

OHRNET

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IN CHUTZ LA'ARETZ PLEASE SAVE THIS FOR NEXT WEEK

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Premium of Freemium

“...regarding this, the poets would say, ‘Come to Cheshbon! Let it be built and established as the city of Sichon!’” (21:25-27)

For those of us whose memories stretch back to 8-track cartridges, the current revolution in music streaming is truly mind-boggling. Spotify is a ‘freemium’ service (we’ll come back to that) that offers access to over 50 million tracks. If we say that the average lifetime of a human being is 25,915 days, so that’s 621,960 hours and 37,317,600 minutes, and the average track is about 3 minutes long – so that’s enough music to keep you going for over four lifetimes – assuming that you give up sleeping and spend your entire life listening to music. Now that’s what I call dedication!

It seems almost too good to be true. You never need to buy another record! Once in a very long time, they’ll play an ad, but then, why not? And then the ads seem to be a teensy bit more frequent, almost something you wouldn’t notice. And then comes an ad that says that if you want all the ads removed, you can get a free subscription for three months and then you start to pay. There’s no such thing as a free lunch. The ads start to come with more and more frequency. Two ads one after the other, and then three. At this point I was sorely tempted to give up and just pay. But I was fascinated to know how far Spotify would be prepared to take this ‘nuisance factor.’ One track every ad? I’ll let you know when I get there...

I was thinking that the *yetzer hara* (negative human inclination) must have taken a lesson from Spotify.

“...regarding this, the poets would say, ‘Come to Cheshbon! Let it be built and established as the city of Sichon!’”

Commenting on the verse in this week’s Torah portion, the Gemara (Bava Batra 78a) says, “Said Rav Shmuel bar Nachman in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: What is the meaning of the verse, ‘the poets (*hamoshelim*) would say...?’ Answer: ‘*Hamoshelim*’ are those who rule over their evil inclinations. ‘Come to Cheshbon’ means Come, let us make an ‘account’ (*cheshbon*) of the world, meaning, let us consider the loss incurred by the fulfillment of a mitzvah against the reward for performing it and set that against the gain (the pleasure) of a transgression against the loss it involves.

We all have a little voice inside us that loves a freebie, but when you go into a restaurant where there are no prices on the menu, remember there’s no such thing as a free lunch – or a free record for that matter. Life comes as a *freemium*.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Shabbat 107-113

Tips for Honoring Shabbat

The following Talmud Tips are all derived in our *daf* from Sefer Yeshayahu (58:13-14), where we find various non-*melacha* activities that are forbidden on Shabbat and the reward for refraining from them: “If you refrain on Shabbat from doing your affairs on My holy day, and you call the Shabbat a delight... and you will honor it (*v’chibadeto*) by not doing your ways (*me’asot derachecha*)... and not speaking ‘a thing’ (*v’daber davar*), then, you will delight with Hashem, and I will cause you to ride on the high places of the Land, and I will give you the inheritance of Yaakov, your father, for Hashem has spoken.”

Dressing Up for Shabbat

Rabbi Yochanan said, “My clothes honor me.”

Rashi explains that clothes honor the person who wears them. Rabbi Yochanan wore “rabbinical garb” that was suitable for him and therefore honored him. Likewise, when a person dresses up for Shabbat, his clothing helps him express his honor for Shabbat.

The *beraita* learns from the word *v’chibadeto* – and you will honor Shabbat – that “one should not dress on Shabbat as he dresses during the week.” Dressing up on Shabbat shows great honor to Hashem, His Creation and His gift of Shabbat to the Jewish People.

- *Shabbat 113a*

Not Walking the Walk

We learned in a *beraita*, “One should not walk on Shabbat in the same manner as one walks during the week.”

This teaching is based on the same verse in Sefer Yeshayahu, specifically the words *me’asot derachecha* – from doing your [regular] paths. In defining a type of walk that should not be done on Shabbat, the *gemara* cites a dialogue between Rebbi and Rabbi Shimon b’Rabbi Yossi. Rebbi asked if a *pesiah gasah* (a large step) is permitted on Shabbat. The answer he received was, “It is not only prohibited on Shabbat, but during the week as well since a *pesiah gasah* takes away 1/500th of one’s eyesight.” Since this manner of walk is forbidden during the week as well as on Shabbat, how is

pesiah gasah an example of a manner of walk that is forbidden on Shabbat although permitted during the week?

The Maharsha explains that although *pesiah gasah* is forbidden during the week due to health reasons (and is a sign of the very negative character trait of haughtiness), there is no formal Torah prohibition or rabbinical enactment that bans it during the week. On Shabbat, however, in addition to not walking in this manner due to safety considerations, there is a *specific ban* on *pesiah gasah*, based on the words *me’asot derachecha* in Sefer Yeshayahu.

- *Shabbat 113a-b*

Not Talking the Talk

We learned in a *beraita*, “One should not speak on Shabbat in the same manner as one speaks during the week.”

This prohibition is based on the words *v’daber davar* in Sefer Yeshayahu. This additional enactment is another way to help us properly honor Shabbat. According to Rashi this law prohibits talking on Shabbat about the weekday and mundane matters of business since it is an activity not allowed on Shabbat. Rabbeinu Tam agrees that business talk is forbidden, but that it is learned from a different source than *v’daber davar*. He writes that *v’daber davar* teaches that one should not talk on Shabbat *excessively*, even about permitted topics. A support for this idea is a teaching in the Talmud Yerushalmi that our Sages only ‘barely’ permitted greeting others on Shabbat with “Shabbat Shalom.”

The Maharsha offers a reason for this emphasis on the quality and quantity of our speech on Shabbat. “Word is equivalent to work on Shabbat,” he explains. Where do we see this? The Torah states that Hashem rested on the seventh day “from all the *work* that He had done.” (*Ber. 2:2*) David Hamelech writes that “with the *word* of Hashem” everything was created. (*Tehillim 33:6*) Hashem’s “word(s)” did the “work” of creating the world. Therefore, since word is work, we should take special care on Shabbat in choosing what to speak about and how much speech is really necessary. (See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 306 and 307 for more details regarding “kosher talk” on Shabbat).

- *Shabbat 113b*

Q & A

Questions

1. "Take a perfect *Para Aduma* (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" *temima* mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a *Para Aduma*?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *Para Aduma*; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the *mitzvah* of the *Para Aduma* entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that *all* of the congregation came to *Midbar Tzin*?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of *Para Aduma*?
8. During their journey in the *midbar*, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the *entire* congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon rather than pass through Moav to enter *Eretz Canaan*?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

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

Answers

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains *tahor*; b) he, but not his clothing, contracts *tumah*; c) he and his clothing contract *tumah*.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were *all* fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to *speak* to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the *midbar*. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - *Har Sinai* for receiving the Torah, *Har Nevo* for Moshe's burial, and *Hor Hahar* for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, which was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, to which everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the *Eretz Canaan* side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d's command, "Do not harass them" (*Devarim* 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Take a Breather (Part 1)

In this 3-part mini-series, we will discuss the five Hebrew words for the “soul.” In Part 1 we discuss the different etymologies of the words *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah*; in Part 2 we discuss the functions of the *Nefesh*, *Ruach*, and *Neshamah*; and in Part 3 we discuss the role of the *Chayah* and *Yechidah*, as well as their etymological basis. In doing so, we will better understand how these five words are not merely synonyms. Rather, each word carries its own unique meanings and implications.

The most common word in the Bible for the “soul” is *Nefesh*. In fact, cognates of the word *Nefesh* appear in the Bible over 750 times! As Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed* 1:41) already notes, the word *Nefesh* carries multiple meanings. Nonetheless, each of these different meanings relates back to the soul in one way or another.

Sometimes, *Nefesh* refers to “blood” (see Num. 19:13, Deut. 12:23, *Bechoros* 6b, and *Niddah* 9a), while in other cases, *Nefesh* refers to somebody who died, i.e. somebody who lost his *Nefesh* (see Lev. 19:28; 21:1, Num. 9:6). In fact, death is often described in the Bible as involving the *Nefesh* leaving (for examples, see Gen. 19:17, 35:18, Num. 21:4, 23:10, I Sam. 21:29). (Interestingly, Rabbinic literature typically describes death as the *Neshamah* exiting the body, not the *Nefesh*).

In other cases, *Nefesh* refers to one’s “will” or “wants” (see Rashi to Gen. 23:8, Ex. 15:9, Jer. 15:1, Prov. 13:2). Rashi (to *Chullin* 120a) explains that one’s *Nefesh* receives satisfaction when his wants are fulfilled. The word *Nefesh* also serves as a self-referent, i.e. “my *nefesh*” means “myself” (see Rashi to Yechezkel 32:10, Jer. 51:14, Ps. 35:3, *Shabbos* 105a, *Sanhedrin* 96a).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the origins of the word *Nefesh* to the two-letter root PEH-SHIN, which refers to something that “grows,” “increases,” or otherwise “expands” (see Jer. 50:11, Hab. 1:8, Mal. 3:20). In that sense, *Nefesh* refers to the incorporeal soul that does not experience atrophy with age as the physical body does. Rather, its horizons are always expandable, as the *Nefesh* always has within it the potential to achieve and attain more and more. [Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) offers a similar idea, even connecting *Nefesh* to the root PEH-SIN, which also refers to “expansion,” see *HaKtav VeHaKabbalah* to Ex. 23:12, 31:17, and Deut. 12:23, as well as Rashi to *Iyov* 35:15.]

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) offers two ways of explaining the etymology of the word *Nefesh*: First, he connects *Nefesh* to *neshef*, which means “blowing” (Ex. 15:10, Isa. 41:24), by reordering the letters NUN-PEH-SHIN as NUN-SHIN-PEH. According to this approach, *Nefesh/neshef* is etymologically connected to *Neshamah/neshimah* (“breathing,” see below). The unspoken basis for that connection is the interchangeability of the letters PEH and MEM. Alternatively, Rabbi Marcus explains that *Nefesh* derives from the two-letter root NUN-PEH, which refers to “movement,” and recalls the constant movement of “breathing.” In this approach, he compares *Nefesh* to the words *napach* (“blowing,” Gen. 2:7, Isa. 52:16), *nafah* (“sifting”), *nofef* (“waving,” Isa. 10:32, 30:28, 13:2) and *nafatz* (“spreading,” Gen. 9:19, I Sam. 13:11).

A verb cognate of *Nefesh* means to “rest” or “relax.” For example, when the Bible reports that G-d “rested” on the seventh day of Creation, it uses the word *Vayinafash* (Ex. 31:17). Rashi explains that *Vayinafash* refers to “resting,” because when one stops working he gives his *Nefesh* a chance to relax and “catch its breath (*neshimah*.)” (In Modern Hebrew, the word *nofesh* refers to “vacation” or “recreation.”)

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 31:17) defines the *Nefesh* as a creature’s unique individuality or personality (see his remarks to Gen. 1:20, 9:4 as well). He uses this to explain the connection between *Nefesh* and the notion of “resting”: When one is engaged in work, he toils in something external to himself, but when relaxing from work, one withdraws into one’s own personality and uniqueness. Only when a person rests and does not try to labor in something external to himself can his own individuality shine forth.

Sometimes, the word *Nefesh* also means “name,” such as when G-d refers to His own *Nefesh* by which He swears (see Rashi and Radak to Ps. 24:4, as well as Ibn Janach’s *Sefer HaRikmah* p. 180). Based on this, Rabbi Reuven Margolios (1889-1971) writes that a tombstone is sometimes called a *Nefesh* (see *Eruvin* 53a, 55b, *Sanhedrin* 48a) because it typically has the deceased’s “name” engraved on it.

Like *Nefesh*, the word *Ruach* also carries multiple meanings. Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed* 1:40) explains that *Ruach* primarily refers to the elemental “air” (Gen. 1:2). From that meaning, it was borrowed to also refer to the “winds” (Ex. 10:13, 10:19), and since the winds can be said to blow from four directions, it also came to mean “direction” or “corner” (see *Yechezkel* 42:16, 42:18).

Maimonides explains that *Ruach* also refers to a “life-giving spirit” (Ps. 79:39, Gen. 7:15), and, as such, is what remains of a person after death, because it cannot be physically destroyed (Koh. 12:7). Raavad (in his commentary to *Sefer Yetzirah*) explains that *Ruach* obviously does not refer to the “wind” or “air” that a person breathes. Rather, it refers to a sort of spiritual engine which powers man and is energized directly by G-d. Indeed, Moses twice describes G-d as the “G-d of the *Ruach* of man” (Num. 16:22, 27:16), because He is the One who grants us that “life-giving spirit.”

Additionally, *Ruach* also refers to “prophecy,” which is a Divine influx of information (Num. 11:17, 11:25, II Sam. 23:2) and – like *Nefesh* – *Ruach* can also refer to one’s “personal likings,” “wants,” (Prov. 29:11, Isa. 19:3), and “temperament” (see *Iyov* 15:13 where *Ruach* means “anger”). Overall, the word *Ruach* with its various imports appears in the Bible some 390 times.

Rabbi Pappenheim combines all these meanings of the word *Ruach* into the two-letter root REISH-CHET, which refers to “air.” Just as “air” is light and almost indiscernible, so does the term *Ruach* refer to the “soul” as something that is abstract and undetectable by the physical senses. In discussing other words derived from this bilateral root, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *revach* (“open space”) is typically filled up with “air,” and *yareach* (“moon”) is called so because its movements control the “winds.”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 8:21, Ex. 30:25) relates the word *Ruach* to *reyach* (“smell”), whose root is REISH-YOD-CHET, and compares those words to another two words: *reichaim* (“millstone”), whose root is REISH-(YOD)-CHET, and *rokach* (“pulverization”), whose root REISH-KUF-CHET is related because of the interchangeability of YOD and KUF. Rabbi Hirsch explains that *reyach* primarily refers to those tiny smell particles that emanate from things that smell. As such, *reyach* relates to the process of “pulverizing” and smashing with a “millstone” – both of which reduce bigger objects into smaller bits. Although Rabbi Hirsch does not explain how this relates back to the word *Ruach*, Rabbi Marcus writes that *Ruach* is derived from *reyach* because the winds are the forces that carry smells from one place to another.

The word *Neshamah* differs from *Nefesh* and *Ruach* in that it refers *only* to the “soul,” and has no other meaning. It is seemingly because of this that the word *Neshamah* appears only 25 times in the Bible. Interestingly, a survey of all those

instances shows that cognates of *Neshamah* never refer to animals. This is because only people have a *Neshamah* (Ibn Ezra to Gen. 7:21, Koh. 3:21, see also Radak to Isa. 42:5).

That said, the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 14:9) connects the word *Neshamah* with *neshimah* (“breathing”) by deriving the lesson that one must thank G-d for every time he *breathes* from the verse, “Every *Neshamah* praises G-d, Hallelujah!” (Ps. 150:6).

Shoresh Yesha adds that the letter MEM from *Neshamah*’s root NUN-SHIN-MEM can be interchanged with BET or PEH, both of which yield words that refer to “blowing” (like *Mashiv HaRuach* with a BET, and *neshef*, mentioned above, with a PEH). Indeed, Rashi (to *Yoma* 85a) seems to define death as the point when a person no longer *breathes* (which may have halachic implications for the brain death controversy).

Similarly, Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* writes that *Tinshamet* – a non-Kosher predatory bird, often translated as “owl” (see Lev. 11:18, Deut. 14:16) – is derived from the root NUN-SHIN-MEM that relates to the *Neshamah* and “breathing,” because when one sees such a bird he starts breathing heavily (presumably out of fright).

Ibn Ezra (to Gen. 7:21 and *Shitah Acheret* to Gen. 2:7) writes that other sages have said that the word *Neshamah* relates to the word *shamayaim* (“Heavens”), and invokes the fact that man’s soul comes from Above. Ibn Ezra admits that even if there is a no etymological connection between *Neshamah* and *shamayaim*, they can still be connected thematically.

Rabbi Pappenheim actually offers a systematic framework for understanding the connection between *Neshamah* and *shamayaim*, explaining that both words are derived from the biliteral root SHIN-MEM, which refers to anything “abstract” that cannot be perceived by the material senses. Other words derived from that two-letter root include *shahm* (“there”) and *shem* (“name”), both of which denote abstract ideas rather than tangible stuff. In that sense, *shamayaim* refers to a wholly spiritual part of Creation, which transcends sentient perception, just as the *Neshamah* denotes a person’s spiritual essence, which one cannot see or otherwise perceive in a physical way. Rabbi Mecklenburg calls this a person’s *geist* – a German word that is related to the English words *gist* and *ghost*.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The laws of the *Parah Adumah*, the red heifer, are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death.

After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam’s righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people’s welfare. G-d commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people’s lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of G-d’s mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock produced

water merely at Moshe’s word. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land.

Bnei Yisrael resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him for 30 days. Sichon the Amorite attacks *Bnei Yisrael* when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, *Bnei Yisrael* conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSING FIVE: WHAT BIG EYES YOU HAVE... ALL THE BETTER TO SEE YOU WITH!

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who gives sight to the blind.”

The fifth blessing thanks G-d for having given us sight. The origin of the words “gives sight to the blind” is chapter 146 from the Book of Psalms, verse eight. There is an obvious practical dimension to the blessing: Sight is a precious gift that has been granted to us, and it is incumbent upon us to thank G-d for having given it to us.

But there is a much deeper element as well. As was mentioned in the introduction, each blessing serves as a step upwards to the next blessing and it is designed to help elevate us toward the next spiritual level. The previous blessing revolved around the recognition that there are commandments to keep, but now we have reached the point where we are able to open our eyes and see those commandments. Therefore, we thank G-d for having allowed us to reach this moment of comprehension that we are surrounded by innumerable opportunities to perform the commandments and to do G-d’s Will.

In chapter 21 of Genesis the Torah describes the plight of Hagar and her son Yishmael. They were banished from Avraham’s encampment, and, having lost their way, they ended up wandering aimlessly through the desert. Yishmael was sick with fever and needed abundant amounts of water to drink. Very soon their water supply dwindled and finally disappeared. It reached the point that Hagar despaired for Yishmael’s life. Unable to watch her son’s pitiful state any longer, she left him under a tree and moved away so that she wouldn’t have to see him die of thirst. And then she did what she had seen and been taught to do in Avraham’s home. She turned to the only One who could help her, and she beseeched G-d to save

her son. Verse 19 reads, “Then G-d opened her eyes and she perceived a well of water, she went and filled the skin with water and gave the youth to drink.” Our Sages point out that the verse does not state that G-d created a new well for Hagar. Rather, the well was there all along. All that G-d did, so to speak, was to open Hagar’s eyes to what was there in front of her the whole time. So, too, in our daily lives there are occasions when we do not see things that are right there in front of our very eyes. My father used to tell me that the best hiding place is out in the open, because that is the place where most people do not think to look!

At this moment in our journey through the Morning Blessings we are ready to “open our eyes.” To open our eyes to the dazzling array of commandments that await us every day to fulfill them. And that is why, at this significant juncture, our Sages saw fit to compose a blessing that reflects our eagerness to do just that.

In a perhaps even more profound approach, Rabbi David Kimchi, one of the classic commentaries on Tanach, writes that the spiritual darkness that accompanies each and every exile is comparable to blindness. Exile prevents us from seeing G-d clearly, and, as a result, makes it incalculably more challenging to connect to Him. Rabbi Kimchi concludes by writing that when the redemption that we await for so long finally occurs, it will be like a flash of the most brilliant radiance, which will illuminate our lives totally, and will banish blindness from our eyes forever.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Seeing Snakes

The journey had been long. After thirty eight years it now appeared as though they were retreating and turning back. The prospect of a long detour drained their spirit and sowed discontent. Now, all of their provisions had been made, but the people complain of their endless days in the wilderness under monotonous and abnormal conditions: *Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? For we have no bread and no water, and our souls are weary of this insubstantial nourishment!*

The nourishment that they had been provided with by miracles had become monotonous. G-d's grace, which had guided them daily for all these years, had become routine. They wanted to reach their destination and grew impatient.

In response, G-d *released* the snakes. These snakes were not *special* sent. They had always existed in the wilderness. However, until this point, G-d's Providence had kept them away from the people. For all these 'monotonous' years, He had neutralized the venomous fangs of these predators. Now, G-d removed this restraint and the snakes behaved as snakes would naturally behave in the wilderness – they bit the people. The purpose of the snakebites was for the people to realize and appreciate the special protection they had experienced until now.

Now they would see the dangers that G-d had spared them from, which lie at every step in the wilderness.

Moshe is instructed to fashion a copper snake and affix it to a tall pole. To be cured from the snakebite, the victim would have only to look upon this snake, to imprint on his mind the image of the snake – the symbol of the perils which G-d spares us from at all times, without our even knowing it. In this way, one will live with the consciousness that every breath of one's life is a new gift of G-d's goodness and might.

Rabbi Hirsch concludes his commentary with a timeless message to renew gratitude during moments of discontent:

“A person is capable of reconciling himself to any fate...if only he will regard himself always as one who was saved from danger by G-d's grace and given back his life as a gift. A person will feel this way if he considers the precipice along whose narrow edge runs the path of all our lives, a precipice which the benevolent G-d screens from our view lest we become dizzy, and over which He carries us in His power and goodness as on eagle's wings. A person would bless G-d for dealing kindly with him, if he would only see [the venomous snakes] which lurk on our path unseen, and which only G-d's almighty Providence renders harmless.”

- Source: Commentary, Bamidbar 21:48

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu •
www.ohr.edu

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LAWS OF SHABBOS – A PRACTICAL GUIDE

by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

Introduction

We all want to do the right thing, to grow and become better people. To reach this goal, we often read *sifrei mussar* (books about character building) that instill in us the drive to push ourselves. However, the commentaries tell us that this is not enough. Without being well versed in halacha, even a well-meaning person can easily transgress the Torah. Take, for example, someone who decides to work on *hakaras hatov* (expression of gratitude). He toils over many books discussing the importance of showing gratitude, and eagerly looks for opportunities to put his learning into practice. So, when it comes time to pay back his friend the money he lent to him previously, he decides he will bring his learning into action by buying his friend a gift to express his tremendous heartfelt gratitude. Though he obviously meant well, he actually transgressed the prohibition of paying interest!

Even though, in the case above, the person didn't intend to commit a transgression, the Gemara still says that such an individual needs atonement (*Nazir 23a*). This is especially so in our case because he wasn't fully innocent, as he should have made time to learn the appropriate halachos. Halacha is, after all, the user-guide for life. The Chafetz Chaim says that this is why the midrash says that one who lacks knowledge can't learn *mussar*. The simple understanding of this is that the *mussar* wouldn't help one who doesn't have an understanding of halacha (and see the introduction to *Shemiras HaLashon* and the Chazon Ish's *Emunah U'Bitachon*, perek 3).

There isn't much that a person can possibly do without knowing halacha, as almost every area of one's life requires knowledge of the appropriate halachos. How can one hold a proper conversation if he isn't versed in the laws of *lashon hara*, flattery, and hurtful speech? How can one eat without knowing the intricate and complicated halachos of which blessings to make on mixtures of food? How can one do business without knowing the laws of buying and selling, overcharging, the detailed laws of taking interest, and the laws of paying one's workers on time? In all these scenarios we see it is impossible to live as a religious Jew without thorough knowledge of halacha. As the Chazon Ish says, with every movement one needs to seek the counsel of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

More than any other area, however, this idea is true when it comes to Shabbos. Given the holiness of the day, there are even more halachos that accompany Shabbos. Simple tasks, such as tidying up the house, tying one's shoes, washing

dishes, moving objects, dusting or washing clothing, wiping a spill, opening bottles and bags of food, changing diapers, opening a fridge, caring for plants and pets, speaking about or reading about certain topics, food preparation, brushing one's teeth, brushing one's hair, using soap, taking medicine, borrowing things, using creams, exercising, taking a shower, playing games, and much more, all have specific halachos when it comes to Shabbos. In light of the above it is no wonder why the *Yaaros Devash* says that if someone hasn't learned *hilchos Shabbos* thoroughly, it is impossible not to transgress Shabbos (see the introduction of the third volume of the *Mishnah Berurah*).

Unfortunately, though, given the complexity of the halachos of Shabbos, there are people who have either never tried to learn them or have tried and given up. With the help of Hashem this new series is meant to combat this unfortunate reality. The point of this new series is to present the halachos in a clear and easy-to-understand format that will make it much simpler to familiarize oneself with the halachos of Shabbos.

Furthermore, there will be a special emphasis on presenting the halacha along with the reasoning behind it in order to help one become aware of the general rules regarding what is and is not permitted on Shabbos, instead of knowing only specific halachos. This has a few advantages. One is that when one knows the reason behind the halachos it makes it much easier to remember them. Also, when one knows the rules behind the halachos one can apply them to other areas that weren't mentioned directly, and then ask one's Rav for the final *psak* halacha. Finally, learning halachos with their reasons makes the learning itself much more enjoyable and intellectually satisfying.

The halachos are written here with both Ashkenazi and Sefardi readers in mind, by pointing out the places where there is a difference of opinion. For the more advanced reader, footnotes were added elsewhere (see Ohr.edu) to include detailed sources of the origins of the halachos, and discussion of how the halachic conclusion was decided.

Readers are encouraged to send in questions, comments and/or suggestions regarding these articles. I conclude here for now with a *tefilla* that in the merit of increasing our awareness of *hilchos Shabbos* we will merit the coming of the Mashiach, speedily in our days.

**For questions, comments and/or suggestions please contact the author at chavivdanesh@gmail.com*