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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Beha'alotcha In Your Elevation

"In your lighting" (8:2)

Once there was a rich nobleman who had a friend who was a simple laborer. The rich man told his friend that he would eat in his home. The laborer did not stint in preparing his home to the maximum of his ability. He cleaned and arranged his meager furnishings, set the table as lavishly as he could, and lit candles to welcome his friend. As it grew dark, the laborer went to the window and saw rising on the horizon a glow. At first, he thought it was the setting sun, but as the sky darkened, the glow continued to get brighter. Suddenly, his friend the nobleman appeared on the crest of the hill with a large group of servants all carrying torches. These torches were so bright that they lit up the night as though it were day. When the laborer saw this entourage approaching his cottage, he turned and looked at his room. The candles that he had arranged, paled into insignificance in the glow of the torches that approached his home. Quickly, he extinguished the candles and hid the candlesticks in a drawer. The nobleman entered his cottage and saw the darkness and said, "Were you not expecting me tonight?" "Yes, I was," said the laborer. "Why did you kindle no lights?" enquired the nobleman. "I did," replied the other, "but when I saw the wonderful blaze of lights from the torches of your servants, I was ashamed and hid my candles away."

On hearing this, the nobleman dismissed all his attendants and said, "Tonight, I will dine only by the light of your candles so you will see how dear they are to me."

People often ask why Hashem gave us so many commandments.

Altogether, there are 613. It's true, however, that not all of them can be performed by everyone. For example, there are *mitzvot* that only *kohanim* can do. There are those that only *leviim* can do, that only women can do, as well as *mitzvot* that can only be done when the Beit Hamikdash exists. Nevertheless, that still leaves a tremendous amount of *mitzvot*.

Why does Hashem need me to do all these things? What possible benefit is there to the Creator of the World if I put on *tefillin*, or if I love my neighbor as myself? Whatever little light I can shine into this world is infinitesimal compared to His Light. How can the little light that my kindness generates compare with Hashem's eternal kindness in creating the world and giving me the opportunity to exist and create a relationship with Him? Isn't my little light swamped completely by His light?

This is exactly how Moshe felt when he entered the Sanctuary. When Moshe went in there, he found the Sanctuary bathed in radiance of the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence. Moshe wondered how the poor earthly lights of the Menorah could radiate any light. He thought they would be overpowered by the brilliance of the *Shechina*.

What possible use could Hashem have for the wicks and oils of mere mortals?

Hashem spoke to Moshe using the first word of this week's Torah portion, "*Beha'alotecha*." This word is usually translated as "*When you light*." However, it can also mean "*In your elevation*." Hashem was telling Moshe that the mitzvah of the Menorah would elevate him. And, likewise, it is so with all of the *mitzvot*. Every mitzvah is a chance to become spiritually elevated and closer to our Creator.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Beha'alotcha

Masechet Shavuot 40-49

Guarding a Lost Object

Rabbi Yosef says, "He is like a paid guard, since he is exempt from giving charity to a poor person while he is involved in caring for the lost object."

The Sage Rabba disagrees with Rav Yosef regarding the degree of responsibility of one who finds a lost object that needs returning — a *shomer aveida*. The finder must take active measures, as necessary, to take care of the lost object until the owner identifies it and it is restored to him. Rabba rules that the finder is a *shomer chinam* — an unpaid guard — since he is not receiving payment to guard the object. Therefore, he is obligated to pay for the lost object he guards only if something happens to it due to his negligence, as is the law of the "unpaid guard" — but not if it is lost or stolen from him without negligence.

Rav Yosef, however, contends that the finder of a lost object has a greater amount of responsibility than an unpaid guard. In fact, he has the responsibility of a "paid guard," who is obligated to pay in the event of loss or theft and is exempt only if the object cannot be returned due to circumstances beyond his control — such as its death or being struck by lightning. You might ask, "What is the "payment he receives?" Rav Yosef explains, *"The money that he saves, since he is exempt from giving charity to a poor person while he is involved in caring for the lost object."*

This is based on the concept that "One who is performing a mitzvah is exempt from performing a different mitzvah at that time". While he is involved in doing something to care for the lost object, if a poor person would come to his door for charity, he would be exempt from the mitzvah of giving charity at that time.

A question is raised by Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Chayot (Maharitz Chayot, 1805-1855, Eastern Europe) on Rav Yosef's line of reasoning. The principle that exempts a person from doing *another* mitzvah while doing one mitzvah is an exemption only from a "positive mitzvah," a *mitzvat aseh*. It is not an exemption that allows transgressing a "negative" command. Giving charity is not only a positive mitzvah, but *also* involves a "negative" mitzvah, a *mitzvat lo ta'aseh*: "You shall not close your hand from your needy brother." (Devarim 15:7) This great *Acharon* (from the "later" period of Rabbis) leaves his question unanswered.

Perhaps the reason for the exemption is that the mitzvah is, after all, a mitzvah *to do something* — in this case to give *tzedaka* — whether it is stated in the "positive" (open your hand and give) or the "negative (don't close your hand to not give). Therefore, regardless of how it is stated in the Torah, the mitzvah is *to do something* — a *mitzvat aseh* — to give charity to the needy.

▪ *Shavuot 44b*

In the Presence of Greatness

The Sage Shimon ben Tarfon says, "If you touch someone who has had oil poured on his body, you will also become oily."

The Yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael teaches, "The servant of the king is like the king."

These are, in fact, two "Talmudic tips" and insights that are taught on our *daf*, but the context for them and their message requires explanation.

The Sage Shimon ben Tarfon is quoted on a number of unrelated issues in our *sugya*, one of which helps explain and intriguing verse in Devarim: "Until the *great* river, the Euphrates." (Dev. 1:7) This statement of this river's *greatness* seems to be in conflict with another verse in Chumash that describes the four rivers that went out from Eden: "And the *fourth* river was the Euphrates," indicating that it was smaller and less important than the other three rivers mentioned there (Ber. 2:14 and Rashi on our *daf*). Question: So why does

the verse in Sefer Devarim call the Euphrates “great” if it is listed only fourth and last in the first Sefer of the Chumash?

The Sage Shimon ben Tarfon answers that although it was indeed the smallest in size, it held a special “claim to greatness” over the other three rivers. The Euphrates is the *only* river mentioned in this verse which refers to the Land of Israel, giving directions to the Jewish People on how to approach the Land of Israel as they prepare to enter it. The key to understanding its greatness is to understand it in the context of its proximity and association with the Land of Israel.

But why does the *gemara* record *two* metaphors to explain its greatness? There are two “levels” of greatness that can be attributed to one who is in the presence of true greatness. By merely being near a great person it is virtually inevitable that some degree of the greatness will “rub off” on the “neighbor,” just as a person’s finger will become oily by touching a completely oiled person. But there is a higher level of greatness. If the neighbor is not only passively there, but is also actively “connected” to the great person — such as the servant of a king to the king (or the King of kings), or the service of water provision to the Land of Israel by the bordering Euphrates — then the “student” attains an even greater degree of the greatness of the “master”. But this requires a “closeness” that is more than a geographical proximity. It must be a closeness of shared goals and values of desiring closeness to the Creator.

▪ *Shavuot 47b*

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Beha'aloscha

KRIAT SHEMA AL HAMITAH (PART 15)

Kriat Shema al Hamitah continues: “Blessed is Hashem by day, blessed is Hashem by night. Blessed is Hashem when we lie down, blessed is Hashem when we arise. For in Your Hands are the souls of the living and the dead. The One in whose hand is the soul of all the living, and the spirit of all human flesh. In Your Hand I entrust my spirit. You redeemed me Hashem, G-d of truth. Hashem, Who is in the heavens, reveal the Oneness of Your Name. Establish Your kingdom forever and reign over all of us for all eternity.”

The verse “For in Your Hands are the souls of the living and the dead” is taken from the Book of Iyov 12:10. The Midrash Tanchuma explains that even after a person passes from this world, they are still in the “Hands of Hashem.” It is our actions in the physical realms that define how we are treated in the spiritual realms. The straightforward understanding of the Midrash is that each person’s World to Come is created by our deeds in this world.

Nachmanides (Tractate *Rosh Hashana* 16b) writes that there are three occasions when a person is judged:

- I. Each Rosh Hashana, a person is judged materially.
- II. On the day a person passes from this world, they are judged for everything they have done during their life.
- III. And, finally, on the “*Yom Hadin Hagadol*” – the Great Day of Judgment that will take place immediately prior to the Resurrection of the Dead – the soul will be judged to see whether it will merit to be resurrected or not.

Rabbi Aharon Kotler points out in *Mishnat Rebbi Aharon* that the final judgment seems to be superfluous. After all, if a person is judged every year on Rosh Hashana, and then cumulatively for their entire life on their passing, what is left for them to be judged for on the *Yom Hadin Hagadol*? With the legendary brilliance and depth he was renowned for, Rabbi Kotler explains that the final judgment is for the *effect* that a person has on others and whether their influence carried through to the following generations.

The novelty of Rabbi Kotler's insight is breathtaking! According to him, the deciding factor about whether a soul will be resurrected is not necessarily their individual spiritual achievements during their life, but what impact the person left in the world. Did they make the world a better place for those around them? Did their interpersonal relations leave others feeling good about themselves? Were they able to convince others to serve Hashem in a more accomplished way simply through their warmth and approachability?

It is impossible to gauge the impact of a kind word and a sincere smile. Often, they can change a person's whole trajectory. And change the generations that come afterwards as well. Unfortunately, the opposite is equally true. The inspirational speaker Rabbi Y. Y. Jacobson relates that Dr. Jerome Mattos, a forensic psychologist and psychiatrist for the San Francisco Police Department, once gave an interview to the New York Times. In it he shared that his job was to examine the evidence after a suicide. And, as to expected, Dr. Mattos had become somewhat desensitized to what he was exposed to on a regular basis. However, he said that there was one case that managed to completely shake him up.

A thirty-something man had ended his life by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. Dr. Mattos went to the deceased's home to see what may have been the catalyst that led him to make such a tragic and devastating decision. In the apartment, he found a note: "I'm going to walk to the bridge. If one person smiles at me on the way, I won't jump."

It is true that no one person can save the entire world. But each individual person is described by our Sages as being an "*Olam Katan* – a Small World." Maybe, just by smiling at those around us, perhaps just by offering a kind word, we might be saving someone from loneliness and despair. Our Sages teach (*Bava Batra* 11a, *Sanhedrin* 37a), "Whoever preserves a single Jewish life is considered as if they have preserved an entire world." Not just the world of the person who they helped, but their own world as well – their World to Come.

Or, in the words of the indefatigable Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, whose heart was always wide open to every single Jew, "Our lives are judged by the lives that we have touched and made better."

To be continued...

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

Beha'aloscha

REMEMBERING MIRIAM

The Torah instructs us: “Remember what Hashem did to Miriam on the way, when you left Egypt.” It is referring to the incident recorded at the end of *Parashas Beha'aloscha*, in which Miriam was struck with *tzaraas* leprosy and exiled from the camp for a week for having relayed negative information about Moshe to her brother Aharon. The entire nation was aware of what had happened because they waited a week for her to recover before continuing to journey.

Miriam had found out that Moshe was not engaging in the Mitzvah to propagate, and she was concerned that his conduct was wrong. After all, she and Aharon had been prophets for longer than Moshe and had never been commanded to refrain from relations, nor had the Patriarchs been commanded so. According to one of the Sages, she wondered if Moshe's conduct was perhaps unwittingly spurred by arrogance. She conferred with Aharon about it, with the righteous intent of rectifying the matter. Hashem rebuked them for speaking ill about such a great man and failing to realize that he had an unparalleled level of prophecy that required an unparalleled level of purity. His conduct did not stem from imagined supremacy but rather from authentic supremacy.

Authorities differ as to whether or not to include the Torah's instruction to remember what happened to Miriam in the count of the 613 Mitzvos. Even according to the majority opinion that does not include it in the count, it is commendable to fulfill it daily. However, all agree that it is important enough for it to have been written in the Torah even though it faults a saintly prophetess who was one of the greatest people who ever lived. Why was it not enough for the Torah to tell us not to speak *lashon hara*? And if it was instructive to illustrate with an example, why could it not select another *lashon hara* incident? Apparently, the incident of Miriam contains essential lessons that we would not have otherwise known, and we need to contemplate it carefully.

The Sages contemplated it and made the following observations:

1. Miriam never intended to speak *lashon hara*. She related that Moshe was doing something that was essentially virtuous, only she wondered if his conduct was wrong and needed to be corrected.
2. She did not relate that Moshe was certainly wrong, but rather asked if he was wrong.
3. She spoke with only one person, keeping the matter as private as possible. Nobody heard their words except for Hashem.
4. She spoke about her younger brother, over whom she had an element of superiority and responsibility. She thought that if she and Aharon would not correct Moshe's supposedly mistaken conduct, no other person would do so.
5. She had a noble intention to increase propagation, one of the greatest of Mitzvos.
6. Moshe was not shamed because he was not present. Moreover, even had he been present, he would not have been offended in the slightest, as he was the humblest person on earth.

Notwithstanding all the above, Hashem became angry with her and smote her with *tzaraas*, which was incurable because the only Kohanim at the time were her relatives and relatives cannot administer the purification of *tzaraas*. Even when Moshe interceded on her behalf, Hashem refused to heal her and allow her back into the camp until a week would pass.

Only by remembering the above incident can we appreciate how severe it is to speak *lashon hara* with *unconstructive* intentions, as though the facts are *certain*, to *multiple* listeners, criticizing *superiors*, *weakening* relationships and *shaming*, as well as causing serious and unrepairable damage. Even when we have to speak negatively about someone for constructive purposes, the incident of Miriam teaches us to be extremely wary and to consider alternative avenues of operation before opening our mouths. Just as a person does not fire a gun at random, we cannot allow ourselves to converse about the faults of others without careful consideration of the Halachah.

It was only because our ancestors did not learn from this incident about the great power of the tongue and the responsibility of its wielder, that they spoke ill about Eretz Yisrael and perished in the Wilderness. It was only because our ancestors forgot about the severity of *lashon hara* and hatred of Jews that the second *Beis HaMikdash* was destroyed. And only when we remember what happened to Miriam will we merit its reconstruction, soon in our days.

Note: The above article reflects the incident of Miriam from an Aggadic perspective, based on the following sources: Sifri §99, Yalkut Shimoni §737, Avos D'Rabbi Nassan (ch. 41), Tagum Yonasan, and Midrash HaGadol. It does not reflect the Halachah, which is based on additional sources and lies beyond the scope of this article.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Beha'alotcha: Chew That

The contextual hook for this week's essay relates to a scene from *Parshat Beha'alotcha* of physical indulgence gone awry. When the Israelites complained about their monotonous manna diet and begged Moses for meat, Hashem responded with a miraculous storm of "*slav*" birds (often identified as quail) from which the Jews were allowed to partake. Yet, while the meat was still "between their teeth" (Num. 11:33), a divine plague struck down many of those who had feasted on the fowl treat. This haunting image of a divine plague arriving post-mastication serves as our point of departure for exploring two words in Rabbinic Hebrew that refer to the act of "chewing/masticating": *kesisah* (the verbal noun for *koses*) and *le'isah* (the verbal noun for *lo'es*). As always with this series, we take two similar Hebrew words that seem synonymous and try to tease out their subtle differences in connotation and/or etymology. And the case in question is a fascinating instance of nuanced synonymy in Hebrew that has not been widely explored.

At the very beginning, we should note an unusual lacuna in Biblical Hebrew: there is no single word that explicitly means "chewing." Indeed, even the iconic Biblical phrase "chews its cud" (*ma'aleh geirah*) used in the context of identifying kosher animals (Lev. 11:3-7, Deut. 14:6-8) literally means "*brings up* the cud" — not chewing, *per se*. Thus, the verbs *koses* and *lo'es* are both Rabbinic Hebrew terms for "chewing," yet neither term appears in the Bible.

The Talmud (*Brachot* 37a) uses the verb *koses* to describe how one who "chews" raw wheat or rice should recite the blessing *borei pri ha'adamah*, rather than *bore minei mezonot*. Likewise, the Tosefta (*Brachot* 4:6-7, cited in the Talmud there), uses the verb *koses* when stating that one who "chews" wheat or rice should recite *bore minei zeraim* (an opinion that is not accepted in Halacha). Similarly, elsewhere, the Mishnah (*Nedarim* 6:10) and Tosefta (*Nedarim* 3:7) discusses whether a person who has foresworn tasting wheat is only prohibition from eating regular wheat-based goods, or is even forbidden from simply "chewing" (*la'chus*) raw wheat.

The Talmud (*Brachot* 36b, *Yoma* 81a) uses the term *kas* to describe a person “chewing” pepper or ginger on Yom Kippur (which, according to Rava, is not Biblically considered “eating” on Yom Kippur as long as the pepper or ginger was dry). Likewise, Abaye describes himself as being so hungry after a lavish meal that he was ready to eat [*koses*] the plate on which the food was served (*Megillah* 7b). In that context, Rashi (to *Megillah* 7b) explains that the term *kesisah* refers to any abnormal or non-standard way of eating something (see also Maharasha there who suggests that perhaps the plate in question was made of something edible).

The Talmud (*Ketubot* 77a) relates that one time, Rabbi Elazar said a Halachah with which Shmuel disagreed, and Shmuel commented that Rabbi Elazar should be fed barley like an animal because there is no substance to the ruling he relayed. In relating this anecdote, the Talmud uses an inflection of *koses* to denote giving Rabbi Elazar food to eat, and Rashi (there) explains that anytime one eats in an unnatural way, that act is called *koses*. Rashi repeats this assertion about *kas/koses* in a few other places (to *Brachot* 36b, *Yoma* 81a, *Chullin* 15a).

In another context, Rashi offers a slightly different definition of *koses*: the Talmud (*Beitzah* 26b) attempts to bring a proof that something cannot become *muktzeh* for only part of a day from the fact that on Yom Tov one may cook lentils and beans. Before one put them into a pot of boiling water, those legumes were suitable for consumption by way of *koses*, but once they are put into boiling water they seemingly become *muktzeh* (because they cannot be eaten while boiling hot) and yet after they are cooked and have cooled down, they revert to their non-*muktzeh* status. While the Talmud ultimately rejects this proof, Rashi nonetheless explains that any food that can be eaten raw, when one does so, this act is called *koses*.

Several philologists like Dr. Asher Weiser and Rabbi Yaakov Yehudah Zilberberg (Di Kasif) connect the Rabbinic Hebrew root KAF-SAMECH-SAMECH with the Biblical Hebrew root KUF-SAMECH-SAMECH, which appears once in the context of “cutting down/destroying” (*yikoses*) the fruits of a metaphoric tree (Ezek. 17:9). Rashi (to Ezek. 17:9) connects KUF-SAMECH-SAMECH with the root KUF-TZADI-TZADI (*kotzet*, “cutting”) based on the interchangeability of SAMECH and TZADI, while Mahari Kara (there) connects KUF-SAMECH-SAMECH with the root KAF-TAV-TAV (*kotet*, “smashing”), based on the interchangeability of KUF and KAF and the interchangeability of SAMECH and TAV. Turning to the classical lexicographers, the triliteralist lexicographers like Ibn Janach and Radak see that root of *yikoses* as triliteral (KUF-SAMECH-SAMECH), while the biliteralist Menachem Ibn Saruk (in *Machberet Menachem*) sees the root as the two-letter string KUF-SAMECH.

Implicitly following that latter approach, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim in his biliteralist work *Cheshek Shlomo* discusses the two-letter root KUF-SAMECH, whose core meaning he defines as "a cut tube." The way he sees it, the term Biblical *yikoses* focuses on the "cutting" aspect of that meaning. Other words that he connects to this root focus on the tubular aspect of the root, including *keset* ("pen/stylus," see Ezek. 9:2, 9:11), *kesem* ("magic stick/wand" or magical writings written with a *keset*), and *kisam* ("toothpick"). Those words refer to tubes cut along their length. The Shulchan ("Table") in the Tabernacle/Temple has *kesavot* (Ex. 25:29, Num. 4:7) which were tubes cut along their width upon which the shewbread rested. Rabbi Pappenheim also sees the Biblical Hebrew word *kaskeset* ("scales" used to identify kosher fish, or "dandruff" in Modern Hebrew) as also related to this root.

An inflection of the terms *kesisah/koses* is the Hebrew *kaskasa* ("crunch" or "crush with one's teeth"). Interestingly, the poem *Elohei Ha'Ruchos* (recited in some communities on Shabbat HaGadol) written by Rabbi Yosef Tuv-Elem of Bonfils states that on Passover night, one must do *kiskusei* to their *maror*. The *Ohr Zarua* (*Hilchot Pesachim* §256) offers an elucidation of that *piyyut* in which he explains that *kiskusei* means "munching/chewing," which suggests that one cannot just swallow the *maror* without first chewing it to experience its bitter taste. On the other hand, Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Ortzel of Bayit Ve'Gan suggests that perhaps *kiskusei* in this context means "(vigorous) shaking" (like it does in *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* §651:9 in the context of shaking a *lulav*) to mean that one must shake off the *charoset* before eating the *maror*. Indeed, the verb *l'kaskes* appears in the Mishnah (*Niddah* 9:7) in reference to "vigorously rubbing" a fabric as part of the laundering process. Perhaps this action resembles "chewing" with its consistent forceful movement.

Looking at the origins of *kesisah/koses*, Rabbi Ernest Klein (no relation) traces these terms all the way back to the Akkadian words *kasasu* ("cutting into pieces") and *kissatu* ("fodder"). The way he sees it, they are related to Arabic cognate that mean "pounding/grounding/pulverizing." I have even seen it claimed by one Dr. A. Weiss (writing in YU's rabbinic journal *Chorev* in 1943 vol. 7, p. 55) that the first word in the Rabbinic Hebrew phrase *kos shel akarim* in reference to a type of "contraceptive" refers not to a *kos* in the sense of "cup," but to a cognate of *koses* in the sense that the ingredients used in this concoction were "cut up" or "chopped up" into small bits and mixed together.

Interestingly, the French word *couscous* (from Arabic *kuskus*) refers to a specific type of food made up of small bits of pounded grain. The word is also cognate with the Rabbinic Hebrew *koses* because it describes chopped up grains that appear as though they are pre-chewed. Yet, this has no connection to the English word *kasha* ("buckwheat"). That word actually derives from Slavic languages (like Russian and Czech) by way of Yiddish — although in those Slavic languages it originally meant "groats/cereal/porridge," and not specifically buckwheat.

Another form of *kesisah/koses* appears in the Targum. When the Bible uses the Hebrew word *nikkudim*) Jos. 9:5, 9:12, I Kgs. 14:3), it refers to food provisions and this word is translated into Aramaic by Targum as *kasnin*. In fact, baked goods like cakes and other pastries on which one might recite *mezunot* are known as *pat haba'ah b'kisnin* (see *Brachot* 42a).

Radak (to I Kings 14:3) relates the term *kisnin* to *koses* by explaining that *kisnin* are the sorts of treats on which one might “munch” during a party (or wedding). Comparable definitions of *pat haba'ah b'kisnin* as the type of snack people eat at a party can be found cited in the name of Rrabbeinu Chananel (Ohr Zarua *Hilchot Brachot* §149) and Rabbi Hai Gaon (*Sefer Ha'Ner* to *Brachot* 42a). Finally, Rabbi Moshe Tedeschi-Ashkenazi (*Ho'il Moshe* to I Kgs. 14:3) suggests that this word is cognate with *koses* (which refers to using chewing something into smaller pieces) because *kisnin* refers to a foodstuff which can crumb and therefore break down into smaller pieces.

The term *le'isah* appears thrice in the Mishnah: the Mishnah (*Shabbat* 19:2) states that one may put ground cumin on a circumcised baby's member on Shabbat for healing purposes, and that if one did not ground the cumin before Shabbat, one may even chew [*lo'es*] whole cumin with his teeth so that it could be put on the child's member. This verb again appears in the context of preparing grits for use in a cleaning agent to remove blood stains (*Niddah* 9:7).

In the third case, the Mishnah (*Pesachim* 2:7) rules that one may not chew (*lo'es*) wheat on Passover to turn it into a gauze/bandage to place on one's wound because this will cause the wheat to become *chametz*. In that context, Rashi (to *Pesachim* 39b) defines *lo'es* as *koses*. Likewise, the Talmud (*Brachot* 44b) states that eating spleen is good for one's teeth, but bad for one's intenseness. Because of this, the Talmud recommends chewing the spleen, but then spitting it out instead of swallowing it. The verb used there to denote “chewing” is an inflection of *lo'es*, and Rashi (there) again comments that *loe'es* means the same thing as *koses*.

The Mishnaic Hebrew term *lo'es* has cognates in Aramaic/Syriac wherein the three-letter root LAMMED-AYIN-SAMECH also means “chewing/masticating.” It even appears in Targum (to Ecc. 12:3). But the etymology of this term is otherwise obscure. Rabbi Avi Kobernick in *Hipuch Otiyot* offers a speculative approach that views LAMMED-AYIN-SAMECH as a metathesized form of the Hebrew root SAMECH-LAMMED-AYIN (*sela*, “rock/boulder,” see my earlier essay “Like a Rock,” Nov. 2018). Just as the *sela* represents a strong, durable mineral that cannot easily be broken, so does *lo'es* represent the polar opposite: the breaking down of some food by chewing it with one's teeth.

Perhaps instead of treating the pair of terms that we have presented as synonyms that need differentiation, we ought to look to their respective etymologies and notice that they are of different origins: *koses/kesisah* seems to be a native Hebrew word, while *lo'es/le'isah* seems to be a Hebrew loanword borrowed from Aramaic. So both terms could mean the same thing, but since they come from different languages, their synonymity does not point to any superfluity.

Yet, despite their apparent synonymy, members of the famed Mazuz family from Tunisia seem to presume that there is some nuanced semantic difference between the types of “chewing” implied by the terms *lo'es/le'isah* and *koses/kesisah*. Although it is hard to substantiate this difference or even understand exactly what it means, this understanding is evident in three works:

Firstly, responsa *Ish Matzliach* (vol. 2 *Orach Chaim* §47) by Rabbi Matzliach Mazuz contains a lengthy discussion of whether the term *pilpel* refers to a “common pepper,” “black pepper,” or both. In that context, he discusses how the use of the term *kas* — with a cognate of *koses* instead of *lo'es* — in the reference to chewing a *pilpel* on fast day might have a bearing on that discussion.

Secondly, Rabbi Matzliach Mazuz’s son Rabbi Meir Mazuz (*Arim Nissi* to *Pesachim* 39b) writes that *le'isah* typically implies chewing something as part of eating it (i.e., in preparation to swallowing it), while *kesisah* does not necessarily bear that implication. Because of this, he explains that when Rashi explains *le'isah* as referring to *koses* (in the context of chewing wheat to create a bandage), Rashi’s point was that the person chewing the wheat on Passover was not doing so in order to swallow it, but simply in order to soften/wet the grain so it can be used as part of the dressing for one’s wound.

Thirdly, Rabbi Moshe Isserles (in his glosses to *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* §567:3) writes that on fast days (except for Yom Kippur), one may chew cinnamon sticks or other unpulverized spices in order to “wet one’s throat” — as long as one spits it out and does not swallow it. In that context, Rabbi Isserles uses the word *lo'es*, following the Tur (there). However, the source for this ruling, the Ravyah (*Hilchot Taanit* §861) actually uses the word *la'chus* (an infinitive form of *kesisah*), not *lo'es*. Rabbi Yitzchak Barda (a son-in-law of Rabbi Matzliach Mazuz) takes note of this word change, and explains that *kesisah* implies a type of chewing whereby there is more enjoyment from the sweetness of the spices’ juices than the type of chewing implied by the term *le'isah*. In other words, he presumes that while *koses/kesisah* may connote forceful or even indulgent mastication, *lo'es/le'isah* leans towards a more utilitarian chewing, possibly with less focus on pleasure and more on functionality.

Questions

1. Toward which direction did the wicks of the Menorah burn, and why?
2. From what material and in what manner was the Menorah made?
3. Moshe was commanded to cleanse the *levi'im* by sprinkling on them "*mei chatat*." What is "*mei chatat*"?
4. Which three "*t'nufot*" (wavings) are in the parsha?
5. Why did G-d claim the first-born of the Jewish People as His possession?
6. Why are the words "Bnei Yisrael" repeated five times in verse 8:19?
7. When a *levi* reaches age 50, which functions may he still perform?
8. Why was the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini not commanded directly to Moshe?
9. What similarity is there between the Menorah and the trumpets?
10. What three purposes did trumpet signals serve?
11. How many tribes marched between the Gershon-Merari detachment and that of Kehat? How was the time differential used?
12. The tribe of Dan, who traveled last, was called "the gatherer of all the camps." What did they gather?
13. When the Jewish People entered the Land, who took temporary possession of Jericho?
14. Which aron is referred to in verse 10:33?
15. Which two topics are out of chronological order in the parsha?
16. Which tastes did the manna not offer, and why not?
17. Moshe was commanded to choose 70 elders to help him lead the Jewish People. What happened to the elders who led the Jewish People in Egypt?
18. Whom did Moshe choose as elders?
19. What was the prophecy of Eldad and Medad?
20. Why did Miriam merit to have the people wait for her?

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

Answers

1. 8:2 - They leaned toward the middle wick so people wouldn't say that the Menorah was lit for its light.
2. 8:4 - It was made from one solid piece of hammered gold.
3. 8:7 - Water containing ashes of the *para aduma*.
4. 8:11 - The wavings of Kehat, Gershon and Merari.
5. 8:17 - Because in Egypt He spared them during *makat bechorot*.
6. 8:19 - To show G-d's love for them.
7. 8:25 - Closing the courtyard gates of the Mishkan and Beit Hamikdash; singing during the avoda; loading the wagons to transport the Mishkan.
8. 9:7 - The people who asked about it were rewarded by being the catalyst for the teaching of this mitzvah.
9. 8:4, 10:2 - They were each made from a single, solid block.
10. 10:2-7 - Announcement of the gathering of Bnei Yisrael, the gathering of the *nesi'im*, and the beginning of a move of the encampment.
11. 10:17-21 - Three: Reuven, Shimon and Gad. In the meantime Gershon and Merari set up the Mishkan.
12. 10:25 - They gathered and returned things lost by the other tribes.
13. 10:32 - The children of Yitro.
14. 10:33 - The aron which held the broken pieces of the first tablets, that was taken to the battlefront.
15. 9:1, 10:35,36 - The Pesach sacrifice, and the traveling of the aron.
16. 11:5 - Cucumbers, melons, leeks, onion and garlic - these are harmful to nursing women.
17. 11:16 - They were consumed in the fire at Taverah (11:3).
18. 11:16 - People who were supervisors in Egypt and had pity on Bnei Yisrael at risk to themselves.
19. 11:28 - "Moshe will die and Yehoshua will lead the Jewish People into the Land."
20. 12:15 - Because she waited for Moshe when he was cast into the river.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Aharon is taught the method for kindling the Menorah. Moshe sanctifies the *levi'im* to work in the Mishkan. They replace the firstborn, who were disqualified after sinning through the golden calf. The *levi'im* are commanded that after five years of training they are to serve in the Mishkan from ages 30 to 50. Afterwards, they are to engage in less strenuous work.

One year after the Exodus from Egypt, Hashem commands Moshe concerning the *korban* Pesach. Those ineligible for this offering request a remedy, and the mitzvah of *Pesach Sheini* — allowing them a "second chance" to offer the *korban* Pesach, one month later — is detailed. Miraculous clouds that hover near the Mishkan signal when to travel and when to camp. Two silver trumpets summon the princes or the entire nation for announcements. The trumpets also signal travel plans, war or festivals. The order in which the tribes march is specified.

Moshe invites his father-in-law, Yitro, to join the Jewish People, but Yitro returns to Midian. At the instigation of the *eruv rav* — the mixed Egyptian multitude who joined the Jewish People in the Exodus — some people complain about the manna. Moshe protests that he is unable to govern the nation alone. Hashem tells him to select 70 elders, the first Sanhedrin, to assist him, and informs him that the people will be given meat until they will be sickened by it. Two candidates for the group of elders prophesy beyond their mandate, foretelling that Yehoshua instead of Moshe will bring the people to Canaan. Some protest, including Yehoshua, but Moshe is pleased that others have become prophets. Hashem sends an incessant supply of quail for those who complained that they lacked meat. A plague punishes those who complained.

Miriam tries to make a constructive remark to Aharon, which also implies that Moshe is only like other prophets. Hashem explains that Moshe's prophecy is superior to that of any other prophet and punishes Miriam with *tzara'at*, as if she had gossiped about her brother. (Because Miriam is so righteous, she is held to an incredibly high standard.) Moshe prays for Miriam to be healed, and the nation waits until she is cured before traveling.