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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Do You Really Want Mashiach Now?

“...and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves and by your offspring” (28:14)
Close eyes for a moment and imagine that Mashiach has come!

He’s here. Everything is great. Everything’s marvelous, everything’s amazing. You jump out of bed to daven with the dawn, after learning for an hour before davening. You run to the Beit Midrash. On your way, your neighbor, who hasn’t spoken to you in six months, gives you a big smile.

You arrive at the Beit Midrash twenty minutes early. At the door, the maintenance manager says to you, “Good morning, Sir. Please make sure you learn with all your energy and concentration today.” You greet your study partner and immediately get down to learning. You have zero desire to shoot the breeze with him. You plunge into the Torah study; every teaching is open before you like a brilliant clear landscape. You have absolutely no desire to get up and make a cup of coffee or check your phone.

Everything is wonderful, but you feel something’s missing. In Kohelet, it describes the days of Mashiach as “yamim sh’eyn bahem chafetz,” meaning “not desirable days.” The commentators explain that they won’t be desirable days because a person will no longer need to struggle against any internal inclination to transgress. There were many things in the past that we had to fight so hard to conquer in our daily battles, such as not speaking slander, not looking where we shouldn’t, not being jealous, and praying and learning with attention and love. For all those challenges in which we succeeded, we received so much reward. Well, when Mashiach comes, we will no longer have that struggle, and, therefore, we’re no longer going to get that reward. That’s why they are called “yamim sh’eyn bahem chafetz,” not desirable days. You know you can no longer get that ultimate reward that comes from meeting a challenge and succeeding in overcoming it.

Of course, everyone wants Mashiach now.

But remember, when Mashiach isn’t here, right now, that’s when the “big bucks” are flowing. That’s when your reward is astronomical, that’s when it’s beyond imagination. So, grab that opportunity now! It’s not going to last forever. Every day we wait for him. And, of course, we want him now. But, right now, while we still have that opportunity - grab it. Think of all that reward stashed up in the only place it really matters, in the First National Bank of Olam Haba.

Q & A

Questions

1. When Yaakov traveled to Charan, the Torah stresses that he departed from Beer Sheva. Why?
2. On the night of his dream, Yaakov did something he hadn't done in 14 years. What?
3. G-d compressed the entire Land of Israel underneath the sleeping Yaakov. What did this symbolize?
4. Yaakov said "I will return with *shalom*." What did he mean by "*shalom*"?
5. Why did Yaakov rebuke the shepherds?
6. Why did Rachel, and not her brothers, tend her father's sheep?
7. Why did Yaakov cry when he met Rachel?
8. Why did Lavan run to greet Yaakov?
9. Why were Leah's eyes tender?
10. How old was Yaakov when he married?
11. What did Rachel find enviable about Leah?
12. Who was Yaakov's fifth son?
13. Who was Leah's handmaiden? Was she older or younger than Rache'ls handmaiden?
14. How do you say *dudaim* in Arabic?
15. "G-d remembered Rachel" (30:22). What did He remember?
16. What does "Yosef" mean? Why was he named that?
17. G-d forbade Lavan to speak to Yaakov "either of good or of bad." Why didn't G-d want Lavan to speak of good?
18. Where are there two Aramaic words in this weeks Parsha?
19. Who was Bilhah's father? Who was Zilpah's father?
20. Who escorted Yaakov into *Eretz Yisrael*?

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

Answers

1. 28:10 - The departure of a righteous person leaves a noticeable void in that place.
2. 28:11 - Sleep at night lying down.
3. 28:13 - That the Land would be easy for his descendants to conquer.
4. 28:21 - Completely without sin.
5. 29:7 - He thought they were loafing, stopping work early in the day.
6. 30:27 - Her brothers weren't born yet.
7. 29:11 - He saw prophetically that they would not be buried together; or because he was penniless.
8. 29:13 - He thought Yaakov was carrying money.
9. 29:17 - She cried continually because she thought she was destined to marry Esav.
10. 29:21 - Eighty-four.
11. 30:1 - Her good deeds, thinking they were the reason Leah merited children.
12. 30:5 - Dan.
13. 30:10 - Zilpah. She was younger.
14. 30:14 - Jasmine (*Yasmin*).
15. 30:22 - That Rachel gave Leah the "signs of recognition" that Yaakov had taught her, so that Leah wouldnt be embarrassed.
16. 30:24 "Yosef" means "He will add." Rachel asked G-d for another son in addition to Yosef.
17. 31:24 - Because the "good" that comes from wicked people is bad for the righteous.
18. 31:41 - *Yagar Sahaduta*, meaning "wall of testimony."
19. 31:50 - Lavan.
20. 32:1 - The angels of *Eretz Yisrael*.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Testify!

After Jacob and his family secretly fled the house of Jacob's father-in-law Laban, Laban and his entourage chased after Jacob with ill intent, but eventually agreed to make peace with him. To mark the cementing of their peace treaty, Laban and Jacob erected a monument which would commemorate their agreement. As the Bible reports it, Laban named the site *Yegar Sahaduta*, Aramaic for "witness mound," while Jacob named the site *Gal-Eid*, Hebrew for "witness mound" (Gen. 31:47). In this essay we focus on the synonyms *eid* and *sahad*, which both refer to "witness" and the act of "giving testimony." In doing so, we examine their respective and shared etymologies, while also discussing other words related to them. At the end of this essay we will consider what these terms might teach us about Judaism's perspective on martyrdom.

The earliest Hebrew lexicographers, like Menachem Ibn Saruk (920–970), Yonah Ibn Janach (990–1050), and the Radak (1160–1235), trace the Hebrew words *eid* ("witness") and *eidut* ("testimony") to the biliteral root AYIN-DALET. That particular root is the etymon for a whole bevy of Hebrew words, but none of the classical lexicographers offer a systematic way of connecting those different words, nor do they even insinuate the existence of such a connection.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740–1814) in both *Yeriot Shlomo* and *Cheshek Shlomo* offers a lengthy discussion of this two-letter root and many of its tributaries. He sees the core meaning of AYIN-DALET as "connecting one thing to another," with the common Hebrew proposition *ad* ("until") serving as an archetypical reflection of this idea. The word *ad* can be used to forge connections in time (e.g., "I will walk until nightfall"), space (e.g., "I will walk until the red house"), or a whole slew of other conditions (e.g., "I will walk until my foot hurts").

Some of the other terms that Rabbi Pappenheim sees as related to this root include *moed* ("meeting," where two or more parties encounter one another), *eidah* ("congregation," where individuals join up at a certain place or for a certain goal), *adi* ("adornment," which connects that which is decorated with the decorations that cause beautification), and *eden* ("enjoyment," because pleasure creates agreement between one who enjoins something with the thing itself).

Following this line of inquiry, Rabbi Pappenheim also connects *eid/eidut* to this biliteral root. He explains that the primary function of a "witness" is to give "testimony" that establishes a connection between an action or event that happened with the preparator or the one responsible for that occurrence. In this way, *eidut* too is a form of "connection." He notes that although this concept applies primarily to human witnesses, it can also be extended to physical monuments or objects, which similarly serve as reminders of a certain message to which they "testify." A certain subset of the Torah's commandments is called *eidot* (Deut. 4:45, 6:17, Ps. 93:5, Ps. 119:2, 119:32) because their purpose is to "testify" about specific historical events that happened to the Jewish People.

Rabbi Pappenheim continues to explain that one of the primary roles of a witness in a judicial context is to warn a potential sinner about the ramifications and punishments resulting from his intended actions. Because of this, the word *eid* itself came to be associated with the act of "warning" another, even outside of the context of witnesses and testimony (for example, see Gen. 43:3, Ex. 19:21, 21:29). As a result, the Torah itself gained the appellation *eidut* (Ex. 31:18, 26:33, Num. 18:2), as most of the Torah's injunctions are negative commandments that "warn" against performing certain actions. In a similar sense, an ox that has already gored three times is called a *muad* (see Mishna *Bava Kama* 1:4, 2:4, 2:6, 3:8, 4:2, 4:5 4:9) because its owner has already been "warned" that his beast is a dangerous one and needs to be watched (see Ex. 21:29).

Interestingly, Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Parchon (12th century) in his *Machberet HaAruch* traces the term *eid/eidut* to the word *adi* mentioned above, explaining that just as ornamental trappings mark something as special and important, so is *eidut* outstanding from all other sorts of verbal utterances in that it relays important, pertinent information.

*To continue reading this essay about *eid/eidut* and how it relates to *sahad/sahaduta*, plus a fascinating exploration of the Jewish perspective on martyrdom, please visit: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Kama 23-29

Following the Majority?

"This teaches that we do not follow the principle of majority in monetary case."

The *gemara* states on our *daf* that this is a halachic principle that we are intended to learn from the two different terms our *mishna* uses interchangeably: *kad* (small vessel) and *chavit* (large vessel). Despite there being a factor of "majority" that we would think should determine which size vessel was intended in the transaction (see the *gemara*), the *mishna* changes the word that describes the vessel "seamlessly" in order to teach that they are considered as "equal," and we are not to follow the "majority factor" that exists.

We certainly follow the majority of *judges* who decide a case involving a monetary claim, as is explicit in the Torah: "Decide according to the majority" (Ex. 23:2). However, if the majority is not a majority that can be clearly counted, but is rather a majority based on logic or solid assumption, we are taught in our *gemara* not to rule according to this type of majority in a monetary case.

Tosefot asks: "Why not?" We find in other places in *Shas* (Chullin 11a, Sanhedrin 69a) that we do in fact follow a majority based on logic to decide whether something is permitted or forbidden, or even to decide if a person is deserving of capital punishment for certain transgressions. Why not rule with this type of majority in monetary cases as well?

Tosefot answers that this type of majority is not "strong enough" to overcome a "*chezkat mamon*", the assumption that when money is in the possession of a certain person it should remain with that person unless clearly proven

to not belong to him. A majority based on logic is not sufficient grounds to allow the claimant to take the money from the person currently in possession of it.

There is still a question: If this type of majority constitutes enough “proof” to take away a person’s life and lead to a ruling that he deserves capital punishment, isn’t this type of majority all the more so sufficient proof to take away his money? One answer the commentaries offer is that although a person is considered to be in possession of his money, he is not actually “in possession” of his life. He is alive, but does not “own” his life. It is something that the Creator owns and puts into a person according to the Will of the Creator.

▪ *Bava Kama 27b*

Watch Where You’re Going!

“It is not the way of people to look carefully down at the road.”

This statement, by Rabbi Aba to Rav Ashi in the name of the Sages of Eretz Yisrael, is taught in order to explain why the *mishna* on 27a teaches that if a person trips on a vessel belonging to someone else that was put on a public road, and breaks it, he is exempt from payment for the damage he caused to the vessel.

The *gemara* asks: “Why is he exempt? He should have looked where he was going, and is therefore negligent and should be responsible to pay damages!” A number of answers are offered in the *gemara* to explain his exempt status, such as “it was dark” or “the vessel was just around the corner”. In other words, the *mishna* is speaking about a “special case,” in which the person who tripped acted without negligence.

A drastically different approach that the Sages of Eretz Yisrael were quoting as teaching is that the breaker is exempt from payment since: “It is not the way of people to look carefully down at the road.” One interesting way to view this is that the nature of a person is that he is a being with a spiritual nature, a “thinker”, and his thoughts are often lofty and connected to the “Above”, as opposed to an animal which is purely physical, and therefore was created (in general) with his eyes facing downward, facing the physical world below. (See Tosefot and Tosefot Rabbeinu Peretz.)

▪ *Bava Kama 27b*

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON – BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

INTRODUCTION (ii)

“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”
(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

As we learned together in the first part of this introduction, the message of Birkat HaMazon is truly extraordinary. Yet, there is another element, as well. An American writer, Jon Dos Passos (1896-1970), is famous for coining the phrase (which is a bit of a tongue-twister), “We work to eat to get the strength to work to eat to get the strength to work.” It often seems that the whole world revolves around the dual concepts of our need to eat to be able to work and our need to work to be able to eat.

Another dimension of Birkat HaMazon is that there is so much more to our existence than simply existing. When we eat, rather than just fueling our bodies, we are also feeding our spiritual selves. When done with the correct intent, the physical act of eating provides our souls with the resources needed to continue enhancing our connection to Hashem. By enriching our physical beings, we allow ourselves to experience how the physical and spiritual can unite together to serve Hashem.

How is this idea found in Birkat HaMazon? For most people, not eating over a prolonged period of time causes them to become less in tune with the needs of others. An adage is that a hungry man is an angry man. A contemporary word has been coined to encapsulate the combination of hunger and anger – hangry. When a person is “hangry,” they lack patience. The ability to deal with the behavior of others is considerably impaired. And, since they don’t take the feelings of those around them into account, they not only make themselves less accessible to those in their vicinity, they also distance themselves from Hashem. Our interpersonal relationships are integral to our relationship with Hashem.

This is a fundamental concept. Our Sages teach that Hashem relates to each of us just as we relate to others. When a person irritably tells someone off, not because the other person deserved it but because the one rebuking is hangry, it causes discord. Discord is more than a lack of harmony. When we don’t get on with each other, we are delaying the arrival of the Mashiach and actively hindering the rebuilding of the Holy Temple. And our unfortunate behavior would be the cause of distress to Hashem. When we sit down and eat a meal, the good feeling generated slows down the time it takes us to react negatively to something or someone. It leaves us feeling satiated and better able to deal calmly with those around us. Which, in spiritual terms, means that we have brought the Mashiach and the construction of the Holy Temple one step closer.

It is now clear why Birkat HaMazon deals with such seemingly disparate concepts. Together, they teach us what we gain (pun intended) by eating bread and reciting Birkat HaMazon carefully. Because, Birkat HaMazon is not simply a means of saying “Thank You” to Hashem. It is also a vehicle to draw our attention to our obligation to become more thoughtful and gentler to those around us. And, by doing so, we are bringing the Final Redemption one step closer.

In effect, Birkat HaMazon is our blueprint for heralding in the Messianic Era. May it happen very, very soon.

To be continued...

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

TRUMPET-BLOWING AT TIMES OF WAR AND DISTRESS

Mitzvah 384 (The mitzvah also obligates the blowing of trumpets in accompaniment of the offerings, which will not be discussed here.)

“When you go to war in your land, against the enemy that attacks you, you shall blow the trumpets, and you will be remembered before Hashem your G-d, and you will be saved from your enemies.” (Bamidbar 10:9)

THE MITZVAH

When we go out to war and at other times of distress, it is a mitzvah to cry out to Hashem and to blow trumpets (*Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos* §59). According to one Midrash, the mitzvah applies specifically to the two trumpets that were made by Moshe and hidden upon his death. During the war of Gog and Magog, these will be discovered and blown, and about this the verse states, *you will be saved from your enemies, forever* (*Sifri* 76, as explained by *Meshech Chochmah*). However, the accepted halachic opinion is that this mitzvah applies in all times of national distress. Some limit the application of this mitzvah to Eretz Yisrael, when it is under Jewish control, and only when there is a terrible decree that threatens a majority of the nation (*Pri Megadim*, OC 576:1). As to whether a shofar may substitute for a trumpet, see *Mishnah Berurah* (ibid.) and *Sifri Zuta* (*Bamidbar* 10:8).

REASON ONE: TERRIFIES THE ENEMY

Trumpets are blown during battle as an expression of power in order to terrify the enemy. By commanding us to blow trumpets, Hashem means that we should place our trust in Him and express our confidence that He is with us. When we do so, He remembers His relationship with us and the merit of our forefathers, and He faithfully saves us from our enemies (based on *Radak* to *Tehillim* 89:16, *Meiri*, *Chibur HaTeshuvah* 2:3, and *Rabbeinu Meyuchas*).

REASON TWO: AWAKENS THE HEART AND FOCUSES THE MIND

At times of life-threatening distress, it is imperative that a person cries out and supplicates to Hashem with his whole heart, but the coarseness of human nature encourages the heart to continue to slumber and miss the opportunity for salvation. There is nothing that awakens like a musical instrument, and especially the trumpet. In addition, the sound of the trumpet captures the heart and clears the mind of all thoughts that would otherwise disturb the complete concentration that is necessary in order to pray from the depths of the heart (*Chinuch*; *Ibn Ezra*).

REASON THREE: INVOKES REPENTANCE

When the Jewish people sin, Hashem “forgets” them and allows their enemies to attack them. The trumpet blasts cause the Jewish people to fear Hashem and repent, and then Hashem “remembers” them (*Abarbanel*). Whenever Hashem “remembers” the Jewish people, He immediately has mercy upon them and saves them (*Sifri* §76).

REASON FOUR: A CALL FOR HELP

The trumpet sounding is a call for help that is directed at Hashem, as if to say: “Remember us, stand by our side, and save us from our enemies!” (*Rav Hirsch*).

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Fleeing from Esav, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and sets out for Charan, the home of his mother's family. After a 14-year stint in the Torah Academy of Shem and Ever, he resumes his journey and comes to Mount Moriah, the place where his father Yitzchak was brought as an offering, and the future site of the Beit Hamikdash. He sleeps there and dreams of angels going up and down a ladder between Heaven and Earth. G-d promises him the Land of Israel, that he will found a great nation and that he will enjoy Divine protection. Yaakov wakes and vows to build an altar there and tithe all that he will receive.

Then he travels to Charan and meets his cousin Rachel at the well. He arranges with her father, Lavan, to work seven years for her hand in marriage, but Lavan fools Yaakov, substituting Rachel's older sister, Leah. Yaakov commits himself to work another seven years in order to also marry Rachel. Leah bears four sons: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and

Yehuda, the first Tribes of Israel. Rachel is barren, and in an attempt to give Yaakov children, she gives her handmaiden Bilhah to Yaakov as a wife. Bilhah bears Dan and Naftali. Leah also gives Yaakov her handmaiden Zilpah, who bears Gad and Asher. Leah then bears Yissaschar, Zevulun, and a daughter, Dina. Hashem finally blesses Rachel with a son, Yosef.

Yaakov decides to leave Lavan, but Lavan, aware of the wealth Yaakov has made for him, is reluctant to let him go, and concludes a contract of employment with him. Lavan tries to swindle Yaakov, but Yaakov becomes extremely wealthy. Six years later, Yaakov, aware that Lavan has become dangerously resentful of his wealth, flees with his family. Lavan pursues them but is warned by G-d not to harm them. Yaakov and Lavan agree to a covenant and Lavan returns home. Yaakov continues on his way to face his brother Esav.

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