

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT YITRO • 20 SHVAT 5782 JANUARY 22, 2022 • VOL 29 NO. 16

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Does Shabbat Like You?

"Remember the day of Shabbat to make it holy."

May I ask you a personal question? How's your Shabbat? Does every Shabbat make you feel suffused with holiness? Does every rock and building and tree whisper to you "Shabbat!" Do you feel so much closer to G-d than on the rest of the week?

If the answer to one or more of these questions is no, then you should know you are part of a very large majority.

Many people find Shabbat a burden: You cannot watch the TV. You cannot go to the ball game. You cannot go shopping. You cannot do this. You cannot do that. When is it going to be dark already?

And even if Shabbat is not a burden, and we enjoy the food, the company, the Shabbat nap — do we feel that we have left one reality and entered another world?

Why don't we feel that *kedusha*, that holiness? Why don't we feel Shabbat?

Many years ago I remember a magic Shabbat. I prayed at the Western Wall in Jerusalem and had the Friday night meal at some friends' in the Old City. After the meal, as I was walking back to my apartment, I don't know why, but I stopped for a moment, closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and said very quietly to myself, "Ahh, Shabbat!" And then I said it again and again and again. I walked through the magical streets of Meah Shearim. I came upon a small synagogue. I went in and opened up a Talmudic tractate and started to learn. I had never been in that synagogue before, and I am pretty sure that I could not find it again. Maybe it only existed for that one night. Who knows?

I learned for a while. It could have been a few minutes or an hour. Then I got up and walked home. I got into

bed and my last words before sleep overtook me were "Shabbat, Shabbat!"

You might think that Shabbat is a day in the week. You might think that Shabbat is a 24-hour period of time between Friday afternoon and Saturday night.

But you would be wrong. It is not.

Shabbat is a being. Shabbat is an existence with feelings and likes and dislikes. Shabbat can choose to come to you once in your life, or every week or never. Because if you never felt Shabbat, that is because it never came to you.

It did not feel comfortable with you. Because you do not feel comfortable with it.

Shabbat is very sensitive and very picky. If it senses that your commitment to it is shaky, then it will not come to you. You can light your Shabbat lights and make Kiddush and eat your cholent to your heart's content, but if you are not really there for it, Shabbat knows that, it senses that, and passes on down the block.

"Remember the day of Shabbat to make it holy."

Every week we have to remember to make Shabbat holy, to exert ourselves and infuse those precious hours with Torah, with spirituality, enthusiasm and *kedusha*, for if we *make* it holy, then the Shabbat queen will arrive with all her retinue of blessings to crown our week.

- Sources: Based on Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz in *Daat Chochma UMussar*

Q & A

Questions

1. Yitro had 7 names. Why was one of his names Yeter?
2. News of which two events motivated Yitro to come join the Jewish People?
3. What name of Yitro indicates his love for Torah?
4. Why was Tzipora with her father, Yitro, and not with Moshe when Bnei Yisrael left Egypt?
5. Why does verse 18:5 say that Yitro came to the desert – don't we already know that the Bnei Yisrael were in the desert?
6. Why did Moshe tell Yitro all that G-d had done for the Jewish People?
7. According to the Midrash quoted by Rashi, how did Yitro respond when he was told about the destruction of Egypt?
8. Who is considered as if he enjoys the splendor of the Shechina ?
9. On what day did Moshe sit to judge the Jewish People?
10. Who is considered a co-partner in Creation?
11. "Moshe sat to judge the people, and the people stood before Moshe...." What bothered Yitro about this arrangement?
12. Why did Yitro return to his own land?
13. How did the encampment at Sinai differ from the other encampments?
14. To whom does the Torah refer when it uses the term "Beit Yaakov"?
15. How is G-d's protection of the Jewish People similar to an eagle's protection of its young?
16. What was G-d's original plan for Matan Torah ? What was the response of the Jewish People?
17. How many times greater is the "measure of reward" than the "measure of punishment"?
18. How is it derived that "Don't steal" refers to kidnapping?
19. In response to hearing the Torah given at Sinai, how far backwards did the Jewish people retreat in fear?
20. Why does the use of iron tools profane the altar?

Answers

1. 18:1 - Because he caused a parsha to be added to the Torah. Yeter means addition.
2. 18:1 - The splitting of the sea and the war against Amalek.
3. 18:1 - Chovav.
4. 18:3 - When Aharon met Moshe with his family on their way down to Egypt, Aharon said to Moshe: "We're pained over the Jews already in Egypt, and you're bringing more Jews to Egypt!'" Moshe, hearing this, sent his wife and children back to Midian.
5. 18:5 - To show Yitro's greatness. He was living in a luxurious place; yet he went to the desert in order to study the Torah.
6. 18:8 - To draw Yitro closer to the Torah way of life.
7. 18:9 - He grieved.
8. 18:12 - One who dines with Torah scholars.
9. 18:13 - The day after Yom Kippur.
10. 18:13 - A judge who renders a correct decision.
11. 18:14 - Yitro felt that the people weren't being treated with the proper respect.
12. 18:27 - To convert the members of his family to Judaism.
13. 19:2 - The Jewish People were united.
14. 19:3 - The Jewish women.
15. 19:4 - An eagle carries its young on top of its wings to protect them from human arrows. So too, G-d's cloud of glory separated between the Egyptians and the Jewish camp in order to absorb Egyptian missiles and arrows fired at the Jewish People.
16. 19:9 - G-d offered to appear to Moshe and to give the Torah through him. The Jewish People responded that they wished to hear the Torah directly from G-d.
17. 20:6 - 500 times.
18. 20:13 - Since it is written immediately after "Don't murder" and "Don't commit adultery," it is derived that "Don't steal" refers to a crime carrying the same penalty as the first two, namely, the death penalty.
19. 20:15 - They backed away from the mountain twelve mil (one mil is 2000 cubits).
20. 20:22 - The altar was created to extend life; iron is sometimes used to make weapons which shorten life.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Laundering and Cleaning

G-d primed the Jews for the Revelation at Mount Sinai by commanding them to groom themselves and otherwise prepare for the great spectacle. One of the items included in this commandment was: “and they shall wash (*v'chibsu*) their clothes” (Ex. 19:10). This word for “washing” is an inflection of the term *kevisah*. In the essay before you, we will discuss various terms for “washing” / “cleaning” in Biblical and Rabbinic Hebrew, tracing them to their core etymological roots and trying to determine if and how these apparent synonyms differ from one another. The terms under discussion include: *kevisah*, *merikah*, *shetifah*, *rechitzah*, *hadachah*, and *kinuach*.

In attempting to find a source for the notion that the Jews immersed in a *mikvah* at Mount Sinai, the Talmud (*Yevamot* 46b) first proposes that such is implied by the commandment “and they shall wash (*v'chibsu*) their clothes” (Ex. 19:10). The Talmud reasons that if the Jews were commanded to clean their clothes, this means that they were considered impure, and just as an impure person must immerse in a *mikvah* to purify himself and must also “clean” his clothes by immersing them in a *mikvah*, so too were the Jews at Mount Sinai themselves required to immerse in a *mikvah*, along with the commandment to “clean” their clothes, which ostensibly means that they should be immersed in a *mikvah*.

However, the Talmud rejects this possible proof-text by counter-arguing that it is possible that in this context, when the Torah commands the Jews to clean their clothes, this does not refer to immersing those clothes in a *mikvah*, but merely to washing them for the sake of cleanliness. If the clothes did not require immersing, then there is no reason to assume that the people themselves did. Because of this, the Talmud seeks out other sources for the notion that the Jews immersed in a *mikvah* at Mount Sinai.

Rabbi Shlomo HaKohen of Vilna (1828-1905) writes that the Talmudic proposition that the Jews were required to cleanse their clothes at Sinai for the sake of cleanliness (and not to purify them from ritual impurity) is also implied by Targum Onkelos to Ex. 19:10, who renders *v'chibsu* into Aramaic as *v'yichavrun*, which literally means “you shall whiten.” This translation does not follow Onkelos’ typical way of translating Biblical injunctions to “wash” clothing by purifying them.

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (1817-1893) makes the same point, adding that the fact that the Bible used the word *simlah* (“clothes”) in this case, as opposed to *begeg* (“clothes”), implies that the commandment only applies to the Jews’ *outer* clothes, not to the underclothes that they wore. He thus infers that the purpose of this cleaning must be to honor the upcoming event at Mount Sinai with freshly laundered clothes, as opposed to purify their clothes from ritual impurity (because if the cleaning was intended to remove ritual impurity, then there is no reason why that impurity would apply only to their outer clothes and not their undergarments).

The Torah stipulates that a metal receptacle used for cooking the meat of a sin-offering must be thoroughly cleaned before being used for another purpose; it must undergo *merikah* and *shetifah* in water (Lev. 6:21). Rashi (to *Zevachim* 96b) explains that *merikah* refers to washing the vessel from the inside, while *shetifah* refers to washing its exterior. Maimonides (in his commentary to *Zevachim* 11:7) explains that these two terms refer to the *quality* of the super-cleaning that is required: *merikah* refers to purging the vessel from any particles that cling to it, while *shetifah* refers to filling the vessel with water and scrubbing at it to clean it even more.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) explains that *rechitzah* refers to cleaning something by washing it from its outside (like pouring the

waters from the laver onto one's hands and feet in Ex. 30:19) or by washing something from the inside (like putting water *inside* the animal innards to cleanse it of fecal matter in Lev. 17:16). By contrast, he explains that *shetifah* refers exclusively to cleaning something from its exterior, but not penetrating inside. Alternatively, Rabbi Wertheimer writes that the difference between *rechitzah* and *shetifah* is in the quantity of the cleaning agent used for cleaning, as *shetifah* implies using more water than *rechitzah* does because the act of *shetifah* is associated with *mayim rabim* – “much water” (Ps. 32:7). A similar point is made by Radak (to I Kings 22:38), who notes that *shetifah* implies a stronger form of cleaning than *rechitzah* does.

Interestingly, Rabbi Wertheimer clarifies that *shetifah* only refers to washing something's exterior when it appears as an active verb, but when inflections of *shetifah* appear as passive verbs they imply that the item that was *shutaf* was cleansed both internally and externally. Since *shetifah* implies using “much water,” with this form of cleaning it was almost inevitable that both sides of the item in question would be cleansed.

Rabbi Wertheimer further clarifies the difference between *shetifah* and *hadachah* (typically translated as “rinsing”) by noting that both verbs primarily refer to cleaning something's exterior, but that *hadachah* implies doing so with a minimal amount of water, while *shetifah* implies using a lot of water. He finds proof to his assertion about the nature of *hadachah* from the following verse: “If G-d will cleanse (*rechitzah*) the excrement of the Daughters of Zion, and He will rinse (*hadachah*) the blood of Jerusalem from within it...” (Isa. 4:4). As Rabbi Wertheimer explains it, in this verse, the word *hadachah* is associated with blood because blood can easily be washed away with a little bit of water (while cleaning off excrement requires more water).

The Kabbalistic work *Sefer Hashem* (ascribed to Rabbi Elazar Rokeach of Worms) contends that the difference between *rechitzah* and *hadachah* lies in what matter is being washed away by the act: The Bible relates that King Solomon built ten lavers for the Temple in Jerusalem, explaining that their purpose was “to wash (*rechitzah*) in them, [and] to rinse (*hadachah*) the burnt-offerings in

them” (II Chron. 4:6). Basing himself on this verse, *Sefer Hashem* claims that *hadachah* refers specifically to using water to rinse off blood, while basing himself on Proverbs 30:12 and Isaiah 4:4 he explains that *rechitzah* refers to using water to rinse off feces.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) writes that the difference between *rechitzah* and *kevisah* lies in what is being cleaned, while *shetifah* refers to the method of cleaning. He explains that *rechitzah* refers to cleaning one's entire body, like when totally immersing oneself in a *mikvah* (Lev. 15:13, Num. 19:7), or select body parts, like washing one's feet (Gen. 18:4) or face (Gen. 43:31). Furthermore, he notes that *rechitzah* can denote cleaning via immersing oneself in pre-existing water (Ex. 2:5, Num. 19:7) or via pouring water onto one's person (Gen. 43:31, Ex. 30:21).

As opposed to *rechitzah*, *kevisah* never refers to cleaning one's body; rather it is always used when referring to cleaning objects, like clothes. Like *rechitzah*, *kevisah* can refer to cleaning an entire object, such as when totally immersing a garment in a *mikvah* for ritual purification (Ex. 19:10, Lev. 11:25, 13:6), or when partially cleaning one part of a garment (Lev. 6:20). Also like *rechitzah*, *kevisah* can refer to immersing a garment into pre-existing water or to pouring water upon that garment. In another discussion of the difference between these words, Rabbi Pappenheim writes that *rechitzah* refers to cleaning or rinsing just the surface of something (e.g. one's epidermis), while *kevisah* refers to cleaning something in a way that the water or cleaning agent penetrates through and through (like when one washes clothing, the water goes from the outside of the cloth through the inside).

As Rabbi Pappenheim explains it, these two terms contrast with *shetifah*, which can refer to both cleaning one's body (Lev. 15:11) and cleaning an object (Lev. 6:21, 15:12). Furthermore, while the former two terms can refer to bringing the person/item to the cleansing waters or bringing the waters to the person/item, the term *shetifah* applies exclusively to bringing the person/item to the cleansing waters. Rabbi Pappenheim clarifies that the core meaning of the trilateral root SHIN-TET-PEH is “flow/stream.” When used in the

context of “cleaning,” *shetifah* refers to bringing a person’s body or an item underneath flowing waters and vigorously shaking that body or item in order to allow the stream of water to clean it.

Rabbi Avraham Bedersi compares *rechitzah* with *hadachah* by explaining that the former refers to a more intense form of “cleaning” something in order to scrub it of any dirtiness or grime, while the latter refers to merely “rinsing” something in a basic way. Moreover, he explains that *shetifah* refers to taking an essentially clean item and further running it under a strong current of water to make it appear even cleaner.

The way Rabbi Bedersi explains it, *merikah* differs from all of these terms in that it does not refer to cleaning something with water, but to buffing or polishing an item to soften it or remove rust/tarnish. In this sense, he explains that *tamruk* mentioned in Megillat Esther (2:3, 2:12) refers to some sort of cosmetic treatment that women would undergo to soften their skin and remove any blemishes on their exterior.

This fits with Rabbi Pappenheim’s understanding of the etymology of *merikah* and *tamruk* as deriving from the two-letter root REISH-KUF (“emptying”), because both of those terms refer to emptying something of unwanted blemishes and imperfections. Menachem Ibn Saruk lists both *merikah* and *tamruk* in his entry on the root MEM-REISH-KUF, but files them into separate categories, without even implying a connection between the two. However, Rashi (to Lev. 6:21) explains that *merikah* is indeed related to *tamruk*.

Speaking of Menachem and Rabbi Pappenheim, both of those biliteralist grammarians trace the term *hadachah* to the biliteral root DALET-CHET, whose core meaning is “to push away/remove.” They explain that *hadachah* is intended to “wash away” whatever can be rinsed off with water.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 21:25, Lev. 6:21) compares the term *merikah* to the word *morag* (“threshing tool”), by way of the interchangeability of KUF and GIMMEL. In doing so, he notes that *merikah* implies a penetrative, deep cleaning that goes beyond the surface. Interestingly, *Machberet Menachem* seems to understand that *merikah* even entails scratching off the surface layer in order to clean something.

Going back to the word *kevisah*, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) theorizes that the root KAF-BET-SAMECH/SIN means both “launder” and “young sheep” in allusion to the process of washing/cleaning the sheep’s wool. He further notes that the word *rachel* (“ewe”) is likewise related to *rechitzah*, because the Hebrew LAMMED apparently switches to a TZADI in Akkadian, in allusion to that same process. Rabbi Marcus finds a hint to the connection between *rachel* and *rechitzah* in Song of Songs 6:6 which uses both words in the same verse.

Although I have been unable to substantiate Rabbi Marcus’ claim regarding the interchangeability of LAMMED and TZADI, I will note that the *Pesikta Rabbati* expounds on the word *keves* (“young sheep”) as though it were related to *kevisah* (“washing,” “laundering”) as an allusion to the sacrificial lamb’s ability to “wash away” one’s sins.

An additional word for “washing” appears only in later Rabbinic Hebrew, but not in Biblical Hebrew: *kinuach*. This verb appears multiple times in the Mishna (including *Brachot* 8:3, *Shabbat* 21:2-3, *Bava Batra* 5:10, *Keilim* 28:2, and *Parah* 3:9), and refers to cleaning something by “wiping off” that which soils it. Rashi (to Isa. 47:11) maintains that *kinuach* is an expression of finality, as when something is “wiped away,” it is gone for good. It is probably in this sense that the term *kinuach seudah* (“the *kinuach* of the meal”) in rabbinic parlance came to refer to dessert.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 1) – BIRKAT HA'AVOT

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”
(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The *Amidah* was composed in a manner that preserved the consistency of the opening blessings, regardless of which *Amidah* is being recited. Therefore, for example, the introductory blessings of the weekday *Amidah* and the introductory blessings of the Shabbat *Amidah* are identical. If, however, the middle part of each *Amidah* differs to reflect the day on which it is said, why are these day-dependant differences not established at the very onset of the *Amidah*? Why did the Men of the Great Assembly choose to begin every *Amidah* with the same three blessings and only then proceed to the blessings reflecting the nature of the day on which it is being said?

The Talmud teaches in the name of Rabbi Simlai (*Brachot* 32a) that one should never begin to ask G-d for personal requests before first recounting G-d’s praises. Later (on 34a), Rabbi Yehudah says in the name of Rabbi Chanina that during the first three blessings of praying the *Amidah*, a person is analogous to a servant who should not ask for his own requests whilst standing in front of his master. Rather than focus on his own needs, he should only praise his master. Therefore, we, too, begin our recitation of the *Amidah* by first defining and praising G-d, and only after the three introductory blessings have been recited do we begin the process of framing our requests and/or describing the nature of the current day of prayer.

If so, it is curious that the three opening blessings are not referred to as “the blessings of praise.” Rather, they are called *Birkat HaAvot* – “the blessings of the forefathers.” The Talmud teaches (*ibid.* 26b) in the name of Rabbi Yossi the son of Rabbi Chanina that each of the three Patriarchs introduced the concept of prayer at a different time of the day. Although they did not actually compose the formalized text we have today, they nevertheless established the obligation to pray three times a day (see *Maharsha*).

Shacharit, recited in the morning, was introduced by Avraham. The Talmud cites the verse (*Ber.* 19:27): “And Avraham arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood.” Our Sages explain that the word “stood” is a reference to prayer. The obligation to pray in the afternoon originated with Yitzchak. The verse states (*ibid.* 24:63), “And Yitzchak went out to speak in the field toward evening.” Our Sages teach that the word “speak” refers to prayer. Finally, Yaakov initiated the nighttime prayers, as the verse states (*ibid.* 28:11), “And he (Yaakov) encountered the place and spent the night there.” Once again, our Sages teach that the word in the Torah for “encounter” denotes prayer.

Consequently, the commentaries connect the first three blessings of the *Amidah* to the three Patriarchs. The first blessing, *Magen Avraham* – the Shield of Avraham – is self-apparent. The shield is a reference to G-d, Who shielded Avraham after he was thrown into the fiery furnace in *Ur Kasdim* and Who later protected him from the kings who tried to kill him. The second blessing, *Mechayeh Hameitim* – Who resurrects the dead – corresponds to Yitzchak. Our Sages teach that during the *Akeida*, as Yitzchak was bound on the Altar, the spiritual encounter was so intense that his soul broke free from the physical confines of his body, returning to the spiritual realms before G-d restored it to Yitzchak’s body. The third blessing, *HaKel Hakadosh* – the Holy G-d – corresponds to Yaakov, as the verse in Isaiah (29:23) states, “They will sanctify the Holy One of Yaakov.”

The blessings of the *Amidah* are so fundamental that our Sages state (*Brachot* 34b) that a person who prays the *Amidah* should do so with concentration and intent for each blessing in the *Amidah*. However, if it is not possible to concentrate on each and every blessing, one should at the least do so for *Birkat HaAvot*. In his foundational work *Arbah Turim* (more popularly known simply as the *Tur*), Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher (1269-1343), one of the most decisive authorities in Jewish Law, defines the concentration required as being both an understanding of the words being recited, and also an awareness that the one reciting the *Amidah* is standing in front of G-d. (*Orach Chaim* 101:1)

The importance of praying the *Amidah* with concentration and intent is very great. When Rabbi Pinchas Menachem Alter (1926-1996), the seventh Rebbe of Ger, universally known as the Pnei Menachem, passed away, approximately two hundred *siddurim* (prayer books) were found in his possession! The Rebbe would change *siddurim* frequently, using different commentaries, to bring an additional quality of freshness to his prayers and supplications, and to help him concentrate on the beauty and the depth of the words that he was saying. While the esoteric practices of the Pnei Menachem are certainly beyond our comprehension, he, with his many *siddurim*, teaches us the enduring lesson that we should always seek additional ways to help us retain our connection to G-d.

To be continued...

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Megillah 30-32

The First Aliyah Blessing

Rabbi Meir says, “Open it (the Sefer Torah), look at it, close it, say the brachah, and then afterwards open it again and read (the verses) from it.” Rabbi Yehuda says, “Open it, say the brachah, and then read it.”

When a person is called up for an *aliya*, what does he do with the Sefer Torah before saying a *brachah*? The answer is disputed between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehuda in a *beraita* on our *daf*. Rabbi Meir mentions to close the Sefer Torah before saying the *brachah*, whereas Rabbi Yehuda does not mention closing it.

The *gemara* explains the reason for Rabbi Meir’s insistence on closing it before saying the *beracha*. He reasons that if the Sefer Torah was open during the *brachah*, some people might mistakenly think that the *brachah* is written in the Torah. It would be a serious issue for people to think so, and the person saying the *brachah* can avoid this problem by closing the Sefer Torah prior to the *brachah*. On the other hand, says the *gemara*, Rabbi Yehuda is not worried that people will make this mistake. Accordingly, he says there is no need to close the Sefer Torah beforehand.

In addition to the reason given in our *gemara*, other reasons are found in Torah sources for not closing the Sefer Torah before saying the *brachah*. Both reasons are based on the concept of time. One reason is that both closing it *before* the *brachah* and then reopening it *afterwards* to read from it require additional time not spent in prayers or Torah reading. This “downtime,” so to speak, poses a “bother” to the congregation (*tircha d’tzibbura*). Another reason not to close it before the *brachah* is to not make any type of interruption (*hefsek*) – even a brief period of time – between completing the *brachah* and beginning to read from the Torah.

Rabbi Zeira says in the name of Rav Masna in our *gemara* that the halacha is to “open it, say the *brachah* and read it” – without mentioning closing it before saying the *brachah*. This is the view of Rabbi Yehuda according to the *beraita* on our *daf*. The *gemara* explains that Rabbi Zeira did not say more succinctly that “the halacha is according to Rabbi Yehuda” since there are some Sages who teach the *beraita* with Rabbi Meir’s and Rabbi Yehuda’s names and views reversed. This ruling is cited as halacha in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 139:4. The Rema adds that the person should turn his head to the side while saying the *brachah* to completely avoid any iota of suspicion that the *brachah* is written in the Torah. The Rema suggests that the correct direction to face is slightly to one’s left side. The Magen Avraham offers a Kabbalistic reason. A person should view Hashem as being in front of him always, and when one faces left, he is facing Hashem’s right, so to speak. The Aruch Hashulchan offers a “practical” reason: since the person who will read the Torah is traditionally standing to the left of the person called up for the *aliya*, it is only fitting to face slightly towards that person.

For what it is worth, in my experience it seems that the widespread practice is to close the Sefer Torah before saying the *brachah*. This view is found in the teachings of the Ba’alei Tosefot here, who say that a person should ideally close the Sefer Torah first, due to the concern voiced in the *gemara* that, if left open, onlookers might wrongly think that the *brachah* is written in the Torah. (See the Bach, the Maharsha, the Pri Megadim, the Aruch Hashulchan and others to better understand how this practice does not contradict Rabbi Yehuda’s ruling and the *gemara*’s endorsement of his view as the halacha.) However, I have also seen individuals who say the *brachah* with their head facing slightly to the side. The Chafetz Chaim cites a variety of halachic opinions and their reasons in his *Mishneh Berurah* writings. In his work called *Bi’ur Halacha* he concludes that either practice is acceptable, providing it does not go against the custom of the community and the ruling of the synagogue’s rabbi.

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE STARS

The stars say, “It is You, alone, Who is Hashem. You created all of the heavens and all of their hosts, the Earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is within them, and You grant life to all, and the heavenly hosts bow to You.”

(*Nechemiah* 9:6)

Hashem controls the natural world through the astrology of the stars. The varying arrangements of the stars channel different flows of blessing from Hashem: life, wealth, strength, progeny and so on. The uncountable stars shine the praise of the similarly immeasurable G-d, Who guides each of them according to His singular will. The constellations constantly bow in unity in the direction of the western horizon, towards Hashem’s *Shechinah*, as if to declare: “It is You Who is Hashem – alone.”

We should not let powerful people and difficult situations confuse us. Hashem controls all, and the Jewish People in particular. Moreover, we are compared to the stars. This means that we have the ability to achieve stellar greatness, to rise above the world, to multiply and to control it. The sky is not the limit.

- Sources: *Aderes Eliyahu*; *Ber. 15:5*; *Megillah 16a*

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

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hearing of the miracles that Hashem performed for *Bnei Yisrael*, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness. Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to Judaism. Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe Rabbeinu, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice.

The Jewish People arrive at Mount Sinai, where Hashem offers them the Torah. Once they accept, Hashem charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain, and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst thunder and lightning, Hashem's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain, and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments:

1. Believe in Hashem.
2. Do not worship other "gods".
3. Do not use Hashem's name in vain.
4. Observe Shabbat.
5. Honor your parents.
6. Do not murder.
7. Do not commit adultery.
8. Do not kidnap.
9. Do not testify falsely.
10. Do not covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay Hashem's word to them. Hashem instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People not to draw close to the mountain or touch any part of it.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

Judaism: Not Religion or Theology

The circumstances of the giving of the Torah convey a great deal about the character of Torah, and of our relationship to it. In G-d's preparatory words to Moshe, He explains that by virtue of the Torah the people will become a "kingdom of priests to Me, and a holy nation." There is then a three day period of separation and sanctification to prepare for the great day. Moshe is instructed to set a boundary around the people and to warn them not to draw close to the mountain or touch any part of it.

One purpose of this separation was to establish for future generations that G-d remained in His place, opposite the people, and that His Word came *to* the people. In this way Judaism is fundamentally different than all other "religions."

“Religion” stems from the hearts of people: their codes of law originate in the human mind and merely express their conceptions of deity, of human destiny, and of man’s relationship to deity and his fellow man that exist in a particular period of history. Like all other disciplines – language, science, art and philosophy – “religion” is subject to change with the passage of time, as its laws and practices are merely an expression of levels reached by civilization at a given time. Because it is only a marker, religion cannot undertake to raise and educate the nation from which it sprang, up to its own higher standard.

But Torah is not religion. It was given by G-d to the people, who stood at a distance, and required preparation to receive it. It was given from the untouchable, extraterrestrial sphere, and strict separation was maintained. As such, Torah presents the absolute ideals, and sets forth conceptions for all time about G-d and human affairs.

Far from having its genesis from within the people, this set of Laws was imposed on a *stubborn, stiff-necked* people, a people who struggled for centuries to impart and implement its truths. It is this imperfection of the Jewish People, and its repeated rebellions against Torah that attests to the Divine origin and uniqueness of Torah. It still remains an absolute, an ideal, towards which the people strive, and the Torah still awaits the age which will be fully ripe for its realization. The Torah has no development and no history; it is the Jewish People which has a history, and a development towards Torah. Torah does not have to catch up with the times. It is the times that have to catch up with Torah.

As much as Torah is not religion, it is also not theology. Despite the Divine, unchanging and supernatural *nature* of Torah, it has never been withheld from the layman and reserved for the gowned theologian. “Theology” contains the thoughts of man on G-d and things Divine, and results in complicated systems of theology, incomprehensible to the layman. But Torah contains the thoughts of G-d on man and human affairs. The Torah speaks not of the essence of G-d and the supernatural, but of what G-d is *to us*, and how we are to relate to Him and to each other. The Torah does not describe how things look in Heaven, but how they ought to look in our hearts and homes. And this is why the entire nation is to be a holy nation of priests, each member drawing the Torah’s wisdom into his personal sphere, wherever and whenever that sphere may be.

- Sources: Commentary, Shemot 19:10-13; Collected Writings I, pp. 183-186, 189-190

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,
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