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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Take It To Your Heart

“Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants in the field.” (9:20)

Translation is a risky business.

When you translate a concept into another language, you put it into a set of cultural assumptions that may well be inimical to the concept itself.

A case in point is the Hebrew concept of *Yirat Hashem*. Literally translated, *Yirat Hashem* means “fear of G-d”. Within the cultural framework of the English language, the adjective “G-d-fearing” conjures up visions of the Pilgrim Fathers, characters with names like Jebedyah and Obadyah; Amish picket fences and Shaker furniture. “G-d-fearing” is not an adjective that sits well in the mouth of the modern English-speaker. It is our culture’s assumption that we should be free from fear.

In the view of Judaism, however, *Yirat Hashem*, fearing G-d is the beginning of wisdom.

But what does G-d-fearing really mean? Does it mean having the haunted look of a severe paranoid, or that getting out of bed in the morning becomes an existential challenge?

This week’s Torah portion reveals the essence of *Yirat Hashem*.

In the seventh plague, the Torah describes the Egyptian reaction to the news that G-d would cause lethal hail to fall on the land. *“Whoever among the servants of Pharaoh feared the word of Hashem chased his servants and his livestock to the houses. And whoever did not take the word of G-d to heart – he left his servants in the field.” (9:20)*

Ostensibly, the opposite of “feared the word of Hashem” in the first sentence should be “And whoever did not fear the word of G-d.” Why then is the opposite of fearing Hashem called “not taking the word of G-d to heart”?

The essence of *Yirat Hashem* is paying attention.

Try this experiment.

How many times a day do you glance at your wristwatch? Let’s say you look at the time twice an hour, maybe three times. Let’s assume that you get up at seven and go to bed at midnight. So, on average, you look at your watch some 50 times a day – 50 times a day, seven days a week. Let’s say your watch is two years old. So you’ve looked at your watch approximately 35,000 times.

Now, without looking, can you tell me what’s written on the face of your watch? Chances are that you left something out, or got something wrong.

You can look at the same thing, day in, day out, but if you don’t pay attention, you’ll never really see it.

It’s the same with *Yirat Hashem*. You can know there’s a G-d, believe the Torah’s true, even do all the mitzvahs, but never achieve an awareness of G-d.

You can think that being an angry person is a very bad thing, but unless you internalize this awareness, until it becomes instinctive, you will carry on being Mr. Angry for the rest of your life.

Every day we say in the prayer called Aleinu, “... and you should know this day and take to your heart that Hashem is the only G-d – in heaven above and on the earth below – there is none other.”

The essence of fearing G-d is not just “to know this day,” but also “to take it to your heart.”

- Based on the *Sfat Emet* and other sources

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Vaera: Berachot 16-22

Personal Prayers for Everyone

The text for the prayers we say nowadays was formulated by the *Anshei Knesset HaGedola* – the Men of the Great Assembly – who led the Jewish People during the time of exile following the destruction of the Second Beit Hamikdash. These people were great Torah scholars, and among them were a number of prophets as well. In their immeasurable wisdom they composed a standard text for our prayers, a text that we still use today.

The *gemara* in our *sugya* cites a variety of personal prayers that a number of the Talmudic Sages were accustomed to say at the conclusion of their individual Shmoneh Esrei prayers (the “standing prayer,” which is said quietly). It is fascinating to note that some of their individual prayers have been incorporated into our own prayer services, although not all of them are said at the conclusion of the Shemoneh Esrei.

For example, the Sage Mar, the son of Ravina, would say at the end of his Shemoneh Esrei: “My G-d, guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent; and let my soul be like dust to everyone. Open my heart to Your Torah, then my soul will pursue Your commandments... As for those who design evil against me, speedily nullify their counsel and disrupt their design.” He would conclude his additional prayer with the following verse: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable before You, G-d, my Stronghold and my Redeemer.” (Tehillim 19:15). This personal prayer that this great Sage added to his prayer forms the basis for an additional personal prayer that we add each time we say the Shemoneh Esrei (the exact complete text can be found in any Siddur).

The *gemara* also records an additional prayer that Rabbi would say for Heavenly protection from dangerous arrogant people. Although we do not say this at the end

of the Shemoneh Esrei, as Rabbi did, it has become part of our prayer service that is recited following *bircot hashachar*, a series of blessings we say in the morning. In a similar fashion, we find that the additional prayer that Rav would say after his Shemoneh Esrei, we now say as a prayer before *Musaf* on “*Shabbat Mevarchin*” – the Shabbat preceding Rosh Chodesh. It is a beautiful and inspiring prayer that Hashem will grant us only goodness in the coming month. Rava’s special prayer, that Hashem should accept our confessions of sin, is now part of our prayers on Yom Kippur.

A person who learns the texts of these personal prayers as they are written in our *gemara*, might have a basic, but seemingly troubling question. How is it that we are privy to know the words that our Sages would add? Their additions were made at the end of the Shemoneh Esrei, and the Shemoneh Esrei is to be said quietly, in a manner that no one else except for the person praying can hear (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 101:2, and the Mishnah Berurah there). Therefore, how did anyone, including the compilers of the *gemara*, know what these Sages actually said in their personal and private prayers that only they and Hashem could hear?

One answer was suggested to me by a Rabbi in Jerusalem. Torah is taught from generation to generation, from father to son, from Rabbi to *talmid*. And not just the Torah that is found in the Chumash, the Mishna, the Gemara and the other classical Torah sources. Every aspect of Divine wisdom that relates to our ability to grow closer to Hashem and go in His path is certainly considered Torah and must be taught. Therefore, all of the Sages undoubtedly taught their *talmidim* their personal additional prayers as part of their Torah study. Whether or not the *talmidim* would also say these prayers, or compose others that were more suited to their individual needs, was up to them.

Berachot 16b-17a

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Q & A

Questions

1. Did G-d ever appear to Avraham and say "I am G-d"?
2. What cause did the forefathers have to question G-d?
3. How was Moshe commanded to act towards Pharaoh?
4. How long did Levi live?
5. Who was Aharon's wife? Who was her father? Who was her brother?
6. Why are Yitro and Yosef both referred to as "Putiel"?
7. After which plague did G-d begin to "harden Pharaoh's heart"?
8. Why did Pharaoh go to the Nile every morning?
9. Give two reasons why the blood was chosen as the first plague.
10. How long did the plague of blood last?
11. Why did the frogs affect Pharaoh's house first?
12. What did Moshe mean when he told Pharaoh that the frogs would be "in you and in your nation"?
13. What are "chamarim"?
14. Why didn't Moshe strike the dust to initiate the plague of lice?
15. Why were the Egyptian sorcerers unable to bring lice?
16. What were the Egyptians likely to do if they saw the Jews slaughtering lambs?
17. Why didn't the wild beasts die as the frogs had?
18. The *dever* killed "all the cattle of Egypt." Later, boils afflicted their cattle. How can this be?
19. Why did Moshe pray only after leaving the city?
20. What was miraculous about the way the hail stopped falling?

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

Answers

1. 6:9 - Yes.
2. 6:9 - Although G-d swore to give them the land, they never actually had control over it.
3. 6:13 - With the respect due a king.
4. 6:16 - 137 years.
5. 6:23 - Elisheva, daughter of Aminadav, sister of Nachshon.
6. 6:25 - Yitro fattened (*pitem*) cows for idol worship. Yosef scoffed (*pitpet*) at his evil inclination.
7. 7:3 - After the sixth plague — *shechin*.
8. 7:15 - To relieve himself. Pharaoh pretended to be a god who did not need to attend to his bodily functions. Therefore, he secretly used the Nile for this purpose.
9. (a) 7:17 - Because the Nile was an Egyptian god.
(b) 8:17 - Because an invading army first attacks the enemy's water supply, and G-d did the same.
10. 7:25 - Seven days.
11. 7:28 - Pharaoh himself advised the enslavement of the Jewish People.
12. 7:29 - He warned that the frogs would enter their intestines and croak.
13. 8:10 - Piles.
14. 8:12 - Because the dust protected Moshe by hiding the body of the Egyptian that Moshe killed.
15. 8:14 - The Egyptian sorcerers' magic had no power over anything smaller than a barley kernel.
16. 8:22 - Stone the Jews.
17. 8:27 - So the Egyptians would not benefit from their hides.
18. 9:10 - In the plague of *dever* only the cattle *in the fields* died. The plague of *shechin* affected the surviving cattle.
19. 9:29 - Because the city was full of idols.
20. 9:33 - The hailstones stopped in mid-air and didn't fall to the ground.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Running on Willpower

Last week we discussed various meanings and derivatives of the Hebrew/Aramaic word *tzvi*. In this essay we will focus on how *tzvi* in the sense of “desire/want” differs from its apparent synonyms in the words *ratzon* (whose verb form is *rotzeh*) and *chefetz* (whose verb form is *chafetz*).

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) explains that *tzvi*, “desirable,” is derived from the root TZADI-BET, which means “standing.” Something desirable remains perpetually in one’s thoughts as though it is constantly “standing” in front of him. *Tzvi* connotes a continuous (perhaps obsessive) “desire” or “yearning” that persists over an extended stretch of time, rather than a fleeting “want” that is more short-lived.

Nonetheless, we find that the Aramaic word *tzvi* is almost synonymous with the Hebrew *ratzon*. This is reflected in Targum Onkelos, which translates *cheshek* (Deut. 7:7) and *chefetz* (Deut. 25:7) as *tzvei*, but also translates *cheshek* (Gen. 34:8, Deut. 21:11) and *chefetz* (Gen. 34:19, Deut. 21:14, 25:8) as *raavon*. *Raavon*, in turn, is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew *ratzon* (because when translating/converting Hebrew words into Aramaic, the letter TZADI in Hebrew commonly becomes an AYIN in Aramaic).

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) explains that *ratzon*, “will/want,” is related to “running” (*ratz*) because one “runs” with greater determination and resolve to do something that one wants to do. Similarly, the word *tzvi*, “desire/want,” was borrowed to refer to deer because they are known to run quickly. Alternatively, one might argue that because a deer is so swift it escapes capture, allowing it the freedom to run towards its goals. Accordingly, a deer may be called *tzvi* on account of its being free to follow its heart’s “wants” and “desires.”

Interestingly, the Midrash (*B. R.* §5:8) asserts that the word *eretz* (“Land”) is related to *ratzon* and *ratz* by explaining that when G-d first created the world, the Land *wanted* to follow G-d’s *will*, so it started *running* to cover as much of the Earth’s surface as possible, until G-d told it to stop. In this Midrash, the words *eretz*, *ratz*, and *ratzon* converge into one idea.

A number of commentators explain that *chefetz* is a stronger, more physical type of desire, while *ratzon* is the more subtle desire to do the right thing.

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the difference between *ratzon* and *chefetz* lies in the intensity of will: *ratzon* connotes a simple “want,” while *chefetz* expresses a strong-willed “wanting” that cannot be as easily suppressed.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook (1891-1982) similarly explains that *chefetz* is a stronger form of “wanting” than *ratzon*, because *chefetz* is closer to the perceivable reality and is less abstract than *ratzon*. This is why all tangible realia are called *chafetzim* in Mishnaic Hebrew (see Rashi to Eccl. 3:1).

Along similar lines, Rabbi Aharon Yehuda Leib Margolios of Frankfurt (d. 1811) in *Beis Midos* explains that *ratzon* refers to a person’s innate desire to do good, while *chefetz* generally refers to his animalistic, physical desires. He thus explains that “To do Your will (*retzoncha*) – O G-d – I have desired (*chafatzti*)” (Ps. 40:9) means that one has taken G-d’s will (His *ratzon*) as something that one wants to do on a behavioral level (*chefetz*). Meaning, he was able to harness his more powerful motivating drive of *chafetz* to do G-d’s will.

Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel (1809-1879), better known as the Malbim, explains that *chefetz* refers to the soul’s emotional desires, while *ratzon* (will) is the mind’s intellectual desires (and as such usually has a positive connotation). He explains that *chefetz* is used when somebody is attracted to somebody/something without his consciously choosing to desire it. A non-intellectual desire like *chefetz* can theoretically drive one to “want” that which is bad for him (for example, Isa. 66:3). On the other hand, when a person’s mental faculties are in play, he would never – “in his right mind” – *choose* to want something that is bad for himself, so *ratzon* always refers to “wanting” something good and noble. This is because *ratzon* refers to man’s choosing what he “wants” by exercising his freedom of will. The word *ratzon* also means “appeasement,” which is an attempt to sway man’s freedom of choice in favor of something.

Malbim explains that sometimes one's *chefetz* can get in the way of his *ratzon*, and trump his true will. For example, the Torah commands that a man marry his childless brother's widow. However, sometimes the man's emotions might get in the way of his fulfilling this moral duty, and he might "not want" to perform this great mitzvah. In such a case, the Bible uses the term *chefetz* to denote his emotional will blocking him from doing his *ratzon* (Deut. 25:7-8, Ruth 3:13).

Rabbi Avraham Bedersi HaPenini (1230-1300) takes issue with those who (like Malbim) explain *chefetz* as referring to an emotional want or desire whose appearance arises beyond one's control. He cites a bevy of Biblical passages which speak of G-d as being *chafetz* someone or something (e.g., Num. 14:8, Isa. 42:20, 53:10, I Kgs. 10:9, Ps. 147:10, I Sam. 15:22) and it is difficult – if not heretical and blasphemous – to say that G-d might have a "desire" or "want" that He did not choose. Instead, Rabbi Bedersi concludes that *chefetz* must also connote a type of "wanting" which is within the realm of free will and one *chooses* to "want" it. [To defend Malbim, we may posit that the Bible uses *chefetz*-related words when speaking about G-d as terms simply borrowed from the human context where it refers to a want/desire that comes without a person consciously choosing it. But this does not mean that G-d could "want" something which is beyond His choice; if He "wants" it, then, *per force*, He "chooses" to want it.]

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Edel (1760-1828) offers a totally different take on the difference between *chefetz* and *ratzon*. He explains that *chefetz* refers to one's final goals, while

ratzon can also refer to intermediary goals. *Ratzon* refers to both the means to an end and the end itself, while *chefetz* denotes the final goal.

To better illustrate Rabbi Edel's point, let's take an example in English: "I want to buy pizza" versus "I want to eat pizza." In the first case, my "want" to buy pizza is only an intermediary goal. My real desire is to eat pizza, but since I don't have any at home I must buy it in order to eat it. According to Rabbi Edel, when I refer to wanting to buy pizza the word *ratzon* is most appropriate because that "want" is not my ultimate goal. However, when I say "I want to eat pizza" eating pizza is my final goal, so the word *chafetz* is more apropos. [Let's not forget that in an earlier essay (entitled "Deleterious Desires," June 2017), we wrote that according to the Vilna Gaon, *chafetz* refers specifically to food-related desires.]

The Torah's commandments and instructions are called G-d's Will (*ratzon Hashem*), which according to Rabbi Edel would suggest that they are a means to His ends, and not His ends in and of themselves. Indeed, the Mishnah (*Maccot* 3:16) makes this point by citing Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya's teaching: "G-d wanted to create merits for the Jewish People, therefore He gave them a lot of Torah and mitzvot, as it says, 'G-d wants (*chafetz*) for the sake of his [either Israel's or His] righteousness to make the Torah bigger and glorify it' (Isa. 42:21)." This teaching reveals that G-d's final will (His *chefetz*) – that is, to create more merits for the Jewish People – is that which fuels His more "intermediary" will (*ratzon*) as revealed in the Torah's commandments.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rklein@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

G-d tells Moshe to inform the Jewish People that He is going to take them out of Egypt. However, the Jewish People do not listen. G-d commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish People. Although Aharon shows Pharaoh a sign by turning a staff into a snake, Pharaoh's magicians copy the sign, emboldening Pharaoh to refuse the request. G-d punishes the Egyptians and sends plagues of blood and frogs, but the magicians copy these

miracles on a smaller scale, again encouraging Pharaoh to be obstinate. After the plague of lice, Pharaoh's magicians concede that only G-d could be performing these miracles. Only the Egyptians, and not the Jews in Goshen, suffer during the plagues. The onslaught continues with wild animals, pestilence, boils and fiery hail. However, despite Moshe's offers to end the plagues if Pharaoh will let the Jewish People leave, Pharaoh continues to harden his heart and refuses.

ASK!

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Food Fight

Dear Rabbi,

I would like your own point of view about this "anecdote." It's Friday, early in the afternoon, a son talks to his mother over the phone, telling her he won't be able to come to her place for Shabbat dinner, and asks her if he can come to pick up one challah (bread) for his Shabbat at his place where he lives with his wife and baby. The mother had baked two challahs, and the son only asks for one. She replies: "No, because I need two challahs in order to say the blessing (according to the rules)." So she won't give her son one because of this, and of course the son has no challahs at all for his Shabbat.

Question: Was she right? Would not it have been better in this situation to skip the "do it by the book" aspect, and to show her love to her son by giving him one challah? Thank you very much for your reply.

Answer

It's a mitzvah on Shabbat to say the blessing over *two* whole loaves of bread. Many use braided challah loaves, but any whole loaves (kosher, of course) will do. In our home, we sometimes use *matzah*. (Did you ever see braided matzah?)

Now, assuming the son had other food, it wasn't a question of his going hungry. Rather, he wanted the mitzvah of enjoying a proper Shabbat meal, and to say the blessing over one whole challah loaf, at least.

Should the mother give away her mitzvah of having *two* whole loaves in order that the son would be able to have the mitzvah of having at least one whole loaf?

Strictly speaking, one doesn't have to give up one's own mitzvah in order to allow the other person to do a mitzvah. But bringing peace and harmony among people, especially among family members, is a very great mitzvah, so there's a strong case to be made against the mother.

But are there any other relevant details? For example, is this the first time the son canceled out on his mother at the last minute? Does she get the feeling that he takes advantage of her goodness and love? Without hearing, first-hand, both sides of the story, it's difficult to give a definitive answer to your question.

Relationships flourish when each person focuses on his obligations to the other person. But when each person focuses on the other person's obligations to him, relationships falter.

LOVE OF THE LAND

A Presidential Moshav

Near the Ben-Gurion International Airport there is a moshav called Kfar Truman.

It was established on July 19, 1949, a little more than a year after the historic recognition of the newly founded State of Israel by the president of the United States, Harry S. Truman. Originally called *Bnei Harel* because its founders were veterans of the Harel Division of the Israel Defense Force, it was renamed in honor of the president, who was such a good and important friend of the Jewish state. (*Editor's note: My mother, of blessed memory, would speak with praise for President Truman over the years, in gratitude for his generosity to European Jews at the end of WW2, and his allowing legal entry into the USA following the war, including her.)

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Wisdom and Eloquence

Moshe and Aharon continue their joint mission of redeeming the Jewish People. This mission included communicating G-d's message to the Jewish People and a great deal of interaction with Pharaoh.

At two points, Moshe raises the concern of his lack of eloquence. When G-d appoints him as leader, he resists, saying, *I am not a man of speech...for I am heavy of speech and heavy of tongue.* (Shemot 4:10). G-d responds, first by declaring that it is G-d who gives the gift of speech, but when Moshe demurs again, G-d responds that Aharon will join his mission as the spokesman: *[Aharon] will speak to the people on your behalf... he will be a mouth for you.* (Shemot 4:16) Later, when Moshe expressed his concern that Pharaoh would not listen to him on account of his speech impediment, G-d again responded: *You shall say everything that I command you, and your brother Aharon shall repeat it to Pharaoh.* (Shemot 7:2).

This arrangement – the division of teaching and oratory – has endured in the transmission of Torah throughout our history. From the beginning, the spoken word in the service of Torah had a dual function: (a) the precise, complete and faithful formulation of content and (b) presentation of this content to the people in such a way that it will be listened to, understood and taken to heart. Our Sages divided these functions much as Moshe and Aharon did. The role of the *Chacham*, the wise scholar, was to carefully and accurately formulate the content to be transmitted; the role of the *meturgeman* was to present to the people that halachic content in an easily comprehensible and explanatory form.

Likewise, the text of the Talmud itself is divided into two categories: the *shemaitita*, the content and analysis of the law, and *aggadeta*, the non-legal texts comprised of anecdotes, moral exhortations and practical advice. The main function of the first category is the precise and rigorous definition of the law, while the function of the *aggadeta* is to win the hearts of the listeners so that they understand and carry out the tasks assigned to them in the *mitzvot*.

Both components are critical for transmission of Torah. The content of Torah requires clarity and precision; the delivery of Torah requires eloquence.

However, the orator has several occupational hazards. In his effort to win the hearts of his audience, he may allow their views to penetrate the truth he wishes to impart, in order to suit it to their taste. He may sidestep the stringency of that truth, spoil its purity with foreign ideas, or resign himself to concessions in order to facilitate its acceptance. He also runs the risk of being high in volume and low in content.

Charisma and showmanship can serve a great function as the conduit of transmission to the heart, but they must be kept in check by wisdom. Rarely are eloquence and wisdom found in equal degrees in the same person. Thus, the division between them among leaders – as modeled by Moshe and Aharon – provides a critical check and balance to ensure that the content remains pure and true before the orator is entrusted to transmit it.

- Sources: Commentary, Shemot 4:15-16

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