

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Is There Anyone Else Up There?

“You shall not desecrate My holy Name; rather I should be sanctified among the children of Yisrael; I am Hashem, Who sanctifies you.” (22:32)

A reckless motorcyclist. A stormy night on a twisting mountain road. The rider takes a curve and finds himself face-to-face with a huge truck. He tries to slither to a halt but he and the bike go over the cliff. As he's falling to his death, he sees a root sticking out of the side of the mountain. He grabs it and holds on for dear life. His cries pierce the sky: “If there's Anyone up there, please, please save me!” From out of a flash of lightning and a peel of thunder, a Heavenly voice booms, “Let go of the branch and I will save you!” Says the rider, “Is there anyone else up there?”

It's easy to believe in Hashem when your life doesn't depend on it. When it doesn't 'cost' you anything. That's the difference between *emuna* and *bitachon*. *Emuna* means faith, an intellectual understanding of Hashem's existence. *Bitachon* means trust, putting your life on the line.

Belief is a slippery thing. People often think you either believe or you don't believe. The truth is that a person's *emuna* and *bitachon* constantly wax and wane. *Emuna* is a character trait, and just like any character trait, it requires constant work and attention.

For example, intellectually, a person would agree that being an angry person is a very bad thing, but that won't stop him from being angry unless he works continually to reduce that natural tendency.

Similarly, a person could intellectually agree to the necessity of a Divine Being, without that affecting the way he lives his life. Or affect his trusting Hashem.

The last seven months have been an increasingly challenging opportunity for us to strengthen our *bitachon* in Hashem.

I just got back from London, where I spent some time with some less religious friends. They are faced with a dilemma: as liberal-leaning Anglo-Jews, they have long espoused the values of the Left wing, but they are now faced with the ugly fact that many, if not all, of the political figures that they support are either rabidly, or covertly, antisemitic. Whether they like it or not, they've been 'outed' as Jews.

Hashem is putting us to the test. And not just Jews whose contact with Judaism is at best, 'match, hatch and dispatch.' Also, the so-called religious part of the Jewish People must realize that the real war is being fought in our hearts, between the voice that believes and the voice that doubts. The voice that doubts tells us to scan the news for 'good' news. Did the Americans send the bombs in the end? The Israeli Eurovision entry got the second highest public score. The voice that believes puts down the newspaper, turns off the computer and picks up a Book of Psalms to say and pray.

Everything is really good news because, inexorably, Hashem is bringing redemption to Zion, and that should give us cause for great joy!

Oh, and by the way, there is no one else up there.

Q & A

EMOR

Questions

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are *exempt* from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *Kohen Gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who "approaches holy objects" while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by "approaches"?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a "*zar*" she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define "profaning" the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbos, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to "count the *omer*"?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is called a "*zichron teruah*" (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *esrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one's parent?

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

Answers

1. 21:1 - Challalim - those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a kohen.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a kohen reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-kohen.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an eipha.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The akeidas (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (Shemos 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 23)

BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”

(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

Birkat HaMazon continues: “You open Your Hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. Blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem; then Hashem will be his security.”

The opening sentence is a verse from Tehillim (145:16). Rabbi Yochanan teaches (Ta’anit 2a-b) that Hashem delegates many responsibilities to agents in this world but that there are three “keys” He retains direct control over: the “key” of rain, the “key” of childbirth and the “key” of the Resurrection of the Dead. The Talmud then cites a similar idea from the Sages of Eretz Yisrael, that the “key” for parnasah – livelihood – is also in the Hands of Hashem alone. The Sages of Eretz Yisrael cite our verse as proof that our sustenance comes directly from Hashem, “You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.” The Talmud asks why Rabbi Yochanan chose not to add a fourth “key” to his list and include the “key” of parnasah, like the Sages of Eretz Yisrael did. The Talmud answers that according to Rabbi Yochanan, the “key” of rain and the “key” of parnasah are one and the same, because the blessing of sustenance is derived from the rain, which causes the world to flourish and to prosper.

The Iyun Tefillah points out that as the verse states, “You open Your Hand,” it is an indication that sometimes Hashem’s Hand is closed and sometimes it is open. Our verse is a constant reminder that the key to our parnasah rests only with Hashem, and that we need Him to open His Hand for us.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch writes that the word “ratzon” does not always mean desire. In certain contexts, it can mean favor. For example, “Yehi Ratzu Achiv” (Devarim 33:24) or Yehi Ratzon Milfanecha. According to Rabbi Hirsch, here it means that Hashem gives everyone chen – grace – in the eyes of other people, which is the most basic prerequisite for making a parnasah. Whether we utilize that chen or not is dependent entirely on ourselves. My late father used to say how it was so much easier to give larger donations to charitable causes when the person collecting made a friendlier impression.

In his customary sharp and incisive way, the Brisker Rav would say that he doesn’t understand how it is that the wealthy have parnasah. He understands how the poor have parnasah. They realize that they can’t manage on their own, so they place all of their trust in Hashem. But the wealthy are – well, wealthy – and they think they can manage on their own. Even when they pray, they don’t feel they need to ask for parnasah. So how do they have parnasah? The Brisker Rav left the question open-ended.

Perhaps now it is possible to understand why, in the beautiful prayers that we recite on Shabbat before Rosh Chodesh, we ask Hashem to bless with Yirat Shamayim – Fear of the Heavens – twice. After asking for Yirat Shamayim the first time, we then ask Hashem to bless us with an abundant parnasah. And if that request is answered, there is a need for additional Yirat Shamayim to help us use our wealth appropriately.

This explains why this verse is followed immediately by the verse from Yirimiyahu (17:7), “Blessed is the man who trusts in Hashem; then Hashem will be his security.” Because, as the Rabbi David Kimche explains, the two concepts go together. When one places their trust in the Hands of Hashem, they are, by definition, allowing Hashem to be their security.

To be continued...

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Fire Insurance

Rav Yehuda said: All who separate from the words of the Torah are consumed by fire, as is written (in Yechezkel 15:7): And I shall set My countenance against them; from the fire they have emerged, and the fire will devour them.

When Rav Dimi came from Eretz Yisrael to Bavel, he said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: Anyone who separates himself from the words of Torah falls into gehinnom, as it is written (in Mishlei 21:): A person who strays from the path of understanding (the Torah) will rest in the congregation of 'refaim' (gehinnom).

Although these two statements sound virtually identical, the Maharsha explains that they refer to two completely different situations and convey two separate messages.

The first teaching refers to two people who were learning together, but then inexplicably stopped learning Torah. At first, they were “heating each other up with the fire of Torah” and “no other fire can consume fire.” But, if they neglect the importance of Torah study and interrupt each other from Torah study, they lose the special protective nature of their Torah study. This will result in their likely falling victim to their inclinations that entice them to transgress the Torah, and be subject to punishment (being consumed by fire of idolatry and the like). The plural wording of the verse in Yechezkel indicates that this message refers to a situation of (at least) two people.

The second teaching, however, is stated in the singular, and is also based on a verse that is in the singular. It refers to an *individual* who is learning Torah and it teaches the effect that his separation from Torah study has on his nature. In this case, he separates from Torah study on his own initiative and not as the result of being persuaded by another Torah student, as in the first case. This case is worse. And as an immediate result of this decision, he is not merely tempted to transgress, but has already substantially lowered his spiritual stature to the point that he has “fallen into *gehinnom*.”

▪ *Bava Batra 79a*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The Kohen Gadol may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*.

The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. Physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a portion of the crop that is given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects.

The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of Hashem by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols.

The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. This Torah portion explains the laws of preparing the oil for the Menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem, and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Rose by Another Name

On the 9th of Iyyar in the year 2017, my grandmother Rose (Roszi) Klein passed away. She was born in 1928 in the Hungarian town of Bonyhad to Meir and Devorah Kuttner. After surviving the horrors of the Holocaust and living in Hungary for a decade after the war, she moved to Brooklyn, NY where married and raised her family. In line with her name, my grandmother had a special appreciation of flowers and I have fond memories of visiting the botanical gardens with her. Although her Hebrew name was technically Shprintza, she was also known as Shoshana, which is a Hebrew translation of her English name Rose. This essay is dedicated to her memory and discusses three Hebrew words for “rose” – shoshanah, chavatzelet, vered.

The words *shoshan* or *shoshanah* as the name of a plant appear twelve times in the Bible, eight of which are in Song of Songs. For example, one such verse reads: "My beloved has descended to his garden / to the row of fragrance / to graze in the gardens / and to gather *shoshanim*" (Song of Songs 6:2). The term *shoshanah* also appears in the Mishna (*Kilayim* 5:8 and *Taharot* 3:7).

The feminine personal name *Shoshanah* was used by Jews dating all the way back to the Second Temple period, as there is a story about a Jewish woman named *Shoshanah* appended to the Septuagint's version of Daniel (and it is included in many versions of the Christian Bible). As you may have realized, the personal names Sue, Susan, and Suzanna are all derived from the Hebrew word *shoshanah*. The word *shoshanim* also appears in the Bible in reference to a specific musical instrument (Ps. 45:1, 69:1, 80:1), whose shape somehow resembles the *shoshanah* flower.

There is reason to assume that *shoshanah* refers specifically to a reddish flower, because the lover's lips – which are presumably red – are compared to *shoshanim* (Song of Songs 5:13, see also there 4:3). Indeed, there is a Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* §19:6) which praises King Jeconiah for abstaining from his wife after she had spotted something like a *shoshanah adumah* (“a red *shoshanah*”), which again associates this term with something red.

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh of Carpentras (an 18th century grammarian and *dayan*) writes in *Ohalei Yehuda* that *shoshanah* is related to *sasson* (“gladness”) via the interchangeability of the letters SIN and SHIN, explaining that when one sees a beautiful *shoshanah* and smells its pleasant scents, one becomes happy and glad.

Ibn Ezra (to Song of Songs 2:1) cites a tradition that accounts for the double SHIN in the beginning of the word *shoshanah* by explaining that that word refers to a specific flower that has "six" (*shesh*) leaves/petals. A similar explanation is given by Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim*, and is also invoked by Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim

in tracing the word *shoshanah* to the bilateral root SHIN-SHIN. This would mean that the word *shoshanah* cannot refer to a "rose," as roses typically have five (or multiples of five) petals, not six.

On the other hand, the Zohar (*Hakdamah* 1a) states that a *shoshanah* is surrounded by thirteen petals, likening this to the Assembly of Israel, which is likewise surrounded by Hashem's thirteen attributes of mercy. On the very same page, the Zohar also states that a *shoshanah* has five "strong" petals, noting that when one holds a goblet of wine to recite a blessing over it (*kos shel brachah*), one's five fingers should surround the cup like these five "strong" petals that surround a *shoshanah*. This would line up with the idea that *shoshanah* refers to a "rose." Although, it should be noted that elsewhere the Zohar (*Vayechi* 221a, *Emor* 105a) also states that a *shoshanah* has six petals.

The word *chavatzelet* appears twice in the Bible: In once instance, a lover compares himself to the "*chavatzelet* of the Sharon / *shoshanah* of the valleys" (Song of Songs 2:1), immediately before famously comparing his beloved to a "*shoshanah* among thorns/thorn bushes" (Song of Songs 2:2). In the other instance, the prophet Isaiah uses the simile of a desolate place which has been rejuvenated by saying that it "blossoms like a *chavatzelet*" (Isa. 35:1).

Either way, the question can be asked: What is a *chavatzelet*? Radak in his *Sefer HaShorashim* clearly defines *chavatzelet* as *rosa* ("rose") and explicitly connects it with the word *vered* (discussed below). However, as we will see below none of this is so simple.

Rashi (to Song of Songs 2:1) writes that *chavatzelet* means *shoshanah*. That understanding also seems evident from the Peshitta (an early translation of the Bible into Syriac), which renders both *chavatzelet* and *shoshanah* as *shoshnat*. Similarly, the Septuagint translates both *chavatzelet* and *shoshanah* into the Greek *krinon*, while the Vulgate also translates both of those terms into Latin as *lilium* ("lily"). Indeed, both Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino in *Ohel Moed* and Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer in *Beiurei Shemot HaNirdafim* treat the words *shoshanah* and *chavatzelet* as synonyms.

The Vilna Gaon (*Biur HaGra* to Song of Songs 2:1) also writes that *chavatzelet* and *shoshanah* refer to the same type of flower, but he sees the difference between the two terms as lying in the location where the flower grows. Meaning, he explains that when this flower grows in the plains (the "Sharon"), which is a flatland exposed to direct sunlight, then the flower becomes especially dried out and assumes a yellow hue as the sun "burns" it. Under these conditions, that flower is called a *chavatzelet*. However, should the very same flower grow in a valley, wherein the heat of the sun is not as impactful, the flower retains more of its moisture and ends up with a whitish-reddish-pinkish color, which is its natural shade. In that case, the flower is called a *shoshanah*.

The notion that *shoshanah* and *chavatzelet* refer to the selfsame flower is already found in the Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* §2:3), which explains that *chavatzelet* refers to the flower in its younger state, while *shoshanah* refers to it in its more fully-grown state. Based on this, Rabbi Wertheimer writes that the final TAV in the word *chavatzelet* is not part of the word's root, but rather serves as a diminutive to denote that it is referring to a "young rose," whose buds have not yet opened up to reveal the flower's inner beauty.

Various commentators to the Midrash (like *Matnot Kehunah*, *Eitz Yosef*, and *Maharzu* there) explain the word *chavatzelet* as a portmanteau of CHET-BET ("hidden") and TZADI-LAMMED (*tzel*, "shadow") explaining that when in the young state of *chavatzelet*, the flower's inner beauty has not yet blossomed outward, but rather remains "hidden" within its own "shadow" (see also *Peirush HaRokeach* to Song of Songs 2:1). A similar parsing of the word is found in the Midrash (*Shir HaShirim Rabbah* §2:1), which interprets *chavatzelet* as related to *chaviv* ("dear") and *tzel* ("shadow"). The Midrash then offers several different ways of explaining why comparing the Jewish People to the *chavatzelet* should be read as a compliment from Above.

In line with the Midrash, the Zohar (*Vayechi* 221a, *Emor* 105a) seems to say that *chavatzelet* refers to a younger plant when it is still green and has green petals, while *shoshanah* refers to a more mature plant that is red and white. That said, Rabbi Daniel Frisch's *Matok M'Dvash* interprets this passage Kabbalistically, explaining that that it does not literally refer to colors, but to the progression of Hashem's mercy: when His Attribute of Justice is first invoked, it is akin to "green" which is pure justice unsweetened by any tint of mercy, while later on His Attribute of Justice appears as a combination of "red" (judgement) and "white" (mercy). Speaking of colors, *Peirush Chachmei Tzarfat* (to Song of Songs 2:1) explains *chavatzelet* as a white flower and *shoshanah* as a red flower.

Another approach identifies the *chavatzelet* flower as the same as the *narkis*. That word is a Hebraization of the Arabic word *narjis*, which, in turn, comes from the Latin word *narcissus* (derived from the Greek *narkissos*), and refers to the flower that we call "daffodil" in English. This approach is apparent from Targum (to Song of Songs 2:1), Ibn Janach's *Sefer HaShorashim* in the name of Rav Yehudai Gaon, Rabbi Saadia Gaon's *Tafsir* (to Song of Songs 2:1), *Kaftor VaFerach* (ch. 56) in the name of Rav Hai Gaon, R. Shemaryah b. Elchanan of Cairo (d. 1011) in his commentary to Song of Songs (there), and Ibn Ezra (to Song of Songs there).

If the Latin name *narcissus* reminds of your neighborhood narcissist, it should. This is because in Greek mythology, Narcissus was a young man known for his extraordinary beauty, but also self-absorbed selfishness. One day, Narcissus caught sight of his own reflection and immediately fell in love with it, not realizing that it was merely an image of himself. He became utterly captivated, unable to tear himself away from his reflection, eventually wasting away and dying by the pool. A flower – the *narcissus* – bloomed at the spot where Narcissus died. That flower, with its delicate beauty and inclination to grow near water, is believed to symbolize Narcissus's vanity and self-love (for a similar tale in rabbinic literature, see *Nedarim* 9b).

Indeed, the Talmud (*Brachot* 43b) mentions something called *narkom* when discussing the blessings over scented plants, but many commentators (including *Sefer He'Aruch*) have an alternate reading which uses the word *narkis* instead. In fact, Rashi (there) even connects the Talmudic term *narkom* back to the Biblical Hebrew word *chavatzelet* in Song of Songs.

In codifying the blessings over fragrant flowers, *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* §216:9) defines *chavatzelet* as *narkis*, but then cites an alternate opinion that defines it as *lirio* (which is Spanish for "lily"). That latter opinion reflects that of Rabbeinu Yonah (*Brachot* 31b in the Alfasi pagination). Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi-Ashkenazi writes in *Ho'il Moshe* (to Song of Songs 2:1) that *chavatzelet* refers to a flower that grows from an onion, hence the string BET-TZADI-LAMMED (*batzel*, "onion") in the middle of the pentaliteral word *chavatzelet*. But then, he adds a comment in Italian that *chavatzelet* refers to a "lily" or "hyacinth."

Interestingly, Rabbi Ernest Klein (no relation) surmises that *chavatzelet* is somehow related to the Akkadian word *habasillatu* ("stalk").

The word *vered* does not appear in Biblical Hebrew, but does already appear in the Mishna (*Sheviit* 7:6-7, *Maasrot* 2:5, *Shabbat* 14:4). In the Targumim, the standard word for rendering *shoshanah* in Aramaic is actually *vered*. Additionally, the Zohar (*KI Tisa* 189b) also seems to equate *shoshanah* with *vered*. In Modern Hebrew, the term *shoshanah* refers to a "lily" (which has six petals), while *vered* refers to a "rose" (which has five petals). Moreover, in Modern Hebrew, the word *varod* refers to the color "pink," and is actually derived from the Rabbinic Hebrew term *vered*.

Rabbi Eliyahu Bachur in *Sefer Tishbi* cites those who explain *shoshanah* as referring to a "white lily" with six petals (as in Modern Hebrew), but rejects that approach because there are no thorns that grow with a lily like there are with a rose, yet – as mentioned above – in Song of Songs the *shoshanah* is said to be something which grows alongside thorns.

As an aside, Bachur also writes that the Mishnaic word *vrudin* (*Chullin* 2:1) in reference to the “veins inside an animal’s neck” is derived from the word *vered*, which likewise refers to something red. Although, Rabbi Yaakov Emden (in his glosses *Ezer Ohr* to *Sefer Tishbi*) finds this connection farfetched.

Ibn Ezra (to Song of Songs 2:1) cites some commentators as explaining that *chavatzelet* means *vered*, and also cites some commentators who explain that *shoshanah* means *vered*. If taken together, this might echo the understanding cited above that *chavatzelet* and *shoshanah* are one and the same.

In discussing the laws of blessings over fragrant plants, Maimonides (*Laws of Brachot* 9:6) discusses the *shoshanah*, *narkis* (*chavatzelet*), and *vered* separately. To Rabbi Yosef Karo (*Kesef Mishna* there), this implies that those three terms refer to three different types of flowers, which leads him to wonder if *vered* and *shoshanah* are not the same thing, then what is a *shoshanah*?

In clarifying this question, Rabbi Massoud Chai Rokach writes in *Maaseh Rokeach* that Rabbi Karo knew that both *vered* and *shoshanah* refer to “roses” and that one refers to a red rose while the other refers to a white rose, his only question was which term refers to which color of rose (see Maimonides’ commentary to the Mishnah *Sheviit* 7:6).

Alternatively, Rabbi Yirmiyahu Low (*Divrei Yirmiyahu*) explains that *vered* is a general term that can include various types of flowers, while *shoshanah* is a more specific term that refers to the “rose” as a type of *vered*. This is borne out in the rabbinic phrase used in *Vayikra Rabbah* (§23:3) *shoshanah achat shel vered* (literally, “a single *shoshanah* of the *vered*”), which implies that a *shoshanah* is a type of *vered*. Alternatively, we may explain that *vered* refers to the whole plant, while *shoshanah* refers specifically to the flower.

Where does the Mishnaic/Aramaic word *vered* come from? Rabbi Ernest Klein (no relation) traces it to the Aramaic word *varda* (or *vardina* in some dialects of Aramaic), which he sees as a loanword from the Old Iranian *wrda*. He explains that latter word as the etymon of the Greek *rodon* and the Latin *rosa*, such that the English word *rose* (which derives from the Latin) is actually etymologically-related to *vered*!

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance.” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a)

Counting the Omer

Mitzvah #306

DAYS OF COUNTING

The Torah commands us to count the forty-nine between the *Omer* offering on the second day of Pesach and the Two Loaves on Shavuot. On a simple level of understanding, the period between Pesach and Shavuot is the time of harvest, when people are busy in the fields. Consequently, many people did not know when the Beis Din sanctified Rosh Chodesh Sivan and did not know which day in that month would be Shavuot. Therefore, Hashem commands each individual to count the days from Pesach to Shavuot (*Moshav Zekeinim*).

DAYS OF YEARNING

The entire purpose of the Exodus was the receiving of the Torah on Shavuos. The Midrash relates that upon leaving Egypt, the Jewish people asked Moshe when they would receive the promised Torah, and he told them that they would have to wait fifty days. On their own accord, they counted those days in anticipation (*Shut HaRashba*, Vol. 3 §284). The Midrash compares this to an imprisoned slave who cried out to the king to free him, and the king said that he would free him and also promised to give him his daughter in marriage after fifty days. Out of his great love for the king, the slave counted those days. So too, our counting the days until we receive Hashem's prized Torah is like that prisoner eagerly counting the days until he merit to wed the king's prized daughter (*Moshav Zekeinim*). By counting the *Omer* we express our yearning for the Torah, which is the purpose of our lives and the only reason for our existence as a nation.

The *Omer* offering consists of barley, a food primarily fed to animals, whereas the Two Loaves on Shavuos are of fine wheat, which is the staple of humans, symbolizing our rise in spiritual status by receiving the Torah. The Two Loaves that are offered on Shavuos correspond to the Two Tablets that we received on that day (*Ra'ayah M'heimana* 98a). They are like a *Todah* (thanksgiving) offering for the gift of the Torah that transforms us from animals into man, with the spiritual potential of becoming greater than the holiest angels (*Meshivas Nefesh*).

DAYS OF PURIFICATION

The Jewish people sunk to the 49th level of impurity in the Egyptian exile, and it was therefore impossible for them to receive the Torah and form a marital union with Hashem until they counted 49 days of purity, which are seven weeks. These seven weeks of national purification that enable us to unite with Hashem parallel the seven days of personal purification that are counted by a *zavah* (woman in a state of impurity). This applies to us as well, as the Sages teach that a spiritual echo of the Exodus and the purification leading up to the Giving of the Torah reverberates every year and enables us to break out of the shackles of our earthly drives, refine ourselves, and bond with Hashem through His Torah. The Torah says to count "for yourselves...complete days" to indicate that the count pertains not only to the quantity of the days but also to their quality. Each must be spiritually "complete" and pure so that it can count. The word *usfartem* ("you shall count") is related to the word *safir*, a sapphire. This alludes to the idea that by keeping pure for each of these days, we are polishing and revealing the brilliance of our souls, which are carved out of Hashem's sapphire Throne of Glory (*Ohr HaChaim* and *HaKesav VeHakabalah*). As our souls become cleansed, we may perceive more and more of the Torah wisdom, which is measured in fifty levels. We do not count the fiftieth day, Shavuos, which corresponds to the fiftieth level, because that level is unattainable to us in our restricted physical forms, and even Moshe did not attain it (*Recaniti*).

Although both the *Omer* and the Two Loaves are mitzvos that pertain to the nation as a whole, the Torah commands each individual to count the interim days for himself. This may allude to the idea that every individual receives his own portion of Torah on Shavuos, for which he must prepare in his own way.

Alshich adds that the fifty days of the *Omer* correspond to the fifty primary years of a lifetime, from age twenty until age seventy. Every single Jew is entrusted with the grand task of making each day of his lifetime count. On Shavuos, we bring the Two Loaves from the new wheat crop, which the Torah calls "a new offering." This alludes to the idea that when every Jew leaves this world, he will present to Hashem whatever Torah insights and good deeds he managed to produce in his lifetime.

INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

5784 – The Year of the Rare Haftarah Part III

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

As discussed in the Ohrnet Magazines to *Parashas Vayigash* and *Parashas Tazria*, our current year, 5784, is quite a rare one indeed. Over the course of this special year, not just one, but three out of the six rarest *haftaros* are *leined*. The next time this will occur is in another seventeen years, in 5801/2040. But first, a bit of background is in order.

According to the *Abudraham* and *Tosafos Yom Tov*, the *haftaros* were established when the wicked Antiochus IV (infamous from the *Chanukah* miracle) outlawed public reading of the *Torah*. The *Chachamim* of the time therefore established the custom of reading a topic from the *Nevi'im* similar to what was supposed to be read from the *Torah*. Even after the decree was nullified, and even prior to the *Gemara's* printing, this became *minhag Yisrael*.

Most *haftaros* share some similarity with at least one concept presented in the *Torah* reading. The *Gemara Megillah* (29b-31a) discusses the proper *haftarah* readings for the various holidays throughout the year, which are rather related to the holiday and generally trump a weekly *haftarah*. But it is not just *Yomim Tovim* that may “knock off” a regular *haftarah*, but special *Shabbosos*, and usually, even if *Rosh Chodesh* falls out on Sunday. Hence, practically speaking, there are several *haftaros* that almost never get a chance to be *leined* publicly.

But, as mentioned previously, this year, at least for most of *Ashkenazic* Jewry, three out of the six rarest *haftaros* are *leined*. They are the *haftaros* of *Parashas Mikeitz* (at the end of *sefer Bereishis*), *Parashas Tazria*, and last week's *haftarah*, that of *Parashas Kedoshim* (both in *sefer Vayikra*). Previous chapters in this series discussed the first two rare *haftaros*. This article sets out to detail the rarest of all, the *haftarah* of *Parashas Kedoshim*, “*Hasishpot*” (*Yechezkel* Ch. 22:1).

“*Hasishpot*” is actually read on average only once in seventeen years, or 5.8% of the time. The last time it was *leined* was in 5757/1997, twenty-seven years ago, and before that, twenty-four years prior, back in 5733/1973. There are even times when “*Hasishpot*” goes forty-four years in between *leinings*. The next several times it will be *leined* are in another 17 years, in 5801/2041, and following in an additional 27 years, in 5828/2068. As noted by Rav Moshe Feinstein, practically speaking, “*Hasishpot*”'s reading is considered so rare, that it is as if it is ‘*k'maat hu ne'elam mi'stam adam*, almost hidden from the average person's conscience.’

Why So Rare?

Now that we established the ‘what,’ we can address the ‘why’. As mentioned previously, generally speaking, whenever there is a double *parashah*, the *haftarah* of the second *parashah* is read, as that is the *Torah* reading that we just concluded.

Yet, when it comes to the *parshiyos* of *Acharei Mos* and *Kedoshim*, it seems that it is not so simple. Although the *Shulchan Aruch* does not mention any difference between these and other double *parshiyos*, the *Rema*, the great codifier of *Ashkenazic psak*, rules that the *haftarah* of the **first** *parashah*, *Acharei Mos*, is the proper one to read.

Acharei Exclusion

The reason for the uncharacteristic change is that the *haftarah* of *Parshas Kedoshim*, ‘*Hasishpot*,’ includes what is known as ‘*To’avas Yerushalayim*,’ referring to a revealing prophecy of the woeful spiritual state and the terrible happenings that will occur to the inhabitants of *Eretz Yisrael* for not following the word of Hashem. The *Gemara* in *Megillah* (25b) relates a story of Rabbi Eliezer and one who read such a *haftarah*, who was subsequently found to have his own family’s indiscretions exposed. Ultimately though, the *Gemara* concludes that that *haftarah* can indeed be read, and even translated.

Hazardous *Haftarah*?

Despite that, all the same, it seems that we are being taught that whenever possible, we should try to avoid having to read this condemning passage as the *haftarah*. Additionally, the content of *Acharei Mos*’s *haftarah*, ‘*Halo K’Bnei Kushiyim*’ (from *Amos* in *Trei Asar* Ch. 9) has similar content to *Parshas Kedoshim* as well. Therefore, the *Rema* rules that when the Torah reading is the double *parshiyos* of *Acharei Mos* and *Kedoshim*, and as opposed to every other double *parashah*, the *haftarah* for *Acharei Mos* is read instead of *Kedoshim*’s.

Although the *Levush* vigorously argued against switching the *haftaros*, positing that it is a printing mistake in the earlier authorities to suggest such a switch, nevertheless, the *Rema*’s rule is followed by virtually all later *Poskim* and *Ashkenazic Kehillos*.

However, it must be noted that this switch was not accepted by *Sefardic* authorities and when *Acharei Mos* and *Kedoshim* are combined, they do indeed read *Kedoshim*’s *haftarah*, ‘*Hasishpot*.’

***Acharei* or *Kedoshim*?**

But there is more to the story and a fascinating dichotomy. As mentioned previously, often special *haftaros* push off the regular one. For example, the *Gemara* states that whenever *Rosh Chodesh* falls out on *Shabbos*, a special *haftarah* is read: ‘*Hashamayim Kisi*,’ as it mentions both the *inyanim* of *Shabbos* and *Rosh Chodesh*. If *Rosh Chodesh* falls on Sunday, then on the preceding *Shabbos*, the *haftarah* of ‘*Machar Chodesh*’ is read, as it mentions the following day being *Rosh Chodesh*. This is the codified *halacha* as well, barring specific exceptions.

Rav Akiva Eiger, adding a wrinkle, writes that when *Parshas Acharei Mos* falls out on *Erev Rosh Chodesh* and its *haftarah* gets pushed off for ‘*Machar Chodesh*,’ then the proper *haftarah* for *Parshas Kedoshim* the next week is... *Acharei Mos*’s *haftarah*, and not *Kedoshim*’s! Rav Eiger’s reasoning is since we find precedent by a double *parashah* that we actively try not to read *Kedoshim*’s *haftarah* due to its explicit content, the same should apply for **any other time** *Acharei Mos*’s *haftarah* was not read, for whatever reason - that it should trump and therefore replace (and displace) *Kedoshim*’s *haftarah*!

Although not universally accepted, Rav Akiva Eiger’s rule is cited as the *halachah* by the *Mishnah Berurah*, and the proper *Ashkenazic minhag* by the *Kaf Hachaim*. The *Chazon Ish*, as well as Rav Moshe Feinstein, and Rav Chaim Kanievsky, all ruled this way as well. That is why in years when *Acharei Mos* is *Shabbos Hagadol* and its usual *haftarah* is not read, but rather replaced by the special *haftarah* for *Shabbos Hagadol*, ‘*V’arvah*’ (*Malachi* Ch. 3), many *shuls* read *Acharei Mos*’s *haftarah* on *Parshas Kedoshim*, instead of *Kedoshim*’s usual one. In other words, if either of the two *parshiyos* requires a special *haftarah*, *Kedoshim*’s “*Hasishpot*” is not *leined* at all, but rather *Acharei Mos*’ “*Halo*” is read on the other *Shabbos*.

So, practically speaking, unless a very specific year such as ours, the common *Ashkenazic minhag* is to **almost never** *lein* “*Hasishpot*.” But this year, for the first time in twenty-seven years, there is no special *haftarah* available to trump either of the two *haftaros*. And hence, the rarest of *haftaros* for *Ashkenazim*, “*Hasishpot*,” will actually, finally be *leined*.

Never Read?

However, there is an alternate, albeit not the common custom - an old *Yerushalmi minhag* - not to **ever** read the *haftarah* of *Kedoshim*. Even in a year such as ours, when the *Parshiyos* are separate, *Acharei Mos's haftarah*, "*Halo*," is instead read two weeks in a row. This *minhag* is claimed to be dated to the esteemed Rav of Yerushalayim of the late 1800s and early 1900s, Rav Shmuel Salant (to 5662/1902), with precedent cited for reading the same *haftarah* two weeks in row from the rare occurrence of *Purim Meshulash* in Yerushalayim.

However, as noted, this is not the common *minhag*, and actually *Kedoshim's haftarah*, "*Hisishpot*," the actual rarest *haftarah* read for most of *Ashkenazic Jewry*, was indeed read by the majority of *Klal Yisrael* this year - the first time since 5757/1997.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch famously wrote that "the Jew's catechism is his calendar." It is this author's wish that by showcasing the uniqueness of our calendar year and its rare *haftaros*, this article will help raise appreciation of them and our calendrical customs.

*This author wishes to thank R' Yosef Yehuda Weber, author of '*Understanding the Jewish Calendar*,' for originally 'tipping me off' as to the rare *haftaros* being *leined* this year, as well as for being a fount of calendrical knowledge.

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