

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT LECH LECHA • 10 CHESHVAN 5782 OCTOBER 16, 2021 • VOL 29 NO. 1

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Visiting One's Self

"Go for yourself..." (12:1)

Many years ago in a more naive and somewhat safer world, I once hitchhiked from Amsterdam to Pisa in Italy.

Only the young and the reckless (and I was both) would climb aboard the rear seat of a BMW 900 motorcycle on a night of driving rain with a 50 pound pack strapped to one's back. (This placed my center of gravity somewhere past the outer extremity of the rear wheel.) Every time the rider accelerated, the backpack dragged me backwards off the bike. The autobahn was a sea of rain. It was King David who taught us that G-d "protects fools." And that night I certainly qualified for protection.

However, hitchhiking taught me something other than G-d protects the foolish; hitchhiking taught me what is called in Hebrew "*menuchat hanefesh*", literally the "repose of the spirit."

We live in a world where stress can literally eat us up if we let it. How do we combat this killer?

There's an elderly lady who sits in a nursing home in New York City and every day she says the following:

"Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift from G-d – that's why we call it the present."

When you stand by the side of the road waiting for a ride, you have no idea whether someone will pick you up in a minute, an hour, or next week.

You are not in control. It's wonderfully relaxing.

No one in his right mind hitchhikes to an important business meeting or to catch an airplane. The very act of

hitchhiking says, *"I'm prepared to be where I am. I don't need to be anywhere else."*

A hitchhiker feels the presence of *hashgacha* (Divine supervision). My life is not in my control. All I have is the present. And therefore I must live in this moment and be here now.

That is why hitchhiking is a great calmer. (No, I don't mean *karma*.)

A Jew's job is to live in the present, but not *for* the present. Much of our lives are spent thinking about what might happen, or what might not happen, or where I could be/should be now, or what went wrong or what went right. What a waste! This moment is unique. It will never be here again. Sometimes, I just close my eyes and think, "I'm alive!"

The little agenda pilot that lives in our head can steal our lives away without our even noticing, unless we heed our little hitchhiker's guide to eternity saying, "G-d gave you this moment; live it to the full!"

At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, G-d said to Avraham, "*Go for yourself...*" Actually, the Hebrew translation is "*Go to yourself...*"

Avraham is the personification of kindness in the world. The essence of kindness is giving, and only a person who is totally at one with where he is can give fully of himself. Avraham had the ability to "*go to himself*", to connect every G-d-given second in his life to eternity.

Q & A

Questions

1. What benefits did G-d promise Avraham if he would leave his home?
2. "And all the families of the earth will be blessed through you." What does this mean?
3. Who were the souls that Avraham and Sarah "made"?
4. What were the Canaanites doing in the Land of Canaan when Avraham arrived?
5. Why did Avraham build an altar at Ai?
6. What two results did Avraham hope to achieve by saying that Sarah was his sister?
7. Why did Avraham's shepherds rebuke Lot's shepherds?
8. Who was Amrafel and why was he called that?
9. Verse 14:7 states that the four kings "smote all the country of the Amalekites". How is this possible, since Amalek had not yet been born?
10. Why did the "palit" tell Avraham of Lot's capture?
11. Who accompanied Avraham in battle against the four kings?
12. Why couldn't Avraham chase the four kinds past Dan?
13. Why did Avraham give ma'aser specifically to Malki-Tzedek?
14. Why didn't Avraham accept any money from Sodom's king?
15. When did the decree of 400 years of exile begin?
16. What did G-d indicate with His promise that Avraham would "come to his ancestors in peace"?
17. How did G-d fulfill His promise that Avraham would be buried in "a good old age"?
18. Why did the Jewish People need to wait until the fourth generation until they returned to Eretz Canaan?
19. Who was Hagar's father?
20. Why did Avraham fall on his face when G-d appeared to him?

Answers

1. 12:1 - He would become a great nation, his excellence would become known to the world, and he would be blessed with wealth.
2. 12:3 - A person will say to his child, "You should be like Avraham."
3. 12:5 - People they converted to the worship of G-d.
4. 12:6 - They were in the process of conquering the land from the descendants of Shem.
5. He foresaw the Jewish People's defeat there in the days of Yehoshua due to Achan's sin. He built an altar to pray for them.
6. 12:13 - That the Egyptians would not kill him, and would give him presents.
7. 13:7 Lot's shepherds grazed their flocks in privately owned fields.
8. Amrafel was Nimrod. He said (amar) to Avraham to fall (fel) into the fiery furnace.
9. 14:7 - The Torah uses the name that the place would bear in the future.
10. 14:13 - He wanted Avraham to die trying to save Lot so that he himself could marry Sarah.
11. 14:14 - His servant, Eliezer.
12. 4:14 - He saw prophetically that his descendants would make a golden calf there, and as a result his strength failed.
13. 14:20 - Because Malki-Tzedek was a kohen.
14. 14:23 - G-d had promised Avraham wealth, and Avraham didn't want Sodom's King to say, "I made Avraham wealthy."
15. With the birth of Yitzchak.
16. 15:15 - That his father, Terach, would repent and become righteous.
17. 15:15 - Avraham lived to see his son Yishmael repent and become righteous, and he died before his grandson Esav became wicked.
18. 15:16 - They needed to wait until the Amorites had sinned sufficiently to deserve expulsion.
19. 16:1 - Pharaoh.
20. 17:3 - Because he was as yet uncircumcised.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

Seeking Completion

All three patriarchs of the Jewish People are referred to as “complete”: G-d told Abraham that when he circumcises himself, he will become *tamim*, “whole” (Gen. 17:1); G-d told Isaac that he is an *olah temimah*, “an unblemished burnt-offering” (*Bereishit Rabbah* 64:3); and Jacob is described as an *ish tam*, “a wholesome person” (Gen. 25:27). These three words are clearly derived from the biliteral root TAV-MEM, but that’s not the whole story. There is another word in Hebrew that also means “complete” / “whole” – *shalem*. In this essay we study these two different words for “completion” and explore how they differ from one another.

Rabbeinu Bachaya (to Gen. 17:1) offers two important points that help us understand exactly what being *tamim* entails. Firstly, he notes that *tam* refers to something that is “complete” in the sense that it does not have any deficiencies or superfluities. To illustrate this point, he uses the example of the Torah, which is called *temimah* (Ps. 19:8) because it is perfectly complete, such that one cannot add or subtract to the Torah’s completion (Deut. 13:1). Secondly, Rabbeinu Bachaya writes that when a person is *tam*, his inside is like his outside. Meaning, there is complete congruency between what the *tam* believes in his heart and what he says with his mouth.

The upshot of Rabbeinu Bachaya’s understanding is that *tam* refers to equivalence. When referring to a righteous person, *tam* means that this person is *precisely equal* to that which is expected of him. He neither falls short of those expectations nor exceeds them. Moreover, the *tam*’s inner spirit *precisely matches* his outer veneer. This fits with the meaning of the related word *teomim/tomim* (“twins”), who are a matching pair in which one person is understood to be *precisely equal* to the other.

Malbim (1809-1879) explains that *tamim* in the sense of righteousness refers to the “completeness” of intention. In other words, the righteous person performs acts with wholesome motives and does not have ulterior, selfish motives, such as receiving reward or avoiding punishment. Malbim further notes that *tamim* implies complete agreement between the different parts of one’s psyche to the extent that the righteous person’s entire being resolves to perform good deeds without any inner conflict or dissent that must be appeased.

Along these lines, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) explains that *tam/tamim* refers to “completion” in a spiritual sense (e.g., a righteous person), in a physical sense (e.g., an unblemished animal), and in a quantitative sense (e.g., a full measurement). The word *tam* also refers to an “innocent” or “wholesome” person whose range of knowledge is “complete” and does not seek to enlighten himself beyond what he already knows. Note the appearance of *whole* in the English word *wholesome*, which points to a semantic affinity between those English words and the Hebrew *tam/tamim*. The result of this is that *tam* often refers to a simpleton, like the *tam* of the Four Sons in the Passover Haggadah. (Interestingly, the *Zohar* to Bamidbar 165b explains that *tam* refers to a higher level of completion than *tamim*.)

After banning Jews from being augurs, diviners, sorcerers, and necromancers, the Torah commands that one should “be *tamim* with G-d” (Deut. 18:13). This means that one ought to be “innocent” and “wholesome,” without appealing to outside forms of wisdom, such as the dark arts, to know the future. The *Kedushat Levi* does not explain *tamim* as “wholesome,” but instead understands the word as a reference to the “completeness” of one’s trust/belief in G-d. He explains that this verse means that one should view

G-d as He who always provides whatever is lacking.

Targum Onkelos on that verse translates the word *tamim* as *shelim* – an Aramaic cognate of *shalem*. In fact, the early Kabbalistic work *Sefer HaBahir* (137) uses this source to prove that *tamim* means *shalem*. This suggests that the words *tam* and *shalem* are synonymous, at least in a colloquial sense.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *shalem* to the biliteral root SHIN-LAMMED, which he defines as “removed” or “cast away.” This meaning is best illustrated by the verse in which G-d tells Moshe at the Burning Bush, “Remove (*shal*) your shoes from upon your feet” (Ex. 3:5). Other words derived from this root include *sheol* (“grave”), because death marks entering a domain that is “away” from the realm of the living; *shallal* (“booty/spoils”), because looting involves taking property “away” from its previous owners as the spoils of battle; and *shalvah* (“tranquility”), because it describes a state in which all disturbances or troubles have been “removed” or “taken away.”

Another derivative of this core root is the word *shalem* (“complete,” “finished,” or, in a financial context, “paid”), which Rabbi Pappenheim explains as referring to the completion reached after everything that has been “removed” from something has already been returned. In a word, *shalem* means that right now, nothing is lacking. In Rabbi Pappenheim’s estimation, the word *shalom* (“peace”) also implies the presence of all the positive factors required for prosperity, such that nothing extra is lacking.

Although he admits that *tam* and *shalem* may colloquially mean the same thing, Rabbi Pappenheim proposes a fundamental distinction between them: *shalem* refers to quantitative “completion,” while *tam* refers to qualitative “completion.” Based on this, he explains that *shalem* is used when the Torah commands a person to be honest in their business dealings by maintaining “complete” (Deut. 25:15) weights that are accurately calibrated and are not missing any part of their declared weight. Similarly, *shalem* is used when the Torah commands that the Altar be built from “complete” stones (Deut. 27:6, Joshua 8:21), which are not chipped or otherwise notched. Additionally, G-d allotted the Canaanites a sort of

“allowance” for their sins, which would allow them to remain in the Holy Land until that quota had been filled. When relating that the Canaanites’ quota of sin had not yet been filled/complete in the time of Abraham, the Bible again uses the word *shalem* (Gen. 15:16). All of these cases refer to “completeness” in a quantity: the stones in terms of their weight, and the Canaanites in terms of their amount of sin.

On the other hand, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *tam* refers to “completeness” in quality. For example, when the Bible prescribes that a sacrificial animal be *tamim* (Lev. 1:3, 22:21), this means that its body must be qualitatively pristine – with nothing extra or missing. This refers to a non-quantifiable form of “completion.” The same is true of the Red Heifer, whose redness ought to be *temimah* (Num. 19:2).

Based on this distinction, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) writes that we can gain a better appreciation of an exegetical homily concerning the Counting of the Omer. The Torah commands that we count the weeks from Passover to Shavuot, saying: “They shall be seven ‘complete’ (*temimot*) weeks” (Lev. 23:15). In explaining this verse, the Rabbis teach that weeks are considered *temimot* only when the Jewish People act according to Hashem’s will (*Vayikra Rabbah* 28:3). As Rabbi Mecklenburg explains it, the Rabbis saw this idea hinted at in the word *temimot*, which refers to *qualitative* completeness, and thus cannot just be a reference to counting the passage of time which is a *quantitative* process. Because of this, the Rabbis explained that this verse is not just talking about counting days, but about bettering oneself *qualitatively* and bringing one’s actions in line with the Divine will.

Shalem refers to anything that is not lacking anything towards its completion, but this does not preclude it from having *more* than needed. For example, *l’shalem* means “to pay” or “to compensate” by giving money to somebody. If, for whatever reason, somebody paid *more than the price* of his purchase, then the verb *l’shalem* still applies to his act of payment. By contrast, when it comes to the term *tamim*, this verbiage cannot apply if there is no *exact* match. Anything having

something missing or extra is considered imperfect and is precluded from being termed *tam*.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) takes a similar approach, but differs in that he explains that *shalem* refers exclusively to “quantitative completion,” while *tam* refers to “qualitative completion” that also includes “quantitative completion.” Interestingly, Rabbi Avraham Bedersi (a 13th century Spanish sage) seems to understand that both words refer to “completion,” but *shalem* is a neutral word that contains no value judgment, while *tam* implies a *positive* form of “completion.”

When the Bible reports that the Jews cried over Moses’ death for thirty days, it then reports “and the days of crying for Moses’ bereavement finished” (Deut. 33:8), using a cognate of *tam* to denote the completion of that mourning period. The commentators are bothered by the presence of this word instead of a cognate of *shalem* in this context, given that the Bible here describes the completion of a certain amount of time, which is a *quantitative* measurement.

To answer this question, we may accept Rabbi Wertheimer’s supposition that *tam* can mean quantitative and qualitative completion, while *shalem* refers only to quantitative completion.

Alternatively, we may answer that the “completion” of this period of mourning refers not to the quantitative measurement of time, but to the qualitative nature of their mourning. Rabbi Moshe Sofer (1762-1839) explains that the mourning of Moses’ death was “completed” when the Jewish People compounded the loss of their leader with the realization that they could have become his pupils in the same way that Joshua was if they had not been so lazy. Thus, *tam* in this case refers to a *quality* of their mourning, and not necessarily to just the completion of a certain amount of days.

If I understood him correctly, Rabbi Shimon Dov Ber Analak of Siedlce (1848-1907) explains that *tam* refers to “completion” in one particular aspect, but not necessarily in all aspects, while *shalem* implies a more overall sort of “completion.” When the Bible reports that Jacob arrived *shalem* at Shechem (Gen. 33:18), the Rabbis (*Shabbat* 33a) expound on the word *shalem* to mean that Jacob was “complete” physically (i.e., his body was healthy), intellectually (i.e., he amassed Torah knowledge) and financially (i.e., he amassed wealth). This demonstrates the broader implications of the word *shalem*. The term *tam* – on the other hand – almost exclusively denotes “completion” in the spiritual realm, but not in the physical, intellectual, or financial sense.

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,
POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. info@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.

©1992-2021 Ohr Somayach Institutions – All rights reserved – This publication contains words
of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Editor’s disclaimer – Ohrnet Magazine is not intended
to be a source for halachic rulings. In any real and specific case one should consult a qualified
halachic authority for ruling.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA: (PART 3)

“The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
– they must be felt with the heart.”
(Helen Keller)

The second blessing begins: “*With an abundant love have You loved us, Hashem, our G-d, with exceedingly great pity have You pitied us.*”

The Avudraham points out that the theme which wends its way throughout the second blessing before the Shema is a message of Hashem’s love for us. The Talmud (*Berachot* 11b) discusses the correct phrase to use when beginning the second blessing. The Sephardic and Chassidic custom is to open the blessing with the words *Ahavat Olam* – eternal love – for both the Morning Service and the Nighttime Service. The phrase *Ahavat Olam* comes from Jeremiah, 31:2. However, the Ashkenazic custom is to begin the blessing in the morning with the words *Ahavah Rabbah* – abundant love – and to use the phrase *Ahavat Olam* for the recitation of the Shema at night. Interestingly, the phrase *Ahavah Rabbah* does not appear anywhere in Tanach, and was incorporated into the blessing only during the Gaonic period. (The Gaonic period lasted for just over four hundred years, until a little after the year 1,000 CE. The *Gaonim* were the undisputed leaders of the Jewish community in Babylon and served as the heads of the two largest and most prestigious Yeshivahs at the time – Sura and Pumbedita.)

What is the intrinsic difference between these two phrases, such that the *Gaonim* felt a need to compose a new description for Hashem’s love for us? The Rabbis explain that the phrase “abundant love” implies that the love exists due to the strength of the merits of the one who is loved. Eternal love, on the other hand, denotes a love that is not dependent on the here-and-now. Eternal love is unconditional. Or, in the timeless words of *Ethics of the Fathers*, it is “love that is not dependent on anything.” Even if the “loved one” is currently lacking in virtues, the love transcends

everything. Perhaps this explains why according to all opinions we begin the blessing with *Ahavat Olam* at night. In Jewish tradition, the night is the beginning of the next day. In effect, we are commencing each new day with the declaration that Hashem’s love for us is unconditional and eternal.

The Vilna Gaon explains that the Nighttime Service focuses on the exile and our spiritual darkness, while the Morning Service concentrates on the Redemption and the glorious light that awaits us. Accordingly, the blessing for the morning prayer is *Ahavah Rabbah* because, when the time comes, we as the Jewish nation will be redeemed on our own merits. However, this is not applicable to the nighttime prayer, which symbolizes the darkness and the exile. As of right now, it seems that we have not yet reached the point where we warrant the Redemption. If so, we must use the phrase *Ahavat Olam*, since Hashem loves us *despite* the fact that we are lacking in merits. We are loved simply because we are the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

But there is another interpretation of the phrase *Ahavah Rabbah* which adds a whole new, beautiful dimension of meaning. The root of the word “*rabbah*” is “*rav*” – many or much. The word *rabbah* carries with it the connotation of something which continues not just to manifest itself, but also that its intensity continues to increase commensurately. If so, the opening words of our blessing convey to us the most stirring and heartening message of all: Hashem’s love for us will continue to develop and increase until the very last moment before we are redeemed.

To be continued...

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Beitzah 35-40

Is Kiddushin a Mitzvah?

“Any activity forbidden on Shabbat is forbidden on Yom Tov. For example: It is forbidden to climb a tree... or make kiddushin... or to consecrate an object... The only difference between Shabbat and Yom Tov is the preparation of food.”

This *mishna* enumerates a variety of activities that are forbidden on Shabbat and Yom Tov, dividing these activities into three distinct categories: acts forbidden by rabbinical decree (*shvut*); voluntary acts (*reshut* – not forbidden, and close to being a mitzvah, but not a real mitzvah – Rashi); and mitzvah acts.

The *gemara* asks regarding the case of kiddushin: “Is *kiddushin* not a mitzvah?” Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam explain this question in two different ways. Rashi explains that *gemara*’s question as being, “Why is *kiddushin* not included in the *mishna*’s list of mitzvah acts that are nevertheless banned on Shabbat and Yom Tov? On the other hand, Rabbeinu Tam explains the *gemara*’s question as being, “Why on earth did our Sages forbid *kiddushin* on Shabbat and Yom Tov, given that it is a mitzvah to make *kiddushin* and be fruitful and multiply?”

The *gemara* answers that the *mishna* is specifically speaking about a case when the man already has a wife and children. According to Rashi’s view of the question, this answer explains why *kiddushin* is listed in the *mishna* under the category of *reshut* and not mitzvah. This seems to imply that *kiddushin* is indeed a mitzvah for a man without a wife and children, but would still not be permitted on Shabbat and Yom Tov. According to the view of Rabbeinu Tam, the *gemara* answers that the ban against *kiddushin* on Shabbat and Yom Tov is only for one who already fulfilled the mitzvah “to be fruitful and multiply.” In addition, a person who has not yet fulfilled this mitzvah would be permitted to make *kiddushin* on Shabbat and Yom Tov.

An interesting question that seems to be taught in our *sugya* is to determine whether the act of *kiddushin* in general is in fact a mitzvah. It appears that at least if the man is not married and has not fulfilled the obligation to procreate, the act of *kiddushin* is a mitzvah. The ruling of the Rambam in his *Mishneh Torah* seems to clearly state that *kiddushin* is a mitzvah. (*Hilchot Ishut* 1:2)

In fact, when I stood under the *chuppah* and was about to give my dear *kallah* a ring for *kiddushin*, something a bit unexpected occurred. One of the witnesses, Rav Avraham Mordechai Isbee, *zatzal* (my words cannot begin to describe his seemingly superhuman dedication to Torah study and dissemination, not to speak of his Torah-based humility and piety) leaned towards me and whispered so no one else could hear (so as not to embarrass me), “Have in mind to fulfill the mitzvah of *kiddushin* according to the Rambam[’s view].”

However, it appears from the writings of other Rishonim, such as Rabbeinu Asher, that *kiddushin* is not a mitzvah, but rather a prerequisite for the ability to fulfill the Torah mitzvah to procreate. He writes that for this reason there is no “blessing for a mitzvah” said for the act of *kiddushin*. There is much discussion on this topic, and to be intellectually honest, some commentaries explain that even the Rambam does not mean that *kiddushin* is a mitzvah. (For example, the *Maggid Mishneh* writes that although *kiddushin* is the *start* of the mitzvah to marry in order to procreate, the marriage-mitzvah is complete only with a later and separate act of *nesu’in* – a topic for another time, *iy’H*.)

▪ Beitzah 36b

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Ten generations have passed since Noach. Man has descended spiritually. In the year 1948 from Creation, Avram is born. By observing the world, Avram comes to recognize G-d's existence, and thus merits G-d appearing to him. At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, G-d tells Avram to leave his land, his relatives and his father's house and travel to an unknown land where G-d will make him into a great nation. Avram leaves, taking with him his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, their servants, and those whom they converted to faith in G-d. When they reach the land of Canaan, G-d appears to Avram and tells him that this is the land that He will give to his descendants.

A famine ensues and Avram is forced to relocate to Egypt to find food. Realizing that his wife's beauty could cause his death at the hand of the Egyptians, Avram asks her to say that she is his sister. Sarai is taken to Pharaoh, but G-d afflicts Pharaoh and his court with severe plagues and she is released unmolested. Avram returns to Eretz Yisrael (Canaan) with much wealth given to him by the Egyptians. During a quarrel over grazing rights between their shepherds, Avram decides to part ways with his nephew Lot. Lot chooses to live in the rich but corrupt city of Sodom in the fertile plain of the

Jordan. A war breaks out between the kings of the region and Sodom is defeated. Lot is taken captive. Together with a handful of his converts, Avram rescues Lot, miraculously overpowering vastly superior forces, but Avram demurs at accepting any of the spoils of the battle.

In a prophetic covenant, G-d reveals to Avram that his offspring will be exiled to a strange land where they will be oppressed for 400 years, after which they will emerge with great wealth and return to Eretz Yisrael, their irrevocable inheritance. Sarai is barren and gives Hagar, her Egyptian hand-maiden, to Avram in the hope that she will provide them with a child. Hagar becomes arrogant when she discovers that she is pregnant. Sarai deals harshly with her, and Hagar flees. On the instruction of an angel, Hagar returns to Avram and gives birth to Yishmael. The weekly portion concludes with G-d commanding Avram to circumcise himself and his offspring throughout the generations as a Divine covenant. G-d changes Avram's name to Avraham, and Sarai's name to Sarah. Hashem promises Avraham a son, Yitzchak, despite Avraham being ninety-nine years old and Sarah ninety. On that day, Avraham circumcises himself, Yishmael and his entire household.

subscribe @ ohr.edu

to receive Ohrnet directly to your email each week

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Count to Ten

When Avraham returns triumphant from his battle against the four kings, Malki Tzedek, a priest to Hashem, greets him with bread and wine, blessing both Avraham and Hashem for the miraculous victory. Avraham then gives Malki Tzedek *maaser*, a tenth of the spoils of war, as a tribute to Hashem.

This is the first mention of *maaser* in Scripture. Later, the Torah will set forth the obligation to tithe produce and give it to the Kohen and the Levi (and also to the poor). One who gives this tenth to the Levi expresses the following: “Hashem, Whose Name you proclaim, is the One Who gave me these possessions.” By giving the tithe to Malki Tzedek, Avraham acknowledges that Hashem, Whose Name Malki Tzedek proclaims, is the One Who graced him with victory.

As a rule, the word for “tenth” is *asirit*. But in this sense of tithing, it is called *maaser*. Had the tithe been called *asirit*, the tenth would have no special significance. It could just as well have been any other fraction. In dedicating assets to Hashem, it is not the fraction that is significant, but it is the act of giving, and specifically the act of giving the concluding tenth of each unit. This is why the verb form is an active form – *maaser* means to ‘make the ten.’ Ten is a significant number, conceptually and mathematically. It always represents a unit, a whole. There are nine digits and then the tenth concludes the first unit and also begins the next. We round to the nearest ten, count years in decades, and count all material things

in tens. This is one of the reasons why a *minyan* is a minimum of ten individuals – it is the smallest unit that can represent the whole.

The obligation to tithe animals and produce was effected in this manner: Each tenth animal that passed under the staff would be separated as *maaser*. When tithing produce, they would not measure the whole quantity and then designate a tenth. Rather, they would designate every tenth measure as *maaser*. *Maaser*, then, does not mean *a tenth part*, but rather *every tenth one*. In this way, both the first and the concluding separation of property to the Kohen or Levi were dedicated to Hashem: The “first” – the first fruits, the first-born animal, and the “last” – the concluding tenth. This served as an ever-present reminder that all property belongs to Hashem.

When a person earns his first penny, he is still humble. With the memory of his previous state of need still fresh in his mind, he knows well that his success depends on the grace of Hashem. But the tenth, the one-hundredth, the thousandth, appear to him as natural as the ninth, or ninety-ninth, or nine hundred and ninety-ninth that came before. The commandment to give *maaser*, every tenth one, is to preserve his awareness that every unit is a direct gift from Hashem.

- Sources: Commentary, Bereishet 14:22-24

Perek Shira: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

Lech Lecha

The Song of the Heavens

The Heavens say: “The Heavens tell Hashem’s glory, and the sky relates His handiwork.”
(*Tehillim 19:2*)

Across the globe, the grand Heavens sing of Hashem’s glory and His handiwork.

The sky is blue, a recognized color of majesty, which represents Hashem's attribute of kingship. For this reason, Hashem’s throne is made of blue sapphire. There is an allusion to this in the verse of this song, as *mesaprim* (telling) has the word-root of *sapir* (sapphire).

The brilliant sun crosses the sky daily, benefitting all flora and fauna indiscriminately. The softly glowing moon and stars soften the effect of the darkness of the night. The endless space and countless stars sing of the honor of the Creator. The constellations tell of Hashem’s reign through the language of astrology. Clouds tell of Hashem’s desire to bestow life upon the Land. Their absence indicates His disapproval.

The Heavens draw to our attention that there is a King Who supervises His world, and they add an element of majesty to all the inhabitants of Earth. Their loftiness speaks of Hashem's loftiness and inspires awe of Him. Hence, one who fears Hashem is said to have "fear of Heaven." Their depth appears endless in the same way that Hashem is endless. Their breadth is inescapable in the same way one cannot leave the presence of the Omnipresent. In fact, it is a mitzvah to look at the Heavens and their constellations to contemplate their Creator and to bless Him – joining their song.

Sources: Zohar (Introduction 2a; Shlach 226b), Rashi, Malbim, Mesaprim Tehilos Hashem, Eved HaMelech (Ha'azinu)

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

Hero or Thief: Revisited

by Rabbi Gavriel Rubin

The Bomb Thief: Revisited

In the previous issue of Ohrnet Magazine we presented the story of Motti Ashkenazi, who in 1997 stole a bag from a beach in Tel Aviv, only to discover that it contained a bomb. Thus instead of the crime he intended to commit, what Motti actually did was to save dozens of lives! The question we left off with was: How are we to look at Motti now – as a [Hero or Thief?](#)

This question is not merely academic. It can have practical ramifications as well. One of these, for example, is whether or not Motti needs atonement. Let's see what the classic sources have to say about the matter:

Happy Accidents

A good place to begin is with a passage in the Talmud (*Menachot* 64a) discussing the scenario in which a fisherman spreads out his net on the Sabbath, a prohibited activity, and hauls in an unexpected catch – a live infant that had fallen into the sea!

Now, it is a well-known principle that the saving of human life overrides all the Sabbath prohibitions. If saving the baby had been the fishman's intention, his act would have certainly been permitted, even if he caught a few fish at the same time. So, now the question here, as in the case of the bomb thief, is: Do we look at the intention or the result?

The Talmud tells us that this was the subject of a disagreement between two of the Sages, Rabbah and Rava. Rabbah says that we look at the result. Therefore, since a life was saved, the fisherman is off the hook. Rava, on the other hand, says that we look at the intention, which in this case was to violate the Sabbath. Therefore, in his view, the fisherman is guilty.

When the Rambam codifies this case he follows the lenient view (*Hilchos Shabbat* 2:16). This seems to bode well for Motti, since in his case, too, the result was the saving of lives.

The Tzaddik and the Temptress

There are, however, a number of other sources that call into question the Rambam's ruling. For instance, the Talmud relates elsewhere (*Kiddushin* 81b) that Rav Chiya bar Ashi's wife once heard him praying to be saved from the Evil Impulse. This left her very perplexed, because her husband had not had physical contact with her for years, which she presumed was due to the weakness of old age.

Determined to get to the bottom of the matter, she dressed herself up in her most alluring outfit, being careful to disguise her appearance, and then passed back and forth before the garden.

“Who are you?” asked Rav Chiya.

“Charusa,” his wife answered, giving the name of a famous woman of ill-repute.

At that moment, Rav Chiya was unable to resist and immediately sought the woman’s services. The woman agreed, but for her fee she demanded a pomegranate from the top of a nearby tree. Not in the least deterred, Rav Chiya leapt to the top of the tree and plucked for her a piece of the fruit.

Sometime later a remorseful Rav Chiya returned home. Seeing that in the meantime his wife had kindled their large baking oven, and seeking atonement for his deed, Rav Chiya climbed into the oven, sat down and awaited his fate.

Fortunately, his wife arrived shortly thereafter. “What’s this all about?” she inquired, whereupon he confessed to her the entire affair. “You have nothing to worry about,” she assured him. “It was me.”

Nevertheless, Rav Chiya was not consoled. “That may be true,” he said, “but I *intended* to commit a sin!” So he spent the rest of his life in fasting until at last he died of weakness.

Pardon for What?

To prove that Rav Chiya’s response to seek atonement was justified, the Talmud cites a verse concerning a woman who has made a vow, which her husband subsequently annulled without her knowledge. The verse reads: “[The vow] is not sustained, and Hashem will pardon her” (*Bamidbar* 30:13). From the words, “Hashem will pardon her,” our Sages infer that although the vow was annulled, the woman is still in need of pardon for any violation thereof. This shows that the *intention* to commit a sin is itself a sin requiring atonement even though no forbidden act was actually done.

This seems to be directly at odds with the Rambam’s ruling that the fisherman who saved the baby is *not* liable for violating Shabbat since in the end no forbidden act was done. So, the question we must now try to answer is: When do we say that the mere intention to sin requires atonement and when not? But, before we do so, let us see one more source.

The Fortuitous Kidnapping

The following story may ring a bell:

A group of brothers once decided for various reasons that another brother was deserving of death. Before the sentence could be carried out, however, one of the brothers, anxious to save his sibling’s life, suggested that he be sold into slavery instead. This proposal found favor in the eyes of the others, and the deed was soon done.

Despite his situation, the enslaved brother did not despair, but threw himself into his chores with all his ability. Very soon he proceeded to rise from his lowly position, withstanding awesome trials along the way, until at last he was appointed viceroy over the entire kingdom.

I am referring, of course, to the story of Yosef and his brothers. Now, Yosef would never have reached his lofty position had he not been sold into slavery. So, if one looks at the result, the brothers' deed had a very positive outcome. On the other hand, that was certainly not their intention. They had meant to punish Yosef, but Hashem turned their action to His own purposes, a fact that Yosef himself pointed out to them after their father's death.

A Bittersweet Cup

According to the *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh* this episode can be likened to the case of a man who intended to give his fellow a cup of poison but accidentally gave him wine instead. In such a case, says the *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh*, the wine-giver would be free of guilt even in Heaven's eyes.

This seems to indicate that as long as the result is good, there is no need for atonement, just as in the case of the fisherman. How then are we to understand the cases of Rav Chiya and the vowing woman, which seem to indicate that a person requires atonement for the mere intention to sin?

A Happy Ending

One resolution given by the commentaries is that in the case of fisherman, as in the case of Yosef's brothers, the result of the deed was actually positive. By contrast, in Rav Chiya's case and in the case of the vowing woman, while no crime was committed, nothing positive was done either.

A Crime Against Whom?

A second resolution is to distinguish between sins towards G-d versus sins towards other people. In the case of sins again God, since He knows what is in a person's heart, it is enough that the person merely *intended* to sin. By contrast in the case of a sin again a human being, all the victim really cares about is the result.

This approach explains why Rav Chiya and the vowing woman were in need of atonement, while Yosef's brothers were not. It does not explain, however, why the fisherman also seems to have been let off. After all, violating the Sabbath is a sin towards G-d!

The answer, say the commentaries, is that we are mixing up two different issues. The Talmud says that the fisherman is off the hook only for the actual *deed*. Nevertheless, he is still in need of atonement for his *intention*. In the case of Yosef's brothers, on the other hand, since the crime they intended was against a human being, they do not even need atonement.

What About Motti?

In Motti's case, the result was a great mitzvah – the saving of many lives. Moreover, his attempted crime, theft, is a matter between human beings. So, it seems that according to both these resolutions he should not need atonement.

Of course, nothing in life, or in Torah, is virtually ever that simple. According to the Chafetz Chaim, *whenever* a person intends on sinning he is in need of atonement (*Hilchot Lashon HaRa, Klal 4*). How he resolves the contradiction is a question we will just have to think about on our own!

(Editor's note: This case appears in Rabbi Rubin's new *sefer* available via Amazon: [*The Bomb Thief and Other Curious Cases: Leaves from the Jewish Logic Tree*](#))

This issue of the Ohrnet is sponsored by the
Harry H. Beren Foundation