

Kol

קול

Mevaseret

מבשרת

A Compilation of
Insights and Analyses
of Torah Topics

by the students of
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לזכר נשמות

נחמן דניאל בן אריה צבי ז"ל

Donny Morris

And all the victims of the Meron tragedy

זכרונם לברכה

May their dedication to

Torah Learning & Avodat Hashem

be an inspiration to us all.

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

בן זומא אומר מצינו פסוק כולל יותר והוא שמע ישראל וגו'. בן ננס
אומר מצינו פסוק כולל יותר והוא ואהבת לרעך כמוך. שמעון בן פוי
אומר מצינו פסוק כולל יותר והוא את הכבש האחד תעשה בבוקר וגו'.
עמד ר' פלוני על רגליו ואמר הלכה כבן פוי (הקדמה לעין יעקב)

It's surprising that this technical pasuk describing the *korban tamid* is considered the pasuk that is most encapsulating. It is noteworthy that this pasuk perfectly captures the experience of MMY 5781.

We knew stepping onto the plane that we were not en route to a typical seminary year. And we were not wrong. However, whether we were in two capsules, five capsules, and finally no capsules, our Torah learning remained constant. While we never knew what tomorrow would bring, one thing was for sure – class would start in the Beit Midrash at 8:30. This level of stability was only afforded to us thanks to the unbelievable dedication of our amazing faculty, whose warmth and enthusiasm permeated the many layers of plastic. We cannot fully express our gratitude to our *rebbeim* and *mechanchot* for fostering a love of Torah and encouraging us to pursue it for ourselves. We express *hakarat hatov* to Rabbi Lerner for the many hours he has spent ensuring that this publication properly represents our Torah learning this year.

Additionally, we thank the student editors for working tirelessly – sourcing, editing, revising, and perfecting all of the articles, always with a smile; this publication could not have been done without them. Thank you, of course, to our contributors, as well.

To MMY 5781, thank you for fostering an atmosphere ringing with positivity and enthusiasm, and sharing your Torah with us.

Lastly, we thank הקב"ה. This past year has taught us that nothing can be taken for granted. Hashem has blessed us with a year of consistent and “normal” learning and gifted us the *Torah Hakedoshah* as a guiding light in our lives, both הערביים and בבוקר.

Sincerely,

The Kol Mevaseret Editors 5781

INTRODUCTION

What a challenging year it has been. Although 5780 in MMY ended abruptly for many of us, who knew that 5781 would be, in many ways, even more challenging. We promised to do our best to give you a full experience even if it would be “different”, and it would seem that *b’ezerat Hashem*, that is in fact how it played out.

It was a year full of *kabbalat Hatorah* and yearning for an Eretz Yisrael experience; a year with lots of twists and turns, multiple lockdowns where our *bein adam lachaveiro* was tested, as we remained confined indoors for long periods of time and were careful to not negatively impact on the personal space of our friends; a year where human weaknesses would be evident, but also one where our personal strengths would shine and our innate *emunah pshuta* would carry us through.

Sounds familiar? In *Parshat Masei* we are reminded, in detailed fashion, of all of the twists and turns, ups and downs, of our forty year journey through the desert. למה נכתבו המסעות הללו. Why does the Torah enumerate each and every stop along the way?

The midrash quotes multiple reasons for this long, seemingly unnecessary listing. I would like to focus on four of them.

1. It serves as *hakarat hatov* to the various host encampments for protecting Bnei Yisrael during the sojourn there – על שקבלו את ישראל ועתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא ליתן שכרן.

2. Rashi initially quotes R’ Moshe HaDarshan that it is a praise to Hashem for making us change locations only twenty times in a thirty-eight year time span. להודיע חסדיו של מקום. Although the long travels served as a punishment for the *chet hameraglim*, Hashem’s *hashgacha* provided a tremendous silver lining in the ‘clouds’.

3. As his second approach, Rashi quotes R’ Tanchuma who provides a *Mashal*:

משל למלך שהיה בנו חולה והוליכו למקום רחוק לרפאותו. כיון שהיו חוזרין התחיל אביו מונה כל המסעות. אמר לו כאן ישננו כאן הוקרנו כאן חששת את ראשך.

There was a king who had an ill child. They needed to travel a great distance to cure the child. Once the exhausting emotional and physical journey was over, there was time to reflect and tell over all of the stories of where they found solace despite the challenges. It is a *hakarat hatov* to Hashem not only for the *hashgacha* of the relative short span of the difficulties (as in Rashi's first approach), but rather for the individual *hashgachot* which took place each and every step along the long and winding road to recovery.

4. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim (quoted by the Ramban), points out that it is human nature to forget all of the details as time goes on. We will remember the overall experience, but the detailed *hashgacha* will get lost with time.

כי הנסים והאותות הנעשות היו אמיתיות לכל רואיהם, אך בעתיד יהיו
דברים בשמועה ויכזיבם השומע ... על כן ... כדי שיראו אותם
הדורות הבאים וידעו האותות הגדולות איך עמדו בני אדם במקומות
ההם ארבעים שנה.

Revisionist history will say that we must have survived the desert with the help of neighboring cities and food delivery services, and of course Zoom. So the Torah reminds us that the details of the reality are important and we should entrench them in our awareness while they are fresh in our consciousness so that they aren't deleted from the historical record.

MMY 5781 was a long forty week saga. Our talmidot benefited from tremendous personal attention from the MMY administration and teachers. The efforts to get our students here before the year began, the ongoing love and care – in sickness and in health – was indescribable. They had an intense *kabbalat haTorah* and Eretz Yisrael experience because they also had a *matan Torah* from incredible mentors (and not just due to their own *kabbalat haTorah*) and indefatigable leadership. The *hakarat hatov* for all of this needs to always be expressed. I say this especially about MMY 5781 since, as a result of my sabbatical year, all of those efforts were thrust upon others, the MMY “encampment hosts”, without any prior warning.

As difficult as this year was for all, it really was a full experience. This Kol Mevaseret proves that. Our talmidot's skills have

developed and, perhaps due to the lack of distractions and travel, their learning experience was even enhanced. They had extra time not only to make an extra-long Purim shpiel, but also to take advantage of absolutely everything the MMY Beit Medrash has to offer. Although logic dictates that it would have been difficult to settle in this year, the long lockdowns were really a blessing in disguise. Each individual's spiritual growth through her personalized intellectual process, and the harmonious diversity that is the MMY experience, is so beautifully reflected in the various articles contained in this Torah journal.



My message to MMY 5781 is that as you reflect on your *shana ba'aretz*, go through all of your “war stories” in great detail. As you read the articles, flash back to where you were when you developed these ideas. Picture your teachers in their masks; picture plastic walls all around you. If you spent quarantine time productively working on your articles, a mishmar, or a self-development project, reflect back on how that *bidud* time really helped you concentrate, and learn how to take advantage of Hashem's gift of quiet time. Hashem is with you every step of the way. Let His voice call out to you from every one of these pages.

Let the very existence of this journal be an inspiration for the next time in your life that you inevitably face a challenge. Even after you have read it through for the first time, on the plane ride on the way home, keep it handy on your shelf as an icon. Never take for granted the Torah opportunities that this past year gave you.

MMY 5781 is a most special and inspiring group. You accomplished the almost impossible, and therefore the publication of this edition of Kol Mevaseret is something remarkable. The harder things are, the more we hold on to them with feelings of immense appreciation.

הבת יקירה לי תשפ"א אם ילדה שעשועים כי מדי דברי בה זכר אזכרנה עוד.

Rabbi David Katz

תנ"ך

חתן דמים

One of the most enigmatic encounters that appears in Sefer Shemot are three pesukim that appear in the midst of Moshe and his family journeying back to Mitzrayim (Shemot 4:24-26). Leading up to this excerpt, a sequence of events takes place where Hashem tells Moshe to return to Mitzrayim and demand the freedom of Bnei Yisrael. If Pharoah refuses to let them go, Moshe should tell him that his firstborn son will be killed (Shemot 4:22-23).

In the encounter itself, an unnamed person is on his way to an inn, and Hashem meets him and seeks to kill him. Tzipporah then takes a stone and cuts off her son's foreskin, giving him a *brit milah*, and touches his legs with it, and says, "You are a *chatan damim* to me!". At this point, he lets him go, and Tzipporah adds, "A *chatan damim* because of the circumcision."

There are a plethora of questions to be asked. Who are the various pronouns in these events referring to? Why is Hashem seeking to kill someone? Why does this follow Hashem telling Moshe that the ultimate demise of Pharoah will be killing his firstborn son? How does Tzipporah understand that to prevent this person's death, she has to give her son a *brit milah*? And finally, what is a *chatan damim* and why does Tzipporah use that phrase not once, but twice? This last question is even more intriguing since that phrase does not appear elsewhere in Tanach.

Rashi bases his explanation on the gemara (Nedarim 31b-32a). Moshe, while on his way to Mitzrayim, stayed at an inn. Hashem sent an angel to kill him because he hadn't given a *brit* to Eliezer, who had been born just before they left Midyan. Two opinions are quoted in the gemara. According to R' Yehoshua ben Korcha, Moshe was grossly negligent in the performance of the mitzvah. R' Yosi disagrees. Moshe was fully aware of his obligation but purposely put it off before traveling. Circumcising Eliezer in Midyan would have delayed his departure by three days to protect the baby's health, and it was clear to Moshe that Hashem wanted him to leave Midyan as soon as possible.

Why, then, was Moshe punished? The location of the inn was close enough to his final destination, that traveling with a newly circumcised baby wouldn't pose any danger. Moshe should have given Eliezer a *brit* the moment they arrived at the inn. Instead, Moshe first involved himself in arranging his accommodations in the inn, incurring Hashem's wrath.

The angel that came to pursue Moshe took the form of a snake that swallowed him from his head to his thighs, and then from his feet to his male organ. Tzipporah understood that he was being attacked because of the *brit*. She quickly cut off Eliezer's foreskin and threw it to the feet of Moshe, and said about Eliezer, "You would have caused my husband to be murdered" – you are the killer of my husband. After the *brit*, the angel lets go of Moshe, and Tzipporah understood that it wasn't sent to kill Moshe needlessly. Rather, he came to warn Moshe to perform the *brit* immediately or he would be killed. She therefore revised her statement, and said, "My husband would have been murdered because of the *brit*."

This is not the only interpretation of the story. The Gemara in Nedarim cites the explanation of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel. Eliezer was the one the *malach* sought to kill. According to R' Yehuda bar Bizna there were multiple *malachim* that came to kill Moshe, specifically *af* (anger) and *cheima* (wrath). They swallowed Moshe and left only his legs (the body part that requires circumcision). After Tzipporah circumcised Eliezer, Moshe killed *cheima*, although the armies (followers) of *cheima* remained.

Ibn Ezra suggests a slightly different approach. Moshe did not forget to give a *brit* to Eliezer, but delayed it out of safety concerns of traveling with the baby. Hashem rebuked Moshe for not giving Eliezer a *brit* in Midyan and leaving him behind with Tzipporah until he had recovered. Moshe was stricken with illness and was unable to perform the *brit* himself. Tzipporah cut off Eliezer's foreskin, and Moshe recovered. Initially, Tzipporah referred to the blood of murder, but after Moshe's recovery, she changed it to the blood of *milah*.

The Chizkuni quotes a variety of opinions. One of his interesting interpretations is as follows. After Tzipporah circumcised Eliezer, she placed the foreskin at the feet of the angel, in lieu of a *korban*, similar to Gideon and Manoach who sacrifice a *korban* in the presence of an

angel. Alternatively, he suggests that Tzipporah placed the foreskin at the feet of Moshe, hoping that in the merit of the blood of the mitzvah of *milah*, he would be saved, similar to the blood of the Korban Pesach that protected Bnei Yisrael on their last night in Mitzrayim.

In a fascinating comment, the Chizkuni explains the phrase “*ki chatan damim atah li*”, that Tzipporah thought that Moshe almost died as a punishment for marrying a Midianite woman, giving a more literal translation to the term *chatan damim*. It was only after the angel left Moshe and in his life was no longer in danger that she realized that Moshe was being severely rebuked because of the delay in the *milah*, and not because of his marriage and therefore changed the phrase to *chatan damim lamulot*.

Chizkuni quotes another amazing *agadda* as well. Although Yitro had rejected avodah zarah worship, he was not yet ready to embrace the monotheism of Avraham’s descendants. He therefore forbade Moshe to give his son a *brit*. The child in our story was not Eliezer, but rather Gershom, the firstborn. However, as soon as Moshe had left Yitro’s home and was no longer subject to his jurisdiction, he should have circumcised Gershom. This delay had long term consequences and was a contributing factor to Gershom’s son becoming an idol worshipper. That was the reason for Hashem’s anger.

Rav Soloveitchik connects our story to the previous pesukim. Mitzrayim related the obligations of a firstborn male with “power and coercion”, while Jewish values fixate on “sanctity and communal responsibility”. That is why the Torah contrasts Bnei Yisrael, Hashem’s firstborn with the Egyptian firstborn. (If the former continue to suffer, the latter will be punished.) Moshe was unable to carry the principles of the Jewish people towards firstborn children until he had circumcised his own firstborn son. This approach agrees somewhat with the last suggestion of the Chizkuni.

What messages can one glean from these various interpretations? Is it the importance of a *brit milah*? Yes, but also so much more. A person must be careful about his priorities in his *avodah Hashem*, must learn to take advantage of mitzvah opportunities as soon as they present themselves and must understand that with privilege comes responsibility. Most importantly, we must be grateful

that in all our journeys, the Divine Presence accompanies us and sends us messengers and messages to keep us on the straight and narrow path towards accomplishing our spiritual goals.

Ben Sorer U'Moreh:

באשר הוא שם or נידון על שם סופו

Questions often arise regarding how Divine judgement works. Are people judged based on their present status or perhaps on what they will do in the future?

In Parshat Vayera, the angel tells Hagar: אל תיראי כי שמע אלקים, “Do not fear, for Hashem has heard the voice of the youth in his present state” (Bereishit 21:17). Rashi explains that Yishmael will be judged according to his current status and not based on his future deeds. Chazal (Rosh Hashana 16b) learn from this that Hashem judges all of us based only on the present, not on what will happen in the future.

This idea, however, seems to be contradicted by Chazal’s understanding of the punishment given to a *ben sorer u’moreh*, a wayward and rebellious son. Even though he has yet to commit any capital crime, he is sentenced to death. Why? Rashi (Devarim 21:18, quoting Sanhedrin 72a) comments that it is preferable to kill him when he is relatively innocent and not wait until, out of desperation, he will become a murderer. He is judged *al shem sofo*. So which is it? Are humans judged solely based on the present or on future actions as well?

Rav Yochanan Zweig explains¹ that there is a basic difference between the two cases. The rebellious son, as the Sages depict him, had a perfect upbringing. His parents did everything right with him. This is hinted by many of the specific laws of the Torah. For example, one condition we saw above is that the parents have similar voices. As Rav Zev Leff explains, the implication is that they raised him with one voice – giving him an entirely consistent upbringing, without each parent pulling the child in a different direction. When a boy’s upbringing is perfect (which needless to say

¹ aish.com/atr/Rebellious-Son-Ben-Sorer-UMoreh-Punished-for-Future.html

is only theoretical), his misbehavior is clearly his own fault. There is no hope for him; he will only get worse. Therefore, instructs the Torah, execute him now while he is relatively innocent.

Yishmael by contrast – as virtually every other person on the planet – was more complex than that. As sinful as he was, one could argue that it was not entirely his fault. He grew up the son of a maidservant, not a part of the main household. Thus, as wicked as he was and as great as his father and step-mother were, as all children he had his issues. His sins at the time were not expressions of pure evil – which would only get worse. There were other contributing factors. And so, he could not be judged based on the future – on what the angels prophetically saw his descendants would one day become. There was hope he would rise above the factors contributing to his wickedness and repent. He could only be judged based on whom he was then.

This approach offers a solution to the problem. Humanity is judged only where a person is at in the present since people are not set up in an ideal situation. This world is one where it is impossible to avoid making mistakes. In a perfect world, people would be judged for their future decisions, since it would have been their own doing and not a product of their surroundings. However, that is not the current reality which is why a person is judged solely on the concept of *ba'asher hu sham*.

There is another point to ponder. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 71a) quotes R' Shimon's opinion that there never was and never will be a *ben sorer u'moreh*, as it is impossible to completely fulfill all the criteria needed to qualify for this halacha. The Torah has this mitzvah for the sole purpose of studying it and receiving reward. If that is the case, what lessons can be learned from studying about a *ben sorer u'moreh*?

Rav Yissocher Frand² quotes in the name of Rav Yisrael Salanter that the chapter of *ben sorer u'moreh* teaches us a unique and profound lesson: "*Torah lishma*" – learning for learning's sake alone,

² rabbidunner.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08

without any application to the “real world” whatsoever, is worthwhile in and of itself. Certainly, the purpose of learning is to bring one to action, and there is value in being “results oriented”. However, we should not think that the whole point of learning is to know “what to do”. Even if something will never be practically relevant, there is still value in just learning the word of G-d. The intrinsic purpose of Torah learning is to study the word of G-d. Its benefit is not dependent on practical application.

Rabbi Kenny Schiowitz³ suggests that since a *ben sorer u'moreh* never existed, it teaches that there will never be a case where one can make assumptions about a person's future decisions. The gemara provides the layout for *nidon al shem sofo* but makes it clear that it will never come to fruition since everyone has the potential to grow.

In our non-ideal world, Hashem gives each person the opportunity to correct their ways and does not factor in their future. Hashem sees the conflicting struggles as well as the effort put forth to continue on the path He has set out. Humanity is not judged *al shem sofo* but rather *ba'asher hu sham*. We should be grateful, and take advantage of the opportunity presented.

³ jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/judging-the-rebellious-child/

Yehuda and Yosef:

What it Truly Means to Be a Leader

The story of the selling of Yosef is one of the most fascinating stories to unfold in all of Tanach, replete with subtle nuances, hidden messages, and deeper meanings. This article will focus primarily on the motif of familial leadership.

Like most details in the narrative of Yaakov and his family, the leadership position is not so clear-cut. On the one hand, Yehuda acts as the leader (after Reuven lost the firstborn privilege). On the other hand, Yosef is also a leader in the family. Though the dominance of one over the other throughout history is a fascinating research topic, this article will analyze the journey Yehuda and Yosef take to *become* leaders and what it really means to be a *manhig b'Yisrael*. Accompanying their interactions with each other, their brothers, and their father, is a profound and impactful journey of growth, teshuvah, and ultimate recognition of true responsibility.

Let us begin with Yosef's side of the story, specifically with his accusation that his brothers were spies. There is an obvious question: Why did Yosef devise this whole plan? What was his end goal? One answer, suggested by the Ramban (Bereshit 42:8), is that Yosef was trying to bring about the fulfillment of his dreams. This required the presence of all of his brothers and his father in Egypt. Yosef's accusation of spying is prefaced with the verse: ויזכר יוסף את החלמות אשר חלם להם ויאמר אליהם מרגלים אתם לראות את ערות הארץ באתם (Bereshit 42:9). In the pasuk, there is a seamless transition between Yosef remembering his past dreams and immediately accusing the brothers of being spies, thus setting his plan into motion.

However, if making his *nevuah* come true was Yosef's *only* agenda in concocting this elaborate plan, some specifics don't add up. There are certain details, and commands of Yosef that don't

appear at all to further the fulfillment of the prophecy. In addition, there are certain actions taken by Yosef that are uncannily similar to what the brothers did to him when they sold him into slavery. It can be suggested that a deeper analysis of these parallels between the selling of Yosef, and Yosef's actions towards his brothers, will reveal that there is indeed more to Yosef's plan than meets the eye.

The similarities begin with the manner in which each party accuses the other. Yosef accuses the brothers of lying about their purpose in Egypt. The brothers accused Yosef of lying and concocting false realities with his dreams. Yosef then confines his brothers (42:17): **וַיֹּאסֶף אֹתָם אֶל מִשְׁמֶרֶת**, just like they imprisoned him in the pit (37:24): **וַיִּקְחֻהוּ וַיְשַׁלְכּוּ אֹתוֹ הַבְּרֵא**.

Soon after, however, Yosef frees all of his brothers from prison except Shimon. Why then, did Yosef at first imprison all of them? It seems pointless. Yosef could have started with taking Shimon and leaving the rest of the brothers free. Perhaps Yosef does this to show all of the brothers how it feels to be thrown into a pit for no apparent reason not knowing what will happen next, just as he experienced this many years earlier.

Before the brothers return to Canaan to bring Binyamin, Yosef instructs his servant to place their silver, in each of the brothers' sacks (42:25) - **וְלֹהֲשִׁיב כַּסְפֵּיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל שָׁקוֹ**. Contrary to the planting of the goblet later in the story, this action has no consequences. When the brothers fearfully admit to having found the money in their bags, Yosef's servant brushes the matter off completely. It could be that Yosef's purpose in planting the *kesef* was purely psychological. The brothers sold Yosef for 20 silver pieces, and so Yosef placed silver pieces in their bags.

After the *kesef* incident is cleared up, the pasuk (43:24) relates that the brothers were given water to wash their feet: **וַיִּתֵּן מַיִם וַיְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם**. Why the need to mention this detail? Perhaps Yosef providing water to his brothers is a foil of **וַיִּתֵּן מַיִם וַיְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיהֶם**, where Yosef didn't have any water in the pit. (37:24) Similarly, the pasuk twice includes the detail that there would be bread in the meal that

Yosef eats with his brothers which could be a reminder to how the brothers sit to eat bread after throwing Yosef into the pit – וישבו לאכל לחם (Bereshit 37:25).

Finally, at the climax of the story, Yosef sets up the ultimate measure for measure: he threatens to take another child of Rachel away from Yaakov. He places the brothers in the exact same situation and sees what their reaction will be. Will they stand up for their brother or will they leave him behind?

There is an obvious question that arises after recognizing all these parallels. Why is Yosef putting his brothers through all of this? At first glance, it seems that Yosef is taking revenge on his brothers. However, one must explore alternate explanations before characterizing Yosef HaTzaddik as a vengeful person. Perhaps Yosef was simulating his own experience for his brothers so they could truly understand the gravity of what they did to him.

When Yosef sees his brothers bowing to him when they first come to Egypt, he understands that now is the time for his dreams to come true, and thus hatches a plan to make this happen. However, it's possible that woven into that plan was a desire to help the brothers recognize just how traumatizing his experiences were in being sold as a slave. As a result, Yosef navigates between orchestrating events so that his dreams come true and determining that his brothers have done teshuva. Ultimately this ends when Yehuda steps up and claims responsibility for Binyamin and passes Yosef's test with flying colors.

When Yosef sees this truthful and passionate act of brotherly love, he realizes that the brothers have gone through a *teshuva* experience and really understand how wrong they were to sell Yosef. (An analysis of Yehuda's transformation in the coming paragraphs will illustrate just how deeply this newfound sense of purpose runs through the brothers.) Now Yosef can focus on saving his family from famine and allowing his *nevuah* to come true. That is why when Yosef reveals himself to his brothers, he reassures them that he is not angry by stressing in 45:8 that it was Hashem, not them, who sent him down to Egypt – וישלחני אלקים לפניכם – He tells the

brothers: **לפניכם** – “Hashem sent me down here in order to keep the family alive” (45:5).

With this in mind, one can transition to the brothers’ side of the story, specifically to Yehuda’s perspective. It is arguable that Yehuda goes through a similar experience to Yosef in that he, through a series of events, learns what it really means to be a leader and what his true responsibilities are. There is a glaring question that can be asked after reading Yehuda’s passionate speech to Yosef on behalf of Binyamin: What changed for him? What allowed him to transform from a man ready to sell one of his own siblings, to a brother ready to sacrifice his freedom for one of his own? An analysis of Yehuda’s journey from the beginning and identification of the reason behind his turning point reveals how Yehuda is able to transform and act so selflessly in relation to Binyamin.

Yehuda, despite not being the natural firstborn, is clearly a prominent leader in the family. However, even with this responsibility, one sees Yehuda acting impetuously, selfishly, and insensitively at the start of the narrative. This is evident especially in the actual sale of Yosef. Yehuda was the one to propose the idea of selling Yosef and the wording of pasuk 37:25 makes it seem like a rash, last-minute thought. **וישאו עיניהם ויראו והנה ארחת ישמעאלים באה**.

They didn’t plan to sell Yosef, they simply see the caravan come and immediately in the next pasuk, Yehuda suggests the idea of selling Yosef into slavery. The proposition itself is also quite alarming. Yehuda says to his brothers, **מה בצע כי נהרג את אחינו** - “What gain will we get from killing our brother?” (37:26). Onkelos translates **בצע** as monetary gain, implying that Yehuda doesn’t want to kill Yosef because he wants something out of the deal for himself, not just because he cares about him as a brother **ואינו בשרנו הוא**. If he really cared about Yosef as a brother, he would not sell him as a slave in the first place.

Nobody argues with Yehuda’s idea; the pasuk immediately reads, **וישמעו אחיו** – “His brothers listened” (37:27). So, 17-year-old Yosef is pulled out from the pit and sold as a slave. Directly after

this comes the story of Yehuda and Tamar. This intermission from Yosef's storyline seems random, but in reality is the key to understanding Yehuda's journey and transformation. Rabbi David Fohrman develops the theory that this bizarre interaction with Tamar is the story in which Yehuda reclaims all he loses after the sale of Yosef and how he realizes his true role within the family.¹

Bereishit 38 begins with Yehuda entering a downward spiral. He realizes that he probably will never see his brother again and in orchestrating that, he broke his father's spirit. Yehuda traveled from home and "went down from his brothers" (38:1). This action was literal in a geographical sense, but perhaps also metaphorical in a psychological and spiritual sense. Yehuda was slipping downwards. He marries a woman from Canaan but two of their children turn out to be "wicked in the eyes of Hashem" (38:7, 38:10). Because of his sins, the eldest, Er, dies childless. In an attempt to continue Er's legacy, Yehuda gives Er's widow, Tamar, to his next son, Onan. Instead of carrying on the legacy of his deceased brother, the pasuk tells us that Onan purposefully "let his seed go to waste" (38:9) because he knew the children wouldn't really be considered his. This selfish act leads to Onan's death as well, again widowing a childless Tamar. Yehuda, fearful of there being some sort of correlation between his sons' deaths and the woman to whom they each were married, doesn't let Tamar marry his third son and tells her to wait in her father's home until his son grows up. Tamar, patient and respectful, does so.

However, time passes with no indication that Yehudah will allow the third son to marry her, so she devises a plan. Tamar removes her widow's garb, dresses like a prostitute, and sits at the crossroads of the city. Yehuda, not recognizing her, comes to consort with her (another indication of how far he has fallen) but does not have any means of payment. To temporarily solve the

¹ See YUTorah.org

problem, he gives Tamar his signet, cloak and staff as collateral until he can send her a goat as payment. Unfortunately for him, Tamar absconds with the items and Yehuda is unable to track her down to trade the goat for his belongings. Months later, it is told to Yehuda that his daughter-in-law is pregnant and the assumption is that she had forbidden relations. Yehuda, acting as the judge at that point, commanded that Tamar be brought out and burned for her sin. Tamar, still in possession of Yehuda's belongings sends word to Yehuda and says, *הכר נא למי החתמת והפתילים והמטה האלה*. Identify these items for whoever they belong to is the father of the child" (38:25).

This is the turning point in Yehuda's life. Because Tamar uses the language of *הכר נא* which is the exact same phrase the brothers said to Yaakov when presenting the bloodstained coat – *הכר נא* (37:32). Yehuda, after being racked with guilt for many years, is now coming face to face with his actions and must make a decision. Does he own up to what he now realizes he did wrong with Tamar, or does he let an innocent person suffer to preserve his own reputation? It would have been so easy to dismiss Tamar's claim and let her burn at the stake, ensuring that no one ever found out the truth about his involvement in the situation. Admitting to the truth, on the other hand, would be uncomfortable, and embarrassing. But Yehuda finally realizes what it means to be a leader; it's about doing what's right, even when it's unpleasant. Due to this realization, he publicly acquits Tamar and reclaims the signet, cloak and staff as his own.

Rabbi Fohrman suggests that these three items are all things a king wears. At first, Yehuda was stripped of these things. But now, as he comes to understand what it truly means to *be* a king, he can reclaim them and wear them with pride. This newfound sense of purpose propels Yehuda forward and allows him to become the selfless, caring, and responsible family leader seen when interacting with Yaakov at home and Yosef in Mitzrayim.

When analyzing Yehuda's argument to Yaakov in Bereshit 43 when he's trying to convince Yaakov to send Binyamin down to

Mitzrayim, the first thing to note is that when referring to Binyamin in his plea, Yehuda calls him “*na’ar*.” This is strange for two reasons. The first being that *na’ar* is often used in the context of “young lads.” However, at this point, Binyamin is married with 10 children. He isn’t such a “young lad” anymore. Secondly, up until now, Binyamin was almost always referred to as “*hakaton*,” the small one, which is more fitting because even though he is a grown man, he will always be the smallest in the context of his older brothers. Perhaps the change of pronoun could indicate that although Yehuda is speaking to his father about Binyamin, he is speaking to himself about Yosef and trying, in some way, to make up for letting his brother down. After all, in Bereshit 37, Yosef is introduced with the words **וְהוּא נֶעַר**. In reality, Yehuda can’t go back in time and take responsibility for Yosef, but at this present moment, he can take responsibility for Binyamin. This is exactly what he does. He declares to Yaakov **אֲנֹכִי אֶעֱרְבֶנּוּ** – “I will be responsible for him” (43:9). Next, Yehuda promises his father that he will present Binyamin safely back before him (43:10) – **וְהִצַּגְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ**. Perhaps this is also a *tikun*, a retroactive fix, relating to the selling of Yosef. Last time, Yehuda and the brothers deceptively presented a bloody coat to Yaakov but now, he is promising to present Binyamin to his father in the flesh. No more tricks, no more plans, just pure brotherly responsibility.

The next speech Yehuda gives comes at the climax of the story, this time to Yosef. Yosef is about to take Binyamin away as a slave. Woven into this speech are indications of Yehuda taking retroactive responsibility for Yosef and making up for selling one child of Rachel by selflessly standing up for the other. It is this genuine display of his transformation that ultimately moves Yosef to realize how much the brothers really have changed. Throughout his whole plea, Yehuda centers his pleas and arguments around family. The background details about the family dynamic and Yaakov’s state of mind seem irrelevant unless Yehuda is trying to subtly make a larger point. Perhaps, by including all this, he is showing that he no longer thinks selfishly and single-mindedly. Rather Yehuda now has the humility to care for the *entire* family and their greater needs.

Another possible *tikun* for the selling of Yosef can be gleaned in how Yehuda tells Yosef three times how they can't possibly go back to their father without Binyamin – כי איך אעלה אל אבי והנער איננו אתי – (Bereshit 44:34). Similarly: והנער/הקטן איננו אתנו (the use of “*katon*” is in 44:26, and “*na'ar*” in 44:30). This phrase is eerily similar to the phrase Reuven uses when he confronts his brothers about Yosef being missing from the pit – הילד איננו. Perhaps Yehuda is saying to himself, “This cannot happen again! I will not put my family in yet another הילד איננו situation!”

Another possible *tikun* can be discerned when Yehuda is clarifying why it would be so hard for Yaakov to lose Binyamin. He quotes his father, saying, אתם ידעתם כי שנים ילדה לי אשתי – “You know that my wife gave me two children” (44:27). The old Yehuda would have been enraged by this argument – “Is Leah, my mother, not considered your wife? Are the rest of us not considered your children? Would you so easily give up the life of Shimon for the life of Binyamin?” Instead, Yehuda is saying “I understand the dynamics of the family, and I am accepting it.” Yehuda stands up for Binyamin, this favored child, the way he didn't for Yosef, although in doing so, he must lower himself in the “ranking” of the family.

In making his passionate and emotional offer to place himself into slavery instead of Binyamin, Yehuda is, in some way, making up for selling his brother Yosef into slavery. He is talking outwardly about Binyamin but inside, he is trying his best to set things right. Even if that means leaving his family forever and becoming a slave. Ultimately, what Yehuda shows is that he now understands that being a family leader means overriding your own personal desires in order to serve the greater group, even if that means doing something uncomfortable. It is this display that shows Yosef that the brothers have come full circle in genuine teshuvah.

Yosef and Yehuda, both leaders of their family, ultimately arrive at the same realization, even though their journey towards it is wildly different. They each come to understand that leadership is not about fulfilling a personal agenda. Rather, it is about subjecting

one's own will to Hashem's and doing what is necessary for the group, not what is comfortable for oneself. Yosef experiences this in his struggle to balance helping his prophecies come true without using a vengeful "measure for measure" approach. He realizes that his focus should be on his brothers' teshuva process. Yehuda begins as a selfish, rash, and insensitive leader thinking only of his own ambitions, but with the help of Tamar, he transforms into a selfless leader ready to take genuine responsibility for his family, even if he, himself, is knocked down a few notches in the process.

This demand on our leaders is evident in many other examples of *manhigei Yisrael*. One obvious example is how Mordechai encourages, nay demands, of Esther to take on a leadership role. Esther very clearly communicates her hesitations and concerns to Mordechai, but Mordechai famously and forcefully responds וְיָדַע אִם לַעֲתָ כֹּזֵאת הַגָּעַת לְמַלְכוּת – "Maybe it was for this reason you were made queen" (Esther 4:14). 'Yes, this is scary and uncomfortable, but Hashem put you here for a reason. To be a leader means doing what is needed and not what is comfortable.'

Ultimately, this journey that Yehuda and Yosef undergo is transformative not only for them but for all future leaders of our nation. Hopefully, we too, can embrace the attribute of aligning our desires with Hashem's and see the positive impact it makes on our daily lives.

Pesach: More Than Just the Holiday of Redemption

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 490:9) teaches that it is customary on Pesach to read the megillah of Shir HaShirim. The public readings of the megillot help us focus on the main message of the day, the historical background, or the emotions we should be feeling on that day. For example, on Purim, it is very fitting that we read Megillat Esther, for the megillah recounts the entire story, leading up to the ultimate salvation of the Jews and establishment of Purim as a holiday. It is fitting to read Eicha on Tisha B'Av, as the megillah expresses feelings of mourning over the destruction of Yerushalayim and the Beit HaMikdash.

But why on Pesach do we read Shir HaShirim, an apparent story of romance about a Lover and his beloved, elaborating on the ups and downs in their relationship, the lovesickness they feel towards each other, and their extensive specific physical descriptions? What relation does this love story have to Pesach, the Holiday of Redemption? Further, why is this megillah considered to be part of the twenty-four Sifrei Tanach, when it seems so different from the others? What is hidden in this romance novel to make it so fitting to be included in the canonized Tanach?

Avot D'Rabbi Natan (1:4) teaches that, initially, Shir HaShirim, Mishlei, and Kohelet were not believed to be part of Ketuvim; however, later the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah came and expounded them, and counted them among the 24 books of Tanach. The mishna in Masechet Yadayim (3:5) mirrors this dispute and recounts a disagreement among the Sages over whether Shir HaShirim and Kohelet warrant being included in Tanach. After citing the opposing views, the mishna concludes with a statement of R' Akiva: שאין כל העולם כלו כדאי כיום שנתן בו שיר השירים לישראל, "The entire world has never
שכל הכתובים קדש, ושיר השירים קדש קדשים"

been as worthy as it was on the day Shir HaShirim was introduced into the world. The rest of the writings of Tanach are *kodesh*, holy, while Shir HaShirim is *kodesh kodashim*, holy of holies.” This strong statement of R’ Akiva not only validates Shir HaShirim’s placement among the twenty-four Sifrei Tanach, but elevates it beyond the realm of dispute. Shir HaShirim certainly deserves its place among the other divinely inspired Writings. The question is why.

The Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 10:3) compares ahavat Hashem to the connectedness a Lover has with his beloved, and the lovesickness that causes his beloved to constantly be in the forefront of his mind. So too, we should always feel a sense of longing to become closer to Hashem, and always have Him on the forefront of our minds. Rambam ends this halacha stating that this is the lovesickness described in Shir HaShirim (2:5) and the entire Shir HaShirim is an allegory for this idea; the love we should feel towards Hashem.

Other sources elaborate on this idea that Shir HaShirim is an allegory representing the connection between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. The gemara (Shevuot 35b) teaches that the name *Shlomo* mentioned in the megillah is *kodesh*, and refers to Hashem: המלך שהשולם שלו. Elsewhere (Berachot 57b), the gemara states that one who dreams of Shir HaShirim should anticipate chasidut (piety).

Ramchal (Mesilat Yesharim, chapter 18), defines chasidut as going far beyond what is demanded in the service of Hashem, in order to please Hashem and express true love for Him, just as a man would act whole-heartedly to fulfill his wife’s wishes. So too, the allegory of Shir HaShirim reflects this strong level of connection and love we ought to feel towards Hashem. From these sources it is clear that Shir HaShirim is more than just the love story between a man and his beloved. It is Bnei Yisrael’s love story of their relationship with Hashem. That is why it is the Holy of Holies and most certainly deserves a place among Tanach.

But why is this expression of love connected to Pesach, the holiday of redemption? The most fitting answer involves a deeper analysis

of the allegory hidden in Shir HaShirim, leading many commentators to interpret pesukim in the megillah as references to Yetziat Mitzrayim. In 1:9, the Lover compares his beloved לַסָּסְתִי בִּרְכַבִּי פָרָעָה, “to a horse among Pharaoh’s chariots”, an image well familiar from the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim.

In 2:14 the Lover describes his beloved to יוֹנְתִי בַּחֲגִי הַסֹּלֶעַ, “as a dove hiding in the cranny of the rocks”, which is interpreted by Rashi and others as a reference to Bnei Yisrael trapped, with Yam Suf before them, the Egyptian camp behind, and the desert full of wild animals surrounding them. The Lover’s beckoning to his beloved, הֲרֵאֵנִי אֶת־מֵרָאֵךְ, “Come forward, let me see you,” is none other than Hashem’s reassurance to Bnei Yisrael to travel forward into the sea and show their faith in Him, and He will protect them.

Verse 3:6 recalls the thoughts of the Lover as his beloved ascends from the desert to the palace on their wedding day. The Lover asks, מִי זֹאת עֹלָה מִן־הַמִּדְבָּר כְּתִימֵרוֹת עֶשֶׂן, “Who is she that comes up from the desert like columns of smoke?” This scene too is interpreted as an allegory to the Jewish nation traversing the desert led by the pillars cloud by day and fire by night, en route to their wedding at Har Sinai.

This is precisely the reason given by the Machzor Vitri, Abudraham (Pesach, Festival Prayers 12), and Mishna Brurah (490:17), who claim that the references to Yetziat Mitzrayim make Shir HaShirim a suitable megillah to read on Pesach. The Chayei Adam (Shabbat U’Moadim 130) adds to this idea by citing the minhag to read Shir HaShirim after the Seder as a continuation of the fulfillment of מִצְרַיִם יֵצֵאת מִצְרַיִם until one falls asleep on Pesach night.

To summarize: Shir HaShirim is more than just a romantic account of a Lover and his beloved, it is actually an allegory of our relationship with Hashem, and is therefore appropriately found among the twenty-four sifrei Tanach. On an allegorical level, there are many references to Yetziat Mitzrayim, Kriyat Yam Suf, and the start of the Jewish nation, and thus it is fitting to read Shir HaShirim on Pesach, the Holiday of Redemption, as a fulfillment of *Sippur Yetziat Mitzrayim*.

However, there is perhaps an even deeper message rooted in the allegory or Shir HaShirim that, once understood, can shine a new light on the Holiday of Pesach and what it is that we are actually celebrating.

In an attempt to understand Shlomo's reason for writing this megillah, Netziv raises another question: If Pesach is a holiday celebrating Yetziat Mitzrayim and the redemption of the Jews, why do we celebrate six more days after the fifteenth of Nissan – the date of the miracle? Evidently, this is not the only event being celebrated on the holiday.

The Netziv explains that the additional days of Pesach are there to help inspire our love and devotion to Hashem. Shlomo HaMelech wrote Shir HaShirim and delivered it to the nation on the first Pesach after the Beit HaMikdash was erected. Perhaps, the Jews at the time were experiencing some conflict in their lives. They were in the midst of an extreme change in their culture and mitzvah observance. Until the Beit HaMikdash was built, they were permitted to sacrifice to Hashem on private altars. With the establishment of a central house of service, many Jews felt that their connection with Hashem would dwindle, as the immediate opportunities to serve Him were taken away. Shlomo reassured the Jews with Shir HaShirim, a recounting of our relationship with Hashem. Through this megillah, he hoped to capture the essence of the final six days of Pesach and inspire the continuation of their connection and devotion to Hashem, despite the changes happening.

This answer of the megillah serving as a recounting of our relationship with Hashem fits well with the sources referencing Yetziat Mitzrayim cited above. While the first few chapters are filled with references to the Redemption, many commentators choose to interpret the later chapters referencing other historical events in our relationship with Hashem. Shir HaShirim serves not only as an allegory to our Redemption, but also to the continuation of our relationship.

Now we understand why Shir HaShirim is so fitting to read on Pesach. Pesach, and the redemption, is the beginning of our

relationship as a nation with Hashem. Hashem testifies how He chose us to be for Him a treasured nation (Shemot 19:4-6, Devarim 7:6-8), how He took us out from under foreign rule to be under His rule (Shemot 20:2 and Rashi), and how He remembers the kindness of our bridal days when we followed him into the desert (Yirmiyahu 2:2). But this is only the message behind the first day of Pesach. Our relationship with Hashem stretches far beyond the initial redemption, through the darkest times of history, and until today.

We read Shir HaShirim on Pesach, the beginning of the relationship, but we must remember that the relationship doesn't end there. It's not just a once in a lifetime historical landmark, but an everyday reality, a love that has to be at the forefront of our minds. It is a love that is *kodesh kodashim* and should not be taken lightly, and with this knowledge of the true message of Pesach, the start of our forever long relationship with Hashem, we can elevate even the most intimate feelings into *kodesh kodashim*.

Pesach is not just the Holiday of Redemption, but a holiday commemorating the start and celebrating the continuation of our everlong relationship with our Lover, Hashem.

A Guide to Becoming a Better Oveid Hashem

Finally! The Jews have been freed from the Mitzrayim, and are on their way to Eretz Yisrael. The beginning of Parshat Beshalach details how Hashem led Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt:

וַיְהִי בִשְׁלַח פָּרְעָה אֶת הָעָם וְלֹא נָחַם אֱלֹקִים דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי
קָרֹב הוּא כִּי אָמַר אֱלֹקִים כֹּן יִנָּחֵם הָעָם בְּרֹאשָׁם מִלְחָמָה וּשְׁבוּ מִצְרֵימָה.
(Shemot 13:17)

He did not lead them by way of the land of the Plishtim, although it was closer, lest Bnei Yisrael have a change of heart when they see war, and return to Egypt.

Rashi explains that Hashem took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt on a roundabout route and not on a straight, direct path towards Eretz Yisrael. Hashem intentionally led them on this route, so that if their travels became unbearable and frightening, and they desired to return to Egypt, it would be more difficult for them to do so.

There is an important life lesson to be learned from Rashi's interpretation. A person often has certain lusts that he wishes to overcome. Once a decision has been made to leave a specific sin, he must try and distance himself in great measure from the very opportunity to sin. Most importantly though, one must also make sure that the path of return to that sin is long, winding, and accompanied by many roadblocks.

The Mishna (Bava Batra 10:1) discusses a unique divorce document known as a *get mekushar*. After each line of the *get* is written it is folded over and signed by a witness. This process is repeated until the *get* is completely folded over with a signature on each fold. It was designed for Kohanim who want to divorce their wives. The point of this tedious and painfully long process is to cause the Kohen to truly ponder over his decision, think about the severity of its outcome, and hopefully prevent him from divorcing his wife. A Kohen

who divorces his wife cannot remarry her, as she is now a *gerusha*, and therefore this decision cannot be taken lightly. Through making this divorce process difficult and slow, the Kohen will continuously be forced to rethink his decision before making one he might regret.

When Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, Hashem made sure that their path back to Egypt would be difficult and very time consuming. If they thought about returning, even for a second, this desire would be immediately crushed by the tolling process through which they would need to return. This is the idea behind a *get mekushar*. In order to prevent making an irreversible and detrimental decision, one must set up many deterrents and obstacles. Similarly, it is vital to establish personal and communal barriers to discourage any attraction to sinful behavior.

This sounds way easier said than done. What happens once we stray away from sin? How can one maintain spiritual inspiration and closeness to Hashem? It is quite amazing that it took only three short days after leaving the miraculous venue of Yam Suf, for Bnei Yisrael to find reason to complain (Shemot 15:22-23).

ויסע משה את ישראל מים סוף ויצאו אל מדבר שור וילכו שלשת ימים
במדבר ולא מצאו מים. ויבאו מרתה ולא יכלו לשתת מים כי מרים הם
על כן קרא שמה מרה.

Ironically enough, now, the lack of water was a matter of concern for Bnei Yisrael. But instead of asking Moshe to daven to Hashem on their behalf, or to think of a way to do *teshuvah* for something they may have done, they immediately began to complain and question Hashem.

Rav Schwab in his commentary on Chumash, writes that although at Kriyat Yam Suf Bnei Yisrael witnessed unprecedented miracles, the effect of this experience only lasted three days. Even the effects of the most inspiring experience imaginable can be lost in such a short period of time. And if the impact of a miracle as great as Kriyat Yam Suf can dissipate in three days, surely any inspiration attained from learning Torah could diminish in that time span.

The gemara (Bava Kama 82b) relates that three days should never pass without learning Torah, and therefore we have a public

Torah reading on Shabbos, Monday and Thursday. What is the source for this?

ושיהו קוראין בשני ובחמישי עזרא תיקן והא מעיקרא הוה מיתקנא דתנאי
(שמות טו, כב) וילכו שלשת ימים במדבר ולא מצאו מים דורשי רשומות
אמרו אין מים אלא תורה שנאמר (ישעיהו נה, א) הוי כל צמא לכו למים.

The gemara's discussion revolves around the second of Ezra's ordinances: "And that they should read the Torah on every Monday and Thursday". The Gemara asks: "Did Ezra institute this practice? But it was instituted from the beginning, i.e., long before his time". As it is taught in a *baraita* with regard to the verse: "And Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water" (Shemot 15:22). Those who interpret verses metaphorically said that water here is referring to nothing other than Torah, as it is stated metaphorically, concerning those who desire wisdom: "Ho, everyone who thirsts, come for water" (Yeshayahu 55:1).

When straying away from *averot* and trying to maintain *ruchniyut* one must constantly be setting limitations for themselves and review and remember why he is here: to serve Hashem.

Another lesson learned from Shemot 15:23 is to try and be positive and not to let negative thoughts change the perspective. When Bnei Yisrael got to Marah, they claimed they could not drink the water because it was bitter. Rabbi Yissocher Frand (*On the Parsha II*, p. 128) quotes the Kotzker Rebbe who suggests that **כי מרים הם** does not refer to the water, rather it expresses the acrimony that possessed Bnei Yisrael's spirit. The repulsive taste of the water was attributed to their resentful mood.

To someone who is angry or upset, even the sweetest of foods can leave a bitter aftertaste. The water in Marah was sweet and drinkable but Bnei Yisrael were so bitter that they were not able to quench their thirst with that water.

One must always try to maintain spiritual inspiration and aspire to achieve an optimistic outlook, and through this continue to develop an even greater relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu without getting distracted by various challenges.

Disability Through the Lens of the Torah

It is written in Devarim 33:4: **תורה צוה לנו משה מורשה קהלת יעקב**. The Torah connects two seminal leaders of the Jewish nation, both of whom have much to teach us through their respective life's struggles that strengthened their Avodat Hashem.

At the beginning of Parshat Vayishlach, Yaakov sends messengers to his twin brother Esav. When he hears that Esav is approaching with an army, Yaakov and his family cross the river Yabbok. Suddenly, a “man” appears and the two struggle until dawn. But this “man” is no ordinary human. He was a heavenly angel in human form who was sent to prevent Yaakov from escaping and avoiding the confrontation with Esav (Chizkuni Bereshit 32:25). When it became clear that the angel could not overcome Yaakov, he struck him, dislocating his hip-socket. Before he departs, the angel gives Yaakov a new name (Bereishit 32:29): **ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל כי שרית עם אלקים ועם אנשים ותוכל**.

Chizkuni comments that the meaning of **שרית** is that Yaakov (or rather, Yisrael) reached the level of angels. Yaakov achieved this amazing status only after he became disabled. This is the name and legacy that he passed on to his descendants, who are called Bnei Yisrael. But what is so significant about the name Yisrael as opposed to Yaakov?

When he was born, he was called Yaakov because he was grasping on to the heel (**עקב**) of Esav. Rashi, quoting the Midrash, explains that Yaakov was acting out of a sense of justice. He had been conceived first and therefore felt entitled to be the firstborn. Yaakov is a person who idealizes integrity and fairness. Throughout his life and the many unfair episodes that he persevered through,

Yaakov consistently chases after this ideal, but he is often passive in his pursuit.

In contrast with the pursuit of justice that is personified through the name Yaakov stands Yisrael, who is forced to fight with an angel and wins, becoming his equal. His lifelong clash with injustice comes to a head during this battle on the banks of the Yabbok river. When the angel sees that he isn't winning, he injures Yaakov's thigh so as to disable him— another unwarranted trick in the life of a man whose lifetime has been filled with trickery. Instead of succumbing to the pain of his injury, Yaakov still ends up evenly matched with the angel, at which point he is bestowed with a new name— Yisrael. He is no longer just Yaakov, the man that was easily manipulated by those around him. Now, he is also Yisrael— someone who does not just yearn for justice but rather takes action, refusing to back down even against the worst of odds.

That this encounter immediately precedes his meeting with Esav is no coincidence. Yaakov demonstrates a new strength of character to deal with injustice in the world and at the same time focuses on developing his relationship with Hashem, building a *mizbeach* right after his encounter with his brother (33:20). Yaakov's disability does not negatively impact his character or his ability to serve Hashem but rather enhances it.

While Yaakov (or rather, Yisrael) was an essential figure in the development of the Jewish nation, there is another individual without whom Bnei Yisrael would have never received the Torah or merited to enter the Holy Land – Moshe Rabbeinu. One of the similarities of these two founders of the national identity of the Jewish people lies in one unique aspect of their lives— both of them were disabled.

During Moshe's first conversation with Hashem at the burning bush, Moshe is told that he is destined to free his nation from the country where they have been cruelly enslaved. Moshe, out of great humility, objects several times. His final objection, a desperate attempt to convince Hashem to choose someone that he sees as

more fitting for the job, is simple: he states that he is “not a man of words” and “heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue” (Shemot 4:10), thereby disqualifying him for a job that would require a great degree of diplomacy.

A famous midrash provides the backstory for this assertion. When Moshe was a child, Pharaoh gave him a test – choose between a piece of gold or a hot coal, with the former choice symbolizing Moshe’s desire for the kingship and the latter symbolizing that he was not a threat to Pharaoh’s throne. As young Moshe reached out to the gold, the angel Gavriel pushed his hand towards the coal instead, saving his life but causing Moshe to place the coal in his mouth, burning it to the extent that it caused speech problems for the rest of his life (Shemot Raba 1:26).

The parallels between the stories of Yaakov and Moshe are clear. In both tales, an angel interfered in the natural course of events (Yaakov reaching a stalemate in the struggle, and baby Moshe reaching out to the glittering gold) and disabled them.

However, while this speech defect should have majorly affected Moshe’s life and his ability to lead Bnei Yisrael, it didn’t. Moshe’s disability is only mentioned twice in the Torah – and both times are when he is humbling himself before Hashem (Shemot 4:10 and Shemot 6:12). Hashem’s response to Moshe’s final objection further proves that He did not consider it to be a reasonable argument against Moshe undertaking this critical mission that would determine the future of the Jewish people: “Who gave man a mouth, or who makes [one] dumb or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” (Shemot 4:11).

The Da’at Zekenim (on Shemot 4:10) quotes an explanation of R’ Ovadiah interpreting Hashem’s answer as a rebuke to Moshe. Moshe knew that Hashem was fully aware of his speech defect and would have done something about it had He thought it would negatively impact his ability to carry out Hashem’s commandments.

“Moses had shame; G-d was not ashamed of him nor did He allow disability to serve as an excuse from any commandment. G-d was sensitive to Moses, but made clear that provisions would be

made so that his disability did not impede ability,” writes Faith Fogelman in “Disability Matters Within Judaism.”

Gently but firmly, Hashem rejects Moshe’s argument, but not totally. He still takes into account Moshe’s apprehensions about his ability to complete the mission fully and tells Moshe that his older brother Aharon will serve as a mouthpiece for him (Shemot 4:14-16). Even with this accomodation in place, it is clear that everyone else, including Aharon, Hashem, and even Pharaoh himself, consider it to be Moshe that is the primary messenger and redeemer of the Jewish people.

The Torah relates (Shemot 11:3) that Moshe was held in high esteem by the people of Egypt because they considered him to be responsible for the *makkot* (see Ramban), despite the fact that Aharon performed the first three. Moshe was viewed as Bnei Yisrael’s leader first and foremost in the eyes of everyone around him, in spite of the speech handicap that he was concerned would impede his performance as a messenger of Hashem.

Hashem makes it clear that He never makes mistakes and that Moshe’s (or even Yaakov’s) disability would not hinder their avodat Hashem – implicitly in the story of Yaakov Avinu and explicitly in the story of Moshe Rabbeinu. The connection between these two influential individuals, especially in regards to the foundational experiences that led each one to become disabled, teaches an important lesson about the resilience of the Jewish people and Hashem’s expectations of us in response to difficult situations. Instead of breaking down and crying out to Hashem, as would have been totally understandable, both men continue to strive to improve in their avodat Hashem.

Immediately after his crucial fight with the angel, Yaakov does not stop for even a moment to lick his wounds or cry about the incredible amount of pain he must have been experiencing – instead, the Torah relates that “The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip” (Bereishit 32:32). He promptly continues on his way to his fateful upcoming encounter with his brother Esav. And once Hashem rejects Moshe’s argument for the

second time, Moshe does not bring it up again. Instead, he undertakes his solemn mission as Bnei Yisrael's newfound leader. So too we, when facing tough times, should emulate their approach to life and persevere instead of letting our pain and/or frustration get the best of us.

The Shared Nevuah of Yeshaya and Yechezkel

Many are familiar with the miraculous vision-like prophecies described in Yeshaya chapter 6 and Yechezkel chapter 1. Both of these esoteric prophecies contain elements of smoke, fire, wind, and celestial bodies. On a simple level, these prophecies seem to be visions of different phenomena. Yet, the Malbim in his commentary, and the Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:6) understand differently. Both prophets observed the same heavenly vision, but provided different descriptions. The Malbim explains that the vision of Yechezkel took place in a different kabbalistic *olam* than that of Yeshaya.

In order to appreciate the commentary of the Malbim, one must have a basic understanding of the four Kabbalistic *olamot*, or realms of existence. These four *olamot* are said to incorporate everything that ever has, is, and will exist. They begin on the most infinite, spiritual level, and increase in physicality and finiteness as they progress.

The highest and most spiritual realm is known as the realm of *atzilut*. This realm is solely inhabited by Hashem and His infinite omnipotence. It is within this realm that all potential resides. The realm of *atzilut* is Hashem in His most true state, with the least amount of *tzimtzum*, or limitation. The next realm in the system is referred to as the realm of *briyah* (or *olam hakisei*). This realm is still spiritual and infinite but is more physical than the realm of *atzilut*. It is here that the ministering angels, along with the spiritual sources known as *kochot* exist. After the realm of *briyah* comes the realm of *yetzirah*. This realm is home to the lower level angels designated to bring the power of the *kochot* and ministering angels into the physical world. The lowest and most physical realm is referred to as the realm of *asiyah*, or planet Earth.

With this basic background knowledge, one can now understand what the Malbim means when he claims that Yeshaya witnessed the vision in the realm of *briyah* (*hakisei*), while Yechezkel's experience occurred in the realm of *yetzirah*.

The Malbim calls attention to how both prophecies begin. Yeshaya 6 begins:

בשנת מות המלך עוזיהו ואראה את ה' ישב על כסא רם ונשא ושוליו
מלאים את ההיכל.

Yeshaya gives absolutely no indication as to how he comes to see such a vision. Instead, he immediately begins describing the wonders that he sees. Hashem is sitting on His throne of glory surrounded by six-winged angels, known as *seraphim*. As the *seraphim* praise Hashem with the words צבקות ה' מלא קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' צבקות, smoke fills the *bayit*, כל הארץ כבודו.

This is quite different from the very detailed-oriented report given by Yechezkel's prophecy. The first *pasuk* in Yechezkel uses the words נפתחו השמים "the heavens opened." The sky opened up to Yechezkel, breaking the barriers between the realms of *asiyah* and *yetzirah*, allowing Yechezkel to witness the *chazon*.

As the prophecies continue to progress, the text again subtly connects the two prophecies. Yeshaya describes "seeing" Hashem sitting on his throne, Yechezkel, on the other hand, is in the *olam* below, and as a result, only gets a vague glance of Hashem on His throne of glory. As *pasuk* 26 states:

ממעל לרקיע אשר על ראשם כמראה אבן ספיר דמות כסא ועל דמות
הכסא דמות כמראה אדם עליו מלמעלה.

Above the *raki'a*, the barrier between the *olamot*, the *pasuk* describes a דמות, or image, of a throne. Sitting on this throne-like image, Yechezkel sees what he believes is a human-like figure. In the realm of *briyah*, Hashem has created some sort of recognizable figure, and this is what Yeshaya is seeing. Yet in the realm of *yetzirah*, all that Yechezkel can see are the lower-level angels and vague silhouettes of what might be occurring in the *olamot* above.

The difference in *olamot* is again hinted to through the description of the different angels that Yeshaya and Yechezkel face. Yeshaya describes the *seraphim* as six winged angels, בִּשְׁתֵּים יָכֶסֶה פָּנָיו וּבִשְׁתֵּים יְעוּפֶף. Their three sets of wings correspond to the realm in which they reside, the third most physical realm of *briyah*. Additionally, there is barely any description of the angels, besides their wings and the way in which they sing to Hashem. This differs greatly from the experience of Yechezkel, who goes into great detail describing the celestials which he encounters. He describes four-winged, four-faced, *chayot hakodesh*, or holy beings:

וּדְמוּת פְּנֵיהֶם פְּנֵי אָדָם וּפְנֵי אֲרִיָּה אֶל הַיָּמִין לְאַרְבַּעַתָּם וּפְנֵי שׁוּר
מִהַשְׁמָאוֹל לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן וּפְנֵי נֶשֶׁר לְאַרְבַּעַתָּן.

Yechezkel describes how the *chayot* relate to one another and the way in which they move. Unlike Yeshaya in the realm of *briyah*, it is possible to use physical words to illustrate what occurs in the realm of *yetzirah*.

In addition to all that is mentioned in the *neviim*, the berachot before *kriyat shema* hint to this idea by saying:

וְהָאוֹפָנִים וְחַיּוֹת הַקֹּדֶשׁ בִּרְעֵשׂ גָּדוֹל מִתְנַשְּׂאִים לַעֲמַת שְׂרָפִים. לַעֲמַת
מִשְׁבָּחִים וְאוֹמְרִים.
בְּרוּךְ כְּבוֹד ה' מִמְּקוֹמוֹ.

The *chayot hakodesh* and *ofanim*, in the realm of *yetzirah*, raise themselves to the level of the *seraphim*, in the realm of *briyah*, by singing praises to Hashem in His place, whether that be His infinite glory in the realm of *atzilut* or His *demut* present in the realm of *briyah*.

Pirkei D'Rabi Eliezer 13:2 discusses in detail the significance of the number of wings given to the different types of angels:

וְהִיא סְמָאֵל שֶׁר גָּדוֹל בְּשֵׁמִים וְהַחַיּוֹת מְאַרְבַּע כְּנָפִים וְשְׂרָפִים מֵשֶׁשׁ כְּנָפִים
וְסְמָאֵל מֵשָׁנִים עֶשֶׂר כְּנָפִים.

סְמָאֵל, more commonly known as the *satan*, is depicted as one of the most powerful ministering angels in Hashem's court. He is described as having twelve wings. While the *satan* is a strange case,

the juxtaposition of these two statements emphasize the fact that the number of wings on an angel indicate their level of importance in the Holy Court.

While the ideas in these two prophecies are quite esoteric and seem out of touch with anyone learning them today, there are many lessons that can be gleaned from each prophecy on its own, but even more so, through the lens of them being the same.

One lesson is as follows. Many people view prophecy as a G-dly experience devoid of any human interaction. They believe that a prophecy is meant to reiterate the exact words of Hashem to Bnei Yisrael. While prophecies are important messages sent by Hashem, in reality it is the job of the prophet to receive these messages, decipher them, and then relay them to the people. As is evident from the many accounts of visions throughout Tanach, prophecies are vague and unclear and it is the function of the navi to understand and communicate Hashem's message to the nation.

There is a concept in *kabbalah* that states that *machloket* originated from a variety of vantage points during *matan Torah*. Each vantage point, based on its location in regards to *Har Sinai*, understood the Torah in a slightly different way, which later developed into what we refer to as halachic discourse. The same idea applies not only to prophecy, but I believe to almost every aspect of one's life. When one has an experience, no matter what has happened, their perception is altered by their external circumstances. Many times we view this as a negative, claiming that we are obstructing the objective truth. But the bias in our perception is not always a bad thing. It can allow us to see things that others would not be able to and to bring to light things that may be overlooked.

Had Hashem needed someone to merely state what he had seen, He would not have needed two prophets to do the job. It was due to the unique life experiences of both Yeshaya and Yechezkel, and the different ideas that they took away from their experiences, that they were chosen to enact change amongst their people. Yeshaya, to the Jewish people still living in Israel with the Beit Hamikdash, and Yechezkel living in *galut Bavel*.

Every person should be vigilant to see what is happening around him, and to internalize each experience and extract from each experience a lesson from which to grow. Let us be like Yeshaya and Yechezkel, and find the means to see the world around us - the true Will of Hashem- and apply it in our own lives. By doing so we will be better able to share our message with others and grow stronger as a nation.

Spaces That Mean Something

Torah, as well as Neviim and Ketuvim, has three main divisions: seforim, parshiyot, pesukim. [The chapters (or *perakim*) that we use were actually instituted by the Christian printers, and therefore, do not necessarily have any significance.] There are two types of parshiyot: *petuchut* and *stumot*. These openings and closings, dividing the pesukim into paragraphs, are identified by two types of empty spaces between the pesukim. The printed text usually has a letter פ or ס between the pesukim. These openings and closings divide topics, clarify the context, and teach us something deeper about the pesukim.

There are several times throughout Tanach that a pause can be found within a pasuk. Because these cases are relatively rare, their occurrences deliver an important message about the text. Examples of this phenomenon, referred to as a *piska b'emtzta pasuk*, are found in Bereishit 35:22, Shemot 20:13-14, Bamidbar 26:1, Devarim 2:8, Devarim 5:17-18, Shoftim 2:1, Shmuel II 12:13, Shmuel II 24:10, 11, and 23, and Melachim II 1:17. In order to understand the message that a *piska b'emtzta pasuk* is trying to convey, we need to further understand each instance separately, in its own context.

The first case is found in Bereshit 35:22:

ויהי בשכן ישראל בארץ ההוא וילך ראובן וישכב את בלהה פילגש
אביו וישמע ישראל ויהיו בני יעקב שנים עשר.

Rashi comments on this pasuk that the story continues by saying that the sons of Yaakov were twelve signifying that they were all righteous. Reuven did not sin.

Seforno advances this approach. Yaakov continues counting Reuven in his twelve sons because he had no doubt that Reuven did teshuva and maintained his status as one of the Bnei Yaakov.

Seforno's approach is that Reuven did sin, but Yaakov was sure that he repented immediately. The dramatic pause lets us know that Yaakov still regarded Reuven as his son despite the seriousness of his transgression.

The next case that we will deal with is found in Bamidbar 26:1:

וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַמִּגְפָּה (פ) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אֱלֵעֶזֶר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן
לֵאמֹר.

This pasuk is within the context of the sin of *Baal Peor*, after Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael, צָרֹר אֶת הַמִּדְיָנִים וְהַכִּיתֶם אוֹתָם.

The Chizkuni comments on this pasuk:

כִּשְׁכֹּל מִתִּי מְדַבֵּר יֵשׁ כָּאֵן פִּרְשָׁה אֶעֱפִי שֶׁהִיא בִּאֲמֻצֵּעַ הַפְּסוּק ע"י
שֶׁכָּאֵן נִפְסְקָה גִזְרֵת מִתִּי מְדַבֵּר וּמִכָּאֵן וְאֵילֶךְ בֹּא לִמְנוֹת הַבְּנִים מִבֶּן
עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעֲלָה שֶׁנִּכְנְסוּ לָאָרֶץ.

At this point in time, all the Jews who had left Mitzrayim and were destined to die in the desert after the חֲטָא הַמִּרְגְּלִים, had died. The next step is counting Bnei Yisrael who would be the ones entering Eretz Yisrael. These three words, וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַמִּגְפָּה, signify the transition between the generation that left Egypt and the generation that would go into the Land of Israel.

The Ohr HaChaim writes that only by doing what Hashem said in regard to harassing the Midyanim did their relationship with Hashem return to normal. This was the way they would be able to do teshuva for the sins of *avodah zarah* and *gilui arayot*. There is a pause to show that by harassing the Midyanim they fixed their relationship with Hashem and brought about the cessation of the plague.

The Ohr Hachaim also quotes a midrash found in the Yalkut Shimoni (773), in which the other nations protested to Hashem for allegedly showing favoritism to Bnei Yisrael when He gave them the Torah. Hashem responded to the accusations by telling these nations that they aren't able to trace the purity of their lineage like Bnei Yisrael can. Once Bnei Yisrael sinned with the Moabite women,

there were grounds for the other nations to claim that the Jews no longer deserved any special treatment. Therefore, Hashem killed with a plague all those who had sinned and damaged Bnei Yisrael's image in the eyes of the world. Only then were Bnei Yisrael worthy of being counted according to their lineage.

This midrash shows that Bnei Yisrael sinned and lost their morality, but through the *magefah*, the Jewish nation was able to do teshuva and earn back the title of Hashem's children. The nation is counted again to show the transformation from a morally corrupt nation to a pure nation entering Israel, which is accomplished through doing teshuva. We see from this *piska b'emtza pasuk* a transformation from the generation that left Egypt to the generation going into Eretz Yisrael, going from sin to purity. This was all done through teshuva.

The next case is in Devarim 2:8:

ונעבר מאת אחינו בני עשו הישבים בשעיר מדרך הערבה מאלת
ומעצין גבר (ס) ונפן ונעבר דרך מדבר מואב.

In the beginning of Devarim, Moshe is giving Bnei Yisrael a recap of their history before they enter Israel. He tells the nation about *chet hameraglim* and *chet hamaapilim*. In the first instance, they were reluctant to go and fight, despite Hashem's promises. In the second case, they went to fight despite Hashem's warning them not to go. In 2:4-9, which includes the *piska b'emtza pasuk*, Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael about Hashem's commandment not to fight Seir and Moav. We see from this the comparison between the generation that left Egypt and the generation that will enter Israel. The generation that left Egypt sinned by being too scared to enter Canaan and fight the nations. In contrast, the generation that would enter Eretz Yisrael will successfully conquer the land.

Additionally, the generation that left Egypt sinned by going to fight when Hashem told them not to, and now, the generation that would enter Israel succeeded by refraining from fighting Seir and Moav when Hashem told them not to fight. This

piska b'emtza pasuk comes to show the teshuva that Generation II did on behalf of Generation I. It was this transformation that proved their worth. Where Generation I failed, Generation II succeeded.

The next case is in Shoftim 2:1:

ויעל מלאך ה' מן הגלגל אל הבכים (פ) ויאמר אעלה אתכם ממצרים
ואביא אתכם אל־הארץ אשר נשבעתי לאבותיכם ואמר לא אפר בריתי
אתכם לעולם.

The first perek of Shoftim discusses the nations that the shevatim fought, including both successes and failures. It also shows their hesitation to fight and willingness to let other nations remain in Eretz Yisrael. In Shoftim 2:1, we see that Hashem is upset with Bnei Yisrael for not doing what they were commanded: to conquer all the nations. One of the reasons that Hashem commands us to be separate from the other nations (Vayikra 20:26) is so that they won't have a negative influence on us. The other nations are full of sin and impurity, and living next to them can cause Bnei Yisrael to commit the same sins. After this pause within the pasuk, we see that Hashem rebukes Bnei Yisrael.

The next case is in Shmuel II 12:13:

ויאמר דוד אל נתן חטאתי לה' (ס) ויאמר נתן אל דוד גם ה' העביר
חטאתך לא תמות.

Here we see that David HaMelech does teshuva with regard to his sin with Batsheva. The pause here comes to show us that David did complete teshuva and was able to repair his relationship with Hashem. He was able to transform himself and gain forgiveness. Although he was punished with the death of Batsheva's first child, Hashem forgave him and gave him Shlomo as Batsheva's second child.

The next case is in Shmuel II 24:10:

ויך לב דוד אתו אחרי כן ספר את העם (ס) ויאמר דוד אל ה' חטאתי
מאד אשר עשיתי ועתה ה' העביר־נא את עון עבדך כי נסכלתי מאד.

In the beginning of this perek, Hashem is upset with Bnei Yisrael. David is led astray and commands Yoav to count all the members of

the nation. After the Jews are counted, David regrets his actions. Following a pause in the pasuk, David admits his error and begs for forgiveness. The Abarbanel comments that David realized that the sin he committed was that of arrogance – הגאווה וגסות הרוח.

Another pause appears in the very next pasuk:

ויקם דוד בבקר (פ) ודבר ה' היה אל גד הנביא חזה דוד לאמר.

Hashem allows David to choose a punishment out of three options. A short time later, there is another intra-pasuk pause in pasuk 23:

הכל נתן ארונה המלך למלך (ס) ויאמר ארונה אליהמלך ה' אליך ירצך.

In 24:18, David was told to buy the threshing floor of Aravnah the Yevusi and set up there an altar for Hashem. David went to buy it and Aravnah also offered David animals and sacrificial materials for free. However, David insisted on buying them because he would not want to offer Hashem a korban that he did not buy himself. After this, Hashem forgave David and the plague stopped.

The next case is in Melachim II 1:17:

וימת כדבר ה' אשר דבר אליהו וימלך יהורם תחתיו (פ) בשנת שתים ליהורם בן יהושפט מלך יהודה כי לא היה לו בן.

This pasuk is said within the context of Achazya dying. After he was injured, he turned to *avodah zarah* for help instead of turning to Hashem.

After analyzing these cases, it is clear what a *piska b'emtza pasuk* represents: the chance to do teshuva. Let us review all of these cases in light of this discovery. In Bereshit 35:22, Reuven had a chance to do teshuva after sinning, and he took this opportunity and repented. Immediately after, he is counted as part of the twelve sons of Yaakov.

We see that Bnei Yisrael in Bamidbar 26:1 had a chance to do teshuva after the sin of *Baal Peor*. Immediately after this pasuk, they were counted again, showing that they would still enter Israel.

Rashi describes in Bamidbar 1:1 that a national census is an expression of Hashem's love for Bnei Yisrael. This shows that they did teshuva, and they were able to return to their loving relationship with Hashem.

In Devarim 2:8, we see that Bnei Yisrael again had to do teshuva, this time on behalf of the generation that left Egypt. They were put in the same position as the Jews leaving Egypt, being told when to fight and when not to fight. This time, they succeeded. Meanwhile, in Shoftim 2:1, Bnei Yisrael were given an opportunity to do teshuva for the sin of the *meraglim*. The *meraglim* sinned by not wanting to fight the nations of Canaan, and here Bnei Yisrael were given the opportunity to do teshuva by fighting all the nations of Canaan. However, Bnei Yisrael failed in this instance, and immediately after, they were rebuked.

In the case of Shmuel II 12:13, David had the opportunity to do teshuva and he did, and was blessed with having a son that would build the Beit HaMikdash and continue his royal line. Later in Shmuel II (24:10), Hashem is upset with Bnei Yisrael and allows David to be convinced to count Bnei Yisrael. After counting them, David realizes his sin. There is a pause in this pasuk, followed by David doing teshuva. Nevertheless, Hashem is still upset and punishes Bnei Yisrael. Only in 24:23 when David went to Aravnah and insisted on paying for the korbanot, did David completely do teshuva. Immediately following this, the plague stops.

Finally, in Melachim II 1:17, Achazya neglected to turn to Hashem and instead sought out *avodah zarah*. Achazya missed his opportunity to do teshuva, and was punished and died.

Perhaps this idea can shed light on the intra-pasuk pauses that are found by the Aseret HaDibrot (Shemot 20:13-14, Devarim 5:17-18). In the last five commandments, there are various pauses within the pesukim. As Hashem gives us the *dibrot* with which to live our lives, He is reminding us that for every sin, there is an opportunity to do teshuva. Through this specific formatting

in certain places throughout Tanach, we are taught that it is our choice to take the opportunity to do teshuva, and even when we do so, Hashem will know when it is sincere.

אסון – Why Only Twice?

The word אסון, literally translated as disaster or tragedy, appears in only two contexts in Tanach and is mentioned a total of five times. In Bereishit, Yaakov does not allow Binyamin to go to Mitzrayim with the other brothers because he fears that פן יקראנו אסון (Bereishit 42:4), perhaps he will be placed in danger. It subsequently appears twice more in this narrative – when Yaakov refuses to let Reuven take Binyamin down (42:38) and when Yehuda recounts the incident to Yosef (44:29).

The second context in which the word appears is in relation to *dinei nefashot*, the laws of killing others. The Torah in Parshat Mishpatim describes a scenario where two men are fighting and accidentally hit a pregnant woman. The Torah says, ולא יהיה אסון ענוש (Shemot 21:22-23), if there is no tragedy (i.e. the woman is not killed, but there is a miscarriage), there is just a monetary fine. If, however, יהיה אסון the woman dies, the *din* of נפש תחת נפש, literally translated as a 'life for a life,' is carried out. It is important to note that, in this scenario, the word אסון refers to the woman, not to the fetus she is carrying. In Bereishit, however, it is Binyamin that is the object of the אסון.

The halachic connection between these two instances is found in the concept of קים ליה בדרבה מיניה, a principle relating to punishments. If a person deserves two punishments for one action, he receives only the harsher one of the two. The question is – how can it be that one of the punishments is completely erased? Rashi (Bava Metzia 91a) resolves this by saying that perhaps the criminal is indeed still culpable on a lesser level – *bedinei Shamayim*, but the *beit din* cannot enforce it. The final judgement of קים ליה בדרבה מיניה, however, is that the more severe action, no matter if it is done intentionally or accidentally, is what is punishable in this world. For example: The Gemara (Ketubot 31) discusses a case of someone violating Shabbat while stealing. In theory, he is liable for two

punishments. Due to *לִיָּה בְּדִרְבָּה מִיָּנִיה* קים, however, he receives the death penalty for chillul Shabbat but does not pay for the theft.

The sugya that specifically relates to the word *אסון* is found in Ketubot (30a). R' Nechunya Ben Hakanah compares Yom Kippur to Shabbat. Just like on Shabbat, if one is liable for the death penalty and a monetary payment, he receives only the capital punishment, so too, on Yom Kippur he would receive only the punishment of *karet*. The gemara derives the rationale for R' Nechunya Ben Hakanah's statement from the two pesukim with the words *אסון*. In Bereishit, regarding Binyamin is an *אסון בידי שמים*. The *אסון* in Shemot regarding the pregnant woman is an example of *אסון בידי אדם*. Just as with a human punishment, *אסון בידי אדם* – מיתת בית דין, one receives only the harsher punishment, so too with regards to a heavenly punishment, *אסון בידי שמים* – כרת.

It seems clear that the *אסון* mentioned in Shemot with regards to the pregnant woman and her miscarriage would be labeled as *אסון בידי אדם*. The pesukim clearly highlight that her miscarriage or her death is caused by the two men fighting. However, why would Binyamin's potential death be automatically labeled as an *אסון בידי שמים*? At face value, it would seem that it too could be an example of *אסון בידי אדם*.

The gemara (Shabbat 55b) lists four people that died only as a result of Adam and Chava's sin despite having no sins of their own. One of them was Binyamin. This clearly indicates the level of *השגחה* and Divine providence that Binyamin was subjected to. If Binyamin were to die, it would clearly be from the hands of Hashem.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch further develops this idea. Yaakov says, *אסון פן יקראנו* (Bereishit 42:4). Rav Hirsch comments that this *lashon* of *יקראנו* really refers to Hashem's control. Yaakov understood that Hashem could take Binyamin at any moment. This would fall under the category of *אסון בידי שמים*, that it is Hashem who would orchestrate Binyamin's death.

There is, however, another, deeper approach to answering this question related to Rachel's death. Rav Elchanan Samet, in an article, *A Great Silence: The Story of Rachel's Death*, notes that Rachel's

giving birth to Binyamin, and her subsequent death, is a silent affair—the only exception is the midwife speaking to her. The midwife says, **אֲסוֹן בִּידֵי שְׁמַיִם אֵל תִּירָאִי כִּי גַם זֶה לָךְ בֶּן** (Bereishit 35:17), do not fear! Chizkuni comments that the midwife was trying to reassure Rachel that her tefillot about having a second child were to be answered and Hashem does not want her to die.

Rav Samet, however, suggests that the midwife is giving a different reassurance. The midwife is saying that despite her approaching death, Hashem is giving her a son. According to Rashbam, therefore, it seems as though Rachel can be referred to as an **אֲסוֹן בִּידֵי שְׁמַיִם**. In Shemot, **אֲסוֹן** is used to label the woman who might be killed by the two men. Therefore, according to Rashbam's understanding, Rachel's death can be categorized as a heavenly one, and label her as an **אֲסוֹן** just like the woman found in Shemot.

Therefore, when he refers to **אֲסוֹן**, Yaakov is really referring to Rachel, who is established as an **אֲסוֹן בִּידֵי שְׁמַיִם**. Instead of directly referring to his son by name, Yaakov channels the pain of losing Rachel into this situation. Just like Yaakov was distraught when Rachel passed away, he transfers those emotions to any potential danger that would occur to Binyamin. Yaakov specifically relates this way to Binyamin because he is Rachel's last living descendent (as far as Yaakov knows at this point).

Prof. Nechama Price (Tribal Blueprints: Twelve Brothers and the Destiny of Israel, p. 260) notes that Yaakov had a special connection to both Rachel and Yosef, as they are the only people he acknowledges that he “loves” (Bereishit 29:18, 37:3). It is understandable that Yaakov would be terribly devastated should something happen to Binyamin since he is all that remains of the family he built with Rachel. If he also lost Binyamin, he would lose his last connection to his beloved Rachel. What a tragedy.

Lastly, Yehuda tells Yosef that Yaakov refused to send Binyamin down, explaining: **וְלִקְחָתָם גַּם אֶת זֶה מֵעַם פָּנִי וְקִרְוָהוּ אֲסוֹן וְהוֹרְדָתָם אֶת שִׁיבְתִּי בְרַעָה שְׂאֵלָה** (Bereishit 44:29). At the end of this pasuk, Yaakov seems to be saying that if anything happens to Binyamin, he will go to the grave! If Binyamin dies, he (Yaakov) will die of heartache.

Similarly, the pasuk says, וְאִם אִסּוֹן יִהְיֶה וְנָתַתָּה נֶפֶשׁ תַּחַת נֶפֶשׁ (Shemot 21:23); If the woman herself dies, נֶפֶשׁ תַּחַת נֶפֶשׁ applies. This is eerily similar to what is stated in Bereishit. When Yaakov declares that should Binyamin die, he will die too. He, in essence, is acknowledging this principle.

When a person is connected to another by bonds of love, he shares a part of his soul with him. Having lost Rachel and Yosef, Binyamin is the remaining guardian of his father's *nefesh*. Should Binyamin die, Yaakov's soul would be lost. Therefore, when Yaakov expresses his concern about a potential אִסּוֹן, he is not only worried about Binyamin, but also about his own well being, because נֶפֶשׁוֹ קְשׁוּרָה בְּנֶפֶשׁוֹ.

Sibling Relationships

In life, the people we are most compared to are our siblings, even more than our parents and peers. We never seem to be able to escape the reputation they establish for us. The Tanach teaches us important lessons that we can learn from sibling pairs along the generations. My aim is to try and understand why certain characters ended up forming the relationships they did with their siblings and how their upbringings, occupations, and even their names could have played a role in these series of events.

Kayin and Hevel

The first pair to examine is that of Kayin and Hevel. Chava names her first child Kayin, because *קניתי איש את ה'* – “I have acquired a man with G-d” (Bereishit 4:1). This first introduction appears lacking in warmth, especially as the archetype of parent-child relationships. It seems as if children are just people to be acquired.

Similarly, when Hevel is born, he seems to be immediately dismissed – with no explicit reason given for his name, just a possible allusion to his early demise. The only descriptor written here is *את אחיו* (4:2), mentioned before even his name. The implication is that his only relevance is in association with his brother. Each one becomes instantly and irrevocably associated with his brother, potentially inhibiting their ability to settle into their own lives. For Hevel especially, this fate was inescapable.

To their credit, Kayin and Hevel each attempted to separate themselves from the other by taking up different occupations. Kayin became an *עובד אדמה*, a tiller of the soil, and Hevel, a *רועה צאן*, a shepherd (4:2). Nevertheless, their actions remained similar and, as a result, they continued to be contrasted. Their insistence that they were different became the fuel for their comparison, climaxing in the weighing of their korbanot against each other.

If we try exploring the psychology of the effects of constant comparison, Kayin's reaction seems more understandable: 'If we are the same people in seemingly every regard, why aren't both of our sacrifices accepted?' ויחר לקין מאד (4:5) is explained by the Or Ha-Chaim as a feeling of inferiority – as the elder brother he should have been accepted over Hevel and he could not comprehend this rejection. In fact, Kayin's frustration is even more understandable when referring back to Chava's reasoning for naming him – 'את ה' – he was acquired with G-d, yet G-d had not accepted him. He feels unaccomplished in fulfilling his purpose in the world. The resentment Kayin must have felt towards Hevel who, true to his introduction (את אחיו), continued to copy his brother – גם הוא מבכורות (4:4) – culminates in murder.

When we hear the constant language of אחיך and אחיו, we assume a much closer relationship between the brothers than they evidently shared. This is a reflection of our modern societal values, where we hold in high esteem those who have close-knit bonds with their families. These brothers had no prototype for their relationship and, instead, had to rely on parents who had experienced even more limited interactions. It is no surprise, therefore, that they look to the actions of each other to formulate their 'own' paths.

Unlike the ideal present day, Adam and Chava raised their children with the sole purpose of the continuation of the world – Chava says that she has "acquired", with no warmth or familiarity – and her children are then forced to navigate this undiscovered territory of brotherhood without guidance, whilst simultaneously forming their own identities. This displays the first lesson that the Tanach teaches: the terrible consequences of not presenting children with the opportunity to discover their individual paths in life.

Yaakov and Esav

One foundation of Judaism is the constant encouragement to correct the mistakes made in previous generations. This represents Judaism's positive attitude towards growth of character. For this

reason, we look to the next pair – Esav and Yaakov – to analyse how their personalities developed as a result of the lessons of their ancestors.

There is significance to the fact that these brothers establish their differences right from the outset. There can be no confusion that they are in any way similar. This divergence is seen even before they are named – *ויתרצו הבנים בקרבה* – “and the children struggled inside her,” (25:22). The famous midrash, quoted by Rashi, explains that when Rivka passed a place of Torah, Yaakov would struggle to get out and when she passed a place of avoda zara, Esav would struggle. It is as if each brother knew the path he wanted to forge in life. Hashem even emphasises to Rivka that it is imperative the twins are not forced together, *ושני לאמים ממעך יפרדו* (25:23) – they are two different nations.

The division is magnified when Esav and Yaakov grow up to become an *איש תם ישב אהלים* (25:27) and *איש ידע ציד איש שדה* (25:27) respectively. From the beginning, it was insisted that they weren't going to be associated with one another in the slightest. This resulted in their ability to give each other enough space to grow. Nevertheless, there were still events that created animosity between the two, despite their separation.

Here is where it is crucial to understand the significance of their names. The first born is called Esav because he came out completely formed; he did not need any more additions (Rashi, 25:25). When his brother followed immediately after, he was clutching onto Esav's heel and was duly named Yaakov (25:26). The decision of Yitzchak and Rivka to focus on this singular aspect of the younger one cornered them into a trap of believing that Yaakov was some kind of continuation of Esav. In doing so, neither child could truly become their own person.

The Torah compares and contrasts the love that their parents have for them. *ויאהב יצחק את עשו כי ציד בפיו* (25:28) seems like a conditional type of love, but even this type does not appear to be extended to Yaakov (as it says separately in the same pasuk,

(רַבִּיקָה אֲהַבַת אֶת יִצְחָק). If so, what was the extent of Yitzchak's love for his children? The Chizkuni comments that the fact that **וַיֵּאָהֵב יִצְחָק** is in the past tense implies that Yitzchak only loved him at certain times. Additionally, Rashi explains that the words that follow – **כִּי צִיר** – refer to **יִצְחָק** של **פִּיּו**; his love for Esav was reliant on the latter's ability to hunt food for his father to eat. Since Yaakov did not have this ability, it seems that he was negatively compared to his brother and was not held in the same regard.

When it comes time to distinguish between Esav and Yaakov in order to give a beracha to the firstborn, Yitzchak cannot seem to tell them apart. The question **מִי אַתָּה בְּנִי** is repeated multiple times, phrased differently each time (27:18, 21, 24, 32), and the whole process is shrouded in confusion – **הַקֵּל קוֹל יִצְחָק וְהַיִּדִים יְדֵי עֶשָׂו** (27:22). He knew there were intrinsic differences between his sons, but because he had a superficial love, Yitzchak could not differentiate between the twins. Instead, Yaakov receives an inheritance intended for Esav and the story culminates in **וַיִּשְׁטֵם עֶשָׂו אֶת יִצְחָק** (27:41).

This buildup of resentment had been set in motion from birth, with the idea that Yaakov was an extension of Esav, and was ratified by the selling of the birthright and the taking away of the beracha. How could Esav, whose name means “fully formed,” coexist with the idea that he needs an extra person associated with himself? Additionally, one would assume that the insistence on their total separation would be a positive influence on their individuality, but perhaps being so emphatically pushed away from each other led to an unhealthy type of division.

The reconciliation between the brothers is brought in conjunction with the story of Yaakov's struggle with the angel – **וַיִּאֲבֹק אִישׁ עָמוֹ** (32:25). There is deep-rooted significance to this connection. Rashi matches the language of **וַיִּאֲבֹק** with a similar root mentioned throughout the Gemara which means “to cling.” Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks interprets this as the fundamental reason Yaakov

was challenged. The angel is saying “previously you clung to Esav, now you must learn to cling to Hashem.”

Rav Gedalyah Schorr (Or Gedalyahu, p. 53) developing this idea, says this was a spiritual battle to push Yaakov to find his own place in the world. The significance of this event was not the triumph itself, but rather the subsequent interaction. When given a new name, Yaakov – or Yisrael – is presented with a new identity, one that is completely devoid of reference to his brother and instead epitomises the central aspect that he embodies: **כִּי שָׂרִית ... וְתוֹכַל** (32:29) – he strives and he prevails. The succession of events that unfold from here makes sense with this context. When the brothers finally meet again Yaakov says **וְהָרַצְנִי** (33:10) – he has, for the first time, been received favourably by Esav. This new reaction could have only been the consequence of the time spent apart and the name change.

By restricting our analysis to Kayin and Hevel, it would be intuitive to believe that Esav and Yaakov’s early separation in childhood would prevent them repeating their mistakes. But only through a complete severing of any associations to each other were they able to acknowledge their individual strengths.

Menashe and Ephraim

The last brotherly relationship to be examined is that of Menashe and Ephraim – the pair who will become the prototype for all future generations of siblings. With this pair, it is crucial not only to uncover how their individuality is expressed, but to also understand the key to Yosef’s parenting technique and how this leads the brothers to develop in the way that they do.

In contrast to the other two pairs, who were intrinsically connected to each other through their names, Menashe and Ephraim have no such association. Yosef names his eldest son Menashe because **נָשַׁנִּי אֱלֹקִים אֶת כָּל עֲמָלִי** – “G-d has made me forget all my burdens” (41:51). He emphasises the fact that he is moving away from his own upbringing and instead striving to raise his children

without the problems of his childhood. Additionally, he is saying that in having children, he has been freed from all of his misfortunes – Yosef centers his children around the happiness he has found in creating his own family.

When he names his second child, there is no reference to his first. Each one receives his own introduction. The Daat Zekenim (41:52) interprets Ephraim's name as coming from the root אפר, or ash. This symbolises the quality of humility, a characteristic accredited to both Avraham and Yitzchak, and represents Yosef's desire to imbue his son with this trait. In both sons, it is clear to see the consideration their father had in establishing separate storylines for them whilst teaching the importance of cherishing the connections they have to their ancestors and to each other.

Later on, when the generations of Yaakov are listed, the pasuk says ויולד ליוסף ... את מנשה ואת אפרים (46:20); this is striking in comparison to how the other shevatim are mentioned: a quick succession of names. There are two parts here of particular significance: 1) ויולד – this shows the care Yosef held in raising them in his ways, instilling within them the love a parent should have for their children; 2) Rather than saying מנשה ואפרים (the way the other descendants are mentioned), there is the added word את before each name, clearly showing a distinction made between them, as individuals as well as brothers, and highlighting their uniqueness amongst all the descendants of Yaakov.

Furthermore, by placing these two ideas parallel to one another, the pasuk indicates that the reason for their individuality is the direct result of the effort Yosef put into focusing on each child's own merits whilst highlighting the importance of remaining part of the family unit. Although Menashe and Ephraim became tribes in their own right, they are mentioned here as the sons of Yosef because he specifically exemplified this trait of familial dedication.

We see some contention between Yosef and his father during the process of Menashe and Ephraim receiving a beracha from Yaakov. The concern Yosef has for his children is very prominent.

Yosef places Menashe at Yaakov's right and Ephraim at his left; Yaakov, however, crosses his hands to rest them on the opposite heads. When Yosef sees this, it is **וירע בעיניו** (48:17). This action triggers a reminder of the way that his father had treated him over his brothers, and he remembers the firsthand resentment he experienced as a result of that favouring. He immediately moves to change this. He has learned from the past and does not want the situation replicated in his own sons.

Yaakov reassures Yosef that he should not doubt his own parenting abilities. Each brother developed one of Yosef's central middot. These can be seen within the pesukim in which they are named: Menashe embodies **סור מרע**, shunning evil. He causes Yosef to forget his burdens; while Ephraim manifests **עשה טוב**, doing good. He is evidence that Yosef has multiplied and spread goodness in the world. Instead of their differences creating tension between them, the brothers are able to live and work harmoniously.

Furthermore, Yosef should trust his sons since they have already learned from the mistakes of previous generations. The midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 91:8) says that Menashe was the interpreter between Yosef and his brothers when they had come down to Egypt during the famine (the political side), and Rashi (48:1) adds that Ephraim would learn with Yaakov and was able to inform Yosef when Yaakov became ill (the spiritual side). Instead of choosing polar opposite interests for themselves, the brothers find different positions that perfectly complement each other.

Rav Schwab discusses this idea in conjunction with Yaakov's beracha. He switched the placement of his own hands but did not change the places that the brothers stood. Yaakov is emphasising that each job – political and spiritual – is equally necessary in society.

This is particularly supported by the fact that descendants of both Menashe and Ephraim are chosen to complete the process of entering Eretz Yisrael. After Moshe's death, Yehoshua, from the tribe of Ephraim (Bamidbar 13:8), leads Bnei Yisrael into the land; he was a spiritual leader. Gideon, from the tribe of Menashe

(Shoftim 6:15), played a key role in the conquering of the land; he was a political leader. The two aspects were required to function together to facilitate the acquisition of the land, and this would not have been possible without the qualities presented by Menashe and Ephraim that were inherited by their descendants.

In contrast to the earlier pairs, there is no singular lesson to be learned from these brothers; rather, it is the intrinsic way in which they live their lives and how they are raised. A person's circumstances – their intrinsic nature together with how he is raised – can severely affect his attitude towards, and relationships with, his siblings.

In Tanach, it is not always easy to find role models of positive behaviours concerning sibling interactions. Instead of looking to the first examples presented, it is more logical to elevate the actions of later pairs since they have the advantage of learning from the shortcomings of previous generations.

It is no surprise, therefore, that when parents come to bless their children today, they say *ישמך אלקים כאפרים וכמנשה* (48:20). The extent of the reward Menashe and Ephraim receive for the way they acted towards each other is intangible today. Every brother is blessed in their name, wishing each week that the children of this generation will learn from the mistakes of the previous one, and more importantly, that they will continue the example Menashe and Ephraim set for them. Parents hope to instill within their children these traits of supporting and respecting their siblings whilst discovering their individual paths.

This beracha should serve equally as a reminder for the parents too; Menashe and Ephraim do not emerge as perfect characters from the outset. It is Yosef's commitment as a parent that enables his sons to exemplify such qualities. Similarly, this can only be achieved by parents today through active efforts to encourage each of their children in accordance with his or her personal abilities and not forcibly push them together or apart.

Sometimes being different from one's siblings can feel strange; a person might think, "We were all raised in the same environment,

yet we are completely different.” The reality is the exact opposite. In order for you to achieve your own potential, your parents are required to cater their actions to your specific personality. The most satisfying feeling is not becoming a carbon copy, but rather discovering the way in which your differences allow you to fit together as the perfect family unit.

Who Are You?

Anonymous Characters in the Torah

One famous principle of Torah study is that every word is carefully chosen and has meaning. But sometimes, it is not what is said that demands explanation, but rather what is not said. Why, in certain cases, does the Torah refer to an individual without identifying him? On occasion, there is no identification at all and other times, the person's identity is revealed only much later. An analysis of some of these instances through the eyes of multiple *mefarshim* suggests various reasons for this anonymity.

One possibility is to teach us something new that would otherwise not be understood if the individual's name was stated. In Shemot 2:1, the chapter begins the story of Moshe's birth by stating, וילך איש מבית לוי ויקח את בת לוי. Instead of introducing Moshe's parents as Amram and Yocheved, the pasuk refers to them as a Levite man and the daughter of Levi. The Siftei Chachamim explains that this is to teach us about Yocheved's regenerated youthfulness. She is referred to as a daughter, implying that although she was too old to bear children at the time that Amram remarried her, she became youthful again and was able to conceive and give birth to Moshe. The initial namelessness teaches us about a miracle which happened that allowed for the birth of Moshe, the leader of the Jewish people in their journey out of Egypt.

Another example is found in Yosef's interaction with the angel Gavriel before meeting up with his brothers and eventually being sold into slavery. Bereishit 37:15-17 relates that a man found Yosef wandering in the field, asked about Yosef's quest, and gave him directions to find his brothers. Ramban comments on Rashi's identification of this individual as Gavriel and states that any time directions are given to figures in Tanach, it is from an angel who is carrying out Hashem's plan. The anonymity shows that Hashem chose Gavriel to direct Yosef, setting in motion the plan of sending

Yosef to Egypt. This was one piece of the puzzle in Hashem's plan to eventually bring all of Yaakov's family down to Egypt.

Additionally, purposely not identifying characters is meant to protect the reputation of some and to avoid publicising their wrongdoings. This is made apparent in the story of a Jewish man named Zimri, his sin with a Midianite woman, and their death penalty carried out by Pinchas. Bamidbar 24:6 introduces Zimri as "a man from amongst Israel" and only later on does the Torah identify him as Zimri, the *nasi* of the tribe of Shimon. Or HaChaim explains that Zimri is referred to by his name only after he is killed by Pinchas. The Torah would not list sinners who are potential recipients of punishment until they are actually punished for their crimes.

This is even more blatant regarding the *mekoshesh eitzim*, the anonymous individual punished for deliberately violating the prohibition of gathering wood on Shabbat. He is never publicly identified. However, the Torah says (Bamidbar 15:32): ויהיו בני ישראל במדבר וימצאו איש מקשש עצים ביום השבת. The Gemara (Shabbat 96b) connects this event that occurred in the desert to Tzelofchad, an individual whose death is also explicitly mentioned to have occurred in the desert. The emphasis placed in both stories on the otherwise obvious location of the desert hints towards a parallel between these two events, identifying the one who violated Shabbat as Tzelofchad.

Furthermore, some personalities are mentioned anonymously because there is an obvious parallel to a different story which identifies the character. One example found in Shemot 2:13, details Moshe's encounter with the two Jewish men who are fighting with each other in Egypt. R' Ovadiah Bartenura comments on Rashi's identification of these two men as Datan and Aviram and notes a parallel between this instance and that of Datan and Aviram joining Korach's rebellion against Moshe. Any example of two anonymous people fighting and complaining is attributed to Datan and Aviram because they are explicitly stated as doing so during Korach's rebellion.

Moreover, anonymity is sometimes used to explain a common practice. The Gur Aryeh expresses this when he writes about Yocheved being referred to as the daughter of Levi. While she is

single, a girl is technically considered to be under her father's control. Once she is married, that authority switches over to her husband. A daughter was viewed as her father's property. Therefore, Yocheved is introduced and primarily defined through her role as Levi's daughter until she marries Amram.

Lastly, certain figures remain unnamed because their identity is irrelevant to the main purpose of the story in which they are mentioned. This is expressed in Shemot 2:11: **ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא** **אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו**. When Moshe goes out of the palace for the first time to see the Jewish people, he witnesses an Egyptian man beating a Jew. Both individuals are mentioned anonymously, which leads Rashi to identify the Jewish man as the husband of Shlomit bat Divri and the Egyptian man as the taskmaster who assaulted her, resulting in a son who later became a *kofer*. The Bartenura explains that the name of the Jewish man is omitted because he has no role in this story; the primary focus of this instance is to parallel the actions of this Egyptian man to the later actions of his son in the desert. Shlomit bat Divri's husband has no impact on her son's story, as his cursing of the Jewish people is attributed to his Egyptian father.

This concept is also shown with the introduction of Moshe's parents, Yocheved and Amram. Ramban states that their names are unnecessary because the purpose of them being mentioned is just to introduce Moshe and the story of his birth. They are later named with regards to their lineage, but in the beginning, they play an irrelevant role in Moshe's upbringing.

Birkat Asher adds to this idea by explaining that the anonymity shows Hashem's hand in Moshe becoming the leader of Bnei Yisrael. Everyone who had an impact on him getting to that point were all emissaries of Hashem's will; naming each of them would be irrelevant and would detract from the main focus of the story. This is also found by the obscurity of the *mekoshesh eitzim*. Rashi suggests that the exact name of the violator is irrelevant as the motivation of the story is to notice that already on Bnei Yisrael's second Shabbat, the entire nation could not refrain from violating the prohibitions set before them. Rabbeinu Bachya adds to this by using this sin of violating

Shabbat in the desert as an additional reason for why Bnei Yisrael were punished with the first generation dying out in the desert.

Through an analysis of the stories of Yosef's encounter with Gavriel, the marriage of Moshe's parents, the Egyptian attacking the Jewish man, the two Jews fighting in Egypt, and the *mekoshesh eitzim*, it is shown that the Torah uses anonymity for a variety of reasons, whether that be to express a subtle idea, protect someone's sinful reputation, identify a parallel between two stories, show a common practice, or draw attention to the main goal of a story.

The Indecisiveness of the *Shalshelet*

People often suffer from difficulty in decision making. As in all areas of life, we turn to our sacred writings for guidance. In *Covenant and Community*, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks discusses situations of ambivalence found in the Torah.

The basic premise of Rabbi Sacks' piece centers around the *shalshelet*, the note that the Torah uses in order to indicate indecisiveness. The shape of the note, which is essentially a zig zag, quite literally embodies this form of ambivalence, as the line oscillates back and forth between two opposite extremes. Within Sefer Bereishit, the *shalshelet* appears three times: in the context of Eliezer searching for a wife for Yitzchak (24:12), Yosef reacting when Eishet Potiphar propositions him (39:8), and Lot being told to leave Sodom and escape the city's destruction (19:16).

Although Rabbi Sacks' approach is to dissect these three instances and use them as a social commentary on our ongoing struggle of Jewish ambivalence and assimilation, I intend to use his basic idea and take it in a slightly different direction. These three instances with the *shalshelet* in Bereishit do more than just warn us of a pervasive communal problem. Rather, they serve as both the paradigm for all forms of indecision and a roadmap to help us navigate our way. They are the archetype for the main causes for internal conflict, as people most often grapple with problems regarding material desires, immoral temptations, and uncertainty regarding identity.

The first case we will deal with appears in Bereishit 24:12, when a servant, whom Chazal identify as Eliezer, goes to find a wife for Yitzchak. When Eliezer turns to ask Hashem for a sign to help locate the right girl, there is a *shalshelet* over the word *vayomar*: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' .אלקי אדני אברהם הקרה נא לפני היום ועשה חסד עם אדני אברהם. So what exactly was Eliezer's indecision about?

The midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 59:9) says that Eliezer's hesitation came from a place of potential personal gain. Eliezer was hoping

that he would inherit Avraham's estate in some way. At first, when Avraham had no children of his own, Eliezer supposed that he, as a *de facto* son figure, would somehow partake in the inheritance. Even after Yitzchak was born, Eliezer did not give up. He hoped that his daughter would someday marry Yitzchak, thereby allowing his lineage to benefit from Avraham's inheritance. Motivated by these desires, Eliezer had a personal reason to wish that his quest to find Yitzchak a wife would fail, as failure would allow his own aspirations to potentially come to fruition. Therefore, when Eliezer asks Hashem for assistance in his mission, the *pasuk* indicates Eliezer's hesitancy by adding a *shalshelet* on the word **וַיֹּאמֶר**.

How does Eliezer resolve this internal conflict? And how, if at all, is that reflected in the *pasuk*? Originally, notes the Or HaChayim, the woman would have to offer to provide much water to Eliezer in a dignified manner: **הֲטִי נָא כֶּדֶךְ** (24:14).

However, once Eliezer saw the water rise to meet Rivka (Bereishit Rabbah 60:5), he knew that this was a clear indication from Hashem that she was the one. Not only does Eliezer become active in his choice, as indicated by the word **וַיֵּרֶץ**, but he also tries to make the qualifications easier for Rivka. When he approaches Rivka, he requests **הֲגַמְיָאֵנִי נָא מֵעֵט מִיַּם מִכֶּדֶךְ**. In asking for merely a sip of water instead of the larger amount he had planned to request, Eliezer actively goes against his own best interests. Here, he is actually trying to get her to pass with relative ease. When Eliezer was standing at the crossroads between personal material gain and responsibility, he chose responsibility.

What was Eliezer's thought process? One might suggest the following. The key to this kind of dilemma lies, it seems, in the way we perceive property. If we view it as something that is inherently owned, to be taken by one and given to another in accordance with human whims, then of course everyone will have an agenda to maintain and gain property, lest they lose out on something that could be theirs.

The reality is, however, that property is determined by Hashem's allocation of material things. He alone decides what each and every person gets, and nothing that is meant to be for someone will ever go to someone else. Initially, Eliezer was playing the property game,

viewing Avraham's inheritance as something that somehow could become his if he played his cards correctly.

However, once he saw the water rising to meet Rivka, a sign from Hashem that she was meant to marry Yitzchak, he was able to comprehend the truth. Avraham's inheritance was never his to begin with. By extension, he realized that Yitzchak finding a wife does not somehow indicate that he's losing out on something that could be his. Once Eliezer shifted perspectives in this way, he was able to run to meet her and fulfill his duty with a full heart.

The second case of the *shalsholet* is when Eishet Potiphar attempts to seduce Yosef (39:8). She says to him *שכבה עמי*. Although Yosef ultimately refuses, his decision to do so, *וימאן*, is clouded with a certain ambivalence.

To understand why this choice was so difficult for Yosef, we have to first take a look at what his childhood was like. Yosef's dreams were repeatedly mocked by his family, he was sold by his brothers, and his one ally, his father, having presumed him dead, never sent anyone out to look for him. All of his familial relationships were tainted by this underlying sense of rejection.

Suddenly, here was Eishet Potiphar, an older alluring woman who was actually showing interest in him! It would have been so much easier, validating, and satisfying for Yosef if he had just given into his vices. Yes, according to everything he had learned in his upbringing, committing adultery was wrong, but who would know? What ultimately stopped Yosef from giving in to Eishet Potiphar?

According to the Gemara (Sotah 36b), during the moment when Eishet Potiphar attempted to seduce Yosef, he had a vision of Yaakov. This image concretized the reality of his decision: he could either follow tradition and morality regardless of his personal desires, or succumb to his vices and lose his name on the Kohen Gadol's breastplate, thereby symbolically relinquishing his place within the Jewish people. In this vision, Yosef quite literally saw Hashem's will, and with that clarity, chose to follow it.

This can be further seen by Yosef's response to Eishet Potiphar, *איננו גדול בבית הזה ממני ולא חשך ממני מאומה כי אם אותך באשר את אשתו* (39:9). Although he initially speaks of how kind Potiphar has been

to him, the last and most important reason that Yosef cites in his rejection of her advances is **והטאתי לאלקים**. At the end of the day, Yosef is concerned about sinning before Hashem. The Chizkuni says that Yosef knew that, while it would be possible for him to hide his affair from other people, he could never hide it from G-d.

Thus, when it comes to the matter of choosing whether or not to pursue an immoral temptation, the methodology of such decision-making boils down to a type of cost-benefit analysis. What will be the physical and spiritual consequences of our actions? Maybe we won't be able to tangibly envision the cost in the same type of clear fashion that Yosef was able to, where he saw his name removed from the Choshen. But there is a realization that there are long term, even eternal, consequences. The conclusion comes when you ask yourself the question "is the temporary pleasure worth it?"

The third case of the *shalshet* in Bereishit (19:16) (which chronologically is the first) is when the angels urge Lot and his family to flee from Sodom as quickly as possible before its destruction. The *pasuk* says: **ויתמהמה ויחזקו האנשים בידו וביד אשתו וביד שתי בנותיו בהמלת ה'** **עליו ויצארו וינחרו מחוץ לעיר**. Despite knowing that the city will be demolished by Hashem, Lot hesitates to leave Sodom. This reflects Lot's deep rooted desire for wealth and the illusion of relative importance that he had established for himself. At this point, Lot had resided in Sodom for many years. He left Avraham's surroundings, a place where he always felt spiritually and morally deficient, and ventured out to make a name for himself, independent of his familial connections. He went to Sodom, put down roots there, married off his daughters to locals, and even became a local judge (Rashi, 19:1).

When it comes to leaving Sodom behind, Lot is unable to make the decision on his own. The *pasuk* says **ויהזקו האנשים בידו**. The angels literally had to grab Lot's hand in order to guide him out of the city. The Ibn Ezra (19:16) says that this lack of strength to run was caused by a sense of fear. Lot was literally paralyzed by the decision he had to make. It is only the intervention of the angels that saved Lot.

There is an alternative way to decide matters of identity crisis. Although, there is no *shalsholet*, let us examine the story of Moshe killing the Mitzri. In Shemot 2:12 it says, **וַיִּפֶּן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אִין אִישׁ וַיִּךְ** ויפן כה וכה וירא כי אין איש ויטמנוהו בחול he turned this way and that and, seeing no one about, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. While the simple reading of the text would indicate that Moshe's looking from side to side was merely a pragmatic attempt to ensure that no one would witness his crimes, it is possible to read it in a more internally-oriented, philosophical way.

Until this point in his life, Moshe essentially had two alternate identities; a Mitzri raised in Pharaoh's palace and a Jew, son of Amram and Yocheved. This dual identity conflict reaches its climax at this very moment when Moshe is forced to choose between the two. He turns from one side to another within himself and **וַיֵּרָא כִּי אִין אִישׁ** – seeing that he was not truly a person if he is in both camps. Moshe decides to kill the Mitzri and bury him in the sand. Moshe chose to embrace his Jewish identity at the cost of his Egyptian one.

When it comes to crises of identity, there seem to be two options. The first option, which Lot utilizes, is the more passive one. It relies on others to remind you of your true identity when you falter. The second option, which Moshe employs, is to actively take it upon yourself to embrace your religious identity even in times that conflicting values are attempting to pull you in another direction.

Thus, through the use of the *shalsholet* in Bereishit we are able to see both the paradigm for difficult decisions and the strategies to cope with them. With matters of personal gain, we have to maintain a clarity of perspective – knowing, first and foremost, that everything stems from Hashem and what we have materially is a deliberate product of His will. When it comes to issues of immoral desires, we have to weigh the benefit of the temporal versus the cost of the eternal.

Lastly, when it pertains to issues of identity, we have to remain firm in our sense of selves when we are able take a more active approach. Using the stories of Eliezer, Yosef, Lot, and Moshe, the Torah provides the necessary guidance for the indecisive among us.

הלכה

Vaccines and Halacha

If one takes a look around at the world today, things look quite a bit different than they did just over a year ago. Masks, social distancing, and hand sanitizer are the new norm. The world community has suffered many losses, gone through several lockdowns, and is waiting for this all to be over. Now, there is a potential end in sight, with the development of several new COVID-19 vaccines. If enough people get vaccinated, we can slow down or even stop the spread of this virus.

In addition to the science, there are halachic ramifications to look at as well. From pesukim in the Torah to modern day poskim, there are discussions regarding situations of protecting ourselves and avoiding danger, both in terms of ourselves and others, and this can be applied to vaccines. This article will take a look at some of these sources to see how vaccinations are viewed in Halacha.

There are several halachic sources that require us to be careful and protect ourselves. We are instructed (Devarim 4:15): **ונשמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם**, justifying the use of medicine to protect ourselves and guard our lives. The Rambam (Hilchot Rotzeiach U'Shmirat Hanefesh 11:4) and the Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 427:8) tell us that in addition to the *mitzvat aseh* of guarding one's life, one violates a *lo taaseh* if he does not remove life-threatening obstacles. This is based on Devarim (22:8): **כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעקה לגגך ולא תשים דמים בביתך כי יפל הנפל ממנו**. This pasuk requires us to build a fence on the roof of our house in order to prevent bloodshed. From here we can derive that we must do all we can to protect ourselves and additionally everyone around us in all situations. It is both an *aseh* and a *lo ta'aseh*.

This general concept can be specifically applied to vaccinations. Vaccines remove the threat of getting seriously ill from diseases and leave us more protected. Therefore, according to

the Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, seemingly we should get vaccinated.

However, one could challenge this line of reasoning. These mitzvot apply when we know we are protecting ourselves. Although vaccines are generally safe (especially nowadays in comparison to the more archaic vaccines of the past), they are not completely free of side effects. We are not supposed to put ourselves in dangerous situations, as seen in the pesukim above. Although the purpose of vaccines is to protect ourselves and those around us, with the possibility of becoming slightly or in some cases seriously ill as a result of vaccinations, should we or should we not vaccinate?

This question first arose around the time of the invention of the smallpox vaccine by Edward Jenner in 1796. Jenner discovered that taking some of the smallpox virus and injecting it into an individual who had not had the virus can help his immune system learn to fight off the virus, thereby making him immune to the disease. This early version of a vaccine had more risks and side effects than our current day vaccines, which is why this was more of a question then, yet the vaccine has since been successful in eradicating smallpox, a significant achievement.

Several rabbanim who lived during the age of smallpox publicly addressed this issue. In 1785, Rav Abraham Nanzig of Hamburg published a pamphlet encouraging inoculation against smallpox (the precursor to the vaccine). Rabbi Nanzig drew on his own personal experiences in order to justify his point of view. He himself lost two children to the smallpox virus, and after seeing firsthand just how horrible this virus was, he decided that smallpox inoculations should be allowed.

Eleven years later, after Edward Jenner invented the smallpox vaccine, Rav Yisrael Lipschitz discussed the matter in his commentary on the Mishnah (Tiferet Yisrael on Avot 3:14). The Tiferet Yisrael brings praises Jenner: וכמה מהן שהיטיבו ביותר לכל באי עולם, שכל ידה ניצולים כמה רבבות בני כחסידי יענער שהמציא האפקקענאימפונג, שעל ידה ניצולים כמה רבבות בני כחסידי יענער – Jenner is described as a *chassid* for his life-saving work.

Additionally, in Yoma (8:3), the Tiferet Yisrael explains that even if there's a risk of one person in every thousand cases dying from the vaccine, one is allowed to put himself in a limited danger in order to prevent a much greater one. This can be applied even more so nowadays, where vaccines are strictly regulated by government and health organizations that require the vaccines to undergo extensive studies to determine their safety before allowing them to be distributed to the public. Vaccines are of such importance that Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Minchat Shlomo 2:29:4) writes that if one can only get a vaccine on Shabbat, and if he does not receive it then he will not have another opportunity to get it for years, he is allowed to get the vaccine on Shabbat.

In a normal, non-pandemic circumstance, many poskim strongly recommend being vaccinated regularly. Being routinely vaccinated helps keep up herd immunity, which is achieved when seventy to ninety percent of the population is immune to a certain illness. This helps stop the spread of the illness because even if one individual becomes sick, he cannot spread it to others since so many other people are protected. This also leaves room to protect individuals who cannot be vaccinated due to medical reasons.

The measles outbreak in 2018-2019 demonstrated what happens when regular vaccines are not popular among a community. Measles, a disease that was no longer common due to the high level of vaccinations suddenly made a recurrence when several communities (mainly ultra-orthodox) were not being vaccinated. In response to this, the Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America released a statement¹ stating that they “strongly urge all parents to vaccinate their healthy children on the timetable recommended by their pediatrician.” Additionally, Rabbi Dr. Edward Reichman² writes that Jewish schools are allowed to require up-to-date vaccinations as a prerequisite for school admissions, because of the possible danger posed to other students by those not vaccinated.

¹ ou.org/news/statement-vaccinations-ou-rabbinical-council-america/

² jewishaction.com/religion/jewish-law/halachic_aspects_of_vaccination/

The halacha becomes even stricter when it comes to a pandemic situation, since there is a more imminent danger from which one must protect himself. The Rema (Yoreh Deah 116:5) states that when there is a plague in a city, one must flee at the beginning and not wait until things are very bad. It is prohibited for one to rely on a miracle and stay, without trying to protect himself in this kind of situation.

In contemporary terms, it would not be necessary to literally flee from the city when we can follow precautions that will protect ourselves, such as getting a vaccine. With the introduction of several new vaccines for the coronavirus with the potential to protect both us and everyone around us from this terrible virus and help stop the spread, many poskim have weighed in on the matter of whether or not we can mandate getting the coronavirus vaccine. We cannot simply look at the effects on ourselves as individuals. We must rather look at the effects on the entire population as well.

Rav Asher Weiss' teshuva about the COVID-19 vaccine³ states that in general, rabbanim rely on the opinions of medical experts when it comes to *pikuach nefesh* situations. Therefore, since there have been a number of intensive studies done and medical professionals are telling us that the vaccines are safe, we should rely on them and not have any concern about severe effects.

He believes that it is halachically correct to get vaccinated, but he cannot say that everyone is necessarily obligated to get the COVID-19 vaccine, as long as they keep following proper safety precautions so that they are not putting others at risk. Additionally, if people are concerned about potential side effects, since the risks are very minimal Rav Weiss says we can rely on the concept of "*shomer peta'im Hashem*" – when one follows the Torah and the Sages, even if he makes a mistake, Hashem will protect him, so it is definitely in one's best interest to be vaccinated.

³ [torahbase.org/pdf/Rav-Asher-Weiss-Covid19-Vaccine.pdf](https://www.torahbase.org/pdf/Rav-Asher-Weiss-Covid19-Vaccine.pdf)

The OU and the RCA put out a letter⁴ based on the guidance of Rav Herschel Schachter and Rav Mordechai Willig, with the support of Rav Dovid Cohen discussing the halachot surrounding the COVID-19 vaccination. They say that for all those who are medically able to get vaccinated, there is a requirement from the Torah to do so in order to protect themselves and others. They also explain that even though one may be concerned about side effects or other issues with the vaccine because of how quickly they were produced and circulated, one should not be worried because the experts have made it clear that this speeding up of the process did not remove any safety procedures or studies from the process.

In summary, it seems quite clear that the Torah prioritizes protecting our lives and the lives of others. In the case of vaccines, which are developed through in-depth studies and are extremely safe, there is no real question about putting oneself in danger. The benefits of receiving vaccines greatly outweigh any potential risks. This is always true, but even more so in our current circumstances. In the case of a pandemic, rabbanim are even more insistent that people should get vaccinated.

⁴ images.shulcloud.com/709/uploads/Guidance-re-Vaccines.pdf

פסיק רישא דלא ניהא ליה

What is a *pesik reisha* situation in Hilchot Shabbat? A person intentionally engages in a permissible activity which will unintentionally but definitely cause a forbidden activity to occur. For example, if one washes his hands over a flower pot, through the mere action of washing his hands, the person will definitely violate the *melacha* of *zorei'ah*. Despite their many debates in the area of *melacha*, both R' Yehudah and R' Shimon agree that a person who performs a *pesik reisha* on Shabbat is liable.

However, there is a scenario within the realm of *pesik reisha* that isn't so clear cut. If one washes his hands over his neighbor's pot of flowers, he will definitely be watering the plant, but in this case he does not care to help his neighbor's flowers grow. This scenario is referred to as a *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* – a *pesik reisha* case in which one has no interest in the resulting *melacha*.

For this second type of *pesik reisha*, it is unclear what the *halacha* is. When looking at later halachic sources such as the Shulchan Aruch and Mishnah Berurah, it seems unclear how they rule for cases of *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*. We will examine their writings and try to understand their rulings.

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 314:1) permits one to remove a knife from a barrel of wine, even though by doing so, he will be widening the hole in the barrel which is prohibited because of *boneh*. This is a *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* because the person's goal is to access the wine in the barrel, not to widen a hole. The Shulchan Aruch permits this because the Torah only prohibits *boneh* with items connected to the ground, so the case of the barrel would only be a case of *boneh d'rabbanan*, and therefore an act of *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* is permitted. One, however, is not allowed to remove a knife that is embedded in a wall, for example, even if it is a *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*, because widening the hole in the wall

by removing the knife would be considered *boneh d'oraita* since the wall is connected to the ground (314:12).

However, later the Shulchan Aruch (320:20) seems to contradict the idea that a *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* is permitted in cases of *d'rabbanan melachot*. The Shulchan Aruch explains that if one is eating strawberries, he is not permitted to wipe his hands on a cloth napkin as he would be in violation of *tzovaya* because it is a case of *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*. (Even though you are not intending to, you are one hundred percent going to be dyeing the cloth by wiping your fingers on the napkin.) This seems to be inconsistent with what the Shulchan Aruch rules in the case of removing the knife from the barrel. Wiping your hands on a napkin stains the napkin and is considered *mekalkel* (a destructive act) and downgrading it to an *issur d'rabbanan*. Why does the Shulchan Aruch prohibit the *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* by this *issur d'rabbanan* but permits it in the case of the barrel of wine?

To resolve this contradiction, we must distinguish between the different factors that can downgrade an action from *d'oraita* to *d'rabbanan*. First, there are deficiencies in *klalei hilchot Shabbat*: e.g. *mekalkel*, *davar sh'eino mitkaven*, *eino mitkayem* and *k'l'achar yad*. All of these factors come to mitigate the element of *melechet machshevet* (skilled *melacha*) present by all *d'oraita issurim*. These factors can be applied to most of the thirty nine *melachot* of Shabbat.

Next, there are deficiencies in *tzurat hamelacha*, which are unique to each of the thirty nine *melachot*. Regarding *boneh*, for example, it is only considered *boneh d'oraita* if it is with something connected to the ground because "*ein binyan b'keilim*". Regarding the *melacha* of *tzovaya*, however, there is no distinction if you are coloring something connected to the ground or not, because "*ein binyan b'keilim*" is unique to the *melacha* of *boneh*.

Rav Uri Cohen (quoted in Tosefet Ohel, 327-332) posits that the Shulchan Aruch only permits a *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* in a case where the *melacha* has been downgraded to a *d'rabbanan* by a deficiency in *tzurat hamelacha* and through a lack of *melechet*

machshevet. In other words, the *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* creates a lack of *melechets machshevet*, but a deficiency in *tzurat hamelacha* is also needed to permit the act. This is why removing the knife from the barrel is permitted (it has both categories), but wiping your hands on a cloth napkin is not (it only lacks in *melechets machshevet*). Thus, the Shulchan Aruch requires one “strike” in *tzurat hamelacha* and one “strike” in *klalei hilchot Shabbat* to permit an act of *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*.

A similar contradiction is found in the Rema. The Rema (340:3) prohibits cutting a cake with letters on it because it is a violation of *mocheik*, erasing, even though there are three “strikes” in the category of *klalei hilchot Shabbat*: *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*, *mekalkel*, and *k'l'achar yad*. Furthermore, this case also has a strike in the area of *tzurat hamelacha* because it is not *al m'nat lichtov*. (In order to violate *mocheik* on a *d'oraita* level, one must be erasing with the intention of rewriting.) Despite the three strikes in the area of *klalei hilchot Shabbat* and a strike in the realm of *tzurat hamelacha*, the Rema still rules that cutting a cake with letters is forbidden on Shabbat!

However, the Rema (316:3) prohibits closing a small drawer that has flies in it because it is a *pesik reisha* violation of the *melacha* of *tzod*. (You don't have the intention of trapping the bug; you just want to close the drawer.) However, this is only *tzeida d'rabbanan* because flies are not typically trapped (*ein b'mino nitzod*), and in order to be considered *tzod d'oraita*, one must trap an animal that is typically trapped. The Mishnah Berurah (316:15) points out that the Rema would likely permit one to close the drawer if it is a large drawer. This is because the big drawer presents another *d'rabbanan* factor- *eino b'chad sechiya*- you can't get the trapped object in one stroke. How do we explain the Rema with regards to these three cases? How is it consistent for the Rema to rule that cutting the cake with words is prohibited, closing a small drawer with flies is prohibited, but closing a large drawer with flies is permitted?

In order to understand how the Rema is consistent, we must look again at the distinction between strikes in *klalei hilchot Shabbat* and strikes in *tzurat hamelacha*. As Rav Uri Cohen suggests (Tosefet Ohel, *ibid.*), echoing the Sha'ar HaTziyun (337:2), perhaps the Rema maintains that in order for a *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* case to be permissible, there needs to be **one** strike in *klalei hilchot Shabbat*, and **two** strikes in *tzurat hamelacha*. Therefore, closing a large drawer with flies is permissible because in addition to lacking *melechet machshevet* (it is a *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*), it has two strikes in *tzurat hamelacha* (*ein b'mino nitzod* and *eino b'chad sechiya*). Therefore, it is permissible according to the Rema. On the other hand, trapping flies in a small drawer is not a case of *eino b'chad sechiya*, which means that there is only one strike in *tzurat hamelacha*. Therefore, the Rema rules that it is forbidden to close the smaller drawer with flies. Similarly, regarding the cake with letters, although there are many strikes in *klalei hilchot Shabbat*, they all serve the same purpose of mitigating *melechet machshevet* and count only as one strike. Additionally, there is only one strike in *tzurat hamelacha* (not *al m'nat lichtov*). This demonstrates that the Rema requires two strikes in *tzurat hamelacha* and one strike in *klalei hilchot Shabbat* to permit an act of *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*.

Now that we understand the guiding principles of the Shulchan Aruch and Rema with regards to *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*, we will explore the opinion of the Mishnah Berurah. When the Rema brings the case of the cake with letters, the Mishnah Berurah (340:15) comments that if the letters on the cake were written in diluted honey or fruit juice (which creates a situation of *eino mitkayem*), it would be permitted to cut the cake. What is the logic behind this statement of the Mishnah Berurah? Clearly the Mishnah Berurah disagrees that all *klalei hilchot Shabbat* strikes count as one; otherwise the addition of *eino mitkayem* wouldn't change anything!

According to Rav Shmuel Kadar (Tosefet Ohel, *ibid.*), perhaps the Mishnah Berurah has a slightly different principle than the

Shulchan Aruch and Rema with regards to *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*. According to the Mishnah Berurah, in order for a *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* to be permitted, it needs to have **two** strikes in the category of *klalei hilchot Shabbat*, and only **one** strike in the category of *tzurat hamelacha*. Meaning, in addition to the *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei*, there must be a strike in both categories (unlike the Shulchan Aruch who includes *pseik reisha d'lo nicha lei* as the strike in *klalei hilchot Shabbat*). The cake with letters made from fruit juice or diluted honey has two strikes in *klalei hilchot Shabbat* (the Mishnah Berurah relies on *acharonim* who disregard *k'l'achar yad* and *mekalkel* in this instance for reasons beyond the scope of this analysis, leaving just *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* and *eino mitkayem*), and one strike in *tzurat hamelacha (lo al m'nat lichtov)*, and therefore cutting the cake is permitted.

In summary, when looking closely at the opinions of the Shulchan Aruch, Rema, and Mishnah Berurah, we see three contrasting principles with regards to what factors make a *pesik reisha d'lo nicha lei* action permissible on Shabbat.

תוכחה

The *pasuk* (Vayikra 19:17) חטא ולא תשא עליו חטא presents a very complex and deep mitzvah. There is a great debate about how one should give *tochacha*, rebuke. This term appears elsewhere in Tanach. For example

לעשות נקמה בגוים, תוכחות בלאמים (Tehillim 149:7).

אל תוכח לץ פן ישנאך, הוכח לחכם ויאהבך (Mishlei 9:8).

In the first instance, the term *tochacha* seems to refer to a punishment, whereas the second one is an example of its common usage, rebuke.

In Mishlei, the word *tochacha* is used in a *mussar* based context. One who gives rebuke to a person who doesn't want to hear it will be hated, but one who gives rebuke to a person who will accept it, will be loved. Rebuke is something that we need to be open to and willing to accept. It is very difficult to hear, but it can only lead to gain.

There is what to learn from the repetition in the *pasuk* in Vayikra, where it says הוכח תוכיח. The gemara (Bava Metzia 31a) relates that someone suggested to Rava that the double language implies that one should rebuke once, and if necessary, twice. Rava responded that the repetition teaches us that when necessary, one must rebuke his friend even one hundred times.

There is a specific type of *tochacha* that is intriguing. To what extent is it okay for a teacher to rebuke a student? It is well known that a teacher has a very large impact on his student, but rebuking a student multiple times can also cause the student to hate the teacher. The gemara (Arachin 16b) says that you need to rebuke someone, but there is a limit: לא תשא עליו חטא – you should not sin through the act of rebuke. If you humiliate a person with your

tochacha it is sinful, and therefore one needs to pull back and refrain from giving rebuke.

How does this work when it comes to *chinuch*? If a student is not improving with the basic *tochacha* that is given to him, is one allowed to make it harsher in an attempt to cause him to listen? The Tiferet Yisrael (Avot 2:5) explains that it all depends on the student's perception of his teacher. If the student thinks that the teacher hates him, it is only logical that he will not be interested in anything that is being taught. But if the teacher truly loves his students and they see it, they will understand that the gentle rebuke is for their own good. [It is interesting to note that the gemara in Bava Metzia acknowledges that there are times when a student may (respectfully) rebuke his teacher.]

The Rambam (Hilchot Talmud Torah 4:5) writes that if a teacher sees that a student is having trouble learning, specifically because he is allowing himself to be distracted by other things, it is his duty to scold and even shame him in a way that shows that he is disappointed in him, in order for the student improve his behavior. This indicates that a teacher must speak in a way that shows his student that he cares about him.

Logically, a student gains the most from a teacher when the teacher expresses how important the student and his learning are to him. Once this connection and understanding is established, it is much more likely that a student will use his teacher's rebuke to improve his behavior. However, if there is *tochacha* by a teacher who makes the student feel like he is a nuisance to the class and the atmosphere, the student is very likely to hate the teacher due to the *tochacha* and is more likely to continue doing the action he is being rebuked for.

As Jewish people, it is important to know what it means to rebuke – but even more so, to need to know how to properly accept rebuke. It is against human nature to appreciate when one person tries to inform another that they are behaving badly or doing something is wrong, and it is even harder for us to fix the mistake. However, it is an essential task in order to better oneself.

A person should not hold a grudge against someone who is rebuking him; instead he should appreciate the gesture. If a person can build up the courage to rebuke the other and to express to him that what he is doing is not right, that truly means that he cares about that person and the betterment of his life. It is important to accept that everyone, including ourselves, has room to grow. Otherwise, we are simply not fulfilling our purpose in this world.

יום ההולדת

בכל שנה, כשמגיע יום ההולדת, אנו חשים שזהו יום מיוחד.¹ אבל האם יום ההולדת הוא באמת יום כל כך חשוב שאנו אמורים לציין אותו בשמחה, או שמא אין שום סיבה למסיבה, וזה מנהג הגויים שאינו שייך לנו? ואם יש סיבה לחגוג, כיצד ראוי לציין את יום ההולדת על פי היהדות?

יום ההולדת על פי התאריך העברי, נחשב כראש השנה הפרטי של האדם. זה היום בו הנשמה באה לעולם. האדם מציין את יום ההולדת שלו ומודה על נס ביאתו לעולם.

ביום זה נעשו לבני האדם ניסי ניסים המוזכרים בתלמוד הבבלי (נדה ל:). העובר מונח בבטן אמו כפנקס, ובא מלאך ומלמדו את כל התורה. כשהוא יוצא, נפתח הסתום ונסתם הפתוח. בכל שנה ביום ההולדת חוזרת ומתעוררת אותה המשכה עליונה של מזל שהתחילה בשעת הלידה.

כתוב בירושלמי מסכת ראש השנה (ג:ח) "ביום ההולדת של האדם מזלו שולט ועוזר לו." מסופר שם שעמלק היה שולח למלחמה מול ישראל לא סתם חיילים, אלא חיילים ביום ההולדת שלהם, מפני שרצה שהם יינצחו את ישראל, מתוך תפיסה שהמזל שלהם גובר ביום הזה.

רבינו יוסף חיים (בן איש חי, פרשת ראה), כותב: "ויש נוהגים לעשות בכל שנה את יום הלידה ליום טוב וסימן יפה הוא, וכן נוהגים בביתנו."

גדולי ישראל נהגו לערוך סיום ביום הולדתם, וכך מסופר על החתם סופר (מנהגי חתם סופר ז:יד) ובנו הכתב סופר (יו"ד ח"ב קמ"ח). יש כאלו מגדולי ישראל שלכבוד יום ההולדת שלהם היו מוציאים ספר לאור, כמו למשל החפץ חיים שהוציא את הקונטרס "בית ישראל", וערך סעודה לכבוד יום הולדתו (י"א שבט תרפ"ח) ולכבוד ההוצאה של ספרו החדש.

המחלוקת בנוגע ליום ההולדת מתחילה מהסוגיה בגמרא (עירובין יג:). קיימת מחלוקת אם נוח לו לאדם שלא נברא יותר משנברא, או שנוח לו לאדם

¹ hidabroot.org/article/135

שכן נברא. המסקנה היא שנוח לו לאדם שלא נברא יותר משנברא, כלומר עדיף שאדם לא היה נברא בעולם, אך מכיוון שנברא – עליו לעסוק במצוות. וכיוון שכן, באו וטענו: אם נוח לו לאדם שלא נברא – אז אין על מה לשמוח ביום הולדתו של האדם. אבל החולקים טוענים שאחרי שנברא האדם, הוא צריך לשמוח על כל יום וכל שנה שניתנה לו.

מהגמרא רואים שיש השפעה טובה ומיוחדת ביום ההולדת של משה רבנו. המן עשה את הפור על עם ישראל באדר כי חשב שזה חודש שמסמל כיליון, והוא לא ידע שזה החודש שבו נולד משה רבנו.

יצחק אבינו נולד בט"ו בניסן (ר"ה י:), ובאותו תאריך נגאלו עם ישראל ממצרים. ובני ישראל גמרו לבנות את המשכן בכ"ה כסלו אבל המתינו לחנכו עד א' ניסן מכיוון שבחודש זה נולד יצחק (ילקוט שמעוני מלכים רמז קפד, י). על הכתוב (קהלת ג:ב) "עת ללדת" כתב החיד"א, "הנה עת הלידה הוא מזל בריא וחזק מאוד." אמנם, בספר שו"ת דברי ישראל כתב שאין שום השפעה מיוחדת לעם ישראל ביום ההולדת. דבר זה שייך לגויים שנשלטים במזלות, ועם ישראל נמצא מעל המזל. לעומת זאת, הרמב"ן, והרמח"ל (ספר דרך השם), סוברים שעם ישראל מושפע על ידי המזלות. המשמעות שאין מזל לישראל היא שה' עושה לישראל ניסים מעל הטבע והמזל, מפני שעל ידי תפילה אפשר לשנות ולקרוע גזירות.

יש נוהגים לציין את יום ההולדת בשמחה על ידי סעודת הודיה, ללבוש בגד חדש ולברך שהחינו, ובעת הברכה על הבגד החדש לכוון גם על השנה. בנוסף יש לערוך חשבון הנפש על השנה שחלפה ולהסתכל קדימה. מסופר על הכתב סופר שביום הולדתו ה-54 תלמידיו ראו אותו בוכה, וכשנשאל למה, סיפר שעשה חשבון הנפש כי 54 הוא הגמטריה של דן.

עוד יצוין כי יום ההולדת זה זמן מיועד לתפילה ולבקשות. יש ממליצים לקרוא תהילים פרק ב' שבו כתוב "אני היום ילדתיך". בחסידות נוהגים לציין את יום ההולדת של צדיקים מנהיגי ישראל בדרכים שונות. הבעל שם טוב הקדוש, מייסד החסידות, היה עורך סעודה מדי שנה ביום הולדתו (י"ח אלול), ואומר דברי תורה.

בחסידות חב"ד מתייחסים ליום ההולדת כראש השנה אישי לאדם הפרטי. וכמו שבראש השנה, תשובה, תפילה, וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזירה, כך ביום ההולדת נוהגים להתחזק במצוות הללו, כולל חשבון נפש.

בחסידות ברסלב מקובל מפי הרב יצחק בנדר זצ"ל, שחסידי ברסלב ביום הולדתם היו נוהגים להיות ערים כל הלילה, כל אחד ביום הולדתו, לומר ליקוטי תפילות, לעסוק בתשובה ולקבל קבלות טובות על עצמו.

לבעל שם טוב הקדוש יש מסר ליום ההולדת – שום אדם אחר שחי אי פעם עלי אדמות ויחיה בעתיד, לא יכול למלא את התפקיד המיוחד והספציפי שאותו נתן לך אלוקים, ולכן באת לעולם. בעל יום ההולדת צריך לדעת שלפני מספר שנים החליט אלוקים שהעולם לא יכול להתקיים בלעדיו, לכן הוא ברא אותו עם תפקיד ייחודי שאף אחד לא יכול לעשות במקומו. בגלל זה אומרים חז"ל (משנה, סנהדרין לז.): "בשבילי נברא העולם."

מחשבה

Do I Have a Choice?

There is a famous philosophical conundrum which is raised time and time again. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy expresses the question in the following manner. Let the variable T represent the fact that you will answer the telephone tomorrow at 9:00 AM. Yesterday, G-d knew that T is true, and therefore T is and has been true for all points in time. Hence, at 9:00 AM tomorrow T is true, and so you have to pick up the phone. So, how can you freely make the choice to do so?

This difficulty is created through two fundamental ideas which seem to be in conflict. The first notion is that man has free will, the ability to choose one action from another, and to discern right from wrong independently of G-d's influence. The second is that G-d has the ultimate knowledge of all things. According to this notion, G-d's knowledge cannot change because that would imply a plurality within G-d (Moreh Nevuchim 3:20). This essay will explore four approaches to this conundrum through the eyes of various philosophical thinkers.

The first approach in an attempt to resolve this paradox is to limit what is considered as G-d's knowledge, thus giving mankind full freedom of choice. Aristotle suggests that G-d has universal knowledge about the general events in the world but not particular knowledge about every detail which occurs during each individual's lifetime. He argues that G-d knows the intricate workings of phones and that humanity has the ability to pick up phones at any time. However, He doesn't know that someone will pick up this phone at 9:00 AM tomorrow. This explanation allows someone to pick up the phone at 9:00 AM by his own volition.

However, this theory is rejected by the Sages because it implies a lack of G-d's knowledge of the goings-on of this world. Throughout Tanach, Hashem knows what is going on in the world, as evidenced

by His interactions with individuals (the *avot*), involving Himself in the way the world runs (*yetziat Mitzrayim*), and by communicating to the prophets what the future holds. According to the Jewish perspective, G-d must have particular knowledge and Aristotle is mistaken.

Another argument is posed by Ralbag (Milchamot Hashem III:4). G-d's knowledge is contingent on man's actions. G-d knows all the potential outcomes for each choice that an individual can make, but He doesn't know which choice will be made until it is decided. This approach allows for free will, but suggests that G-d is blind to man's choices until he makes them. This explanation is also challenged. If this were the case, all prophecy which predicts future events would be uncertain, since G-d couldn't see the path the world would take until it had taken it.

A second explanation is to limit *bechira*, free-will, and to accept G-d's knowledge as all-encompassing. There is no capacity to go against G-d's will and absolute knowledge, so there is therefore no *bechira*. However, this is not the Jewish belief. The gemara quotes in the name of R' Chanina (Brachot 33b, Megillah 25a): **הכל בידי שמים** **חוץ מיראת שמים**, "All is in the hands of Heaven except fear of Heaven". Furthermore, Rambam notes (Hilchot Teshuva 5:4) that if mankind doesn't have the capacity to choose right from wrong, how can G-d demand this? What's more, how can a just G-d reward and punish a person for those choices? It is clear that this explanation is flawed.

One turns to a third approach which argues that both G-d's foreknowledge and humanity's free will can exist simultaneously. Rav Saadia Gaon (Emunot V'Deot, chapter 4) suggests that there is an underlying false assumption in this problem: G-d's knowledge of a thing existing does not equal the cause of its existence. G-d can know man's eventual decision, but man can actively choose whatever he'd like irrespective of what G-d knows.

Another argument is made by Rav Hasdai Crescas (Or Hashem), saying that G-d's knowledge is outside of time. Just as knowing a person's past actions does not change the fact they had the freedom to make that choice at the time, G-d's knowledge of

humanity's perceived future does not alter the fact that a particular person can freely choose what to do in any given situation.

R' Yehuda HaLevi (Kuzari, chapter 5) agrees with these arguments and explains that since G-d exists outside of linear time, this does not conflict with the cause and effect (which is the result of a linear-based existence) in which humanity lives.

The fourth and final approach is expressed by the Rambam in Hilchot Teshuva 5:5. Man's knowledge is separate from his being. In contrast, G-d's knowledge is intrinsically part of His very essence and thus is not separate from His existence in any way. This is a concept that is incomprehensible to man, as G-d has a fundamentally different and superior nature to man, as is written in Yeshaya-hu (55:8), "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways." Therefore, it is futile to try to understand the workings of G-d. This means it is impossible to understand how the ability for man to choose and an omniscient G-d can co-exist, but despite this lacking in human faculties, one must trust in the fact that they can.

It appears that either of the last two answers are viable options within accepted philosophies of mainstream Judaism. While a final satisfactory answer will not necessarily be reached, the arguments posed allow these two ideas to be more palatable and understandable to the reader.

True Art and Science – The Center of Religiosity

The synergy of science and art with Judaism has been broadly debated, ranging from opinions decrying the heresy and idolatry involved in these areas, to the full integration of Jews into the scientific and artistic communities. This essay will explore a possible balance – ignoring neither religious ideals, nor an appreciation towards science and art – through the lenses of two towering twentieth-century Jewish thinkers: Rav Soloveichik and Rav Kook.

Rav Soloveichik's overall approach to the secular world is that there should not be a division between the spiritual and the mundane. *Halakhic Man* (p. 93) explores the idea of "religious schizophrenia" – when religion and daily physical life are treated as polar opposites by other religions. However, if this world is to be a halachic world, as Jews we extend spirituality to physical actions and elevate them and ourselves. Religion does not exist only in prayer and shul visits.

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that the entire purpose of halacha is to unite the facets of being human with the spirituality of a relationship with G-d: "The Halacha declares that man stands before G-d not only in the synagogue, but also in the public domain".

A closer look at Halacha demonstrates how much "Halacha writes in the language of orderly scientific reality." An excerpt from Rav Soloveitchik's essay *And From There You Shall Seek* illuminates how far science penetrates Halacha. To paraphrase, the laws of forbidden hybridisation rely on knowledge of organism morphology; laws which depend on plant growth

(tithes, forbidden produce, first fruits) require organic chemistry. Public and private domains in regards to carrying on Shabbat, a kosher sukkah, the area on which a dead body imparts impurity are all dependent on a mathematical grasp of conceptual space. In the areas of causality laws, mechanics, psychology, epistemology, morality, metaphysics, astronomy, anatomy, physiology, pathology, politics, sociology, psychiatry – Halacha relies extensively upon science.

Furthermore, as a Jewish civilization, one could even say (as Rav Soloveitchik does in *The Lonely Man of Faith*) that Jews are commanded to advance themselves as a society and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the way the world works: מלאו את הארץ וכבשוה, “Fill the land and conquer it” (Bereishit 1:28). Jews are instructed to take G-d's intentionally imperfect creation of mankind and better themselves by becoming a more developed society and more knowledgeable – arguably the underlying purpose of all the mitzvot, which exist to enable the elevation of the physical.

From these sources, Rav Soloveitchik draws three main points:

- (1) Religion is found in "secular" life and doesn't exist as an independent, mutually exclusive idea.
- (2) Halacha depends on scientific methods and concepts.
- (3) To become more civilized and educated could be a direct command from G-d.

To appreciate the implementation of this theory, it would be worthwhile to read what Rav Soloveichik said about Yeshiva University (*The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik*). After explaining the importance of having innovative and individualised Torah learning in order to have a proper grasp of it, he extends this to institutions such as Yeshiva University. “Our goal is to educate a generation of Torah scholars with secular knowledge.”

Yet, while Rav Soloveitchik is very insistent that a secular education is important, when dealing with criticisms about Yeshiva University not “achieving the proper synthesis between Torah study and secular endeavour,” he gives a surprising response. *עם דרך ארץ* is not the ideal of YU. In fact, “there is no real synthesis in the world,” between Torah and secular studies. How can there be, if they contradict? A thesis and an antithesis cannot be in synthesis. “In general, a synthesis is very superficial. [It] ... imitates others and the individual loses his uniqueness. In synthesis, no one succeeds.”

So rather than being a synthesis, Yeshiva University is a double headed institution – one head Torah, one head science. And, concludes the Rav, “it is better to have two heads than none at all.”

While non-spiritual actions are meant to be elevated, Rav Soloveitchik does not advocate the meshing of spiritual and secular in terms of knowledge. Yes, it is important to get a full secular education, but this shouldn't mean religion is compromised by way of synthesis.

However, all of this is based on the assumption that Torah and secular studies, in essence, are sometimes in contradiction with one another. It is certainly true – some theories directly contradict our tradition and thought processes, but this shouldn't automatically discredit all other studies of science and scientific theories.

Science is the study of life, and life is true. So too, Jews study the Torah, and while the Torah is unarguable truth, some interpretations might not always be correct. It might be unfair to say science and Torah cannot ever be reconciled. Scientific fact can't be dismissed just because some scientific theory doesn't agree with Torah. (Note: more scientific theories than we realise fit in with Torah; see *In the Beginning* by Rabbi Dr. Nathan Aviezer.)

When it comes to the arts, Rav Soloveitchik doesn't discuss them directly, but one can apply his ideas about the elevation of the physical and the need of society's advancement, to this topic. If people are meant to develop themselves in all areas, the creative side must not be ignored. If there are halachot regulating an activity, as there are for artistic expression, arguably Jews are allowed to pursue the activity. However, perhaps Rav Soloveitchik would oppose synergy between art and Torah and would prefer the studies to be kept separate.

Rav Kook takes a stronger approach. Art, as opposed to science, has an innately more emotional side to it. Rav Kook is stylistically very emotional and empathises with the artist. He explains: if the soul is divine, the feelings contained within it are divine too. People who feel the need for catharsis of these feelings through art, and have the ability to, should express themselves artistically. If not, the world will be lacking in that area of divinity. Of course, not everything expressed through art is divine, and it is the duty of the artist to recognise what is spiritual within himself, and express only those aspects and not art that borders on depravity.

As a concept, art isn't as problematic as science sometimes is – but the content can be. So long as the content is mediated, Rav Kook feels that art is necessary for the completion of the Jewish society.

Art is often a means of expressing intense feelings. In agreement with Rav Kook, it has to be monitored, but overall, art is not contrary to ideals within Judaism. Furthermore, it is a positive influence on the growth of society, and people who feel the need for artistic release should not have this outlet inhibited.

The title chosen for this article is based on a quote from Albert Einstein. As discussed in this essay, art and science both have strength and power, which when misused, gives them the ability to defy religion, whether in theory or in content. However,

there is room to argue that immersion in either is not inherently irreligious or G-d-defying. When used correctly, art and science are two tools gifted to be the center of religiosity.

The Laws of the Korban Pesach:

A Blueprint for Spiritual Transformation

There are many interesting items to note about the presentation of the Korban Pesach. Firstly, the placement of the laws are puzzling – they come right in the middle of *makat bechorot*. Usually, Hashem warns Pharaoh about the *makah* and then immediately enacts it but here, the Torah detours to explain the laws of the Korban Pesach.

A second abnormality is that the laws are fragmented and recorded at two separate points. The first set comes right after Pharaoh receives warning for *makat bechorot*, (Shemot 12:1-13) and the second set comes after Pharaoh lets Bnei Yisrael go and they leave Mitzrayim (12:43-50).

The question on this oddity is two-fold. (1) Why would the laws be split up? (2) How does it make sense to give laws pertaining to the Korban Pesach *after* Bnei Yisrael leave Mitzrayim? Rashi (12:43 s.v. **וְזֹאת חֻקַּת הַפֶּסַח**) comments that the second set of laws was actually given on the 14th of Nissan (before they leave) but it's recorded in the text later on (after they leave). The obvious question on that explanation is: Why not record the laws when they were actually said? What does this particular format have to teach us?

The answer to all these questions lies in the fact that the Torah is not a storybook – rather it is our guide on how to live as servants of G-d in this world. Therefore, each deviation, idiosyncrasy, and seemingly random detail comes together to create layers of meaning waiting to be uncovered. Perhaps, a deeper analysis of the laws of the Korban Pesach, their specific order, and precise configuration will uncover those deeper levels of understanding and create for us, the readers of the Torah, a clear understanding of what it means to be a true servant of Hashem.

The Halachot begin as follows (12:3). Hashem tells Moshe to command Bnei Yisrael to set aside one sheep per household on the tenth of Nissan. If the household is too small they may join with their neighbors, but they must make sure the amount of meat is still proportionate to the amount of people eating. The sheep must be *תמים* – full, *זכר* – male, and *בן שנה* – one year old. Perhaps this is the start of Bnei Yisrael's transformation into servants of G-d. These characteristics represent different aspects of Bnei Yisrael as individuals, and Hashem is asking them to "gather" them into one in the form of a Korban Pesach and sacrifice it to Him.

The singular sheep per household represents Bnei Yisrael's existence as distinct individuals at this point in time; they have not yet melded into one nation. The text goes out of its way to twice command that the amount of meat be proportionate to each household – stressing that each family unit is their own. The Torah (12:3) states: *וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֶׁהָלַבִּית אֵת שֶׁהָלַבִּית* – Rashi explains that there can't be too many people at the meal if there will be too little food. (Each person must receive at least a *kezayit*). Then (12:4), there is a prohibition for there to be too few people and a surplus of meat. Rashi explains that the words *וְאֵם יִמְעֵט הַבֵּית* refers to a situation where the household would be too small for one lamb and there would be leftovers (a forbiddance outlined later in the sets of laws). In either case, we see an emphasis on proportionality, highlighting in the beginning of the process the importance of individual households .

Next, the sheep must be *תמים* – full, or pure. Rashi explains this word to mean without blemish, but perhaps there is a deeper layer of significance. Perhaps this could represent the status Bnei Yisrael maintained in Mitzrayim throughout their exile. The Rambam (Hilchot Issurei Mizbeach 4:3) codifies the prohibition of *kila'im*, cross-breeding, regarding korbanot. A korban must be pure-bred. Regarding Korban Pesach, this could be alluding to the purity of Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim and how they did not "cross-breed" with the Egyptians. This idea is alluded to in a midrash listing all the merits Bnei Yisrael had in order to leave Mitzrayim. Among them

are that no individual members from Bnei Yisrael were involved in any immorality (Vayikra Rabbah 32:5).

Finally (12:5), there is the **בן שנה** component. Rashi explains that *ben shana* does not mean one year old, rather, that it was born within the last year. Perhaps the significance of this connects to the mishna that says that the judgment of Mitzrayim lasted twelve months (Eduyot 2:10). It's possible that Hashem is asking Bnei Yisrael to bring along not only their individual selves (**שה לבית**) and the merits from their past (**תמים**), but also their evolving personal journey they have been on this whole year since the geula began. It's irrefutable that each member of Bnei Yisrael has transformed in some way from all they have witnessed this past year and through every detail, were shown that Hashem is running the world.

Perhaps with these three elements, **בן שנה**, **שה לבית**, and **תמים**, Hashem is asking Bnei Yisrael to take elements of their past and elements of their present, fuse them together, and sacrifice it all to Hashem in an act of moving forward into a new future, free of Pharaoh. They are transforming from who they used to be, servant of Pharaoh, to who their destiny is to be, servant of G-d. And the metaphor of transformation extends much further through the Pesukim.

To truly become reborn, Bnei Yisrael must fulfill the next commandment (12:7), to take the blood of the Korban Pesach and use it to line the doorposts of their house – the same doorway they will walk through to leave Mitzrayim and transform in servants of Hashem. This metamorphosis cannot happen through any blood, it has to come from the Korban Pesach which represents Bnei Yisrael's pure sacrifice to Hashem.

When Bnei Yisrael transform, they must say “this is who I was, this is who I am, and I'm giving it all to You, Hashem. I'm channeling it all through one doorway, through Your Torah”. Their transformation is a commitment through nullifying themselves and realizing that Hashem is really in charge. It's interesting that the pasuk specifically says they must put blood on the doors of homes that will have people eating inside. If the Korban Pesach was not

eaten in the house, there is no blood on the doorway. In our extended metaphor this would translate to mean that a person devoid of sacrifice and commitment would be devoid of transformation as well.

The next step in this rebirth actually comes not from Bnei Yisrael's point of view, but from Hashem's. Then (12:8) there is the commandment to eat the Korban Pesach with matzah and maror. The significance of those two elements are well known – matzah is *lechem oni*, a poor man's bread and maror symbolizes pain and suffering. Hashem, *kavyachol*, is saying to Bnei Yisrael: "I saw your pain, I heard your bitter cries, and don't worry, I've been here since the beginning, and I'll be with you until the end."

Matzah and maror are not the only things giving over this message. There is also a commandment that the meat should be eaten בלילה הזה – that night. What night is this referring to? – The night of *makat bechorot*, where Hashem paralleled the horror the Egyptians inflicted on Bnei Yisrael when they killed their sons, by killing the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. Wrapped up in Bnei Yisrael's transformation is Hashem saying: "I saw, I heard, I know"

The next criteria (12:9) is that the *entire* animal must be cooked (i.e. roasted) over the fire. This could represent two ideas. Firstly, water is often used to symbolize Torah, so cooking the Korban Pesach *without* water may be another indicator of where Bnei Yisrael are in terms of being a Jewish nation – they are still in the beginning stages and don't yet have the Torah. A second interpretation could come from the verse in Devarim (4:20) comparing Mitzrayim to a *kor habarzel* – a fiery furnace. Perhaps roasting the *entire* animal over a burning fire mirrors how each individual member needed to go through the fiery furnace of Mitzrayim to come out stronger, better, and closer to Hashem.

Next (12:10) there is the commandment, mentioned earlier, of not leaving any leftovers. Bnei Yisrael must eat everything by morning and if they can't, they must burn the remnants. This could be indicative of the reality that transforming from servants of Pharaoh into servants of Hashem means leaving everything behind

and moving forward. A commitment to being a servant of Hashem is not something done halfway – it's a full, complete, and all encompassing declaration.

Finally, at the end of the first set of laws (12:11) there is the commandment to eat the Korban Pesach ready to go. Their shoes must be on their feet, their staff in their hands, fit to flee Mitzrayim at a moment's notice. The significance of this will be explored after a brief analysis of the second set of laws.

The second set of laws (12:43-49), contrary to the first, puts more of an emphasis on nationhood rather than individuality. It represents Bnei Yisrael finally coming together and becoming a unified people. Non-Jews cannot join in the Korban Pesach, slaves must be circumcised before joining, and generally, any male who wants to join needs to be circumcised. This insistence on circumcision could correlate with it being such a point of identity for Jewish males. Circumcision symbolizes who we are; every Jewish boy has a *brit mila*.

Another law honing in on the concept of unity is the commandment not to bring the meat outside at all. Everyone needs to stay inside together until morning. Additionally they are told to eat the Korban Pesach without breaking any bones. If the Korban Pesach is representative of Bnei Yisrael, then it's clear why we cannot break off any bones – we cannot break off any member of Klal Yisrael. Finally, there is a distinct commandment (12:47): **כל עדת ישראל יעשו אותו**. The emphasis on unity cannot get any more explicit than that.

The final piece of the puzzle is to discuss the fragmentation of the two sets of laws. If, according to Rashi, they happened at the same time, why were they recorded in this way? Perhaps the answer connects back to two issues: (1) the final point in the first set – eating the Korban Pesach ready to leave, and (2) what transpired between the two recordings of laws.

What is interesting to note about the commandment to eat ready to go was that Hashem was telling Bnei Yisrael to do this before Pharaoh gave them the “okay” to leave. They have to com-

plete this aspect with blind faith that Hashem will make Pharaoh release them. We know the end of the story, that geulah is just a few pesukim away, but Bnei Yisrael don't! But this blind faith, this *emunah peshuta* sealed the deal in terms of Bnei Yisrael's transformation into servants of G-d. It allowed them to finally become a nation. It proved to Hashem the legitimacy and strength of their commitment to Him.

This blind faith is depicted again when Bnei Yisrael are actually leaving Mitzrayim – the Torah emphasizes that they were taking matzot with them because there was no time to let the bread rise. (12:34,39). Perhaps what the Torah is trying to reiterate is that despite only having matzah to eat (a food of, arguably, lesser quality), Bnei Yisrael still followed Hashem into the desert. The Torah (12:39) goes out of its way to tell us that they also had no provisions of food, highlighting further their “less than ideal” physical circumstances. Nonetheless, Bnei Yisrael trusted in Hashem and followed Him out of Mitzrayim and into the desert.

After this display of faith, Bnei Yisrael leave Mitzrayim and the night is called *ליל שימורים הוא לה'*. Rashi explains that Hashem was watching out and looking forward to the night He could redeem Bnei Yisrael and fulfill the promise He made to Avraham in *brit bein habetarim*. Perhaps Hashem was waiting for this display of unconditional commitment from Bnei Yisrael. That's why only after they eat ready to go and show Hashem that even though the next step isn't clear, they are willing to follow him, there can be the set of laws emphasizing nationhood and unity. Only after we show Hashem our unconditional commitment can our transformation into true servants of Hashem can really be complete.

The only wrinkle with that explanation is that, in reality for Bnei Yisrael, (according to Rashi) there wasn't a delay, they got all the laws before they left Mitzrayim and displayed their categorical commitment to Hashem. Evidently, the lesson isn't meant to be learned by the characters in the story, but by us, the readers of the Torah. We are supposed to read this chapter and use it as a blueprint on how to transform ourselves into servants of G-d.

We, like Bnei Yisrael, must gather all parts of ourselves, past and present, and channel them towards Hashem to create a new future for ourselves, one that's intertwined with Hashem. We must sacrifice our whole selves, leaving nothing behind, and realize that Hashem is with us every step of the way. Finally, we must commit unconditionally to living a life of Torah and mitzvot, and show our unbounded desire, love, and passion to become the best servant of G-d that we can be. When we do this, we will see our lives become enhanced more than we can imagine for we are truly living with Hashem.

Takkanot of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai

In the introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah, the Rambam describes the category of *takkanot* added on by Chazal:

החלק החמישי הם הדינים העשויים על דרך חקירה וההסכמה בדברים
הנוהגים בין בני אדם. שאין בם תוספת במצוה ולא גרעון. או בדברים
שהם תועלת לבני אדם בדברי תורה. וקראו אותם תקנות ומנהגים
ואסור לעבור עליהם וכבר אמר שלמה ע"ה על העובר עליהם (קהלת י')
ופורץ גדר ישכנו נחש. ואלו התקנות רבות מאד ונזכרות בתלמוד
ובמשנה מהם בענין איסור והיתר ומהם בענין הממונות
מהם תקנות מיוחדות ליחידים מן החכמים כמו שאמרו (שביעית פ"י)
התקין הלל פרוזבול (גיטין דף לד:) התקין רבן גמליאל הזקן (ביצה
דף ה) התקין רבן יוחנן בן זכאי והרבה בתלמוד התקין ר' פלוני התקין
ר' פלוני.

The Rambam explains that *takkanot* are positive laws that are either agreed upon by *Am Yisrael*, or instituted to benefit *Am Yisrael* in matters of Torah. *Takkanot* can fall under the category of those instituted by the Sanhedrin and those instituted by individual Sages. He mentions the *takkanot* of Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai as an example of the latter category.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai instituted several *takkanot* following the destruction of the Second Temple as a response to the *churban*. All *takkanot* instituted by individuals must clearly be of an advantage to *Am Yisrael* and Torah in some way. To understand the advantages that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai intended with his *takkanot*, we must examine them within their historical context.

Prior to the destruction of the Second Temple, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai escaped Yerushalayim to meet with the Roman general, soon to be emperor, Vespasian. The gemara (Gittin 56b) tells us that Vespasian granted him the opportunity to make a request. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai famously responded *תן לי יבנה וחכמיה*,

prioritizing the continuation of Torah learning and the Jewish people, over a desperate and probably futile attempt to save Yerushalayim.

At the end of his life we see Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai tormented on his deathbed (Brachot 28b). Rav Soloveitchik (The Rav Speaks pp. 51-52) offers a suggestion as to why:

Who at the time could foresee how Vespasian would reject such an enormous request as the sparing of Yerushalayim? This difficult decision, perhaps the most difficult question in Jewish history, R' Yochanan had to decide by himself without consultation with colleagues, in a fleeting moment! He was therefore never certain that he had decided correctly. On the one hand it appeared to him that he could have influenced Vespasian to spare Yerushalayim, as R' Akiva thought, and his heart bled at not having asked for it. On the other hand, he thought, "It was forbidden to place in possible danger the lives of the sages of Yavneh and the Oral Law....

Notwithstanding the sanctity and importance of the Temple, national existence is not dependent on it. However, without the Oral Law ... the Jewish people would not continue to exist.... How many restless nights and sorrow-filled days ensued for R' Yochanan because of this doubt? We cannot even imagine it. Thus it was that in the last moments of his life.... There were two paths – one correct, the other not correct; one leading to paradise, the other to hell.

With this understanding, the gemara (Sukkah 41a) states:

בראשונה היה לולב נטל במקדש שבעה, ובמדינה יום אחד. משחרב בית המקדש, התקין רבן יוחנן בן זכאי שיחיה לולב נטל במדינה שבעה, וזכר למקדש. ושיחיה יום הנף כלו אסור.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai extended the number of days the mitzvah of *lulav* was performed to seven, in the *medinah*, while in the times of the *Mikdash*, *lulav* was only performed for seven days in the *Mikdash* itself. He also forbade eating new grain produce for the whole day of waving the *korban omer*. The mishna attributes the reasons for the first *takkana* to the idea of *למקדש*. The second *takkana* is not yet given a reason.

The reason for these two *takkanot* will be enriched by the following gemara:

מנא לן דעבדינן זכר למקדש א"ר יוחנן דאמר קרא (ירמיהו ל, יז) כי
אעלה ארוכה לך וממכותיך ארפאך נאם ה' כי גדחה קראו לך ציון היא
דורש אין לה. דורש אין לה מכלל דבעיא דרישה.

The gemara wants to know the source for enacting things *zecher laMikdash*? R' Yochanan said that it comes from the pasuk in Yirmiyahu lamenting the fact that none seek out Zion. From the fact that the pasuk states: "There is none that seeks her," it can be understood that she requires seeking, i.e. people should think of and remember the Temple. That is the reason for Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's *takkana*.

ושיהא יום הנף: מ"ט מהרה יבנה בית המקדש ויאמרו אשתקד מי לא
אכלנו בהאיר מזרח השתא נמי ניכול ואינהו לא ידעי דאשתקד דלא
הוה בית המקדש האיר מזרח התיר השתא דאיכא בית המקדש עומר
מתיר.

The gemara asks about the reason for the second *takkana* and explains that soon the Temple will be rebuilt, and people will be confused about this halacha. They might say that because last year they ate the new crop at dawn, this year they could too. But if the *Beit HaMikdash* is rebuilt they can't eat the crop until the *korban omer* is waved.

In the wake of the *churban*, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai feared that people would forget Yerushalayim. After making the bold decision to relocate the center of the Jewish people from Yerushalayim to Yavneh, his greatest fear was that he would see the full replacement of Zion. Therefore, he instituted *takkanot* for the purpose of *זכר למקדש*. It allowed the people to continue living Jewish lives in the absence of the *Mikdash*, without diminishing its centrality to the Jewish nation.

This *takkanah* also served the purpose of ensuring that if the Temple were to be rebuilt in the near future, the people wouldn't be confused by the change in law. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai lived at a turning point in Jewish history where the future was

anything but clear. A few generations later would come the Bar Kochba Revolt, and with it, the hope, as supported by R' Akiva, that the *moshiach* had arrived. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai could not know for sure if the *Beit HaMikdash* would be rebuilt in the near future or if *galut* would continue for the next two millennia. Through this *takkana*, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai effectively prepared the nation for however history would unfold.

The gemara in Sukkah clearly states the reason for the Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai's *takkanot*. In Rosh Hashana 29b the reason is not as obvious.

יום טוב של ר"ה שחל להיות בשבת במקדש היו תוקעין אבל לא
במדינה. משחרב בהמ"ק התקין רבן יוחנן בן זכאי שיהו תוקעין בכל
מקום שיש בו ב"ד. אמר רבי אלעזר לא התקין רבן יוחנן בן זכאי אלא
ביבנה בלבד. אמרו לו אחד יבנה ואחד כל מקום שיש בו בית דין.

The mishna explains that in the *Beit HaMikdash* they would blow shofar even if *Rosh Hashanah* were to fall on Shabbat. However, they would not blow shofar in the rest of the country. After the *Mikdash* was destroyed, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai made a *takkana* that the people should sound the *shofar* on Shabbat in any place where there is a *beit din* of twenty-three judges. Rabbi Elazar claimed that Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai instituted this practice only in Yavneh. They responded that he instituted the practice both in Yavneh and in any place where there is a *beit din*.

At first glance this *takkanah* does not seem to be serving the purpose of remembering the *Beit HaMikdash* and Yerushalayim. On the contrary, it seems to be enabling Yavneh to replace Yerushalayim. But the Mishnah continues:

ועוד זאת היתה ירושלים יתירה על יבנה שכל עיר שהיא רואה ושמעת
וקרובה ויכולה לבוא תוקעין וביבנה לא היו תוקעין אלא בב"ד בלבד.

This clarifies the difference in stature between Yavneh and Yerushalayim. Yavneh was not to replace Yerushalayim, rather, it was to behave like Yerushalayim on a practical level. In the times of Yerushalayim, any neighboring city which overlooked Yerushalayim could blow shofar on Shabbat, whereas in Yavneh they were limited

not only to the city, but to the *beit din* itself. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai once again allowed Jewish life to continue without the *Mikdash*, while branding it into our hearts that nothing can truly replace Yerushalayim.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai did not know what events would transpire after his death. Today, it is clear to us that he made the correct decision in his request to put Yavneh over Yerushalayim. Our *mesorah* was able to continue despite an exile of persecution, dispersion, and near annihilation, thanks to the institutional changes Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai made.

Interestingly, when the people of Masada heard that the *Mikdash* was destroyed, they truly thought Jewish life had ended. It might have, had Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai not shown the Jewish nation how to live Jewish lives in a Templeless world. His use of *takkanot* ensured the most crucial and difficult part of this endeavor – that the Temple would not be forgotten by a people who had learned to live without it.

Hashem is Truly Everywhere

If one were to ask Jewish children: “Where is G-d?”, it wouldn’t be surprising if many of them would respond in the celebrated words of Uncle Moishy, and sang out “Hashem is here; Hashem is there; Hashem is truly everywhere”.

This concept of “Hashem is truly everywhere” may seem somewhat trivial at first. However, when one begins to think deeply about G-d's presence in this world and His active involvement in everyone’s daily life, it can have many practical ramifications. Furthermore, it begs individuals to evaluate what being an *eved Hashem* genuinely means.

Rabbi Sacks (*Covenant and Conversation on Exodus*), explains that a major theme in Shemot is “the idea of a single G-d whose sovereignty extends everywhere.” In most ancient civilizations, there were multiple gods that were sovereign only over a particular place or thing. This idea is expressed when Pharaoh asks Moshe (5:2):

מי ה' אשר אשמע בקלו לשלח את-ישראל לא ידעתי את ה' וגם את
ישראל לא אשלח.

Pharaoh knew of the G-d of the Israelites. However, he believed that the gods of Egypt were the gods in charge of what occurred in Egypt. Pharaoh's perception of god was place specific, and therefore Pharaoh could not comprehend how a universal, all encompassing G-d could exist. Rabbi Sacks explains that the ten plagues were meant to reveal the truth of monotheism and prove G-d's total dominion over every corner of the world (9:16):

בעבור הראיתך את כחי ולמען ספר שמי בכל הארץ.

The book of Shemot emphasizes that G-d is present everywhere and governs everything. If G-d is present everywhere, then individuals have the tremendous opportunity and responsibility to always be *avdei Hashem*.

Rav Lichtenstein (*By His Light*) explains that there are two levels of *avodat Hashem*. One level is that of *dvar mitzvah* and the other is *dvar reshut*. A *dvar mitzvah* is a clearly religious action, such as Shabbat observance and Torah study. In contrast, a *dvar reshut* is a level of *avodat Hashem* where any action, even if it does not seem inherently religious or is not a specific Torah command, can be imbued with holiness. Mishlei (3:6) states **בכל דרכיך דעוהו**, that one should infuse G-d into all aspects of his life.

In the same vein, Rambam in Hilchot De'ot explains that even sleeping can be considered a form of *avodat Hashem*, if one recognizes that sleeping is a means of keeping healthy and maintaining the ability to serve G-d. Being a Jew, means seeing G-d in everything, and elevating the seemingly temporal areas of life to a spiritual status.

If one follows Rav Lichtenstein's logic, one can understand that nothing in life is void of spiritual potential, and holiness can be achieved even through the involvement in the secular world, as long as one views it as a part of their *avodat Hashem*. Engaging in a secular profession has inherent value and religious potential, if it is paired with Torah observance. The Mishna (Avot 2:2) states:

וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה, סופה בטלה וגוררת עון.

Even though having an occupation may not be as overt of a *dvar mitzvah* as talmud Torah, it is clear that an occupation can bring one even closer to G-d and further from sin.

The idea that one is able to connect to G-d at all times, whether one is formally engaged in a *dvar mitzvah* or not, is something that shouldn't be taken lightly. In the *Lonely Man*

of Faith, Rav Soloveitchik explains that another name for G-d, is *HaMakom*, the reason being that the Jewish perspective recognizes that G-d is everywhere and is constantly involved in everyone's lives.

Rav Soloveitchik (*Halakhic Man*) condemns the all-too-prevalent "spiritual schizophrenia" which religious people at times practice. This "spiritual schizophrenia" can be exemplified by an individual who does ceremonial rituals and encounters G-d in the house of worship, but acts without justice when he leaves, treating his fellowmen with indecency. This idea was already perfectly captured in Yeshayahu 1:15:

ובפרשכם כפיכם אעלים עיני מכם גם כי תרבו תפלה אינני שמע
ידיכם דמים מלאו.

G-d rejects prayers from individuals who act with this "psychic dualism", as it is a rejection of G-d's complete dominion over this world.

Once one begins to restrict G-d to the house of worship, he begins to limit G-d, who is, by definition, infinite. By following Halacha, individuals remind themselves just how present G-d is in their lives, and are able to serve Him optimally.

Halacha is a guidebook. And this guidebook is what keeps the Jewish community alive, and history has proved it. Individuals must ground their spirituality in Halacha, as not every moment will be filled with inspiration. Jews are part of a covenant with Hashem, and with that comes a sense of obligation. If service of G-d was just based on how an individual feels, then his relationship would not amount to anything, as feelings are always in flux.

Judaism creates moments and places for individuals to recharge their "spiritual batteries", such as the chagim, Shabbat, and shul. However, if one doesn't leave these experiences with a greater sense of holiness and living more ethically, then something vital is missing.

Rav Hirsch (Devarim 16:7) explains that when one goes to the Beit Hamikdash it is easy to feel inspired by the intrinsic holiness there. However, if one doesn't grow from this experience, then the *aliyah l'regel* is incomplete.

The Sifri explains that if one comes to Yerushalayim to give a *korban*, he is halachically obligated to spend the night in Yerushalayim to reflect on the holy experience of the Beit HaMikdash and internalize how this experience will make him a better person. Halacha allows individuals to recognize Hashem in every circumstance and perpetuate closeness to Him even in moments that aren't incredibly inspiring.

In his work, *And From There You Shall Seek*, Rav Soloveitchik explains that most religions primarily perceive the body and the physicality as innately sinful and negative, unlike Judaism which values the comprehensive body and soul experience. Jews aren't asked to have any less physical pleasure than the hedonist. However, that pleasure isn't simply experienced in a vacuum. Halacha intervenes and channels the participation of individual in the pleasures of the physical world and tasks us to disengage at certain points, in order to find G-d in sacrifice.

Rav Soloveitchik uses the example of a bride and groom who are forced to separate from each other when the bride realizes that she is a *niddah* on their wedding night. This purely physical action is elevated when catharsis is undergone, in order to make space for G-d in one's life. Unlike hedonism, in Judaism, pleasure doesn't control the individual, but rather the individual controls the pleasure through the guidance of Halacha.

Judaism is an all encompassing religion, and individuals are commanded to draw spirituality out of seemingly mundane activities at all points of their day. Being a true *eved Hashem* means understanding that we are constantly tasked with the

mission to recognize how active G-d is in our lives and strive to forge an everlasting relationship with Him, as “Hashem is truly everywhere.”

Looking Beyond Joy to Find Simcha

The idea of living life *b'simcha* is very prevalent in Judaism. Tehillim (100:2) instructs us: עֲבֹדוּ אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה בָּאוּ לִפְנֵי בְרִנָּה. We should serve ה' with *simcha*. In Devarim (28:47), Bnei Yisrael were warned that they would be punished if they did not serve Hashem with the proper *simcha*. Happiness, as *simcha* is often translated, seems fleeting. There is a quote attributed to Henry David Thoreau: "Happiness is like a butterfly; the more you chase it, the more it will elude you." Happy hunting.

One possible explanation for the decline in overall happiness levels in recent years is the idea of a "slave personality." Rav Soloveitchik explains that this first developed while Bnei Yisrael were slaves in Egypt, but it is still a part of modern culture and society. The defining aspects of a slave personality can be derived from the mitzvot that an *eved* is exempt from.¹

Firstly, an *eved* cannot testify in *beit din*. His life is dictated by the whims of another person. An *eved* is also exempt from positive time-bound commandments since the management of his time belongs to his master.

Another crucial component of a slave mentality is that an *eved* is not allowed to get married. Since he must be conscious of even the most minute details of his master's life, the slave does not have the ability to create relationships or communal bonds. An *eved* exists solely within the moment and cannot transcend beyond that.

Under the guise of self-actualization, people are taught to adopt a selfish mentality that perpetuates a slave mentality. The promotion of ideas such as "hustle culture," (when any moment not

¹ israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/18782

spent working is a waste), or “self-partnership,” (which promotes remaining single instead of investing in a relationship,) ensnares people into a slave mentality while promising to make them more free than ever.

A person is told that the only thing that should be of any value in her mind is her relationship to herself. Anything that prevents this, such as community, interpersonal obligations, or freely giving up personal time for the good of another – the very things that prevent a slave mentality from developing – are seen as hindrances to the pursuit of *simcha*, rather than a tool to achieve it. Before the creation of Chava, Hashem tells Adam **לֹא טוֹב הָיִיתָ הָאָדָם לְבָדּוּ** – “It is not good for man to be alone” (Bereishit 2:18).

While the terms are often used interchangeably, there is an important distinction that must be made between feeling alone and the feeling of loneliness. Being alone is “lacking companionship or love, [and] is entirely destructive” (*The Lonely Man of Faith*) while loneliness is an awareness of a person’s individualism, knowing that everyone is completely solitary in their uniqueness. One can feel lonely even when surrounded by loved ones because, even then, she cannot be completely understood; no matter how beloved. No one person can fully comprehend the expansive vastness that resides within another human.

Rav Soloveitchik explains that this realization of loneliness, while painful, can become a cathartic experience and push humanity forward in the search for G-d. While no human can fully comprehend another individual, G-d can. After finding solace within the Oneness of G-d, a person can reach out to her peers and connect on a level that was unattainable before the onset of loneliness. If connection brings us closer to *simcha*, then, while it may seem antithetical, loneliness can lead to connection, and ultimately, to *simcha*.

Becoming “happy” seems impossible. Life is difficult and stirs up emotions that conflict with happiness, so how can a person possibly attain *simcha*? When thinking of the narrow, classic definition of *simcha* as happiness, meaning “a pleasurable or

satisfying experience” according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, living a life *b’simcha* would require eternal bliss in the face of challenges, which is impossible.

According to the Malbim, *simcha* is actually a feeling of inner contentment. The Vilna Gaon also uses a similar definition of “unadulterated joy” in regards to *simcha*, but adds more nuance in his translation of “*sasson*”. *Sasson* is happiness tinged by feelings of disappointment, frustration, or sadness.

When the definition of happiness is expanded, the possibility of living a happy life seems less lofty, but still extremely difficult.

One approach to building *simcha* is through appreciating all that Hashem does for humanity. According to Rav Kook (Shemonah Kvatzim 6:130), once a person notices all of Hashem’s kindnesses, she cannot possibly feel alone or depressed. This is echoed in Divrei HaYamim (I 16:27) where it says, עֹז וְחֵדָּה בְּמִקְמוֹ – “strength and joy are with Hashem.”

Another idea championed in Tanya (chapter 26) is that sadness leads to laziness in the fight against the *yetzer hara*. When a person takes the time to work on herself, she can overcome struggles and eliminate the root of her sadness, passivity and low motivation.

Two of what are perhaps the most common ideas on how to combat sadness seem very similar but are not identical.² The first is לְטוֹבָה זֶה אוֹתוֹרָה attributed to Nachum Ish Gamzu and often used to reassure oneself when something upsetting occurs. The other phrase attributed to R’ Akiva is: כֹּל מַה דַּעֲבִיד רַחֲמָנָא לְטַב עֲבִיד – “All that the Merciful One does, He does for good.”

Nachum Ish Gamzu’s phrase means that everything Hashem does *is* good, while R’ Akiva meant that everything Hashem does *will be* good. In accordance with R’ Akiva’s approach, even when difficult events arise, a person should not despair because it is all

² chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112045/jewish/Nachum-Ish-Gamzu-and-Rabbi-Akiba.htm

part of a master plan that will eventually work out for the best. On a level that is more difficult to comprehend, Nachum Ish Gamzu believed that since all events happen only with Divine providence, hardships are not only part of an overall good plan, but are inherently good. This is similar to the pasuk in Tehillim (94:12): קֵה אֶשְׂרֵי הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר תִּסְרְנוּ קֵה – “Happy is the man who is disciplined by Hashem.”

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski was regarded as one of the foremost authorities on addiction, often speaking about the 12-step program and its applications to Jewish life. The first few steps mirror the ideas about joy stated above. Steps one and two (honesty and faith) involve admitting powerlessness, but a power greater than humanity (Hashem) can restore sanity. Without recognizing Hashem’s power and all He does, as explained by Rav Kook to mean living *b’simcha*, people are as lost as the alcoholics this program is designed to help. As it is written in Yeshayahu (29:9), שָׁכְרוּ וְלֹא יֵין נָעוּ וְלֹא שָׂכַר.

Step four of the Alcoholics Anonymous 12-step program: “Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself.” This concept is known to Jews as *cheshbon hanefesh*. One must admit all their faults in addition to our strengths. Only then does one know what to work on and can then work to fulfill the Tanya’s definition of *simcha* by improving ourselves.

One last concluding thought: when a person experiences frustration or sadness, she may be told that she should be happy because there is someone else who is even worse off. While many disagree with this mentality on a fundamental level, perhaps there is wisdom that can still be taken from it. Rav Dessler (Michtav Me’Eliyahu, vol. 1, Kuntres Hachessed) writes that the root of every negative emotion is a selfish motive, while the source of every positive emotion is a motive of giving. If one cannot find joy in knowing that life is worse for other people, deliberately working to help those who have less will automatically stir up good emotions, purely because of the effort invested in helping another person.

Life sometimes does not appear to be fair, simple, or easy. While one may want to be filled with constant euphoria, this just isn't possible. When life is difficult, there is room for all emotions, even those that seem to contradict *simcha*. Just because a person experiences challenges does not mean they are lacking *simcha*.

In the words of author and behavioral scientist Steve Maraboli, "Happiness is not the absence of problems; it's the ability to deal with them."

The Purpose of Humanity

Why did Hashem create human beings? Hashem doesn't require anything from humans, yet He created an entire world for them to inhabit. Is there a deeper purpose for existing other than to eat, sleep, breathe, and procreate? If so, what is that higher purpose? Analyzing the following pasuk in Devarim, may lead us to an answer.

In Sefer Devarim, the Torah describes the great blessings that Hashem will bestow on Bnei Yisrael if they follow in His ways, including (28:9): קדוש ה' יקימך – “Hashem will raise you up to be a holy nation”. The Midrash Tanchuma (Nitzavim 1) comments on the wording: יקימך. “For what reason did the [other] nations deserve destruction, while we remain alive? ... In the case of Israel, when afflictions come upon them, they submit and pray.”

The reason for Bnei Yisrael's survival from the persecutions by other nations, is their dependency on Hashem. When they are in trouble, their first response is to turn to and pray to the only One who can make a difference. Hashem will raise someone if he acknowledges that he needs Him and everything depends on His will. This is not only the reason for individual existence, but the reason for the survival of the Jewish nation throughout history. As long as one continues to keep this in mind, the nation will remain alive.

Ramban notes in his commentary on Breishit (1:10) that the term used to describe dry land, “*eretz*”, is the same term used to describe the whole planet. Why? Earth was created so that it can be inhabited by mankind וְאֵין בַּתְּחִתּוֹנִים מִכִּיר בּוֹרְאוֹ וּזְלוֹתוֹ – There is nothing else in the lower realm that can recognize Hashem aside

from humans. The world itself was created for the purpose of humans recognizing that Hashem has the power to do all.

The reason for the creation of the universe is discussed in an article by Rav Ezra Bick.¹ He mentions the Ramban's idea for the creation of the universe but takes it one step further. The purpose of human existence is to establish a relationship and connection with Hashem. Whereas according to the Rambam, it is enough to simply acknowledge Hashem on an intellectual level as the One in charge and recognize man's dependence on Him, the Ramban believes that people need to emotionally connect to Hashem through the relationship established from their dependency on Him. "Acknowledging G-d as one's creator is acknowledging a relationship, one based on the total dependency of man on G-d".

A different opinion reflecting on the purpose of mankind is based on the language found in Bereishit (2:7). Right after man's creation, it says: וַיֵּצֵר ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפֶר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפֹּחַ בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה. Rashi explains the difference between *nefesh chaya* and *nishmat chayim*. While humans and animals are both *nefesh chayah*, humans have something unique to them – the *nishmat chayim*. This manifests into the specific human ability of *deah*, the ability to think, and *dibbur*, speech. Just by being human, one has different capabilities and therefore, a different purpose than animals.

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato elaborates on this idea in *Derech Hashem*. There are primary and secondary creatures in the world. Humans are the primary creatures and therefore, everything in the world is here to aid in man's purpose. This difference is manifested in the purpose of human existence.

"And see that education and all of the proper traits are mechanisms for perfection that are found for a man to perfect himself; and physical matters and bad traits are the mechanisms for

¹ etzion.org.il/en/ot

deficiency – that we have mentioned – among which man is placed, for him to acquire perfection” (Derech Hashem, Part One).

The way in which people were created, with their personalities and unique challenges, hints to their purpose: to perfect their faults. People are given innate personality traits that they are required to spend their lives working on perfecting. This outlook is explained further by the Ramchal (138 *Pitchei Chokhma*): “That which is known to us of the intentions of the blessed G-d is that, in His desire to act benevolently, He wanted to create entities that would receive His benevolence. And in order for this benevolence to be complete, it was necessary that they would receive it by right, not by charity, so that it would not be marred by their shame — like one who eats food that is not his own. And in order for them to be able to be deserving, He produced a reality which would be reliant on them for its repair — unlike Himself — and by repairing it, they would become worthy.”

The creation of the world was for man to receive Hashem’s kindness as a result of working on perfecting themselves. This can be achieved through the means of *devikus b’Hashem*, cleaving to Hashem. Each person is given a unique personality and character traits for him to use and work towards perfecting. It is through this that a person can be worthy of receiving Hashem’s chessed in the next world, *olam habah*. This gives a direct instruction for what humans’ purpose is: working on themselves.

In accordance with the Ramchal, it is necessary for a person to develop himself, but in what way can this be accomplished? HaKtav V’Hakabbalah comments on the words *והלכת בדרכיו* (Devarim 28:9): *להיותך עם קדוש תלוי בתנאי כשרון מעשה החסידות, והיא ההליכה בדרכי ה'* מה הוא חנון אף אתה חנון. Hashem wants Bnei Yisrael to be a holy nation, but as HaKtav V’Hakabbalah explains this is only possible if a person does acts of goodwill that are modeled on Hashem’s actions. Walking in Hashem’s ways means, just as He is compassionate, so too should humans mirror that quality. Although

this may seem like a lofty, nearly impossible task, the following pasuk proves this to be within human capability. The Torah states (Bereishit 1:27), **בַּצֶּלֶם אֱלֹקִים בָּרָא אוֹתוֹ זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה בָרָא אֹתָם**. If man was created in Hashem's likeness, *b'tzelem Elokim*, it is in mankind's nature to be able to act like Him, too.

The Ralbag comments on the same pasuk in Devarim: In order to become holy and get additional *hashgacha* from Hashem, one is required to keep Hashem's *mitzvot* and walk in His ways (which is to develop one's middos). When Jews keep the mitzvot, Hashem elevates them. In fact, not only is the Jew becoming holy, but they are also fulfilling the commandment found in Vayikra 19:2, “**קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה'**”. Through following the commands written in the Torah, one becomes sanctified and fulfills what Hashem wants from them. A Jew's purpose is to keep Hashem's mitzvot.

In Kohelet (12:13), Shlomo Hamelech writes **סוּף דְּבַר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע יִרָא אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים** – Fear Hashem and keep his mitzvot because for this is the purpose of all of mankind. Keeping mitzvot is so important, especially since it is through them it is possible to establish a connection with Hashem.

However, not only is doing mitzvot the purpose for existing, but also learning Torah. “Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai received [the oral tradition] from Hillel and Shammai. He used to say: “If you have learned much Torah, do not claim credit for yourself, because for such a purpose you were created.” (Avot 2:8). Jews were created to study Torah. Since part of doing a mitzvah is learning about the mitzvah, these two purposes for the Jew are intertwined.

Although all the previously mentioned options seem different, they are actually all one and the same. Each hints to a deeper purpose: to be an *eved Hashem*. There are many different ways to serve Hashem, through keeping his mitzvot and Torah learning, recognizing Hashem as the source, establishing a relationship with

Him, or perfecting one's character. Despite these differences, they all intend for people to recognize their limitations as humans and acknowledge that Hashem is the Source and knows best. While the way in which one aims to achieve this varies, every *tafkid* leads to Hashem.

Family

There are many halachot which serve as directives to build, grow, and sustain families. It appears that the way that family is expressed in the halachic realm is predominantly utilitarian in nature. Let us begin by looking at the first mitzvah in the Torah, the commandment to be fruitful and multiply, through the lens of the Sefer HaChinuch.

מצות פריה ורביה. משרשי מצוה זו כדי שיהיה העולם מיושב שהשם ברוך הוא חפץ בישובו, כדכתיב (ישעיהו מה יח) לא תהו בראה לשבת יצרה. והיא מצוה גדולה שבסבתה מתקיימות כל המצות בעולם, כי לבני אדם נתנו ולא למלאכי השרת ... ומצוה זו אינה מוטלת על הנשים, והמבטלה בטל עשה וענשו גדול מאד, שמראה בעצמו, שאינו רוצה להשלים חפץ השם לישוב עולמו. (ספר החינוך מצוה א)

According to the Sefer HaChinuch, Adam and Chava were commanded to have children so that the world would be populated. He notes that this mitzvah is more significant than others because it is the means by which the other mitzvot would be kept – who will keep Hashem's commandments if not people? This mitzvah doesn't seem to me to be a source for the significance of the family unit – it seems to be ensuring population, a primarily utilitarian purpose. In addition, he notes that this mitzvah does not obligate women – half of the foundation of every Jewish family.

Let us now explore the mitzvah of *kibbud av va'em*, as explained by the Ramban.

כאשר צויתך בכבודי כן אנכי מצוך בכבוד המשתתף עמי ביצירתך ולא פירש הכתוב הכבוד, שהוא נלמד מן הכבוד הנאמר למעלה באב הראשון יתברך. (רמב"ן יתרו כ:יב)

The Ramban relates that the reason why a child is obligated to honor his parents isn't rooted in the significance of an emotional relationship between them. Rather, just as we honor Hashem, Creator of the world, we honor our parents, partners in our creation.

What about the mitzvah of לבניך – to teach our children Torah?

לבניך. אלו התלמידים, מצינו בכל מקום שהתלמידים קרויים בנים.
(רש"י דברים ו:ו)

ושננתם לבניך גם אלה מצות מבוארות נרמזו כבר כי מאחר שצוה במצות חקת עולם לדורותיכם ביני ובין בני ישראל אות היא לעולם (שמות לא יז) זאת בריתי אשר תשמרו ביני וביניכם ובין זרעך אחריו (בראשית יז י) הנה אנחנו מצווים שידעו בנינו המצות ואך ידעו אותם אם לא נלמדם. (רמב"ן דברים ו:ו)

Firstly, Rashi relates that this mitzvah isn't just directing parents to teach their children. Rather, it is directing teachers to teach students because "students are called sons." The Ramban, however, interprets this pasuk as relating to children – but, still, not in a way that promotes an emotional bond. He relates that "parents are commanded that their children know mitzvot, and how will they know if we don't teach?"

Let us explore for the moment the word *mishpacha*. Where does the word for family actually appear in the Torah? In almost all cases, it is mentioned in reference to counting or travelling – not the family unit as something inherently meaningful. For example:

ויהי אחרי המגפה ויאמר ה' אל־משה ואל אלעזר בן־אהרן הכהן לאמר.
שאו את־ראש כל־עדת בני־ישראל מבין עשרים שנה ומעלה לבית אבתם
כל־יצא צבא בישראל ... ראובן בכור ישראל בני ראובן חנוך משפחת
החנוכי לפלוא משפחת הפלאי. (במדבר כו:א-ב,ה)

Family as a value directed by Hashem

Let us explore family as a value that humans should naturally embrace, as expressed by Hashem to Kayin.

ויאמר ה' אל קין אי הבל אחיך ויאמר לא ידעתי השמר אחי אנכי.
ויאמר מה עשית קול דמי אחיך צעקים אלי מן האדמה. ועתה ארוך
אתה מן האדמה אשר פצתה את־פיה לקחת את דמי אחיך מידך.
(בראשית ד:ט-יא)

The constant repetition of the term *achicha*, your brother, in Hashem's rebuke to Kayin makes it clear that Hashem isn't just

upset that Kayin killed a man – which is a problem in and of itself – but also that he killed his brother.

Often young siblings fight and occasionally hurt each other. The parent will discipline them, telling them that fighting is unacceptable behavior. But there is usually an additional admonition that hurting a brother or sister is even worse. A sibling is someone we should love and protect unconditionally. From the beginning of history, Hashem was teaching us the importance of unwavering commitment to our family members.

Family as the Legacy of our Avot and the Foundation of our Nation

Our avot and imahot are shining examples of individuals who expressed devotion, commitment, and love towards their family members. Rabbi Shmuel Goldin writes in *Unlocking the Torah Text* that the time period of the avot “establishes the importance of the Jewish family and home ... that before we could become a nation, we had to be a family.”

This idea is expressed in a midrash regarding Matan Torah. The Yalkut Shimoni (684) relates that when the other nations asked Hashem if they could have the Torah, He directed them to “show Him their family trees.” We see that being a family is a prerequisite to becoming a nation.

When examining the lives of the avot and imahot, one can discern four themes about family values: loving relationships, trust and commitment, protection, and supporting and ensuring success.

Family is about Deep, Loving Relationships

Although Avraham Avinu converted thousands to a belief in monotheism, he desperately longed for a biological child that he could love. Even Yishmael and Esav, whose spiritual behavior left a lot to be desired, were loved by their fathers.

Avraham was pained by Sarah's suggestion to send Yishmael away. Yitzchak loved Esav. Why? Because parents love their children.

Rabbi Shalom Rosner (Parshat Vayechi 5781) discusses Yaakov's bracha to Ephraim and Menashe and the directive to bless our children in their names, and suggests the following idea.

Why Ephraim and Menashe? Because they were the first children to really have a relationship with their grandparents. When we bless our children on Friday night, we are davening that they, too, experience that loving relationship. That they, too, know what it means to be part of a family.

Families are founded on trust, loyalty, and commitment

Avraham and Yitzchak instruct their sons to marry within the family, and not local women from Eretz Canaan. The women their children ultimately married were not children of *tzadikim*. Rivka was a daughter of Betuel. Rachel and Leah were from the house of Lavan. However, there is something about family that gave our avot a sense of trust that the right wives would be found there.

In Sefer Mishlei (17:17) the pasuk states: **בכל עת אהב הרע ואח לצרה יולד**

At first glance, this pasuk seems to be implying that “our friends are all-loving, while our brothers are born for adversity.” The Ralbag, however, explains this pasuk as illustrating a brother's sense of commitment in time of need.

כי האוהב יתחבר לאהובו בכל עת כדי שישמח בטובתו ויעזרוהו לעת רעתו אמנם האח לא יחוש להתחבר עם אחיו בעת טובתו אך בצרתו יתעורר לעזרו כי הטבע יכריחנה על זה מפני היותו עצמו ובשרו.

Our friends may love us in good times and bad times, but often, they move on. But a brother, although he might not necessarily be with us through the good times, will always be with us in the bad times. Family is about loyalty. A brother will never let us down.

Family Protects Family

“Mama Rachel,” for most, not our biological mother, was buried on the road so that she could daven for Bnei Yisrael on their way down

to *galut*. She wasn't focused on our sins, rather on protecting her family.

Similarly, Miriam watched over her baby brother Moshe when he was placed in the Nile River. Miriam was young. Moshe was in a basket in the river. What did she think she could possibly do to save him? Yet, Miriam stood from afar, watching her brother. Because family protects family.

Yehuda is another prime example of the responsibility of family towards protection. When he works to convince Yaakov to let him take Binyamin down to Mitzrayim, he says:

אנכי אערבנו מידי תבקשנו אם לא הביאתי אליך והצגתי לפני
וחטאתי לך כל-הימים. (בראשית מג:ט)

"I will guarantee him," says Yehuda. I am his brother, and I will make sure that nothing happens to him. For "If I don't bring him back, I have sinned against you forever."

Let's examine the story of the *shevatim* more deeply. We all know that commitment to family goes by the wayside in the beginning of the story with the sale of Yosef. However, I think that the way the *shevatim* interact with Yosef and Yaakov throughout the story expresses their growth in terms of family.

Firstly, when the brothers come down to Egypt themselves, they identify as brothers.

כלנו בני איש-אחד נחנו כנים אנחנו לא-היו עבדיך מרגלים. ויאמר
אלהם לא כיערות הארץ באתם לראות. ויאמרו שנים עשר עבדיך
אחים אנחנו בני איש-אחד בארץ כנען והנה הקטן את-אבינו היום
והאחד איננו. (בראשית מב:יא-י')

They are "the sons of one man" and "twelve brothers." There is a recognition of the significance of family.

In an article entitled *Family Matters*, Mrs. Shayna Goldberg suggests that after all that ensues between Yosef and his brothers, all Yosef wants is a relationship with them. After Yaakov died, the brothers were scared that Yosef would punish them for how they treated him. Therefore, they lied to Yosef, telling him that Yaakov's dying message was a command to Yosef not to take revenge on

them. Yosef, however, knew that no such message had been given, for he had never told Yaakov what had actually gone on between him and his brothers. So Yosef cried.

He weeps because all he wants is a connection to his family, to be one of the brothers, to love them and to be loved in return. And he first realizes now that, even after their reunion, they are not really united. He cries because perhaps he never told Jacob what had truly transpired, but his brothers clearly think he did. He cries because he needs them to comfort him, but instead he must comfort them. Joseph had every reason in the world to seek retribution. But all he wants is restoration.

Yosef just wanted to be a part of the family, because family matters.

Family ensures and celebrates the success of their family members.

In discussing Hashem's directive to Moshe to speak to Pharaoh, the Torah says:

וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי ה' שְׁלַח־נָא בִּידֶיךָ שֹׁמֵר וַיֹּאמֶר ה' בְּמֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן
אֶחָיו הָלֹוֹי יִדְעָתִי כִּי־דַבֵּר יִדְבֹר הוּא וְגַם הִנֵּה־הוּא יֵצֵא לִקְרֹאתְךָ וְרֹאךָ
(שמות ד:יג-יד)

Moshe wanted Hashem to send someone else. Someone else, Rashi says, refers to Aharon. Aharon was Hashem's usual messenger – and Moshe wanted his brother to continue to hold that honor.

Hashem answers Moshe that Aharon will see him and “be happy in his heart.” Moshe didn't want to step into Aharon's shoes, but Hashem reassured him that Aharon won't be in pain, but rather, he will be happy.

וְרֹאךָ וְשֹׁמֵר בְּלִבּוֹ. לִפִּי שְׂהִיָּה מֹשֶׁה אֹמֵר מָה אֲנִי בֹא בְּתַחֲמוֹ שֶׁל אֶהְיֶה
שׂוֹמֵר בְּלִבּוֹ בְּמִצְרַיִם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר הִנֵּה־נִלְכָּה נִגְלִיתִי וְגו'. אָמַר לוֹ יְיָ לְמָה אֶתָּה
מִזְכִּיר אֶהְיֶה אִינוּ מֵיִצֵּר אֶלָּא שֶׁמֶח הֵ"ד וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אֶהְיֶה לְךָ לִקְרֹאת
מֹשֶׁה כְּדִי שִׂידַע שְׂאֵתָה שֶׁמֶח. (דעת וְקִנִּים שְׂמוֹת ד:יד)

It's up to us to look out for our brothers. To ensure their success to the best of our abilities, and to celebrate it – even when we would have enjoyed that same success ourselves. Because that's what brothers do.

When Rav Aharon Lichtenstein was asked in an interview about his proudest accomplishment, (*Reflection on 50 Years of Torah Leadership: An Interview with Rav Aharon Lichtenstein*), he responded, “What I am proudest of is what some would regard as being a non-professional task. I’m proudest of having built, together with my wife, the wonderful family that we have. It is a personal accomplishment, a social accomplishment, and a contribution – through what they are giving and will give, each in his or her own way – in service of the Ribbono shel Olam in the future.”

This sense of love, pride and commitment toward family was essential to the avot and imahot and is a key element in passing down our mesorah to future generations.

Protecting our Jewish Neshama

Throughout the generations, many have tried to physically and spiritually destroy Am Yisrael, including Pharaoh and Haman. Despite having similar goals, the two *reshaim* approached the task in very different manners.

Pharaoh and the Egyptians had a roundabout approach. Their thought process presumably was along the lines of “we don’t want to kill you, we just want to benefit from you as much as possible.” This led to a brutalization of the Jews, and an attempt to strip them of their identity as a nation.

The Torah relates (Shemot 1:14): וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה, Pharaoh made their lives bitter with hard back-breaking work. The Jews were forced to carry heavy bricks, make mortar, and do other jobs of toiling labor. From this pasuk, it may seem that the goal was the physical destruction of Bnei Yisrael. Although they were physically oppressed, the pasuk emphasizes that their lives were made bitter, implying that the goal was not to kill them. Rather he wished to enslave them and break their spirit.

A few pesukim earlier, Pharaoh suggests that as a result of the exponential growth of Bnei Yisrael the Egyptians should enslave them so that in the event of war, Bnei Yisrael will not be able to side with their enemy and destroy them (Shemot 1:10). However, the work forced upon Bnei Yisrael was not just back-breaking work, it was degrading as well. Shemot Rabbah (1:11) describes the type of work Pharaoh gave them. Commenting on וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּפֶּרֶךְ, the midrash illustrates how the men were given tasks that were usually given to women and vice versa. The nation's identity was stolen, leaving them lost and without a sense of self.

Shemot Rabbah (1:10) also elaborates on the previous pasuk: וַיִּבְנֶן עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לַפְרֹעָה אֶת פָּתֹם וְאֶת רַעַמְסֵס. According to the midrash, the ground on which the cities of Pithom and Ramses were located

was not sturdy. Bnei Yisrael would finish building their structures after a long day and return the next day, only to see that the work from the day before had sunk into the ground, forcing them to start from scratch. They began to feel as if the work they were doing was useless and all of their future tasks were pointless, which could easily leave people in a broken mental state.

And yet, even with all the enslavement and torture, Pharaoh was unsuccessful in his goal to eradicate Jewish identity. Vayikra Rabbah (32:5), says that Bnei Yisrael were redeemed on the merit of four things: they did not change their names, they did not change their language, they did not gossip, and they did not have immoral relations. Each of these four things show that being a member of Am Yisrael is not just about the individual, but about the person being part of a *klal*.

Throughout *galut* we have tried to keep our names, speak *lashon hakodesh* especially while davening and learning Torah, and avoid the moral degradation of the surrounding nations. We have continuously demonstrated the impossibility of destroying the Jewish soul. By protecting their collective *nefesh*, Bnei Yisrael ward off annihilation.

The second, more direct approach of “we want to kill the Jews” was adopted by Haman, whose goal was straight forward eradication. להשמיד להרג ולאבד את כל היהודים (Esther 3:13). If Haman had succeeded, the entire nation would have been destroyed. Haman was one of the first people in history to get so close to this goal, because he was going after the physical Jew, the vessel that houses the G-dly *neshama*.

The Ramchal (Derech Hashem 1:3) says that the purpose of humans being brought into this world is to strike a balance between the *guf* and the *neshama*, but it can become very dangerous when the priority is placed solely on the *guf*. When this happens, the *nefesh* becomes very vulnerable and easily destroyed. When the *neshama* is not properly cared for, the *guf* also becomes an easy target – which is exactly what happened with the Jews in Shushan.

Because they did not take care of their *neshamot* properly, they left a clear path open for destruction of their *guf*.

The Jews of Shushan began to familiarize themselves with the hedonistic culture of Persia centering on the physical, unlike Judaism which emphasizes the spiritual. Even though Mordechai warned Bnei Yisrael to avoid going to Achashveirosh's party, they went anyway. They were giving into their current physical wants and desires, which left their collective *nefesh* up for destruction at the hands of Haman.

It was not until Bnei Yisrael did *teshuvah* by fasting for three days (Esther 5:16) that the salvation began to move forward at full speed. They abstained from the very physical culture around them and focused solely on the spiritual. Immediately following this, Achashveirosh allows Esther into his throne room, despite the fact that she broke the law (Esther 5:2). The Megillah switches from a story of misery to one of redemption, and revelation of Hashem's hidden miracles that were there all along.

Where would we be if Bnei Yisrael did not switch their priority from physical to spiritual? It is our job to protect our *nefesh*, because if we do not, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the nations around us who want to destroy us. Our identity as Jews is what has stayed with us throughout the whole *galut* and all of the persecution we have suffered. That is why it is so important to continue to write and share our divrei Torah.

Don't Forget About Me

Seminary has definitely been an eye-opening experience in so many ways. When trying to pinpoint the certain areas of my life that have been most affected over these past few months, I would say that there is an all encompassing broadening of the mind that I have encountered. That is to say, the sheer magnitude of information, texts, books, and opinions that I have been exposed to here, is incomparable to all of the last seventeen years combined. This has resulted in a somewhat cruel cycle: the more there is to know, the more I want to know; the more I want to know, the more I learn, and the more I learn, the more I discover just how much I don't know.

However, there is one curveball that turns this formidable challenge into an insurmountable one, and that is *shichecha*, forgetting. In reality the cycle should read the more there is to know, the more I want to know, the more I want to know, the more I learn, and the more I learn, the more I discover just how much I don't know, and the more I forget.

Forgetting is quite possibly one of the most frustrating phenomena to exist. We work hard to comprehend something. We struggle through a difficult text piece by piece, line by line, word by word, until we finally understand it. And then...we forget. Nothing is quite as defeating as opening a book, studying for a test, or rereading notes that are not so old, only to realize you cannot recall their content.

Forgetting Torah is not simply an exasperating everyday occurrence. It is a *lo taaseh* that is addressed by our Sages. What exactly are the Halachic parameters of *shichecha*? How do we cope with this depressing fact of learning, and what can we take away from it?

The gemara (Menachot 99b) states: כל המשכח דבר אחד מתלמודו. עובר בלאו. Moreover, the mishna (Avot 3:8) says: כל השוכח דבר אחד ממשנתו, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו מתחייב בנפשו

These two sources establish the basic premise of *shichecha*, namely that it is a negative commandment, but leave much to be investigated. Firstly, both sources quote the same *pasuk* in Devarim (4:9): רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חיך והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך

While the Rambam and Ibn Ezra interpret this statement as a prohibition against forgetting *ma'amad har sinai*, both the Smag (*laavin* 13) and the Yerei'im (*siman* 349) explain it differently, writing הפורש מן התורה אפילו זקן מופלג עובר בלא תעשה, and דברי יוצרך תן על לבך תמיד respectively. Apparently, the prohibition is about separating oneself from Torah as a whole. This implies a distinct connection between separating oneself from Torah and forgetting Torah. The prohibition seems to revolve more around not putting oneself in a position to forget Torah, than actually forgetting Torah.

Consequently, the mishna (Avot 3:8) follows its previous claim with a defining condition: forgetting is not considered *shichecha* unless a person removes it from his heart. If someone forgets because they've aged or they do not properly comprehend the information, they have not violated this prohibition. *Shichecha* only applies when a person sits and actively forgets what has been learned. This raises an obvious question. By focusing on forgetting something, it is being thought about. So how does a person actively forget?

The Tosfot Yom Tov and Abarbanel (Avot 3:8) explain that actively forgetting means that a person does not do what they can to preserve what they have learned. When a person is lazy and forgets out of their own lack of initiative and responsibility they have violated the prohibition.

Rav Ovadiah Bartneura takes this concept one step further. Not only is forgetting due to engaging in meaningless activities considered *shichecha*, but a person violates *shichecha* when they forget because they did not review what they had learned. The prohibition against forgetting is actually introducing the necessity of *chazara*.

The gemara (*Taanit* 7b) draws a comparison between Torah and three liquids; water, wine, and milk. Just as these three liquids

only spoil through *hesech hadaat*, so too Torah is only forgotten through *hesech hadaat*. Rashi explains that this *hesech hadaat* refers to not doing proper *chazarah*. When a person doesn't put in the effort to retain the information, namely, when he doesn't properly review what he has learned, he is actively removing it from his heart.

With the parameters of *shichecha* more clearly defined, another question arises: What is so bad about forgetting? What is so detrimental about not remembering, to render the caution with which it is regarded.

Rav Gedalia Schorr (*Ohr Gedalyahu Likutei Dibburim al Inyanei Shavuo*) addresses this question. He quotes an idea from the Tzafnat Paneach (*Parshat Beshalach*) discussing the canister of *manna* that was placed in the *aron kodesh*. If the *manna* was left out overnight in people's tents it spoiled. So how could a canister of it be placed in the *aron* forever?

The Tzafnat Paneach explains that before G-d, nothing ever ages and everything is always considered new. Therefore, while the *manna* would usually spoil, in this case, where it is put in the *aron* which is constantly before Hashem, it will always retain its freshness. Leaving the *manna* before G-d is entirely different than leaving it out overnight.

Rav Gedalia Schorr connects this idea to people. *Shichecha*, he explains, arises due to lack of *d'veikut*, closeness, to Hashem. A person who is constantly connected to Hashem and views himself as standing before Him at all times, will never forget. Forgetfulness only occurs when things feel old, when they lose their life, their *hitchadshut*. While forgetting is a natural occurrence, G-d is above nature, so nothing grows old or stale before Him. We forget because we lose our connection to Hashem. We don't feel the closeness, the excitement, or the G-dliness of it, so Torah becomes detached and repetitive.

Similarly, the Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:2:4) explains that Bnei Yisrael only began to forget Torah when they asked Moshe to be a messenger between them and Hashem and recite the commandments, as opposed to hearing them directly from G-d. Once

they decided that this level of closeness and connection to Hashem was too much for them, once they asked Moshe to be a go between, Bnei Yisrael gave up that connection and the inherent value that accompanied it, and they began to forget what they learned. It was only because they distanced themselves from Hashem, because they didn't value this connection, that Bnei Yisrael forgot.

Moreover the Chofetz Chaim (Al HaTorah, p. 204) comments on the mishna (*Avot* 2:8), which praises R' Eliezer ben Hurkenus for never forgetting any Torah, equating him in greatness to the rest of the sages combined. The Chofetz Chaim asks, if a phenomenal memory is basically a gift from Hashem, why is R' Eliezer ben Hurkenus praised for never forgetting Torah? It is unfair to consider him so superior for possessing an innate quality. He explains that memory is actually something people can influence.

The Chafetz Chaim recounted a story of an old man from his village who presumably did not remember much from his early years, but was able to describe in great detail when the Tsar came to visit when he was a little boy. When something is exciting to us, when it is invigorating, and when it is important to us, we remember it. That was the praiseworthiness of R' Eliezer who was excited about every detail of Torah he studied. That, is what the Chofetz Chaim says we have to strive for; to reach a level of boundless love and commitment to the Torah, in which we will remember it like the old man could vividly remember the exciting time from his youth.

Rav Moshe Taragin offers another point of view. He explains that when something is viewed as being in front of a person, it is not considered forgotten. Only when a person turns his back to whatever it is he is facing has he forgotten it. So too, Torah is only considered forgotten when we put it behind us. The key, he explains, is to view Torah as a lifelong process. The purpose of learning is not the acquisition of knowledge for the purpose of knowing and moving on. If that were the case, any time a person forgot what they had learned it would be considered *shichecha*. However, if a person understands that they will never truly abandon the material they are currently engaged in, then they will never actually forget it.

The problem with forgetting is not necessarily the act itself, rather what it implies.

Memory is a direct function of our connection, closeness, and commitment to G-d. When we are connected to Hashem and are excited by Torah, when we view ourselves as standing before Hashem, nothing is ever old, stale, or boring. In fact, everything we learn has a level of *hitchadshut* to it.

Moreover, memory is a function of our values in life. People remember what matters to them. When something seems important, we do our utmost to ensure that it remains ingrained in our memory. Forgetting Torah signifies that something is lacking within us. By defining this *issur* we are being taught to structure our lives in such a way that we put Torah at the forefront of who we are. We must live a life that revolves around being close to, and cultivating a connection with Hashem, as well as internalizing and appreciating Torah. At the end of the day it seems that this *issur* is meant to teach us the proper manner to live our lives and the values that we are supposed to have as Jews.

However, another question must be raised. The gemara (*Eruvin 54a*) states that had the first set of *luchot* not been broken, Bnei Yisrael would never have forgotten any Torah. However, a contrasting gemara (*Menachot 99b*) states that Hashem praised Moshe for breaking the first set of *luchot*! How can something that leads to *shichecha*, which is not only a *lo taaseh*, but as previously discussed, the exact opposite of how we are supposed to live our lives, be anything but negative?

Chovot Halevavot (*Shaar HaBechina*) addresses this question with regards to memory in general, explaining that if not for forgetfulness, people would never be able to function normally. If a person was never able to forget traumatic experiences or humiliating moments, if grief was never allowed to fade, they would never be able to experience true joy. As counterintuitive as it seems, forgetting is actually what allows humanity to function at its fullest.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner (*Pachad Yitzchak, Chanukah, Maamar 3*) applies a similar concept to *shichecha*. He explains that Torah *she baal peh*, is a direct result of *shichecha*. Since Bnei Yisrael did not

always remember Torah, or know the proper thing to do, we had to figure it out.

The way he views it, we lost Torah because we forgot. But, along with *shichecha* came so much new Torah. New concepts through *machloket* came into play. Because Torah is no longer clear to us, we worked extremely hard to best define it, and as a result so much Torah has been created. The sheer magnitude of Torah SheBe'al Peh, the refinement of ideas, appreciation of multiple opinions, the concept of *eilu v'elu divrei Elokim chayim*, would never have existed if not for *shichecha*. We don't all agree, but if everyone simply knew the answer our world would be completely unrecognizable.

Torah, specifically Torah SheBe'al Peh the way it has developed, has enhanced our Halachic lives. Without it, we would never have *chiddushim* or anything new. *Shichecha* has created realms of thought, worlds of conversation, and so much Torah learning. It has allowed us to take an active role in the Halachic process, forging an unshakeable connection with Torah. Rav Hutner goes as far as to say that the disputes of the Sages, and the Torah that has resulted from that is far more valuable than if they had simply agreed. These new levels of understanding, along with the sheer level of commitment and hard work that is required to delve into Torah as a result of *shichecha* has immeasurable value. This quality has taken the Torah and transformed it into our Torah.

Additionally, *shichecha* affords another advantage. The Midrash (*Kohelet Rabbah* 1:13:1) on Kohelet (1:13) quotes differing opinions regarding the phrase:

ונתתי את לבי לדרוש ולתור בחכמה על כל אשר נעשה תחת השמים
הוא ענין רע נתן אלקים לבני האדם לענות בו.

According to R' Abahu *בו לענות* is referring to the pain and tragedy of learning Torah and forgetting it. However, Rav Tuvyah rejects this approach, exclaiming that *shichecha* cannot be the imposition described. He explains that if a person retained all of the information that he learned, he would sit for a few years, learn the entire Torah, and move on. It is only through forgetting Torah that we are able to pursue it relentlessly.

The beauty of the scenario is that we have the ability to commit ourselves to Torah. We get to pursue it again and again. Forgetting Torah isn't a negative quality. It is actually what gives us the ability to spend a lifetime surrounded by and immersed in Torah. It is only through *shichecha* that we are able to build lives that constantly revolve around Torah. It appears that the disease may in itself be the remedy.

Furthermore, when discussing the merits of learning Torah, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein explains (*The Nature and Value of Torah Study*), "Conceived in such terms, *talmud Torah* is invested with a dual nature. In part, it is oriented to accomplishment, with the acquisition of knowledge and skills being obvious goals. Teleological considerations aside, however, the process, as has been noted, is no less important than its resolution; and even if one has retained nothing, the experience itself – live contact with the epiphanous divine will manifest through Torah, and encounter with the divine Presence, which hovers over its students – is immeasurably important." Torah itself is a purifier. It refines us, and makes us into better people. It allows us to engage in a dialogue with Hashem, regardless of what we retain.

Rav Soloveitchik draws a comparison between Torah and the waters of the *mikveh*. After a person leaves the *mikveh*, they may get physically dirty, but they are still pure. True, a person may forget Torah, but it has a lasting influence long after it is forgotten. Regardless of how much people think they have gained intellectually and regardless of how much of it they can actually recall, the fact that they sat and immersed themselves in Torah means that Torah will impact them.

On a more simple level, someone learns, takes time out of their day and dedicates it to Torah. Yes, they may forget, but they have transformed themselves into a person who learns, and that has inherent value and changes him as a person. We must learn with the goal to remember, but even when we fall short of that goal, which we inevitably will, Torah and the time dedicated to it has altered us in an irrevocable way.

Moreover, we have to ask ourselves: is the purpose of learning actually to remember? The Beit Halevi (*Parshat Mishpatim*) raises a fascinating question: Why did Bnei Yisrael respond *na'aseh v'nishma* to the giving of the Torah? Practically speaking, this implies that Bnei Yisrael were agreeing to fulfill the mitzvot, but had no idea how to fulfill them at all. The Beit Halevi explains that had the response been *nishma v'na'aseh* which is the logical order of the words, we would have thought that the sole purpose of hearing, or learning the mitzvot is to perform them. However, this is not the case.

There are actually two separate aspects of *limud HaTorah*. The first is knowing how to perform the mitzvot, and the second is purely learning them. While the former is a practical necessity of life, the latter is the true essence of *limud HaTorah*. Yes, we have to know Torah and follow it correctly, but the important part is delving into Torah, not simply to know it. In fact, as the Beit Halevi points out, the bracha is "*la'asok b'divrei Torah*," to delve into the words of Torah. Learning purely to know what to do is not what we make a bracha on because it is not the impactful part of Torah. Forgetting aside, Torah has an impact on us because we learn it. The learning itself is the key, not the result. Remembering may be important, but it is not why we learn, it is merely what allows us to keep learning.

While the Beit Halevi implies that remembering Torah is not the important part of the learning experience, Rav Soloveitchik (*VeHigata Bo Yomam VaLayla*) suggests that it is actually irrelevant to *shichecha*. He explains that there are two types of forgetting: forgetting of the mind and forgetting of the heart. The Torah cannot command us not to forget Torah. It is inevitable and uncontrollable. However, this is regarding forgetting of the mind. A person can know all of the Torah and still have *shichecha*.

Shichecha is the forgetting of the heart, forgetting the value and love of Torah. Forgetting of the heart means no longer holding Torah dear, no longer considering Torah important, and no longer yearning for Torah. A person can forget the actual information, but they can never forget what it represents. That is *shichecha*. That is what we say a bracha on, and that is the essence of who we are:

a people who love, desire, and connect with Torah. When we forget this, we forget who we are.

In conclusion, while *shichecha* seems like a daunting concept at first, at a closer glance it holds the key to our function as a spiritual nation. *Shichecha* teaches us to create lives that revolve around Torah and connect to Hashem, and to value what is important. While forgetting information is frustrating, it is essential in our day to day lives, allowing us to get past hard times, and experience better ones.

Even more, the very fact that we don't remember all of what we learn is what allows us to keep learning, to recommit ourselves to Torah over and over again, to spend a lifetime pursuing it, building the lives we so desperately crave. This creates a reality where even if we do forget, which we inevitably will, Torah has already affected us by the mere fact that we made time to learn and have engaged in the process of *Limud HaTorah*, in a dialogue with Hashem.

Torah is something we have to understand, connect with, and remember on an intellectual level, but that is not why we learn. Forgetting Torah is losing your connection to Hashem, and your connection with Torah. Removing it from your heart means no longer loving it, no longer valuing it.

The problem is not forgetting what we learn. It is forgetting why we learn. Forgetting the words, or the content happens often, and while it is sad and frustrating, it might even enable us to connect with Torah more, and allow us to build lives that cherish Torah and revolve around a *kesher* with Hashem, and that kind of forgetting is not *shichecha*. We learn for the process and not the result. In fact, forgetting might even be what allows us to cultivate our appreciation for Torah and build lives that constantly revolve around it. That is what we have to remember.

In reality, forgetting is not what makes us weak, or flawed. It's what makes us the strong, determined, invested, and intellectually curious people that we are. When viewed in this light, it might actually be forgetting which enables us to remember.

The Significance of Jewish Names

In Bereishit (2:19), the Torah tells us that all the animals were brought before Adam to be named. These names were not given randomly. According to Rav Hirsch, Adam named each animal based on the impression it made. He notes that the word *sheim* (name) is similar to the word *sham* (place). From this linguistic link between the two words, we learn that a person's name determines his place in this world. Therefore, choosing a name it's not just a simple task.

There are cases in Tanach where Hashem named people directly (e.g. Yitzchak, and the changing of Avram to Avraham). The Arizal (Gilgulim, Introduction 23) states that even the name a parent gives a child isn't random. Each name is given with Hashem's guidance, to fit the neshama of each individual child.

The gemara (Yoma 38b), tells the story of a baby named Doeg who died a tragic death, in part because he was named after an evil person. Based on this, we have a minhag not to name a child after *resha'im*. Rav Yaakov Emden (Migdal Oz, Nachal Tet, 14) adds that *kal v'chomer*, we shouldn't name a baby with a non-Jewish name.

Bnei Yisrael merited to leave Egypt in part due to the fact that they didn't assimilate in certain areas, including maintaining their Jewish names (Vayikra Rabba, 32; Shir HaShirim Rabba, 4). Maharam Schick, in his responsa (Y.D. 169), argues that giving your child a non-Jewish name is considered *chukot hagoyim*, and is therefore an *issur d'oraita*. Rav Asher Weiss (Minchat Asher, Shemot 1) explains that you violate this prohibition only if you use non-Jewish names in order to assimilate. However, using non-Jewish names for business purposes, with no interest in assimilating, is acceptable.

The Maharal (Gevurot Hashem, ch. 43) writes that the fact that Bnei Yisrael didn't change their names in Egypt was very specific to that time. We know that Bnei Yisrael almost sank to the lowest possible level of *tumah*, and they were so assimilated that one of the only things which distinguished them from the Egyptians was their

Jewish names. However, once we received the Torah and mitzvot, keeping that in itself is what distinguishes us from the non-Jews. The Maharal therefore reasons that since there are many other ways to distinguish us from the rest of the world it should no longer be an issue to use non-Jewish names. Rav Shmuel de Medina (She'eilot U'Teshuvot Maharashdam, Y.D. 199), in agreement with the Maharal, writes that these days the *issur* of *chukat hagoyim* refers to clothing and not to names and therefore you can use non-Jewish names.

Following the Maharal, Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe, E.H. 3:35; O.C. 4:66) states that although you are allowed to use non-Jewish names, it's a *davar meguneh*, inappropriate. He notes the names of many *gedolim*, such as Rav Papa and Rav Huna, who had secular names, as a proof to his point that it is definitely not *assur*. He recognizes that using secular names in the Jewish Orthodox world has become normalized, even amongst Rabbis and maintains that it's definitely allowed, but finds it to be a *davar meguneh*.

Rav Feinstein was also asked (O.C. 5:10:4) whether there is a mitzvah of *kibbud av v'aim* regarding the use of a name. Someone was given both a Jewish and a secular name by his parents, but his parents preferred to use the secular name. He responded that the child is not obligated to continue using the secular name.

There are those who suggest that parents should shy away from naming their children after people who died young, since we fear that this name may bring bad *mazal* to the baby. In order to avoid the problem, some say to change either the spelling of the name or to add another name to the child's name.¹

A person's name is often based on a significant individual; whether it be someone in Tanach, a Rebbe or mentor, or a family member. Rav Betzael Stern (B'tzel HaChochamah III, 108:12) writes that naming after a parent's family member is also fulfilling the mitzvah of *kibud av va'eim*.

The Midrash Rabbah (Bereishit 37:7) points out that in Tanach and earlier generations, parents chose their child's name based on events or feelings they had around the time of their child's birth.

¹ Sefer Chassidim 363-364; Yam Shel Shlomo, Gittin 4:31

The idea of naming a child after a Rebbe stems from a story quoted by the Sefer HaBris (p. 320) in the name of *Chemdah Genuzah*. When the Ramban's grandson was born, he told his son that although the *minhag* is to name the first born after the father's side, he should instead name the baby after his grandfather, Rabbeinu Yonah, on his mother's side since he was *also* the baby's father's Rebbe. As the Ramban points, honoring one's Rebbe overrides honoring his parents. Although a child's parents bring him into *olam hazeh*, his Rebbe is the one who will ultimately teach him how to attain *olam haba*.

There is also a discussion regarding the issue of naming a child with two names; whether it is one long name or two separate names. There are various reasons why one may be given two names; naming after two different people, two names that the parents liked, or adding a second name to a *choleh*. This custom is relatively new, and it is very rare to find anyone in the times of Tanach, Chazal and even Rishonim to have double names. For this reason, there are many who are hesitant about naming children with two names.

But regarding adding on a name to a *choleh*, the gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16b, Ta'anis 16a, and Baba Kama 125a) teaches us that adding a second name can change a person's life status, and can ultimately remove the evil decree and bring a *refuah*. In such cases, it is common that the additional name will be a name, such as Refael or Chaim.

As Jews, there are many factors to take into consideration when naming a child. A child's name is decided by both his parents and Hashem, and can clearly impact his whole life. A name is someone's identity, which is why many strongly believe that, as a Jew, one's child should be given a Jewish name, filled with much thought and meaning.²

² See R. Aryeh Lebowitz, Journal of Halacha & Contemporary Society, volume 47; rabbimanning.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Having-a-Secular-Name.pdf

Shema Yisrael

The pasuk שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד is recited three times a day: once in the morning, once in the evening, and once at night before going to sleep. The source for *Shema* is in Devarim (6:4-9). In the previous *pesukim*, Moshe emphasizes that the mitzvot were being given to Bnei Yisrael prior to their entering the Land of Israel, as a prerequisite for their successful inheritance of the Land flowing with milk and honey. There is a need for Bnei Yisrael to develop a relationship with Hashem based on both אהבה and יראה.

The Maharal (נתיבות עולם, נתיב העבודה, ז"ד) asks an obvious question: Why, when we say *shema* today, do we repeat משה's declaration word for word? Why don't we skip the words "*shema Yisrael*" and simply state "*Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*?" Who are we asking to listen if we say שמע to ourselves?

Although the individual is reciting Shema, Hashem's sovereignty is over the entire nation. It is therefore necessary for the individual to jointly testify with the rest of Am Yisrael that Hashem is everyone's G-d. When he says the words Shema Yisrael, it is as if he is reciting the declaration together with the entire nation.

The individual *avodah* is only complete when it's done as part of the greater community that is also accepting Hashem. In His infinite wisdom, Hashem gave us the Torah as a tool not only to connect with Him, but also to create a truly unified nation. Unity does not have to present itself in a group setting. It can be individual acts done by a group, all sitting at home by themselves and doing the same thing at the same time. The unification is the comfort that the acts are being done separately but together.

The Gra writes in Aderet Eliyahu that we need the *Shema Yisrael* aspect to have the *Hashem Echad* aspect. The *Elokeinu* will always be there, but it's our responsibility as a unified nation to take it upon ourselves to make the name of G-d one in this world.

Another approach, suggested by Rabbi Lamm in *The Shema: Spirituality and Law in Judaism* is that *Shema* is the calling out to Am Yisrael. We need to continue the tradition that Yaakov started and by acknowledging Him we are showing our love, devotion, and dedication to doing so.

The Siftei Chaim (Beurei Tefilla, Keri'at Shema) writes that each of the twelve shevatim had its unique strengths and special goal within Am Yisrael. Nevertheless, everything that they did was for a unified purpose – to serve Hashem. *Shema* is a reminder that they all had a unifying mission, and Am Yisrael throughout the generations makes the same declaration.

Am Yisrael, living a life of Torah, can only truly be a nation in Eretz Yisrael, where it serves as a unifying factor not only within the nation, but between the nation and Hashem as well. The opening chapter of *Ha'am V'ha'aretz* by Rav Eliezer Melamed discusses the fundamental reasoning and basis for the necessary connection of the people of Israel in the land of Israel.

The Sages say in the Tosefta that settling in Eretz Yisrael is *שקולה כנגד כל המצוות*, and in Devarim it is written that Hashem especially reigns over, watches, and protects Eretz Yisrael. Outside of Israel, we can reveal the *kedusha* in the spirituality, but we are alienated from nature. While living under the ruling body of a foreign land that does not care about our well being, everything we add to science, economy, etc. is another possible thing to use against us. This can happen anywhere and in any time period. No matter how much effort is put in, Hashem cannot truly be revealed in the material aspects of *chutz la'aretz*.

As Rav Melamed writes, there is no deeper wound to our *אמונה* than only being able to find Hashem in the spiritual. Hashem is One and whoever lives in *chutz la'aretz* cannot fully connect with Hashem in Oneness because they don't connect with Him in the physical. Accordingly, it is our task in life to cling to Hashem as a nation in every aspect of life, in the spiritual and in the physical and that's only possible in Israel.

Eretz Yisrael has a symbiotic relationship with Am Yisrael. It is part of a living, ever changing, continuing entity. According to Rav Kook (Orot Eretz Yisrael 34) we need to meditate on the fact that the spirit of Hashem is the soul of Israel. He writes that it is virtually impossible for Jewish people to be fully loyal and dedicated to themselves outside of Israel to the extent that they can in Israel.

Away from Israel, we are distracted by the externality around us. Eretz Yisrael is a place where we can feel at home; it's our inner tranquility. It starts with the return to Eretz Yisrael, and this is what the prophet Yechezkel considers step one. Step two is the "spiritual return", and according to Rav Kook, people that disagree are denying the hand of Hashem in our history.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe was very adamant about protecting the state of Israel's borders and supporting the army (Rabbi Eliyahu Touger: *Eyes Upon the Land*). He believed that if you live in *chutz la'aretz*, your mission is to reveal the G-dliness within the *ruchniyut* of your four *amot*. However, he truly believed that the physical state of Eretz Yisrael was reflective of the spiritual state of Am Yisrael.

Immediately following the statement of Shema, it is written **וְאַהֲבַת אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ**. Once we are a united nation, one with each other and with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, we must not forget the most important aspect of all, to not only fear, but also serve through love, which is something fully accessed only once we have returned to the Land.

FACULTY

What Hides Inside the Jewish Soul?

Rav Kook's "*Torah Lishmah*"

The sixth chapter of Pirkei Avot opens by declaring the great virtue of learning Torah "*lishmah*". The meaning of this phrase sparked controversy in the modern era. Among chassidim this term delineated an approach to learning which is focused on *deveikut*. The Torah is, in some sense, a manifestation of G-d's thoughts. Therefore, studying the Torah provides an avenue for connection to G-d. This connection is the ultimate goal of learning and the entire pursuit ought to be oriented towards it.¹

The *mitnagdim*, epitomized in the writings of Rav Chaim of Volozhin, rejected this approach.² According to their view, Torah *lishmah* means learning for the sake of the Torah itself. Rav Chaim presents this idea in a couple of ways³. Firstly, "for the sake of the Torah" can mean for the love of the Torah. Learning Torah then becomes the ultimate intellectual pursuit. The one who learns *Torah lishmah* seeks to "comprehend it fully, and have complete knowledge of all its details, without leaving out either a small or great part of it." Alternatively, "for the sake of the Torah" can mean for the honor of the Torah. The one who learns *lishmah* is concerned with the disgrace which would befall the Torah, should it cease to be learned.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook⁴ sides, at least nominally, with the *mitnagdim*. He writes that *lishmah* means for the sake of the Torah, but his understanding of what this means is subtly, but

¹ See Tanya, Likutei Amarim, 5.

² See Nefesh Hachayim, Sec. 4, chapters 1-3.

³ Ruach Chaim to Avot 6:1.

⁴ Orot HaTorah Chapter 2:1.

critically, different. Rav Kook explains that it is G-d's will that divine wisdom become manifest in the world and shape the way we live our lives. The Torah is a revelation of this wisdom, but its full meaning is not immediately obvious. We uncover this meaning through our learning of the Torah, as we attempt to understand it. Thus the Torah becomes more manifest, at both the theoretical and practical levels, as it is studied more and by more people.

The motivation of learning *lishmah* is then not just a love for the Torah itself, but also a desire to fulfill G-d's will by enabling this revelation to take place. The pinnacle achievement, by this approach, is to articulate new Torah ideas (*chiddushim*) which are a palpable product of successful *Torah lishmah*.⁵ The meaning and implications of Rav Kook's approach diverge from that of R' Chaim. Let's unpack them.

Torah literature is filled with endless debates on virtually every imaginable topic. Where did all of these opinions come from? One view is that they resulted from a breakdown in our traditions. According to Rav Sherira Gaon⁶, until the destruction of the first Beit Hamikdash a virtually complete version of all Torah knowledge was transmitted from one generation to the next. This body of knowledge included a full understanding of Halacha, complete with all the arguments that would later be presented in the Talmud, as well as a philosophical system. Debates began when this chain of tradition was broken and have multiplied as we have moved farther away from authentic understanding. The Rambam seems to accept a variant of this view.⁷

Another approach centers on the uniqueness of each Jewish soul. The Torah is like white light, and each soul is a prism which

⁵ R' Chaim also mentions the greatness of *chiddush* (Ruach Chaim ibid, Nefesh HaChaim ibid, ch. 12). However, he emphasizes the theurgic value of *chiddush* which is not obviously integrated into his theory of *Torah lishmah*.

⁶ Iggeret of Rav Sherirah Gaon 2:3-3:1.

⁷ See the introductions to the Perush Hamishnah and Mishneh Torah, and the Rambam's letter to R' Joseph on the purpose of the Talmud and its study.

reveals a unique hue as the Torah is refracted through it. Therefore, the new ideas which emerge as each Jew is exposed to the Torah are actually facets of the Torah which are being revealed for the first time. This position, and similar imagery, are presented by Rav Shlomo Luria⁸, among others.⁹

According to the first of these views, Torah study is fundamentally reconstructive. We are attempting to retain and possibly recover knowledge from previous generations. According to the second view, Torah learning progressively expands our knowledge, as each individual adds the revelations that he or she alone is able to. Rav Kook explicitly takes the second approach. He writes¹⁰ that the reason why Torah learning causes an expanded understanding of G-d's will is precisely because each individual interacts with the Torah in a unique way.

The implications of this approach are profound. They include, for instance, that no one has ever fully understood the Torah. As long as there are still unique Jewish souls that have not passed through this world¹¹, this is impossible. There is also something at once empowering and demanding here. Each one of us, by definition, has a way of understanding the Torah which is ours alone. There is a contribution for us to make which nobody else can. Precisely because of this, however, we each bear responsibility for this contribution. If we do not work hard to cultivate it, we risk a loss for the entire Jewish people.

Finally, Rav Kook's approach has implications for the way we consider Jews from different backgrounds. We are bidden to remember that every Jew we encounter, no matter what their lot in life, has the potential for a unique connection to the Torah.

⁸ Introduction to *Yam Shel Shlomo*, Bava Kama.

⁹ See Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato's essay *Derech Etz Chaim*.

¹⁰ *Orot HaTorah*, *ibid*.

¹¹ And we believe that there will be until the time of Mashiach (see *Yevamot* 62a).

The Gemara illustrates this powerfully in its description of the *chavruta* between R' Yochanan and Reish Lakish.¹²

R' Yochanan, one of the *gedolei hador*, encounters Reish Lakish who had become a murderous thief and convinces the latter to return to a life of Torah. R' Yochanan educates Reish Lakish in Torah and they become *chavrutot*. One day R' Yochanan offends Reish Lakish by reminding him of his past. Reish Lakish's sharp response prompts heavenly punishment, which results in his death. R' Yochanan is despondent. In an attempt to make him feel better the Sages find him a new *chavruta*, R' Elazar ben Padat. For every statement R' Yochanan makes, R' Elazar provides sources. Eventually R' Yochanan lashes out at his new *chavruta*:

Are you comparable to the son of Lakish? In my discussions with the son of Lakish, when I would state a matter, he would raise twenty-four difficulties against me in an attempt to disprove my claim, and I would answer him with twenty-four answers, and the halacha by itself would become broadened and clarified. And yet you say to me: There is a ruling which is taught in a baraita that supports your opinion. Do I not know that what I say is good?¹³

R' Yochanan is incapacitated by his grief. He wanders around with torn clothing seeking Reish Lakish until he loses his mind. In the end the other Sages pray for G-d to have mercy on him and R' Yochanan dies.

Today it is hard to imagine a *chavruta* between a *gadol hador* and a former common criminal, not as a charity case, but as real partners. And yet, this was exactly the pairing of R' Yochanan and Reish Lakish. This story exemplifies Rav Kook's understanding of learning *Torah lishmah*. Reish Lakish's unique perspective challenged the positions championed by R' Yochanan. As a result of this interaction the Torah was broadened to the benefit of us all.

¹² Bava Metzia 84a.

¹³ Translation from the William Davidson Talmud at www.sefaria.org.

The story also serves as a warning of the precarious dialectical tension at play in the relationships between diverse individuals. We must respect and embrace the other, while still allowing them to express their own views. Emphasizing differences risks a breakdown like the one between Reish Lakish and R' Yochanan. On the other hand, too much reverence risks one person's views being subsumed by the other's, as was the case with R' Elazar ben Pedat.

Rav Kook's approach to *Torah lishmah* empowers us to discover and articulate our own unique contribution to Torah knowledge. It humbles us with the understanding that no one has yet understood the Torah fully. It instructs us to treat every other Jew, regardless of background, as a scholar-in-waiting, and to consider carefully his or her earnest attempts to understand the Torah once the commitment has been made to properly study Torah. Whichever path of *Torah lishmah* one ends up following, this is one worth careful consideration.

