

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Pinchas

Pinchas and the Copper Snake

*“Therefore, I (Hashem) say, ‘Behold! I am giving him (Pinchas) My covenant of peace’
(25:12)”*

The name Pinchas is related to the word nechoshet, which means copper. In the Torah, copper connotes resilience, judgment and healing. The altar was made of copper, signifying endurance and the capacity to withstand fire. And its ability to bring spiritual healing through the korbanot, the sacrifices. But the connection goes deeper.

In last week’s Torah portion of Chukat, Hashem brought a plague of fiery serpents (nechashim serafim). Moshe was commanded by Hashem to construct a serpent of copper — a nachash nechoshet — and place it on a pole. Whoever looked upon it would be healed. (Bamidbar 21:9)

Why a serpent? Why copper?

Chazal, in Rosh Hashanah 29a, explain: “Was it the actually the serpent that killed or was it actually the serpent that gave life? Rather, when Israel looked upward and subjugated their hearts to their Father in Heaven, they were healed.” The nachash nechoshet was not a magical cure, but a symbol to direct the heart to spiritual rectification.

Now, enter Pinchas. When Zimri publicly violated the sanctity of Israel, causing a Divine plague to erupt, Pinchas rose up with a spear and halted the sin — just as the nachash nechoshet halted the plague. Both involve symbols of judgment (nachash, nechoshet, a spear). And both lead not to destruction, but to healing.

But here’s the irony: the nachash, the snake, is a Biblical symbol of sin, temptation and death — from the Garden of Eden onward. And yet, Hashem uses this very symbol as a conduit for healing. Likewise, Pinchas’ act, which on the surface is violent and harsh — becomes the source of peace and Divine favor.

This teaches a powerful principle:

"From the wound itself comes the healing."

In our deeper Torah sources, the nachash represents din — strict judgment. But when judgment is wielded by someone l'shem shamayim, as was with Moshe or Pinchas, it becomes sweetened, transformed, into a vessel of rachamim (mercy).

Thus, Pinchas, like the copper snake, channels Divine judgment to restore spiritual order — not for punishment, but for purification.

The Midrash and Zohar go further. Both the snake and Pinchas are agents of paradox. They bring healing through confrontation, peace through zeal, life through death. And because of this, Pinchas becomes Eliyahu, the one who brings ultimate peace; the one who "Returns the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to their fathers..." (Malachi 3:24)

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe to inform Pinchas that he will receive Hashem's "covenant of peace" in reward for his bold action — executing Zimri and the Midianite princess Kozbi. Hashem commands Moshe to maintain a state of enmity with the Midianites, who lured the Jewish People into sin. Moshe and Elazar are told to count the Jewish People. The Torah lists the names of the families in each tribe. The total number of males eligible to serve in the army is 601,730. Hashem instructs Moshe how to allot the Land of Israel to the Bnei Yisrael. The number of the Levites' families is recorded. Tzlofchad's daughters file a claim with Moshe.

In the absence of a brother, they request their late father's portion in the Land. Moshe asks Hashem for the ruling, and Hashem tells Moshe that their claim is just. The Torah teaches the laws and priorities which determine the order of inheritance. Hashem tells Moshe that he will ascend a mountain and view the Land that the Jewish People will soon enter, although Moshe himself will not enter it. Moshe asks Hashem to designate the subsequent leader, and Hashem selects Yehoshua bin Nun. Moshe ordains Yehoshua as his successor in the presence of the entire nation. This Torah portion concludes with special teachings of the service in the Beit Hamikdash.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Masechet Avodah Zarah 23-29

Deceiving the Thieves

“He should exaggerate the distance he plans to travel, as Yaakov did when dealing with his dangerous brother Esav.”

This advice is given in a beraita on our daf as one of a number of tips for a traveler who meets another traveler along the way, whom he suspects may do him harm. Instead of telling the other person his true destination, he should tell him that he is headed for a place that is actually farther along, in order to mislead the person into thinking that there is still plenty of time to do harm. In this way, the innocent traveler has a better chance of arriving at his destination safely before his dangerous companion has decided to act.

The proof for this deceptive, cunning behavior is based on what Yaakov told Esav, as opposed to what he actually did. Yaakov told Esav, as they both set out to travel, “Now let my master (Esav) go ahead before his servant, and I will move at my own slow pace... until I come to my master to Se’ir.” (Gen 33:14) However, Yaakov had no intention to travel as far as Se’ir at that time, but rather planned to travel only as far as a nearer place, as the verse states, “And Yaakov traveled to Succot...” (Gen. 33:17) This halacha of misleading a potentially dangerous travel escort is cited in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De’ah 153:3, with an intriguing “footnote” there.

Rashi, in his commentary on the Chumash, quotes the Midrash Rabbah (Gen. 78:14), which states that Yaakov was not actually lying. Although he did not go to Se’ir at that time when he was with Esav, he will indeed go there in the days of the Mashiach (see Ovadia 1:21).

Our gemara brings two stories that illustrate this halacha, with a fascinating twist. In one case, the students of Rabbi Akiva were travelling to the city of Kaziv in the Land of Israel, when they were approached by robbers on the road. “Where are you going?” asked the robbers. “To Acco,” replied the students (farther than Kaziv – Rashi). The robbers accompanied the students, and when they arrived at Kaziv, the students separated themselves, safely, at their destination, to the surprise of the robbers. “Whose students are you?” the robbers asked them. “Students of Rabbi Akiva,” they replied. “Praiseworthy are Rabbi

Akiva and his students, that no bad person ever harmed them,” announced the robbers.

A second story happened in Bavel (Babylonia): Rav Menashe was travelling to a city called Bei Turta. Thieves approached him and asked where he was going. He told them that he was headed for Pumpedita, a city farther than his real intended destination. They travelled along with him, and when he arrived at Bei Turta he separated himself from the dangerous thieves. They said to him, “You are the student of (Rav) Yehuda the liar!” (Rashi explains that they were demeaning not only Rav Menashe but his Rabbi, since he certainly learned how to deceive them from the teachings of Rav Yehuda, his Rabbi.) Rav Menashe defended the honor of the Torah and the honor of the Torah scholar who taught him, Rav Yehuda, by cursing the band of thieves who dishonored the Torah and its scholars. For the next twenty-two years the thieves saw only failure in their attempted thefts. This caused them to seek out Rav Menashe to lift the curse from them. (All but one thief atoned, and he was eaten by a lion according to the gemara.)

The gemara concludes with an insightful comparison of these two similar stories of robbers and thieves who accompanied Torah scholars on their travels in both the Land of Israel and in Bavel, according to the very different reactions of these criminals. “Come and see,” states the gemara, “the difference between the thieves of Bavel and the robbers of the Land of Israel.” Rashi points out that the word for robbers in the gemara refers to a more dangerous type of person than the word used for thief in the gemara. Despite the robbers being more dangerous, they praised the Torah scholars when they heard the wisdom of the Torah that guided them, whereas the less dangerous thieves cursed the Torah scholars. Rashi notes that this concluding statement of the gemara is meant to highlight the praise of the Land of Israel.

This statement in our gemara reminds me of an event that occurred in a yeshiva in Jerusalem that was robbed in the middle of the night (decades ago, and alarm systems were installed immediately afterwards). In the morning, when the theft was discovered, I heard the following report from someone in the yeshiva’s office: “The thief stole all of the money and the passports from the safe, but he didn’t steal any of the expensive silver adornments for the Torah scrolls that were kept there. I guess he was a ‘religious’ thief!”

- Avodah Zarah 25b-26a

Questions

1. Why was Pinchas not originally a kohen?
2. Why was Moav spared the fate of Midian?
3. What does the yud and hey added to the family names testify?
4. Korach and his congregation became a "sign." What do they signify?
5. Why did Korach's children survive?
6. Name six families in this Parsha whose names are changed.
7. Who was Yaakov's only living granddaughter at the time of the census?
8. How many years did it take to conquer the Land? How many to divide the Land?
9. Two brothers leave Egypt and die in the midbar. One brother has three sons. The other brother has only one son. When these four cousins enter the Land, how many portions will the one son get?
10. What do Yocheved, Ard and Na'aman have in common?
11. Why did the decree to die in the desert not apply to the women?
12. What trait did Tzlofchad's daughters exhibit that their ancestor Yosef also exhibited?
13. Why does the Torah change the order of Tzlofchad's daughters' names?
14. Tzlofchad died for what transgression?
15. Why did Moshe use the phrase "G-d of the spirits of all flesh"?
16. Moshe "put some of his glory" upon Yehoshua. What does this mean?
17. Where were the daily offerings slaughtered?
18. Goats are brought as musaf sin-offerings. For what sin do they atone?
19. Why is Shavuot called Yom Habikkurim?
20. What do the 70 bulls offered on Succot symbolize?

Answers

1. 25:13 - Kehuna (priesthood) was given to Aharon and his sons (not grandsons), and to any of their descendants born after they were anointed. Pinchas, Aharon's grandson, was born prior to the anointing.
2. 25:18 - For the sake of Ruth, a future descendant of Moav.
3. 26:5 - That the families were truly children of their tribe.
4. 26:10 - That kehuna was given forever to Aharon and his sons, and that no one should ever dispute this.
5. 26:11 - Because they repented.
6. 26:13,16,24,38,39,42 - Zerach, Ozni, Yashuv, Achiram, Shfufam, Shucham.
7. 26:46 - Serach bat Asher
8. 26:53 - Seven years. Seven years.
9. 26:55 - Two portions. That is, the four cousins merit four portions among them. These four portions are then split among them as if their fathers were inheriting them; i.e. two portions to one father and two portions to the other father.
10. 26:24,56 - They came down to Mitzrayim in their mothers' wombs.
11. 26:64 - In the incident of the meraglim, only the men wished to return to Egypt. The women wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael.
12. 27:1 - Love for Eretz Yisrael.
13. 27:1 - To teach that they were equal in greatness.
14. 27:3 - Rabbi Akiva says that Tzlofchad gathered sticks on Shabbat. Rabbi Shimon says that Tzlofchad was one who tried to enter Eretz Yisrael after the sin of the meraglim.
15. 27:16 - He was asking G-d, who knows the multitude of dispositions among the Jewish People, to appoint a leader who can deal with each person on that person's level.
16. 27:20 - That Yehoshua's face beamed like the moon.
17. 28:3 - At a spot opposite the sun. The morning offering was slaughtered on the west side of the slaughtering area and the afternoon offering on the east side.
18. 28:15 - For unnoticed ritual impurity of the Sanctuary or its vessels.
19. 28:26 - The Shavuot double-bread offering was the first wheat-offering made from the new crop.
20. 29:18 - The seventy nations.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KRIAT SHEMA AL HAMITAH (PART 20)

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

Wilson Mizener – American Playwright

Kriat Shema al Hamitah continues: “Behold, the resting place of Shlomo, with sixty mighty ones surrounding it, of the mighty ones of Israel. All of them gripping their swords, skilled in warfare, each with their sword on their thigh, from fear in the nights.” (Shir Hashirim 3:7-8)

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 11) connects the “sixty mighty ones” to the sixty letters of Birkat Kohanim, which is why it is included in Kriat Shema al Hamitah immediately before the words of Birkat Kohanim are recited. The Midrash poetically explains that the sixty letters of Birkat Kohanim are like a sword that cuts through all the obstructions that try to block our way forwards to Hashem. It is the Name of Hashem within our Tefillot that sweeps away all the obstacles and allows us to draw closer and closer to our Father in Heaven. The Rabbis teach us the number sixty is analogous to the sixty tractates of the Mishna. (There are actually sixty-three tractates in the standard version of the six orders of the Mishna. However, originally, some of them were actually considered to be as only one tractate, such as Bava Kamma, Bava Metzia and Bava Batra.) Homiletically, the verses are teaching us that a person should “surround” themselves with the Mishna to keep them safe.

I read a moving account by someone who related that he attends a shiur in his local neighborhood in Ramat Beit Shemesh. Sitting next to him is someone called Akiva Hoffman. Akiva Hoffman is an Israeli who participated in many fearsome battles during the Yom Kippur War. Today he spends his mornings immersed in learning Torah. One day, he gave all those present an amazing lesson about the power of learning Torah, and specifically Mishna, that happened to him during the war.

Soon after the war began in 1973, Akiva was first sent up north with his unit to Ramat HaGolan and then later on down south to the Sinai Desert. He had no idea how long he would be away from home, so he brought with him a volume of Mishna to learn whenever the opportunity arose.

The war progressed, and in between the battles and the skirmishes, Akiva used his “spare time” to continue learning Mishna. At some point, he would finish whichever volume he had brought with him, and each time that he was given permission to go home for a short leave he would exchange the volume he had finished for the next one.

One day, a non-religious soldier named Chadad asked Akiva what he was so busy with when they weren’t in combat. Akiva explained that he was learning Mishna and that there are 525 chapters that are split up into six sections. He then mentioned that his aspiration was to finish the entire six orders of the Mishna. Completely unexpectedly, Chadad told him, “The day you finish all of the Mishna, the war will be over and we’ll get to go home.”

Akiva laughed at the remark and went back to his learning. At a later date, intensive international diplomacy led to a ceasefire, and slowly but surely the Israeli troops in the Sinai Desert began withdrawing. But, for some inexplicable reason, Akiva’s unit was left waiting for their orders to return home. On the Friday afternoon of Parshat Zachor, Chadad said to Akiva, “It’s enough! I want to go home already! How close are you to finishing the Mishna?”

Akiva told him, “I’ve almost completed them all, but I have guard duty tonight, so I won’t have time to finish over Shabbat.”

“I’ll take your guard duty,” Chadad replied. “We need you to finish!”

So Akiva eagerly went back to learning his precious Mishna. And, sure enough, that Shabbat he finished the entirety of the Mishna and, together with his unit, made a festive meal in honor of his incredible accomplishment.

Early Sunday morning Akiva was shaken awake by Chadad, “Akiva, we just got our orders! We’re going home!”

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Pinchas: An “Asinine” Essay (Part 2/2)

In Part I, we discussed the words chamor (domesticated donkey), pere (wild ass), and aton (a female donkey). In this installation, we continue the discussion to treat additional words related to donkeys, namely ayir, pered, and yeimim. Last week’s essay opened with a tie-in to Parashat Balak because Balaam rode an aton. This week’s Parashat Pinchas discusses the preparations for the war against Midian, and although this week’s Parashah does not go into detail about that war, the Torah later states that the Jews captured sixty-one thousand donkeys as part of the spoils of war (Num. 31:34) — so donkeys are also related to this week’s Parashah, as well.

The word ayir appears eight times in the Bible. For example, it is included among the animals that Jacob sent Esau as part of his tribute (Gen. 32:16). Likewise, the judge Jair the Gileadite was said to have sired thirty sons who rode thirty ayarim (Jud. 10:4), while the judge Ivtzan was said to have fathered forty sons and thirty grandsons who rode on seventy ayarim (Jud. 12:14). Evidently, riding an ayir in ancient times was a sign of nobility, and the prophet Zechariah famously referred to the Messiah as “riding on a chamor and an ayir son of atonim” (Zech. 9:9).

As seen from this last passage and several others that juxtapose the term ayir to aton, it is clear that in Biblical Hebrew, the ayir is the aton’s offspring (e.g., see Gen. 32:16, 49:11, Zech. 9:9), making it a “foal.” Radak in his Sefer HaShorashim already makes the point that ayir can refer to a young domesticated donkey (offspring of a chamor) or to a young wild donkey (offspring of a pere). If you are a Winnie-the-Pooh fan (and I have a special connection to Winnie that only my closest friends and relatives know about), then you might be familiar with the miserable grey donkey Eeyore, whose name might have been derived from the Hebrew word ayir.

Although the classical lexicographers trace the word ayir to the triliteral AYIN-YOD-REISH, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim sees the middle YOD as non-essential to the core root, leading him to connecting ayir to the biliteral root AYIN-REISH, “revealing.” Other terms he explains as deriving from this root include ir (“city,” an urban space with plaza and central squares that are open and revealed to the

public), ohr (“skin” the part of one’s body which is revealed to the outside), ervah (“nakedness,” when a person’s body is revealed), taar (“razor,” a blade used for cutting hair and revealing the skin underneath), and ar (an “enemy” who reveals his enmity outwardly). The word eir (“awake”) is also derived from this root because when one sleeps, his or her abilities are not readily apparent; but when they awaken, those abilities are suddenly revealed.

Following from this last point, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that naar (“lad”) denotes a stage in an adolescent’s maturation when their potential suddenly reveals itself, as if they just woke up from the slumber of childhood. In the same way, he explains that the ayir refers to the adolescent donkey as one whose potential strength as pack animal is now being fully revealed.

Despite ayir in Biblical Hebrew clearly being associated with young donkeys, Rashi (to Rosh HaShanah 3a) explains ayir in Rabbinic Hebrew as referring to a young horse. See also Rashbam (to Bava Batra 78b) who writes that in Rabbinic Hebrew, a young donkey is called sayach — yet in Modern Hebrew, that word refers to a "young horse," or "colt."

The standard Hebrew word for “mule” is pered/fered (or pirdah when referring to a female mule). This term clearly derives from the triliteral root PEH-REISH-DALET, whose declensions refer to “separating” in various ways (hafradah, pirud). Rabbi Yehoshua Steinberg of the Veromemanu Foundation compares the pered/pirdah to its human counterpart, the mamzer. The word mamzer is understood as related to the word zar (“strange/foreign”) because the mamzer is often excluded from polite company due to the illegitimacy of his parentage. Likewise, by dint of its tainted, intermixed lineage, the pered may have been viewed as something “separate” from other animals as a sort of pariah.

Alternatively, the Mishnah does not even need to say that horses and donkeys may not be bred with each other, and instead tells us the more novel rule that a pered cannot be mated with a horse or donkey (Kilyaim 1:6). Accordingly, we may propose another approach that understands the root PEH-REISH-DALET as referring not only to “separating,” but also to its polar opposite “joining together that which ought to be separate.” In view of that, it would make sense that the pered could relate to the theme of this root because the pered’s parentage reflects a forbidden union of two different species that should really not have been mated with each other.

Radak (in his *Sefer HaShorashim*) adds another dimension to this discussion in the name of Rav Hai Gaon, explaining that mules relate to the core meaning of the three-letter root PEH-REISH-DALET because they are “separated” from other animals in their inability to reproduce.

Because the Hebrew word *pered* looks and sounds very similar to the German/Yiddish *pferd* (“horse”), a common misconception is that Hebrew somehow borrowed from German, or vice versa. In truth, linguists actually trace that German word to the Proto-Indo-European root *reidh-* (meaning “to ride”) by way of the Latinate term *paraveredus* (“a courier’s horse”)

Finally, we arrive at the final term discussed in this essay. The Torah relates an anecdote about a Horite prince named Anah who was said to have “found the yeimim in the desert, when he was shepherding his father Zibeon’s donkeys” (Gen. 36:24). The enigmatic word *yeimim* is attested to only once in Scripture, making it a *hapax legomenon*. The way Rashi explains this anecdote, it means that Anah had “discovered” or “invented” mules by mating a male donkey with a female horse. The significance of this that Anah himself was of illegitimate lineage — a *mamzer* having been born of the incestuous union between Zibeon and Zibeon’s mother — and he engaged in bringing more illegitimate offspring into the animal kingdom. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Brachot 8:5) actually cites a slightly different version of this tradition, noting that the *yeimim* were born of a male horse and female donkey. [Targum Onkelos says *yeimim* were giants, and Ibn Ezra follows with this approach when noting that elsewhere, Targum Onkelos also calls the *Eimim* people giants (Deut. 2:10–11).]

Shadal (to Gen. 36:24) alludes to Rashi’s explanation but rejects it because he does not see the difference between the term *yeimim* and its apparent synonym *pered*. Because of this, Shadal instead prefers to explain that *yeimim* are crossbreed animals that have a donkey mother and a horse father (in line with the Yerushalmi). According to Shadal, it comes out that a *pered* is a “mule,” while *yeimim* refer to “hinnies.” [According to Al-Hatorah.org website, the comment in Rashi that states that the *yeimim* have a donkey father and horse mother does not appear in all MS versions of Rashi, which makes sense because it is the converse of what Chazal said in the Yerushalmi).

In terms of the etymology of the name yeimim itself, Rashi (to Gen. 36:24), following the Babylonian Talmud (Chullin 7b) sees that word as related to eimah, “fear” (even though it has no ALEPH) because yeimim were dangerous animals that people fear. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim offers a similar explanation in Cheshek Shlomo when he connects yeimim to the biliteral roots YOD-MEM and HEY-MEM, which he defines as referring to “wildness/chaos.” On the other hand, the Rabbi Yehuda ben Simon cited in the Yerushalmi (mentioned above) sees yeimim as Greek, explaining it as a form of hemionos. We saw earlier that the Greek word for “donkey” is onos, and many readers might know that the Greek prefix hemi- means “half” (for example, as in the English word hemisphere, meaning “half of the sphere”). According to this, yeimim/hemionos means “half-donkey,” thus giving the etymological backing to the tradition about Anah discovering/inventing the mule.

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)

ERETZ YISRAEL

PREFACE

The three-week period between the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av, when we mourn over the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash and our exile from Eretz Yisrael, is an appropriate time to contemplate the greatness we lost and hope to regain soon. We will explore the topic of living in Eretz Yisrael, which is a major focus in the Torah. Halachic authorities dispute whether it is a full-fledged Mitzvah or only a means to perform the Mitzvos that are applicable to Eretz Yisrael, such as tithing produce, but all agree about its foremost importance. This needs to be understood. Why is this land better than all the other lands, and why is it virtuous to live there? Why were our Patriarchs rewarded for all their loyalty to Hashem with this land, and why were all the tragedies of Tisha B'av decreed when our ancestors in the Wilderness rejected this land (Taanis 29a)? The coming article will scratch the surface of this vast topic.

THE LAND OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai expounded: Hashem examined all the lands and did not find a land that was fitting to give to the Jewish people other than Eretz Yisrael (Vayikra Rabbah 13:2). Midrash Tanchuma (Masei §4) similarly compares Eretz Yisrael to clothing that is a perfect fit for the Jewish people. In light of this, it appears that it is important to live in Eretz Yisrael because it suits us and completes us.

To elaborate, Eretz Yisrael is not an ordinary inanimate land; it is spiritually alive. Indeed, Eretz Yisrael is called “the Living Land” (Yechezkel 26:20). Just as the Jewish people have a higher spiritual quality than gentiles, Eretz Yisrael has a higher spiritual quality than other lands. Only when we live in Eretz Yisrael is our spiritual quality complete (see Sacred Soil).

For example, Hashem watches over the Jewish people with special providence (Derech Hashem 2:4 §8), and He watches over Eretz Yisrael with special providence (Devarim 11:12). Thus, only when we live in Eretz Yisrael is the way He watches over us complete. Whereas, when a Jew lives outside Eretz Yisrael, he is missing a degree of connection with Hashem. About this, the Sages made an astounding comment: “Whoever lives outside Eretz Yisrael is considered as if he does not have a God.” As the commentators explain, Eretz Yisrael is the main resting place of the Divine Presence (Tashbetz §565) and Hashem watches over its inhabitants with special Divine providence (Rif to Ein Yaakov). Whoever lives outside Eretz Yisrael is missing this connection with Hashem.

The combination of qualities when we live in our land is not merely one plus one equals two. Just as clothing is an extension of a person, Eretz Yisrael is an extension of us. When we live there, our spiritual qualities expand to include a whole new dimension. This has ramifications on everything we do. A Mitzvah that is performed in Eretz Yisrael is much greater than a Mitzvah that is performed outside it. One of the leading Torah scholars of this generation once advised someone who flew to Eretz Yisrael and put on tefillin when he davened on the plane that he should ideally put them on again the same day when arriving in Eretz Yisrael. He explained that although we are only obligated to put on tefillin a minimum of once a day, doing a Mitzvah in Eretz Yisrael is not just a greater fulfillment of the same Mitzvah; it is a different Mitzvah, on a whole new dimension.

Kol Bochim goes so far as to suggest that Eretz Yisrael is not just like clothing to our body but like a body to our soul (cited in Eretz Yisrael §85, in commentary Ben Yisrael). In other words, it is an extension of us and connected to us, and without it, we cannot accomplish our purpose in this world. Perhaps according to this, “Eretz Yisrael” does not just mean “the land that belongs to the Jewish people,” but also “the land that is the Jewish people.”

Kol Bochim illustrates this concept by citing the teaching of the Sages that tzaraas, a spiritual disease that results from sin, only affects homes in Eretz Yisrael. [This was discussed in an earlier article about tzaraas.] If someone were to commit the exact same sin outside Eretz Yisrael, his home would not be stricken with tzaraas (see Vayikra 14:34). What is the difference? It is because only the land of Eretz Yisrael connects with the Jewish people who live there, feels the impurity of their sins, and reacts with tzaraas. In contrast, the land outside Eretz Yisrael is like dead flesh that does not feel nor react.

The Torah similarly states that if people commit abominable sins within Eretz Yisrael, it “vomits” them out (Vayikra 18:28). This is because Eretz Yisrael is alive with spirituality and therefore reacts to anything that does not agree with its holy nature. While it is sensitive to all that occurs upon it, it is especially sensitive to the nation of which it is part, the Jewish people.

On the other hand, when the Jewish people act virtuously in Eretz Yisrael, it feels and reacts positively. It becomes the bountiful and blessed land that was promised to our patriarchs as the greatest possible reward in this world, in which Hashem’s Presence rests upon His people and shines forth throughout the world.

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INSIGHTS INTO HALACHA

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

5785 – The Rarest Year of Them All

Part XIV: The Ramifications of Not Having Shavua Shechal Bo Tisha B'Av

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 has been detailing many of them over the course of the year. Let’s continue on our journey through our unique year.

Enter the ‘Three Weeks’ and ‘Nine Days’

The Mishnah in Maseches Ta'anis famously teaches that “Mishenichnas Av Mema'atin Besimchah - When the month of Av arrives (Rosh Chodesh Av), we lessen our joy.” This is due to the heralding of the beginning of the tragedies that took place prior to the destruction of both Batei Hamikdash, from the breaching of the walls of ancient Jerusalem on the 17th of Tamuz, until the actual destruction of the Beis HaMikdash on the Ninth of Av. As detailed in the Mishnah and Gemara Ta'anis (26b and on), both of these days (Shiva Assur B'Tamuz and Tisha B'Av) have long since become communal Fast Days, in remembrance of the tragedies that happened on these days. In order for us to properly commemorate and feel the devastation, halacha dictates various restrictions during this period, getting progressively stricter up until Tisha B'Av itself.

These restrictions include not getting haircuts or getting married (from Shiva Assur B'Tamuz), eating meat or chicken, not drinking wine, not doing laundry, nor wearing freshly laundered clothing nor pleasure bathing (during the ‘Nine Days’). Many of these restrictions are generally still in effect until midday (Chatzos) of the next day, the tenth of Av with some being stringent the whole next day for some of the restrictions (unless in a year when Tisha B'Av is actually being observed on the tenth of Av, since it fell out on Shabbos).

Ashkenazic or Sefardic Halacha?

However, this aforementioned timeline follows the general Ashkenazic minhag. On the other hand, many Sefardim only start most restrictions on beginning of the week that Tisha B'Av falls out on, aka ‘Shavua Shechal Bo.’

Although there is no mention of such in the Gemara, these restrictions are indeed binding Ashkenazic practice, as instituted by many Rishonim and later codified by the great Ashkenazic authorities, including the Rema, Rav Moshe Isserlis, and is cited by many later decisors as well.

While several later Sefardic authorities maintain that it is proper for Sefardim to follow the Ashkenazic minhag and start the restrictions from Rosh Chodesh Av, nevertheless, most Sefardim only observe these restrictions from the actual week that Tisha B'Av falls out on, as per the actual ruling of the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 551:4).

Tisha B'Av on Sunday

In our rare year - 5785, Tisha B'Av will fall out on a Sunday, or to be more accurate, immediately as Shabbos ends, on Motza'ei Shabbos Chazon. This means that accordingly, without an actual 'Shavua Shechal Bo Tisha B'Av,' generally speaking, this year Sefardim will not undertake any Nine Days restrictions, save for the proscription of partaking of meat and wine. Hence, Sefardim may shower, shave, and do their laundry all the way up until Shabbos Chazon – which is Erev Tisha B'Av this year. On the other hand, Ashkenazim, generally speaking do not share this dispensation, and would still need to keep all the Nine Days' restrictions.

However, and although this is the rule, this does not mean there aren't any dispensations available for Ashkenazim. For example, more people are permitted to be invited to a fleishig Seudas Mitzva (see Rema O.C. 551:10, and Mishnah Berurah ad loc. 77) than normally would be in a standard year. Also, there would be more permissibility regarding cutting one's nails (see Mishnah Berurah ad loc. 20) and washing childrens' clothing (see Mishnah Berurah ad loc. 77) than normally would be as well. Perhaps if one has a hetter to swim for his health "until Shavua Shechal Bo Tisha B'Av," he would also be able to benefit from Tisha B'Av being on Sunday this year, etc. As with most halachic topics, if one requires a special dispensation, he should certainly ascertain such from his reliable halachic authority.

Although Tisha B'Av being observed on Sunday occurs not infrequently (as when 9 Av falls out on Shabbos, the fast day's observance is also pushed off to Sunday), nonetheless, in this author's mind, it is quite fascinating that this remarkable coincidence will occur in our exceptional year.

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 article will help raise appreciation of them and our fascinating calendarical customs.

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