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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A World of Wiggle-Room

“These are the thing that Hashem commanded them to do:” (35:1)

When I was in my late twenties, I developed a fascination for vintage motorcycles. I found an old Harley-Davidson WLA in a barn in Devon. The American army had brought thousands of these motorcycles across for the D-Day landings, and this one hadn't made it across the channel in 1944, and laid buried for thirty years. I brought it to Fred Waugh Motorcycles in the King's Road in Chelsea to be restored.

The WLA was an ideal military bike because it had plenty of 'wiggle room.' It was built to tolerances of about half-an-inch, meaning that it would work even if you got the parts somewhere in the region of the right place. No one on a battlefield has the time or the presence of mind to deal with a machine that needs the precision of a BMW or a Ferrari.

In Judaism, there is a concept called *bidieved*. An untranslatable word usually translated as 'after the fact.' The concept is that a mitzvah has an ideal – *lechatchila* – way to be performed, but there is also a degree of latitude that, while not ideal, will still cause the mitzvah to have its effect. The WLA was the ultimate example of “*bidieved*.”

I was thinking what a tremendous kindness of Hashem it is, that he allowed the existence of *bidieved*. Was there anyone who ever lived who was able to hit the mark every day all day? Who never let his performance of mitzvot drop from 100 percent?

A mitzvah is the will of Hashem. There can be no *bidieved* where Hashem Himself is concerned. The will of Hashem is One, just as He is One. The word in Hebrew for “one” is *echad*. Interestingly, the word in Hebrew for “sharp” is *chad*. Clearly, they are connected. The two sides of a blade meet at the sharpest point, where the two are closest to being one.

What starts off in the highest realms as the Will of Hashem, as it devolves down through the countless myriad of worlds, each further and further and further from Hashem Echad, the greater the room there is for flexibility, the less exacting becomes the fulfillment of His Will

– until we arrive at this, the lowest of worlds, the place where there can be something called “*bidieved*.”

One might say, a world of “wobble-room.”

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Sanhedrin 107-113

Bitter/Sweet Sustenance

Rabbi Elazar said that the dove (that returned to Noach’s ark) offered a request and a prayer: Master of the Universe, let my sustenance be bitter as an olive but be delivered from Your Hand, and let my sustenance not be as sweet as honey but be delivered from the hand of Man.

This statement on our *daf* is Rabbi Elazar’s manner of explaining the verse which describes the return of the dove from the ark that Noach sent out to see if the water had receded yet or not. The verse states, “And the dove returned to him in the evening, and it had a plucked olive leaf in its mouth, and Noach knew that the water had subsided from the earth. (Gen. 8:11)

The *gemara* explains that we understand the olive leaf in its mouth to be its food, and not merely a symbol of the receding water, based on comparing the word “*teref*” in this verse with a different verse which uses the same word, and clearly its meaning there is “food” — “provide me my allotted bread”. (Mishlei 30:8; the Maharsha explains in a beautiful manner why the *gemara* chooses this particular verse to prove that *teref* means food, instead of quoting other seemingly equally satisfactory verses that also show that *teref* means food.)

How do we know that the dove was “offering this prayer”, or as we would say, expressing a message, by its carrying an olive leaf in its mouth? Rashi seems to address this question by focusing on the word “*piha*” in the verse, which means “in its mouth”. Why does the verse need to point out where the leaf was? The phrase “in its mouth” teaches us that the dove was actually offering the above prayer with its mouth, so to speak, in order to express its desire to receive its food directly from G-d, and not from the hand of Man, even if the food is bitter and not sweet.

This is a lesson that is applicable not only to doves, of course, but is taught here as a lesson for all of Mankind.

The Maharsha explains that a person should to be content with even the little he receives from Heaven and not seek the luxuries which will make him dependent on other humans. He also points out that the dove brought back a *leaf* from an olive tree, but not an olive from the tree. The leaf is bitter, whereas the fruit is not. Bringing back the leaf also hints at the above idea

that it is by far preferable for a person to be satisfied with less and more basic sustenance from Hashem than to desire larger amounts and luxurious provisions from a fellow human being. As our Sages teach, “Make your Shabbat meals similar to your weekday ones, rather than being dependent on others.” (Shabbat 118a)

For this reason we ask in *birkat hamazon*: “And please, let us not be dependent, Hashem, our L-rd, neither on a gift, nor on a loan from a human being, but rather on Your full, open, holy and generous hand, so that we should never feel embarrassed or ashamed.” “Embarrassment and shame” come as a direct result of being dependent and sustained by a fellow mortal.

Based on this central theme of our desire to receive our sustenance directly from G-d’s Hand, there is a halacha in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 167:18) that states regarding distributing the challah to guests after saying Hamotzi and cutting it up: “One who cuts the bread should place a slice *in front of* each person, and each person should pick up his slice, and the ‘cutter’ *should not put it into the hand of the eater* unless the eater is a mourner.” I have heard that this halacha, based on the “Talmud Tip” for this week from our *sugya*, is the reason why the host usually places the slices of challah on a plate or tray to be passed around the table to allow the guests to take from, instead of placing the slices directly into the guests’ hands.

▪ ***Sanhedrin 108b***

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Moshe Rabbeinu exhorts the Bnei Yisrael to keep Shabbat, and requests donations for the materials for making the Mishkan. He collects gold, silver, precious stones, skins and yarn, as well as incense and olive oil for the Menorah and for anointing. The princes of each tribe bring the precious stones for the Kohen Gadol's breastplate and ephod. G-d appoints Betzalel and Oholiav as the master craftsmen. Bnei Yisrael contribute so many resources, such that Moshe begins to refuse donations. Special curtains with two different covers were designed for the Mishkan's roof and door. Gold-covered boards in silver bases were connected, forming the Mishkan's walls. Betzalel made the Holy Ark (which contained the Tablets) from wood covered with gold. On the Ark's cover there were two figures facing each other. The Menorah and the table with the showbreads were also of gold. Two Altars were made: a small incense Altar of wood, overlaid with gold, and a larger Altar for sacrifices, made of wood covered with copper.

Q & A

Questions

1. On which day did Moshe assemble the Jewish People?
2. Why is the prohibition against doing work on Shabbat written prior to the instruction for building the Mishkan?
3. Why does the Torah specify the particular prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbat right after it had already noted the general prohibition of doing work on Shabbat?
4. What function did the "yitdot hamishkan" serve?
5. What function did the "bigdei hasrad" serve?
6. What was unusual about the way the women spun the goat's hair?
7. Why were the Nesi'im last to contribute to the building of the Mishkan? How does the Torah show dissatisfaction with their actions?
8. Who does the Torah identify as the primary builders of the Mishkan? From which tribes were they?
9. What time of day did the people bring their daily contributions for the construction of the Mishkan?
10. For what was the woven goat's hair used?
11. What image was woven into the parochet?
12. Why does the Torah attribute the building of the aron to Bezalel?
13. Where were the sculptured cheruvim located?
14. How many lamps did the menorah have?
15. Of what materials was the mizbe'ach haketoret composed?
16. Of what material was the mizbe'ach ha'olah composed?
17. The kiyor was made from copper mirrors. What function did these mirrors serve in Egypt?
18. How did the kiyor promote peace?
19. The kiyor was made from the mirrors of the women who were crowding at the entrance to the Ohel Mo'ed. Why were the women crowding there?
20. Of what material were the "yitdot hamishkan" constructed?

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

Answers

1. On which day did Moshe assemble the Jewish People?
35:1 - The day after Yom Kippur.
2. Why is the prohibition against doing work on Shabbat written prior to the instruction for building the Mishkan?
35:2 - To emphasize that the building of the Mishkan doesn't supersede the laws of Shabbat.
3. Why does the Torah specify the particular prohibition of lighting a fire on Shabbat right after it had already noted the general prohibition of doing work on Shabbat?
35:3 - There are two opinions: One opinion is to teach that igniting a fire on Shabbat is punishable by lashes as opposed to other "melachot" which are punishable by death. The other opinion is to teach that violation of numerous "melachot" at one time requires a separate atonement for each violation.
4. What function did the "yitdot hamishkan" serve?
35:18 - The edges of the curtains were fastened to them. These were inserted in the ground so the curtains would not move in the wind.
5. What function did the "bigdei hasrad" serve?
35:19 - They covered the aron, the shulchan, the menorah, and the mizbachot when they were packed for transport.
6. What was unusual about the way the women spun the goat's hair?
35:26 - It was spun directly from off the backs of the goats.
7. Why were the Nesi'im last to contribute to the building of the Mishkan? How does the Torah show dissatisfaction with their actions?
35:27 - The Nesi'im reasoned that they would first let the people contribute materials needed for the Mishkan and then they would contribute what was lacking. The Torah shows its dissatisfaction by deleting a letter from their title.
8. Who does the Torah identify as the primary builders of the Mishkan? From which tribes were they?
35:30, 35:34 - Bezalel ben Uri from the tribe of Yehuda; Oholiav ben Achisamach from the tribe of Dan.
9. What time of day did the people bring their daily contributions for the construction of the Mishkan?
36:3 - Morning.
10. For what was the woven goat's hair used?
36:14 - It was made into curtains to be draped over the Mishkan.
11. What image was woven into the parochet?
36:35 - Cherubim. (See Rashi 26:31)
12. Why does the Torah attribute the building of the aron to Bezalel?
37:1 - Because he dedicated himself to its building more than anyone else.
13. Where were the sculptured cheruvim located?
37:7 - On the two extremities of the kaporet (cover of the aron).

14. How many lamps did the menorah have?
37:23 - Seven.
15. Of what materials was the mizbe'ach haketoret composed?
37:25,26 - Wood overlaid with gold.
16. Of what material was the mizbe'ach ha'olah composed?
38:1-2 - Wood overlaid with copper.
17. The kiyor was made from copper mirrors. What function did these mirrors serve in Egypt?
38:8 - These mirrors aided in the proliferation of the Jewish People. The Jewish women in Egypt would look in the mirrors so as to awaken the affections of their husbands who were exhausted by their slave labor.
18. How did the kiyor promote peace?
38:8 - Its waters helped a woman accused of adultery to prove her innocence.
19. The kiyor was made from the mirrors of the women who were crowding at the entrance to the Ohel Mo'ed. Why were the women crowding there?
38:8 - To donate to the Mishkan.
20. Of what material were the "yitdot hamishkan" constructed?
38:20 - Copper.

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KRIAT SHEMA AL HAMITAH (PART 10)

“The amount of sleep required by the average person is five minutes more.”

Wilson Mizener – American Playwright

The first paragraph of the Shema concludes: “Bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be *totafot* between your eyes. And write them on the doorposts of your home and upon your gates.”

There is so much that can be written about Tefillin. The spiritual power that they generate. How their physical elements blend with the spiritual elements. How the box of the Arm Tefillin is positioned so that it points towards the heart and how the Head Tefillin sits on the fontanelle because the fontanelle represents our intellect and our intelligence which is found in the brain, and the heart is the center of our emotions. Rabbeinu Bachya (*Kad Hakemach*) writes that one of the underlying lessons that Tefillin portrays is that we must utilize both our hearts and our intellect to serve Hashem properly. Our hearts to love Him, and our intellect to recognize Him.

I would like to focus on one feature about Tefillin, which Rabbeinu Bachya draws to our attention. He points out that the Arm Tefillin and the Head Tefillin are not constructed exactly the same. The Arm Tefillin has only one compartment with one piece of parchment containing four paragraphs from the Torah, whereas the Head Tefillin is divided into four distinct compartments, each one containing one paragraph written on a separate piece of parchment. Rabbeinu Bachya brilliantly connects the single compartment of the Arm Tefillin and the four compartments of the Head Tefillin to our five senses. The five senses are touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste. The sense of touch is centered around the arm, while the other four senses – sight, hearing, smell and taste – are all centered around the head. That is why there is one compartment for the Arm Tefillin, representing the sense of touch, and four compartments for the Head Tefillin, representing the other four senses. Rabbeinu Bachya eloquently describes how, when we put on our Tefillin, we are binding together our five senses and dedicating them to the service of Hashem.

The Shema then turns to the Mitzvah of putting Mezuzot on the doorways of our homes. The Rambam (end of *Hilchot Mezuzah*) writes, “When a person comes and goes, they should be aware of the existence of Hashem and remember their love for Hashem, and this will awaken them from their ‘sleep’ and their mistaken way in their fleeting life... and they should know that there is nothing else in this world that has any permanent value other than the knowledge of Hashem, and by passing by [the doorway with the Mezuzah], they will return to themselves and continue on the correct path.”

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the purpose of the Mezuzah is to serve as fortification against the pervasive and destructive foreign cultures that encroach upon the holiness and purity of a home built on Torah ideals. When we leave our homes, we have no

real control over what is waiting for us outside. We are bombarded with a kaleidoscope of sights, clothing and adverts that often lack the purity that we crave. Outside is beyond our control but inside is not. It is we, alone, who define what the tone of our homes will be. The Mezuzah is the proud “sentry” standing at our doorways and making sure that nothing undesirable crosses our threshold. In effect, the Mezuzah is a constant reminder that it is what we make of our homes that matters, and not what our homes make of us.

Aside from the Mitzvah to love Hashem, there are three central Mitzvot in the first paragraph of the Shema. They are: teaching our children, Tefillin, and Mezuzah. Together with loving Hashem, these three Mitzvot are paramount to the continuity of the Jewish People. Teaching our children the values of the Torah is our future. Wearing Tefillin denotes our personal relationship with Hashem. And the Mezuzah symbolizes the purity and the sanctity of the Jewish home.

As has been abundantly proved throughout the generations – including ours today – the world that we live in does not care for Jews very much, to put it mildly. The Shema is teaching us that the only way to survive living alongside such hatred is through complete sublimation to Hashem. Ultimately, the only guarantee that we have for the continuity of the Jewish People is dedicating our children, ourselves and our homes to Hashem.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Vayakhel/Parah: Seeing Red (Part 1)

This week, we read Parshat Parah, one of the four special Torah portions recited during the Purim-Pesach season. This special reading outlines the laws of the parah adumah (literally the “red heifer”), a ritual used to purify those who have become ritually impure through contact with a human corpse. In honor of this occasion, we embark on a three-part exploration of Hebrew and Aramaic words associated with the color “red.” Part I of this series focuses on the word adom and its etymological cognates, while Part II will examine other Hebrew terms for “red,” and Part III will focus on Aramaic synonyms to round out the discussion.

The adjective *adom* (“red”) derives from the trilateral root ALEPH-DALET-MEM. It appears nine times in the Bible to describe objects characterized by redness. For example, *adom* is used to describe the red lentil stew that Esau traded for his birthright (Gen. 25:30) and is also used to describe a lover’s complexion in Song of Songs (5:10). Of course, the red heifer is described as a *parah adumah*, with a feminine form of that adjective used to denote the cow’s color (Num. 19:2). A related adjective, *admoni* (“ruddy”), appears three times in the Bible, in reference to both Esau and King David (Gen. 25:25; I Sam. 16:12, 17:42). Another derivative, *adamdam* (“reddish” or “ruddy”), is used six times in Leviticus 13–14 to describe *tzara’at* discolorations on the skin or garments that may indicate ritual impurity.

The verb forms of *adom*, which mean “to redden” or “to dye red,” appear ten times in the Bible. A plurality of those instances are when the Bible describes the red-dyed hides used in the construction of the Tabernacle (Ex. 25:5, 26:14, 35:4, 35:23, 36:19, 39:34). Other examples of these verbs include Isaiah’s metaphor of sins being “red as crimson” (Isa. 1:18) and Nahum’s description of warriors’ shields being “reddened” in battle (Nah. 2:4, see also Lam. 4:7 and Prov. 23:31).

One of the most common derivatives of the root ALEPH-DALET-MEM is the noun *adam*, which refers both to Adam as the first man created by Hashem during the Six Days of Creation (proper noun) and to humanity in general (common noun). The word *adam* appears over 560 times in the Bible, making it one of the more frequently used terms in Scripture.

The Midrash (*Tanchuma Tzav* §14) and early Spanish exegetes such as Rabbi Yonah ibn Janach (in *Sefer HaShorashim*) and Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (in *Kuzari*) explain that man is called *adam* because he was formed from the *adamah* (“ground” or “earth”). This connection is implicitly stated in Genesis 2:7: “And Hashem God formed man (*adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*),” but the Bible does not make quite make the linguistic connection explicit. Interestingly, Rabbi Ernest Klein notes a parallel etymology in Latin, where the words *homo* (“man”) and *humanus* (“human”) are said to derive from *humus* (“ground” or “earth”). This linguistic connection underscores the universal symbolism of humanity’s earthly origins. Other English words derived from *humus* include *exhume*, *humble*, and *humiliate*.

Rabbi Ernest Klein further suggests that the word *adamah* itself likely derives from *adom*, originally denoting “the red arable ground” prized for agriculture.

The root ALEPH-DALET-MEM gives rise to a rich array of nouns, each reflecting a connection to the color red or the concept of earth. These include: *odem* (“ruby” or “carnelian”), a red gemstone (Ex. 28:17); *madim* (“Mars”), known as the “Red Planet”; *adamdemet* (“rubella” in Modern Hebrew), a term for a reddish rash; *Edom*, an alternate name for Esau and his descendants on account of the red lentils Esau demanded from Jacob (Gen. 25:30); *Admon*, the name of a judge in Jerusalem mentioned in the Mishnah (*Ketubot* 13:1, *Bava Batra* 9:1, *Shevuot* 6:3) and a poetic reference to Edom in *Maoz Tzur*; *Admata*, the name of one of Achashverosh’s advisors (Est. 1:14).

There are also several place-names derived from this root: *Adam* is the name of a city in the Holy Land (Josh. 3:16); *Adamah* and *Adami* are names of cities in the tribal territory of Naphtali (Josh. 19:36); and *Admah* was a kingdom allied with Sodom that was destroyed along with it (Gen. 10:19, 14:2, Deut. 29:22, Hos. 11:8).

Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 1:26) offers a novel interpretation of the relationship between *adam* and *adamah*. Contra to the traditional view that *adam* derives from *adamah*, Rabbi Hirsch argues that — *au contraire* — *adamah* derives from *adam*. He explains that being formed from the earth is not something unique to Adam/humans; rather, animals, too, share this characteristic. What distinguishes humanity from the animal kingdom is man's combination of a physical/corporeal body and a supernal/abstract soul, which makes man more akin to Hashem, who is entirely incorporeal.

In this way, Rabbi Hirsch connects *adam* to *adom* (“red”) by noting that red lies at the edge of the visible light spectrum, making it the closest color to invisible light (such as infrared). This position symbolizes humanity's unique role as the bridge between the physical and the divine. The physically invisible lights hint to Hashem's physical invisibility, and red's position at the edge of the rainbow makes it the closest color to the divine. Just as red is the closest visible color to the invisible, man is the closest creation to Hashem, possessing free will and the capacity for spiritual elevation in ways that no other creature can attain. Once the word *adam* came to mean “man,” *adamah* evolved to denote the earth as the domain over which man reigns.

Using his famous theory of phonetic interchangeability, Rabb Hirsch further explains that ALEPH-DALET-MEM bears a similarity to HEY-DALET-MEM (*hadom*, “footstool”) — based on the interchangeability of ALEPH and HEY — because *adam* serves as the Divine footstool (so to speak), serving as the earthly representative of Hashem's interests. Furthermore, Rabbi Hirsch sees the word *adam* as also related to *chatam* (“seal”) — based on the interchangeability of ALEPH and CHET, as well as DALET and TAV — explaining that the presence of man in This World represents Hashem's signature or signet, as man's existence shows all and sundry how Hashem has stamped creation with His own imprimatur.

Rabbi Hirsch further posits that *adam* can be read as a portmanteau of ALEPH (representing the number one in *gematria*) and *dam* (“similar”). This can be explained by realizing that man's unique independence and capacity for freewill makes him similar to the One God who created the universe (per the above).

Dr. Lawrence (Yaakov) Resnick, author of *1,000 Words*, offers an intriguing interpretation of the word *adam*. He suggests that *adam* can be understood as a combination of ALPEH and *dam* (“blood”), signifying a particularization of blood. Before the creation of man, all living creatures were characterized collectively, with one animal essentially representing and being interchangeable with another. However, with the creation of humanity, each individual — a “blood-containing unit” — holds intrinsic and unique value, making them irreplaceable and distinct from all others. According to Dr. Resnick, this inherent value of the individual is rooted biblically in the very name *adam*, emphasizing the sanctity and uniqueness of human life.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim takes this discussion in a slightly different direction, seeing *dam*, *adom*, *adamah*, and *adam* as related in the sense that they all derive from the biliteral root DALET-MEM. The core meaning of that root, according to Rabbi Pappenheim, is the concept of “similarity” or “resemblance.” The most direct declensions of this root include the words *domeh* (“resembling”), *demut* (“likeness/image”), and *dimyon* (“imagination,” which may resemble reality, but does not truly match it). Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *dam* (“blood”) derives from this root because one’s imaginative capacities depend on one’s blood, and the temperament of that blood can determine the exact content of what one sees in one’s mind’s eye or dreams. Building on this, Rabbi Pappenheim asserts that the word *adom* derives from *dam* simply because “red” is the color of blood.

When it comes to the word *adamah*, Rabbi Pappenheim has a more complex way of tracing it to the biliteral DALET-MEM: He asserts that mere “similarity” implies “incongruity,” for when two things only *similar*, then this means that they cannot be exactly equal. As a result, Rabbi Pappenheim traces the words *dom/domem* (“quiet/inactive”) to this root, noting that stopping activity creates an “incongruity” between the goings-on that continue to be active in one’s mind and the actions that one has ceased to do. Taking this a step further, Rabbi Pappenheim sees *adamah* (“ground”) as deriving from this idea because the *adamah* reflects such incongruity, as the *adamah* is a place wherein plants are active and grow, yet the *adamah* itself always remains passive and sedentary.

Finally, when it comes to the word *adam*, Rabbi Pappenheim offers two ways of explaining how it relates back to the biliteral root DALET-MEM. First, he cites the popular idea that man is called *adam* because he was created from the *adamah*. However, Rabbi Pappenheim raises a series of difficulties with this approach, which leads him to rejecting that etymology. Instead, he prefers to explain that man is called *adam* because man was created “in the image [*demut*] of Hashem” (Gen. 1:27) in the sense that he *resembles* Hashem in some ways (as we have seen above).

Interestingly, Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi Ashkenazi also explains *adom* as a derivative of *dam* (like Rabbi Pappenheim), but explains the etymology of *dam* differently. He sees the word *dam* as deriving from the biliteral root ZAYIN-BET (“flowing”), as blood can be characterized as the liquid that “flows” from an open wound, or “flows” about in one’s body through the circulatory system. This explanation is based on the interchangeability of the letters DALET and ZAYIN (often seen when switching between Semitic languages, like when the Hebrew ZAYIN typically becomes an Aramaic DALET), as well as the interchangeability of the letters BET and MEM (as both of those letters represent labials).

The exploration of *adom* and its cognates reveals a profound interplay between language, symbolism, and theology. From the redness of the earth to the sanctity of human life, these words encapsulate the essence of creation and humanity’s unique role within it. In Parts II and III of this series, we will delve further into other Hebrew and Aramaic terms for “red,” further illuminating the richness of this vibrant color in Jewish thought and tradition.

To be continued

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)

THE ARON

Shemos 25:10-22

The innermost sanctum of the Mishkan contained nothing other than the Aron (Ark) of the Luchos, on which are inscribed the Ten Commandments that are a microcosm of the Torah. It is called “the Aron of the Covenant of Hashem” (*Devarim* 10:8) because the Luchos symbolize the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people.

Idolaters place their idol in the center of their temples because it is the focus of their worship. In stark contrast, we believe in a one and only God Who has no form and Whose essence cannot be perceived by any sense, including thought (Introduction to *Tikkunei Zohar* pg. 17a). We can only perceive Hashem according to how He chooses to relate to us, and that is primarily through His Torah. We are therefore commanded to place the Luchos in the innermost chamber of the Mishkan, at the focus of our worship.

On top of the Aron’s cover are two statues of golden angels called “*keruvim*,” one male and one female (*Rabbeinu Bechaye*). Although the Torah generally prohibits making such statues, this was an exception. To avoid the possibility of people thinking that the *keruvim* represent Hashem, the Torah instructs us to make two of them. They are to be facing each other with their gazes downward to the Aron, demonstrating that they are only statues that honor Hashem, and not idols (*Midrash HaGadol* and *Chizkuni*).

The Mishkan is Hashem’s house, the Holy of Holies is His throne room, the Aron is His throne, and the *keruvim* represent the angels that carry the Throne of Glory, as witnessed by Yeshayah and Yechezkel in their prophecies (*Rabbeinu Bechaye*). The fact that Hashem sits enthroned upon the Aron suggests that the revelation of Hashem's kingship is linked to our fulfillment of His Torah.

The Sages see the *keruvim* as a representation of the husband-wife relationship between Hashem and His people (see *Yoma* 54a). This does not contradict the idea that the *keruvim* represent the angels that carry Hashem’s Throne; rather, it is another facet of the same idea. For, as has been explained, Hashem's kingship is revealed specifically through His relationship with the Jewish people, which means that His Throne of Glory *is* His relationship with us. That is, when we perform His will completely and lead the world in His service— as shall be in the days of Mashiach — His Throne is complete.

Hashem's Throne of Glory in Heaven is carried by four angels; so too, the Aron is carried by four Levites, using these two staves (*Rabbeinu Bechaye*). The two staves are each connected

to the Aron by two rings, and we are commanded never to remove them. *Malbim* suggests that this symbolizes that we carry the Aron with our two eyes and two ears, which must be constantly attached to the Torah. [Further symbolisms of the staves have been discussed in an earlier article.]

The Sages also see the Aron as a symbol of the Torah scholar, who contains the Torah and embodies it with his every act. Thus, the Aron is a wooden box plated with gold on both sides, symbolizing that a Torah scholar must be "golden" inside and out. The Aron was two-and-a-half by one-and-a-half *amos*. Just as its physical measurements are broken (i.e., not whole numbers), a Torah scholar needs to break his physical dimensions by curbing his physical drives (*Rabbeinu Chananel*, cited by *Rabbeinu Bechaye*). *Baal HaTurim* writes that the *keruvim* symbolize a pair of Torah scholars engaging in joint study. The Aron has a crown (25:11), which represents the Crown of the Torah (*Yoma* 72b).

It emerges that the Aron alludes to Hashem's Throne of Glory, His Torah, and His people. These concepts are ultimately one, for the Jewish people reveal Hashem's kingship by fulfilling His Torah, as the *Zohar* (Vol. III, pg. 74a) states, "The Holy one, blessed is He, the Torah, and the Jewish people are interlinked." This finds expression in the fact that the cover of the Aron, which houses the Torah, and the *keruvim*, which represent the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people, are carved from a single block of gold.

The *keruvim*'s presence in our place of worship indicates that their worship is linked to ours. Hence, there are specifically two *keruvim*, corresponding to the two Tablets of the Covenant (*Rav Hirsch*), which suggests that the power of the angels is linked to our fulfillment of the covenant. Similarly, there is a verse that describes Hashem as being enthroned upon the praises of the Jewish people, which means that Hashem does not accept praises from the angels until He receives the praises of the Jewish people (*Avos D'Rabbi Nassan* §26 and *Siddur Rokeach, Uva LTzion*). Though the angels are incomparably greater than human beings, they are dependent on our worship, for it is the worship of the Jewish people — which rises despite all our challenges — that Hashem primarily desires (*Bishvili Nivra HaOlam* §32). We may thus suggest that the *keruvim* denote that our service and praise, though confined by all the limitations of earthly human beings, are amplified beyond measure by the parallel service and praise of the angels.

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INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

5785 – The Rarest Year of Them All

Part VIII

As detailed in previous installments in our series, our current year, 5785, is not only a rare one, but calendarically speaking, actually the hands-down **rarest** of them all. 5785 is classified as a *HaSh”A* year in our calendars. This abbreviation is referring to Rosh Hashana falling out on Thursday (*hei*), both months of Cheshvan and Kislev being *shalem* (*shin* – 30-day months instead of possibly 29; these are the only months that can switch off in our set calendar), and Pesach falling out on Sunday (*aleph*).

A *HaSh”A* year is the rarest of years, and out of the 14 possibilities in *Tur*’s 247-year calendar cycle, this year type occurs on average only once in about 30.19 years (approximately 3.3 percent of the time). Indeed, at times there are 71 years (!) in between *HaSh”A* years. The last time this year type occurred was 31 years ago in 5754 / 1994. The next time will be 20 years hence in 5805 / 2044. The next several times after that are slated to be 27 years further, in 5832 / 2071 and then a 51-year gap in 5883 / 2122.

The reasons and rules governing the whys and whens this transpires are too complicated for this discussion; suffice to say that when the *Mishnah Berurah* discusses these issues he writes “*ain kan makom l’ha’arich*,” that this is not the place to expound in detail, which is certainly good enough for this author.

Obviously, such a rare calendar year will contain many rare occurrences. This series sets out to detail many of them. As we get nearer to the actual events, we will perhaps discuss them in greater detail. Let’s continue on our journey through our unique year.

Vayakhel and Pekudei Split

An interesting feature of a rare *HaSh”A* year is that it is the only regular (non-leap) year configuration where the *Parshiyos* of *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* are *leined* separately. The background for this uncanny occurrence is as follows: It is well known that the *Torah* is divided into 54 *parshiyos*, ensuring there are enough *parshiyos* for every *Shabbos* of the yearly cycle, which begins and ends on *Simchas Torah*. Since most (non-leap) years require less than 54 *parshiyos*, we combine certain *parshiyos*. This means that two consecutive *parshiyos* are read on one *Shabbos* as if they are one long *parasha*, to make sure that we complete the *Torah* reading for the year on *Simchas Torah*.

As detailed by the *Abudraham*, there are seven potential occurrences when we read “double *parshiyos*.” These seven are:

Vayakheil / Pekudei, the last two *parshiyos* of *Sefer Shemos*.
Tazria / Metzora, in *Sefer Vayikra*.

Acharei Mos / Kedoshim, in *Sefer Vayikra*.

Behar / Bechukosai, in *Sefer Vayikra*.

Chukas / Balak, in *Sefer Bamidbar* (this can only occur in *Chutz La'aretz*).

Matos / Masei, the last two *parshiyos* of *Sefer Bamidbar*.

Netzavim / Vayeileich, towards the end of *Sefer Devarim*.

Aside from *Nitzavim / Vayeileich*, which have their own reasoning when they are split or combined, the others are generally combined in a standard year and split up only in leap years. Yet due to the rare combination that occurs in a *HaSh" A* year, there are sufficient *Shabbosos* in the first part of the year, and it is the only standard year type that *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* are *leined* separately. Moreover, it is the only year type that *Parashas Parah* actually falls out on *Parashas Vayekhel*. Interesting, no?

Ten Shabbasos Without Av Harachamim?

Another interesting calendar anomaly is that depending on a shul's specific *minhag*, the *Tefillah* of *Av Harachamim* may not be recited for ten consecutive *Shabbasos* this year. Starting from *Parashas Mishpatim* – which was *Shabbos Mevorchin Adar* (the last week in *Shvat*), potentially all the way up until *Parashas Tazria-Metzora* – which is the first *Shabbos* on *Iyar*, *Av Harachamim* may not be said, *minhag* depending. The basic rule is that whenever there is a joyous *Simchadik* occasion that would mandate *Tachanun* not to be recited, neither would *Av Harachamim*, as it is a prayer of commemoration for the deceased (see end of *Orach Chaim* 284).

Although not universal, yet, as this Purim-Pesach period includes *Shabbos Mevorchins*, the *Arba Parshiyos*, Shushan Purim, and *Chodesh Nissan*, we end up with a record of consecutive weeks where *Av Harachamim* would potentially not be recited. Each of these events follows the general rule, but depends on varying *minhagim*. For example, there are those who do recite *Av Harachamim* on the weeks of the *Arba Parshiyos*, whereas most do not. There is also some debate as to *Shabbos Mevorchin Iyar* – as it always occurs during the mourning period of *Sefiras Ha'Omer*, whether or not *Av Harachamim* should be recited that week.

Also, as pointed out to this author by Rav Dovid Heber of the Star-K, *Shevii shel Pesach* falls out on *Shabbos* this year. In Eretz Yizrael this is the last day of Pesach, and hence *Yizkor* is recited. Anytime there is *Yizkor*, *Av Harachamim* is also recited. So in Eretz Yisrael this *Shabbos* streak would end after eight *Shabbasos*, whereas in *Chutz La'aretz*, and if following the *shitta* of the Vilna Gaon - that *Av Harachamim* is never recited on *Shabbos Mevorchin*, except for *Mevorchin Chodesh Av*, it will continue for two more *Shabbasos* (although *Av Harachamim* will still be recited on *Shemini shel Pesach* along with *Yizkor* – but that is not on *Shabbos*).

As the *Rema* concludes “*V’holchin bazeh achar haminhag*, in this matter we follow the (local) custom.” Or, as the *Aruch Hashulchan* sums it up, “*V’chol makom u’makom lefi minhago*, every place should follow its own individual custom.”

What is agreed upon is that this extended potential streak can only occur in a rare year such as ours, when Rosh Chodesh Adar falls out on Friday-Shabbos and Erev Pesach falling out on Shabbos. In fact, it will only next occur in 20 years’ time in 5805 /2045!

Our fascinating journey detailing the many remarkable facets of our rare year will IY”H be continued...

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 *minhagim*, this series will help raise appreciation of them and our fascinating calendrical customs.

This author wishes to thank R’ Yosef Yehuda Weber, author of ‘Understanding the Jewish Calendar,’ for being a fount of calendrical knowledge and for his assistance with this series.

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