

## **Vayeishev** – Rabbi David Mahler

Very often, the most counterintuitive ideas are the most penetrating. They allow us to rethink a situation or offer a different perspective on something we might often take for granted.

Similarly, when we are exposed to an alternate understanding of a word or phrase, our eyes and minds are expanded as well.

For example, we refer to the holiday of our exodus from Egypt as *Pesach*. We have been taught from a very young age that *Pesach* is translated as passover, in commemoration of the gratitude *Am Yisrael* has for *Hashem* passing over our homes and not killing the firstborn Jews on the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Nissan*.

To me, it always seemed peculiar and bizarre that the festival of freedom is named for the one specific incident of the firstborn being spared. There are many other miracles that the *chag* could be named for.

Additionally, there is another word in Biblical Hebrew for passing over – *Avar*. Why is that word not used as the name of the holiday?

Perhaps the answer to this peculiarity is addressed by *Onkelos* (*Shemos* 12:13). The *pasuk* reads, “The blood shall be a sign for you upon your houses where you are: I shall see the blood, and I shall pass over you; there shall be a plague of destruction upon you when I strike in the land of Egypt.” In *pasuk* 12 the word *Avar* (pass over) is used whereas in *pasuk* 13 the word *pasach* is used. *Onkelos* translates the word *pasach* not as pass over but rather as to have mercy.

Reinterpreting the *pasuk* this way, we now understand the great name of *Pesach*. This was the *chag* where *Hashem* demonstrated his great love, mercy and sensitivity towards *Am Yisrael*.

We have a similar example in this week’s *parsha*.

At the end of the first *aliyah* of *Vayeishev*, *Yaakov* and the brothers have been informed of *Yosef*’s dreams. At first, the brothers are angry at him and then their anger leads to jealousy. *Yaakov* seems disturbed as well. Though he does not say anything explicitly, one feels that *Yaakov* is not happy that *Yosef* feels the need to inform the brothers of a dream which portends to his future greatness. The *aliyah* ends (37:11) by noting that *Yaakov* keeps *Yosef*’s words in mind – “*V’aviv shamar et hadavar*”. He stores the content of the dreams away. *Rashi* comments that the word *shamar* does not mean guard or keep in this context but rather here it means to anticipate or look forward to. *Yaakov* was anxiously awaiting the moment in time when *Yosef*’s dreams would come into fruition.

This is not the only time *Rashi* reinterprets the word *shamar* as awaiting or looking forward to. The night of the 15<sup>th</sup> of *Nissan*, the night of our redemption is known as *Leil Shimurim* based on a *pasuk* in *Parshas Bo* (12:42). According to *Rashi*, it is not only a night replete with extra protection but it is a night that *Hashem* was looking forward to and anticipating ever since the Jewish people descended to Egypt.

Based on the alternate understanding of the root word *shamar*, I believe we can add a deeper interpretation to referring to a person as a *shomer shabbat* or a *shomer Torah u'Mitzvot*. A *Shomer Shabbat* is not merely one who keeps each of the many laws and statutes but rather one who can't wait for *Shabbos* to begin and to soak in all of its *kedusha*. Additionally, one who is a *shomer Torah u'mitzvot* is one who is excited by learning and living a life dedicated to *Hashem's Torah*.

May we all be *zoche* to not only keep and guard each and every *mitzvah*, but to more importantly genuinely look forward to and anxiously await opportunities for them to animate our lives.

Good Shabbos!