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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Two Drops of Rain

“He (Yitro) said to him (Moshe), ‘I shall not go; only to my land and my family shall I go.’ ” (10:30)

I live a few hundred meters from a road called Levi Eshkol Boulevard. Ostensibly, there's nothing particularly interesting about this highway. There are many extremely similar roads in Jerusalem, but Levi Eshkol Boulevard marks a watershed. Quite literally.

Two drops of rain falling right next to each other on Levi Eshkol Boulevard. The one that falls to the east side of the road will make its way down through East Jerusalem, through the wadis of the Judean desert, and end up as a saline solution in the Dead Sea. And the one falling to the west will make its way down the slopes of the Judean Hills, ending up in the Mediterranean. Two drops of rain that begin their journey together, yet end up as far from each other as east from west.

I was talking on the phone with an old friend. He's probably the oldest friend I have. We were English schoolboys together some fifty years ago. To say the least, we went on to travel very different roads. He married twice. The first time was to a Jewish girl. It didn't work out. They divorced without children. Now he's married again. They have one child, a boy. His name is something like Sebastian.

One Shabbat, at the third meal, I was watching my grandsons sitting at the table (well, jumping all over the table really). My eldest grandson was 'saying over' words of Torah heard from his rebbe. Words

that his rebbe had once heard from his own rebbe. Words that were thousands of years old and full of holiness.

And I thought of my friend and his son. I remembered our conversation. My friend told me that his son was very bright and ran rings around his (Christian) Bible teacher. “Sebastian” had asked his teacher, “Who created G-d?” This left the Bible teacher in a lather of half-muttered apologetics, such as, “You can't ask such questions” and “You don't understand”. My friend was pleased that his son was showing no signs of incipient Christianity. In his eyes, he had bequeathed to him the ‘casual atheism’ that he was brought up to believe was Judaism. I said to him that I was surprised the Bible teacher had been stumped by such an easy question. “If someone had created G-d, then He wouldn't be G-d. By definition, G-d exists *beyond* creation. He created creation. Nothing can exist before Him or after Him. Time has no dominion over Him because He created time.”

There was a slight pause on the line. For a moment, my friend wasn't quite sure whether I was preaching Christianity to him.

And here, at the Shabbat table, I was looking at my grandson speaking his little heart out with words of Torah, and I reflected about what it had ‘cost’ to get to this table. Breaking your teeth on a language

taught you so poorly as a child that you would be better off not having learned it at all. Having to reply, “*Ich nisht redt Yiddish*,” when someone mistakes you for an FFB. Having to explain to your daughters why their grandmothers don’t wear *sheitels*. Feeling that you will never quite fit in – that there will always be ‘edges’ which will never be rubbed smooth.

Was it worth it? Of course, it was! How can you compare a Jewish life to any other? And that’s just in this world. And, yet, when I think back, my decision to re-embrace the faith of my ancestors was not based on some huge life changing event. Rather, one small commitment led to another, which led to another.

“*He (Yitro) said to him (Moshe), 'I shall not go; only to my land and my family shall I go.'*”

Yitro eventually changed his mind and stayed with the Jewish People.

Sometimes one decision can change your whole life.

Like two drops of rain.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Beha'alotcha: Yoma 37-43

Influencers: Good and Bad

Rav Elazar said, "When Hashem blesses the righteous, He punishes the sinners at the same time. When Hashem punishes the sinners, He rewards the righteous at the same time."

We see here an interconnected relationship between the way Hashem rewards the righteous and how He punishes sinners. It surely cannot be a coincidence that when Hashem punishes sinners, He rewards the righteous – and conversely, when Hashem punishes sinners, He also rewards righteousness at that time. Certainly, the connection is deliberate and meaningful. There must be an important message here, one that will teach us Hashem's way – and therefore something about our own nature and our relationship to Hashem.

So, what does Rav Elazar mean by this connection Hashem makes between blessing the righteous and punishing the wicked?

I once heard an Orthodox scientist mention our *gemara* as proof that just as there is a law of conservation of energy in Newtonian Physics, likewise there is a principle of conservation of blessing and punishment in the "spiritual energy" in the world. Accordingly, when Hashem blesses one person, He punishes another, thereby conserving and continuously maintaining the balance of positive and negative spiritual energy in the world. At the time, I wasn't sure if the scientist was being serious, or if it was his way of injecting a touch of humor into the lecture. I am still not sure.

The classical Torah commentaries, however, learn from our *gemara* an important lesson regarding the nature of absolute righteousness, relative righteousness and the role of righteous and non-righteous influences on a person.

Let us take a close look at the examples in the Torah which Rav Elazar cites as proof of this connection. The first part of his teaching asserts that when Hashem blesses the righteous, He also punishes the sinners. As the verses state (in Ber. 8:18-21 and more): "And Avraham will become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of the world will be blessed in him. For I have known him because he commands his sons and his household after him, that they should keep the way of Hashem, to perform righteousness and justice, in order that Hashem will bring upon Avraham that which He spoke concerning him."

This is immediately followed by: And Hashem said (to Avraham – Rashi), "Since the cry of S'dom and Amorrhah has become great, and since their sin has become very grave, I will descend now and see, whether according to her cry, which has come to Me, they have done; I will wreak destruction upon them...."

Here we see that when Hashem blessed Avraham, He also punished S'dom and Amorrhah for their transgressions."

Elsewhere in Chumash (Ber. 13-17) we see this same dual process of blessing the righteous and punishing the wicked – but stated in the reverse order. "And the people of S'dom were very evil and sinful against Hashem. And Hashem said to Avram (his name before Hashem changed it to Avraham) after Lot had parted from him, 'Please raise your eyes and see, from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward. For all the land that you see I will give to you and to your descendants to eternity. And I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth,

so that if a person will be able to count the dust of the earth, so great your descendants will be in number. Rise, walk in the Land, to its length and to its breadth, for I will give it to you.”

In one set of verses, the blessing of Avraham was mentioned prior to – and together with – the punishment of the wicked people of those cities, teaching that a person has the potential to be completely righteous and choose the righteous path of Hashem *despite* the wicked influences of his time and place. Avraham, despite the wicked people of these cities and the entire pagan world surrounding him, chose to follow the righteous path of Hashem as evidenced in his passing the ten Divine trials (as mentioned in Pirkei Avot). He was not negatively influenced by his wicked environment. On the contrary, his utter righteous conviction made it a moral imperative for him to try to help elevate the ways of the wicked – to do *teshuva* and recognize the one true all-knowing and all-caring Creator of everything in existence.

The other set of verses show the opposite: that the wicked people of S'dom and Amorrhah failed to pay heed to the positive influence of the righteous Avraham. Therefore, they were deserving of the serious punishment that was commensurate with their wickedness.

Speaking of righteous people, a close relative once suggested to me that there might be a connection between the concept taught in our *gemara* and the status of Noach. The verse (Ber. 6:9) states: “Noach was a righteous man; he was perfect in his generations.” The qualifying phrase “in his generations” appears quite enigmatic. Why mention it at all when describing the righteousness of Noach? Rashi in Chumash addresses this point

by citing a Midrash: “Some explain this as a compliment – Noach was righteous *despite* being in a generation of evil-doers; just imagine how much more righteous he would have been had he lived in a generation of righteous people! Others, however, explain the phrase as an insult – Noach was “righteous” only *relative* and compared to the other sinners of his generation. But had he lived in the generation of Avraham, he would not have been of any significance.”

What appears to be the most correct explanation of this Midrash is that the first opinion regards him as having been righteous, whereas the second opinion views him as a sinner. When the verse calls him “righteous in his generation” does it mean that he was indeed righteous, and he accomplished righteousness despite living in a sinful environment? Or does it mean that he was not actually objectively righteous, but rather relatively so. He was a sinner but just less of a sinner than the other people of his time and place.

The concept seen in our *gemara* is perhaps more clearly consistent with the first view, that Noach was righteous *despite* the sinners all around. Since he resisted the negative influence of his environment, he deserved the great blessing of being saved during the Great Flood while the rest of mankind perished. But, is the second view in the Midrash also consistent with the principle taught by Rav Elazar? If he was not really righteous, can we still apply Rav Elazar’s principle to Noach and the sinners of his generation? The reader is invited to share with the author of this column any thoughts and insights on this question.

• *Yoma 38b*

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Questions – Beha'alotcha

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

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

Answers

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

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Fishy Words (Part 1/2)

When the Jews complained about the manna they received in the wilderness, they nostalgically spoke about what they ate in Egypt, saying, “We remember the fish (*dagah*) that we ate in Egypt for free.” (Num. 11:5). *Dagah* is clearly related to the common Hebrew word *dag* (“fish”), but in what way do the terms *dag* and *dagah* differ from each other? Our study on different words for “fish” in the Hebrew language begins with probing this question, and then continues by exploring other Hebrew and Aramaic words for “fish” and the differences between them.

Most of the sources that deal with the difference between *dag* and *dagah* focus on the word-change regarding the aquatic creature that swallowed up the prophet Jonah. Initially, that fish is identified as a *dag* (Jonah 2:1), but afterwards the prophet uses the word *dagah* (Jonah 2:2).

The Talmud (*Nedarim* 51b) explains that *dag* denotes a “big fish,” while *dagah* can denote either a “big fish” or “small fish.” Accordingly, the Talmud explains that Jonah was first swallowed up by a big fish (*dag*), which then spit him out, whereupon Jonah was subsequently swallowed by a second, smaller fish (*dagah*). According to this, when the Bible reports that the fish in the Nile died during the Plague of Blood, it uses the word *dagah* (Ex. 7:18) because both the big and small fish alike died. But in the context of Jonah, the Bible switches from *dag* to *dagah* to denote the change in size from the first fish to the second one. Accordingly, when the Jews reminisced about eating *dagah* in Egypt, this could mean either “big” or “small” fish.

Alternatively, other sources (like Rashi to Jonah 2:1 and *Yalkut Shimoni* 550) explain that the first fish (*dag*) that swallowed Jonah was a male. The male fish’s belly was quite spacious, such that Jonah was not overly alarmed by his situation. However, subsequently, G-d had the male fish spit Jonah out, so that a second, female fish (*dagah*) would swallow him. This second fish was “pregnant” and its abdominal cavity was not as spacious, which caused Jonah to realize the straits he was in and pray to G-d. According to this explanation, *dag* means “male fish,” while *dagah* means “female fish.” By this rubric, it is hard to understand why the Jews in Egypt would have specifically eaten *female* fish and why the Plague of Blood would have killed only *female* fish. (Perhaps this lends credence to the Talmudic view in *Yoma* 75a that “eating *dagah*” does not actually refer to eating fish, but to illicit sexual activity, in which the Jews were free to engage while they lived in Egypt.)

The Zohar (*Beshalach* 47b-48a) also takes note of this word-switch and explains that at first Jonah was swallowed up by a live fish. Only later, G-d decided that Jonah was too comfortable inside the fish. Therefore, He caused the fish to die, which put Jonah in a more uncomfortable situation and spurred him to begin praying to G-d. As the Zohar explains, the earlier word *dag* denotes a “live fish,” while the word *dagah* used subsequently means a “dead fish.” The Zohar further adduces this understanding from Ex. 7:18, which uses the word *dagah* for the “dead fish” in the Plague of Blood. The Zohar’s explanation is echoed by Rabbeinu Bachaya (to Num. 11:5 and *Kad HaKemach*, cf. his comments to Num. 22:33) and Rabbi Avraham bar Chiya HaNasi (in *Higgayon HaNefesh*). Based on this it seems that when the Jews in the wilderness recalled eating fish in Egypt, they used the word *dagah* because they ate *dead* fish (because eating a living fish is forbidden; see *Rema* to *Yoreh Deah* 13:1).

Ibn Ezra (to Ex. 7:18) explains that *dagah* refers to the entire species of “fish” as opposed to individual fish (see also Rashi to Yirmiyahu 6:6 and Malbim to Jonah 2:2). This does not help us explain the word-switch said about Jonah, but it does explain why the word *dagah* was used to denote the fish the Jews ate in Egypt and the fish that died in the Plague of Blood – it implies that they ate all sorts of different fish there.

Rabbi Mordechai Gimpel Yaffe (1820-1892) takes the opposite approach, writing that *dagah* refers to a *specific* type of fish that was native to Egypt. He explains that this is why *dagah* is prefaced both in Numbers and Exodus with the letter *hey* as the definite article (“the”). He, too, does not account for why the story of Jonah switches from *dag* to *dagah*.

Interestingly, besides *dag* and *dagah*, there is a third variant in the primary Hebrew word for “fish.” When Nehemiah reports that Tyrian merchants would bring fish to sell to Jews in Jerusalem on the Sabbath (Nech. 13:16), the word *dag* in that passage is spelled DALET-ALEPH-GIMMEL (but still read *dag*). Ibn Ezra (there and in *Sefer Tzachut*) explains that the root of *dag* is trilateral, being either DALET-YOD-GIMMEL or DALET-VAV-GIMMEL, but in this case the middle letter of the root is replaced with an ALEPH. On the other hand, the commentary known as the Rasag (there) interprets the presence of an extra ALEPH exegetically, explaining that it alludes to them bringing extra “worries” (*da’agah*) to the world by engaging in commerce on the Sabbath.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces all these ‘fishy’ words to the biliteral root DALET-GIMMEL, which refers to fecundity and quantitative increase. According to him, *dag* (with or without an ALEPH) means “fish” – a species of creature known for their highly-productive fecundity, while *dayag* (Isa. 19:8) and *davag* (Yir. 16:16) refer to “fisherman” who try to catch such creatures (according to Ibn Chayyuj, Ibn Janach, and Radak the VAV is part of this word’s root). There is also a special type of boat used by fisherman known as a *dugah* (Amos 4:2), which also derives from this root.

Jacob used a verb form of the word *dag* – *v’yidgu* (“and you shall become fish-like”), i.e. you will be fruitful and multiple like fish – when blessing Joseph’s sons (Gen. 48:16). As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) points out, this is the only instance of the verb form of *dag* in the entire Pentateuch! Everywhere else, cognates of *dag* only occur as nouns that refer to “fish.”

Among the earlier grammarians, only Menachem sees this verb as deriving from the same root as *dag*, while Ibn Janach and Radak understand its root to be the trilateral DALET-GIMMEL-HEY, although Radak seems more open to the idea of it being related to *dag*.

Indeed, the root DALET-GIMMEL-HEY appears in Rabbi Yehuda Ibn Balaam’s list of verbs that are derived from nouns. However, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) understands that just the opposite is true: the primary meaning of the root DALET-GIMMEL-HEY is fecundity and quantitative increase, while the word *dag* in the sense of “fish” is actually borrowed from that usage. Rabbi Marcus uses this assertion to explain away why the Pentateuch never uses the word *dag/dagim* (e.g., in the Creation narrative of Genesis or when detailing kosher and non-kosher fish in Leviticus), and if anything, it only uses *dagah/digat* or *v’yidgu*. (I must point out, though, that the word *digei* does appear once in the Pentateuch, in Gen. 9:2, and that word seems to be the construct form of *dag*.)

Interestingly, Rabbi Pappenheim also connects two more words to this root that the other commentators do not necessarily see as related: *da’agah* and *dagan* (“grain”). As Rabbi Pappenheim explains it, *da’agah* refers to a minimally-justified sense of apprehension that leads to a person “worrying” about something. The worrier simply sees some signs of a possible danger and this already leads to his apprehensiveness. Rabbi Pappenheim connects this to the words *dayag/davag*, because the fisherman also decides to go fishing at a specific place simply because he has some vague signs that point to that location’s usefulness in fishing, but he has no solid proof or reason to think that there will really be any fish there. The three major Hebrew lexicographers (like

Menachem, Ibn Janach, and Radak) all see *da'agah* as deriving from its own trilateral root DALET-ALEPH-GIMMEL.

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *dagan* relates back to *dag* because grains are an especially fertile and fecunditious plant, as one seed can beget grains with many more seeds, just like one fish can father many more little fish. The three important lexicographers mentioned above all see *dagan* as deriving from its own trilateral root DALET-GIMMEL-NUN.

The word *dugmah* ("example") appears twice in the Mishna (*Shabbat* 10:1 and *Eduyot* 5:6), and numerous times in the Talmud. This word refers to a "specimen" or "pattern," and is said to be a loanword sourced in the Greek *deigma*. However, given Rabbi Pappenheim's understanding of the biliteral DALET-GIMMEL, we may conjecture that this word is derived from that root as well (with the MEM extraneous to the root itself), in the sense of an example being a mere sampling of a quantitatively larger pool.

As an aside, Menachem does agree that the name of the Philistine god 'dagon' derives from the same root as *dag*, because the idol that represented that deity was fish-shaped. I wrote about this at length in the encyclopedic section of my book *God versus Gods: Judaism in the Idolatry* (Mosaica Press, 2018) in my entry on that deity.

Earlier in this essay we spoke about big fish versus small fish. Interestingly, if you look in the Talmud you will find multiple Aramaic words that Rashi defines as "small fish":

Rashi (to *Succah* 18a) writes that *avruma* (or *avdumah* according to the *Sefer HaAruch*) means "small fish."

Rashi (to *Sanhedrin* 49a, *Avodah Zarah* 29a, and *Ketuvot* 60b) also writes that *munini* means "small fish." In some places, the Talmud specifically mentions *munini* brine (see Rashi to *Shabbat* 105b and *Gittin* 69b), and the term *munini* itself eventually became synonymous with brine (see *Shabbat* 110b which refers to grasshopper brine as "*munini* of grasshoppers"). Rabbi David Golomb (1861-1935) parses this word as comprising the diminutive MEM and the Aramaic *nun* ("fish"). Rabbi Moshe Batzri, on the other hand, reads this word as a portmanteau of the phrase *mei nuna* ("water of fish").

The word *gildna* refers to a specific type of fish (Rashi to *Sanhedrin* 100b, Rabbeinu Gershom and Rashbam to *Bava Batra* 73b), and elsewhere, Rashi (to *Horayot* 12a, *Brachot* 44b, and *Ketuvot* 105b) clarifies that *gildna* are some sort of small fish. Ichthyologists (mentioned by Dr. Moshe Raanan) identify this fish with the Flathead Grey Mullet (*Mugil cephalus*) or with Gilt-head bream (*Sparus aurata*).

Rashi (to *Megillah* 6a, *Brachot* 44a) explains that *tarit* refers to the fish we all know as "tuna." Elsewhere, Rashi (to *Shabbat* 39a and *Chullin* 66a) also identifies the fish referred to as *sultanit* and Spanish *kulyis* as "tuna." According to the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Nedarim* 6:3), in Babylon people called a *tarit* a *tzachanta* (which Rashi to *Succah* 18a and *Sanhedrin* 49a defines as a "small fish"). Modern scholars (cited by Dr. Moshe Raanan) identify this fish with either sardines or anchovies.

To be continued...

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

TO BELIEVE IS TO BEHAVE (PART 7)

(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)

Mitzvah number six is providing the wherewithal for people to marry, known in Hebrew as *hachnasat kallah*. Our Sages teach that the concept of establishing a Jewish home is extremely central to Judaism. They therefore say in Tractate Berachot 6b that one who brings joy to newlyweds is, in a sense, regarded as having “rebuilt one of the ruins of Jerusalem.” Rabbi Shmuel Eidels, known as the Maharsha (the Hebrew acronym for Our Teacher, Rabbi Shmuel Eidels), explains in his innovative and indispensable commentary on the Talmud that the new home that the freshly-married couple establish is strengthened by the joy displayed by others. This “strong home,” in turn, will help perpetuate the social fabric of the Land of Israel.

Additionally, we are taught (Jerusalem Talmud, Bikkurim 3:3) that all of the sins of the *chatan* and the *kallah* are forgiven on their wedding day. What an amazing concept! Part of the joy felt at a wedding stems from the idea that when a couple marries, they become a brand new entity and are considered to be pure – without sin.

But it is not just at the wedding that the mitzvah of *hachnasat kallah* is applicable. Rabbi Shimon Schwab in his *Iyun Tefillah* includes everything related to the wedding in this mitzvah. Starting with being involved in trying to find suitable

marriage partners, all the way up to the wedding itself – and everything else in between.

In fact, this mitzvah is so great that virtually every religious community has a special fund to assist parents in offsetting the costs of marrying off their children. Very often, funds are raised without the family even being aware that money is being collected for them. In addition, there are many innovative, anonymous and non-embarrassing ways that can usually be found and employed to help with the many expenses. The sensitivity of the situation is so delicate that many times the assistance is given in such a way that the family may not even realize that their community is involved. In this manner, the community can help in a significant fashion while the family retains its dignity.

Rebbetzin Devora Sternbuch, the mother of one of the most eminent Halachic authorities of our generation, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, ran such a fund. Once, someone came to her to ask for help in marrying off his seventh child. He mentioned that he had managed by himself with the previous six weddings, but the seventh one was proving to be too much for him. Instead of immediately agreeing to help, Rebbetzin Sternbuch uncharacteristically asked the man to come back in a week. One of her sons happened to overhear the conversation and after the man had left he asked

his mother why she had told him to come back. She answered that, unbeknownst to the man, she had helped out with the expenses of all six previous weddings *and* that she had already sent more help for the latest wedding, help that the father was not aware came from her. Now, she had to seek out advice from an established Torah authority, as to whether it was permissible to give him even more. Such is the empathy and the caring of the Jewish People, and the overwhelming desire to help others.

In the Talmud (Pesachim 112a) there is a beautiful aphorism taught by Rabbi Akiva: “More than the

calf wants to suck, the cow wants to suckle.” Rabbi Akiva is not just letting us know that no matter the amount the calf wants to take, its mother still desires to give even more. Rather, he is conveying to us an insight into the Jewish psyche. The trait of wanting to help others is ingrained within our “spiritual DNA.” And one of the clearest ways of identifying this trait is by observing just how far a person is prepared to go in order to help their fellow in need.

To be continued

@ OHR

The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach
by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

TRAPPED!



Jerusalem May, 16, 2021
Picture this scene:

David, a happy young professional black man is driving down the highway on his way home from an exciting and fulfilling extended weekend up North. He's talking on his cell phone to his mom. It's Monday May 10th, the day after Mother's Day. Because he was so busy yesterday, he had forgotten to call. As he reaches the intersection of Route 70, a police roadblock is directing traffic in a different direction. His GPS is now recalculating his route, directing him to take a small country road. A large truck is in front of him and a similar one behind. As the convoy reaches the outskirts of a small town David sees an immense fire shooting up some 25 feet in the air. At the other end of the town, 150-200 angry men with KKK garb and battle flags are yelling and jumping around the fire. His mom hears the yelling and asks him what's going on. Not to alarm her, he tells her it's nothing, just some kids having fun. But David is scared to death. The truck in front is waved past the bonfire by the mob.

Then, it's David's turn to drive through. But the truck in front suddenly brakes, stopping a mere few feet ahead of him. The mob sees David's black face and starts banging on the car and hitting it with baseball bats. Someone throws a large rock through the rear window. Glass shatters. The mob moves in to grab David from the car, lynch him and burn him in the bonfire. David, his adrenaline pumping into his bloodstream and nervous system, is calm. Thinking very strategically, he drives his car into the truck in front of him, causing it to move forward a few feet. He puts his own car in reverse and floors the gas pedal. The car spurts backwards a few feet into the crowd, which now scatters to avoid being hit, as David shifts into drive, weaves behind the truck in front and drives off into a field on his right. The mob, angrier than before, starts running after him. He's driving down a dirt path in the middle of the field. It's now 10:30 pm. He tells his mother something came up and he will call later. After driving a mile or so, the road ends at a brick wall. He has less than a quarter of a tank of gas.

Sounds like a movie you've seen? Well, this time it's no movie. And David – or Dovid – isn't black, and he's driving to Tel Aviv; and the mob is a mob of Arabs waving Palestinian flags, thirsting for the blood of Jews.

Our former Center student, Dovid Uhlmann, a native Chicagoan and an Israeli citizen, was here in Israel to *daven* at the graves of our holy ancestors and great rabbis, and to see friends and visit his *alma mater*, Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem. The last grave he had visited was that of Yonason ben Uziel in Amuka, where he recited the whole book of Tehillim. And, although he almost joined his ancestors in his own grave – Hashem had other plans.

There are some facts you need to know about Dovid before we go on. He made *aliyah* in 2015 to join the IDF as a combat soldier. Making the decision to join a military unit that was like minded in mitzvah observance, he joined an Orthodox unit of the Givati – one of the elite combat units in the IDF. He had also graduated from IDC, an internationally renowned college in Herzliya, with a Master's Degree in Government, specializing in counterterrorism, homeland security, counter cyber-terrorism, and a cluster certificate in cyber-security. Hashem had prepared him, as much as possible, for this very moment – a time of extremely high tension on the streets of Israel, as thousands of rockets were fired by Hamas into Israeli civilian areas, and local Jew-hating mobs roamed Israeli cities and roads in their search for innocent Jewish victims.

The truck that had been behind him at the roadblock was now also following him down the dirt road in the field. Dovid had no idea if the truck's occupants were "friend or foe." The truck drove up next to him and the driver instructed Dovid in perfect Hebrew to follow him to safety. Still wary, Dovid called the police to report the incident and inform them of his predicament. The police were cordial, but since he wasn't injured or in immediate danger, they told him that they were quite busy and wished him "good luck." And they added that under no circumstances was Dovid to follow the truck.

However, not seeing any alternative, Dovid disregarded their advice and started following the truck with his lights off. He continued following the truck for a short while. Then, suddenly, Hashem opened his eyes to a road that he had failed to see before, which lead in the opposite direction, away from the village. He took that "miracle road" to safety and was able to tell the tale – and celebrate his Divine salvation.

On Thursday evening, Dovid made a *siyum* on the *Gemara Makkos* and spoke at an all-program, festive, night of Torah study at the Yeshiva. Recounting his ordeal, he ended his speech with the following message: "It doesn't matter where you are in the world. You can be in Jerusalem, South Africa, South America or the USA. Bad things can happen anywhere. You can even be in the middle of angry and dangerous anti-Semitic mob. If Hashem does not give permission for something to happen, nobody can touch you."

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

A Prophecy of Democracy

When Moshe expressed his exasperation with the people's request for meat and his inability to lead the people without assistance, G-d told him to assemble seventy elders. He gathered the seventy around the Tent, and the Divine Spirit descended in a cloud. G-d spoke to Moshe, extending some of the spirit that rested on Moshe to the elders, who then prophesied.

There were two men – Eldad and Meidad – who were summoned by Moshe to be among the elders. Moshe must have called seventy-two men – six from each tribe – so that there would not be envy among the tribes. While Moshe knew that only seventy would be chosen, he decided to leave it up to G-d to determine which two would not be elected. However, when Eldad and Meidad realized that two would not be chosen, they decided on their own to remain behind in the camp. Out of modesty, they thought that they were least worthy of the group. Precisely because of this modesty, the prophetic spirit rested on them, even though they remained in the camp among the people, and never approached the Tent.

When Yehoshua saw this, he ran to report the incident to Moshe, saying, "Eldad and Meidad are prophesying in the camp!" Yehoshua thought that they were undermining Moshe's authority and infringing upon his authority, because the other seventy elders received their share of prophecy only as participants with Moshe, but Eldad and Meidad appeared as independent prophets. Yehoshua told Moshe to restrain them.

Moshe's response was nothing of the sort. Instead, he questioned Yehoshua, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all of G-d's people were prophets, so that G-d would place His spirit upon them!"

These incidents – both the appearance of Eldad and Meidad as prophets, and Moshe's response – are highly significant and instructive for all successive generations. As the first leadership committee was being established, we are taught that supreme spiritual authority is not intended to establish a

spiritual monopoly. Spiritual aptitude granted by G-d is not dependent on any special office – the humblest of the nation may be endowed with a portion of G-d's spirit too.

While Yehoshua was jealous for Moshe's honor and position, Moshe's reply models the ideals of a true teacher and leader in Israel – whose supreme ideal is to raise the people so that they all attain a spiritual level that renders the leader's own services superfluous. "Are you jealous for *me!*!" asks Moshe. There is no sacred clergy who must keep their grip over the laity – *Would that all of G-d's people would be prophets!*

While the text does not reveal the content of Eldad and Meidad's prophecy, one opinion is that they spoke of the future war between Gog and Magog at the end of days.

Gog and Magog represent the "roof principle" (*gog*, related to *gahg*, roof) – the concentration of all leadership at the summit of the nation. This principle will be defeated in the end of days, and the city of the opposing principle of democracy will be called *Hamonah*, meaning "City of the Masses."

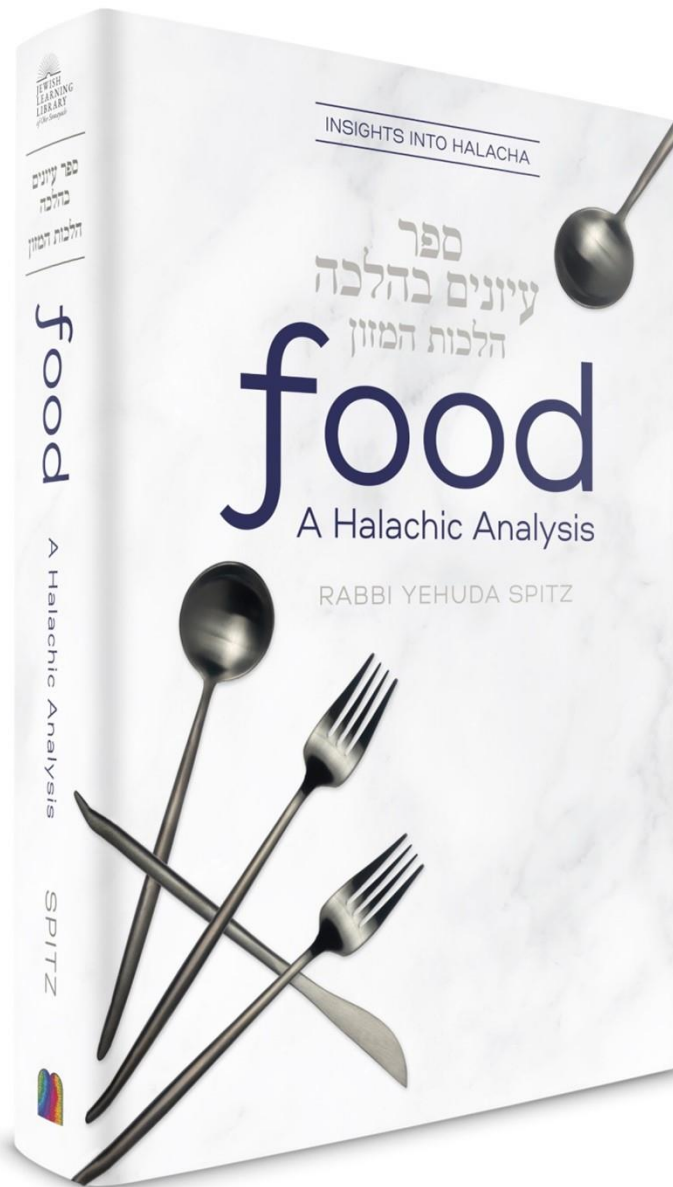
Eldad and Meidad heralded the ultimate victory of the principle of democracy over that of Gog and Magog. This prophecy was pronounced by the most modest of men, who were found worthy of leading the people. Out of their great modesty, they declined influential posts and preferred to remain in the midst of the people. For this reason they merited to bear the message of an ideal democratic future, in which the focal point of world social salvation would not be in the "Tent," but in the "camp."

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 11:26-30

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