

PARSHA INSIGHTS

TRAIN SPOTTING

“In order to save him (Yosef) and to return him to his father...” (37:22)

Every British schoolboy knows the legend of King Canute (995-1035) who stood facing down the sea and commanded it not to come any further. He ended up with wet feet and a lot of royal egg on his face.

It's like trying to stop a runaway train hurtling toward the end of the line by standing in front of it and valiantly raising your hand and saying, “I command you stop.” All that will do is cause a rather nasty mess on the tracks.

You'd do much better (and save the railway company a large cleaning bill) by trying to find the place where you can divert the train to a harmless siding so that it can dissipate its speed and come to a slow stop.

People are a lot like trains.

When someone is utterly determined to do something wrong, the worst thing you can do is to stand on his tracks and put out your hand to stop him. You're liable to get run over verbally — or worse.

You have to divert him slowly from his lethal trajectory.

This is exactly what Reuven did to save his brother Yosef.

The brothers hated Yosef and were determined to kill him. Had Reuven tried to stop them by telling them to spare him, such was their hatred that they would have ignored him. Rather, he diverted their energy into a less lethal plan. He persuaded them to dispose of Yosef without having blood on their hands, by putting him into a pit full of snakes and scorpions. Then Reuven, bit by bit, would mollify their evil intent and spirit Yosef away — back to his father.

Much more effective than trying to stop a runaway train...

• Sources: based on the Ralbag as seen in Talelei Orot

*With great sorrow the Ohr Somayach family
shares in mourning the passing of our esteemed and beloved teacher, mentor and colleague*

RABBI EPHRAIM ORATZ רבי עפראים אוראץ

A distinguished member of our faculty for over thirty years.

May Hashem comfort his family along
with the mourners of Tzion and Yerushalayim.

SOTAH 44 - 49

We learned in a beraita, “One who speaks between putting on the tefillin of the hand and the tefillin of the head has a transgression ‘in his hand’ and goes home from the ranks of the Jewish army.”

The *gemara* explains that this statement is consistent with the opinion of Rabbi Yossi Hagalili who gives a novel explanation in the *mishna* on *amud alef* for the Torah exempting certain people from a Jewish army in the verse: *And the officers shall continue to speak to the people and say, “What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, that he should not cause the heart of his brothers to melt, as his heart.”* (Deut. 20:8)

Rabbi Yossi Hagalili teaches in the *mishna* on *amud alef* that this refers to someone who is fearful due to his transgressions, and as the *gemara* explains, even rabbinical transgressions. He also explains in the *mishna* that the exemptions for a new vineyard, house and wife (verses 5, 6 and 7) act as a type of “cover up” for people to return from the battleground without suffering embarrassment. People who return from the other troops due to their transgressions will be judged favorably, as really returning due to their new vineyard, house or wife. (Rashi)

But why is speaking while putting on *tefillin*, which is an interruption in the mitzvah and a transgression, mentioned in the *gemara* as an example of this teaching that a transgressor does not go to battle? One answer is that by keeping the mitzvah of *tefillin* ‘properly’ (on the arm and head, without interruption) the army of the Jewish People merit that G-d will bless them with the blessing that Moshe gave the tribe of Gad in Devarim 33:20, “He shall smite the enemy’s arms and heads” (they would sever the head and arm of the enemy with one blow — Rashi).” (Rabbeinu Asher)

• Sotah 44a

“After the passing of Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuha Hanasi), the traits of ‘humility’ (‘anava’ in Hebrew) and ‘fear of sin’ ceased to exist in the world.”

This teaching, taught on the concluding *daf* of Tractate Sotah, is challenged by Rav Yosef and Rav Nachman on the concluding line in the *gemara*. Rav Yosef said, “Don’t teach ‘fear of sin’ (ceased), because there is me”. Rav Nachman said, “Don’t teach ‘humility’ (ceased), because there is me.” The commentaries question how Rav Yosef and Rav Nachman could each apparently praise themselves in this manner. And are we not taught, “May a stranger praise you and not your mouth...” in Proverbs 27:2?

One explanation is that they felt that it was their obligation to make sure that the teachings of the Torah were transmitted correctly, and if there was something incorrect, it should not be taught. Since Rav Yosef and Rav Nachman, great Sages without self-bias, felt that they still possessed these traits, it was their Torah obligation to say not to teach that these lofty traits had ceased. (Maharsha)

The Maharsha adds that the trait of “fear of sin” was no longer laudable to the people of this generation, and it could therefore not be considered “praise”. Perhaps even the opposite. A different answer is offered in the name of Rabbi Eliyahu, the Gaon from Vilna. When it says “*ana*” in the *gemara* it does not mean “me or I”, the speaker. Rather it refers to another Sage by the name of Ana, and the speaker is in fact not praising himself.

• Sotah 49a

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PARSHA Q&A ?

1. "These are the offspring of Yaakov: Yosef...." Give three reasons why Yosef is considered Yaakov's main offspring.
2. What was praiseworthy about the fact that Yosef's brothers did not speak to him in a friendly manner?
3. How do we see from Yosef's dream about the sun, moon and stars that all dreams contain some untrue element?
4. Who brought Yosef down to Egypt?
5. Where was Reuven when Yosef was sold?
6. In addition to the brothers, who else knew that Yosef was alive?
7. Why didn't G-d reveal prophetically to Yaakov that Yosef was alive?
8. For how long did Yaakov mourn the loss of Yosef?
9. Verse 37:35 states "his father wept." To whom does this refer?
10. Who was Tamar's father?
11. In what merit did Tamar deserve to have kings as her descendants?
12. Why is the word "hand" mentioned four times in connection to the birth of Zerach?
13. Why does the Torah relate the incident with Potiphar's wife immediately after the incident of Yehuda and Tamar?
14. How did Potiphar "see" that G-d was with Yosef?
15. Who in this week's Parsha pretended to be sick?
16. Why were the butler and the baker imprisoned?
17. For how long were the butler and the baker in prison?
18. How did the baker know that Yosef had correctly interpreted the butler's dream?
19. What prompted the butler and baker to tell Yosef their dreams?
20. How was Yosef punished for asking the butler for help?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week's Questions!

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

1. 37:2 - (a) Yosef was the son of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. (b) Yosef looked like Yaakov. (c) All that befell Yaakov befell Yosef.
2. 37:4 - They did not act hypocritically.
3. 37:10 - The moon represented Rachel. Since she had already died, it was impossible for that element of the dream to come true.
4. 37:28 - A caravan of Midianites.
5. 37:29 - He was attending to Yaakov.
6. 37:33 - Yitzchak.
7. 37:33 - Because the brothers had issued a ban against revealing the truth to Yaakov, and G-d, so to speak, abided by their ban.
8. 37:34 - Twenty-two years.
9. 37:35 - Yitzchak, who wept because of Yaakov's suffering.
10. 38:24 - Shem.
11. 38:26 - In the merit of her modesty.
12. 38:30 - To allude to his descendent, Achan, who sinned with his hand by taking four things from the spoils of Jericho.
13. 39:1 - To teach us that just as Tamar acted with pure motives, so did Potiphar's wife.
14. 39:3 - Yosef mentioned G-d's name frequently in his speech.
15. 39:11 - Potiphar's wife.
16. 40:1 - The butler was imprisoned because a fly was found in the king's goblet, and the baker was imprisoned because a pebble was found in the king's bread.
17. 40:4 - Twelve months.
18. 40:5 - The baker dreamed the interpretation of the butler's dream.
19. 40:6 - Yosef asked them why they looked troubled.
20. 40:23 - He remained in prison an additional two years.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

TOMB OF THE MACCABEES

Although there is no firm evidence that the heroes of the Chanukah miracle that we will soon be celebrating are buried in a place called "Modi'in", the site east of Lod and Ben Shemen near the new city of Modi'in is visited by many Jews who consider it to be the resting place of the Maccabees.



Eshtori ha-Parchi identified Tzova, west of Jerusalem, as the Maccabean Modi'in, while other travellers named different sites. During the last century, researchers have leaned towards the above-mentioned site near the Arab village of Mideah, where visitors go to identify with the Chanukah heroes.

Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

Vayeshev

On the surface, the narrative of Yehuda and Tamar is profoundly puzzling. What were the transgressions of Tamar's first two husbands, Er and Onan, who were Yehuda's first two sons? Why did Yehuda prevent his youngest son Shelah from marrying Tamar? How could Tamar disguise herself as a prostitute in order to have relations with Yehuda, and how could a righteous man like Yehuda consort with her?

Er transgressed by refusing to have children with Tamar. Most likely he didn't want her to lose her physical attractiveness. However, this represents his refusal to fulfill G-d's commandment to be fruitful and multiply, especially with regard to the offspring of Avraham.

His brother having died childless, Onan was obligated to marry his sister-in-law, as the custom of Yibum was also practiced by mankind before it was given to the Jewish People at Sinai. Since the purpose of this custom was to perpetuate his brother's line, Onan knew that his child with Tamar would really be considered his brother's child. As a result he felt that the commandment to reproduce really didn't apply to him with Tamar. However, having seen what happened to his brother, who refused to have any relations at all with Tamar, Onan reasoned that he would be spared the death penalty if he had relations while preventing conception from occurring. However, G-d considered this action to be equally egregious.

Yehuda felt that the behavior of his two oldest sons was the result of their impetuous immaturity, having been not even teenagers at the time. In order to protect Tamar from a similar fate with the young Shelah, he sends her away to her father's house until Shelah is mature enough to handle the responsibility of Yibum.

Even after Shelah grows up, Yehuda does not give him to Tamar in marriage. This is most likely because Yehuda is also worried that Tamar was somehow complicit by nature in his sons' deaths and should not be allowed to marry anyone. At this point Divine Providence comes into play to orchestrate the eventual union of Tamar and Yehuda. Having lost his wife, Yehuda was lonely and in need of physical female companionship. With his period of mourning over, Yehuda went out to participate in the sheep-shearing festival, a joyous occasion which only increased his physical desires.

Having heard that Yehuda went to the festival, Tamar changed clothing and covered her face in order not to be recognized. She positioned herself in a place where Yehuda

would see her, and she hoped that he would invite her to accompany him to the festival and then propose marriage. All of Tamar's actions were with the purest of intentions. She knew that the mitzvah of Yibum still applied in this family, since it was absolutely the will of G-d that Yehuda's lineage continue. With Shelah no longer in the picture she felt that she had to conceive with another family member, and who better than with the respected and honorable Yehuda himself. However, the situation took a different turn. True, he didn't recognize her, but instead of proposing marriage, he saw her as a simple prostitute with whom he could satisfy his physical needs. At that time Yehuda's behavior was considered perfectly normal and not immoral. Adjusting quickly to the sudden turn of events, Tamar went along, but refused to take payment immediately. She took a security instead, in order to set up the scenario later on, where she is able to reveal her identity after having already become pregnant.

Still unrecognized by Yehuda, Tamar returns home and makes no effort to hide her pregnancy. When her pregnancy becomes public knowledge she is assumed to have had an illicit relationship and thus liable to the death penalty as she was still attached through the Yibum customs to her second husband. She is brought to the furious Yehuda, and rather than directly reveal the truth, which would have seriously embarrassed Yehuda, she produces the security items. Her intention is also to make it clear that he deserves the death penalty for adultery as well.

When Yehuda recognizes the security items he says the words, "she is right" and "from me". Abarbanel offers two interpretations of Yehuda's response. His first interpretation is that Yehuda is saying that both of their behaviors were justified, but that Tamar's was much nobler than his own. Even though he didn't do anything wrong, he was simply fulfilling his physical desires whereas she was carrying out the will of G-d. Furthermore, Yehuda says that she is superior to him "inasmuch as I did not give her to Shelah my son". He means that the reason I kept her away from Shelah is because she is much smarter than I and she did not deserve to be burdened with my young and ignorant son.

His second interpretation is that Yehuda now realizes that his sons died due to their transgressions rather than due to Tamar's "poisonous nature". Tamar realized this and made sure that the lineage continued. Her insight and righteousness far surpassed his own.

CHANUKAH - A TALE OF TWO CITIES

From: Allen

Dear Rabbi,

It seems to me that the ancient Greeks promoted good things, such as Science, the Arts and Physical Fitness. Why does Chanukah "celebrate" the opposition to, and victory against, ancient Greek culture?

Dear Allen,

The ancient Greeks are viewed as descending from Yafet, the son of Noach. The name Yafet is related to the Hebrew word for beauty. In fact, the Torah says about Yafet, "May G-d beautify Yafet, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem". (Gen. 9:27) This suggests that the intellectual, aesthetic and physical beauty of Athens was given by G-d, and has a dwelling place within Jerusalem.

So what was the problem?

The Sages taught that although Esav's body was not buried in the cave of Machpela with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, his head was. After trying to bar Jacob from burial in the cave, he was smitten by Chushim the son of Dan, which resulted in Esav's head rolling into the cave where it was sealed. Since Esav's progeny aligned with the ancestors of ancient Europe, we see here as well that when these forces confront Torah they must be opposed. But when these forces have their "head in the right place", they may abide within Judaism.

So the problem with ancient Greek culture was that it used Science, Arts and Fitness to oppose G-d in an attempt to usurp the supremacy of Torah, rather than to take them in their natural role to support and enhance the awareness of G-d in the world and the beauty of His Torah.

This opposition of the world-view of the descendants of

Yafet to that of the descendants Shem was manifested in their major decrees against the Jews and the Torah, which prohibited the observance of Shabbat, the sanctification of the new moon and the covenant of circumcision.

Shabbat proclaims that the world was created by the Creator, G-d, and is ruled by Him alone. Rather than using Science to reveal and celebrate the wonders of G-d in Creation, the Greeks used it to dethrone G-d and attribute everything to Nature and natural causes.

Similarly, the sanctification of the new moon expresses our G-d-given ability and mandate to elevate the physical and sensual to holiness. Rather than directing the Divinely-endowed ability to raise mundane aesthetics to the plane of the spiritual, the Greeks used the Arts for pleasure-seeking indulgence in the profane.

Finally, the covenant of circumcision imposes restraint on otherwise unbridled, animalistic desire and deification of bodily perfection. The ancient Greeks, however, prized physical fitness as means of liberation from limitation, where power and prowess were used to subjugate others to themselves, rather than subordinating themselves to G-d.

The approach issuing from ancient Athens — a world without a Creator, life without holiness and a body without restraint — is diametrically opposed to the message of Torah which goes forth from Zion. A Science which sees only itself with no vision of G-d; Art in the form of immoral spectacles which are antithetical to exaltation and sanctity; and Fitness which liberates a conflagration of base impulses — all of these have no role in our "Tent of Shem" unless they are severed from their impure source and elevated for, and made subservient to, the service of G-d.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Yaakov settles in the land of Canaan. His favorite son, Yosef, brings him critical reports about his brothers. Yaakov makes Yosef a fine tunic of multi-colored woolen strips. Yosef exacerbates his brothers' hatred by recounting prophetic dreams of sheaves of wheat bowing to his sheaf, and of the sun, moon and stars bowing to him, signifying that all his family will appoint him king. The brothers indict Yosef and resolve to execute him. When Yosef comes to Shechem, the brothers relent and decide, at Reuven's instigation, to throw him into a pit instead. Reuven's intent was to save Yosef. Yehuda persuades the brothers to take Yosef out of the pit and sell him to a caravan of passing Ishmaelites. Reuven returns to find the pit empty and rends his clothes. The brothers soak Yosef's tunic in goat's blood and show it to Yaakov, who assumes that Yosef has been devoured by a wild beast. Yaakov is inconsolable. Meanwhile, in Egypt, Yosef has been sold to Potiphar, Pharaoh's

Chamberlain of the Butchers. In the Parsha's sub-plot, Yehuda's son Er dies as punishment for preventing his wife Tamar from becoming pregnant. Onan, Yehuda's second son, then weds Tamar by levirate marriage. He too is punished in similar circumstances. When Yehuda's wife dies, Tamar resolves to have children through Yehuda, as this union will found the Davidic line culminating in the *Mashiach*. Meanwhile, Yosef rises to power in the house of his Egyptian master. His exceptional beauty attracts the unwanted advances of his master's wife. Enraged by his rejection, she accuses Yosef of attempting to seduce her, and he is imprisoned. In jail, Yosef successfully predicts the outcome of the dream of Pharaoh's wine steward, who is reinstated, and the dream of Pharaoh's baker, who is hanged. In spite of his promise, the wine steward forgets to help Yosef, and Yosef languishes in prison.

BELIEVING IN MIRACLES

“For the miracles, and the salvation, and the mighty acts, and the victories, and the battles which You performed for our fathers in those days, in this time.”

Believing in Miracles

One Erev Shabbat, Rabbi Chanina found his daughter crying because she had used vinegar instead of oil to light the Shabbat candles, not realizing her mistake until after sunset when it was too late to fix the matter. Rabbi Chanina responded to her calmly, saying, “Don’t worry; the One who commanded oil to burn will command vinegar to burn.” And, indeed, the candles burned for the entire duration of Shabbat, and were even used as light for the Havdalah ceremony. (*Ta’anit* 25a)

This story illustrates to us that G-d has the power to make the impossible possible. Although G-d usually chooses not to transcend the laws of nature, we must realize that from G-d’s perspective it is no more difficult to change nature than it is to create it.

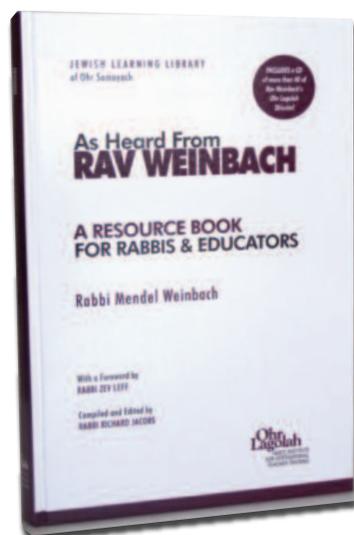
The human psyche is impressed with the novelty of the “supernatural”, while the impeccable consistency of nature leaves a person unfazed. However, Rabbi Shneur Zalman from Ladi explains that, in reality, the design and the complexity of nature, which G-d brings into being from utter nothingness, is a far greater act than the momentary suspension of its rules. For the latter is merely the influencing of

forces that already exist. Accordingly Rabbi Dessler explains that the process we call “nature” is in truth miracles that we have become used to.

Relying on Miracles

The above story of Rabbi Chanina and his daughter seems to contradict a well-known saying of our Sages in Tractate Pesachim (64b) that “we don’t rely on miracles.” In fact, one’s merits can even be deducted for having a miracle performed for him. (Shabbat 32a) The resolution to this apparent contradiction can be understood as follows:

One who believes that miracles are difficult should not rely on them. Someone with faith in G-d’s total control of the world will realize that there is no difference between miracle and nature. G-d’s “speech” brought all things into being and continues to maintain all existence. “Nature” appears to be natural only due to our dim eye that cannot perceive the essence of this continuing creative process. Therefore, just as G-d’s word causes oil to burn, G-d can choose to say “Let vinegar burn.” Whoever realizes this, as did Rabbi Chanina, is not relying on miracles, because to him miracles and nature are identical; the only difference is that what we call “miracles” occur less frequently. Thus, there is such a thing as a circumstance that a person may find himself in that is beyond hope. One must not give up on prayer, for G-d has the power to save us from anything.



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ADAM ZEIFF

Age: 24 - From: Jericho, Long Island, New York
University: SUNY Buffalo, BA in Psychology

The hottest, most effective and innovative program in outreach today is the JInternship Program. Originated and devised by the Ohr Somayach “Think Tank,” it matches up college graduates and graduating seniors together with jobs in their desired careers in Israel. Though this program we have managed to attract young Jewish men with minimal or no Jewish background and with varying degrees of interest in Judaism to our campus. And they are flourishing here.

The program involves a learning schedule and an occasional trip in addition to their internship with Israeli employers. This “work/study” program, the duration of which is usually four to five months, has literally changed the lives of scores of young men and has added a new dimension to their lives — an attachment to the Jewish People.

One of the stars of the program is Adam Zeiff. Adam grew up in Jericho, Long Island, NY in a very secular Jewish home and community. After high school he went to SUNY Buffalo and got a degree in Psychology. While in college he was active in sports, particularly in basketball and track and he was a member of a fraternity - Sigma Alpha Mu. A bundle of energy and enthusiasm, after college, Adam started working in a startup moving business where he did sales and business development. He also worked in software sales.

Despite his success in business, Adam was looking for more meaning in life. On the advice of a rabbi he met in college, Adam came on a Birthright trip in May of 2013. That

trip inspired him to keep searching. This past summer he decided to come to the JInternship program at Ohr Somayach. Adam is now working at the Israel office of Finn Partners, one of the top public relations firms in the United States and one of the largest in the world. He works from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm and then learns in the Yeshiva from 3:00 pm to 7:00 pm. He is putting on *tefillin*, davening and keeping many *mitzvot*.



Recovering his heritage has had a collateral effect on his family. His mother, who is a dentist with a practice in Manhattan, recently came to Israel on a Jewish women’s trip and is now very excited about keeping *mitzvot* and living a more Jewish life. His two younger siblings are also getting involved in Judaism.

Adam has what the Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Nota Schiller, *shlita*, calls an incurable disease — “*hakarat hatov*” — a desire to acknowledge and to repay the good that he received. “The Yeshiva is a wonderful institution. I want to see more students

coming here.” Towards that end, Adam, together with the other interns, is starting a crowd-funding project to aid the Yeshiva in its goals so that others can benefit as he is. On this past Thursday evening, November 25th, the interns launched this crowd-funding project with a gala barbecue. Adam chaired the event and led a lively discussion of goals and methodology. The intelligence, seriousness and focus of the discussion and the interns’ obvious display of enthusiasm are a fitting tribute to Adam and an almost certain guarantee of success.

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

Prime Beef

BY RABBI RICHARD JACOBS

Despite the fact that the holiday of Chanukah is a holiday of rabbinic origin, there are a number of references to Chanukah in the Chumash. In fact, the first reference to Chanukah in the Torah can be found right “in the beginning”, in the Midrash on the second verse of Genesis:

“And darkness covered the surface of the abyss”: Darkness — this alludes to the Greek exile, that the Greeks darkened the eyes of Israel with their decrees – saying to the Jews “Write on the horn of an ox that you have no share in the G-d of Israel” (Ber. Rabba 2:4)

We could easily view this midrash as being somewhat esoteric, but on close examination we can find that the decree to “Write on the horn of an ox that you have no share in the G-d of Israel” hints at one of the foundations of Chanukah, underpinning the essential nature of the holiday.

We celebrate Chanukah, the miracle of the victory over Greece, and the miracle of the oil — when one small jar of pure olive oil lasted for eight days instead of only one when we recaptured the Beit Hamikdash — by lighting a menorah. The main purpose of lighting a menorah is *pirumei nisa* — publicizing the miracle.

The Hebrew word for an advertisement is *pirsomet*, and the student of advertising can learn a number of principles in advertising from the laws of Chanukah:

PRIME TIME

- the menorah should ideally be lit at dusk or nightfall when people are on the street, returning home from work
- if someone returns home too late for anyone outside to see the lit menorah, then they should advertise the miracle to their family by lighting with them
- if it is both too late to light with family and for others outside to see, one cannot properly fulfill the mitzvah

because there is no *pirumei nisa*, and therefore the menorah is lit without saying a *beracha*.

PRIME LOCATION

- ideally the menorah should be placed in the doorway to the street, where it will be best seen
- in a place where it’s too cold or dangerous to light the menorah outside near the street, we place it inside at the window where the most people can see the lights
- if one lives too high above ground and lights where no one else can see – one has not fulfilled the mitzvah

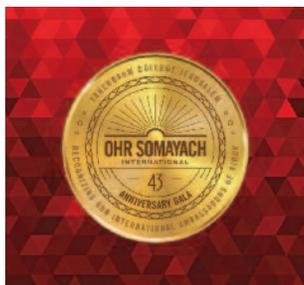
PRIME AUDIENCE

- in order to publicize the miracle in a place where a large audience congregates we light a menorah in shul with a *beracha*, even though no one actually fulfills the mitzvah with this lighting

The struggle between the Greeks and the Jews was primarily one of ideology. In propagating their decrees against the Jews (including prohibiting circumcision, the observance of Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh and the laws of family purity) the Greeks were trying to get the Jews to break their connection to G-d.

In order to spread their message they advocated an advertising technique which is prevalent today – the bumper sticker. It’s just that the predominant vehicle in their day was the ox-drawn cart. “Write on the horn of an ox that you have no share in the G-d of Israel.”

Advertising, too, is a battle of ideas. This Chanukah, with our lighting the Chanukah lights, we demonstrate that the message of the Greeks has failed, as we spread the word of the miracles of Chanukah.



Highlights from the 43rd Anniversary Gala Dinner

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The Miracle Behind Nature

BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

The Beit Yosef asks the famous question: “Why do we celebrate Chanukah for eight days if there was already enough oil for the first day?” More succinctly, why is the first day considered as part of the miracle? As many as five hundred answers, including three from the Beit Yosef, have been given to this well-known question. However, most importantly, we will attempt to understand how we may benefit personally and practically from this knowledge.

The Nefesh Hachaim (1:2) points out one very clear distinction between man’s creative abilities and G-d’s creative abilities. When man creates something, the thing itself is independent from him, and he may easily walk away from it without causing any significant losses to the created object. However, even after G-d created the world, He still continues to sustain it. If G-d were to cut off His special *hashgacha*, His sustaining power, for even a second, the world would instantly cease to exist. This idea is hinted at in the blessing before *kriat shema* where it describes, “He (G-d), in His kindness, renews the works of creation everyday, always”. G-d literally renews the creation every second by giving everything the sustaining power that keeps it going.

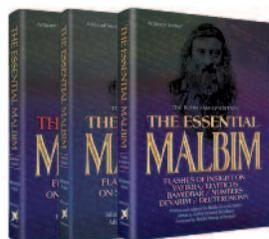
The Ramban at the end of *parshat Bo* says that the purpose of miracles is to instill in us this very idea. Through witnessing a miracle we are meant to recognize G-d’s mastery over nature. This is so, to the point where we see the same Divine guiding hand in nature as we do in miracles. In this light, revealed miracles are meant to be a stepping-stone to truly believing and knowing that nature, too, is run by G-d. Ultimately, the only difference between nature and miracle

is that we are accustomed to nature. This is why in the silent *shemoneh esrei* we thank G-d for His miracles that are with us everyday. The Pri Tzadik (Chanukah, 14) explains that the miracle we are referring to in this context is, in fact, nature.

One reason behind the idea of the ten plagues in Egypt was to truly inculcate this idea. By altering nature on every possible level in Egypt, G-d revealed that He is the One behind everything in this world. This is perhaps one reason behind the commandment to remember the leaving of Egypt everyday. By constantly reminding ourselves of the spectacular miracles that were performed then, we are reminded of the fact that G-d controls nature as He does everything else. On the holiday of Chanukah, G-d performed an open miracle in which He showed to the world that He can easily defy the laws of nature. However, so much more essential than that idea is that by performing an open miracle, G-d is affirming that He Himself controls nature. From the fact that oil burned during the last seven days, when nature would have dictated otherwise, we learn that the oil burning even on the first day, the day in which, naturally, there was no miracle at all, is in fact just as supernatural as the following seven.

Based on this, Rabbi Simcha Zissel (Kitvei Hasaba M’Kelm, Chanukah v’Purim, 5) explains that the reason why the first day of Chanukah too is a celebration, regardless of the fact that there was already enough oil to burn for that first day, is because the very idea of oil burning at all is miraculous from a Torah perspective. We celebrate the first day of Chanukah to declare that undeniably nature itself is miraculous.

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