



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY



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לִגְר לִיתוּם וְלֹא לְמִנָּה יִהְיֶה:

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120 YEARS OF RELIGIOUS ZIONISM

www.mizrachi.org
www.mizrachi.tv
office@mizrachi.org
+972 (0)2 620 9000
f t i n

PRESIDENT

Mr. Kurt Rothschild z"l

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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.

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Rabbi Reuven Taragin

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Esther Shafier

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Ari Levine

Josh Maurer

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Ian Schwartz

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

Leah Rubin

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Confronting Amalek

Haman, Hitler and a Nuclear Iran



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

Absolute evil has existed for millennia. It constitutes a single-minded, systematic focus to destroy all good in the world. According to Torah tradition, it has a name – Amalek.

The Torah commands us at the conclusion of this week's Parasha never to forget what Amalek represents and to be prepared to confront them. Although Amalek no longer exists as a nation, it most certainly does as an ideology.¹

Final Solutions

Having mentioned absolute evil, most situations in life are not so black or white. Certainly in ethical terms, little is absolutely good or absolutely bad, but rather nuanced with many shades of moral grey. Nevertheless, world and Jewish history are testaments to the undeniable existence of destructive ideologies of significant evil.

Haman's intention was to kill every last Jew in one day in all 127 countries of Achashverosh's global empire. His Final Solution was on the brink of implementation and it was only through the grace of G-d and the actions of Mordechai and Esther that his plan was thwarted at the last minute.

Thousands of years later, Hitler declared the same intentions. Tragically, he succeeded in staggeringly murdering one-third of the Jewish people, and if not for the hand of Providence guiding the actions of the Allied Forces, he would have gone much further. Unstopped and unchecked, this type of evil would, G-d forbid, destroy every last Jew.

What is remarkable about Haman and Hitler's obsession with totally eradicating the Jews as a people is just how irrational and inexplicable it is. In both eras, the Jewish people were stateless and nationally

powerless and certainly posed no threat whatsoever to either Haman or Hitler in any political or military way. Yet this never deterred them from a willingness to commit the most tortuous atrocities and genocides on the grandest scale.

The reason is that the *raison d'etre* of both Israel and Amalek's existence is of a deep metaphysical nature. Without understanding the spiritual nature of the Jewish mission and hence Amalek's opposition to it, it cannot be fathomed.

The Perennial Battle

The struggle between good and evil is at the core of the human condition. Heroes and villains are locked in constant battle. Judaism sees this moral struggle taking place on two concurrent plains - the individual and the collective. Just as each person has a *יצר טוב* and a *יצר הרע* – a good and evil impulse – so does the world as a whole struggle with the same challenges. The Jewish people have always seen their mission as being a force of good in the world – to be a moral force of G-dliness and goodness – seeking altruistic good for its own sake. Amalek is the polar opposite – it is the collective cosmic *יצר הרע* – the base and barbaric impulse for unfettered destruction and even self-destruction. Amalek's goal is to eradicate everything good in the world – the Jewish people and all those who stand for morality and justice.

It is for this reason that the only two nations in the entire Bible who are called *גוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ*, the first of nations, are the Jewish people and Amalek. The point is clear – these two nations are pitted against each other in a perennial battle of good versus evil.

Evil for its own Sake

Amalek was the first nation to attack Israel immediately after the Exodus from Egypt. There are two remarkable features of this attack that highlight Amalek's pursuit of evil: "How he happened upon you on the way and cut off all the stragglers at your rear, when you were faint and weary, and he did not fear G-d" (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

Firstly, there is **no stated motive** for this attack. Amalek was not motivated by any normative political or military reasoning. There was not a battle over land or religion nor a war of defense, deterrence or display of regional power. These are the five reasons why countries wage war and none were present in Amalek's seemingly inexplicable attack.

They chose to attack for no reason other than to commit evil for its own sake. To sow darkness at the very dawn of Israel's aspirations to be 'a light unto the nations.'

Secondly, Amalek always **intentionally targets defenseless innocent civilians**.

There is not a regular military confrontation but rather a purposeful and systematic attack on those lagging behind: the elderly, the young, the weak and the infirm. They attacked the most vulnerable in society. Those who do not threaten anyone – those that anyone with a healthy moral conscience should understand should never be targeted.

Amalek Today

Amalek-type evil has taken on a new name – **Terrorism**. The aim of international terrorism is to do exactly what its name implies: to terrorize people anywhere and everywhere. The acceptable international norm in military interaction is that an army confronts another, and only combatants in uniform fight against their counterparts. Civilians are beyond the pale of ideological and military conflict. An Amalek mindset operates differently. It is **specifically** the non-combatants who are the aim of their terror.

Hamas and Hezbollah terrorize Israeli civilians just getting on with their lives as do terrorists the world over. 9/11 showed us just what warped minds of terror could conjure up - there seems to be no limit to immoral perversion.

Iran today is the greatest supporter of international terror and has its own diabolical aspirations for nuclear hegemony. How Iran can get away with openly having stated that the purpose of its nuclear weapons will be to eradicate Israel and is still somehow not unequivocally sanctioned and stands to be accepted in the family of nations boggles the moral mind.

Terrorism, as fitting for an Amalek-type ideology, exists outside the moral consensus and international convention of normative political, military and societal living.

One thing is crystal clear about Amalekite anti-Semitism – it begins with the Jews but never ends with them. One can be sure it will spill over to all fair-minded, good people around the world. Buildings and planes in New York, trains in Madrid, buses in London, nightclubs in Bali, schools in Toulouse, stores in Paris and coffee shops in Sydney are all fair game. Radical Islamic terror is the latest incarnation of Amalek's global mission. Iran's nuclear ambitions will never be limited only to Israel. The Abraham Accords can partly be attributed to Arab Sunni nations perceiving the clear and imminent threat to the whole region of a nuclear Shi'ite Iran. In today's ballistic missile world they will indeed be a global threat.

The Leaders' Crucial Role

It is therefore incumbent particularly on statesmen to comprehend the challenge of dealing with Amalek.

It is for this reason that the mitzvah to confront Amalek is not a personal commandment but a collective one. Its fulfillment rests squarely on the shoulders of the elected national political leader.⁴

The leader's role is key. It was Mordechai who had this clarity of moral vision and courageous temerity to stand up to Haman and enlist Esther's heroic leadership in the process.

What would have happened to Europe, and beyond, if not for the heroic leadership of Winston Churchill in the 1940s? Charles Krauthammer, America's sorely missed preeminent columnist, argued that Churchill's role in confronting Nazism was so indispensable that it made him the most important person of the 20th century.⁵ What enabled Churchill to be the right statesman

at the right time was his absolute clarity of vision of what Nazism stood for and aspired to achieve. From countless articles in the 30s, it is evident that he, more than anyone else, understood and articulated the looming threat. In 1935, many branded him as an extremist sowing panic and viewing the world in simplistic, black-and-white terms. By 1940, none of his critics could doubt him. In our nuclear age, Churchill's brand of leadership, courage and clarity of vision is more critical than ever.

Yes, life is very nuanced and complex and must be viewed with great sophistication. And yes, this Amalek-type hatred is rooted in a small minority with the majority being good, peace-loving people. Nevertheless, we have to be very mindful that our own nuanced sophistication does not cloud our vision in dealing with this scourge of evil. The great advantage of an open, pluralistic and democratic "live and let live" society must not become our greatest weakness. The forces of good cannot prevail if we are not armed with robust moral clarity.

With the global threat of terror and a nuclear Iran, the Mitzvah to remember and confront Amalek's unfettered evil ambitions is more relevant than ever. It is a perennial reminder and biblical primer encapsulated in the slightly amended powerful adage – "the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people not to do enough".

1. The Netziv (HaEmek Davar, Exodus 17:14), distinguishes between the nation of Amalek which no longer exists and the ideology of Amalek which persists to this day.
2. Regarding Israel: "Israel is holy to G-d, the **first** of His grain..." (Jeremiah 2:3). Regarding Amalek, in Bilaam's prophecy: "When he saw Amalek, he took up his parable and said, "Amalek was the **first** of the nations.." (Numbers 24:20).
3. The Malbim on the above verse says that none of these five reasons at the core of all normative military conflict were present here.
4. Rambam (Laws of Kings and Their Wars 1:1), based on the Talmud (Sanhedrin 20b), states that the mitzvah of remembering and confronting Amalek is a mitzvah on **כָּלֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל** – the Jewish people as a collective – and is to be implemented by the king. Indeed, Rabbi Meshulam Roth in his Halachic responsa (Kol Mevasser 2:42) notes that the majority of opinions rule that this mitzvah is incumbent upon the king.
5. Things That Matter, p.22.

PIRKEI AVOT

Taking Full Advantage



Rabbi Reuven Taragin

Educational Director, World Mizrahi
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רבי טרפון אומר, היום קצר והמלאכה מרבה, והפועלים עצלים, והשכר הרבה, ובעל הבית דוחק: (אבות ב:טו)

הוא הִיא אומר, לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין לבטל ממנה. אם למדת תורה הרבה, נותנים לך שכר הרבה. ונאמן הוא בעל מלאכתך שישלם לך שכר פעלתך. ודע מתן שכרו של צדיקים לעתיד לבא: (אבות ב:טז)

Towards the end of Avot's second perek, Rabbi Tarfon makes two statements about the effort expected from us in this world.

A Challenging Mission

His first statement delineates the context of our lives. The Chassid Yaavetz gives the background to this statement by identifying three reasons people fail to accomplish what they are meant to in their lifetimes: they overestimate the amount of time they have, underestimate the amount to be accomplished, or fail to appreciate the importance of the task. Rabbi Tarfon responds to all three reasons by emphasizing that “the ‘day’ (a metaphor for life) is short, there is much work to do, the workers are lazy, the reward is great, and the master (Hashem) has high expectations.” Each of Rabbi Tarfon's five points are independently important.

Short on Time

He begins with the length of the “day.” Earlier in the Rebbi Eliezer taught the importance of taking advantage of each day of life when he urged doing teshuva the day before we die. As this can be any day, we should do teshuva daily.

If the “day” were long, we would have lots of time to accomplish our objectives. In truth, though, our lives fly by. Tehillim compares man's life to a shadow: man, like a shadow, disappears quickly.

The Chofetz Chaim compared the way we experience life to the way people inscribe a postcard. Because the postcard initially has lots of blank space, people begin their writing with regular-sized letters. As they get to the end of the card (when little space remains) people often feel like they have

much more to say and are forced to use much smaller letters in an attempt to fit it all in. Sadly, many people live life the same way. While young, with our whole lives ahead of ourselves, we often lack the urgency to maximize our time. Only once the end is near, people scramble to “get it all in.”

Of course, we would be wise to appreciate the time we have at an earlier stage. The Chiddushei HaRim explains the custom to give a *chatan* (groom) a gold watch this way. The watch should remind us to appreciate the value of time, life's most precious commodity.

The Significant Task

The challenge of the shortness of life is compounded by the enormity of the task. This is Rabbi Tarfon's next point: “there is much work to do.” The *meforshim* on the Mishnah explain that this pertains particularly to Torah learning, which is described as “longer than (all) land and wider than the seas.”

What makes matters worse is the fact that we do not appreciate the importance of the task at hand. The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 47:7) tells us that Moshe Rabbeinu fasted and did not sleep for the entirety of the 120-day period he was receiving the Torah. His mindset was like that of a minister given permission by the king to keep all the gold coins he could count within a limited period of time. Moshe realized the golden opportunity he had and did not want to squander even a single minute.

Rabbi Tarfon taught that for us, like for Moshe, “the reward is great.” Every moment of our lives is an opportunity to perform meaningful actions or study the Torah that Mishlei (3:14) describes as more

rewarding than money and any other commodity. These pursuits give meaning to our lives and are the only things we take with us from this world.

Doing Our Part

Rabbi Tarfon's second Mishnah counterbalances his first. He begins by emphasizing that we are “not expected to finish the work.” This is his response to the erroneous conclusion we might reach from the previous Mishnah: if the amount that needs to be accomplished so exceeds the time we have available, maybe we should not even begin the task. To this, Rabbi Tarfon responds that we are not expected to finish it all.

Though we are not expected to finish, we “are not free to decide to desist from it.” Life is not just an opportunity; it comes with the expectation that we maximize it. As Rebbi Yochanan ben Zakkai (Rebbi Tarfon's rebbi) taught just a few Mishnayot earlier: “*Im lamadta Torah harbei, al tachazik tovah latzmecha, ki l'kach notzarta.*” To paraphrase, “If you learn much Torah, don't pat yourself on the back.” You are merely fulfilling the mission you were created to accomplish. Many people see Torah learning and maximizing our time as a matter of personal choice. In truth, they are the destiny we are required to realize.

May Rabbi Tarfon's teachings help us appreciate how short life is, how much we need to accomplish, and what is truly valuable.

Though we know that one lifetime is not enough to accomplish it all, may we embrace our destiny and commit ourselves to the mission of maximizing our lives.

● Summarized by Rafi Davis

Teshuva: Rupture and Repair



Rabbanit Shani Taragin
Educational Director, World Mizrahi

As the Yamim Noraim approach, we are enjoined to take advantage of this time¹ and seek out a relationship with *Hashem* as He is so near. This year in particular, we must undergo personal and national introspection, while we may feel as though it is behind us, we are still in the wake of a worldwide מגפה (plague or pandemic) that has taken hundreds of thousands of lives. The Rambam² teaches us that when suffering befalls us, we are implored to view it as an indication of our wrongdoings and undergo a process of repentance.

There are three episodes of national מגיפות mentioned in the Torah, each one with a lesson to teach us for today.³

The first time a מגפה strikes *Am Yisrael* follows the story of the 10 slandering spies, who died in a מגפה!⁴ Immediately thereafter, Moshe warns *Bnei Yisrael* – who seek to repent⁵ by attempting to engage in battle with the Canaanites and Amalekites as they enter the Land – that they will be unsuccessful in their attempts. *Hashem* will not accompany them for He has already punished them with 40 years in the wilderness.⁶ They did not properly display belief in *Hashem's* powers of conquest earlier, and therefore they are killed by their enemies.

Perhaps this is the first message we must internalize today: taking advantage of Divinely-destined opportunities to come to *Eretz Yisrael*. Perhaps we have not properly heeded the miraculous “knocks”⁷ to return to *Eretz Yisrael*. Perhaps a pandemic struck to remind us to take advantage of “open skies” and a Promised Land before it’s too late.

The second time a מגפה appears is in the aftermath of the Korach rebellion.⁸ Despite the miraculous punishments of Korach and his followers, *Bnei Yisrael*

blamed Moshe and Aharon for their deaths, and *Hashem* warned of immediate punishment. Moshe quickly tells Aharon to take *ketoret* and atone for the people, saving lives amidst the pandemic that killed 14,700 people. In anticipation of future democratic arguments, *Hashem* then manifests Aharon’s Divine appointment through the blossoming of his staff – a sign of continued authority.

Our generation has witnessed the waning of leadership in many spheres of government and judiciary. The Torah commands us to ensure that officers of the law are instituted in every community and abide by values of justice and righteousness. Torah leadership as well must be respected in every generation, a phenomenon drastically lacking today in many Jewish communities. Sometimes it takes a pandemic to recognize and respect Torah authorities.

The third and final מגפה in the Torah comes as a punishment for the sin of *Ba'al Pe'or*,⁹ when 24,000 men were killed after practicing a promiscuous form of idolatry. After *Hashem* rewards Pinchas for ending the pandemic through publicly murdering two of the perpetrators, He commands Moshe to fight against the people of Midian for sending their daughters to seduce *Bnei Yisrael*. However, before this commandment is carried out, the Torah teaches us what appear to be unrelated narratives including a national census, the petition of the daughters of Tzelofchad, and the laws of the annulment of vows. The common denominator of all these apparent non-sequiturs is the theme of family.

The national census includes the counting of every individual family, to literally rebuild the family structure that had been destroyed by the sin of *Ba'al Pe'or*. *Bnot*

Tzelofchad came to Moshe to appeal for the perpetuation of their father’s legacy within his family, and fathers/husbands are taught to listen to their daughters and wives in order to annul relevant vows.

The pandemic of *Ba'al Pe'or* and the ensuing repair reminds us of the dangers various cultures pose to the sanctity of our homes. Only once we rebuild our immediate family structure, restore family values and learn to listen to our family members, are we sufficiently edified to battle our surrounding enemies. How relevant in our post-modern society which has redefined marriage, family and simultaneously disposed of their intrinsic sanctity! *Teshuva* in the wake of pandemic enjoins us to quarantine in our homes with immediate family members and invest in rebuilding our relationships.

In the midst of these days of sensitized introspection, let us take heed of the Torah’s messages of pandemics, and stir our souls and selves to reignite our commitment to *Eretz Yisrael*, Torah leadership and family values. Together with *tefillah* and *tzedakah*, may we merit repair and *refuah* for this upcoming year!

1. Yeshayahu 55:6.
2. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Ta’aniot 1:1-2.
3. The word מגיפות first appears by the plagues of Egypt with historical and theological messages, albeit not a national pandemic for *Am Yisrael*.
4. Bamidbar 14:37. Rashi explains that they died through their tongues מידה כנגד מידה.
5. See Seferno (Devarim 1:45), HaEmek Davar (Bamidbar 14:40-45).
6. Bamidbar 14:42.
7. See Rav J.B. Soloveitchik, “Kol Dodi Dofek.”
8. Bamidbar 17:6-14.
9. Bamidbar 25:1-9.

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot

Question: The pricing of electricity drastically changes based on the hour of the day. At around midnight, the price is about one-sixth of what it is normally. Can we set a timer before Shabbat for our washing machine to go on in the middle of the night? If this is allowed, am I allowed to open the door on Shabbat day to remove the clothing so they do not smell? Am I allowed to then hang them up to dry (maybe they are not muktzeh because they were dry at the onset of Shabbat)?

Answer: The Rema in OC 252 forbids setting an object to function which makes significant noise on Shabbat. Therefore, because a washing machine makes noise, it should not be set on a timer to go off on Shabbat. Shu"t Yechave Daat and Minchat Kohen write that the issue of noise may not apply for Sephardim. In practice, Sephardim should not be lenient unless there is a real need.

If a silent washing machine will be invented, then it will be permissible to set a timer. In such a case, there is room to discuss whether or not the machine may be opened. Although the clothing were not wet before Shabbat, the clothing may still be defined as "muktzeh machmat issur." On the other hand, there may be room to claim they are not muktzeh based on the concept in Beitza 22 of "gamru beyedei adam."

Hanging the clothing would certainly be prohibited because it appears as though he washed the clothing on Shabbat.

Question: If I wrote a prozbul at the beginning of the shemita year, must I also write one at the end?

Answer: In Parshat Re'eh, the Torah commands us regarding shemitat kesafim. There are three separate commands: A positive command to release all debts, a negative commandment not to demand payment from the borrower, and a negative commandment not to refrain from lending in light of the impending remission of debts. The mitzvah of shemitat kesafim applies today only on a rabbinic level, like shemita of the land. However, it differs from shemita of the land in that it also applies outside of Eretz Yisrael (Shulchan Aruch and Rema, CM 67:1).

The psukim regarding shemitat kesafim say "miketz sheva shanim" - at the end of the seventh year. Through comparing the wording of this pasuk to the mitzvah of hakhel, the Gemara (Eruchin 28b) learns that shemitat kesafim takes effect at the end of the seventh year. The Rambam quotes this le'halacha.

Rav Dovid Zvi Hoffman explains why the mitzvah kicks in at the year's end. By the end of the year, after many months of leaving the land fallow, the poor man has no means to repay his debtors. The Torah, therefore, commands us to absolve the debts. At the beginning of the year, the poor are capable of repaying the debts from the reapings of the end of the sixth year, and there is no reason for the remission of loans.

The Mishnayot in Shevi'it discuss Hillel's enactment of the prozbul which is a document written to prevent the remission of loans. Based on what we explained above, the timing of the writing of the document would be at the end of the year.

The Rosh, however, quotes the Tosefta which says that the writing of the prozbul is on Rosh Hashanah eve of the seventh year. The Rosh explains that while the debts are absolved at the end of the year, the negative commandment of demanding money from debtors takes effect at the beginning of the seventh year. Therefore, according to the Rosh, there is a need for prozbul written at the beginning of the year.

Most rishonim explain like the simple understanding of the Gemara, that all of the rules of shemitat kesafim apply at the year's end. The Shulchan Aruch paskins this way (CM 67:30). Therefore, one can collect loans throughout the shemita year. The prozbul should be written at the end of Elul of the shemita year (Chazon Ish, Rav Ovadya Yosef). Some poskim believe a prozbul should be written right before the shemita year (Shulchan Aruch Harav and others) in accordance with the Rosh. Even according to those opinions, a prozbul must be written at the end of the year as well for the loans created during the shemita year.

● *Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.*

תקציר פרשת כי תצא

הרבנית שרון רימון



לאור הבנת טעמים של איסורי כלאיים, ננסה להבין מדוע התורה משתמשת בלשון חריגה כדי לתאר את האיסור: "לא תִזְרַע פְּרֶמֶךְ כְּלָאִים פֶּן תִּקְדָּשׁ הַמְּלֶאֶה". מדוע האיסור מתואר בלשון של "קדש"? ומדוע התורה משתמשת בלשון חריגה זו דווקא לגבי כלאיים ולגבי איסור זנות – "לא תִהְיֶה קְדֻשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל"?

גם איסור כלאיים וגם איסור זנות מתייחסים לפעולות של רבייה והולדה – בצומח, בחי ובאדם. ההולדה היא המשך יצירת העולם, אשר נברא על ידי הקב"ה. דבר זה צריך להיעשות בקדושה, בצורה נכונה וראויה, מתוך תחושת שותפות עם בורא העולם.

אולם, אם האדם מערבב דברים שאינם צריכים להיות מעורבים, ומשבש את סדרי העולמות, הוא גורם להולדה בצורה מנותקת מהקב"ה, ולהפך הקדושה. התורה מכנה את ההיפוך של הקדושה במילה "קדש", ובכך מדגישה את עוצמת הפגיעה בקדושה. מטרתם של איסור כלאיים ואיסור זנות הוא לשמר את סדר העולם (התחתון והעליון כאחד), למנוע ערבוב הרסני, ובכך לדאוג להמשך קיום העולם, בקדושה.

האדם מנסה ליצור מינים חדשים, כאילו שהוא הבורא. אולם, האדם לא יכול באמת להיות בורא וליצור מינים חדשים, ולכן למינים הנוצרים על ידי כלאיים, במעשה ידי אדם, אין אפשרות להתרבות, ומשום כך ההתערבות הזו במעשה בראשית הורסת ומקלקלת את הבריאה.

המב"ן ורבונו בחיי מרחיבים בביאור טעם זה על פי תורת הסוד: לכל צמח בעולם התחתון יש כח עליון שאחראי עליו, וישנה השפעה הדדית בין ההתרחשות בעולם העליון להתרחשות בעולם התחתון. חיבור נכון בין המינים משרה בהם את ברכת השלום, וברכת השלום חוזרת ומשפעת גם על הכוחות העליונים המופקדים על אותם המינים. ולהפך – כאשר ישנו עירוב שלילי של מין בשאינו מינו מתערער גם השלום העליון ופעולת הכוחות העליונים משתבשת. התורה אומרת לגבי איסור כלאיים "את חוקתי תשמרו", ובכך מבהירה לאדם שיש לו אחריות על שמירת "חוקות שמים", על שמירת הסדר בעולמות העליונים. (בהקשר זה, המילה "כלאיים" מתפרשת מלשון "כלא", דהיינו כליאת הכוחות העליונים וחסיתם).

פרשת כי תצא מופיעה רשימה ארוכה של מצוות. אחד מן האיסורים המופיע בפרשה זו (כ"ב, ט"א) הוא איסור כלאיים (הכולל: כלאי הכרם, כלאי בהמות, וכלאי בגדים - שעטנז). במקרה שמישהו עובר על האיסור זורע כלאיים, התוצאה היא "תִּקְדָּשׁ הַמְּלֶאֶה" – תיאסר התבואה הבשלה.

מהו טעמו של איסור כלאיים? לדעת רש"י איסור כלאיים הוא מן החוקים אשר אין להם טעם, וניתנו כדי לצרף ולזקק את ישראל, ולכן עלינו לקיימם ללא הבנה, כגזירת מלך.

לדעת רשב"ם, איסור כלאיים הוא מן החוקים, שהם מצוות בסיסיות, מעין 'חוקי יסוד' שמטרתם לשמר את העולם. מצוות כלאיים מהווה המשך ישיר למצווה שנצטווה הארץ בששת ימי בראשית: "תוצא הארץ... נפש חיה למינה" (בראשית א', כד), ו"תדשא הארץ... עץ פרי עושה פרי למינו" (שם, יא). האדם מצווה שלא לערבב בין המינים, כדי שלא לגרום במעשיו לקלוקל מעשה בראשית.

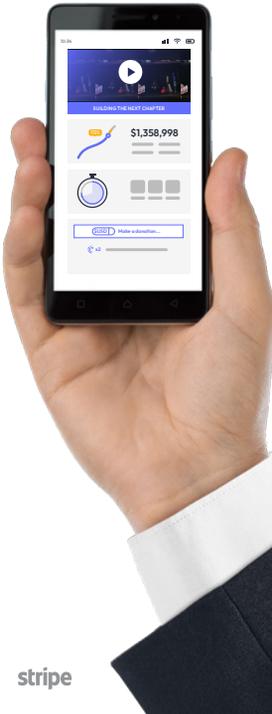
רמב"ן ור' יוסף בכור שור מבארים שההתערבות במעשי בראשית בעייתית מצד הגאווה האנושית


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The Most Mitzvot



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Parashat Ki Teitzei is the Torah portion with more mitzvot than any other: 74 mitzvot. Let's take a look at three of them that don't generally receive much attention:

- “If you build a new house, you must make a guard rail on the roof.” At the dedication of a new house, we are accustomed to putting up a mezuzah, not a guard rail. We are not used to regarding basic safety rules as mitzvot, but to make a guard rail around a roof, to place grating on balconies, to check tires for air, and to put on a seat belt -- these are not recommendations, but holy mitzvot. The Rambam explains that from the guard rail mitzva we learn to be careful and to do everything possible to prevent, heaven forbid, physical harm.
- “You cannot ignore.” The Torah details the importance of returning a lost object to its owner to the extent that if we notice an item that appears to be abandoned, we simply cannot ignore it. If we see a cellphone or a briefcase of a wallet that someone forgot, it is forbidden to look away. It's impossible to ignore it.
- “You shall not withhold the wages of a poor or destitute hired worker... you shall give him his wage on his day (that he worked).” Holding back wages is not a modern concept. The ancients also struggled to pay workers on time and not at some indeterminate time in the future.

To put up a guard rail, to return a lost object, and to pay wages on time. How simple, how self-evident, how obvious.



The weekly Torah portion begins with these words: “If you go out to war against your enemies.”

Commentators in every generation emphasize that this is not just about a physical war. In *Chovot Halevavot* (Duties of the Heart), an ethical treatise by Rabbi Bachya ibn Paquda (1050-1120), the following story is told:

“A pious man met soldiers rejoicing in a victory parade, ecstatic that they had just been victorious in a war against a neighboring country.

The man said to them: ‘You have won the little war but the big war is still in front of you.’

The soldiers said to him: ‘But this was a very big war, why do you say it was a little war?’

He answered: ‘Every war in this world is considered small compared to the big war against undesirable character traits, the evil inclination, our human weaknesses. This big war of our lives is perpetual, sophisticated, endless. It's about the manner in which we speak, act, and think.’”

We are perennially preoccupied with wars on the battlefield. We study and analyze every detail of past and present wars, and those we may have to fight in the future. Still, the big war we all should be fighting – the war of self-improvement – is sometimes neglected completely. We do not speak about it enough with our children and may not even think much about it ourselves.

Commentators write that this is the reason we read this week's Torah portion during the month of Elul, the month of self-improvement and personal refinement, the climactic month of the big war. May everyone enjoy success this month in waging this war.



Dr. Rakefet Ben-Yishay writes: “Whoever has tried to diet knows that the most difficult problem is when we eat just a small bite of something 'forbidden' and immediately afterwards we say to ourselves that, in any case, we have already messed up, the diet is over, and we can now go back to eating without limit. This is sad since the first bite that we took was negligible from the standpoint of calories and it could not by itself destroy our diet. The problem was what we said to ourselves after we took that bite. We allowed it to distract us from the road we had chosen and so it really did destroy our diet.

This mistake also occurs in the emotional and spiritual domain. In *Ki Teitzei* a series of sinful occurrences is described that appear to have no connection between each other. Yet Rashi explains that the Torah put them together in order to demonstrate an important principle – one transgression leads to another and every sinful act leads to a more serious one. The main problem with sin is not the sin itself, but what it brings in its wake. A person feels that because of a sin he is a failure and has distanced himself from other people or from God. Despair begins to gnaw at him and he believes his situation is irredeemable. This mindset of ‘everything or nothing’ brings him to continue to err and to sin since, in any case, he thinks he's disqualified and no longer in the game.

But this is a false notion. No one is ever a failure. The Torah tells us that at every stage and at any point it's possible to start over. This is especially true during the month of Elul. Even if you took one extra bite, even if you went down the wrong road, you can always stop and change direction.”

Continued on next page

For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis
Deputy CEO, World Mizrahi
Rabbi at Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“You shall pay his wage on that day and the sun shall not set on him, for he is poor and his life depends on it, and he shall not call against you to Hashem, for it shall be a sin on you” (Devarim 24:15). Towards the end of this week's Parsha, we are commanded to pay our workers on time. The slightest delay beyond sunset of the day on which payment is due is considered a sin. Earlier on in the Parsha, we are also commanded to pay Hashem on time: “When you make a vow to Hashem your G-d, you shall not be late in paying it, for Hashem your G-d will surely demand it of you, and there will be a sin in you” (Devarim 23:22).

We, therefore, see that both regarding payments due to our fellow man and payments due to Hashem, there is a clear Torah requirement to be punctual and it is a sin to withhold due reward. However, whilst Hashem sets certain standards for us, at first glance, He does not appear to use the same time frames Himself. One of the major tenets of our belief is that the

true reward for our efforts in this world will only come in the world to come. If we see the righteous suffer we are not to despair, for we believe their reward is being withheld for later.

How can it be that we are expected to pay our workers on time when time and time again, Hashem withholds and delays our rewards?

I once heard Rav Shlomo Riskin explain that there are different kinds of workers. On the one hand, there is the “S'chir Yom” – a daily worker who is employed to perform specific tasks e.g. hiring somebody to tile a bathroom floor or mow the lawn. These are the workers that the Torah requires us to pay on the very same day, at the completion of their tasks.

However, there is also the “Kablan” – a worker who is contracted to complete a project e.g. building a house. In such a case, the worker cannot turn up and expect to be paid at each small stage, just for tiling the bathroom floor or mowing the lawn. Only at significant milestones

or upon the completion of the project can they expect to deserve the full reward.

Hashem does not unjustly withhold the rewards for our efforts because we are not “S'chirei Yom” who can expect to be rewarded after completing each specific task. We are “Kablanim” with projects and missions to complete. We cannot just put Tefillin on one morning or keep one Shabbat and then sit back and wait to be rewarded. We have missions in life – to build Jewish homes based on Torah values, to lead upright lives dedicated to the service of Hashem, to be lights unto the Nations and to be strong links in the chain of our people. Apart from the general tasks, we also have individual tasks to complete and it is for each person to discover their mission and role in this world. Only when our time is up and we present our final projects for judgment can we expect to be rewarded.

May we succeed in correctly identifying, understanding and performing our roles, so that when the deadlines for our missions arrive, we will only deserve reward.

Continued from previous page

לשים לב לכל מעשה או מחדל שלו: לשים גדר מסביב לבור בחצר, לחזק סולם רעוע, לוודא שהכלב שלו לא יכול לנשוך אחרים. לאורך השנים נוספו כמובן יותר ויותר כללי זהירות: לשים גדר מסביב לבריכה בצימר, שילדים לא יטבעו חלילה כפי שקרה לצערנו בקיץ הזה. לחגור חגורות בטיחות, לבדוק שמן ומים, למלא אוויר בגלגלים. האם אנחנו מתייחסים לדברים האלה כאל מצווה? האם ברור לנו שמי שלא מקפיד על כך, עובר עבירה? הרמב"ם קורא לכל אחד לשים לב לסכנות כאלה סביבו: “וכן כל מכשול שיש בו סכנת נפשות, מצוות עשה להסירו ולהישמר ממנו ולהיזהר בדבר יפה יפה”.

נשמע אפור ומשעמם? עדיף לריב על נושאים עסיסיים יותר? תסתכלו על הסטטיסטיקות של יולי-אוגוסט בכביש, בים ובבריכה. הלוואי שהיינו מאמצים כולנו יחס של יראת קודש כלפי הנושא הזה.

“חיה ותן לחיות” או “עזוב אותך, מה זה ענייני?” אנחנו לא יצורים אדישים שרק חיים זה לצד זה, אנחנו צריכים להסתכל סביב כל הזמן ולשאל: האם אנחנו יכולים להתעלם?



כשנכנסים לבית חדש, התקנת המזוזה היא בדרך כלל חלק מתוכנית הבית, היא העיקר. האם מישוה עומד בהתרגשות ובחגיגות ועושה טקס של התקנת סורגים ומעקה? לא ממש. אבל הוראה מיוחדת בפרשת השבוע קובעת: “כִּי תִבְנֶה בַּיִת חֲדָשׁ וְעָשִׂיתָ מַעְקָה לְגַגְּךָ וְלֹא תִשֵּׂים דְּמִים בְּבִיתְךָ כִּי יִפֹּל הַגָּפֶל מִמֶּנּוּ”.

כלומר, אדם שבונה בית חדש מחוייב להתקין אמצעי בטיחות. אם יש לך גג – חייב להיות בו מעקה. מהביטוי “לא תשים דמים בביתך” נלמדו לאורך השנים כללים הלכתיים רבים של זהירות. האדם צריך

האם אנחנו יכולים להתעלם מעוול, אם נעצום עיניים ממש חזק?

שלוש מילים מופלאות מופיעות בפרשת השבוע: “לא תוכל להִתְעַלֵּם”. הפרשה מתארת אדם שרואה ברוב אבדיה של מישוה, ופשוט לא יכול להמשיך ללכת בלי לעצור ולהחזיר את החפץ לבעליו. התורה לא אומרת “זה לא יפה להתעלם” וגם לא מבקשת “בבקשה אל תתעלם”. היא מכריזה: “לא תוכל להתעלם!”. כלומר: אנחנו מכירים אותך, עמוק בפנים אתה אדם טוב, אתה רוצה לעזור, אתה לא יכול להמשיך כרגיל, אתה לא יכול לעשות כאילו לא ראית, אתה פשוט לא יכול להתעלם.

פרשנינו מסבירים כי שלוש המילים האלה קשורות לא רק לחפץ שהלך לאיבוד, אלא לכל מה שאנחנו רואים סביבנו. זהו ציווי לחיות חיים עירניים וקשובים יותר כלפי הסביבה, לשים לב מה דורש תיקון ואיפה אנחנו יכולים להועיל. לא להגיד רק

To the Third and Fourth Generations



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

There is, on the face of it, a fundamental contradiction in the Torah. On the one hand we hear, in the passage known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, the following words:

The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious G-d, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness and truth ... but who does not acquit the guilty, *holding descendants to account for the sins of the fathers, children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.*" (Ex. 34:7)

The implication is clear. Children suffer for the sins of their parents. On the other hand, we read in this week's parsha:

Parents shall not to be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents. A person shall be put to death only for their own sin. (Deut. 24:16)

The book of Kings records a historic event when this principle proved decisive.

When Amaziah was well-established as king, he executed the officials who had assassinated his father. However, he did not kill the children of the assassins, for he obeyed the command of the Lord as written by Moses in the Book of the Law: "Parents shall not to be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents. A person shall be put to death only for their own sin." (2 Kings 14:5-6)

There is an obvious resolution. The first statement refers to Divine justice, "at the hands of Heaven." The second, in Deuteronomy, refers to human justice as administered in a court of law. How can mere mortals decide the extent to which one person's crime was induced by the influence of others? Clearly the judicial process must limit itself to the observable facts.

The person who committed the crime is guilty. Those who may have shaped his character are not.

Yet the matter is not so simple, because we find Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the two great prophets of exile in the sixth century BCE, restating the principle of individual responsibility in strong and strikingly similar ways. Jeremiah says:

In those days people will no longer say, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Instead, everyone will die for their own sin; whoever eats sour grapes - their own teeth will be set on edge. (Jer. 31:29-30)

Ezekiel says:

The word of the Lord came to me: "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the Land of Israel: 'The parents eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As surely as I live," declares the Sovereign Lord, "you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For everyone belongs to Me, the parent as well as the child - both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die." (Ezekiel 18:1-4)

Here the prophets were not speaking about judicial procedures and legal responsibility. They are talking about Divine judgment and justice. They were giving the people hope at one of the lowest points in Jewish history: the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of the First Temple. The people, sitting and weeping by the waters of Babylon, might have given up hope altogether. They were being judged for the failings of their ancestors that had brought the nation to this desperate plight, and their exile seemed to stretch endlessly into the future. Ezekiel, in his vision of the valley of dry bones,

hears G-d reporting that the people were saying, "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost." (Ezek. 37:11) He and Jeremiah were counselling against despair. The people's future was in their own hands. If they returned to G-d, G-d would return to them and bring them back to their land. The guilt of previous generations would not be attached to them.

But, if this is so, then the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel really do conflict with the idea that G-d punishes sins to the third and fourth generation. Recognising this, the Talmud makes a remarkable statement:

Said R. Yose b. Hanina: Our master, Moses, pronounced four [adverse] sentences on Israel, but four prophets came and revoked them ...Moses said, "the Lord *punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.*" Ezekiel came and declared, "The one who sins is the one who will die." (Makkot 24b)

In general the Sages rejected the idea that children could be punished, even at the hands of Heaven, for the sins of their parents. As a result, they systematically re-interpreted every passage that gave the opposite impression, that children were indeed being punished for their parents' sins. Their general position was this:

Are not children then to be put to death for the sins committed by their parents? Is it not written, "Visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children"? - There the reference is to children who follow in their parents' footsteps [literally "seize their parents' deeds in their hands," i.e. commit the same sins themselves]. (Brachot 7a, Sanhedrin 27b)

Specifically, they explained biblical episodes in which children were punished

along with their parents by saying that in these cases the children “had the power to protest/prevent their parents from sinning, but they failed to do so.” (Sanhedrin 27b; *Yalkut Shimoni*, I:290) As Maimonides says, whoever has the power of preventing someone from committing a sin but does not do so, he is seized (i.e., punished, held responsible) for that sin.¹

Did, then, the idea of individual responsibility come late to Judaism, as some scholars argue? This is highly unlikely. During the rebellion of Korach, when G-d threatened to destroy the people, Moses said, “Shall one man sin and will You be angry with the whole congregation?” (Num. 16:22) When people began dying after King David had sinned by instituting a census, he prayed to G-d: “I have sinned. I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let Your hand fall on me and my family.” (II Sam. 24:17) The principle of individual responsibility is fundamental to Judaism, as it was to other cultures in the ancient Near East.²

Rather, what is at stake is the deep understanding of the scope of responsibility we bear if we take seriously our roles as parents, neighbours, townspeople, citizens, and children of the covenant. Judicially, only the criminal is responsible for his crime. But, implies the Torah, we are also our brothers’ keepers. We share collective responsibility for the moral and spiritual health of society. “All Israelites,” said the Sages, “are responsible for one another.” (Shavuot 39a) Legal responsibility is one thing, and relatively easy to define. But moral responsibility is something altogether larger, if necessarily more vague. “Let a person not say, ‘I have not sinned, and if someone else commits a sin, that is a matter between him and G-d.’ This is contrary to the Torah,” writes Maimonides in the *Sefer HaMitzvot*.³

This is particularly so when it comes to the relationship between parents and children. Abraham was chosen, says the Torah, solely so that “he will instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.” (Gen. 18:19) The duty of parents to teach their children

is fundamental to Judaism. It appears in both the first two paragraphs of the Shema, as well as the various passages cited in the “Four Sons” section of the Haggadah. Maimonides counts as one of the gravest of all sins – so serious that G-d does not give us an opportunity to repent – “one who sees his son falling into bad ways and does not stop him.” The reason, he says, is that “since his son is under his authority, had he stopped him the son would have desisted.” Therefore it is accounted to the father as if he had actively caused his son to sin.⁴

If so, then we begin to hear the challenging truth in the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. To be sure, we are not legally responsible for the sins of either our parents or our children. But in a deeper, more amorphous sense, what we do and how we live do have an effect on the future to the third and fourth generation.

Rarely has that effect been more devastatingly described than in recent books by two of America’s most insightful social critics: Charles Murray of the American Enterprise Institute, and Robert Putnam of Harvard. Notwithstanding their vastly different approaches to politics, Murray in *Coming Apart* and Putnam in *Our Kids* have issued essentially the same prophetic warning of a social catastrophe in the making. For Putnam, “the American dream” is “in crisis”.⁵ For Murray, the division of the United States into two classes with ever decreasing mobility between them “will end what has made America America.”⁶

Their argument is roughly this, that at a certain point, in the late 1950s or early 1960s, a whole series of institutions and moral codes began to dissolve. Marriage was devalued. Families began to fracture. More and more children grew up without stable association with their biological parents. New forms of child poverty began to appear, as well as social dysfunctions such as drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancies and crime and unemployment in low-income areas. Over time, an upper class pulled back from the brink, and is now intensively preparing its children for high achievement, while on the other side of the tracks children are

growing up with little hope for educational, social, and occupational success. The American Dream of opportunity for all is wearing thin.

What makes this development so tragic is that, for a moment, people forgot the biblical truth that what we do does not affect us alone. It will affect our children to the third and fourth generation. Even the greatest libertarian of modern times, John Stuart Mill, was emphatic on the responsibilities of parenthood. He wrote:

The fact itself, of causing the existence of a human being, is one of the most responsible actions in the range of human life. To undertake this responsibility – to bestow a life which may be either a curse or a blessing – unless the being on whom it is to be bestowed will have at least the ordinary chances of a desirable existence, is a crime against that being.⁷

If we fail to honour our responsibilities as parents, then - though no law will hold us responsible - society’s children will pay the price. They will suffer because of our sins.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the fundamental duties of a parent towards their children?
- To what extent do you think children should take responsibility for their own mistakes?
- To what extent do you think that all Jews should take responsibility for each other?

1. Hilchot Deot 6:7.
2. See Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, New York, Schocken, 1972, pp. 329-333.
3. *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, positive command 205.
4. Hilchot Teshuvah 4:1. The reference is of course to a son under the age of thirteen.
5. Robert Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).
6. Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (New York: Crown Forum, 2012), p. 11.
7. *On Liberty and Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 117.

The Real Definition of Tznius



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of Yeshiva University

לא יבא עמוני ומואבי בקהל ד' ... על דבר אשר לא קדמו אתכם בלחם ובמים בדרך בצאתכם ממצרים.

An Ammonite or Moavite shall not enter the Congregation of Hashem ... Because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt. (Devarim 23:4-5)

When the Torah prohibits marriage to an Ammoni or Mo'avi, it reveals to us the reason for the issur. There is a Tannaïtic dispute between Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yehudah regarding whether דקרא דרשינן טעמא דקרא – “we expound the rationale of Scripture.” Ascertaining the ta'am hamitzvah (the reason behind a mitzvah) certainly does constitute an important aspect of Torah study. It allows us to glean the moral, ethical, or religious principle that the Torah is trying to teach us through any particular mitzvah. The Tanna'im argue, however, regarding whether the reason for a mitzvah can regulate the application of the mitzvah, such that the mitzvah does not apply if the reason does not apply (Tosfos Gittin 49b, s.v. vRebbi). That is, the machlokes centers around whether or not ta'am hamitzvah constitutes one of the מידות שהתורה נדרשת בהן (exegetical rules through which the Torah is elucidated).

For example, there is a machlokes regarding whether the restriction on taking the garment of a widow as security for her debt applies to a wealthy woman. The reason for the issur, posits Rabbi Shimon, is that the creditor would have to return the garment to her each day, thereby giving her a bad reputation among her neighbors. Therefore, according to Rabbi Shimon, one would be able to exact security from a wealthy widow, to whom he need not return the garment, since she does not need it for daily use.

We generally assume דקרא דרשינן טעמא דקרא; the rationale of the mitzvah does not define the limits of its dinim. However, when the Torah itself states the reasoning behind an issur explicitly, even Rabbi Yehudah is דריש טעמא דקרא (Sanhedrin 21a).

That is how the chachamim in the days of Dovid HaMelech knew to expound

the passuk above to limit the Ammoni and Mo'avi restriction to males – עמוני ולא עמונית מואבי ולא מואבית – “Ammoni, but not a [female] Ammonis; Mo'avi, but not a [female] Mo'avis,” since it was customary for only men, and not for women, to greet travelers with bread and water (Yevamos 76b). Therefore, the women of Ammon and Mo'av could not be blamed for being negligent in providing food to Bnei Yisrael, as this was never expected of them.

It is most noteworthy that the Torah's vision of the private role of women paved the way for the admission of Rus HaMo'aviyah into Klal Yisrael. This, of course, led to the establishment of the Malchus Beis Dovid, which will ultimately lead to the coming of the Melech HaMashiach himself!

One of the most important mitzvos is והלכת בדרךיו – “And you [shall] go in His ways” (Devarim 28:9), listed among the very first mitzvos in the Rambam's count of mitzvos. The mitzvah to imitate Hashem devolves upon us because we were created בצלם אלקים – “in the image of G-d” (Bereishis 1:27), and we are commanded to preserve the middos Elokus (characteristics of G-dliness) that are naturally within us from birth. That is the reason we are presented with a description of the actions of Hashem throughout Tanach – so that we know what the “ways of Hashem” are.

One of the middos of Hashem is that He is קל מחתה – “a G-d Who conceals Himself” (Yeshayah 45:15), so much so that many even deny His existence. We too, then, are obligated to preserve this aspect of our tzelem Elokim by acting in a manner of tznius.

Many make the mistake of thinking that the definition of tznius is dressing with long sleeves and skirts. It is true that this comprises one aspect of tznius. However, tznius is a more overarching principle that applies

to men as well as to women, for through this middah we are all instructed to lead an anonymous, private life.

Some people always sit in the front row, wear loud, colorful clothing, and make the most noise in class or in shul, letting their presence be known. That is a life of בפרהסיא (in public), in contrast to a quiet life, led בצניעות (in private). Rashi (Shemos 34:3) brings the Midrash which teaches that the first luchos were destroyed because they were given with great fanfare and sounds, and were therefore affected by the evil eye. In contrast, the second luchos were given quietly and privately, and therefore endured. The moral lesson is “there is nothing better than tznius.” Clearly, the term “tznius” here refers to a private event carried out בצניעות, not to a modest style of dress.

In a hesped for his mother, Rav Ahron Soloveitchik spoke of an incident depicting her tznius. A Kohen had come to present a question before Rav Moshe Soloveitchik regarding his entry into a certain location, which was in close proximity to a corpse. Rav Moshe's wife, who was well versed in Mishnah, walked into the room quietly, placed a Mishnayos Oholos open to the relevant case in front of Rav Moshe, and walked out. She was able to assist in the psak, although she maintained her middas hahistatrus.

Once in a long while, Hashem performs a gilui Shechinah (Divine Revelation), such as at makkas bechoros and Ma'amad Har Sinai, but those are unique situations in which He compromises His middah of tznius. Similarly, there are times that we, like Hashem, must compromise on our tznius, for we must appoint a king to govern the nation, a rabbi to teach in public, and a shaliach tzipur and ba'al korei to lead the congregation.

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the Parsha.

Zachor



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Torah Vodaas

This week's Parsha has the Mitzvah of זכירת עמלק, to remember what Amalek did to us when we left Egypt. We typically fulfill this Mitzvah once a year by reading the Haftorah from this week's Parsha on the Shabbas before Purim, yet the חתם סופר writes a מצוה הידור that pertains to certain years. The idea of doing מעשה עמלק once a year comes from the fact that the Torah commands us to remember what Amalek did to us, and 12 months is the time that is Halachically considered forgetting. The Gemara in מסכת ברכות says that after 12 months, we finally begin forgetting about the deceased. אמר רב אין המת משתכח מן הלב אלא לאחר שנים עשר חדש. Furthermore, the Gemara in מסכת בבא מציעא talks about having to announce a lost object for 12 months, once again because after 12 months a person has already forgot about his lost object. Therefore, it is important that we mention מעשה עמלק at least once every 12 months. However, the חתם סופר discusses a case when the following year is going to be a leap year (for example, last year), as during such a year there are in fact 13 months between each Purim. The חתם סופר says that in such a year, a person should have in mind when they read תצא כי פרשת to also fulfill the Mitzvah of remembering Amalek, and in that way, there won't be more than 12 months between each reading.

However, this idea by the חתם סופר is questioned by the Satmar Rebbe. The



When the Torah wants us to remember Amalek, it is not asking us to merely remember the fact that Amalek existed, but instead to remember our connection to that event, and to the trouble and pain that Amalek caused us.

Gemarat that the חתם סופר quoted are dealing with two different topics, the concept of forgetting someone who died, and forgetting a lost object. Both of those seem very different from the concept of remembering what Amalek did to us. By the Mitzvah to remember Amalek, seemingly Hashem wants us to always remember that there was a nation called Amalek, and to remember the events that happened after we left Egypt. However, by a dead person or by a lost object, you are not "forgetting" their existence, but rather you are merely moving on. One does not "forget" a relative after 12 months, Chas Vshalom, but rather just begins to move on. Similarly, one does not "forget" the fact that they owned an object after 12 months, but rather moves on from it and stops hoping that he will get it back. Thus, the Satmar Rebbe asked why the חתם סופר thought to compare all of these different concepts.

Yet, using an idea that Rav Hutner writes in the פחד יצחק, perhaps we can answer this question. Rav Hutner explains that the forgetting that Chazal are talking about is not the forgetting of "existence", but rather forgetting a "connection" to a certain reality. When the Torah wants us to remember Amalek, it is not asking us to merely remember the fact that Amalek existed, but instead to remember our connection to that event, and to the trouble and pain that Amalek caused us. If this is true, we can now understand why the חתם סופר thought to compare this to the forgetting of a deceased relative, or even a lost object, as those also relate to forgetting a connection to a person or item. When one, Chas Vshalom, loses a relative, they don't forget the person, but rather forget the newness of the loss, and forget the pain that ending that relationship brought.

In a more positive light, this idea can be very important as we start to prepare for Rosh Hashana. One of the main aspects of the day is זכרונות, when we ask Hashem to remember us. Based on what Rav Hutner said, we can understand that זכרונות is that we are asking Hashem to remember the connection that He has with us, and the closeness of that connection that we have with Him. Not merely a remembrance of existence, but rather a remembrance of relationship.

● Edited by Jay Eisenstadt and Ari Levine.

Long Life and Honoring Parents



Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein
Chief Rabbi of South Africa

In 1964, Arno Penzias and Robert Woodrow Wilson, two young astronomers, stumbled on the origins of the universe completely by accident. Sitting at their desks at Bell Labs, New Jersey, they suddenly picked up a strange buzzing sound from their telescope. The noise was emanating from all parts of the sky at all times. Puzzled by the odd signal, Penzias and Wilson did their best to eliminate all possible sources of interference, even removing some pigeons that were nesting in the antenna.

A year later, it was confirmed – this inexplicable hum was in fact Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB), the radiation left over from the birth of the universe, providing the strongest possible evidence that the universe expanded from an initial violent explosion, known as The Big Bang. The CMB remains one of the most important scientific discoveries in history. In one fell swoop, the Big Bang theory – the theory that the universe had a beginning – displaced the dominant Steady State Model – that the universe had no beginning, that it simply always was.

Of course, this idea that the universe had a beginning, that it was created anew, is what Jews have maintained for thousands of years.

The subject of the origins of life comes up in this week's parsha, Ki Tetzei, via a surprising route. In the parsha, we read about the mitzvah of *Shiluach HaKen* – sending away the mother bird before taking the eggs or fledglings from the nest. The reward the Torah promises for this seemingly minor action is startling “...so that it will be good for you and your days will be lengthened” (Deuteronomy 22:7).

There is in fact only one other mitzvah in the Torah for which the reward is long life: the commandment to honour one's parents (Deuteronomy 5:16). The Talmud says this

refers to life in the next world, which is truly eternal. Why is long life associated with these two commandments?

The Kli Yakar draws the connection between sending away the mother bird and honouring one's parents – they are both mitzvot which involve honouring parents, whether human or avian.

But the Kli Yakar takes it one step further. He says the great reward promised for the fulfilment of these two mitzvot is because they touch on one of the foundational Jewish beliefs – that G-d is the Creator of all existence.

Both mitzvot encourage a person to think about origins. When we show respect to our parents, we acknowledge them as the source of our very existence. When we send away the mother bird, we are likewise showing sensitivity to the plight of the mother, the source of life for these eggs or fledglings. Reflecting deeply on this should eventually lead us to reflect on the source of all life – the Creator Himself.

The Talmud says there are three partners in the creation of a child – a father, mother and G-d. By respecting our parents, we are acknowledging those who gave birth to us. But our parents were also the product of their own parents. And that set of parents, our grandparents, were in turn the product of their parents, our great-grandparents, and so on, going all the way back to the beginning of time, to the first set of parents, Adam and Eve, who were brought into existence by G-d Himself. So by implication, by honouring our parents, we are also acknowledging our Father in Heaven, the Creator of the universe, the One who brought everything into being.

And that's why, explains the Kli Yakar, Shabbos and the mitzvah of honouring our parents are juxtaposed in various places in the Torah, including the Ten Commandments. Shabbos is an even more explicit

acknowledgement of G-d as the Creator of the universe. When we keep Shabbos, we are testifying to the fact that G-d created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. When we say Kiddush on Friday night, we refer to Shabbos as “a remembrance of the acts of Creation”. This is why Shabbos is not just something we do or observe, it's something we believe.

The Kli Yakar calls this foundational idea – that G-d created the universe anew, from nothing – *Chidush HaOlam*, literally “the newness of the world”. Of course, this “newness of the world” stands in direct contrast to what was, as we have said, the accepted scientific wisdom from the time of Aristotle until deep into the twentieth century: that the physical universe had always simply existed. Only with the acceptance of the Big Bang theory has science taken the tentative first steps towards Jewish belief. Today, science endorses the newness of the world – but obviously what lies at the heart of Jewish belief is that G-d created everything in the universe, and it is this article of faith that animates these three mitzvot of honouring parents, sending away the mother bird and Shabbos.

To know G-d is to live with an acute awareness of all the miracles around us. It is to view the world with fresh eyes, with a sense of wonder and appreciation. It is to see G-d's presence in everything; to feel close to G-d in good times and difficult times. To know G-d is not an intellectual pursuit, it is an experiential reality that colours the way we live, that animates life itself.

What's remarkable is that these big ideas, these foundational truths that lie at the very heart of Judaism, are opened up for us by something as seemingly small as the mitzvah of *Shiluach HaKen* – sending away the mother bird.

Sole for the Soul



Rabbi Shalom Rosner
Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

One of the most curious mitzvot that appears in this week's parsha is the mitzvah of *chalitza*. This is connected to the mitzvah of *yibum*. When a deceased is childless, his brother is obligated to marry the widow and bear a child in order to carry on the name of the deceased. If the surviving brother is not interested in marrying the widow (his sister-in-law), then the *chalitza* ceremony is conducted. The surviving brother's **shoe** is removed and his sister-in-law spits in the shoe and it is declared

שמו בישראל בית חלוץ הנעל”
”ככה יעשה לאיש אשר לא יבנה את בית אחיו. ויקרא

“Thus shall be done to the man who will not build up his brother's household! And that family shall be called in Israel, ‘The family of the one whose **shoe** was removed.’” (Devarim 25: 9-10).

What is the connection between not carrying on the name of one's deceased brother and shoes? The family is now known as “the one whose shoe was removed”. Borrowing a cliché from a well-known shoe manufacturer – “just do it”. Perhaps the Torah is seeking to encourage us to fulfill the *yibum* imperative and avoid the embarrassment of the *chalitza* ceremony. But still – what significance does a shoe foster in this scenario?

The Malbim expresses a fascinating idea in Megillat Ruth. When Ruth appears next to Boaz at night twice we are told that she is next to his “feet”. שכבת מרגליותו (Ruth 3: 8; 14). This is to highlight that he has a choice to either fulfill his *yibum* requirement, or *chalitza*, with his shoes. The Malbim then explains the significance that shoes portray in connection with the childless deceased. The body serves a “shoe” or encasement for the soul, as shoes do for one's foot. The **sole** of the



One's spiritual soul cannot walk this earth absent a body in which to be housed, as an individual cannot walk a rough terrain without shoes.

shoe to one's foot is symbolic of the body to the soul. One's spiritual soul cannot walk this earth absent a body in which to be housed, as an individual cannot walk a rough terrain without shoes. By not marrying the widow and bringing forth a child, the brother is essentially ceasing to provide an encasement for his deceased brother's soul to perpetuate. That is why we remove his shoe to underscore the act he is in fact committing by preventing a body for his brother's soul.

Perhaps that is why when Hashem speaks to Moshe he instructs him to remove his shoes של נעלך מעל רגלך – when one encounters God he must remove his shoes, symbolizing the release of an enclosure of his soul, to enable his spirituality to run freely.

We have previously referenced another idea with respect to shoes that perhaps is relevant here as well. See Shalom Rav Vol I page 290. The *Kuzari* explains that there are four levels of being in this world: *domem* (inanimate), *tzome'ah* (plants), *chai* (animals), and *medaber* (people, humans). Humans are at the top of this pyramid, which signifies that everything under us was created for our use, to help us serve HaKadosh Barukh Hu. We are the chosen ones of the creations.

What action symbolizes our rulership over animals, the item below humans in the pyramid? Wearing leather shoes and trampling on animal hide with each step we take. That act is a symbol of our dominion and authority over everything in the world. When we take leather to make our shoes, we are showing clearly that we are using the animal kingdom and everything else to serve HaKadosh Barukh Hu. Therefore, when we enter a holy place, where we *don't* have dominion, we take off our shoes. We do not have authority in a holy place. There, we acknowledge that we are not on top.

Perhaps we can extend this concept to *chalitza* as well. We make a choice not to engage in *yibum*. By removing one's shoe in *chalitza*, it is symbolizing that although one can make the choice not to continue his brother's name, ultimately, it is Hashem who makes such decisions, and so we remove our shoes to symbolize God's power to fulfill the deceased memory absent the cooperation of his brother.

As the *Yamim Noraim* are approaching, we can connect these ideas to Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur we do not wear shoes, because it is a day when we are in the presence of HaKadosh Barukh Hu. It is a day on which we are to remove all obstructions and enable our spirituality to escalate. May we be able to prepare properly so that we experience the sanctity of this special day and remove all barriers so our *neschama* and *ruchniyut* can indeed achieve great heights.

An Honest Rememberance



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

This week's *parsha*, *Parshas Ki Seitzei*, commands us regarding many mitzvos. According to the *Sefer HaChinuch*, the *parsha* delineates a total of *seventy-four mitzvos*; *twenty-seven mitzvos aseï* and *forty-seven mitzvos lo ta'aseh*. Two important *mitzvos* – which are recorded one after another – concern *neggah tzaraas* and *zechiras Miriam*.

The Torah commands us regarding the affliction of a *negah tzaraas*, which can be defined as a physical manifestation of a spiritual malady (see *Parshios Tazria-Metzora* in the book of *Vayikra*). Due to sins of (including but not limited to) *lashon harah*, haughtiness and stinginess of eye (*Arachin 16a*), one is afflicted with the illness of *tzaraas*, whose treatment, and subsequent habilitation, are under the watchful eye of the *kohen*.

The *pasuk* states:

הַשְּׁמֶר בְּנֶגַע-הַצָּרַעַת לְשֹׁמֵר מְאֹד וְלַעֲשׂוֹת: כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-
יִוְרֶה אֶתְכֶם הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם, כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתֶם—תִּשְׁמְרוּ
לַעֲשׂוֹת.

beware of the *tzaraas* affliction, to be very careful and to act; according to everything that the *Kohanim*, the *Leviim*, shall teach you – as I have commanded them – you shall be careful to perform (*Devarim 24:8*).

Commenting on this verse, Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky writes, “According to our sages, this verse comes to teach us the prohibition of trying to conceal, remove or otherwise tamper with the *negah tzaraas*.” It is a warning to an afflicted person might truly desire – and attempt – to remove the blemish so as not to have to go through the humiliating ordeal of isolation, banishment from all three camps, and the subsequent purification process (*Parsha Parables*, *Devarim*, p.665).

The very next verse in the Torah states one of the *shesh zechiros* (Six Remembrances): זְכוֹר אֶת-
אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְמִצְרַיִם, בְּיָדְךָ, בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם
Remember what Hashem your G-d did to Miriam on the way, when you went out of Egypt (*Devarim 24:9*). Writes Rabbi Kamenetzky, “Indeed Miriam was afflicted with *tzaraas*. She did

speak *lashon harah* about her brother Moshe, to her brother Aharon. The *pasuk* therefore exhorts us to remember not to speak gossip, lest we suffer the same fate she did.”

While this is all true and well, Rabbi Kamenetzky posits a compelling question: “Why mention *zechiras Miriam* here? There are other portions in the Torah that teach us about *negah tzaraas*. Why not use the example of Miriam in context of those portions? Better yet, after the incident of Miriam's *lashon harah* (*Bamidbar 12*), why didn't the Torah exhort the people to remember what happened to her? Would that not be the most appropriate place to remind us not to forget her sin and subsequent punishment?”

“Why mention it right after warning us not to remove or try to hide a *tzaraas* affliction?” (*Parsha Parables*, *Devarim*, p.665)

With great insight and relevance, Rabbi Kamenetzky proposes as follows: “Perhaps the juxtaposition of these two verses bears tremendous relevance. First, the Torah tells us to heed the *tzaraas negah*. We must not attempt to remove or tamper with the affliction in any way, nor may we attempt to alter – or cover up – its appearance.

“Then the Torah tells us to remember Miriam. If we analyze the two directives, we will find a very powerful connection. Miriam had what we might call ‘friends in high places.’ Her brother Moshe was the supreme leader of the nation and her brother Aharon was the *kohen gadol* (the high priest). If anyone could cover up the affliction of *tzaraas*, it was these three siblings. Her brothers could certainly have swept her blemish ‘under the rug,’ and carted her off for fourteen days to a secret location outside of the camp, perhaps saying she was taking an extended vacation for personal reasons.

“However, they did not. Moshe prayed openly for her healing while the entire nation was informed that they were waiting to journey forward until she was recovered. There was no cover up... Miriam spoke incorrectly about Moshe and she was duly

punished. And the greatest powers in government, her brothers Moshe and Aharon, informed the nation of her affliction and taught them the lessons that we ought to learn from this incident.

“Instead of whitewashing the incident, Moshe, Aharon and Miriam candidly confronted, and dealt appropriately with, the situation. Thus, the Torah first tells each and every one of us to beware of the *tzaraas* plague and not to cover it up (24:8). It then reminds us to remember what happened to Miriam (24:9) – the sister of our great leaders who was indeed afflicted, but whose experience, honesty and integrity taught endless generations of descendants” (*Parsha Parables*, *Devarim*, p.666-667).

What a powerful insight into human nature, into the honesty and integrity that the Torah expects and demands of us, and the greatness of our leaders, who set an example through the *yoshrus* (straight path) and *emes* (truth) of their lives.

This is also an especially relevant lesson for *Chodesh Elul*, as we quickly approach the *yimei ha'din* (Days of Judgement). It is easy to stand before the RS”O and attempt to “cover up” and “whitewash” our sins. It is easy to be *melamed zechus* upon ourselves, even as we *klap an al cheit*. And yet, when we stand before The Judge of Truth and King of all kings, we must present ourselves as we really are – the good and bad; the *zechuyos* and *chovos* that we all have (for a full essay on this topic, see *The Rav Thinking Aloud Shemos*, p.155-158). Remember, the Torah warns us, that when you are spiritually blemished, healing is always possible through the gift of *teshuva*. Just don't stand before Me, G-d says, attempting to cover-up your sins. Stand as you are, and your repentance will surely be accepted.

שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם לְרָחוֹק וְלְקָרוֹב, אָמַר ה' וְרַפְּאֵתִי
peace, peace to the far and the near, says Hashem, and
I will heal him (*Yeshayahu 57:19*).

The Message of Tzara'at



Rabbi Menachem Leibtag

Tanach Study Center | Yeshivat Har Etzion

Although most of the laws in Parshat Ki Teitzei deal with 'mitzvot bein adam le-chavero', one exception calls our attention: "*Be very careful with regard to [the laws concerning] a 'nega tzara'at' (a type of skin disease) – do exactly as the levitical priests instruct you*" (24:8).

This juxtaposition of the commandment to **remember** how Miriam was punished with tzara'at for speaking 'lashon ha-ra' against her brother, leads many commentators to the obvious conclusion that the Torah's 'reminder' concerning tzara'at is in essence a reminder not to slander.

For example, Rashi's opening commentary to this pasuk seems to make exactly this point: [**Remember what God did to Miriam**] (24:9): "*If one wants to be careful not to contract tzara'at at all – then don't speak lashon ha-ra [in the first place]. Remember what happened to Miriam when she spoke against her brother...*".

The laws of tzara'at are mentioned in Parshat Ki Teitzei specifically because they in fact **do** relate to bein adam le-chavero!

Despite the simplicity and beauty of this interpretation, several serious questions emerge.

First of all, why doesn't the Torah just tell us 'don't speak lashon ha-ra?' Furthermore, does it make sense for the Torah to recall a 'bad story' concerning Miriam in order to teach us not to tell 'bad stories' about other people?!

Due to these difficulties, Rashbam and Chizkuni will explain these two pesukim in a radically different manner.

In contrast to the approach of Rashi and Ibn Ezra that the primary purpose of these pesukim is to prohibit lashon ha-ra, Rashbam points us in a totally different direction: "**Be careful to keep the laws of tzara'at:** [This comes to teach us that] even with regard to [an **important person**] like King Uziyahu – do not honor him (should he become a metzora / see Divrei Hayamim

II 26:11-22). Instead, send him outside the camp [as Miriam was sent]... for remember what happened to Miriam: **Even though** she was a prophetess and Moshe's sister, they did not honor her; instead, they sent her outside the camp..."

According to Rashbam, the primary focus of these pesukim relates indeed to the laws of leprosy and 'protektzia' – and hence has nothing to do with lashon hara.

Note how this interpretation resolves almost all our questions. Although the technical details of tzara'at have already been recorded in Sefer Vayikra, Sefer Devarim commands us **not** to make any exceptions for special people – i.e. **no 'protektzia'**!

Chizkuni (on 24:8-9) explains these pesukim in a similar fashion: "**Keep the laws of tzara'at:** Do not grant special honor to important people by exempting them from banishment from the camp. Remember what God did to Miriam – even though she was sister to the king and high priest, she was nevertheless banished outside the camp for the entire seven-day period."

Rashbam and Chizkuni agree that the primary purpose of these pesukim is to teach us that everyone is equal under the law, and hence, not to make exceptions for VIPs. Note, that this approach as well provides us with a good reason for including this law in Parshat Ki Teitzei, as it falls into the category of bein adam le-chavero, and it reflects G-d's expectation that Am Yisrael live by higher moral standard.

Ramban begins by quoting Rashi's explanation that guarding one's tongue against lashon hara prevents the onset of tzara'at; However, Ramban takes Rashi's approach one step further, demonstrating that what Rashi considers 'drash' may be not only 'psat', but should even be counted as one of the 613 mitzvot!

To our amazement, Ramban considers zachor – what appeared to be simply a 'reminder' – as a positive commandment to daily remember (or possibly even recite) the

incident involving how Miriam contracted tzara'at after speaking about her brother.

Like an artist, Ramban beautifully 'puts all the pieces together,' explaining this seemingly enigmatic pasuk in light of our earlier questions. Like Rashi and Ibn Ezra, he points to lashon hara as the central topic of these pesukim. This is why the incident of Miriam is introduced and why the issue of tzara'at is mentioned altogether in Parshat Ki Teitzei, in the context of mitzvot bein adam le-chavero.

However, Ramban's interpretation also explains the advantage of employing Miriam to present this mitzva (rather than stating it explicitly): "... Hence, this is a warning (of the Torah) not to speak **lashon hara**, commanding us to **remember** the terrible punishment that Miriam received [even though she was] a righteous prophetess, and she spoke only about her brother (not someone outside the family) and only **privately** with her brother (Aharon), not in public, so that Moshe himself would not be embarrassed... But **despite these good intentions**, she was punished. How much more so must we be careful never to speak **lashon hara**..." (see Ramban 24:9).

According to Ramban, the Torah doesn't mention Miriam to tell us how bad her sin was. On the contrary, the incident of Miriam emphasizes how **careful** we must all be in all matters which may involve even the slightest degree of **lashon hara**. This pasuk reminds us that punishment was administered **even** in the case of Miriam's mild lashon hara.

Ramban's closing remarks are most significant, as they reflect another important aspect of his exegetical approach: "*For how could it be that **lashon hara** - which is equivalent in its severity to murder - would not be considered a [full fledged] **mitzva** in the Torah! ...*"

Rather, this pasuk serves as a serious warning to refrain [from **lashon hara**], be it in public or in private, intentional or unintentional...and it should be considered one of the 613 **mitzvot**..." (see Ramban 24:9).

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The Message of Yibum



Rabbi Eli Mansour

Edmond J Safra Synagogue, Brooklyn

Towards the end of Parashat Ki-Teseh, the Torah presents the Misva of Yibum, which applies when a married man dies without children. His brother is required to marry the widow, and the child born from this marriage will be considered, in some sense, the offspring of the deceased. If the brother refuses to marry the widow, then he must perform a special ceremony called “Halisa,” whereby he wears a special shoe which the widow removes from his foot. (Although it is clear from the Torah that Yibum is preferred over Halisa, nowadays, Halisa is performed when this unfortunate situation arises, for reasons which lie beyond the scope of our discussion.)

Various different approaches have been suggested to explain the meaning and significance of Yibum and Halisa. Rabbenu Bahya (Spain, 1255-1340) suggested, quite simply, that the Torah commands the brother to marry the widow in order to keep the deceased’s wealth in the family. Since the deceased had no children, his only inheritor is his wife, and if she would then marry somebody else, all his wealth would end up in a different family. As people generally wish for their wealth to remain in their family, the Torah commanded the brother to marry the widow. In explaining the significance of Halisa, Rabbenu Bahya writes that Yibum has the effect of bringing the deceased back to life, in some sense. As the Torah writes, the child produced by the brother’s marriage to the widow “shall be named after the deceased.” Since the deceased in effect caused this child to be born, as his brother was required to marry the widow because of his death, the deceased – who had no children – is considered as having a legacy and presence in this world through the



By performing Misvot in the father’s merit, a person brings great blessing to the deceased father’s soul.

birth of that child. And so if the brother refuses to marry the widow, he essentially causes the brother to “die” again. He consigns the brother to no longer have any chance of leaving a legacy in this world. The brother therefore has his shoe removed – a symbol of mourning, conveying the message that his refusal is causing his brother to “die” once again, in that it denies the brother an opportunity for a spiritual presence in this world through offspring.

But the removal of a shoe from the brother’s foot might also send a different message.

The Zohar and other sources speak at length about a person’s ability to elevate his father’s soul in the next world. By performing Misvot in the father’s merit, a person brings great blessing to the deceased father’s soul. In fact, a son’s Misvot performed in the father’s merit have a greater effect upon the father’s soul than those performed by the greatest Sadik in the world. The Gemara teaches that one is required to honor his parents both during their lifetime and after their passing. When the parent is alive, the child is to help him here in this world by caring for him and respecting him. When the parent passes on, the child is to help the parent in the next world, through the performance of Misvot.

Elsewhere, the Gemara comments that a child is “Kar’a De’abu” – “his father’s leg.”

The commentators explain this to mean that a child has the ability to enable his parent to “move” even in the next world. Once a person leaves this world, he no longer has the ability to perform Misvot, and so he no longer has the ability to build himself, to elevate himself, to grow and develop. The only way this can be done after death is through one’s offspring, whose good deeds are attributed, to some extent, to the parent who produced the children and trained them to observe the Torah. The child is the parent’s “leg” in the sense that he grants his father the ability to continue “walking” even in the next world, to be elevated and raised, through the performance of Misvot.

This might be the meaning of the Halisa ceremony. The shoe is removed from the brother’s foot to sharply reprimand him for denying his brother a “shoe” – a child who would be able to carry his soul further in the next world. The Torah gave the brother the opportunity to produce a child that would be considered the child of the deceased, and would thus elevate the deceased’s soul to infinitely greater heights in the next world, but he chose not to seize this opportunity. He thus removed his brother’s “shoe,” his means of achieving greater elevation.

The greatest thing we can do for our beloved family members who have left this world is to involve ourselves in the study and observance of Torah in their merit, through which we elevate their souls to ever greater heights for all eternity.

Take the Battle to the Enemy



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

As it says in the pasuk at the beginning of the Parsha (Devarim 21:10), “כִּי-תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה, “עַל-אֹיְבֵיךָ וְנִתְּנָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְיָדְךָ,” “When you go out to war against your enemy and Hashem your G-d delivers them into your hand...” This pasuk promises us absolute victory. This differs markedly from the description of war found in Parshas Beha’alosecha (Bamidbar 10:9), where it says, “וְכִי-תָבֹאוּ מִלְחָמָה בְּאֶרְצְכֶם עַל-...הַצֵּר הַצָּרִי אֶתְכֶם וְהִרְעִתֶם בְּחֻצְרוֹת...,” “when war comes to your land against an enemy who oppresses you, you shall blow the trumpets...” The psukim there describe desperate pleas to Hashem for salvation in the war. Why are we assured a smooth victory here in Parshas Ki Seitzei but the victory seems so hard-fought in Parshas Beha’alosecha?

The Kotzker explains that the difference is that the war described in Parshas Beha’alosecha is one where “כִּי-תָבֹאוּ מִלְחָמָה בְּאֶרְצְכֶם.” we have waited passively for the enemy to enter our land. That is why we have to blow the shofar and beg and plead for victory. But in our Parsha, where we bring the battle to the enemy, we do not allow them to enter Eretz Yisroel. Instead, we initiate a preemptive strike. Therefore, “וְנִתְּנָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְיָדְךָ,” Hashem delivers the enemy (relatively) easily into our hands.

The mussar seforim, and particularly Michtav Me’Eliyahu, speak of three territories in any war. Those territories are (i) the enemy territory, which is completely in the enemy’s hands, (ii) the territory which is completely under one’s own control, and (iii) the battleground which is up for grabs by both sides. The goal with respect to the battleground is first, not to let the enemy’s forces increase their territory and second, to push forward

deeper and deeper behind enemy lines to increase one’s own territory.

Similarly, in our war with the evil inclination, there are certain areas which are completely under our control and over which the evil inclination does not even attempt to fight, such as keeping Shabbos, putting on Tefilin, and fasting on Yom Kippur, etc. Such matters are completely within our domain. On the other hand, there are matters which, although they are part of halacha, seem totally within the domain of the evil inclination and over which we feel that we are not yet ready to fight, such as, for many of us, constant awareness of Hashem’s presence, saying every bracha with intense concentration, etc. While we hope to master these areas one day, for all practical purposes, these areas are completely in enemy hands for now.

We also have the “battlefield,” the aspects of our service of Hashem which are challenging but attainable. This area is called the נְקוּדַת הַבְּחִירָה, the point where our ability to choose is most pronounced. If one is honest with himself about the matters in this battlefield, he knows that if he pushes himself a bit, he can conquer more of this territory from his evil inclination. This is the battleground into which we can “כִּי-תֵצֵא לְמִלְחָמָה עַל-אֹיְבֵיךָ,” go out of our comfort zone, into enemy lines and push the enemy further from the home front. When one takes the initiative and fights those big battles, it automatically brings a number of smaller matters in the conquered territory safely into one’s own dominion as well. The main thing is to bring the battle to the enemy and not wait passively for the inevitable onslaught of the evil inclination.

The Gemara in Shabbos 88b teaches that when the Jewish people stood ready to accept the Torah, “כַּפֵּה הַקֶּבֶ"ה עֲלֵיהֶם אֵת,” “הָהָר כָּגִיגִית וְאָמַר לָהֶם אִם אַתֶּם מִקְבָּלִים הַתּוֹרָה הָהִיא מוֹטָב וְאִם לֹא שֵׁם תְּהֵא קְבוּרַתְכֶם,” “Hashem turned the mountain over their heads like a barrel and said, ‘If you accept the Torah, it is well. And if not, there will be your grave.’” The tzadikim ask why it says your grave will be “there.” It should have said your grave will be “here.” They explain that the greatest grave in the world is “over there.” When a person says, “I can’t really serve Hashem here, where I am right now. Such a person says, “over there,” one day, when I make aliya/when I get married/when I get a new job/when I can go to that yeshiva, then I can be a real Jew. The pasuk is teaching us that the attitude of “over there” is death, it is our grave.

The Medrash Tanchuma (Beshalach 15) explains that the pasuk in Devarim 10:12, “וְעַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׂאֵל מֵעַמְךָ,” “And now, Israel, what does Hashem your G-d ask of you...” by noting that “וְעַתָּה,” “and now” implies teshuva. Why? Because the secret of doing teshuva is recognizing that the time is “now!”

The secret to truly living and not descending to the grave of “over there” in this world, is taking the initiative in those areas of life that are within our grasp to conquer and not being afraid of the battle, but bravely taking the battle to the enemy’s territory. When we do that, then “וְנִתְּנָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְיָדְךָ,” Hashem will help us conquer that enemy territory. In the merit of our bravery in battle, may we merit complete victory in the battle against the evil inclination and the coming of Moshiach soon in our days, Amen.

A Tale of Two Spouses



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

“Does marriage change one's personality?” Greg asked his buddy Mike. “In a way,” says Mike. “You see, when I was engaged, I did most of the talking and she did most of the listening. When we just got married she did most of the talking and I did most of the listening. Now we both do most of the talking and the neighbors do all of the listening.”

This week's Torah portion (Ki Seitzei) states the following law: “If a man will have two wives, one beloved and one unloved, and both the loved and unloved wives have sons, and the firstborn son is that of the hated one; on the day that this man wills his property to his sons, he cannot give the son of the beloved wife birthright preference above the son of the hated wife, the firstborn.

“Rather, he must recognize the firstborn, the son of the hated one, to give him the double portion in all his property.”

On the most literal level, these biblical verses mandate that a firstborn son shall inherit a double portion of his father's estate, while each subsequent son shall inherit an equal portion of the property. A father does not have the power to bequeath the double portion reserved for the firstborn to one of the other sons he loves, and any attempt to do so is ignored by Judaic law. As the Talmud makes clear, a person is certainly empowered to distribute his entire estate to one of the other sons (or to any other individual for that matter), as long as he conveys it as a gift.

But if he chooses to bequeath the estate to one of the sons as an inheritance and so deny his firstborn son's rights as a natural heir, then the father's attempt has no legal validity in the Jewish judicial system.

What is disturbing, however, is the Torah's need to state the point via a shameful example of a man who loves one of his wives and loathes the other. Why was it necessary to use a crude and offensive illustration in order to make the simple point that the

firstborn son is entitled to a double portion of the inheritance regardless of the father's preferences?

One of the most essential factors to bear in mind during biblical study is the idea that each mitzvah, law and episode described in the Torah contains—in addition to its physical and concrete interpretation—a psychological and spiritual dimension as well. Nachmanides writes: “The Torah discusses the physical reality, but it alludes to the world of the spirit.” Another great Kabbalist went even further. 17th century mystic Rabbi Menachem Azaryah of Fanu (in Italy) states that “The Torah discusses the spiritual reality, and it alludes to the physical world.”

This means that stories and laws in the Torah ought to be understood first and foremost as events and laws in the spiritual realm, and this is actually the primary method of Torah interpretation. But in its communication of spiritual truths, the Torah also lends itself to be interpreted from a physical and concrete vantage point.

What then is the spiritual meaning of the seemingly coarse description in this week's portion, of “a man who will have two wives, one beloved and one hated, and both the loved and unloved wives have sons, and the firstborn son is that of the hated one”? How are we to understand this verse in the universe of the spirit?

Judaism teaches that the relationship between each husband and wife in this world reflects the cosmic relationship between G-d (the Groom) and the Jewish people (the Bride). The entire book of “Song of Songs” by King Solomon is based on the notion that our human and flawed relationships are capable of reflecting the Divine marriage with Israel.

There are two types of human beings who enter into a marriage with G-d: the “beloved spouse” and the “despised spouse.” The “beloved spouse” represents those unique

individuals who enjoy a continuous romance with G-d. Their souls are overflowing with spiritual ecstasy, selfless idealism and fiery inspiration. They cannot stop loving G-d, and G-d cannot stop loving them. On the other end of the spectrum stand the “despised spouses,” all those human beings possessing numerous qualities that ought to be spurned and hated: immoral urges, vulgar passions and ugly temptations.

These are the people whose hearts are not always ablaze with love toward G-d; rather, they struggle each and every day to remain married to their Divine soul and not fall prey to the lure of their animalistic tendencies and the array of confusing paradoxes filling their psyches. Throughout their life they must battle not to become a victim of many a natural instinct and craving. Egotism, fear, selfishness, arrogance, corruption, short-sightedness, guilt, shame, threaten to overcome their daily living patterns and they must constantly stand on guard to preserve their integrity and innocence.

The Torah teaches us that G-d's “firstborn son” may very well come not from His union with the beloved spouse but rather from His relationship with the despised spouse.

This means that the spiritual harvest that a struggling human being produces as a result of his or her grueling and stormy relationship with G-d, may often be far deeper and more powerful than that of the spiritually serene person.

For it is precisely in our daily struggle against the forces of darkness within ourselves and the world around us that we generate a powerful explosion of G-dliness and holiness in the world, unparalleled in the tranquil life of G-d's “beloved spouse.” The morality and the integrity that emerges from the midst of a battle between good and evil contain a unique depth and splendor not possessed by the straightforward spirituality of the saint.

Ki Teitze: For Others



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

When the Lubavitcher Rebbe shared the following story, which he heard from his father in law, the Frierdiker, or 'Previous' Rebbe, he remarked that there was a time when the chasidim refrained from sharing it publicly...

One Yom Kippur morning, Reb Shneur Zalman, the Alter Rebbe, stood in shul among his *chassidim*, deep in *deveikus*, when suddenly he became motionless, gazing into space. Snapping out of the trance, he closed his siddur, took off his tallis and *kittel*, and walked briskly out the front door.

Concerned, as well as curious, one *chassid* followed him at a distance, as the Rebbe strode along an icy road leading to the edge of the city, and then onto a footpath entering the woods. The *chassid* was stunned to see that when the great Alter Rebbe stopped at a clearing, he picked up an ax and began chopping wood. Then he carried the wood into a small house and, through the frosty window, he was visibly stoking a fire, heating water, making soup, and dipping a towel into the remaining water. Each of these activities was strictly prohibited on Yom Kippur!

However, when the *chassid* caught sight of the Rebbe serving the soup to a woman inside, who was helplessly shivering under her blankets, clutching a newborn baby... he understood.



The Rebbe expounded on this story of *chesed* and sacrifice:

"Immersed in prayer, dressed in his tallis and kittel like a malach, the exalted spiritual level and deveikus that the Alter Rebbe reached on Yom Kippur is beyond our comprehension. Even so, the Alter Rebbe took off his tallis and kittel and went to the edge of the city, just to help bring another Jew into the world. This story also illustrates the necessity for action and doing all that we can in the service of others...This was the way of the Alter

Rebbe: without pausing to draw up accounts, he interrupted his avodah in order to help a simple Jew, waiving his gashmiyus (physical well-being) and even his ruchniyus (spiritual pursuits) for the sake of loving another.



Of the numerous *mitzvos* commanded in our *sedra*, the Torah forbids welcoming any male of Moavite or Ammonite descent as a convert:

לֹא יִבְאֵ עִמּוֹנִי וּמוֹאָבִי בְּקֹהֶל ה' גַּם דּוֹר עֲשִׂירִי לֹא יִבְאֵ לָהֶם בְּקֹהֶל ה' עַד־עוֹלָם: עַל־דִּבְרֵי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־קִדְּמוּ אֶתְכֶם בְּלֶחֶם וּבַמַּיִם בַּדֶּרֶךְ בְּצֵאתְכֶם מִמִּצְרָיִם...

No one from the nation of Amon of Moav shall be admitted into the congregation of Hashem; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall be admitted into the congregation of Hashem... because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt... (23:4-5)

Sefer haChinuch explored the essence of this law and suggests a reason for the underlying principle:

והודיענו הכתוב מזה, גודל מעלת גמילות חסדים והרחקת מדת הנבלה והכילות, ועל כן צונו לקבוע שנהא עמהם שהשחיתו והתעיבו להראות תכלית רשעים ונבלותם, שלא להקדים אפילו בלחם ובמים לקראת קהל גדול עייפי הדרך העוברים בגבולם...

From here the Torah informs us of the greatness of the virtue of acts of loving-kindness, and the need to distance oneself from villainy and stinginess. And therefore we are commanded to prescribe a hatred for them, as they were wicked and abominable, in order to display the fullness of their evil and villainy in not even greeting with bread and water a large congregation exhausted from the road, passing their border..."

One of the fundamental human traits that Hashem expects of us is to engage in *ahavas chesed*, loving-kindness. The idea of *chesed* transcends a simple definition, yet gives voice to the essence of being a Jew and a

human being. With every act of service and kindness, the *tzelem Elokim*, the Divine likeness within a person, is given expression. With each such expression, that person more fully realizes his or her mission on this earth.

The cruel refusal of Amon and Moav to extend any help to the forlorn people at their border showed that they were at odds with the *tzelem Elokim* itself. This is why it would be impossible to welcome them into our spiritual community and our collective mission.

Rav Daniel Z. Feldman, Maggid shiur at Yeshiva University, wrote eloquently on the nature of the *midah* or quality of *chesed*: "...It is a feeling to possess, an attitude to maintain, an action to perform, a personality to develop, a mindset to cultivate, a habit to acquire, a perspective to apply; it is mandatory and voluntary, basic and extraordinary, routine and outstanding all at once. It is a birthright and an inheritance, and yet it is actualized only through personal initiative and commitment. The Jewish mission is to bring this trait to life in all of its manifestations, and to pursue every method and every opportunity to do so.... To quantify or to limit this endeavor in any way is to do no less than hold back the very development of what a human being can be.



In the early 1980s, the Lubavitcher Rebbe began to speak on the importance of sharing the Torah's universal code of morality with the whole world through the Seven Laws of Noah. At that time, he related the above story, and said that if the Alter Rebbe could break the laws of the holiest day of the year to help a vulnerable person, then surely every Jew can set aside time to reach out to the rest of humanity.

As we approach the *Yamim Nora'im*, may we internalize the lesson learned from our *sedra* and turn our attention toward providing for the needs of others!

Incredible Investment

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

In this season of awe, we often invoke the mantra, “Uteshuvah utefillah utzedaka ma’avirin et roa hagezaeirah/ Repentance, prayer and charity can turn back a negative decree.” These three paths to a positive outcome are alluded to in three verses that contain an acronym of Elul, notes Rav Schlesinger.

The first verse is in Shir Hashirim: “Ani ledodi (u)vedodi li/I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me.” It implies prayer. The second verse, from Deuteronomy, signifies return: “Umal et levovcha (u)vet levav zarecha/ And He will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring.” The final verse is in Megillat Esther: “Mishloach manot (e) ish lere’eyhu umatanot la’evyonim/Sending mishloach manot to a friend and gifts to the poor,” which alludes to tzedakah.

While there seems to be a clear connection between repentance and prayer, why did our Sages choose tzedakah as the third path? The Ben Melech notes, so many of the mitzvot are rooted in the concept of tzedakah, in the command to create a world that is just, where all people have what they need while retaining their dignity. As the Ohel Moshe explains, when you give a needy person money, you give him a new lease on life. In return, Hashem will do the same for you. Rav Hofstadter notes that all three of these tools are alluded to in the verse: “Ve’ahavta et Hashem Elokhecha bechol levavcha uvechol nafshecha uvechol me’odecha/And you shall love Hashem with all your hearts, and with all your soul and with all your resources.” “With all your heart,” refers to prayer; “With all your soul,” refers to teshuvah; “And with all your resources,” refers to tzedakah.

But charity can be done on multiple levels. On the first level, it’s given more to alleviate the donor’s discomfort than as an altruistic act. Although still tzedakah, it’s selfish giving. A higher level is seeking out people in need. The donor’s only need is to give to

others. This was the character of Avraham Avinu who beseeched Hashem to send him wayfarers. The giver acknowledges that he is actually giving from the wealth that Hashem has merely entrusted to his care. This level of tzedakah has the ability to annul an evil decree, for by acknowledging that everything comes from Hashem, he proves himself worthy of continuing to receive Hashem’s blessings.

But the highest form of tzedakah is performed with the intention of imitating the behavior of Hashem. Here, the sole intention of giving is to help others. Hashem’s purpose in creating Man was so that He would have a recipient for all He had to give. When our sole purpose is to give to others, we are validating Hashem’s purpose in creating Man and are meriting further life and blessings.

An integral part of tzedakah is building a relationship, having a generous spirit and a “good eye” for your fellow, says Rabbi Mintzberg z”l. It’s responding to the emotional needs of another. Chesed and tzedakah are intimately related. When you interact with others this way, Hashem will view you as well with a generous eye.

Rabbi Scheinerman reminds us that Hashem reacts measure for measure. If someone shows mercy toward others, Hashem will show mercy towards him even if he is unworthy. So too, adds Rav Wolbe z”l. If you show no mercy to others, Hashem will withhold His mercy from you. If someone has other positive attributes but is too strict with others, why would Hashem nevertheless not be merciful with him in light of his other good attributes?

Rav Wolbe z”l explains that the character of being charitable creates vessels that can accept blessings and plenty. Lacking these vessels, there is nothing that Hashem can fill. We determine how Hashem will interact with us by how we interact with others. If we are miserly or demeaning, that is how

Hashem will act with us. If we are uplifting and generous with others, we create huge vessels that Hashem can fill.

The Sifsei Chaim cites the verse from Psalms 85, “Kindness and truth have met, righteousness and peace have kissed.” If you relate to the world only through strict judgment without kindness, you cannot make peace even in your own actions. Even when we do mitzvot, there is usually a tinge of improper thought. If we want Hashem to view our mitzvah performance as complete, we have to give the benefit of the doubt to others. We must look for ways to do kindness, in deed and in judgment, to others.

Just as tzedakah has gradations, so too chesed. Sometimes we may do a chesed by rote, or because we feel obligated. True chesed is love of chesed that prompts us to look for opportunities. It requires stepping outside oneself and seeing the need of others. Are you taking up two parking spaces and too tired to straighten out your car? Are you making room on the supermarket’s conveyor belt for the next person? Are you praying for others in need? Even holding the door or offering a smile can raise someone’s spirit. When you go beyond the “I”, there is less “I” even in a sin to condemn you.

Chesed is about changing yourself from being a taker to being a giver, of taking one’s personal physicality and transforming it to spirituality, writes Rabbi Moshe Schwab z”l. Tomer Devorah tells us that there are angels tasked with collecting acts of chesed, Bnei Yisroel perform. When Hashem is contemplating judgment against Bnei Yisroel, these angels display the acts of kindness and Hashem displays compassion. Rabbi Gedaliah Eisenman z”l notes that proper chesed is about connecting to others. When we perform act of chesed, we become part of the collective of Am Yisroel. Together as a community, our judgement is less harsh.

May we merit a year full of goodness.

So whose education is this?



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

This week, a high school teacher published a post that drew angry reactions on the Internet. “What did you send me!!!” she wrote. “Parents! Have you seen what your kids look like at the end of two months of vacation? Have you seen how fat we are!!! How much they have lost weight in an extreme way? You have sent me children addicted to screens, with empty and hollow eyes. Where have you been?”

I can understand her so well. The Torah less so.

This week’s parsha is about the disobedient and wayward son. It describes parents who have lost their temper. Children who are older than the child. They are shocked at themselves, “This is our son?!” He’s a glutton and a drunkard, he can not hear his father’s or mother’s voice because he’s covered up with headphones most of the day. And they are very afraid. They are afraid that this seven-year-old boy who wants something and does not get it when he’s “seeking the pleasures in vain,” G-d forbid, will one day stand at a crossroads and strangle humanity. Nothing will stop him.

What a phrase. “In vain he seeks the pleasures.” It turns out that he does ask for education. And what an amazing solution to the Torah! They will take him to a teacher. “His father and mother shall seize him and bring him to the elders of his town in the public square of his

community.” We have already met these town elders in the previous episode. They are told to wash their hands and say, “Our hands are not dirty.” They take responsibility. They say nothing, the elders in the case of the disobedient son, they do not even make a sound, because he does not “hear” but he sees.

Are the eyes of the student dead? “And let your eyes see your teachers!” Rabbi Zadok of Lublin writes that the disobedient boy, when he sees the old teacher who looks at him with hopeful eyes, asks for his education, he wants to learn anew himself, freed from what he ate in the parental home. He is no longer named after his end, he will now learn something new.

“There has not been, nor will there be, a disobedient and wayward son.” You may have such a son, but such a disciple? There was not and there will not be.

In the wonderful story of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav, “A multitude of deeds and a single son,” the son does not hear his father’s voice and asks to travel to the tzaddik. In his father’s eyes, the boy has strayed from the path of his fathers and he prevents him from traveling and in the end the boy dies.

Do not be your son’s or daughter’s rabbi, Rabbi Nachman would say. With you, sometimes he will not be able to learn anything new, because you come with the name you gave him at birth, and then with you he is “named after his end.” We

do not want a “multiple act and an only son.” You are a father with an only son and let him go to the rabbi who looks him in the eyes and says to him, “You are the little light, you reflect only the light of the one who looks at you.”

The teacher is right. To her come many single boys and girls whose parents do not know what to do with this child. Do not go back to them, to the parents, with a demand. Here is a boy or a girl, and they want their education, education about themselves, they want in your eyes, the teacher, an identity and a definition that they do not know about themselves. Do not give them back to their father and mother now. You held them in your arms as long as you could and talked about them while they were walking in the street, lying down and standing up.

Now it’s your teacher’s turn. Read her name from the journal in a different way each morning. Do not call her by her last name. Fill their hollow eyes with hope, saturate them with your kindness so they do not gobble up the whole day, give them an adult in their life who will teach them something about themselves they did not already know. They ask you to teach them, you will be their rabbi and only son, they have come to you with all the hopes in their hearts, do not give them back to their father and mother so easily. You are the old woman of the town, lead them to the gate of their place.

Continued from page 17

Ramban here employs ‘conceptual logic’ – the very essence of his pshat approach – to support his comprehensive interpretation of these pesukim. Because logically there must be a mitzva in the Torah against speaking lashon hara, Ramban prefers to interpret this pasuk as one of the 613 mitzvot.

In this manner, Ramban utilizes a wider perspective of pshat to reach a conclusion not only similar to the Midrash, but also more poignant.

Recall how the mitzvot of the main speech form the guidelines for the establishment

of G-d’s model nation in the land of Israel. Imagine an entire nation, where each individual reminded himself daily of these stringent guidelines concerning lashon ha-ra!

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
balashon.com

Parashat Ki Tetze ends with the mitzvah to erase the memory of Amalek. The justification for the mitzvah is how they attacked Israel:

זָכוֹר אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לְךָ עַמְלֵק בְּדַרְךָ בְּצֵאתְךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם: אֲשֶׁר קָרַךְ בְּדַרְךָ וַיִּזְנֹב בְּךָ כְּלִ-הֲנַחֲשׁוּלִים אַחֲרֶיךָ וְאַתָּה עָנִי וַיִּגַע וְלֹא יָרָא אֱלֹהִים:
“Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey, after you left Egypt, how he fell upon you on the way and cut down all the stragglers, with you famished and exhausted, and he did not fear God.” (Devarim 25:17-18)

The word נַחֲשָׁוּלִים, rendered here as “stragglers,” refers to the weak, feeble ones in the nation (see Rashi on the verse). However, the root חשל in modern Hebrew means “to strengthen, to toughen, to forge (metal).” That seems to be the opposite

meaning as found in our verse in Devarim. How did that come to be?

Some scholars say that they are simply different roots. Ibn Ezra on Devarim 25:18 notes that נַחֲשָׁוּלִים is possibly a metathesized version (i.e., reversed letters) of חשל, from the root חלש, meaning “weakened.” This view is adopted by modern linguists as well. Others say that נַחֲשָׁוּלִים may be associated with the root כשל - “to stumble.”

Others, however, do connect the two meanings of חשל. They point out that in Aramaic and Akkadian the root חשל means “to crush,” and from there it developed the sense “to forge” (and later in Hebrew, “to strengthen.”) This original meaning, “to crush,” led on the one hand to strengthen, but also gave נַחֲשָׁוּלִים the

sense of “broken,” which developed to “feeble” or “stragglers.”

This phenomenon, where one word or root can have two opposite meanings, is known as a contronym. They are not uncommon in Hebrew. Other examples include the root חטא meaning both “cleansed” and “sin,” and עקר referring to both the “root” and “to uproot.” According to linguists, these are a special use of the pi’el verb form. While usually the pi’el form usually indicates emphasis, or causing an action, in these circumstances it means “to remove.”

This can explain one more word in our verse - וַיִּזְנֹב. Translated here as “[he] cut down,” it can also be rendered “he routed the rear of an army,” - literally, “he cut off the tail [זנב].”

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

Find a word whose interior letters form a reptile while the exterior letters form a Mitzvah.

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

The word is מִלֹּחַת appearing in the verse (25:18):
וַיִּזְנֹב אֶת-חַיֵּי מִלֹּחַת אֲמָלֵק מֵאַחֲרַיִךְ
The word מִלֹּחַת has in it the word חלח - snake and on the sides the letters מ, ל, ה which form the word מילה. The CHIDA in his work Nachal Kedumim explains that the weak ones straggling at the end of the Jewish Camp were from the tribe of Dan some of whom were expelled from the Cloud and exposed to Amalek.
The tribe of Dan are compared to a snake by Yaakov in his blessings to the tribes (Vayechi 49:17).
Amalek cut down the Milot of these members of Dan. This is alluded to by the word מלח + ה = מילה.



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