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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Things Were Changing at the Hotel Metropole

“May Hashem, the G-d of your forefathers, add to you a thousand times yourselves, and bless you as He has spoken to you.” (1:12)

Times were changing at the Hotel Metropole.

The new owner wanted to add at least one star to the scanty three-star rating that the hotel currently enjoyed.

Max was the porter at the entrance to the garage. He was one of the most popular members of the staff. He just had a way with people. The new owner came over to Max one day and said, “Max. I want you to carry on with your job – we love you here, but one small change. Whenever someone goes in or out, I want you to write it down in a book. Okay? Max said, “I’m so sorry, but I can’t write.”

“You can’t write, Max?” “No, I’m really sorry. Does it make that much of a difference?” “Well, Max, I’m afraid it does. The insurance company won’t insure us without it.” Max looked very crestfallen. “I’m so sorry Max, but I can’t keep you on if you can’t write.”

And so, after years at the Metropole, Max went back to his small apartment, dejected and depressed. He was in bed for a week or more, unable to escape his depression.

A note from the post office dropped through his letterbox. He needed to go to the big city to pick up a registered letter. As he was leaving, his neighbor asked him where he was going. When the neighbor heard that he was going to the city, he said, “Max, could you pick up some bits and pieces for me from the hardware store? I’ll pay you a bit. It’ll save me the journey.” “Sure,” said Max. Max went to the city, picked up his registered letter, which turned out to be a 50 cent fine for a late return of a library book, then picked up the supplies for his neighbor and went back home and back to bed.

The following week, his neighbor knocked on his door and asked if he was going to the city again that week. Max said that he hadn’t planned to, but that he didn’t mind going for him.

The neighbor said, ‘Great, I’ll give you something for your trouble.’ This time, a friend of the neighbor also wanted him to bring him some vegetables from the city, and so Max did that errand too. Within a couple of months, the word got around about Max, that he was making bi-weekly and then tri-weekly trips to the city.

He had a new job.

One day, he thought to himself, ‘You know, rather than going to the city three times a week, why don’t I just buy a whole bunch of stuff and set up my own shop here?’

“Max’s Emporium” took off like a rocket.

Ten years later, he was one of the most important citizens of the town. One day, there was a reception at the Metropole Hotel for the State Governor, and Max was naturally invited. The owner of the hotel didn’t recognize the Max that he had fired all those years ago. As a distinguished guest, the owner of the Metropole invited Max to sign the guest register. Max, said, “You don’t you recognize me? I’m Max, the porter you fired. I still can’t write.” The owner of the hotel said, “Mr. Max, I’m so sorry.” Max said, “I’m not. If I could write, I would still be sitting down there in the garage, checking cars in and out.”

Everything Hashem does is for the good. Just sometimes it’s difficult to see it. We’re living in a time where it may seem quite difficult to see that everything Hashem is doing for the Jewish People is leading to a day of great light. But everything Hashem does is to test our faith in him. We hope and pray that very soon we will see with our own eyes how all the pain and sorrow has led to the greatest joy.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Gittin 51-57

Misplaced Humility and National Tragedy

Rabbi Yochanan said, “The humility of Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulus destroyed our Beit Hamikdash and burned our Heichal and exiled us from our Land”.

This statement concludes the well-known story of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza, which led to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish People by the Romans. When Bar Kamtza was ejected from a certain celebration, he sought revenge by telling the Roman Caesar that the Jews were rebelling against him. The Caesar then sent an animal with him to be sacrificed in the Beit Hamikdash, to test their loyalty. But Bar Kamtza intentionally made a blemish in the animal as he took it to Jerusalem. Now, the Sages faced a great dilemma. If they refused to offer the Caesar’s sacrifice and word of their refusal got back to the Caesar, they and the Jewish People were likely to face serious consequences. Many Sages were therefore inclined to either offer the Caesar’s sacrifice or otherwise to kill Bar Kamtza, thereby removing the danger. However, Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulus, “in his humility,” convinced the Sages to neither offer the sacrifice nor to kill Bar Kamtza, a decision that resulted in destruction and exile.

Why does the *gemara* attribute this decision to his “humility”? Where do we see his humility in this decision? It would seem that the more correct description for the basis of his decision would be his “righteousness” or his “piety.” (Rashi translates “*anwatanuto*” in the *gemara* not as “humility” but rather as “patience,” a translation that seems to beg explanation.)

Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkulus was an outstanding Torah scholar of his generation and had the authority to declare what would have appeared to be a *temporary* “overriding” of Torah law for the sake of avoiding a potential danger to the Jewish People. Nevertheless, he was extremely humble, not thinking that he was a great enough Sage to actually *carry out* either one of the suggested rulings that would have prevented the national tragedy. And, for this “misplaced” humility, our *gemara* places blame on him for the ensuing disaster of destruction and exile. (Maharitz Chiyut)

- *Gittin 55b-56a*

Q & A – Devarim

Questions –

1. How do we see from the beginning of *Parshat Devarim* that Moshe was concerned for the Jewish People's honor?
2. How much time elapsed between leaving Mt. Sinai and sending the spies?
3. Moshe rebuked the Jewish People shortly before his death. From whom did he learn this?
4. Why did Moshe wait until he had smitten the Amorite kings before rebuking the Jewish People?
5. What were some of the achievements that resulted from the Jewish People "dwelling" at Mt. Sinai?
6. Why does the Torah single out the names of the *avot* in connection with the giving of the Land?
7. What did Moshe convey to the Jewish People by saying: "You today are like the stars of the Heavens"?
8. "Apikorsim" (those who denigrate Talmud scholars) observed Moshe's every move in order to accuse him. What did they observe, and what did they accuse him of?
9. Moshe was looking for several qualities in the judges he chose. Which quality couldn't he find?
10. Moshe told the judges, "The case that is too hard for you, bring it to me." How was he punished for this statement?
11. Why did Moshe describe the desert as great and frightful?
12. Which tribe was not represented among the spies?
13. Which city did Calev inherit?
14. How many kingdoms was Avraham promised? How many were conquered by Yehoshua?
15. Why were the Jewish People forbidden to provoke Ammon?
16. Why were the Jewish People not permitted to conquer the Philistines?
17. How did Hashem instill the dread of the Jewish People into the nations of the world?
18. Why did Moshe fear Og?
19. Who was instrumental in destroying the Refaim?
20. What was the advantage of Reuven and Gad leading the way into battle?

Answers

1. 1:1 Moshe mentions only the names of the places where the Jewish People sinned, but does not mention the sins themselves.
2. 1:2 - 40 days.
3. 1:3 - From Yaakov, who rebuked his sons shortly before his death.
4. 1:4 So that no one could say, "What right has he to rebuke us; has he brought us into any part of the Land as he promised?"
5. 1:6 - They received the Torah, built the *themishkan* and all its vessels, appointed a Sanhedrin, and appointed officers.
6. 1:8 - Each of the *avot* possessed sufficient merit for the Jewish People to inherit the Land.
7. 1:10 - They are an eternal people, just as the sun, moon and stars are eternal.
8. 1:13 They observed the time he left home in the morning. If Moshe left early, they accused him of having family problems (which drove him from his home). If he left late, they accused him of staying home in order to plot evil against them.
9. 1:15 - Men of understanding.
10. 1:17 - When the daughters of Tzelofchad asked him a *halachic* question, the law was concealed from him.
11. 1:19 - Because the Jewish People saw huge, frightening snakes and scorpions in the desert.
12. 1:23 - Levi.
13. 1:36 - Hebron.
14. 2:5 - Avraham was promised the land of ten kingdoms. Yehoshua conquered seven. The lands of Moav, Ammon and Esav will be received in the time of the *mashiach*.
15. 2:9 - This was a reward for Lot's younger daughter, the mother of Ammon, for concealing her father's improper conduct.
16. 2:23 - Because Avraham had made a peace treaty with Avimelech, King of the Philistines.
17. 2:25 - During the battle against Og, the sun stood still for the sake of the Jewish People, and the whole world saw this.
18. 3:2 - Og possessed merit for having once helped Avraham.
19. 3:11 - Amrafel.
20. 3:18 - They were mighty men, and the enemy would succumb to them.

Q & A – Va'etchanan

Questions

1. "And I prayed to Hashem at that time." Why "at that time"?
2. What characteristic trait is represented by Hashem's "strong hand"?
3. What is *ha'levanon*?
4. What did Hashem tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the *mitzvot* properly?
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
7. What is hinted by the word *v'noshantem*?
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
10. Why is east called *mizrach*?
11. "Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had Hashem previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
13. What is meant by "Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One"?
14. What are two meanings of loving Hashem "with all your might"?
15. How well-versed must one be in Torah?
16. Where does the word *totafot* come from?
17. Who is fit to swear in Hashem's name?
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
19. When someone serves Hashem with love, how many generations receive reward?
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

Answers

1. 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of *Eretz Canaan*, Moshe thought perhaps Hashem had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
 2. 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
 3. 3:25 - *Ha'levanon* means the *Beit Hamikdash*, which makes "white" (*lavan*), i.e., atones for the Jewish People.
 4. 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
 5. 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
 6. 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
 7. 4:25 - The *gematria* of *v'noshantem*, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
 8. 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.
 9. 4:28 - No. It means that you will serve others who serve idols.
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- 10.4:41 - It is the direction from which the sun shines (*mizrach* means shining).
 - 11.5:13 - Before *Matan Torah*, at Marah. (*Shmot 15:25*)
 - 12.5:16 - At Marah. (*Shmot 15:25*).
 - 13.6:4 - Hashem, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
 - 14.6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether Hashem treats you with kindness or harshness.
 - 15.6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
 - 16.6:8 - *Tot* means two in Caspi. *Fot* means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
 - 17.6:13 - One who serves Hashem and reveres His name.
 - 18.7:7 - *B'nei Yisrael* are the humblest nation.
 - 19.7:9 - 2,000.
 - 20.7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

Q & A – Ekev

Questions

1. What must the Jewish People do to ensure that Hashem will fulfill His promise to do good for us?
2. What were the:
 - a) wonders
 - b) strong hand
 - c) outstretched arm that the Jewish People saw in Egypt?
3. When a group performs a *mitzvah*, whose name is attached to the *mitzvah*?
4. How did the Jewish People do their laundry in the *midbar*?
5. How did the Jewish People obtain clothing for their growing children in the *midbar*?
6. How many days did Moshe spend on Mount Sinai altogether?
7. On what day did Moshe come down from Mount Sinai having received complete forgiveness for the Jewish People?
8. How was Aharon punished for his role in the golden calf?
9. Who made the ark in which Moshe placed the second set of tablets? What special function did it later serve?
10. Which sin of the Jewish People was prompted by the death of Aharon?
11. Why were the *levi'im* chosen by Hashem?
12. Why do the *levi'im* have no portion in the Land?
13. All aspects of man's life are in Hashem's "hands" except one. What is this?
14. What is the "added benefit" of observing the *mitzvot*?
15. What is meant by circumcising one's heart?
16. What are the sources of water for the fields of Egypt and *Eretz Yisrael*?
17. What path does the Torah prescribe for gaining new knowledge?
18. Which activity is "serving Hashem with the heart"?
19. When the Jewish People sin, why are they considered worse than the generation of the flood?
20. How does one "cleave to Hashem"?

Answers

1. 7:12 - Guard even the "light" commandments.
2. 7:19 -
 - a) Plagues;
 - b) Pestilence;
 - c) Slaying of the firstborn.
3. 8:1 - The person who finishes it.
4. 8:4 - The *ananei kavod* (clouds of glory) cleaned and bleached their clothes.
5. 8:4 - As their children grew, their clothing grew with them.
6. 9:18 - 120 days.
7. 9:18 - The tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur.
8. 9:20 - His two sons died.
9. 10:1 - Moshe. This ark would accompany the Jewish People into battle.
10. 10:6-7 - When Aharon died the *ananei kavod departed* causing many Jews to fear war with the King of Arad and to retreat toward Egypt.
11. 10:8 - Because they did not participate in the sin of the golden calf.
12. 10:9 - Since they served in the Temple, they were not free to work the land.
13. 10:12 - Fear of Heaven, which is dependent upon the person.
14. 10:13 - There is reward.
15. 10:16 - To remove those things that block the words of Torah from entering.
16. 11:10 - Egypt is irrigated by manually carrying water up from the Nile. *Eretz Yisrael* is supplied by rainwater requiring no work on the part of its inhabitants.
17. 11:13 - By repeatedly reviewing what one knows, one more easily acquires new knowledge.
18. 11:13 - Prayer.
19. 11:17 - Because the generation of the flood had no one from whom to learn.
20. 11:22 - Attaching oneself to Torah scholars.

Q & A – Re'eh

Questions

1. What were the sites designated for the "blessings and the curses" to be pronounced by the people?
2. On what condition will Bnei Yisrael receive the blessings from Hashem?
3. Why does the Torah use idolatry as an example when describing one who strays from the path that Hashem commanded?
4. What was to be the sign for the Jewish People that they would inherit the Land?
5. During the 14 years of the conquest and division of the Land, what types of offerings were permitted on private altars?
6. What must one do with consecrated animals that develop a blemish?
7. In what ways does a consecrated animal that develops a blemish retain a degree of kedusha (holiness) even after it has been redeemed?
8. Why was the tribe of Yehuda not permitted to conquer Jerusalem?
9. In consecutive verses, the Torah repeats the prohibition against eating blood. What two types of blood are referred to?
10. Why were the Jewish People allowed to see the extermination of the Canaanites?
11. What forms of idol worship are punishable by death?
12. If a person performs miracles in the name of Hashem and then says that the laws of the Torah have been revised, what is done to this person?
13. The Torah says, "To Him (Hashem) you shall cleave." How does one fulfill this command?
14. The trial of a person accused of encouraging others to worship idols differs from the trial of other capital cases. How?
15. Who has the primary responsibility of inflicting the punishment on one who tried to entice others to worship idols?
16. What is the "source" of the Jewish People being an *am kadosh* (holy nation)?
17. How should the Jewish People maintain themselves as an *am kadosh*?
18. What is the order of priority regarding to whom one should give charity?
19. What mitzvah recalls the Exodus from Egypt?
20. Which four individuals are under Hashem's "special protection"?

Answers

1. 11:26 - Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Eval, respectively.
2. 11:27 - On condition that they listen to Hashem's commandments.
3. 11:28 - Because those who worship idols are considered as if they have strayed from the entire Torah.
4. 11:31 - The miracles that would occur while crossing the Jordan River.
5. 12:8 - Vow offerings or free-will offerings.
6. 12:15 - They must be redeemed and may then be eaten.
7. 12:15 - Eating it is permitted, but use of its milk or fleece is forbidden.
8. 12:17 - When Avraham bought ma'arat hamachpelah, he made a covenant of peace with the Hittites who sold it. His descendants honored this pact regarding the Hittite descendants in Jerusalem.
9. 12:24-25 - Blood that seeps slowly from the incision as soon as the cut is made and again after it no longer gushes. Blood absorbed into the limbs of the animal.
10. 12:30 - To learn not to follow in their depraved ways.
11. 12:30 - Slaughtering or burning a sacrifice on an altar, pouring libations, prostrating oneself, and any normal manner of worshipping that idol.
12. 13:2-6 - He is put to death.
13. 13:5 - One should emulate Hashem's actions by performing good deeds, assisting in burying the dead and visiting the sick.
14. 13:10 - If he was acquitted and new information of a condemning nature arises, he is retried. If he was judged guilty, he is not returned to court to plead in his favor.
15. 13:10 - The person whom the guilty one attempted to entice.
16. 14:2 - The kedusha is inherited from the avot.
17. 14:21 - By avoiding excesses even in permitted matters.
18. 15:7 - The most needy, a brother from one's father, a brother from one's mother, the poor of one's city, the poor of another city.
19. 16:3 - Eating the korban pesach and the matzah on the night of Pesach.
20. 16:10 - A levi, convert, orphan and widow.

Q & A – Shoftim

Questions

1. What is the role of shoftim? What is the role of shotrim?
2. What qualifications should one look for when appointing a judge?
3. May a judge accept a bribe if only for the purpose of judging fairly?
4. What is the source for the concept "seek out a good beit din"?
5. Although the avot built matzevot, the Torah later forbade doing so. Why?
6. "You will come to...the judge who will be in those days." It's impossible to visit a judge living at a different time, so why must the Torah add these apparently extra words?
7. What does Hashem promise a king who doesn't amass much gold, doesn't raise many horses and doesn't marry many wives?
8. How many Torah scrolls must the king have?
9. How was King Shaul punished for disobeying a minor command of the Prophet Shmuel?
10. Certain kosher animals are not included in the law of "chazeh, shok and keiva." Which ones?
11. Families of kohanim served in the Beit Hamikdash on a rotational basis. When was this rotation system established?
12. Which three categories of false prophets are executed?
13. What does it mean to "prepare the way" to the cities of refuge?
14. How many witnesses are meant when the Torah writes the word eid (witness)?
15. "Through the mouth of two witnesses...." What types of testimony does this verse invalidate?
16. If witnesses in a capital case are proven to be *zomemim* (false-conspirators) before their intended victim is executed, how are they punished?
17. Why does the section about going to war follow the laws governing witnesses?
18. The Jewish army is warned of four "scare-tactics" the enemy might employ. What are they?
19. When a murder victim is found in a field, who determines which city is closest?
20. What happens if the murderer is found after the calf's neck was broken?

Answers

1. 16:18 - Shoftim are judges who pronounce judgment. Shotrim are officers who enforce it.
2. 16:18 - That he is expert in the law and that he is righteous.
3. 16:19 - No, because it will sway his judgment.
4. 16:20 - "Tzedek tzedek tirdof...."
5. 16:22 - Because the Canaanites used them for idolatry.
6. 17:9 - To teach that although a judge may not be as eminent as judges of previous generations, we must obey him nevertheless.
7. 17:18 - That his kingdom will endure.
8. 17:18 - Two. One stays in his treasury and one he keeps with him.
9. 17:20 - He lost his kingship.
10. 18:3 - Chayot (non-domestic-type animals).
11. 18:8 - During the time of David and Shmuel.
12. 18:20 - One who prophesies something he didn't hear, something told to another prophet, or prophecies in the name of an idol.
13. 19:3 - To post direction signs saying "refuge" at the crossroads.
14. 19:15 - Two, unless otherwise specified.
15. 19:15 - Written testimony and testimony translated from a language which the judges don't understand.
16. 19:19 - They are put to death.
17. 20:1 - To teach that if the Jewish People execute fair judgment they will be victorious in war.
18. 20:3 -
 - a) Changing their shields
 - b) Making their horses stomp and whinny
 - c) Shouting
 - d) Blowing horns.
19. 21:2 - The Sanhedrin.
20. 21:9 - He is tried and, if found guilty, executed.

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 performed by someone who understands its significance” (Meiri, *Bava Kamma* 17a).

MEZUZAH

Mitzvah #423; *Devarim* 6:9

Overview: We affix the mezuzah on the right-hand doorpost of each doorway, one-third down from the top of the doorpost. The mezuzah scroll contains the first two passages of *Shema*. The first passage sets forth the Mitzvos to believe in Hashem’s unity, to love Him wholeheartedly, to study His Torah, to wear tefillin and to affix mezuzos. The second passage contains a Mitzvah to serve Hashem with all of our hearts, particularly through prayer, as well as a description of the reward for doing so. It also cautions against allowing our natural inclinations to lead our hearts astray and describes the catastrophic results. It closes by encouraging us to fulfill the Mitzvah of Mezuzah so that we will merit lengthy days in Eretz Yisrael. These two passages contain allusions to three foundations of our faith: the existence of the one and only Creator; that He watches over us and subjects our deeds to reward and punishment; and the truth of Moshe’s prophecy (*Rabbeinu Bachya*). There is a custom for a person to place his hand on the mezuzah whenever he enters and exits his home (*Rema*, YD, 285:2; see also *Birkei Yosef*).

Much of the following selection of reasons behind the mezuzah has been culled from “Mezuzah Maven: A Pictorial Guide” by my father, Rabbi Ze’ev Shlomo Kraines, zt”l. The guide is readily available at mezuzahmaven.org

A CONSTANT REMINDER

The mezuzah reminds us whenever we enter and leave our homes about the fundamentals of our faith in Hashem (*Sefer HaChinuch* §423). In the *Rambam*’s words: “Whenever a person enters [his home], he immediately encounters the unity of the Holy One, blessed is He, and remembers his love for Him. This awakens him from his slumber and improper involvement in the vanities of this world and reminds him that nothing lasts forever and ever except for one’s knowledge of Hashem. He then returns to his senses and proper conduct” (*Mezuzah* 6:13).

We may add that the mezuzah provides us this reminder as we are about to enter two different areas of challenge. Firstly, when we enter our homes and are faced with the challenge of maintaining our faith in the invisible G-d when we are not under the shaming eye of the public. And secondly, when we exit the confines our homes and are faced with the challenge of following the Torah uncompromisingly despite contrary social influences of the non-Jewish

world. The mezuzah sends us an invariable message about the invariable truth: only Hashem's "opinion" counts.

TESTIMONY ABOUT THE JEWISH HOME

Rav Hirsch explains that a mezuzah dedicates the house as an abode where Hashem is ever present and where the service of Hashem is fulfilled, thus testifying that all that occurs in one's life is accomplished through Hashem (*Horeb*, Intro. to Section II, p. 187). We similarly find that *Targum Yonasan* (*Devarim* 20:5) considers the affixation of mezuzos as the *chanukas habayis* (dedication / inauguration of a home). Once a person dedicates his house to Hashem with a mezuzah, the Divine Presence comes to rest in that home, which means that Hashem lives together with the residents. This is one of the reasons why one who sells his house should generally not remove the mezuzos (*Ritva* 102a and *Pele Yoetz*, *Binyan*).

EXPRESSION OF LOVE

The first passage of the *Shema* first commands us to love Hashem with all our hearts, souls, and resources and then to place these words in tefillin on our hearts and heads, and in mezuzos on the doorways of our homes. We may interpret this to mean that the hand-tefillin box represents loving Hashem with our hearts, the head-tefillin box represents loving Him with our souls, and the mezuzah represents loving Him with our resources. A person's home is the receptacle of his worldly possessions, and by placing a mezuzah at the entrance, he expresses the idea that he is willing to give up all he owns for the love of Hashem if He would so desire. *Maskil El Dal* (Vol. IV 7:4 §37) writes similarly that the mezuzah by the entrance reminds us not to trade the eternal worth of the World to Come for the temporal worth of earthly possession in one's home. It also reminds us never to bring through the doorway of our home any possession that was acquired dishonestly or that compromises Torah values in any way.

DIVINE PROTECTION

The Divine Presence is manifest on the mezuzah and protects the home (see *Avodah Zarah* 11a). This is well understood in light of what has been explained above about how the mezuzah substantiates our faith in Hashem, makes our relationship with Him constantly fresh, and makes our home fit for Hashem's residence. *Kol Bo* (§90) suggests that the letters of the Divine name *Shin-Dalet-Yud* that are customarily inscribed on the outside of the mezuzah parchment allude to the phrase "*Shomer Dalsos Yisrael* (Guardian of the doors of Israel). The *Zohar* (Vol. III, pg. 300b) note that the letters of the word "mezuzos" can be rearranged to spell "zaz maves," meaning, "death moves [away]." This alludes to the idea that the mezuzah prevents harmful spiritual forces from entering the Jewish home. The *Maharal* explains that by affixing a mezuzah, one is placing his home and family at the service of the King of the universe, and it follows that the Divine Sovereign would then spread His protective wings over those who have thus taken refuge in Him and would guard them from all harm. By reminding us of our dedication to Hashem, the mezuzah protects us from sin (*Menachos* 43b). The *Zohar* (*Va'eschanan* 266b) writes

that Hashem protects the residents of a house with a mezuzah from the time they leave the house until the time they return, as it is written, “Hashem will protect your goings and comings” (*Tehillim* 121:8).

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Devarim

This Torah portion begins the last of the Five Books of The Torah, *Sefer Devarim*. This Book is also called *Mishneh Torah*, "Repetition of the Torah" (hence the Greek/English title “Deuteronomy”). *Sefer Devarim* relates what Moshe told the Jewish People during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan River into the Land of Israel. Moshe reviews the mitzvahs with the people, stressing the change of lifestyle they are about to undergo – from the supernatural existence of the desert under Moshe’s guidance, to the apparently natural life they will experience under Yehoshua’s leadership in the Land.

The central theme this week is the sin of the spies, the *meraglim*. This Torah portion opens with Moshe alluding to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they had not sinned by sending spies into Eretz Yisrael. Hashem would have given them, without a fight, all the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, including the lands of Ammon, Moav and Edom.

Moshe details the subtle sins that culminate in the sin of the spies, and reviews at length this incident and its results. The entire generation would die in the desert and Moshe would not enter Eretz Yisrael. He reminds them that their immediate reaction to Hashem’s decree was to "go up and fight" to redress the sin. He recounts how they would not listen when he told them not to go, and that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They had ignored him and suffered a massive defeat. They were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of Esav, Moav or Ammon. These lands were not to be part of the map of Eretz Yisrael in the meantime. When the conquest of Canaan will begin with Sichon and Og, it will be via natural warfare.

Va’etchanan

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special mitzvahs. Hashem refuses. Moshe reminds the Jewish People of the gathering at Mount Sinai when they received the Torah, that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on the Jewish People that the Mount Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jewish People will ever claim that Hashem spoke to their entire

nation. Moshe specifically enjoins the *Bnei Yisrael* to "pass over" the Mount Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when the Jewish People dwell in Eretz Yisrael, they will sin and be scattered among all the nations. They will stay few in number – but will eventually return to Hashem.

Moshe designates three "refuge cities" to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the Ten Commandments and then teaches the *Shema*, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism, forgetting their purpose as a spiritual nation. The Torah portion concludes with Moshe exhorting *Bnei Yisrael* not to intermarry when they enter Eretz Yisrael, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and that in doing so they would become indistinguishable from the other nations.

Ekev

If *Bnei Yisrael* carefully observe even those "minor" mitzvahs that are usually "trampled" underfoot, Moshe promises them that they will be the most blessed of the nations on earth. Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* that they will conquer Eretz Canaan little by little – so that the land will not be overrun by wild animals in the hiatus before *Bnei Yisrael* are able to organize and settle the whole land. After again warning *Bnei Yisrael* to burn all carved idols of Canaanite gods, Moshe stresses that the Torah is indivisible and not open to partial observance.

Moshe describes the Land of Israel as a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, a land of oil-yielding olives and date-honey. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to become haughty and think that their success in Eretz Yisrael is a result of their own powers or vigor. Rather, it was Hashem who gave them wealth and success. Nor did Hashem drive out the Canaanites because of *Bnei Yisrael's* righteousness, but rather because of the sins of the Canaanites, for the road from Mount Sinai had been a catalogue of large and small sins and rebellions against Hashem and Moshe.

Moshe details the events after Hashem spoke the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, culminating in his bringing down the second set of Tablets on Yom Kippur. Aharon's passing from this world is recorded, as is the elevation of the *Levi'im* to be Hashem's ministers. Moshe points out that the 70 souls who went down to Egypt have now become like the stars of heaven in abundance. After specifying the great virtues of the Land of Israel, Moshe says the second paragraph of the *Shema*, conceptualizing the blessings that accompany keeping mitzvahs, and the curses that result from non-observance.

Re'eh

Moshe presents to the nation the blessing of a spiritually oriented life, and the curse of becoming disconnected from Hashem. When the nation enters Eretz Yisrael, they must burn

down any trees that had been used for idol-worship, and destroy all idolatrous statues. Hashem will choose only one place where the Divine Presence will dwell. Offerings may be brought only there, but not to a private altar.

Moshe repeatedly warns against eating animal blood. In the desert, all meat was slaughtered in the Mishkan, but in Eretz Yisrael meat may be *shechted* anywhere. Moshe lists the categories of foods that may be eaten only in Jerusalem. He warns the nation against copying the ways of the other nations. Since the Torah is complete and perfect, nothing may be added to or subtracted from it. If a so-called prophet tells the people to permanently abandon a Torah law or indulge in idol worship, he is to be put to death. One who entices others to worship idols is to be put to death. A city of idolatry must be razed. It is prohibited to show excessive signs of mourning, such as marking the skin or making a bald spot.

Moshe reiterates the classifications of kosher and non-kosher food and the prohibition of cooking meat and milk. Produce of the second tithe must be eaten in Jerusalem, and if the amount is too large to carry, it may be exchanged for money with which food is bought in Jerusalem and eaten there. In certain years this tithe is given to the poor. *Bnei Yisrael* are instructed to always be open-hearted, and in the seventh year any loans must be discounted, and then Hashem will bless the person in all ways. A Jewish bondsman is released after six years, and must be sent away with generous provisions. If he refuses to leave, his ear is pierced with an awl at the door post and he remains a bondsman until the Jubilee Year. This Torah portion concludes with a description of the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot and Succot.

Shoftim

Moshe tells *Bnei Yisrael* to appoint judges and officers in their cities. A bribe of even an insignificant sum is forbidden. Trees are not to be planted near Hashem's altar, as was the way of idolaters. Blemishes in animals designated for offerings and other points of disqualification are listed. The Great Sanhedrin is to make binding decisions on new situations, according to Torah criteria, to prevent the fragmentation of the Torah. A very learned scholar who refuses to accept the halachic decisions of the Sanhedrin incurs the death penalty. A Jewish king may have possessions and symbols of power only as commensurate with the honor of his office, but not for self-aggrandizement. He is to write for himself two *Sifrei Torah* – one to be kept with him wherever he goes, so that he doesn't become haughty. Neither the *Kohanim* nor the *Levi'im* are to inherit land in the Land of Israel. Rather, they are to be supported by the community, by a system of tithes.

All divination is prohibited. Hashem promises the Jewish People that He will send them prophets to guide them, and Moshe explains how a true prophet may be distinguished from a false one. Cities of refuge are to be provided an accidental killer to escape the blood-avenger from the deceased's family. However, someone who kills with malice is to be handed over to the blood-avenger. Moshe cautions *Bnei Yisrael* not to move boundary markers to increase their

property. Two witnesses who conspire to frame a third party are to be punished with the very same punishment that they conspired to bring upon the innocent party.

A *kohen* is to be anointed specifically for when Israel goes to war, to instill the nation's trust in Hashem. Among those disqualified from going to war is anyone who has built a new house but not lived in it yet, or anyone who is fearful or fainthearted. An enemy must be given the chance to make peace, but if they refuse, all the males are to be killed. Fruit trees are to be preserved and not cut down during the siege. If a corpse is found between cities, the elders of the nearest city must take a heifer, slaughter it, and wash their hands over it, saying that they are not guilty of the death.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 9)

UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

"My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever."
(Charles Duke - Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

Kiddush Levanah then continues with the following sentence, which is repeated three times: "As stone, let them be still at Your arm's greatness; terror and fear upon them let fall."

This sentence seems to basically repeat the previous one – but in reverse order. Rabbi Dr. Elie Munk (1900-1981), in his classic work called "World of Prayer," explains this repetition and the reversal. There is a natural order to the world. If one looks objectively at the world, they will see Hashem's imprint on every single detail. Within the natural world, Hashem protects us and ensures that His nation will always exist. However, there are times when Hashem reverses the laws of nature in order to keep us safe. That reversal of the natural world is what we would call supernatural occurrences. Our sentence in Kiddush Levanah, being in the reverse order of the previous one, alludes to the overt miracles that Hashem has performed for us throughout history.

The Rabbis teach that if we were able to truly recognize Hashem in the natural world, there would be no need for miracles. Miracles are necessary only because it is often so difficult to identify Hashem within the physical world. Rabbi Emmanuel Feldman, in a thought-provoking essay, encapsulates the Torah's difference between what we call "nature" and what we call "miracles." In 1967, at the onset of the Six-Day War, a non-Jewish correspondent asked a Rabbi in Jerusalem how he thought the war would end. The Rabbi answered, "In one of two ways. Either by a miracle or in a natural way." Asked the correspondent, "What would be the natural

way?” Answered the Rabbi, “To settle it with a miracle.” The correspondent asked, “If so, what would be the miraculous way?” Answered the Rabbi, “To settle it in a natural way!”

Rabbi Dr. Yaakov Herzog (1921-1972), son of the first Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Herzog, was a brilliant Torah scholar and orator, with a doctorate in international law. He was Israel’s ambassador to Canada and was a candidate for the position of the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire.

In 1969, Rabbi Dr. Herzog hosted a group of fifteen Christian theologians who had been sent by the American government to the Middle East to report on the spiritual life of the various peoples of the region. In his private notebook, he wrote that he told them (among many other things) with uncanny prescience, as if he were describing our reality today: “Our society in the State of Israel seems to be teetering on the brink when we look through the lens of security, yet, in fact, we are the most permanent of all societies. We seem to be the most agnostic of societies, always relying on the might of our own innovations and powerful army, yet, in fact, we believe in miracles. The State of Israel, with all its religious divisions, believes in miracles more than does any other nation. We always seem to be going blindly into the unknown, yet, in fact, we are going toward our destiny. We are full of paradoxes, yet, when all is said and done, we are ‘a people that will dwell alone’ (Bamidbar 23:9), not as a paradox, but perhaps as the only natural phenomenon of human history that succeeded in existing above time, and therefore took its place above the accepted rules of history.”

Because, truly, every moment of our – the Jewish People’s – existence, defies the natural order.

The Alter of Novardok would study Torah and *Mussar* by himself in a small hut in the forest throughout the night. Once, his lamp ran out of oil and he was left surrounded by darkness. The Alter told himself, “Hashem can do anything and everything. If Hashem wants me to continue learning, He will send me oil.”

He opened the door of his hut just as a man passed by. This was something that had never happened before. The hut’s location was so far off of the beaten path. The Alter asked his unexpected visitor if he happened to have any spare oil. And, of course, he did. So, the Alter settled down to continue learning uninterrupted for the rest of the night. In the morning, the Alter took the remaining oil and carefully stored it away so that he would never forget the miracle that Hashem performed for him.

Some years later, there was a fire in the Alter’s home, and the jar of oil was lost together with all of his other possessions. When he spoke about it afterwards, the Alter would say that he was happy that the little container of oil didn’t survive the blaze. He explained: “Why should I remember that oil episode more than all the other miracles Hashem performs for me? Every moment of life is filled with miracles!”

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

All Mixed Up

In this special essay written for the Tisha B'Av season, we briefly touch on various synonyms in Hebrew related to the concept of “mixing.” One of those words is also related to the word for “tears,” which leads us to considering at length why the words for “tears” and “mixing” should be related. Finally, we conclude the essay with a excursus on the topic of “crying” and how the Hebrew word for “crying” also relates to the concept of “mixing.”

The Semitic root AYIN-REISH-BET is quite versatile and holds a plethora of different meanings. For our purposes, it is significant to note that this root is used in both Biblical Hebrew (Prov. 14:10, 20:19, 24:21, Ps. 106:35, and Ezra 9:2) and Biblical Aramaic (Dan. 2:41, 2:43) to denote the act of “mixing” something into another thing. For example, when Ezra laments the intermarriage between Jews and other nations, he uses the word *hitarvu* (which is derived from the root in question), to denote the mixing of Jewish seed with non-Jewish seed (Ezra 9:2). Similarly, when the Psalmist criticizes the Jews for mixing in with the gentiles and learning from their idolatrous ways, he uses the word *vayitarvu* (Ps. 106:35). Other declensions of this root in the same sense include the words *taarovet* and *irbuv* (which refer to “mixtures”), as well as *eiruv* (“connection/mixture”).

Another Hebrew term for “mixing” is *mizug*, which seemingly derives from the root MEM-ZAYIN-GIMMEL. Inflections of that particular root only occur once in the entire Hebrew Bible – in the noun *mazeg* (Song of Songs 7:3), which in context refers to “mixed wine.” That terminology is used more often in rabbinic literature, where it is used in Mishnaic Hebrew for the act of “mixing” a cup of wine. In ancient times, this entailed diluting that very strong beverage in water to dull its potency. For example, when the Mishnah outlines the structure of the Passover Seder, it consistently uses the phrase *mazgu lo* (“they mixed for him”) when referring to each of the Four Cups drunk on that special night (Pesachim 10:2, 10:4, 10:7). That phrase also appears in the context of a Nazirite’s vow (Nazir 2:3) and when teaching how to declare *maaser* (Demai 7:2). Other inflections of this term include *mezigah* (Shabbat 8:1), *mozeg* (Avodah Zarah 5:5), *mozgin* (Brachot 8:2), *mazug* (Negaim 1:2, Niddah 2:6-7), and *limzog* (Pesachim 7:13, Sukkah 2:9). Two original uses of these terms in Modern Hebrew are the phrase *mezeg avir* (which practically means “whether/climate,” but literally means “the mixing of air”) and *mazgan* (“air conditioner”).

Although I wrote above that these terms seemingly derive from the trilateral root MEM-ZAYIN-GIMMEL, as early as Menachem Ibn Saruk (who lived over 1000 years ago), it has been suggested that the root is actually ZAYIN-GIMMEL, with the initial MEM being radical to the root. The root ZAYIN-GIMMEL (*zag*) refers to either the “seed” or “skin” of a grape (see Nazir 6:2), but how this connects to *mizug* is not so clear. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim accounts for

this connection by noting that mizug denotes a sort of "mixing" that entails pouring a drink from one vessel into another. When a fruit juice like wine is stored in a receptacle, that vessel serves as a stand-in for the natural skin of the fruit from whence the juice was extracted. Thus, the mizug represents something that takes the place of the zag ("skin"). Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh of Carpentras in Aholei Yehuda makes a similar point, noting that mizug preserves the taste of wine, just like the zag naturally does.

So far, we have two different terms for "mixing," iruv and mizug. These two terms are not one-hundred percent synonymous, as Rabbi Shimon Dov Ber Analak of Shidlitz (1848–1907) points out that they refer to "mixing" in two slightly different contexts. He explains that iruv refers to "mixing up" dry objects (like the cases of intermarriage and assimilation noted above, where the admixture in question refers to people intermingling and mixing together), while mizug refers more specifically to "mixing" liquid ingredients together (like mixing wine with water).

**To read the rest of this fascinating discussion, check out the full version of this essay http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/ and learn more about the Hebrew words for "tears" and "crying."*

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