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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

No Spare Tie

“...and the people gathered around Aharon and said to him, ‘Rise up, make for us gods that will go before us, for this man Moshe who brought us up from Egypt – we do not know what became of him.’” (32:1)

Let me give you, in my opinion, an essential “life-hack” – something that is going to save you a lot of time. It goes like this:

There are two kinds of lost objects: the kind that will eventually turn up, and the kind that is irretrievably lost. Whenever you lose something, don't try to find it. That's just a waste of time. Do the following. Think to yourself, "Do I absolutely need this thing right now? Is there a work-around? Do I absolutely need to wear my pink tie with the little green elephants on it? I know I was really looking forward to wearing it today, but maybe I could just get by, if I really need to, with the yellow one with pink poodles.”

Much, if not most, of the time we can substitute what we want with what we need. Looking for non-essentials is a complete waste of life. Because they will

either turn up, one-way-or-another, or they are gone forever.

Life is about distinguishing the essence from the nonsense.

When Moshe failed to appear from Mount Sinai, the Children of Israel made a fatal mistake. They thought they could find a work-around. They thought they could replace their “lost object” – Moshe – with a golden calf.

Nothing could replace Moshe. *“There never has risen again in Israel a prophet like Moshe...” (Devarim 24:10)*

When it came to Moshe Rabbeinu -- there was no “spare tie.”

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel - Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. ohr@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, Mrs. Helena Stern.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Be Lionhearted

Rabbi Yehuda ben Teima says, “Be as brazen as a leopard, as light as an eagle, as swift as a gazelle, and as strong as a lion – to do the will of your Father in Heaven.”

The teaching by the great Torah Sage on our *daf* is actually a *mishna* taught in Pirkei Avot (5:20). Here we are taught to internalize four “animal” traits to enable each person to maximize his individual potential to do the will of Hashem.

One explanation for the mention of these four traits, associated with four aspects of a person’s ability to serve Hashem, is offered by one of the major classical commentaries on *The Mishna*, Rav Ovadiah from Bartenura. “Be bold like a leopard (which he describes not as a leopard, but as an “unnatural” crossbreed of a wild boar and a lioness) implores a person to *not be embarrassed* to ask his rabbi for further explanation if the student does not understand the Torah teaching sufficiently – “One who is embarrassed will not learn,” teach our Sages. “Be light like an eagle,” he explains, is to review what you have learned, and, if you really try, you will find that *you will not be weary* from the toil of your repeated study. “Run like a gazelle” means to *persevere* in your efforts to fulfill as many mitzvahs as you can, in the best manner possible. “Be brave like a lion” is to *conquer* any innate, inner inclinations you may have that tempt you to transgress the way of the Torah.

Another approach is offered by Rabbeinu Yaakov the son of the Rosh – also known as the *Tur*. (Orach Chaim 1) He relates each of the character traits that are lauded in the *mishna* to four main parts of a person’s body. “Be bold as a leopard” teaches that a person should *embolden his mind* and determination to not refrain from doing Hashem’s will, although he may encounter fools and dolts who delight in making fun of his fervent mitzvah fulfillment and Torah study. “Be light like an eagle,” the *Tur* explains, means to “fly in the heavens,” above it all, as it were, without seeing negative and improper sights. One should guard his *eyes* to be careful to not view anything that might lead to transgress the way of the Torah. It is well known that the sight of something inappropriate is the beginning of the transgression. “Run like a gazelle,” he writes, instructs a person that his *feet* should be used only for running to do good deeds and mitzvahs. “Be brave like a lion” is an instruction to strengthen one’s *heart* – the seat of emotion – to want to strive more and more to improve his following the way of Hashem. Be *lionhearted*. The *Tur* lines up the four essentials in the *mishna* with four parts of a person: mind, eyes, feet and heart – all to be used properly and to the fullest in the service of Hashem.

Rabbi Yechiel Michal Epstein – also known by his work called *Aruch Hashulchan*, an invaluable codification of all branches of halacha – suggests an alternative reason for there being four distinct teachings in the *mishna*. He notes that there is a concept that man is comprised of the four basic “elements”: fire, air, water and earth. The four traits in the *mishna* correspond to these fundamental building blocks: boldness corresponds with fire, which is very brazen and mighty; lightness with air, which is very lightweight and ethereal; running with water, which flows back and forth; and bravery/courage with the earth, which is strong and hard. Rabbi Epstein writes that he humbly asserts that the *mishna* means to teach the need for a person to constructively

use all of these four elements of his physical being *only* for the sake of doing the will of Hashem, and not, G-d forbid, for any negative reason.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger cites a source who makes a fascinating observation in the *mishna*, providing a deeper understanding of the call to be *az* – brazen or bold. Let us look at the entire *mishna*. “Rabbi Yehuda ben Teima would say: ‘Be brazen like a leopard, light like an eagle, fleeting like a deer and mighty like a lion – to do the will of your Father in Heaven. He would also say, ‘The brazen – to *gehinom*, the bashful – to *Gan Eden*. May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and G-d of our ancestors, that the Beit Hamikdash will be built speedily in our days – and grant us our portion in Your Torah.’” Note the apparent contradiction regarding the quality of the character trait called *az*, brazenness. This is why the *mishna* concludes, “May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and G-d of our ancestors, that the Beit Hamikdash will be built speedily in our days – and grant us our portion in Your Torah.”

Rabbi Akiva Eiger continues his explanation: Towards the end of the *mishna* we see that brazenness is an extremely negative trait: “The brazen – to *gehinom*”, whereas at the beginning of the *mishna* we are taught that it is positive to be brazen – be brazen like a leopard. It must be that this trait is generally bad, but can be positive if used in the correct way at the correct time. For example, in our times, before Mashiach, it is good to not be timid about speaking up to ask questions in order to learn Torah. A person who is embarrassed, lest he be seen as ignorant for asking questions in order to understand the Torah, will not learn Torah, explain our Sages. A person should be bold in seeking greater Torah knowledge and wisdom. In the future, however, in the time of Mashiach, the world will be filled with knowledge of Hashem and his Torah. Then, there will be no need to be brazen in order to understand and acquire the Torah, and any sign of brazenness will be considered negative and lead to *gehinom*, away from Hashem, as it were.

A parenthetical note: It is important to recall the words that we wrote as “Talmud Tips” on Eruvin 100b, where the *gemara* states, “Even if the Torah had not been given we would be able to learn modesty from the cat and we would have learned to not steal from the ant.” The Ben Yehoyada points out that once the Torah was given, we are to learn these and other positive character traits only from the Torah, and not from animals. Animals also possess negative qualities, which one might be influenced by, whereas the Torah is pure righteousness and goodness. Here, too, the four traits mentioned in the *mishna*, although associated with animals, are learned only from our pure and holy Torah.

• *Pesachim 112a*

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Q & A

KI TISA

Questions

1. How many "geira" are in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after Yom Kippur and again after Pesach. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? Didn't some 19-year olds turn 20 during that six month period?
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called "malachim" ?
7. What is the difference between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbat is a "sign." What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, G-d says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did G-d show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

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

Answers

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the *Mishkan*.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays.
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'at* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between G-d and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2,3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that by building it by himself it would take longer and in the interim Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids those who have estranged themselves from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (Pesach sacrifice), surely the entire Torah cannot be given to a whole nation which has estranged itself from G-d!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, sharing the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say "Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people."
16. 32:34 - Whenever G-d punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the Girgashites, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. G-d commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Ki Tisa: Remember Forever

Six commandments mandate that a Jew remember certain things. These six things are the Sabbath (Ex. 20:7), the Exodus from Egypt (Deut. 16:3), that Amalek attacked after the Exodus (Deut. 25:17), the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai (Deut. 4:9), how the Jews angered G-d in the desert (Deut. 9:7), and what G-d did to Miriam when she spoke slander (Deut. 24:9). In all but one of those commandments, the Torah uses the Hebrew word *zachor* to mean “remember.” This essay seeks to more clearly define the term *zachor* and explain how it differs from another Hebrew word that means “remember” – *pakad*. The Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 32b) essentially recognizes *pakad* as a synonym of *zachor*, such that it asserts that *pikdonot* equals *zichronot*, meaning Biblical verses which mention G-d “remembering” with a cognate of *pakad* can also be included in the *zichroniyot* prayer on Mussaf of Rosh Hashanah.

The most basic definition of *zachor* is offered by Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra (1055-1138), who writes that it means to remember something that one once knew but forgot (while *shamor* means to “keep in mind” something that one currently knows). But what is the definition of *pakad*?

The Hebrew word *pakad* is used in so many different ways that it is quite difficult to pin down its core meaning. In addition to meaning “to remember,” the verb *pakad* and its cognates also mean “to count” (Num. 1:21, 2:32, I Shmuel 15:4), “to be absent” (Num. 31:49, Isa. 38:10), “to command” (Ps. 19:9, 119:56, Ezra 1:2), “to appoint” (Num. 1:50, 31:14, Esther 2:3, Ps. 109:6), “to punish” (Ex. 20:5, Hos. 2:15), “to bring about death” (Num. 16:29, Jer. 46:21), “to visit” (see Rashi to *Nedarim* 39b and Kli Yakar to Num. 16:29), and “to deposit” (Lev. 5:23).

The Malbim points to two differences between the sort of “remembering” that *zachor* denotes and that which *pakad* denotes. First, Malbim explains that *zachor* simply refers to “remembering” in one’s mind, i.e., mentally recalling a certain fact or idea, but not doing anything else other than just remembering it. *Pakad*, on the other hand, denotes “remembering” something in order to take some sort of action – for better or for worse. Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) capsulizes this stance by writing “*zechirah* is in thought, while *pekidah* is in action.”

This understanding of *pakad* accounts for the broad semantic spectrum denoted by that term. In other words, *pakad* primarily means “remembering” something or someone in order to “attend to it,” “deal with it,” or otherwise “pay attention to it.” The most basic way of paying attention to something is to determine whether it is actually present or not; hence the term *pakad* means “to count” and “to be absent.” Another way of dealing with somebody or something is to give him or it instructions about what to do (“command” or “appoint”). A third way of dealing with somebody is to give him what he deserves (whether that means to “punish” him, or even, in some cases, to “bring about his death,” or simply to “visit” him). Finally, a way to deal with an item is by “depositing” it in somebody else’s hands to take care of. Thus, the Malbim teaches us that *pakad* means more than just the mental exercise denoted by *zachor*. It means “remembering” something in a practical sense that leads to action. (Rabbi Dr. Asher Weiser writes that *kapdanut* - which means “meticulousness/strictness” – relates to *padak* by way of metathesis, in the sense that one who is *makpid* pays attention to something to the utmost degree and is “particular” about all the details.)

Alternatively, Malbim explains that *zachor* denotes constantly “remembering” something over a long span of time, while *pakad* simply denotes one fleeting act of “remembering,” whereby one remembers something just enough that he can take certain actions related to that memory. After that, he can forget about it.

The Italian scholar Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino points out in *Ohel Moed* that the word *zecher* sometimes refers to the “scent” of something (Lev. 6:8, Hos. 14:8, Ps. 20:4), in the same sense that a “memory” of something is a whiff of that idea, but is not it itself.

Rabbi Saadia ben David Al-Dhamari (a 15th century Yemenite scholar) explains that *pakad* refers to remembering something after a long time, while *zachor* refers to remembering something after a shorter amount of time. For example, when G-d says He “remembered” the Jews and will redeem them from Egypt (Ex. 3:16), this “remembering” came after they had already been in exile for centuries! Or, when the Bible reports that G-d “remembered” Sarah and allowed her to become pregnant (Gen. 21:1), this happened after she had already been barren for several decades. In both of those cases, the word *pakad* is used to denote G-d “remembering.” In both cases He “remembered” after a long time.

By contrast, when the Bible reports G-d “remembering” Noah hiding from the deluge in his ark, Noah had been there only for about a year (Gen. 8:1). Similarly, when G-d “remembered” Rachel before granting her pregnancy, she had only been barren for a few years (Gen. 30:22). In those two cases the word used to denote His “remembering” is a cognate of *zachor*, because only a short amount of time elapsed.

Now we can address the elephant in the room: the word *zachor* seems to be related to *zachar* (“male”), but what is the thematic connection between the two? The interplay between these two words is

found in a Talmudic anecdote (*Bava Batra* 21b) in which King David’s general Yoav explains that he did not kill female Amalekites, because his teacher vowelized the word *zecher* in the commandment “erase the remembrance (*zecher*) of Amalek” (Deut. 25:19) as *zachar*. But, what is the deeper connection between these two words that are spelled exactly the same?

Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (1361-1444), also known as Rashbatz or Tashbatz, writes in his commentary to *Avot* (5:12) that men have better memory (or potential for memory) than women. He buttresses this claim with the insight that the Hebrew words *zachar* (“male”) and *zachor* (“remember”) seem related. On the flip side, the Hebrew word for “women” (*nashim*) is related to the word for “forgetfulness” (see *nashani* in Gen. 41:51 and *teshi* in Deut. 32:18).

Indeed, Rabbi Moshe de Leon (1240-1305) – the Kabbalist who first published the *Zohar* – writes in *Sefer HaRimmon* that the term *zachor* is indeed related to the word *zachar*. In the relationship between a man and woman, man serves as the initiator who provides the nourishing kernel that woman receives and develops into something greater.

With this in mind, Rabbi de Leon accounts for a curious phraseology in the *Yaaleh V’Yavo* prayer. In that prayer, we ask G-d to remember us using both forms of “remembering” – *v’yizacher/zichronenu* and *v’yipaked/fikdonenu* – and then we specifically beseech Him to bestow upon us from His benevolent efflux in two ways – *zachrenu, fukdenu*. Yet, there are two terms for His benevolent efflux, *tovah* (literally “good”) and *berachah* (literally “blessing”). The word *tovah* implies His direct bestowal of good in a way that parallels the male’s role in bestowing the female with the germinate kernel, so it is no wonder that when we ask G-d to remember us with His *tovah*, we use the word *zachrenu*. On the other hand, the word *berachah* implies Him blessing what we already have by allowing it to grow and multiple, in a way that

mirrors the female's role in incubating and gestating the seeds which the male has provided her. Accordingly, it makes sense that when we ask G-d to remember us with a *berachah*, we use the term *fukdenu*, which is the Hebrew synonym for "remembering" associated with the female.

As mentioned previously, when G-d "remembered" Noah in his ark (Gen. 8:1), the Torah uses the verb *zachor*. Rashi enigmatically explains that this means that G-d switched His trait of strict judgment for His trait of mercy, but there is no textual basis for this explanation, especially because that very verse uses His name *Elokim* (which implies strict judgment) instead of the Tetragrammaton (which implies mercy). To resolve this difficulty, Rabbi Naftali Hertz Treves of Frankfurt (1493-1540) postulates in his work *Sefer HaGur* that the term *zachor* itself implies "remembering" as an act of mercy, while *pakad* does not (as it sometimes refers to "remembering" in order to punish).

This explanation dovetails nicely with the Kabbalistic terminology used above: G-d's trait of mercy reflects unfettered Divine influence with a focus on the Giver, thus associating *zachor*/mercy with the male (giver) paradigm. On the other hand, G-d's trait of judgment reflects a limited Divine influence that focuses on the recipient and whether or not said recipient deserves to receive from Him. As a result, *pakad*/judgment more closely follows the female (receiver) model.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchiv (1740-1810) in *Kedushas Levi* (to Gen. 21:1) explains that *pakad* alludes to the female element because it implies that the person who is "remembered" already

received his or her due. When G-d promises to give something, that "gift" is already considered to have come into existence the moment the promise was made because vis-à-vis G-d, there is no difference between past, present and future – it is all one continuum. Any difference in time is only according to our perception. Therefore, if in the present it looks like G-d had not yet granted His promise, this only means that the fulfillment of said promise, which already came into existence the moment He made the promise, is simply "hidden" from us until such time that He decides to reveal it. With this in mind, we can understand why the Torah uses the word *pakad* regarding Isaac's birth. From Hashem's timeless, omnitemporal position, Isaac already existed before he was born, but from the viewpoint of the receiver (in this case, Sarah), it had been hidden away, until G-d "remembered" to reveal to her the gift's existence.

Finally, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) explains that *zachar* is related to *zachor* in the sense that one's male descendants are typically his legacy by which he is "remembered" in This World. This is because daughters generally marry into other families and become part of their husband's extended household, while sons carry on the name of their father's family.

Postscript: In case you've forgotten, we previously ran an article about different Hebrew words for "forgetting" entitled "Forget About It" (Sept. 2019), and another article about different Hebrew words for "counting" entitled "When Just Counting Doesn't Count" (May 2017).

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

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 1)

(LAILAH GIFTY AKITA)

“These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world, but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come. They are: honoring one’s parents; acts of kindness; early arrival at the study hall in the morning and the evening; hosting guests; visiting the sick; providing the wherewithal for a bride to marry; escorting the dead; praying with concentration; making peace between two people; and Torah study is the equivalent of them all.” (*Tractate Shabbat 127a*)

The opening sentence of this section gives us an insight into one of the most fundamental tenets of Judaism: the relationship that exists between our physical actions and their spiritual reward. By teaching us, “These are the precepts whose fruits a person enjoys in this world but whose principal remains intact in the World to Come,” our Sages are conveying to us an important message. Not only do our good actions accrue spiritual rewards, but they mostly do not directly benefit us in the physical realms. Not because they cannot, but simply because we do not want to squander their eternal worth in the World to Come on something as transient as a reward this world.

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (1944-2001), an exceptionally eloquent and brilliantly prolific Torah scholar who lectured all over the world, described this concept as the equivalent of buying a bottle of water using a ten thousand dollar check with no hope of receiving any change. A person desperately thirsty in the desert would likely be willing to part with such a huge sum of money. But that same person knows that in a different reality there would be no way they would spend even a fraction of that amount for a simple bottle of water. Under normal circumstances, the value of the check totally eclipses the worth of the water.

Likewise, the commandments we keep and the good deeds we perform in the physical world are priceless

in the “currency” of the World to Come. They create our eternity. However, in order to be able to continue to exist and function in the physical world, there is a need, at times, to transfer some of the spiritual merits accrued in the spiritual spheres into our physical domain. This idea is similar to one having a savings account and a checking account. As a rule, money held as savings is not to be used for day-to-day needs. Over time it accumulates and can turn into a luxurious nest-egg, but there may be occasions when it is necessary to transfer from one’s savings account to the checking account to cover any shortfalls. Correspondingly, our Heavenly “bank account” is being topped up every time that we perform a mitzvah, but we are also drawing from our “savings account” into our “checking account” to fill any gaps that may have built-up as we live our lives in this world. Normally, such transfers come directly from the accumulated merits that we have amassed in the spiritual realms. However, the Talmud is teaching us here that there are certain mitzvahs that can garner us benefit in this world – yet not detract from our reward in the World to Come. Truly a win-win!

It is intriguing that these mitzvahs are not the ones that would necessarily spring to mind as being the ultimate source of reward both in both this world and in the World to Come. In general, the mitzvahs are loosely divided into two groups: those that reflect our relationship with G-d and those that determine the way that we interact with everyone around us. It would seem logical that the mitzvahs which would be

those which are the source of such bountiful reward *both* in this world and in the World to Come would be ones that are clearly G-d-related. These mitzvahs appear to more clearly reflect the Divinity within us, by emphasizing our spiritual actions. Yet, it is quite the opposite. The mitzvahs listed here are not the ones that obviously define our connection with G-d, but are almost entirely related to our interpersonal relationships. This essential tenet is addressed by Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel (1250-1327), one of the

most erudite scholars in his generation and whose commentary on the Talmud is considered until today to be fundamental to understanding its depths. He writes (Tractate Peah 1:1) that G-d prefers mitzvahs that benefit other people *even more* than the mitzvahs that are between us and G-d.

As we shall learn together, even those mitzvahs which seem, at first glance, to only concern our relationship with G-d, are actually also focused on those around us and how we can help them and ourselves.

To be continued...

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Moshe conducts a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and G-d instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels and Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Betzalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels.

The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Shabbat, an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments.

The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems to be delayed, and so they force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. Hashem tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship, he smashes the Tablets and destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men.

Moshe ascends the mountain again to pray for forgiveness for the people, and G-d accepts his prayer. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's clouds of glory return. Moshe asks G-d to show him the rules by which he conducts the world, but he is granted only a small portion of this request. G-d tells Moshe to hew new Tablets, and reveals to him the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy.

Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of Tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

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LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

“Keeping” the Sabbath

The Torah repeatedly uses the verb “keep” (*shemor*) when instructing about the Sabbath. While this verb is also used for the entirety of Torah and mitzvahs, its use in the context of a particular commandment – here, repeated three times in the context of the Sabbath – is unique. This language has taken root in our colloquial speech, as we refer to one who observes the Sabbath as a “*shomer Shabbat*.”

The use of this term teaches us to regard the Sabbath as a precious possession given to us and entrusted to our care. Just as a watchman must guard the object of its care, take care not to be negligent, and never tamper with it, the Jewish People is instructed to be scrupulous and vigilant in keeping away and fending off anything that might damage this treasure.

G-d instructs us, “Only keep my Sabbaths!” The plural indicates that what is entrusted to our safekeeping is not the Sabbath in general, but that each and every Sabbath day is so entrusted as a unique asset. The word “only,” explain our Sages, teaches that the Sabbath is given priority over the work of the Tabernacle. The “safeguarding,” then, is not against violation by personal, profane activity or ordinary occupational pursuits, but rather against the sublime work of constructing a dwelling for G-d! Thus, the priority of Sabbath observance over all other endeavors less sacred is impressed with greater impact.

“This” – the safekeeping itself – is a “sign” between G-d and Israel so that we may know G-d sanctifies us. (Shemot 31:13). By our safekeeping – by refraining from constructive work on Sabbath – we lay ourselves, our whole world, and all the powers we have been granted, to shape the world in homage before G-d.

Ever since the world’s existence, the Sabbath was known as a memorial to G-d’s creation of the world. But it existed only as an abstract idea. Because it lacked a visible expression – a symbol – it disappeared from man’s consciousness.

When Israel was chosen as an instrument for G-d’s rule – to acknowledge and spread the knowledge of Him as Master and Ruler of mankind – He gave Sabbath the concrete symbol of prohibiting creative activity. This was a sign “between G-d and Israel” of the mutual relationship, so that we may know He has chosen Israel to be that instrument.

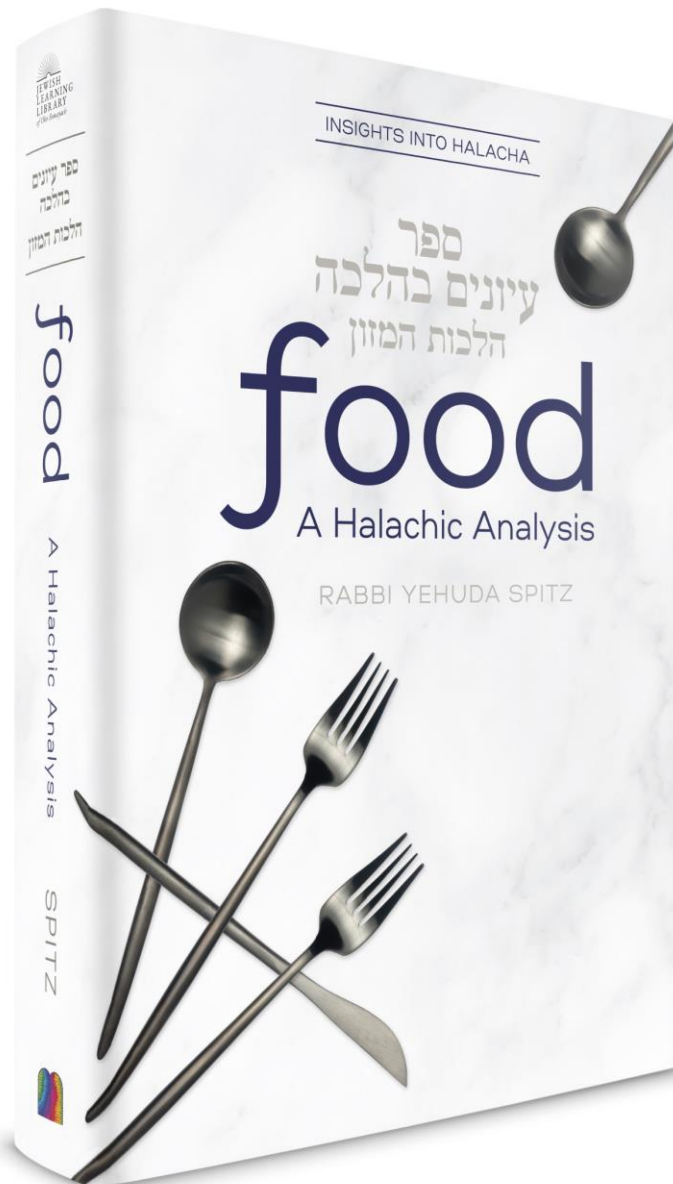
- Sources: Commentary, Shemot 31:13

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