is a great deal that a תלמידה can be proud of. But don't make the mistake of erecting a מצבה to tout your achievements. At this stage (or any stage) in life, it is something that הקב"ה hates. Build a מזבח! Recognize that spiritual growth doesn't end when you board the plane at Ben Gurion airport to return home. The environment may be different, the challenges may be greater, and the progress may be at a different pace, but you can and must continue your growth. Brick by brick, level by level, you have the ability to build a glorious מזבח of your own personal עבודת ה'; אהבת ה' built with אהבת ה' and in turn, beloved by ה'.