

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

SUCCOT INSIGHTS

DRY LIPS IN PRAYER

The four species, the *etrog*, *lulav*, *hadass* and *arava* correspond to parts of the human body. The *lulav* is the spine; the *etrog* the heart; the *hadass* the eyes and the *arava* the lips.

The four species also correspond to four kinds of Jew: The *etrog* has both smell and taste. It represents the Jew who has both Torah and good deeds. The *lulav*, the palm, has taste but no smell. It represents the Jew who has Torah but not good deeds. The *hadass*, the myrtle, has a beautiful smell, but its fruit is tasteless. It corresponds to the Jew who has good deeds but not Torah. And the *arava*, the willow, has neither taste nor smell. The *arava* represents the Jew who has neither Torah nor deeds.

Which is why it is puzzling that of all the four species, we make the most fuss over the *arava*. We have a special day on Succot where the *arava* is the “star” — Hoshana Rabba. None of the other three species have the honor of a specific day of Succot on which they are

remembered. Why is the *arava*, which represents the least of the Jewish People, celebrated above all the other species?

The message of the *arava* is that G-d loves our prayers. The lips of a Jew are his most precious possession. And even when our prayers seem dry and empty like the *arava*, when they come from a humble heart, G-d loves them, listens to them and accepts them.

“Everywhere that Jews study Torah, Moshe is alive and well in the land of the living.”

Even from the dry lips of someone who is as lacking as an *arava*, G-d has *nachat*. Just as a parent loves the least of his children and takes pleasure when his child tries to please

him, so too G-d loves the least of us and takes pleasure from our attempts to please Him, however dry and limited our attempts may be.

ANY OLD RUBBISH?

If you think about it, a succah is a peculiar thing. We take great pains to deck it out so that it becomes our home away from home. We take in our finest tableware and furnishings. We bedeck it like a princess with all manner of jewelry and decoration. And yet look up at the roof of a succah and what do you see? Rubbish. Dead palm fronds. “The chaff of the vineyard and the granary.”

It’s difficult for us to visualize spiritual realities. We know that on Yom Kippur, if we merit it, all our sins are forgiven. We emerge from synagogue white as snow (hopefully, not from lack of food.)

But not only does Hashem forgive our errors, if we do *teshuvah* out of love, our sins are turned into *mitzvot*.

This is a very difficult concept for us to grasp, and maybe even as we

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sit in our *succot* we may feel a twinge of sadness. Can my sins really become *mitzvot*?

At that moment we can look up and see a perfect visual-aids representation of sins being turned into *mitzvot*. The *schach*, the rubbish which is the ceiling of our *succah*, is its essential part. The word *succah* comes from *schach*. Waste and rubbish have been turned into a *mitzvah* of incomparable spiritual beauty, outshining by far the brightest decoration and adornment. Now we can understand: *Teshuva* that comes from love turns our "rubbish" into *mitzvot*.

V'zot Haberacha

BURIED TREASURE

"So Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there, in the land of Moav, opposite Bet Peor, and no one knows his burial place to this day." (31:4)

Many years ago, there was a small Jewish community somewhere in Poland which had very little to recommend it. Its people were not scholars nor interested in being so. It was a backwater of a backwater. Nothing ever happened there, nor was likely to. It happened that the position of rabbi fell vacant in this town. The president of the synagogue advertised in the newspaper in Lublin "dynamic rabbi needed for important town." Not long afterwards, a young enthusiastic rabbi who had just received his *semicha* (rabbinical ordination) came for an interview. After looking around the town he was rather disappointed. He mentioned to the president that it didn't

seem that much could be done in this town. Nobody seemed to be interested in studying the Torah. He implied that this wasn't really a very important town. The president said to him "What do you mean, this isn't an important town? Do you realize who is buried here?"

"No. Who?"

"The Rambam is buried in this town! Rashi is buried in this town!"

When faced with the possibility of having such illustrious antecedents, the rabbi started to look at the position in a new light. "Okay." He said. "I'll take it."

Some months later, the rabbi was passing by the town's graveyard. On the spot, he decided to pay a visit to the graves of the Rambam and Rashi. The graveyard was not a big place. After half an hour of searching, he was convinced neither the Rambam nor Rashi were present amongst those who rested there. And then he thought to himself "Hang on a minute! The Rambam is buried in Teveria in Eretz Yisrael! Rashi's buried somewhere in France!"

Livid, he demanded to see the president of the synagogue. "You lied to me!" he said, his face quivering from betrayal. "You said that the Rambam is buried in this town; that Rashi is buried in this town. That's not true! The Rambam is buried in Teveria." "No, he isn't." replied the president calmly. "He's buried here." "But that's simply *not true!*" replied the rabbi.

The president explained himself. "The Rambam isn't buried in Teveria, because in Teveria everyone studies him. The Rambam is buried in *this* town because here nobody learns him. Rashi is buried in *this* town because here nobody learns him. I was hoping that you could 'resurrect' them."

"So Moshe, servant of Hashem, died there, in the land of Moav, opposite Bet Peor, and no one knows his burial place to this day."

If the Torah specifies that Moshe died "there in the land of Moav, opposite Bet Peor," how can it immediately say that "no one knows his burial place?"

The righteous are "alive" even when they are dead. It's true that Moshe's body died "in the land of Moav opposite Bet Peor." However, "no one knows his burial place" because everywhere that Jews study Torah, Moshe is alive and well in the land of the living.

Sources:

Dry Lips In Prayer - Midrash Rabba Shemot 35:4,
Ohr Yaheil, Rabbi Mordechai Perlman
Any Old Rubbish? - Rabbi Yissochar Dov Turnheim

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Dedicated in loving memory of our father and grandfather

אברם אייזיק ב"ר יהודה לב ז"ל
ב' מר חשוון תשנ"ה
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

Willow-Power

The Midrash teaches that the four species represent four types of Jews, with the *arava* (willow) representing the lowest level, the person who lacks both Torah study and good deeds. The Midrash further compares the four species to four body parts. The *arava*, with its long, lip-shaped leaves, represents the mouth.

Is there a connection between the mouth and a person who lacks both Torah and good deeds?

When Hashem formed man from dust and breathed life into him, the Torah calls him “a living soul,” which Targum Onkelos renders as “a speaking soul.” Onkelos departs from the seemingly simple translation to teach us that speech is the essence of man’s nature, that the mouth is the essence of humanity.

But what was the purpose of this wonderful gift? With no one else yet created, to whom was man going to speak? To the trees? To the birds?

Rather, the purpose of speech was for man to communicate with his Creator, to distinguish himself and raise himself above the rest of Creation.

The simplest Jew, lacking both Torah and good deeds, still retains “a mouth,” for “Hashem is close to all who call upon Him.” One need not know *how* to talk to Hashem; one need only appreciate that he is indeed speaking to Hashem.

Certainly the numerous laws and ever-deeper levels of

understanding enhance *tefillah* (prayer). However, the essential factor is that the Jew speak to Hashem from the heart. In this, the “simple Jew” can sometimes exceed those involved in Torah and *mitzvot*, for he knows he has no impressive “gifts” for the King, so what he offers he offers with a full heart.

On Hoshana Rabba, we put aside the other three species and wave a bundle of *aravot* by themselves. On Hoshana Rabba, even the simplest Jew, the “*arava* Jew,” now stands on his own feet. Although his lack of knowledge and practice makes him incapable of being deemed righteous, he is capable of flashes of inspiration and clarity that the truly righteous might rarely achieve. Recognizing his lacking and his distance from the Creator, he can take advantage of this distance through his longing to return. His *tefillah* can be innocent and ingenuous, imbued with tremendous inspiration. With his “back to the wall,” he musters all his energy and cries out to Hashem. And in truth, every Jew, no matter how learned or righteous, is a simple Jew.

The province of every Jew, *tefillah* has throughout the ages remained the treasure of the oppressed and distraught, and of the simple, unpretentious Jew. *Tefillah* is the most basic gift of the Jew, to communicate with the Creator. It is open to every Jew who is willing to labor — the labor of the heart.

SUCCOT Q&A

1. According to the Torah, what three basic requirements define a material as valid for use as a succah roof?
2. If the succah causes discomfort (e.g., it’s too cold) to the extent that under similar conditions you would leave your very own house, you are exempt from the mitzvah. Why?
3. What two things are forbidden to do outside of the succah all seven days of the festival?
4. What is the absolute minimum number of meals a person is required to eat in the succah during the seven day holiday?
5. Besides referring to the tree and its fruit, what does the word “*etrog*” mean literally?
6. What is the minimum length of a *lulav*?
7. What is the maximum percentage a person should add to the purchase price of his *etrog* in order to obtain an *etrog* of greater beauty?
8. On the Shabbat that occurs during Succot, we read the Book of Kohelet, in which King Solomon refers to himself as “Kohelet.” Why is King Solomon called Kohelet?
3. Eat (an “established” meal) and sleep. (*Orach Chaim* 639:2)
4. One. Eating a meal in the succah the first night of Succot is a requirement. The rest of the festival, a person can eat “snacks” which are not required to be eaten in a succah. (Outside Israel, one must eat a meal the second night of Succot as well. However, there is no requirement to live outside Israel!) (*Orach Chaim* 639:3)
5. Beauty. (*Ramban Vayikra* 23:40)
6. Its spine must be at least 4 *tefachim* (halachic handbreadths).
7. 33.3% (*Orach Chaim* 656:1)
8. Because he gathered (*kihale*) vast wisdom, and because he, as king, gathered the nation on Succot after the Sabbatical year. (*Rashi, Kohelet* 1:1)

ANSWERS

1. It must grow from the ground, no longer be connected to the ground, and not be receptive to *tumah* (ritual defilement).
2. Because the commandment of living in a succah is to dwell in the succah for seven days the same way you dwell in your house the rest of the year. (*Mishna Berura* 640:13)

SUCCOT SIGNIFICANCE

Carol from Port Orchard, Washington
<ies@web-o.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I am wondering about Succot. Why is it important? What is the present significance? How does this relate to the mashiach (messiah)?

Dear Carol,

Succot celebrates the super-natural protection we, the Jewish People, enjoyed when G-d took us out of Egypt. In this sense, Succot is like Passover. While Passover celebrates our rescue from the Egyptians, Succot goes a step farther, celebrating our miraculous existence in the desert for forty years after that.

Thus, the major significance of Succot is a message of gratitude. If not for the food, water, and shelter G-d gave us in the desert thousands of years ago, we wouldn't be here today. Our gratitude to G-d never fades, just like you never stop being grateful to your parents for giving birth to you. So, for the seven days of Succot, Jews leave the protection of their roofed homes and live in huts covered only with branches, recalling the fact that it is not our homes, but G-d who protects us.

Regarding the connections between Succot and messianic times: According to the Prophet Zecharia, the nations who survive the final "War of Gog and Magog" will come to Jerusalem every year "to prostrate themselves to the King, Hashem...and to celebrate the Succot festival." (Zecharia 14:16)

The Prophet Ezekiel describes the Jewish People prior to the "War of Gog and Magog" as living in an almost-messianic state, having been recently gathered from amongst the nations and living in prosperity in their own land. Then, the world's nations — led by "Gog" from the land of "Magog" — will attack Israel in an attempt to put a final end to the Jewish People.

Magog is identified by the Talmud as "Gothia," the land of the Goths. The Goths were a Germanic people, in keeping with the midrashic rendering of Magog as "Germamia" or "Germania."

Our miraculous victory against Gog is to occur during the Succot season, and those of our enemies who repent and survive will come to Jerusalem each Succot to celebrate the anniversary of our victory.

Rabbi S.R. Hirsch notes that "Gog" is related to the Hebrew word for roof. A roof, with its ability to shut out the heavenly influences of rain and sun, symbolizes man's imagined independence from G-d. The symbol of the roof stands in diametric opposition to the weak succah-booth. A succah, covered only by some meager branches, symbolizes our depen-

dence on G-d. Thus, Gog's struggle is the battle of the "roof" against the "succah," in which those who believe only in man's ability to manipulate nature try to eradicate the Jews, whose very existence loudly nullifies this world-view.

The universal nature of Succot is also alluded to in the special Succot offerings, which were seventy in number. This corresponds to the number of primary nations of the world; i.e., the seventy nations descended from Noah (see *Genesis Chapter 10*). Seventy is also the numerical value of the Hebrew phrase "Gog and Magog."

Sources:

- *Book of Ezekiel 38*
- *Ibid. Commentary by Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, Mesorah Publications*
- *Yerushalmi Megillah 3:9*
- *Targum Yonatan 10:2, Bereishet Rabbah 37:1*

MYRTLE DEALER

Ted Bucklin from California <tubucklin@vom.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I am a myrtle grower in California and I have been preparing Succot myrtle for a gentleman in New York for years, but I am still in the dark about the use of the myrtle stems we so meticulously prepare. I am also interested in exploring the marketplace to see if I can find other potential clients for this product. Could you please explain the significance of myrtle in the New Year celebration, how it is prepared and used, and could you possibly refer me to someone who knows the myrtle market or who might be interested in purchasing my product. Thank you very much.

Dear Ted Bucklin,

Myrtle is one of the "four species" of trees which Jews are commanded to pick up and hold during the Succot festival. As the Torah says regarding Succot, "You shall take to yourselves...the fruit of an etrog tree, palm fronds, braided (myrtle) branches, and brook willows..." (*Leviticus 23:40*).

Myrtles are called "braided" because the leaves grow in sets of three with each set of leaves covering the set above it on the branch, giving the myrtle branch the appearance of a braided chain. The myrtle used for Succot has special requirements; for example it should be complete, and the three leaves of each set should grow from the same point along the stem. Agronomists in Israel have recently developed a method which produces myrtles of the highest standard.

For the expansion of your clientele, contact dealers in Jewish communities throughout the USA. You might do this by contacting official congregations listed in in the phone book.

CLOSE SHAVE

Name@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Is someone who shaves daily all year round allowed to shave during the week of Succot and Pesach (on Chol Hamo'ed)?

Dear Name@Withheld,

No. Shaving is forbidden on *Chol Hamo'ed*. Shaving one's beard with a razor is always forbidden, but during the week of Succot and Pesach, it's even forbidden to trim it with scissors.

In the times of the Chatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer), some Jews in the high society used to shave with a razor, disregarding Jewish Law. Now, the Torah prohibition against shaving with a razor doesn't apply until the beard stubble has grown somewhat (approximately two or three days' growth). So the Chatam Sofer said that it was better for them to continue shaving on *Chol Hamo'ed* so that the hair would not have time to grow to that length, rather than letting it grow during and shaving after the festival, which would entail the violation of hundreds of Torah prohibitions, one prohibition for every two hairs shaved. Many people misunderstood this, mistakenly thinking that the Chatam Sofer was lenient regarding the prohibition of shaving on *Chol Hamo'ed*.

LEFTY LEAVES

Mel Tanen <meltanen@juno.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am left-handed so I hold my lulav (palm branch) in my left hand and the etrog (citron) in my right hand. Do I still place the hadassim (myrtles) to the right of the lulav and the aravot (willows) to the left of the lulav?

Dear Mel Tanen,

According to Ashkenazic custom, a lefty holds his *lulav* in his left hand. However, the setting of the *haddasim* and *aravot* is the same as everyone else, which is that the *haddasim* go on the right of the *lulav* (as you hold the *lulav* with its spine facing you).

The Sephardic custom is that even a lefty holds the *lulav* in the right hand.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 651:3 and Rema
- Mishna Berura *ibid.* note 12 in the name of the Pri Megadim

HOLIDAY WRAPPING

Michael Braitman from Givat Shmuel, Israel <hy59@popeye.cc.biu.ac.il> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What's the significance of "isru chag" (the day after a festival)? Why is there no school (in Israel, at least) on *isru-chag*? A friend said it has something to do with the fact that there was an extra day for people to bring a korban (Temple offering) during the festival, in case they couldn't make it to Jerusalem on time. If so, why is this pertinent to our day, when there are no sacrifices?

Dear Michael Braitman,

Ever go jogging? When you're done, you're not supposed to stop suddenly; it's too big of a shock to the system. Rather, you "warm-down" by walking, and finally you can stop.

The same is true of a Festival. We don't go directly from a joyous festival back into everyday life. We need a day to "warm-down," or rather to "wrap-up" the joy of the Holiday. "*Isru chag*" is that day. "*Isru chag*" literally means "tie up the festival." That is, take the happiness and meaningfulness of the festival and bring it with you into the rest of the year.

In Temple times, festive offerings were brought on *isru chag* of the *Shavuot* Festival. *Isru chag* remains a semi-festive day, even today when there is no Temple.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch 429:2
- Succah 45b
- Jerusalem Talmud, Avodah Zarah 1:5

SUCCAH IN THE SUN

Name@Withheld from New York, NY wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Can one place branches over the open sunroof of one's car in order to create a valid succah?

Dear Name@Withheld,

The *mishna* says "One who makes a succah on a wagon, or on a ship, it is a valid succah."

However, a succah has certain minimum dimensions of height and area. The sunroof must be at least 7 x 7 halachic handbreadths (approximately 70 X 70 cm) and the walls must be at least 10 halachic handbreadths high (approximately 100 cm). Ideally, the branches which cover the sunroof should not sit directly on the metal of the car; but rather, they should rest on top of other wood or branches.

A MAN'S WORK

"Hashem G-d took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it" (2:15)

What was Adam's work? Ostensibly it would appear that Adam was placed in Eden to work and guard the Garden. However, the gender-endings of the two verbs "to work it" and "to guard it" are both feminine. Garden — *gan* — is a masculine noun. The "it" cannot be referring to the garden.

The work and the guarding that Adam had to do was to work and guard his soul. (Soul, *neshama*, is a feminine noun). How was Adam supposed to work and guard his soul? By fulfilling one simple command. Not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Seems like a simple enough job. G-d places Adam in more than a veritable "garden of Eden." He puts him in the real Macoy. Adam has just one mitzvah and he can't even keep that one. What possessed Adam to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil?

Before Adam ate from the fruit, evil existed in the world only in a state of potential. Evil existed outside of Adam. By eating the fruit, Adam ingested evil into himself, thus bringing evil into actuality. But why should Adam have wanted to bring evil into his body? Why take poison?

Adam wanted to serve G-d in the greatest possible way. He reasoned that if his service of G-d consisted of refraining from eating of the fruit when evil was no more than a potential, so to bring the enemy onto his "home ground" and then defeat him would be a much greater way of serving G-d!

Adam's motivation was selfless. His mistake was fatal. Literally. He and Chava (Eve) brought death into the world. Adam tried to second guess G-d. If G-d tells us to do something, He wants us to do *exactly* that, no less and no more.

We can see Adam's mistake from another point of view. The fruit that he was forbidden to eat was not from the "tree of knowledge" as is sometimes misquoted. It was from the "tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil." "Knowledge" in the Torah always connotes connection, conjunction, amalgamation. The union of man and wife is spoken of in terms of "knowledge." Eating from the tree caused a knowledge, a mixing of Good and Evil. It created a world where Good and Evil became very hard to separate.

Sources:

- Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, Rabbi Mordechai Perlmán

WE HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY

"They said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire.' And the brick served them as stone, and the lime served them as mortar." (11:3)

Technology is the conceit of the modern world. The GNS system in our car allows us to receive satellite signals locating our position to within six feet anywhere on the planet. Behind the helm of our trusty gleaming V-8, we are the kings of the road. Previous generations pale into technological primitives.

We have the technology. With a cellular phone we can call from the desert, from the top of a mountain, from the middle of nowhere, and communicate to anywhere in the world. And what are those deathless words that we wish to communicate across the tens of thousands of miles?

"Hi! Guess where I am!"

Now that's what I call progress.

We may know where our car is better than ever before, but when it comes to knowing where we ourselves are — that's a different story.

If we had developed in any real sense over the last couple of thousand years, would we still find anything of value in Shakespeare? If the human spirit had undergone a comparable degree of progress to technology, the poetry and art of those who died hundreds of years ago should seem impossibly quaint to the modern eye. If we were really more advanced, no-one should be in the slightest bit interested in John Donne, Cervantes, Sophocles, Pascal, Mozart or Boticelli — except for historians. And yet, we recognize that our generation is hard put to come anywhere close to these artists.

Technology is an apology for our feelings of inferiority when we compare ourselves to our forebears. Our axiom is "We may have less to say, but we can say it from the middle of nowhere." Cold comfort is better than none.

At the end of this week's Parsha, the Torah describes the attempt of the Generation of Dispersion (*Dor Hapalaga*) to build a tower that reached into the sky.

"They said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks and burn them in fire.' And the brick served them as stone, and the lime served them as mortar."

Rashi comments: *"In Babylon there were no stones.."* Because there were no rocks in Babylon, they were forced to apply technology and invent the brick. Immediately fol-

lowing this verse they say, "Come, let us build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens..." They wanted to make a tower to challenge G-d.

This is a seeming non-sequitur. What does the lack of stones in Babylon have to do with building a city and a tower to challenge G-d? Why is making bricks a harbinger of incipient rebellion?

The *Dor Hapalaga* were intoxicated with technology. Bricks were the Babylonian equivalent of a Saturn V rocket. Take some mud, bake it and voila! Genius. If man can take

mud and turn it into towers and spires and palaces, what can he not do? Is there a limit to his powers?

From this kind of thinking there is a very small step for mankind to think that they can dispense with G-d completely.

"Let us build and make for us a name." We have the technology.

Sources:

- Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld,
Rabbi Yissocher Frand

PUBLIC DOMAIN

RE: CORPORATE HEADS (Ohrnet Nitzavim/Vayelech):

You recently wrote regarding wearing a *yarmulke* (skull cap) at work, and the respect one gains for the integrity of doing so. I would like to relate the following incident told to me by a very religious surgeon, the intern in the incident:

When the intern appeared to participate in an orthopedic surgical procedure, the head surgeon expressed doubt about the intern's ability to operate with his long beard. The intern assured him that the beard would be fully covered by the surgical mask and would not hinder the operation at all. After successfully completing the procedure and impressing the head surgeon with his skills, the head surgeon told the people present that all during his professional life he had tried to hide his own Judaism and here was someone who was professionally competent and not afraid to live openly according to his beliefs. He even offered the intern to join his lucrative group practice in orthopedic surgery!

- Shimshon <shimshon@rokar.co.il>

Regarding the Manhattan man who feels his *yarmulke* hinders his career advancement: I work in a totally non-Jewish business setting in rural Missouri, in a town where I am one of less than a dozen Jews and the only Orthodox Jew, except for my wife. I think that wearing a *yarmulke*'s effect on one's coworkers is often based on the perception of the wearer. Although I only recently started this job, I have never felt that my *yarmulke* was creating a negative response. It is hard to believe that people in Manhattan (where I am originally from) would feel negatively toward *yarmulke* wearing since it is so common in NY.

- Larry Weinberg from Maryville, MO
<edlawlarry@geocities.com>

RE: ROSH HASHANA (Ohrnet Ha'azinu):

You wrote that Jewish kids can feel special when they "get out of school on Rosh Hashana while all their friends are in school." You should be aware that many major county school systems do not have school on Rosh Hashana (first day), Yom Kippur, or the first day of Pesach.

- Menashe Katz
<mkatz@snsnet.net>

Is it not true that Rosh Hashana is the new year for the world, so that actually it should be a worldwide holiday? What a great thing it would be if people worldwide would join together to realize that Hashem is judging the entire world at the same time and thus create a day of world prayer.

- Stuart Wise
<swise@amlaw.com>

RE: WHAT LEVITES NEVER SEE (Ohrnet Nitzavim/Vayelech):

Regarding your Yiddle Riddle, "what does a *levi* never see in his adult life," here's a second answer: Before the *kohen* blesses the congregation (on Festivals outside the Land of Israel, or daily in the Land of Israel) a *levi* washes the *kohen*'s hands. If no *levi* is present then a *bechor* (first-born son) washes the *kohen*'s hands. Thus, a *levi* would never witness anyone other than himself or another *levi* washing the *kohen*'s hands.

- Bruce M Selznick,
Richmond, VA
<bmselznick@juno.com>

PARSHA Q & A

PARSHAT V'ZOT HABERACHA

1. Before giving the Torah, Hashem went to Seir and Mount Paran. Why?
2. Why is Yehuda blessed immediately after Reuven?
3. What covenant (*brit*) did Levi keep?
4. Why was Binyamin blessed before Yosef?
5. Which Tribe received the “best” portion of *Eretz Yisrael*?
6. Besides the sun, which celestial body helps fruit to ripen?
7. If there were only 7 Canaanite nations, why did Yehoshua need to conquer 31 kings?
8. What three things did the land of Zevulun possess?
9. What did visiting merchants see that inspired them to convert to Judaism?
10. The tribe of Gad saw “the beginning — *reishit*.” The beginning of what?
11. The source of the Jordan River was in the territory of which tribe?
12. Which tribe possessed the *Kinneret*?
13. The daughters of which tribe married High Priests and Kings?
14. Who wrote the last eight verses in the Torah, starting with the verse “and Moshe died”?
15. Who buried Moshe?

ANSWERS TO V'ZOT HABERACHA QUESTIONS

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

1. 33:2 - In order to offer the Torah to the people of Seir (Eisav's descendants) and the people of Paran (Yishmael's descendants).
2. 33:7 - Because both of them admitted their sin.
3. 33:9 - *Brit Mila* (circumcision).
4. 33:12 - Because the *Beit Hamikdash*, built in Binyamin's portion, was “more beloved” than the *Mishkan* built in Yosef's portion.
5. 33:13 - Yosef.
6. 33:14 - The moon.
7. 33:17 - Since the Land was so desirable, all foreign kings and governments acquired palaces and property there.
8. 33:19 - *Tarit*, a type of fish; *Chilazon*, a mollusk whose blood was needed for the *techelet* (a dye needed for *tzitzit*); and a type of sand needed for white glass.
9. 33:19 - They saw that the Jews serve one G-d and follow a unified kashrut code.
10. 33:21 - They saw the beginning of the conquest of the land, and chose that as its portion.
11. 33:22 - Dan.
12. 33:23 - Naftali.
13. 33:24 - Asher.
14. 34:5 - According to one opinion, Yehoshua wrote it. Rabbi Meir says Moshe himself wrote it with tears.
15. 34:6 - According to one opinion, Hashem buried Moshe. According to Rabbi Yishmael, Moshe buried himself.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

The Torah's last verses describe Moshe's death. According to Rabbi Meir, Moshe wrote these verses “*B'dima* — in tears.” But this word can also be read “*B'dema* — jumbled.” This implies that Moshe wrote these verses in a disorderly fashion so their meaning could not be immediately discerned.

• Based on *The Vilna Gaon*

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

- 33:6 Why not Shimon?
33:12 The Shelter of Binyamin

SFORNO

- 33:6 Reuven's Blessing
33:7 Shimon's Blessing
33:17 The Kingship of Yosef
33:25-6 The Collective Blessing

PARSHA Q & A

PARSHAT BEREISHET

1. Why does the Torah start with the account of Creation?
2. What happened to the light that was created on the first day?
3. Why isn't the word "good" associated with the second day?
4. How were the trees supposed to taste?
5. On which day were the sun and moon created?
6. Hashem blessed the birds to be fruitful and to multiply. Why did He not do so with the beasts?
7. In whose likeness was man fashioned?
8. What kind of food did Adam eat?
9. Why is "the sixth day" written with the definite article?
10. At the end of the sixth day what was the world still lacking?
11. Why was man made from dust gathered from the entire earth?
12. How is man superior to the animals?
13. Why was it not good that man be alone?
14. Where do we learn that one must not add to a commandment from Hashem?
15. What does it mean that Adam and Chava "knew that they were naked?"
16. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd?
17. What was the marital practice of the generation who lived before the flood?
18. What did Tuval-Cain invent?
19. Why did Chanoch die at a young age?
20. What was the sign that Shem was born with great propensity for righteousness?

ANSWERS TO BEREISHET QUESTIONS

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

1. 1:1 - So that when the nations accuse us of stealing Eretz Canaan from the Canaanites, we can respond that Hashem, as Creator, has the right to give the land to whomever He sees fit, and He gave Eretz Canaan to us.
2. 1:4 - Hashem saw that the wicked would be unworthy of it so He hid it for the righteous.
3. 1:7 - Because the work with the water wasn't completed until the third day. Anything that is incomplete is not "good."
4. 1:11 - The wood was to have the taste of the fruit.
5. 1:14 - They were created on the first day and suspended in the firmament on the fourth day.
6. 1:22 - He did not want the serpent, who was to be cursed, to receive a blessing.
7. 1:26 - In the likeness of the angels.
8. 1:30 - Vegetation.
9. 1:31 - "The" in Hebrew is the letter *hey*, which has a numerical value of five. Hashem created the world on the condition that it will endure only if the Jewish People accept the Five Books of the Torah.
10. 2:2 - Rest.
11. 2:7 - So that wherever he might die, the earth would receive his body.
12. 2:7 - He was given understanding and speech.
13. 2:18 - If he were alone, he would appear to be a god; The creation of woman emphasized man's dependence.
14. 3:3 - From Chava. Hashem commanded not to eat from the tree but she added not to touch it. Because she added to the command she eventually came to transgress it.
15. 3:7 - They had been given one commandment and they had stripped themselves of it.
16. 4:2 - Since the ground had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.
17. 4:19 - They married two wives, one with whom to have children. The other one was given a potion which prevented her from bearing children.
18. 4:22 - Murder weapons.
19. 5:22 - Though he was righteous, he was easily influenced; therefore Hashem took him before his time to protect him from sinning.
20. 5:32 - He was born already circumcised.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

All 49 "gates of understanding" which exist in the world were given by Hashem to Moshe. And all 49 are written in the Torah; some are written explicitly, some are hinted in the words, some are hinted in the *gematria* (numerical values) or in the shapes of the letters, or in the "crowns," the ornamental frills written on top of the letters. All of King Solomon's wisdom came to him through the Torah.

• Ramban, Introduction to the Torah

KASHA!

Name@Withheld from Brooklyn, NY wrote:

This question was asked to me by a friend's father. And here it goes: In Genesis, Chapter 1, after every day's creation, it says "And G-d saw that it was good," with the exception of the second day. Why is this?

Dear Name@Withheld,

Since the work of the second day (the water) was not completed until the next day, Hashem did not call it "good." According to the Midrash, the second day is not called "good" because the waters were then separated, which is a symbol of strife and discord.

PARSHA Q & A

PARSHAT NOACH

1. Which particular sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
2. Why did Hashem tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
3. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
4. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?
5. Why did Hashem postpone the flood for seven days?
6. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
7. What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did Hashem do to protect him?
8. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
9. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
10. What did the olive branch symbolize?
11. How long did the punishment of the flood last?
12. A solar year is how many days longer than a lunar year?
13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to “be fruitful and multiply” directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared.
17. Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called *Yiscah*?

ANSWERS TO NOACH QUESTIONS

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

1. 6:13 - Robbery.
2. 6:14 - So that people would see Noach building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noach would answer, “Hashem is bringing a flood,” it might encourage some people to repent.
3. 6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.
4. 7:2 - Hashem told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. “Kosher” and “non-kosher” are Torah concepts.
5. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Metushelach.
6. 7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.
7. 7:13,15 - People said, “If we see him going into the ark, we’ll smash it!” Hashem surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.
8. 7:22 - The fish.
9. 8:4 - Eleven *amot*.
10. 8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that it’s better to eat food “bitter like an olive” but which comes directly from Hashem, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)
11. 8:14 - A full solar year.
12. 8:14 - Eleven days.
13. 9:3 - After the flood.
14. 9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.
17. 9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noach’s disgrace to Ham. And because Ham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Ham’s fourth son, Canaan.
18. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against Hashem.
19. 11:9 - They lived together peacefully.
20. 11:29 - The word “*Yiscah*” is related to the Hebrew word “to see.” Sarah was called *Yiscah* because she could “see” the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

In Hebrew, “ark” and “word” are synonymous. Furthermore, the ark’s dimensions were 30 x 300 x 50. These numbers correspond to the Hebrew letters “*lamed shin noon*” which spell “*lashon*” — “tongue.” The true “ark” which saved Noach and family were the words of prayer they uttered with their tongues.

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

	RAMBAN	10:9	Nimrod	8:22	The Pre-Flood World
6:19	Miracle of the Ark	10:15	The Land of Canaan	9:6	The Crime of Murder
7:1	Preserving the World	11:32	The Death of Terach	9:9	The Conditions of the Covenant
8:11	The Olive Leaf				
9:12	The Rainbow		SFORNO	9:13	Meaning of the Rainbow
9:18	<i>Ham</i> and Canaan	8:21	The New World		

THE HILL AND THE HOLE

When Haman offered Achashveirosh 10,000 talents of silver for permission to carry out his genocidal plot against the Jews, the king responded: "The silver is given to you as well as the people, to do with them as you see fit." (*Megillat Esther 3:11*). He then gave Haman the royal ring as power for his "final solution."

Our Sages compare this scene to a dialogue between a man who had a hill in his field which obstructed his cultivation of it and another who had a similar problem with a deep hole in his field. Each of them longed for what was in the other's field as a solution to his own problem. One day the fellow with the hole approached the hill owner with an offer to buy his hill from him so that he could fill his hole. The hill owner graciously declined the offer of money and gladly allowed him to removed the hill for the benefit of both of them.

Achashveirosh and Haman both hated the Jews, but for opposite reasons. To the haughty king, this wise and noble people represented a hill that threatened his own stature. To Haman they were lowly, contemptible creatures to look down upon as one would a hole in the ground.

In another sense, these two symbols represent two classical approaches to overcoming anti-Semitism throughout the ages. The Jews who believe they are hated because they are different have discovered that assimilation only earns them the disrespect of those they attempt to imitate, who subsequently look down on them even more than before — the hole! Other efforts to win the affection of non-Jews by reminding them how much they owe the Jews who have enriched their commerce, science and arts, only produce an irritating hill of debts which our enemies, like Achashveirosh, are glad to get rid of.

The only real solution is that indicated in the very next lines of *gemara* commenting on the king's transfer of the ring: "The transfer of this ring achieved more than all of the 48 prophets and seven prophetesses who did not succeed in causing Jews to repent, while this transfer of power did."

• *Megillah 14a*

THE GREATNESS OF TORAH STUDY

The study of Torah, says Rabbi Yosef, is greater than even the saving of lives. As proof he calls attention to two biblical passages which describe Mordechai's return from exile to *Eretz Yisrael*. In the first one (*Ezra 2:2*), Mordechai is mentioned after four others who came togeth-

er with Zerubavel after the Persian ruler Koresh granted permission to return. In the second one (*Nechemiah 7:7*) he is mentioned after five others who accompanied Zerubavel 24 years later when he returned a second time after the building of the second *Beit Hamikdash*.

Why was Mordechai thus demoted, asks Rabbi Yosef. The answer is that during this interval there occurred the Purim miracle and Mordechai became Persian prime minister. Even though this enabled him to save Jewish lives, he was lowered in his prestige among the sages because he could no longer devote himself to Torah study with the same intensity.

This ruling of Rabbi Yosef is posed by Maharshah as a challenge to a halacha in *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 251:14*. The ruling there is that if a community has collected money for the purpose of supporting Torah study, it may divert those funds to pay a tax levied upon it by a despotic ruler. Although the general rule is that property or money set aside for one sacred purpose cannot be diverted to another sacred purpose unless it is of a more exalted nature, it is sanctioned in this case because there is a danger to the lives of poor people in the community whose inability to pay the tax will bring violent action from the ruler against them.

But if the study of Torah is greater than the saving of lives, asks Maharsha, how can funds collected for this more exalted purpose be diverted to a less important cause?

An interesting answer is supplied by Turei Zahav (*ibid. 6*):

There is no doubt that if one is studying Torah and a situation of lifesaving arises he is obligated to interrupt his study in order to save the life, as "nothing stands in the way of lifesaving," say our Sages. So clearly, Torah study must be interrupted for this purpose, and funds collected for Torah study must be diverted to save the lives of the potential victims of the tax collector.

When Rabbi Yosef compares Torah study and lifesaving, he is merely measuring the *merit* of one who was able to study Torah without the interruption of emergencies to the merit of one whose study was compromised by the circumstances which compelled him, like Mordechai, to divert his time and energy to saving lives.

• *Megillah 16b*

RESPECT FOR THE CONGREGATION

A woman, rule our Sages, may not be given an *aliya* to the Torah on Shabbat out of respect for the congregation. This concept appears once again in our *gemara* as an explanation for why one whose torn clothes reveal his

arms and shoulders cannot be the reader of the Torah for the congregation, lead the services for them or bless them if he is a kohen.

What is meant by “respect for the congregation?”

The common understanding is that an individual must show respect to a community. Since a woman is not obligated in the mitzvah of Torah study, as is a man, it is a sign of disrespect for the man’s obligation to have someone who is exempt from that obligation read the Torah publicly for him. Someone who is not properly attired would also be guilty of disrespect for the congregation if he led it in Torah or prayer or even publicly blessed its members.

Tiferet Yisrael, however, offers a different perspective of what our Sages meant with respect for the congregation. Not the honor of the congregation was the concern of our Sages, he maintains, for this would invite the possibility of the congregation waiving the honor due it. Since we find no allowance made by halacha for such a gesture by the congregation, we must conclude that “respect for the congregation” should better be understood as the respect “by the congregation” which must be shown towards Heaven. A congregation has a greater responsibility in its service to Heaven than an individual, and must therefore show its respect for Heaven in a more proper manner.

This approach to “respect for the congregation” fits the cases mentioned in our *gemara* and another *gemara* (*Gittin 60a*) which prohibits reading for the congregation from a scroll containing just one of the five *Chumashim* (*Books of Moses*) rather than the entire Torah. There is some difficulty, however, applying this interpretation to other *gemara* statements (*Yoma 70a and Sotah 39b*) where the term is used in relation to not causing the congregation to idly wait while certain functions are performed (such as rolling the Sefer Torah to the place where it will be read). This would seem to be an indication that indeed “respect for the congregation” is the issue. It may be, however, that an entire congregation idly waiting and not utilizing their presence in the synagogue to pray or study also constitutes a lack of “respect by the congregation” for their responsibilities towards Heaven in such a holy setting.

• *Megillah 23a/24b*

BLESSINGS AND RETURNS

“What happened to your belt?” asked the Sage Rav of his disciple Rabbi Huna when he noticed that he was wearing some makeshift

belt of vegetation rather than his regular one.

“I gave away my belt as collateral in order to secure money to buy wine for Shabbat *kiddush*.”

Rav was so impressed by his disciple’s sacrifice of a personal garment for a mitzvah that he blessed him that he should, as a reward, “be covered with clothes.”

Some time afterwards Rabbi Huna was hosting a wedding for his son Rabba. Rabbi Huna, who was a very short man, lay down upon a bed to rest while his family gathered for the celebration. His daughters and daughters-in-law did not notice his presence and they placed their coats on the bed, completely covering him with clothes in fulfillment of Rav’s blessing.

When Rav heard that his blessing had thus been fulfilled he complained to Rabbi Huna:

“When I blessed you why did you not respond with a blessing of “the same to my master” (Rashi — it may have been a moment of Divine favor and the blessing would have been fulfilled for me as well).

Two problems arise in regard to understanding this story. Why was it necessary to mention the uncomplimentary fact of Rabbi Huna’s diminutive size? Even more puzzling is Rav’s disappointment in not receiving a counter-blessing after seeing the fulfillment of his blessing. What benefit would Rav have derived from being temporarily covered by clothes as was his disciple?

The simple approach to the first question is that it was necessary to mention Rabbi Huna’s size in order to explain why his family members did not notice his presence on the bed where they placed their coats. In regard to the second issue, an interesting explanation is offered in the footnotes of Bach (Rabbi Yoel Sirkis):

Rav was upset because the fulfillment of his blessing indicated that it was moment of Divine favor and had he received a counter-blessing it may well have, in his case because of his greater merit, been fulfilled in the way it was intended by Rav — by being blessed with the wealth which enables one to cover himself with clothes.

A most innovative approach to answering these questions is suggested by Rabbi Yaakov Emden. Rav was the tallest sage of his generation while Rabbi Huna was among the shortest. Rabbi Huna therefore hesitated to return the blessing which Rav gave, as the clothes which fit his short figure would look absurd on the tall figure of his master.

An important lesson is to be learned from this story. When you receive a blessing from anyone, be sure to return it.

• *Megillah 27b*

SIMCHAT TORAH MYSTERY

Mystery surrounds the source of a familiar custom. The *gemara* tells us that on the very last day of Succot (known as “Simchat Torah”) we read the last parsha of the Torah — “Beracha” — and for the haftarah we read from the eighth chapter of Melachim I (8:22) about King Solomon’s prayer at the inauguration of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

Rabbeinu Nissim (Ran) explains the choice of these two sections. Simchat Torah is the climax of the festivals, and it is fitting to read on that day the blessings which Moshe gave to all of Israel. Since a haftarah must follow the spirit of the Torah reading, it is fitting that Moshe’s blessings be followed by the blessings Solomon gave to all of his people.

Tosefot already calls attention to the custom — which is the one we follow — to read as the haftarah the first chapter of Yehoshua. Rabbeinu Nissim’s explanation of this custom is that since we concluded our Torah reading with Moshe’s passing, it is fitting that the haftarah consist of what Hashem commanded Moshe’s disciple, Yehoshua, immediately afterwards.

The explanations are perfect. But there is a mystery as to why we have abandoned what the *gemara* determines as the haftarah. Tosefot cites a source that says the Gaon Rav Hai instituted this custom, but Tosefot wonders what reason there was for deviating from what our *gemara* says.

Rabbeinu Asher (Rosh) cites the Jerusalem Talmud as the source for this custom, but Korban Netanel comments that he was unable to find it there.

Whatever the source, this is the universal Jewish custom just as is the celebration which surrounds the completion of the reading of the entire Torah. The source for this celebration, however, is no mystery. The Midrash, referring to King Solomon making a festive banquet for all his servants when he realized that Heaven had granted his request for wisdom (*Melachim I 3:15*), declares this as a source for celebrating when we finish reading the entire Torah.

Just as Solomon felt a need to celebrate the gift of wisdom granted by Heaven, so do all Jews, who feel so much wiser as a result of reading the entire Torah for a year, feel the need to celebrate with Simchat Torah.

• *Megillah 31a*

EVERY DAY A HOLIDAY

The mitzvah to read on holidays the Torah portions relating to those holidays, says the *mishna*, is hinted at in the passage which concludes the Torah section on holidays: “And Moshe related these holidays of Hashem to

the Israelites.” (*Vayikra 23:44*)

Rashi explains that it would seem superfluous for the Torah to inform us that Moshe related to Israel the *mitzvot* of the holidays, since we already know that Moshe related to them all the *mitzvot*. The hidden message of this passage must then be that he was instructed to tell them to read the Torah sections related to those holidays. In line with this, Maharsha suggests that we gain another perspective of an earlier passage (23:4) in which the holidays are introduced with a command to “proclaim them in their season.” The word “*tikre’u*” (proclaim) in that passage can now also be interpreted literally as “you shall read,” since there is a mitzvah to read the Torah sections related to the holidays “in their season” — on the holidays themselves. Mesechta Megillah ends with a *beraita* informing us that Moshe instituted that Jews should study the laws of Pesach on Pesach, the laws of Shavuot on Shavuot and the laws of Succot on Succot; they are to ask the halachic authorities about those laws and listen to public lectures about them. This, notes Maharsha, was not included in the Divine command to read the Torah sections related to the holidays, but was an initiative of Moshe to create a greater awareness of what is required of Jews on those special days.

But why only in regard to the three festivals did Moshe institute this practice, and not in regard to Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur which are also mentioned in that same Torah chapter about holidays?

The answer, concludes Maharsha, is that Moshe felt a need for Jews to study the *mitzvot* relating to holidays which came at specific times of the year in order to refresh their knowledge of the essence of those days. The essence of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, however, is the repentance which a Jew must achieve in order to be worthy of favorable judgment. Such repentance is not a once a year issue but a matter which is relevant every day of the year.

• *Megillah 32a*

DON'T MIX YOUR SIMCHAS

Weddings are not held during *Chol Hamo'ed* — the intermediate days of the Festival of Pesach or Succot. The reason given in the *mishna* is that getting married is an occasion of *simcha*.

This explanation is greeted with wonder in the *gemara*. Our *mesechta* is filled with the laws regulating what sort of work may be done during these special days because, as Rashi points out in the very first *mishna*, the Torah communicated to us that some categories of work should be prohibited on *Chol Hamo'ed* and left it up to the Sages to deter-

mine which ones. But why should a wedding be prohibited just because it is an occasion of *simcha*?

A number of explanations are offered by the Talmudic Sages. One view is that it is improper to “mix one *simcha* with another” because the *simcha* one has in getting married will make it impossible to single-mindedly focus on the *simcha* of the festival.

A second explanation goes a step further. The *simcha* of getting married will actually cause him to neglect the *simcha* of the festival and goes against the Torah command of “You shall rejoice in your festival” (*Devarim 16:14*) which implies an exclusion of “joy with your new wife.”

While these two explanations revolve around the competition between the *simcha* of marriage and that of the festival, the Sage Ula returns us to the basic restriction of work on *Chol Hamo'ed*. Since a Jew will be so concerned with properly preparing for the great *simcha* of his wedding, he is bound to invest a great deal of work and such a strenuous effort is prohibited.

Rabbi Yitzchak completes the list of explanations by pointing out that since getting married is such an occasion of *simcha* a Jew will be tempted to put off his wedding until the festival when he is free from his work and when he is in a festive mood. Such a delay, which can sometimes add up to almost half a year, postpones the fulfillment of the important mitzvah of getting married and bringing children into the world.

The explanation cited by the halachic authorities is the first one about not mixing *simchas*. The *gemara* provides us with a fascinating source for this rule:

When King Solomon inaugurated the *Beit Hamikdash*, he led the entire people in a celebration which consisted of the seven days before Succot (*Melachim I 8:65*). Why did he not delay the inauguration ceremony until Succot itself so that they could celebrate both it and the festival simultaneously? The answer is that this would have constituted the mixing of *simchas*. This is why the aforementioned passage stresses that there were two distinct seven-day celebrations, to teach us that such mixing should not be done.

• *Mo'ed Katan 8b-9a*

WHEN TO ASK AND WHEN NOT

Rabbi Yannai had a disciple who was constantly posing challenges to his Talmudic lectures. When it came to the Shabbat of a Festival, this disciple did not ask any questions. In praise of his behavior, Rabbi Yannai cited a passage in *Tehillim (50:23)* which promises a revelation of Divine salvation for one who makes a proper evaluation of the

course he takes in life.

Rashi explains that the disciple's motive in refraining from challenging Rabbi Yannai on those special days was his fear that perhaps he would not be capable of answering his question and would suffer great embarrassment since large crowds of people came to hear the lecture on those days. The discretion displayed by the disciple in evaluating the proper time to ask and the proper time to be silent was considered by Rabbi Yannai as a fulfillment of *Tehillim's* description of a “proper evaluation of the course.”

Maharsha finds difficulty with Rashi's approach, both because it is inconceivable that Rabbi Yannai should stand the danger of being stumped and because showing discretion as to the proper time for asking can hardly be described as a course.

The explanation he offers is based on a fascinating analysis of posing challenges which every student of Talmud will enjoy:

The questions which we find in the *gemara* break down into two basic categories. One is the challenge posed by an apparent contradiction between the statement made and another source, like a *mishna* or a *beraita*. The other is a challenge to the need for making such a statement since the information it conveys is already known to us, either because it appears in one of the aforementioned sources or because it is obvious from simple logic.

These are the sort of questions which Rabbi Yannai's scholarly disciples asked him daily. On the Shabbat of the Festival, when he delivered his lecture to a general audience, the subject matter was of so simple a nature that there was nothing which could be challenged by contradiction. It also would have been absurd for any of his scholarly disciples to challenge him on that day about the need for teaching matters which were already common knowledge, since that knowledge was not common to the common people who gathered on that day to hear the lecture.

Why then did this disciple bother coming to the lecture if there was apparently nothing in it which was not already known to him? The answer is that he made an evaluation of the Divine reward he would be eligible for if he took the course from his home to the *beit midrash* to attend the lecture. Rabbi Yannai then declared that the passage in *Tehillim* describes this as deserving a reward of “a revelation of Divine salvation” — Divine assistance in discovering some new insight in the simple subject of the lecture which he would not have been capable of gaining with his natural intelligence.

• *Mo'ed Katan 5a*