



Chanukah commemorates God's salvation of the Jews from the hands of the wicked Antiochos. Although the Greeks sought to eradicate our Torah practice, God miraculously saved us. Remember how the few conquered the many, for the sake of Torah adherence. Rejoice over this.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

VAYESHEV	1,8,9
CHANNUKAH	1-3
AFTER ARAFAT	1,4
CHANNUKAH: THE TALMUD	5-7
BOOKS: MOTIVATION	10
THE SELLING OF JOSEPH	11
COMMANDMENTS: SHATNEZ	12-14

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Weekly Parsha

VaYeshev

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“What is Chanukah? Our Sages taught: On the twenty-fifth of Kislev Chanukah is observed. This is for eight days on which it is prohibited to eulogize or fast. For when the Hellenists entered the Temple they defiled all of the oil. And when the

(continued on page 8)

the Establishment of CHANNUKAH

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

When studying the sources dealing with Chanukah, there are many questions which surface.

I will first outline those questions, and then offer possible answers.

1) The Al HaNissim prayer of thanks included in our daily prayers and Birchat HaMazone primarily discuss the war. And at the end it makes mention of our kindling the lights, but does not mention the

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After Arafat

RABBI REUVEN MANN

The Death of Yasser Arafat has engendered speculation about the future. Will things remain the same, or will relations between the Mid-East protagonists change for the better? This line of speculation is based upon the realization that Arafat was constitutionally incapable of abandoning his war against Israel and making peace. Now that he is gone, we face a big unknown. Will new leaders committed to ending the conflict emerge? Even if better leaders come along, there is reason to question whether they can reverse the growing tide against peace. It is incumbent on us to consider appropriate responses to any new possibilities that may emerge.

We cannot approach the issue of negotiations with superficial optimism and naïve belief. Faith in the mystical

(continued on page 4)





miracle of the oil. Does this mean that war is the essence of the day? What was the essential element in Channukah the Rabbis deemed worthy of being instituted as a holiday? Was it the miracle that a few Jews overtook the myriads of Greeks in battle, the duration of the oil, both, or some other factor?

2) What was the purpose in the miracle of oil lasting 8 days? The principle of “ohness rachmana patreh” - one forced by situation is exempt - rendered the priests innocent for not being able to light the menorah. Since they were exempt from the obligation to light the menorah until they pressed new oil and were cleansed from the casualties, why did God create this miracle of the oil’s duration?

Can we suggest that the miracle of the oil is to reflect upon the war, that it was won via miracles? If so, why then does Rambam state that we won due to God’s salvation, even before discussing the oil? It would seem that Rambam held that the Rabbis understood our military victory to be caused by God. In such a case, the oil would be superfluous for teaching this. Unless we suggest that the military victory - although executed by God - was not an overt miracle, and itself would be no cause for a holiday. It would be no different than wars won by Joshua for example, when conquering Jericho. A day around which, the Rabbis did not create holiday. What then was so different about the battle of the Macabees or that entire event in general, that God decided to underline that event by the miracle of the oil, showing thereby such significance? There were many battles in which God made us victors. Yet in those many wars, God did not create an overt miracle after the fact, as is the case with Channukah.

Additionally, in his Mishneh Torah, Rambam indicates that until the miracle of the oil, the Rabbis would not have instituted the holiday based on military success alone. According to Rambam, what is it about the oil - or the war upon which it reflects - which demanded that Channukah be established as a holiday?

3) The Megilla - the letter - is read on Purim as our halachik observance. The reasoning is that this specific element was the catalyst for the Jew’s salvation, as the Talmud in Megilla 12b states, “had it not been for the first letter, not one remnant or escapee of Jews would have survived”. Meaning, since the Persians disqualified King Achashverosh’s credibility based on a previous letter, which was foolish in their eyes, they showed little respect for the Kings subsequent decree to destroy the Jews. Following this template for establishing a holiday, if the Rabbis established Channukah based on the success of the war, why is there no mention of the Channukah battle as part of our halachik performance? Lighting oil or candles is divorced from the battle. Why are these lights selected by the Rabbis as the performance of the halacha, and not something germane to the war, like carrying a sword or the like? Purim’s laws were organized around elements, which caused our salvation. Why are Channukah laws centered on a miracle subsequent to our salvation?

4) What is the concept of having “mehadrin” - the concept that there are multiple levels of fulfilling the obligation of Channukah flames, each more preferred than the previous? We do not see this concept in connection with the Megilla. Additionally, why focus on the 8-day element, to the point that 8 days became an essential aspect of our halachik performance, as we light for 8 days, but only read the Megilla on one day? Additionally, why does a single Channukah menorah satisfy an entire household’s halachik obligations, whereas this does not work in the case of Lulav? Here, each member must have his own four species?

Although possible to enact a miracle in the war itself, God chose to enact a miracle in the lights to emphasize our adherence to the Torah commands as the essence of that event, not mere bodily rescue. Life alone is not the goal for man. It must be a life of understanding and adherence to God’s Torah. Without Torah, our lives are meaningless. Perhaps for this reason the Rabbis understood the oil miracle in this light, and sought to build the laws of Channukah around this reuniting of the Jews to their laws, illustrating thereby that the initial act of Torah adherence - lighting the menorah - was the goal of the victory.

This follows well with Purim, as we state therein, “kimu v’kiblu mah shekiblu kvar”, “they

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*What role did the oil
play in establishing
Channukah?*

(the Jews) rose up and accepted that which they previously accepted”, i.e., the Torah. Purim was an event where the Jews saw that a life permeated with wisdom proved to be the source of their salvation, as Mordechai’s and Esther’s cunning saved the Jews. The statement of “kimu v’kiblu mah shekiblu kvar” displays again that mere victory is not the goal, but rather, the highlight of that military success was the reacceptance of Torah. Channukah is therefore celebrated via lights (the goal of the victory) which was the reestablishment of the Temple.

The Talmud in Shabbat asks, “what was Channukah established upon?” Meaning according to Rashi, “upon which miracle?” This Talmudic question addresses our question: answering, that without a miracle, military success would not qualify as a holiday. Only through the event of the miracle of the oil did the Rabbis deem Channukah worthy of institution as a holiday, and did so via lights, as this was the ‘goal’ of the victory. The essential miracle was the war, as it was the catalyst for our Torah adherence. So when offering thanks, we thank God for the success of the war, but not the lights. The lights are not that for which we are thankful. The lights are the reestablishment of our Torah. It was the war, which demands thanks. The lights are used to recall the goal of the day through observance generation after generation. We make recourse to lights to pronounce the goal. However, it is the war alone for which we are thankful.

What was present in Channukah, which surpassed the battle at Jericho for example? Or when God stopped the Sun and Moon in Gibeon and Ameik Ayalon respectively? All had miracles! Why then was Channukah established as a holiday, but not Jericho or other events, which included miracles? The answer could be the following: The miracle of the oil was subsequent to the war when we were already victors. All other wars, which contained miracles, had miracles for the sake of winning the war. The Rabbis may have perceived the fact that God enacted a miracle unnecessary for salvation as a Divine indication that Channukah was different, and worthy of institution as a holiday. (A Rabbi once discussed another difference, that during Channukah, the Greeks sought to strip us of our Judaism, not so in other wars, where the enemy simply was fighting for land.)

The element of a subsequent miracle (not necessary for salvation) compounded with our salvation from religious oppression (not mere military victory) were recognized by the Rabbis as grounds for instituting Channukah as a holiday. That special quality of God’s salvation from oppression, enabling us to follow the Torah

also existed during Purim. Therefore we have only two holidays subsequent to the giving of the Torah; Purim recalls our bodily salvation, whereas Channukah recalls our religious salvation.

While discussing this further with Rabbi Mann, we came to the observation that “holiday” means that which is instituted for generations to observe. This needs explanation, as it would have sufficed to celebrate Channukah just that one year. The concept of a perpetual celebration must be adding another point. That is that the future celebrants have what to celebrate, somewhat on par with those who actually experienced the salvation so long ago. What do we - the future celebrants - have in common with the Jews alive at that event? It is that our existence and ability to practice our laws is a direct result from the miracles of Channukah. As we are direct beneficiaries, we must also show thanks to God for these acts of kindness. This also explains why Passover has two models: “Passover of Egypt”, and “Passover for Generations”. We see this idea is consistently part of our laws.

The concept of mehadrin – beautification – teaches us that there are levels of fulfilling the obligation of Channukah. The reason mehadrin exists for few commands is as follows: When a Torah obligation deals with qualitative act, such as donning tefillin, one either dons them or does not. There is nothing more to be added after one has put on tefillin-you cannot wear tefillin more, once they are on. A quantitative increase is impossible, you either wear them or you don’t. The same applies to kosher, either one eats kosher or he doesn’t. But an act, which is of a quantitative measure, is different. Such acts as discussing the Exodus, Channukah lights, and purchasing a finer Esrog, all lend themselves to quantitative increase. One may discuss the Exodus until morning, or buy a better Esrog, or light multiple candles. But there still must be sound reasoning behind such increase.

There is one goal with the lighting of the candles: to publicize the miracle to others. There are two ways in which we can increase this publicity: 1) more individuals spreading the story through multiple menorahs, and 2) increasing the content of the story publicized, which is achieved by increasing the number of lights each night. This teaches a passerby that there were a number of days, which the miracle lasted, thus, teaching a new element. By lighting only one candle each night, all one knows when he sees a menorah, is that there was a miracle of Channukah. But if he sees five candles on the fifth night, he now learns something new: there were many days to the miracle. This increases the content of the story taught through the lights. ■

*The purpose of God's
miracles was to
enable our Torah
adherence.*

After Arafat



power of a "peace process" led to the Oslo Accords and the subsequent disaster of the "second" Intifada. Some have observed that if this is peace – then maybe war is not so bad, after all. It is vital to approach the post-Arafat period with caution and realism. Above all we must free ourselves of illusion. However, we must not bury our heads in the sand and shut out the world. It is our obligation to retain an open mind and seriously consider any viable chance for an improved condition. It is not an all-or-nothing situation. Even small advances are important if they decrease casualties and save Jewish lives. Our primary concern is the protection of Jewish life. This overrides any other consideration on anyone's political agenda.

The attitude we bring to the next phase of our relations with the Palestinians is of the greatest importance. While we rightfully despise Arafat as a rasha (wicked individual) deserving of no pity in life or death, we must not adopt a posture of blanket hatred against all Arabs. We cannot assume that every Palestinian has the same mentality as Arafat. Indeed, if it were to become clear that most Palestinians are incapable of abandoning warfare, we would have no choice but to accept reality and act accordingly. However, at this point there is no evidence that such is the case. We must therefore retain an open mind and use our ingenuity to seek out every legitimate avenue for progress.

This will not be easy. We have suffered a lot and lost our patience. We feel that we have exhausted every option and that there is no real solution. Or put a different way, there is no legitimate peace partner. We yearn for a speedy, decisive military type of resolution. However we must face the fact that there just aren't any quick fixes out there. The Palestinians are not going away. Like it or not we have to accept the fact that they will occupy a significant portion of Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel) for the indefinite future. We will have to decide whether or not we can engage them in meaningful negotiations leading to genuine agreements. Perhaps vigorous and constant military action against the terrorist infrastructure is the only feasible option at present, however imperfect it may be. Before

reaching conclusions on these challenging questions we will need to do something which is very difficult in the best of times and almost impossible now: put ourselves in the position of the enemy. We must try to understand his concerns and take them seriously. We must at least attempt to comprehend what bothers him and why it bothers him. Even if we don't believe he is justified in feeling the way he does we will gain because we will be in a better position to formulate viable initiatives. A vital aspect of the quest for resolution is acknowledging the grievances of the other party. It is absurd to believe that Israel is perfect and the Palestinians are all evil. No one denies that the Arabs have suffered hardship and mistreatment and have real complaints. We do not begrudge them their issues. We cannot, however, condone the path they have chosen to achieve their political goals.

There are paths that once taken do not allow for an easy return. You don't embark on the road of terrorism, indiscriminate murder, and incessant incitement to violence without bending your soul seriously out of shape. There are certain things you just can't do and still expect to be regarded as human, much less as civilized. You don't violate the sanctity of innocents. You don't target the most vulnerable and defenseless: mothers, children, babies, the elderly. You don't coldly execute a pregnant woman and pump a few extra bullets directly into her belly to make sure that the fetus doesn't survive. You don't toss an elderly man in a wheelchair off the deck of an ocean liner and pretend that you are fighting for a "cause." There is nothing more dangerous than a "cause" which for all intents and purposes is just a license to unleash the most primitive and bestial human impulses. All mass murderers act in the name of an ideal and have a "cause." The legitimacy of any cause is measured by the behavior of its adherents and the means utilized in its pursuit. We are dealing with a movement which has adopted suicide bombing, Jihad, and martyrdom as its national symbols. Under Arafat a culture based on demonization of Israel and a belief that any means is justified to attain Palestinian goals was cultivated. Arab children were robbed of their freedom to think by early indoctrination in martyrdom and Jew-hatred. Have the Palestinians reached the point of no return? Can they find the way back to reason and reconciliation?

Before we begin our own process of introspection and entertain thoughts of returning to negotiations we need to find out whether Arafat is truly dead or if his spirit lives on in the minds and hearts of his people and their new leaders. ■



Channukah: a Talmudic analysis

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What demands that one person, the house head, may achieve the fulfillment of Channukah lights for the entire household?

Talmud Shabbos 21a:

“The Rabbis learned: the command of Channukah is “a single light for a man and his household” (i.e., one light each night - regardless of the number of household members). A greater beautification of the command is each house member lights one light each night. And a beautification of even greater quantity; Bais Shammai says; the first day one lights eight lights, and then progressively decreases one light each day. And Bais Hillel says; on the first day one light is lit, and from here forward, one progressively increases one light each day. (Note: This is our custom, that all household members light one candle on day one, two candles on day two, etc.)

Ulah said, two Amoraim (Rabbis) in the West argued on this dispute between Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel. They were Rabbi Yosef son of Avin, and Rabbi Yosef son of Zveyda. One Rabbi said, Bais Shammai’s reasoning is to correspond to the number of days of Channukah yet to come about, and a reason for Bais Hillel, corresponding to the number of days that have passed. The other Rabbi gave a reason for Bais Shammai, that we correspond to the number of sacrifices (there commenced 8 oxen, and they decreased one ox each day) and a reason for Bais Hillel, that we ascend in sanctity, and do not descend.”

A number of questions must be addressed:

1) What is it that demands that one person, the house head, may achieve the fulfillment of

Channukah lights for the entire household? Tefillin, prayers, and other commands are obligated equally upon each Jew. And generally speaking, one does not satisfy his obligation by another person’s performance. Why then is the command of Channukah lights different, that it was formulated that one person’s lighting satisfies the entire household? Is this merely another example of the principle, “Shomayah K’Oneh”, that is, “One who hears is equivalent to one who answers” (i.e., “performs”)? For example, all must recite the Sabbath Kiddush (sanctification over wine). However, one person may recite it on behalf of all present, and everyone thereby equally fulfills their obligation. The principle of “One who hears is equivalent to one who answers” renders all present as if they in fact recited Kiddush. Is this how the Channukah lights by the one house head renders all as if they performed? Or, perhaps, this principle is inapplicable with regards to Channukah. Is Channukah formulated - by its very design - as a ‘group’ performance? If so, what demands such a formulation?

2) What is the definition of the command of Channukah lights, that more lights creates a “greater beautification” of the command?

3) What is the dispute between Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel, whether we count down, or up?

4) Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel appear to agree on one point; that one may not light eight candles each night. (Or any identical number each night.) There must be a difference in the number of lights

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The Greeks defiled the Temple, intent on forcing the Jews to abandon Judaism, and accept their Greek religion. The five sons of Mattisyahu did not tolerate this possibility and immediately commenced a revolt to salvage Judaism and the Jews. They were successful.



each night. What is their one theory of mutual agreement, which demands this to be so?

To answer these questions, we must first understand the basic command and purpose of lighting Channukah lights: The Rabbis teach that our goal is to proclaim the miracles of God's salvation during the Greek empire. The Greeks defiled the Temple, intent on forcing the Jews to abandon Judaism, and accept their Greek religion. The five sons of Mattisyahu did not tolerate this possibility and immediately commenced a revolt to salvage Judaism and the Jews. They were successful. Upon their triumph, they entered the Temple to sanctify it, and found but one canister of pure olive oil, bearing the High Priest's seal. This meant it was not defiled. However, this canister would not last the eight day duration required to press new oil - it contained a quantity of oil for just one day's burning. Miraculously, this one day's supply endured for the entire eight days. This was significant not only of God's providence over the oil, but of the military victory. The Channukah holiday was thereby declared. The purpose in our lights during this holiday is to proclaim God's miraculous salvation, throughout all generations. The original miracle was through lights, so we commemorate God's miracle with lights.

We now understand the basic reason for lights. But why is there a dispute as to whether we ascend or descend in the number of lights each night? And why must there be eight days of lights? Well, we can say that 'eight' days signifies the number of days, which the miracle lasted. But why not light eight candles on 'one' day, as the entire fulfillment? We must keep the purpose of the law in mind; to proclaim the miracle. What was the miracle? It was a duration of eight days that the oil lasted. Each day included a new miracle - it was not simply one miracle for eight

days. Evidently, we must display this miracle's duration through the medium of "days". So Channukah was defined by the Rabbis to be a celebration lasting eight days. But if this is so, where is there room for the Rabbis to say that we may 'add' to the basic law, and allow an increase or decrease of lights each night? Understanding that the basic law is to 'proclaim the miracle', we may answer as follows.

Since the miracle was not a one day affair, the Rabbis decreed that by lighting a "different number of lights" each day, those who see our lights realize a new concept each day: that there was a new miracle each day. The same number of lights each day does not impart the next day's miracle. But when we see a different number of lights each day, the lights thereby imbue the onlooker with the realization of a new element of miracle, which did in fact take place each day. Seeing a new number of lights each day, the onlooker learns of a new miracle, unseen in the previous day's lights. Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel agree that an additional proclamation of the original miracle may be gained by differentiating each night's number of lights.

Why does Bais Shammai light eight lights on day one, and decrease one light each day? The Talmud said it was done so as to count the days yet to enter. Bais Hillel said we start at one light and ascend to eight on the eighth day. He counts the days of Channukah that have passed. What is the theory of each side? Again, we keep in mind that the lights are to remind us of God's providence and salvation. Using this information, think about each Rabbi's view before reading further. The purpose of learning is to delve into an analysis of theories, so do so before continuing.

It appears that Bais Shammai's theory is that we are to count the days of God's providence, yet to occur. The lights are to make us mindful of God's "continual" providence, which is the providence yet to happen. This is why, I believe, Bais Shammai says we count the days yet to come. On day 3, we light six lights, as we have this day, plus five more yet to come, which is six total. We count down, and become mindful of God's providence yet to come. Conversely, Bais Hillel says we count the days of providence that God has already enacted for us. This he feels is what we are to be mindful of through the Channukah lights. God "has" performed miracles for us, and we are to be thankful for His already enacted kindness. The dispute between these two Rabbis is whether we are to focus on God's "continual providence", or on His "performed providence". My friend Howard suggested that the number of eight lights is to demarcate the day when the temple was back in order, to the degree that the oil's miracle was no longer required. The Jew's perfection depends on the functioning Temple,

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The very unit through which Judaism was proliferated - the family - was defined as the vehicle through which God's miracles are to be conveyed.

which took place in part by the eighth day. This is the focus of the eighth day, and why we have eight lights. (It took eight days to press new oil.)

Let us address our first question - the formulation "a single light for a man and his household". We asked, "Is this yet another case where, 'One who hears is equivalent to one who performs', similar to the Sabbath Kiddush?" Is this how the Channukah lights by the one house head renders all as if they performed? As I suggested in the question, I believe Channukah is formulated - by its very design - as a 'group' performance. Let us consider: the Jews were spared through God's miracles. Thereby, they were enabled to retain, and sustain their Judaism, of which the Greeks wished to strip them. How is Judaism transmitted? Through each family, the father - the house head - one transmits his learning to his children. Perhaps for the purpose of focusing on this factor, the Rabbis ordained that Channukah be celebrated by the household, i.e., via the unit through which Judaism is transmitted. Judaism was spared, and the Jews resumed to transmit our Torah system through new families, all due to God's miracles. The very unit through which Judaism was proliferated - the family - was defined as the vehicle through which God's miracles are to be conveyed. Judaism as a religion was threatened, so the holiday, which celebrates the salvaged, continuance of Judaism, is embodied in Jewish law, by this very unit - the household. We then conclude that Channukah lights performed by one for the many is not a case of "One who hears is equivalent to one who performs". Truthfully, Channukah's very design was formulated - from the outset - as a group (family) performance.

This reasoning also answers why there is a "beautification" of the miracle, when all household members are represented through additional lights. Not only is the "family" represented, but each individual's representative light proclaims a greater effect of the miracle: all these family members benefited from God's miracles. However, this is not the highest degree of miracle proclamation. The highest level is when there is an increase of one candle each night. Why is this most preferred? It is because in this manner, the number of days of God's miracle are now displayed. Lighting four candles each night, when there are four household members, only tells the onlooker that there were four people who benefited. But adding a candle each night displays a new element: God's degree of miraculous salvation, i.e., the miracles lasted eight days.

We learn that the greater fulfillment in these lights is the greater praise of God. When recounting - through additional lights - that God's miracles were so extensive, greater appreciation

of God is thereby achieved. Praise of God's actions far outweighs the effect that more people were saved. This sounds like it degrades Jewish life. However, when studying Talmud, we are intent on defining the phenomenon at hand. We see a clear distinction between a medium level of fulfillment, and the highest level. Since the highest level depicts God's miracles more clearly, we understand that this element - praise of God's acts - outweighs how many were saved as a result. The Talmud is to impart ideas based on truths, and is not contingent on our subjective, moral estimations. We must learn the Talmud and change ourselves based on the Rabbis teachings. Not the opposite. When our personal feelings conflict with our studies, we do not prioritize our subjective preferences. We change to be in line with the truths of the Talmud - the Torah's Oral Law.

This Channukah, do not simply light the lights, but understand what they represent. Let us deepen our true appreciation for our lot, that we have the freedom and ability to study Torah, the most enjoyable and meaningful pursuit. We must be appreciative, and thankful to God, enabling mankind to possess intellect, the only tool for understanding truths. In contrast to what many assume, we are not given intelligent life to immerse in physical pleasures. Our intellect is proof that man was gifted with a distinct and superior role over all Earthly creation. Time flies quickly. Do not forfeit your one opportunity here on Earth, to use your minds and arrive at the numerous, profound insights enclosed in God's creations, and His Torah. Dedicate the majority of your day to study, and minimize your work, as Rabbi Mayer said in Ethics, "Minimize your involvement in worldly pursuits, and indulge in Torah". (Ethics of the Fathers, 4:10) God has many messengers through which He can assist us financially. He desires that we pursue Torah study over all else, even over other commandments. (Talmud Moade Katan 9b) Therefore, He will surely give a satisfactory lot to those who truly "remove from their necks the yoke of monetary calculations which the masses follow", engaging in Torah study as their primary pursuit. (Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shmita and Yovale, 13:13)

Comprehend the majesty of God's creation displayed in the universe, composed of billions of galaxies. He can easily provide sustenance for us, on but one, small planet. God desires Torah as our life's choice, for our own good. We can arrive at this conviction with study. If however, our conviction lacks, then we must study until convinced of God's abilities. God controls all. Let these truths guide your beliefs and actions.

A joyful Channukah to everyone! ■

(Vayeshev continued from page 1)

Hashmonaim rose to power and overcame them, they only found one container of oil sealed with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. It only contained sufficient oil for one day. But a miracle was performed with this oil and they lit from it for eight nights. In a different year they established and made these days a festival with Hallel and giving thanks.” (Tractate Shabbat 21b)

The events that are associated with Chanukah are widely known. The celebration recalls the miracles that our ancestors experienced in their triumph over the Assyrians. However, precisely what miracle or miracles are we recalling? If we consider traditional sources the answer is unclear. The Talmud explains that the celebration of Chanukah recalls the miracle of the oil. The Hashmonaim defeated the Assyrians and reoccupied the Bait HaMikdash. They wished to rekindle the Menorah – the candelabra – of the Temple. They required ritually pure oil. The Assyrians had defiled the oil in the Temple. The Hashmonaim found only a small container of oil that remained fit. It held sufficient oil to fuel the Menorah for a single night. They would require eight days to procure additional oil. A miracle occurred and the small container of oil provided sufficient fuel for all eight nights.

The Talmud explains that the days on which this miracle occurred were established as a holiday. The festival is celebrated through reciting Hallel and offering thanks to Hashem. How do we offer thanks? We add the prayer of Al HaNissim to the Birkat HaMazon and the Amidah.[1]

It is clear, from the discussion in the Talmud that, the miracle of the Menorah is the central event commemorated by Chanukah. We would expect that Al HaNissim would thank the Almighty for this miracle. However, a review of Al HaNissim reveals that the miracle of the Menorah is not even mentioned. Instead, the prayer deals exclusively with the salvation of the Jewish people from their enemies. The Talmud indicates that this prayer is a fundamental aspect of the celebration of Chanukah. Why does this prayer not mention the central miracle?

Before we can answer this question we must consider an interesting problem in this week’s parasha.

“And they took him and they threw him into the pit. And the pit was empty. There was no water in it.” (Beresheit 37:24)

Parshat VaYeshev describes the relationship between Yosef and his brothers. Yosef’s brothers were jealous of him. They resented both the special treatment he received from his father Yaakov and Yosef’s dreams of ruling over them. The brothers conspired to kill Yosef and to tell Yaakov that he had been killed by a wild

animal. Reuven intercedes with the brothers. He tells them that they should not kill Yosef. Instead, they should throw him into a pit. Reuven hoped that the brothers would accept his counsel. He could then return, rescue Yosef, and return him to their father.

In our pasuk the brothers accept Reuven’s advice. They throw Yosef into a pit. The Chumash describes the pit. The pasuk says that the pit was empty and that it did not contain water. Our Sages note that the pasuk seems redundant. If the pit was empty, obviously it did not contain water. They resolve

this issue by explaining that the intent of the pasuk is that the pit was empty of water. However, it was not completely empty. It contained snakes and scorpions.[2]

This explanation of the passage raises a number of difficult problems. The first issue is raised by Torah Temimah and others. Reuven wished to save Yosef. It seems strange that he should suggest throwing Yosef into a pit containing poisonous snakes and scorpions. It is worth noting that the Sages comment elsewhere that the natural outcome of a person falling into a pit containing snakes and scorpions is that the person will die. Maimonides concludes that a woman is permitted to remarry based upon testimony that her husband fell into such a pit.[3] In other words, in suggesting that the pit into which Yosef was thrown contained snakes and scorpions, the Sages acknowledge that the likely outcome of this event should have been Yosef’s death. This is a strange way for Reuven to attempt to save Yosef![4]

The second issue is that it is obvious that the brothers did not expect Yosef to die quickly. The Chumash relates that after throwing Yosef into the pit, Yehuda suggested that the brothers sell Yosef to a group of passing merchants. The brothers agreed, drew Yosef from the pit and made the sale. Apparently, they fully expected him to be alive. How can this be reconciled with our Sages’ contention that the pit contained snakes and scorpions?



“Rav Kahana said that Rav Natan the son of Minyomi explained in the name of Rav Tanchum: A Chanukah light that is placed above twenty cubits is disqualified – as is the case in regards to a Succah and an alley.” (Tractate Shabbat 21a)

One of the major observances of the Chanukah celebration is the lighting of the Chanukah lights. The Talmud explains that the lights cannot be placed above twenty cubits from the ground. Rashi and others explain the reason for this disqualification. The objective of the Chanukah lights is to publicly give expression to the miracle of Chanukah. In order for this objective to be embodied in the lights, they must be readily visible. If the lights are placed above twenty cubits they will not be easily seen by a person passing in the street.

This law directly precedes the Talmud’s discussion of our passage. In other words, immediately following the statement of this law concerning the maximum height of the Chanukah lights, the Talmud interrupts its discussion of the laws of Chanukah in order to teach us that the pit into which Yosef was thrown was empty of water but contained snakes and scorpions. After teaching this lesson, the Talmud returns to its discussion of the laws of Chanukah. Why does the Talmud make this interruption?

One factor that might be suggested is that the authorship of the law concerning the height of

(continued on next page)

the Chanukah lights and the lesson concerning Yosef's pit is the same. Both are authored by Rav Kahana in the name of Rav Natan the son of Minyomi who in learned the lesson from Rav Tanchum. However, Torah Temimah suggests a more fundamental connection. He contends that the two lessons both deal with the limitations of human vision. Just as an object that is twenty cubits high is not readily observed, so too the brothers were unable to clearly see the bottom of the pit. Therefore, they did not realize that they had thrown Yosef into a pit containing snakes and scorpions.

This answers both of our questions. Reuven's plan was reasonable. Because of its depth, the bottom of the pit and its snakes and scorpions were unobserved. Reuven did not realize that his suggestion placed Yosef's life in immediate danger. Reuven reasonably assumed that Yosef would be safe in the pit until he could return and rescue him. His brothers were similarly unaware of the dangers of the pit. Therefore, they fully expected Yosef to be alive and available to be sold to the merchants.[5] So, unbeknownst to Yosef's brothers he experienced a miraculous salvation. As the brothers drew Yosef from the pit, they were not aware of experiencing anything out of the ordinary. But Yosef knew that he had just experienced a personal miracle. This divergent understanding of the event led to an interesting confrontation between Yosef and his brothers.

“And the brothers of Yosef saw that their father had died. And they said, “Perhaps Yosef will seek vengeance against us. And he will repay us for all of the evil we caused him.” (Beresheit 50:15)

With the death of Yaakov, the brothers became concerned with Yosef's attitude towards them. They had sold their brother into bondage. The brothers feared that Yosef had not truly forgiven them. They feared that Yosef's kindness had been motivated by his love for their father. Without Yaakov's presence, Yosef might finally demand repayment for the evil done to him.

Did the brothers observe any behavior of Yosef to suggest a basis for their fear? The midrash suggests that they did. One opinion in the midrash is that during the journey to bury Yaakov at Maarat HaMachpayla, Yosef stopped and peered into the pit he had been thrown into by his brothers. The brothers feared that Yosef was recalling his treatment at their hands. However, the brothers were mistaken. Yosef was peering into the pit in order to recall the miracle he had experienced and to give thanks to Hashem.[6] The brothers and Yosef had

divergent understandings of Yosef's experience in the pit. Therefore, the brothers failed to appreciate Yosef's reason for visiting the pit.

The Sages comments regarding Yosef's interest in the pit requires further consideration. Certainly, Yosef's rescue from the pit was miraculous. But this event was just the first step in a series of experiences that were no less wondrous! Yosef entered Egypt as a slave and eventually became the Paroh's prime minister. Was Yosef's mercurial rise to eminence any less impressive than his rescue from the pit?

Actually, the Sages description of Yosef's attraction to the pit reflects a principle of normative halacha. Shulchan Aruch explains that one who encounters a place at which he experienced a miracle is required to recite a blessing acknowledging the miracle. Shulchan Aruch explains that the authorities dispute the standards for defining an experience as miraculous in the context of reciting this blessing. Some argue that only an event that is inconsistent with nature is regarded as a miracle in this context. In other words, if someone was the sole survivor of some natural disaster, this person would not recite the blessing. In contrast, if a person was directly hit by a car and incurred no injury, the blessing would be recited.[7]

The midrash's interpretation of Yosef's behavior reflects this distinction. Yosef's rise to power in Egypt was clearly engineered by Hashem. Yet, this process evolved within the patterns of nature. In contrast, Yosef's rescue from the pit was an unnatural event. Therefore, the midrash's assertion that Yosef chose the visit to the pit as the occasion to thank Hashem for the miracles he had experienced is consistent with the laws relating to the blessing over miracles. The blessing is stated over events that are outside of the nature. Yosef offered thanks to Hashem for a miracle that was outside of the pattern of nature.

Let us now return to our original question. What miracle does Chanukah commemorate? According to the Talmud, the central theme of the celebration is the miracle of the Menorah. However, the Al HaNissim makes no mention of this miracle and instead focuses on the victory of Bnai Yisrael over the Assyrians. In order to resolve this contradiction, we must appreciate that the fundamental objective of Chanukah is the commemoration of a miracle and thanking Hashem for this wonder. Which miracle was greater – the miracle of the Menorah or the victory of Bnai Yisrael over the Assyrians? It depends on the perspective from which the question is asked. Certainly, the victory over the Assyrians had greater impact. This triumph liberated the Jewish people and

made the rededication of the Bait HaMikdash possible. Also, the success of Bnai Yisrael in battling and defeating their formidable enemy is clearly a wonder brought about by Hashem. However, in one respect the miracle of the Menorah was the greater miracle. It involved an overt violation of the natural law.

As we have discovered, our Sages maintain that only events that are clearly outside of nature are treated as miracles in regards to the blessing. It is reasonable to assume that the Sages apply the same criterion in creating a Chanukah – a celebration commemorating and thanking Hashem for a miracle. The basis for such a celebration must be a miracle that meets the standard of being outside of the patterns of nature. Without such an event the celebration is not warranted. The miracle of the Menorah meets this standard. Therefore, it serves as the basis upon which the celebration is founded. However, although the miracle of the Menorah is the basis for creating the celebration of Chanukah, the celebration is not limited to recalling than thanking Hashem for this miracle. As we noted above the victory over the Assyrians in many ways was an even more significant miracle than the miracle of the Menorah.

This explains the discrepancy between the Talmud's contention that Chanukah recalls the miracle of the Menorah and the Al HaNissim's emphasis of the victory over the Assyrians. Each is discussing the miracle of Chanukah from its own unique perspective. The Talmud is explaining the basis for the creation of the celebration. This is the miracle of the Menorah. The Al HaNissim is a prayer of thanks. It emphasizes the victory over the Assyrians. This miracle delivered the Jewish people from oppression and made possible the rededication of the Bait HaMikdash. Therefore, its impact is of far more significance than the miracle of the Menorah. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Shabbat 21b.

[2] Mesechet Shabbat 22a.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Gerushin 13:17.

[4] Rav Baruch HaLeyve Epstein, Torah Temimah on Sefer Beresheit 37:24.

[5] Rav Baruch HaLeyve Epstein, Torah Temimah on Sefer Beresheit 37:24.

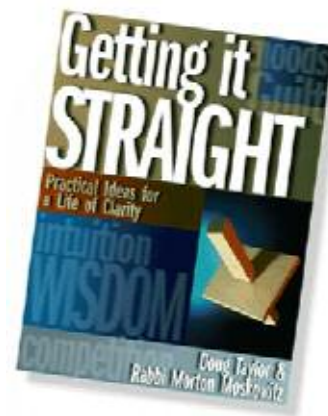
[6] Midrash Rabba, Sefer Beresheit 100:8.

[7] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 218:4,9.

Taken from "Getting It Straight"
Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity

Motivation

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ



"So who cares about grades?" he asked.

I stared at him, unbelieving. My friend, the King of Rational Thought, not caring about quality education?

"You can't mean that," I said.

"Oh, but I do," he said, not backing off an inch as our discussion of schools and education progressed. "Look, what's the purpose of a grade?"

"Well, it's to measure someone's level of expertise in an area."

"Ok. Would you also agree that grades can motivate children to learn?"

"Sure," I said.

"Now which do you think is more important, the learning or the grade?"

"Well, the learning of course." What was he driving at?

"Now comes the critical question," he said.

"Which do you think is more important to the children, the learning or the grades?"

"Hmm," I said, beginning to get it. "Probably the grades."

"Right. Grades should be just a means to an end; a motivator to get children to learn. But somewhere along the way, we got things reversed. Now the grades are the most important thing. Learning is only a means to the grades. How many kids do you know who study just because they love to learn?"

I had to admit I didn't know any.

"You see?" he continued. "Now, if children cheat, they may get a good grade, but they lose the knowledge they would otherwise have gained. Yet they view that as secondary. The important thing to them is the grade. Unfortunately, they're losing the real value - the learning. The grade, in and of itself, has no value at all."

"But what about getting into college and getting a good job?" I asked.

"Why do kids want to get a good job?" he countered.

"So they can make a good living," I said.

"Same issue," he said. "You're focusing on the end result, not the process. Years ago, people used to feel good when they made something. They took pride in their work. Some craftspeople still do. But would you say most people enjoy their work today?"

"No," I replied. "I'd say most people just tolerate, if not outright dislike, what they do for a living."

"I agree. Lacking a sense of purpose in their work, they focus instead on what they can get out of it. The end result. The paycheck. The bonus. The three-week vacation. What should be important to them is that there is value in doing good work and doing the right thing as you go along. But once people decide there's only value in the result -"

"They cheat, and they're not bothered by it," I finished, seeing his point.

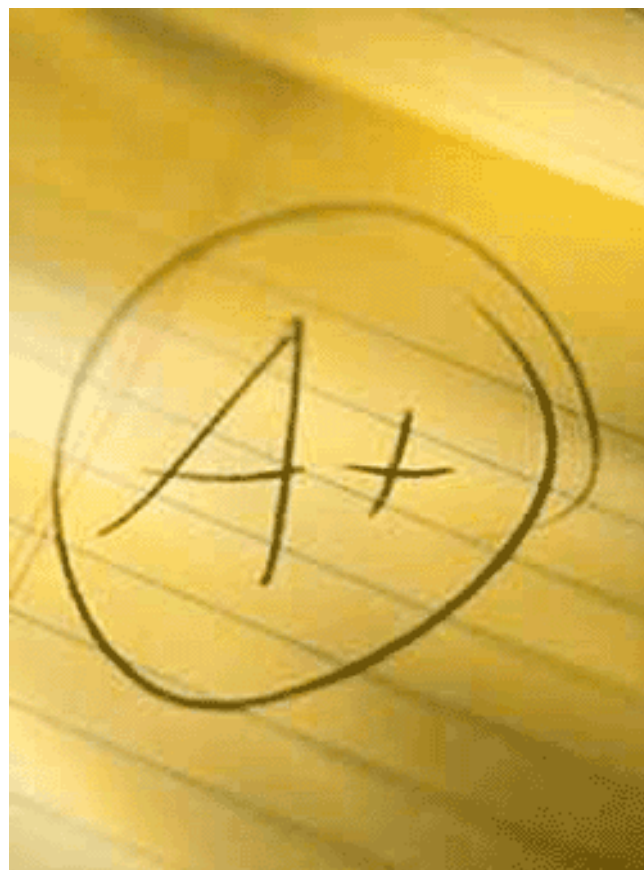
"Exactly. Like the student who sees only value in the grade, many adults only see value in the end result, not the process. You see, when you cheat to get a grade or money, it means you don't see the value of the learning or the work. Because if you recognized the value of those things, how could you cheat? You wouldn't, because you'd realize you were missing the most important thing: the activity itself."

"So back to grades," he went on. "Would you agree that most people - parents and teachers alike - push kids to get good grades?"

"Yes."

"And what result do you think that produces?"

I shuddered, realizing the implications of what he was saying. "The students focus on the grades rather than the learning," I said.



"Yes," he said. "The way out of this is to de-emphasize grades and show students the value - and the joy - of learning itself. The really happy person is the one who loves what he's doing, whether it's learning or working. For him, the true motivator is the activity itself, not the grade or the paycheck."

I thought about my own children, not quite school-age. Could I motivate them to study for more than just a grade?

"How can I pass along a love of learning to my children?" I asked.

"That's easy," he replied.

"You model it." ■

RABBI REUVEN MANN

The Selling of Joseph

Introduction

The Torah in Genesis Chapter 37 describes in detail the manner in which Joseph was sold into Egyptian bondage by his brothers. After accepting the advice of

Reuven not to execute Joseph but to place him in a deep pit they sat down to eat bread. Suddenly a caravan of traders enroute to Egypt appeared on the scene.

Judah convinced his brothers to remove Joseph from the pit and instead sell him into slavery. The arguments employed by Judah to achieve his goal warrant careful study: 23. And it came to pass, when Joseph came to his brothers, that they stripped Joseph of his coat, his coat of colors that was on him; 24. And they took him, and threw him into a pit; and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. 25. And they sat down to eat bread; and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing gum, balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. 26. And Judah said to his brothers, What gain will there be if we kill our brother, and cover up his blood? 27. Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, our own flesh. And his brothers agreed.

The Difficulty of Judah's Statement

The statement of Judah contains two problems: 1) Judah seems to base his argument against killing Joseph on the factor of expediency. It is not profitable to kill him for then we will have to cover his blood i.e. endure the burden of maintaining a cover up. However, after proposing to sell him to the Ishmaelites (verse 27) he offers what seems to be a second reason. For he is our brother our flesh. We may ask: Was the proposal to sell Joseph based on the desire to avoid the practical consequences of hiding a murder, or on the moral prohibition of killing ones brother? These are two entirely distinct ideas and yet Judah utilized both of them. What is the underlying thread that unites these seemingly separate arguments?

2) There is a fundamental problem with Judah's argument about covering the blood. The simple interpretation is that the plan of selling Joseph would remove the need for a cover up. Yet it is clear from the story that such was not the case. After selling Joseph, the brothers dipped the coat in blood and presented it to Jacob, who concluded, a savage beast has devoured him. Thus they were forced to cover up the crime of selling Joseph. It is reasonable to assume that had they adhered to the plan of Reuven and left him to die in the pit they would have followed the identical procedure. In effect, they had to engage in a cover up whether they killed Joseph or sold him. However no one challenged Judah on his argument. It was accepted that his plan removed the need to cover the blood. Yet this is contradicted by the presentation of

Joseph's bloody garment to Jacob. We must therefore ask: What did Judah really mean when he said, what gain will there be if we kill our brother and cover his blood?

Who is Wise?

Who is Wise? ask the Rabbis one who foresees the future. This common translation is a bit misleading. For man, unless he has prophecy can not foresee the future. The Hebrew term used by the Rabbis in this teaching is Nolad which literally means something, which has come into existence. Thus, the wise person is one who can foresee the outcome of a scenario on the basis of the underlying causes that are already in existence (the Nolad). He can anticipate the inevitable results of his actions because he does not flinch from confronting the consequences that are visible to those who have the courage to discern. The Wise person (Chacham) is not merely one who has intelligence; for many intelligent people walk in blindness. Their intelligence operates only in areas that are compatible with their feelings. The Chacham bases his entire life on wisdom and subordinates his emotions to the rule of reason. He foresees the outcome because he lives in accordance with the abstract reality though it is not apparent to his senses or pleasing to his feelings. For him the reality that is perceived by the mind is of paramount importance.

Most people err because they operate on the basis of certain false assumptions. This usually happens when they are under the sway of powerful emotions.

When a person is in love or under the grip of a compelling fantasy he is convinced that the emotion will stay this way forever and that since it feels so good it is impossible that anything negative can be associated with it. Thus he is unable to anticipate the outcome.

Let us examine the state of mind of the brothers when they decided to destroy Joseph. These were great men who operated on the basis of wisdom. True, they were mistaken about Joseph but they deliberated in accordance with their understanding and found him guilty. The Torah indicates the psychological serenity of the brothers by recording that they sat down to eat bread (verse 25). The point of conveying this detail is to show that they were not in a state of emotional frenzy when they cast Joseph in the pit. In their own minds they felt confident that they had acted correctly in preventing Joseph from realizing his dreams of grandeur. Judah dissented from the plan they had adopted. He asked: What will we gain if we kill our brother and cover his blood? The key word is kill. Casting him in the pit where he will die naturally instead of directly executing him does not absolve you from murder, he argued. This may not bother you now but one who is wise anticipates all the consequences of his actions, physical and psychological, visible and hidden. At the moment you feel no guilt. You have

entirely disassociated yourselves from Joseph and you imagine that you will feel this way forever. However there are psychological and emotional ties which can be suspended but not permanently broken. Thus we will always have to live with the knowledge that we killed our brother and because this is too painful we will have to repress it from our consciousness. Judah was not referring to a physical cover-up of the murder but to a psychological repression of it when he said, what will we gain if we kill our brother and cover his blood? Verses 26 and 27 now flow smoothly. We can now understand the connection between the two elements in the argument of Judah. It is an impractical plan to kill Joseph, he said, for then we will have to repress the guilt that will surely emerge to haunt us. Let us, therefore sell him to the Ishmaelites for he is our brother, our flesh. This is the essence of his argument. The psychological ties that bind us can never be broken for he is our brother, our flesh. The words our flesh would, at first sight, seem redundant. Yet, they are necessary for Judah is seeking to convince them that such a powerful identification cannot be broken.

The Lesson of Judah's Argument

Judah's brilliance consisted of his ability to foresee the hidden consequences of a self-defeating course of action. Most of the suffering people experience in the world is self-induced (see Maimonides: Guide for the Perplexed, Part III, Ch.12). A prime cause of sin is the inability of people to look beyond the immediate effects of their action. The anticipation of pleasure paralyzes the mind. Few people have the ability to think beyond the moment of pleasure and contemplate how they will feel on the morning after. Even those who think in terms of consequences usually can only deal with those that are very obvious. If Cain had known that he was destined to cry, my guilt is too great to bear would he have killed his brother?

The Ultimate Consequence

Since man is a complex being no course of action is ever as simple as it appears. Sin carries many dangers, which are not apparent from the vantagepoint of the one who is in a state of lust. The ultimate effect is one that few people ever consider: the loss of ones relationship with God. This was clearly enunciated by Cain when he said: Behold you have expelled me from the face of the earth and from your face and will I be hidden (Gen. 4:14). The relationship will not be the same. And this relationship is mans greatest need. It is the whole point of his existence. Yet no one thinks about it. Every sin puts at risk ones relationship to the Creator. Cain described this truth after the damage was done. The Torah records his lament because we can profit from his mistake. The truly righteous people are not immune from desire. Their uniqueness lies in how they react to temptation. Jewish law trains one not to act instinctively but to subject our desires to the crucible of reason. This is the meaning of the injunction to circumcise ones heart. We are bidden to conquer and subdue the passions and redirect their energies to the service of our Father in Heaven. □

Understanding Shatnez

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Wool and linen are no longer attached to their life source. Why then must I not mix that which cannot regenerate new, crossbred species?

This past week, my close friend Adam mentioned that he and his mother Jean were discussing the Torah law concerning Shatnez. Jean had asked what the idea is behind this law. This is an important question, as the Rabbis state, "Our own instincts and the idolaters target Shatnez with accusations against Judaism." As if to say, "This law seems so bizarre. What can possibly be corrupt about wearing these two materials? Judaism is unfounded." Ramban states that the masses do not understand Shatnez, although they agree that crossbreeding has a purpose. But Ramban adds that although a "statute" (commonly misunderstood as bereft of reason), "every word of God's is tried". (Proverbs, 30:5) This means that all of God's commands contain reasons, including "chukim" or statutes.

"Shatnez" refers to the Torah law prohibiting the wearing of wool and linen together. There are many parameters: prohibitions relating to a single garment woven of both wool and linen; wearing wool garments over linen garments and vice versa; what material finishing processes qualify to violate this law; and many other issues. For brevity's sake, we will simply refer to "Shatnez" as all prohibited forms, without going into the Halachik distinctions.

We must note, that this law is not its own category. In the Torah, we find Shatnez mentioned twice, together with two other prohibitions: crossbreeding animals, and crossbreeding plants. Let us review the Torah's words on these three laws.

Lev. 19:19: "My statutes you shall guard; your animals you shall not crossbreed mixed species; your field you shall not plant intermixed species; and a mixed garment Shatnez, do not wear."

Deut. 22:9-11: "You shall not plant your vineyard with a mixture, lest the growth of the seed which you plant and the produce of the vineyard become forbidden. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. You shall not wear Shatnez, wool and linen together."

We learn from their repetition that these three laws are not joined coincidentally, and certainly from the Torah's joining all three laws in a single verse: they share a common thread. (We have a tradition from the Rabbis that individual verses contain related ideas. All concepts found in a single, Torah verses are joined somehow, thereby, explaining why they are found together in one verse.) It is not hard to suggest how these three laws are related: in all three cases, one is prohibited from intermingling various species. However, I understand that I cannot crossbreed living things, as this is where reproduction of new species may occur. But regarding Shatnez, this case is the mixing of lifeless substances: the wool and linen are no longer attached to their life source. Why then must I not mix that which cannot regenerate new, crossbred species? Furthermore, where do we see that animal and vegetable can be interbred, even while living? (We will address Shatnez shortly)

Crossbreeding: Two Categories

From this general observation, we arrive at our first insight: the prohibition to crossbreed can take place in but two areas: animal and vegetable. This is because there are no other existences, which "reproduce". Ramban also points to this categorization. Ramban cites many reasons, which justify this prohibition. For one, crossbreeding

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The Commandments

*“...the heathen priests
adorned themselves
with garments
containing vegetable
and animal material,
whilst they held in
their hand a seal
made of a mineral.”*

destroys the pure species, creating a new one, which is Divinely unintended. Additionally, the new species' offspring cannot beget others. This is seen in the case of a mule; a species that is the result of crossbreeding, and cannot reproduce with other mules. This is also the case with vegetation. I suggest that perhaps this result of infertility is actually part of God's design of nature: He designed reproductive species in a way, that when crossbred, the offspring cannot reproduce, thereby underlining man's error. Had crossbred species' offspring been fertile, nothing in nature would indicate a flaw in crossbreeding. However, as the offspring cannot reproduce, this infertility points back to the original sin. Thus, God's system is not simply perfect in its normal function, but when abused, nature is designed to deliver a message to man regarding his precise abuse. Infertility of crossbred species teaches man that the Designer of nature does not wish crossbreeding: the act of intermingling in the fertilization process is signaled as an error, in the area of infertile offspring. I find this profound.

Ramban states that one who crossbreeds also violates God's will that only certain species exists. God said in Genesis that each species should bring forth "liminayhu", "according to their own kind". This is a grave corruption, as man assumes he knows better than God. We understand the gravity Ramban places on violators.

Ramban also quotes Rabbis Simon and Chanina, who suggest a reason for the term "My statutes you shall guard", as referring to the very natural laws which govern life. These Rabbis state that "Chukos", "laws", refer to natural law. These laws are the actual causes, which continue to govern all species in their reproduction of similar offspring. The maple tree, for example, does not reproduce maple trees, of its own. There is a law guiding this phenomenon, non-existent in the substance of 'maple tree'. A law is of the metaphysical realm, which governs the latter. Similarly, what keeps rocks "solid" substances are God's, created laws. We learned in chemistry that the very same molecules found in liquids, might be found in solids: lava is a perfect example. However, the Master of the universe has decided when a molecule should form part of each. His laws determine this. We tend to view the physical world as the be all and end all of creation. But as we learn in the first two chapters of Genesis, God describes two aspects of Creation. The first act refers to the substance, while the second "creation" refers to the laws governing those creations. Crossbreeding, then, violates and corrupts these very natural laws. Therefore, there is sound reasoning why God includes in the laws of crossbreeding the introductory, and rarely used phrase, "My statutes you shall guard." For one who crossbreeds not only corrupts the physical

species, but also creates new species, thereby, convoluting the laws of nature. (An example is the infertility of mules.) How does Shatnez fit into this? Shatnez doesn't lend itself to interbreeding. Why is it prohibited?

What is "Shatnez"?

Quoting Rashi, and disagreeing with him, Ramban identifies three words from which the conjunctive term "SHA'TNeZ" is derived. Spelled in Hebrew, Shatnez is "SH", "T", and "NZ". "SH" refers to the word "Shua" – combed, "T" refers to the word "Tavui" - spun, and "NZ" refers to "NuZ" - twisted. Therefore, Shatnez refers to that which is combed, spun and twisted, meaning threads in a completed form. Ramban critiques Rashi, for according to him, only when all three processes are found, is there a prohibition. However, the Rabbis taught that if one does not complete all three processes, yet, the prohibition remains, as in a case where one takes two ropes, each one consisting exclusively of one material, tying them together. Ramban concludes: the three processes are "Scripturally" prohibited, but even in the case where all three are not found, a "Rabbinic" prohibition still exists.

Ramban offers the reasoning that Shatnez guards us from the other two prohibitions. It is a "fence" of sorts. By complying with the laws of Shatnez, we will be safeguarded. As we accustom ourselves to guard against mingling in clothing, and we will thereby be more sensitive to the mingling of species. Ramban then quotes Maimonides' reasoning as being sourced in idolatry. I will quote Maimonides here ("Guide to the Perplexed", Book III, Chap. 37):

“We have explained in our large work that it is prohibited to round the corners of the head, and to mar the corners of the beard, because it was the custom of idolatrous priests. For the same reason, the wearing of garments made of linen and wool is prohibited: the heathen priests adorned themselves with garments containing vegetable and animal material, whilst they held in their hand a seal made of a mineral. This you find written in their books.”

We may ask why those idolaters developed the practice of mixing animal and vegetable, while also seizing minerals. Perhaps they too recognized these categories, including animal and vegetable, substances we cannot live without, and sought in their foolishness to manipulate them, so as to better procure them. Although violating God's will, idolatry has rhyme and reason, as it is caused by the human psyche, which follows precise behavioral patterns. However, these behavioral patterns are deviant ones.

(continued on next page)

The Commandments

Shatnez: Recalling Man's Nature

On the subject of the psyche, a Rabbi once taught a remarkable idea on Shatnez, based on the words of Ibn Ezra. Ibn Ezra taught that Shatnez is a "remembrance" law, as are other laws, such as the Sabbath, which is a "remembrance of the Egyptian Exodus." (Our freedom for Sabbath rest is due to God's redemption of the Jews.) Ibn Ezra states that Shatnez is a remembrance to those statutes "planted in the heart". This Rabbi asked, "What is planted in the heart, for which, we must have a remembrance via Shatnez? What is similar between Shatnez, and those things 'planted in the heart'?" He explained; "What are planted in man's heart are the intellect, and the emotions". "Heart" refers to both. We are commanded to "Love thy God with 'all' of your heart." This refers to the command that man must devote himself to God with all his heart, or "both" parts, i.e., the intellect and the emotions. I understand that the heart refers to both faculties, but where does Shatnez come in? The Rabbi said that Shatnez is a law prohibiting the mixture of two, diverse species, hinting to our need to prevent the mixture of our intellect and our emotions. This means to say, that man must be guided by intelligence, undiluted by his emotional desires. His choices in life must stem from rational thinking, not emotional impulses. Shatnez, then, is a command, which reminds man to keep his intellect free from his emotions. This is what Ibn Ezra hinted to by his own words, "and here I will hint to you a fundamental" which is "planted in the heart."

Ibn Ezra's words about those things "planted in the heart" are found in his commentary on Abraham's perfections, that he adhered to God's "guards, commands, statutes and Torah." In that commentary (Gen. 26:5) Ibn Ezra says "statutes" refers to Shatnez. Now, as Abraham had no Torah as we do, his act of keeping God's "statutes", means that he possessed this perfection of guiding his life by intelligence, and not emotions, in contrast to the idolaters. In his other commentary, (Lev. 19:19) Ibn Ezra says an enigmatic statement, "Know; that which is complete, is very complete, therefore it is said regarding Abraham, 'and he guards My guards, My commands, My statutes and My Torah'." Rabbi Reuven Mann expounded, "That which is very 'complete' is one who is completely in line with his intelligence. He does not dilute his intelligence with his emotions." We now understand the teaching of Ibn Ezra.

Hints

Perhaps this is why Ibn Ezra made use of a subtle teaching, a "hint", as opposed to spelling

out his idea: he wished to convey that Shatnez is essentially a "hinting" type of command. Thus, Ibn Ezra used the teaching mode of "hinting", which embellishes on the nature of Shatnez: it hints to something.

We may ask why must God give laws of such a nature, which only "hint" to an idea. Many others, like Mezuzah, are clearly understood, so their practice is clearly stated: we must contemplate God's existence and His oneness. Where is the need in the Torah system for laws, which "hint"?

I suggest as follows: a "hint" implies that the matter hinted to, is obscure. Most individuals do not readily see it. Otherwise, it can be taught outright, like Mezuzah. Shatnez hints to that which is obscure: man's nature. Freud once lectured on psychology, opening his discourse by admitting that his "subject", the human psyche, may not be laid out as a cadaver, concretely. He anticipated and sought to defend his attendees' critique on his "un-evidenced" theories. The study of psychology has this one, great hurdle: it is not as "empirical" as is biology, for example. We may visually examine the human body, but the human psyche has no visuals – it is greatly abstract. This is the case with regards to Shatnez: it refers to man's "unseen" nature, and therefore must be alluded to, by ways of hints. The nature of man is not a matter readily 'seen', so Shatnez, the laws concerning it, allude to its obscurity by their very "hinting" nature.

The Exception

Why are Tzitzis and the Priest's garments not governed by the law of Shatnez? In these two areas, one may combine wool and linen. My theory is that since one is involved in God's will when fulfilling these two commands, Shatnez is superfluous. His very act of wearing Tzitzis or priestly garb is itself a manner of following his intellect, i.e., God's will. Shatnez in these cases would serve no purpose.

We understand according to Ramban, Maimonides and Ibn Ezra that crossbreeding has many flaws. We also understand that crossbreeding may only apply in the two categories of existences, which are living, i.e., animal and vegetable. I suggest that these two commands not to crossbreed animals or plants function on one level: addressing the intermingling within a single category, either animal with animal, or vegetable with vegetable. But Shatnez is a case where one may not mix these very, basic categories of animal with vegetable. Perhaps this supports the Rabbi I mentioned earlier: Shatnez's basic categories parallel two other basic categories which are greatly distant: intellect and emotion. ■

Shatnez is a law prohibiting the mixture of two, diverse species, hinting to our need to prevent the mixture of our intellect and our emotions.