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Prayer

Yishtabach: Realizing our Limitations

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

The prayer of Yishtabach brings to a close Pesukei Dezimra, signifying the end of one theme of prayer and transitioning to the birchos kriyas shemah and amidah. The prayer itself has tremendous import, and according to some was authored by Shlomo Hamelech. There is an interesting Midrashic source for this prayer that helps shed light on the ideas one should have in mind when reciting it.

We find a source for this prayer in the Mechilta (Beshalach 1,2,3), spread out over three different episodes. In these midrashos, we see a common thread as it relates to the praises of Yishtabach. The first Mechilta explains that as Bnei

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Fundamentals



GOD'S UNITY

The Shima and the Baruch Shaim

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by a student

Rambam writes[1] that when one reads the Shima, after completing the first verse (Shima Yisrael...) he is to read "Baruch Shaim Kivod Malchuso Li'olam Va'ed" in a whisper, and then returns to reading the rest of the Shima in a normal manner. Why do we whisper the "Baruch Shaim"?

Rambam then includes some history in his law. At the end of his life, Jacob gathered his sons and commanded and "strengthened" them on God's unity[2]. He asked them if they accepted the unity of God as he, Jacob did;

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Vayetze

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Transition in Leadership from Yitzchak to Yaakov

And Yaakov kissed Rachel and he raised his voice and cried. (Sefer Beresheit 29:11)

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(Vayetze cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Yaakov's arrival to Charan

Yaakov flees from his father's home to escape the anger of his brother Esav. He travels to Charan to seek refuge in the home of his mother's brother, Lavan. After a long, dangerous journey he arrives at the outskirts of Charan. He comes to the well shared by the shepherds of the vicinity. The shepherds have gathered their flocks in the area of the well but have not yet begun to water their flocks. The opening of the well is covered by a large stone. Only when all of the shepherds have gathered can they together remove the huge stone and water their flocks. Yaakov inquires of the gathered shepherds regarding his uncle, Lavan. They affirm that they know Lavan and tell Yaakov that Lavan's daughter is approaching with her father's flock. Yaakov goes to the well, single-handedly rolls off the large stone that covers its opening, and waters Lavan's flock. He kisses his cousin Rachel and cries. He introduces himself and Rachel quickly departs and relates to her father the news of Yaakov's arrival.

Yaakov's reaction to meeting Rachel

The commentators offer a number of explanations for Yaakov's tearful response to his first encounter with Rachel. Rabbaynu David Kimchi's (RaDaK) explanation is perhaps the simplest. He explains that Yaakov's tears were an expression of his joy evoked by finally rejoining family. Yaakov had come to the completion of a long, dangerous, and lonely journey. Finally, he was reunited with family. He was overcome by a sense of relief and the intensity of his feeling was expressed in his tears.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno rejects RaDaK's assumption that Yaakov's tears were an expression of happiness. He suggests that these tears reflect a sudden and intense sadness. Yaakov had not considered marriage while living in his father's home. Like his father Yitzchak, he rejected the option of marrying a woman from the people of the Land of Canaan. His many years spent in his father's home had postponed entry into marriage and creating a family. In meeting his cousin – whom he regarded as a suitable partner with whom to build a family – he realized that he would now be able to embark upon this next stage of his life. Certainly, he rejoiced in the anticipation of building his own family. However, he also felt a deep sadness over the delay he had endured. His embrace of Rachel expressed his joy. His tears gave voice to his sadness.

Rashi agrees with Sforno that Yaakov's tears

were an expression of sadness. He suggests various explanations for Yaakov's gloom. The simplest of these explanations is that Yaakov had arrived at Charan virtually destitute. He had come to Charan to escape his brother but also anticipating that he would marry and build a family. Now, he was in Charan, safe from his brother. He had met his cousin Rachel, a wonderful woman who might be the perfect partner. However, he lacked any means of winning the hand of his bride or for beginning and supporting a family.

And Yaakov loved Rachel and he said: I will work for you for seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter. (Sefer Beresheit 29:18)

Yaakov's poverty

Rashi attributes Yaakov's tears to his destitution. The commentators argue with Rashi over whether this is the proper explanation for Yaakov's gloom. However, they must accept Rashi's contention that Yaakov arrived at Charan without financial

resources. This conclusion is evident from the passages.

Lavan and Yaakov enter into a business relationship. Yaakov agrees to take charge of Lavan's flocks. They negotiate Yaakov's compensation. Yaakov agrees to work for Lavan for seven years in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage. It is apparent from this arrangement that Yaakov did not have the means to secure Lavan's agreement to the marriage. Therefore, he

was compelled to secure Lavan's acquiescence through his seven years of service. In other words, this agreement confirms Rashi's conclusion that Yaakov came to Charan without significant financial resources. He had nothing of substance to offer for Rachel other than his labor. Why did Yaakov arrive at Charan without any resources? This issue is disputed by the commentators and Sages.

The cause of Yaakov's poverty

Chizkuni offers the simplest explanation. Yaakov was forced to leave his father's home in great haste. He was fleeing from his brother Esav. Rabbaynu Yosef Bechor Shur elaborates on this explanation. In order to escape without Esav's detection, Yaakov left quickly and quietly. He had neither the time or option of carefully planning his journey or properly provisioning himself for a new life in Charan.

Rashi agrees that Yaakov arrived at Charan bereft of any resources. However, he provides a

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different explanation of the circumstances. Yaakov prepared himself for his journey before his departure. However, Esav sent his son Elifaz in pursuit of Yaakov with orders to kill him. Elifaz overtook Yaakov. However, he had a very close relationship with his uncle Yaakov. He was trapped between his love for his uncle and his obedience to his father's command. Yaakov suggested a subterfuge that would allow Elifaz to report to his father that he had fulfilled his mission but allow him to spare Yaakov. Yaakov gave to Elifaz all of his possessions. He explained to Elifaz that the destitute person – in a sense – is dead. Through taking from Yaakov his possessions, Elifaz could report to his father that Yaakov had died at his hands.

The Midrash blames Yitzchak for Yaakov's poverty

The Midrash offers one of the most interesting comments on Yaakov's meager resources. In order to understand the Midrash's comments it is helpful to consider an earlier incident. The Torah relates that Avraham sent his servant Eliezer to Charan to select a suitable wife for Yitzchak. He sent Eliezer on this mission with a caravan of valuables. RaDak explains that Avraham realized that substantial inducement would be required to persuade a potential bride and her family to agree to a marriage with a man in a foreign land. Avraham knew that a demonstration of his great wealth would provide Eliezer with the inducement required to complete his mission. The potential bride and her family would examine the caravan and would be overwhelmed by the wealth it implied. Their resistance to marriage would be transformed into eager desire for the union.

The Midrash focuses on the contrast between Avraham's carefully designed strategy and Yitzchak's directions to Yaakov. Avraham sent Eliezer on his mission with every conceivable advantage. Yitzchak sent Yaakov to Charan without any resources. Eliezer arrived in Charan representing a desirable suitor. Yaakov arrived destitute, was compelled to explain his poverty, and then work for seven years to secure his chosen wife. The Midrash concludes that Yaakov was punished for his neglect. He was deprived of prophecy.

This explanation presents two problems. First, it faults Yitzchak for his behavior toward Yaakov. However, it provides no suggestion of why Yitzchak acted with apparent neglect. Second, it identifies the punishment that Yitzchak received. However, the punishment seems arbitrary. The Midrash does offer an explanation of the relationship between the punishment and the sin to which it corresponds.

Perhaps, the Midrash's comments can be understood if we assume that the punishment does correspond with the sin and then evaluate what sin

is implied by the punishment. In other words, we know that there is a correspondence between Hashem's punishment and the sin that it addresses. Therefore, consideration of the punishment provides insight into the sin to which it corresponds. The Midrash explains that Yitzchak was punished by being deprived of prophecy. What does this reveal regarding his sin?

Understanding Yitzchak's motives

On a superficial level, one might suggest that Yitzchak deprived his son of the resources he needed at this time. Therefore, he was deprived of the gift which was most precious to himself – his prophetic vision. However, the Midrash may be suggesting a deeper insight into Yitzchak's behavior.

The Torah describes the events leading-up to Yaakov's departure from his father's home. Yitzchak had reached old age and sensed that death was approaching. He summoned his son Esav in order to transmit to him a final blessing. Yaakov substituted himself for Esav and secured the blessing. Directly before his departure, Yitzchak summoned Yaakov and bestowed upon him a second blessing. He appointed him as the guardian of the spiritual legacy that he has inherited from his own father. The sense communicated by these events is that Yitzchak was

withdrawing from his role as humanity's spiritual guide and pioneer. He was passing on leadership to the next generation. Avraham had passed his legacy and role to Yitzchak and now Yitzchak was repeating this process of transmission with his son. However, there is a significant difference between Avraham's and Yitzchak's actions. The Torah tells us that when Avraham transmitted his role to Yitzchak, he did so unequivocally and without qualification. He even transferred to Yitzchak all of his worldly possessions. Yitzchak did not transfer his wealth. What does this suggest about Yitzchak's attitude toward the transition? It suggests some degree of ambivalence. Yitzchak realized that the time had come for him to step back and relinquish his role to Yaakov. He responded by transmitting to him the blessings. However, he did not complete the transition.

Yitzchak's punishment

As a consequence, Yitzchak was punished. The punishment perfectly reflects the sin. Yitzchak could not relinquish his role as spiritual leader of humanity. As a consequence, the prophetic capacity that was essential to his role was taken from him and bestowed upon Yaakov. Yaakov leaves his father's home and immediately he is granted his first prophecy. ■



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(God's Unity continued from page 1)

perhaps there was some fault in one of his sons. They all confirmed, "Shima Yisrael, Adonoi Elohaynu, Adonoi Echad; Listen Israel (Jacob) God is our God, God is one". Jacob responded, "Baruch Shaim Kivod Malchuso Li'olam Va'ed; Blessed be the fame of His kingdom's honor forever". This why all Jews say this same verse; a praise to God that all Jacob's sons confirmed God's unity.

We must ask: Why is this story placed in Rambam's Laws of Shima? This is a story, an Aggada, and seems out of place when inserted in a code of laws. Additionally, this verse is merely Jacob's response. What then does it have to do with us? Many authorities say that Baruch Shaim is recited in a lower tone since it is not part of the Torah's portion of the Shima: Moses did not say it. Rambam appears to say that our recital of Baruch Shaim is for a different reason.

Talmud Pesachim 56a:

"And us today, what reason do we say Baruch Shaim? It is as R. Shimon ben Lakish said, "Jacob desired to reveal the end of days, but God's presence was removed from Jacob. Jacob thought perhaps the presence left him as there was fault in his children. But his sons confirmed "Just as in your heart there is only one God, so too in our hearts." At that moment Jacob said, "Baruch Shaim Kivod Malchuso Li'olam Va'ed"."

"Rabbi Yitzchak said, "It is a metaphor to a king's daughter: she smelled the leftovers of a delicious dish. If she said she wanted the leftovers on the bottom of the pan, its shameful for this king's daughter to eat leftovers. If she does not eat an enjoy it, she is in pain for what she desires. So her servants brought it to her privately in a room. This way no one saw her enjoying the leftovers."

This metaphor likens us to the king's daughter; the leftovers are likened to the Baruch Shaim. We too are somewhat ashamed, so we recite the Baruch Shaim silently, like the king's daughter enjoyed the leftovers privately. But of what are we ashamed?

The idea of Jacob "strengthening" his sons in God's unity, teaches that God's unity requires effort to confirm. This is not a simple matter, since the unity of God is a rejection of all natural, idolatrous tendencies in man. This strengthening of God's unity is part of accepting the yoke of heaven. Our minds tend to veer from affirming God's unity; we have many emotions. Therefore we must constantly reaffirm our conviction in God's unity. The Chinuch writes, *"If you don't accept this principle of God's unity, all else is*

worthless." The Chinuch stresses the vital nature of God's unity. Remaining firm in our conviction of God's unity is a lifelong obligation and struggle. Even Jacob's children required this affirmation.

Why did Rambam include this story of Jacob in his code of laws? Reading this story of Jacob, we attain a certain strength essential to our acceptance of God's unity. This explains Rambam's inclusion of this story in his laws: it is part of the very law of God's unity. The telling over of this story gives us this vital strength.

The Rabbis asked, since Moses didn't say Baruch Shaim, we too shouldn't say it. Buy Jacob did say it. How do we resolve this inconsistency? It was inappropriate for Moses to say Baruch Shaim, as it would degrade his level of prophecy. Moses did not need this strengthening of God's unity, as he spoke to God "face-to-face." He reached the zenith of human perfection. But we do require this strengthening. Thus, we strike a compromise and recite Baruch Shaim, but in a lower tone. We recite it as we require this strengthening of God's unity, but we whisper it to indicate this is not the optimum level of man.

The king's daughter is a parallel for us. The degradation of the princess means that we shouldn't want the "lower parts" of the pan, meaning this "strengthening" from the story of Jacob.



This indicates our weakness to cave to idolatrous tendencies. While recognizing Moses did not require it, we are humbled by the realization that we are not on Moses' level. Yet, we require it, so we say it in an undertone, just as the king's daughter ate the leftover privately. Were it not for this metaphor in Pesachim we'd have no way to understand this act of whispering Baruch Shaim. And without this story in the Rambam, we lack this idea.

Torah is not simply a compilation of mitzvahs, it has an essence. Each mitzvah relates back to God's unity. (Rev Chaim traced Chanukah lights back to God's unity.) All of Torah depends on God's unity. The Mezuzah's two sections are comprised of the first and second paragraphs of the Shima. Just as a Torah scroll requires a baseline scoring into the parchment (sirtute), so too does Mezuzah require sirtute. This is to teach that these verses of Shima are the essence of Torah. Not all of the Torah's content carries the same level of importance. However, Torah law saw it essential that this literal "underlining" of the Torah scroll text be mimicked in the Mezuzah. The Shima's two sections placed in the Mezuzah also require an underlining, or emphasis. We are thereby directed to the gravity of the Shima's message, of God's unity. God alone is responsible for the entire universe. There are no other forces.

Rabbi Mendy Feder mentioned that the king's daughter "yearned" for the leftovers. We too yearn for God's unity. But we are affected more through reviewing the 'story' of Jacob, as opposed to directly relating to the pure idea of God's unity. (It is significant that even non-religious Jews abhor alien religions and idolatry, conveying this yearning for God's unity.) Rabbi Saul Zucker added that in the morning prayers, when recounting our great lot in life as Jews, we refer to our law to recite the Shima twice daily. Again, this underlines the significance and central theme that the Shima and God's unity possess within Torah.

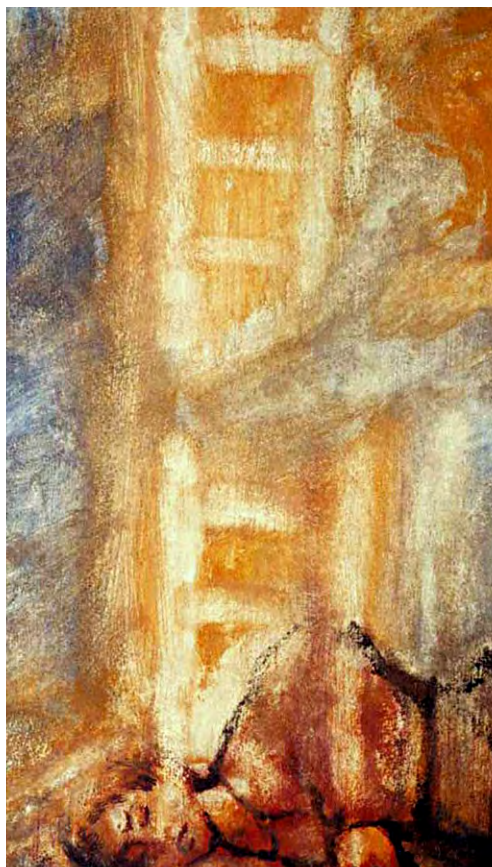
Finally, why on Yom Kippur do Ashkenazim recite Baruch Shaim out loud? The answer is, since we are like angels on Yom Kippur (not eating or sitting; angels are not physical and do not eat or have legs or joints) on this one day we do not need affirmation of God's unity. We attest to it all day Yom Kippur. Therefore, we need not whisper the Baruch Shaim, which indicates our inability to reach a high level and affirm God's unity. On Yom Kippur, we in fact do reach a high level. ■

[1] Mishneh Torah; Laws of Reciting the Shima, 1:4

[2] God's unity refers to accepting God as the exclusive cause of the universe, to the exclusion of all other imagined powers or forces.

Jacob's Ladder

RABBI REUVEN MANN



This week's Parsha, Vayetze, depicts Yaakov's exile from his parent's home and his sojourn with his uncle Lavan. The Rabbis say "The actions of the fathers are a sign for the children." Every event we have encountered in our long and often bitter historical journey was already experienced by the Avot who established the precedent for how to deal with them. The Jews are a people with great resiliency who are never crushed or defeated by adversity. Yaakov experienced the setbacks, disappointments and persecutions which were repeated against his descendants many times. However, Yaakov could not be defeated even by the superior might of his envious uncle. Lavan himself attested to Yaakov's "special protection" when he said, "It is in my power to do you harm but the G-d of your father spoke to me last night saying, 'beware lest you speak to Yaakov either good or bad.'"

Lavan's admission of weakness was a fulfillment of the promise Hashem had made to Yaakov in a prophecy conveyed to him in a dream. Yaakov saw a ladder which was planted in the earth and rose all the way to Heaven with the angels of Hashem rising and descending upon it. Many commentators have expounded on the significance of this dream. I would like to focus on the meaning of the ladder and the identity of the "angels of Hashem." In my opinion the ladder represents the Torah and the unique system of Mitzvot it contains. We are physical beings "planted in the earth" which means we are heavily influenced by our material desires. We can, however, uplift ourselves and change our nature by developing our spiritual qualities. Each Mitzvah we perform with devotion and sincerity elevates us and brings us closer to Hashem who is "standing" at the top of the ladder. He is always there waiting to receive anyone who makes the effort to refine his character through Torah and Mitzvot.

This dream expresses the religious philosophy of Judaism which rejects the idea of "instantaneous conversion." Many religions glorify the individual who in a moment of inspiration is "born again" and transformed from a sinner to a saint. Such a notion is contrary to Torah. Hashem has set out for us a roadmap which leads us, step by step, through the pathway of genuine spiritual attainment. Holiness cannot be achieved in a day. Every Mitzvah improves us by teaching a truth, instilling a virtue and restraining us from harmful

speech and deeds. The Torah is a "tree of life for those who cling to it." Hashem is at the top of the ladder and carefully guards the "angels" who ascend it to come close to Him and who then embrace the Jewish way of life. The eternal character of the Jewish people traces itself back to the prophetic vision of Yaakov. From "atop the ladder, Hashem promised him, 'Behold I am with you and will guard you wherever you go and I will return you to this land for I will not forsake you until I have done that which I have spoken about you.'" It is our attachment to Hashem through observance of His commandments and our attempt to get close to Him through emulation of His ways that assure our survival and well-being through the dark nights and bright mornings of our unique historical journey.

The contemporary climate is antithetical to the values of Torah. Our society craves instant gratification in the religious as well as the secular realm. We want to gain a feeling of holiness without putting in the hard work that it requires. Judaism rejects the notion that "Religion is the opiate of the masses." Our rabbis teach, "The day is short and the work is long and the master of the house is demanding." To reach the heights we must climb the ladder with dedication and steadfastness, drawing ever closer to Hashem who extends a helping hand to those who seek Him in truth.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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The Wisdom of King Solomon

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Kings I 3:16 states that two women came before King Solomon. Both bore a child. The careless woman slept on her child and killed it. While the innocent woman slept with her infant nearby, the murderess switched the living infant with her dead infant. In the morning, the innocent woman awoke and recognized what the murderess did. They both came before the King, each claiming that the living child was theirs. King Solomon arrived at his conclusion to cut the infant in two and to give half of the child to each woman. Of course he would not have gone through with this barbaric act. However, the King's seemingly bizarre and ruthless suggestion caused the lying woman to display her heretofore-concealed carelessness for her infant, as she subsequently said, "Both to me and to her; the child will not be. Cut the child!" The king successfully brought into the open the spine-chilling nature of the true murderess. Justice was served, and the infant was given to his true mother.

The Jews were in awe of King Solomon's wisdom, "And all the Israelites heard the ruling that the King judged, and the people feared the King, for they saw that God's wisdom was in him to mete out justice (Kings I 3:28)." What was King Solomon's great wisdom?

The Jews were impressed by King Solomon's plan to expose who was telling the truth. They were taken by his "justice," as this verse repeats the word justice or judgment three times. The Talmud states, "Who is wise? One who sees the outcome (Tamid 32a)." Why is foreseeing the outcome the definition of wisdom? I believe it is because wisdom exists only when there is no ignorance of results. One may have all the present facts, and use a cunning mind. However, if he cannot anticipate all outcomes, his current decision may prove tragic. Thus, he would not be termed "wise." One may only be spoken of as wise if he considers not only what is true now, but also what may be true in the future. The future is no less real to a wise person. He considers all of reality, and that does not refer to the present alone. As "time" is a factor, he considers all moments, and anticipates all results of a given decision.

But even prior to his decision to cut the infant in two, the King must have had some knowledge that he felt would be the most effective response. How did he arrive at his ploy? What did King Solomon consider? A closer examination of the verses reveals

that the King already knew who was innocent and who was guilty, before his suggestion to cut the child in two. However, perhaps he did not feel his observation would be accepted. Let me explain.

Verses 22 and 23 state the quarrel between the two women:

[22] And the other woman said, 'No! Mine is the living infant and yours is the dead. And the other said, 'No! The dead child is yours and the living child is mine', and they spoke before the king. [23] And the King said, 'This one said 'Mine is the living, and yours is the dead child', and this one said, 'No, the dead one is yours, and the living is mine.'

At this point, King Solomon commanded that a sword be brought. Thus, he had a plan. But what did the King already know, and how did he know it?

Why does Kings I record verse 23, where King Solomon reiterates (albeit to himself) what each woman said? Verse 23 is not redundant. I feel this verse is here to indicate that King Solomon detected

a distinction in the women's words, he pondered this, and then devised his plan. Therefore, verse 23 records for us what the King pondered. He was pondering the women's words. So we must ask, what did he detect? These words in verse 23 appear to contain no clue whatsoever; they are a mere repetition of what they already said in verse 22. But there is one, subtle difference: the first woman refers to the living child first, while the second woman refers to the dead child first. Read it again: "Mine is the living infant and yours is the dead." And the other one said, "No, the dead child is yours and the living child is mine."

I believe the King knew the following principle: a woman always refers to her child first. From this principle, the King knew which woman killed her child. It was the second woman, the one who referred to the dead child first. But perhaps, this subtle, psychological principle alone would not be appreciated by Israel, nor be sufficient by his court so as to justify his return of the child to one of the women. Others were not as keen as the King and would not be able to appreciate the women's words alone as sole cause for a verdict, without demonstrative proof. Thus, he instantly thought of how he could demonstrate the true callousness of the murderess. He created a scenario, in which he anticipated that the murderess might express her true nature. It worked!

King Solomon, in his wisdom, predicted the outcome of his plan: the murderess will express her callousness again. Forecasting an outcome he created the opportunity for the murderess to again express her cold nature. So when the King said to cut the infant in half, the murderess allowed it, "To me and to her; the child will not belong, cut the child." She was

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more concerned that the other woman should not have a child while she does not have one, than with human life. This exposed her.

“Who is wise? One who sees the outcome.” We now understand why Kings I repeats for the reader that the King pondered the women’s words. It directs us to study the King’s specific observation, appreciating the level of wisdom he received from God.

The Jews were amazed by such insight. Today, we are equally awed, not at only the King’s wisdom, but by God’s formulation of these verses; a verse’s subtle clues reveal more knowledge than what the Jews witnessed back then.

God Granting Solomon Wisdom

Having come this far, can we determine why God imbued King Solomon with such unparalleled wisdom? Solomon became king at the age of 12. God then appeared to him in a nighttime dream (Kings I, 3:5-14):

[5] In Gibeon, God appeared to Solomon in a dream of the night, and He said, ‘Ask what I will give to you.’ [6] And Solomon said, ‘You have done with Your servant, my father David, great kindness as he walked before you in truth and charity and in an upright heart with You, and You guarded this great kindness, and You gave him a son sitting on his chair as this day. [7] And now God, my God, You have made Your servant king under David my father, and I am a young lad, I know not of going out and coming. [8] And Your servant is in the midst of Your people You have chosen, a numerous people that cannot be counted from their size. [9] And give to your servant a hearing heart, to judge Your people, to distinguish between good and evil, for who can judge Your people, heavy as they are?’ [10] And the matter was good in God’s eyes, that Solomon asked for this thing. [11] And God said to him, ‘On account that you asked for this thing, and you did not ask for long days, and you did not ask for yourself riches, and you did not request the life of your enemies, and you asked for yourself understanding, to hear righteousness, [12] behold I have done according to your words, behold I have give to you a wise heart, and understanding, that none were like you before you, and after you, none will rise like you. [13] And also what you did not ask, I give to you, also riches and also honor; that none will be like you, a man among kings, all your days. [14] And if you go in My ways, to guard My statutes and commands as David your father went, then I will lengthen your days.’

God commences His vision to Solomon with the words, “Ask what I will give to you.” How do we understand such a general offer? I would suggest that

God only makes such an offer when someone would not have requested wisdom based on his accurate understanding of reality. Correctly so, Solomon understood that wisdom is arrived at through personal effort. God also knew what Solomon’s new concern was, having been made king immediately before this vision and requiring wisdom to rule the people. But why didn’t God simply imbue Solomon with this new wisdom without a dialogue, and without Solomon requesting it? God knew what Solomon desired! As a Rabbi stated, God wishes that man use his mind at all times. For this reason, God did not create miracles for Pharaoh that were undeniable. This would remove Pharaoh’s chance to arrive at a realization with his mind that God in fact sent Moses. Being awed by overt miracles, Pharaoh’s mind would be disengaged. This is not how God desires man to arrive at truths. Similarly, when Solomon may have the opportunity to think into a matter, and arrive at knowledge on his own, God will not remove this opportunity from him. Therefore, God framed this vision in a dialogue so that Solomon would be afforded this opportunity to learn something new with his own mind; a new idea about how God operates. Aside from receiving his newfound wisdom, God desired that Solomon’s mind be engaged in the very dialogue itself.

Solomon then realized something new: “God would not make such an offer for a matter I may achieve independent of His interaction. God must be intimating that He offers to me that which is naturally unavailable.” Solomon immediately seized the true sense of God’s offer, and asked for the most admirable request: wisdom to judge God’s people. Solomon desired to fulfill his role as king as best he could. This demanded that he, a 12-year-old, be equipped with wisdom.

Solomon was perfectly in line with God’s will. Before asking for wisdom, he describes how God granted such kindness to David his father, and that he was now to replace David’s position as king over “God’s” people. Solomon was stating that based on God’s will that the Jews exist as a “chosen” people, and must have a king, it is in line with God’s will to ask for wisdom. Solomon requested something necessary to fulfill God’s will. This is why he made such a lengthy introduction before asking for wisdom. This is why he was granted such wisdom.

Unparalleled Wisdom: For What Need?

This case of the two women is the first event recorded after God imbued King Solomon with His great wisdom. We understand that the king’s wisdom was superior. The king, successfully exposing the true murderess, had a profound effect on the Jews.

Previously, we read in verse 13, “...behold I give to you a wise and understanding heart, that before you none were similar, and after you, none will rise like you.” But we wonder: why did God grant

Solomon wisdom in this high degree, “unparalleled by others, both, prior or subsequent to him?” Could not a lower, “natural” level of wisdom – on par with other Prophets and kings such as David – suffice for Solomon to rule Israel effectively? Additionally, Solomon did not request wisdom of such a degree: God’s gift was over and above what the king requested. As such wisdom was never offered to all others, we must examine these verses to detect any clues that might lead us to an answer.

For one, we can safely say that this degree of wisdom was viewed as “unnatural” – it was clearly granted through God’s Providence. As no other human attained such wisdom, purposefully stated in the verses, Israel would recognize that Solomon’s wisdom was achieved only by means of a miracle of God. We must then understand why this was necessary.

One possibility occurs to me: King Solomon was 12 when he became king. Perhaps a youth would not be well received by the Israelites, with the exclusive, authoritative power deserving a king. Imagine a 12-year-old running the United States. Many would be reluctant to subject themselves to such a youngster. Perhaps this was why God, on only this occasion, wished to give a man an undisputed and unparalleled mind. Only with the wisdom that undeniably was granted miraculously by God, would the Israelites find themselves with no argument against the king’s continued leadership – it was God’s leadership, through him. It is Solomon’s age that distinguishes him from all other rulers and I feel this might be the reason for his receipt of such a gift.

Additionally, the verse may teach us another point. Verse 11 says that God gave Solomon this wisdom “on account that he did not seek riches, long days, or his enemies’ lives.” What does this verse teach? Perhaps God teaches us here that it was precisely Solomon’s selection of wisdom over all else; he raised himself to a higher level through this very act of selection – a level where God would relate to him on such a plane, granting him unparalleled wisdom. A person who selects wisdom as his primary desire in life causes God to relate to him on a higher level than all other people. Solomon was not ‘entitled’ to this wisdom without raising himself to the level where he responded properly to God’s offer. Had Solomon selected something other than wisdom, he would not have received it.

Finally, why did God also grant Solomon those things he did not request? This teaches that requesting things such as riches, his enemy’s deaths, or long life are improper. Such requests display one’s view that these matters are ends unto themselves, and this is against the Torah’s philosophy. By requesting wisdom, Solomon displayed a proper character, one in which he would relate to those other areas in the correct manner. Therefore, God granted to him these other benefits as well. ■



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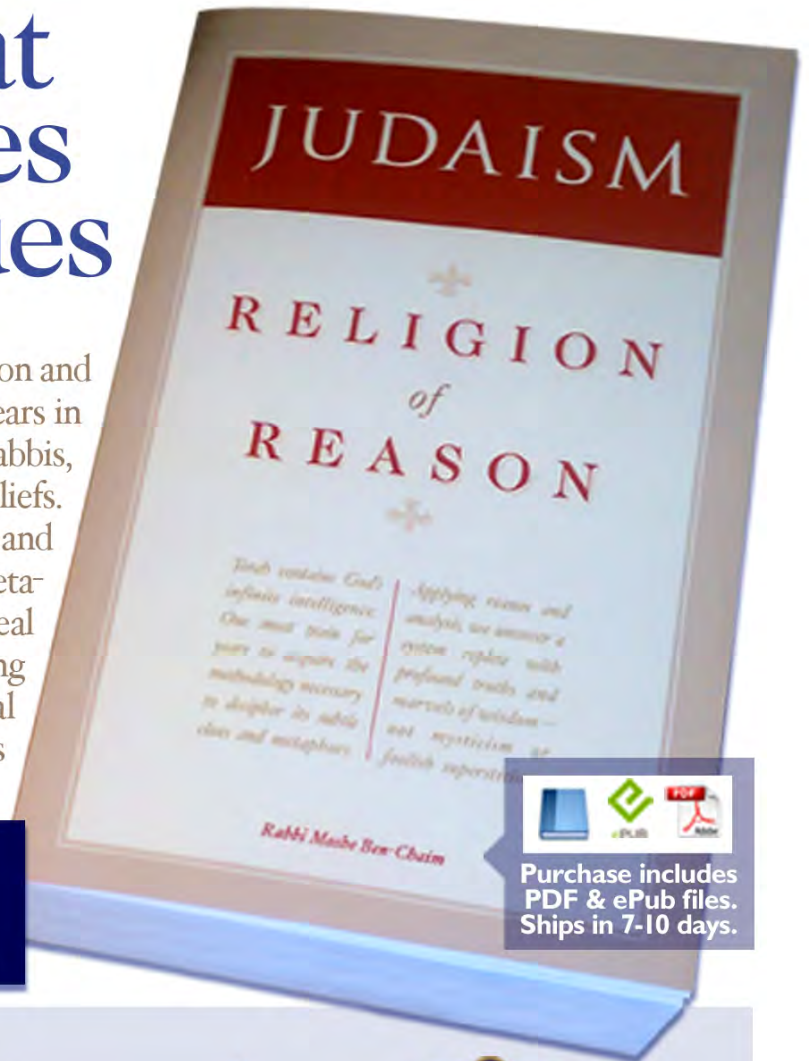
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(Yishtabach continued from page 1)

Prayer

Yisrael left Egypt, pursued by the Egyptians, they were singing and praising God. Specifically, they were giving “song, grandness, greatness, praise, and glory to the One with whom war belongs to.” (these praises are found in Yishtabach). In the second Mechilta, we see a slight deviation. God tells Bnei Yisrael He will fight for them, providing for them numerous miracles, and they should stand awaiting these demonstrations. Bnei Yisrael turn to Moshe and ask him what they could do, implying that standing in silence was insufficient. Moshe explains that they should be praising and singing about God, giving “song, grandness, greatness, and glory to the One whom war belongs to.” In the third Mechilta, we once again see another aberration. God tells Moshe He is aware of the danger facing the nation, with their enemy pursuing and the sea blocking off any escape route. He instructs Moshe to stand and engage in prayer. Moshe inquires as to what this specifically refers to. God replies that Moshe should be singing and praising, giving “song, grandness, thanks, greatness, glory, beauty, and Hallel to the One whom war belongs to.”

As we can see, some of the praises we find in Yishtabach are repeated in these three midrashim. Yet how does this help us gain a greater insight into the prayer? We must also understand the differences throughout these different episodes. In the first, the people are giving praise, in the second Moshe instructs them to give praise, and in the third, God instructs Moshe about giving praise. Why the differentiation? There is also the strange object of the praise – “to the One whom wars belong to.” What does this mean?

Let’s first establish the common thread between these different episodes. It would seem each event referred to a different stage in the overall redemption of Bnei Yisrael from the hands of the Egyptians. When first exiting Egypt, the Jewish people turned their praises towards God, even though they were being chased by the Egyptians. They had been witness to tremendous miracles, and were able to place their security in God; this is expressed in these praises. And then they came face to face with a closed off escape route. God reassures them that He will provide more miracles, saving the Jewish people. Bnei Yisrael turn to Moshe, who then instructs them to continue in their praises. Didn’t they have faith that God would once again “come through?” The issue was not a question of faith – it was a question of a lack of knowledge. Once they reached the sea, they reached a point where they did not have insight into how God’s plan would unfold. And then we have the final incident. Moshe knew God had a plan to rescue the Jewish people, expressed in the command to raise his

staff. But then what? God responds with the similar directive to praise Him. Again, Moshe had a greater insight into the plan of God, but had reached an end point to this knowledge. The solution is to praise God (we will see why praising is the universal solution shortly). At this point, we can see this common thread between the three episodes. In each, there was a knowledge and experience of God’s plan, naturally evoking praise. Yet after a period of time, the plan was no longer as clear, the specifics more elusive. Every time the end point is reached, the instruction is to turn to more praise. We now need to understand why praising God is the answer.

Note the specific praise of God as “the One with whom war belongs to.” We see a similar description in the Song at the Reed Sea, the praises recited by the Jewish people upon exiting Yam Suf. God is described there (Exod. 15:3) as “man of war.” Rashi explains that God is the “baal milchama”, the master of war. On a literal level, this would paint a picture of a warmongering Deity, thirsting for blood. Of course, such a description is ridiculous. Instead, it might be a specific expression of an important fundamental idea about God and His knowledge versus ours. When it comes to fighting in battle, we tend to focus on what we think are obvious factors in victory or defeat. Issues such as the size of the army, psychological morale, military strategy, etc., all paint a picture of why one outcome is more likely than another. Yet, in reality, there are an infinite number of causes and effects at play, events that man can never completely know. Both on the individual (soldier) and national (army) level, we must be aware of the clear lack of knowledge that we inherently possess. This idea is at the forefront of the different episodes detailed in the Mechilta. The Jewish people possessed knowledge of the plan of God and how He was to wage war on their behalf. At a certain point, though, this changed, and the knowledge of how the plan would unfold was hidden. It had

to be clear to them that there was a limitation to what they could know. This is reflected in the three distinct episodes recounted above. After Bnei Yisrael reached the Reed Sea, they not only reached a natural obstacle, there was an intellectual barrier as well. Therefore, they were told to direct themselves to praise God. When focusing on the greatness of God, we are in turn acknowledging how far removed we are

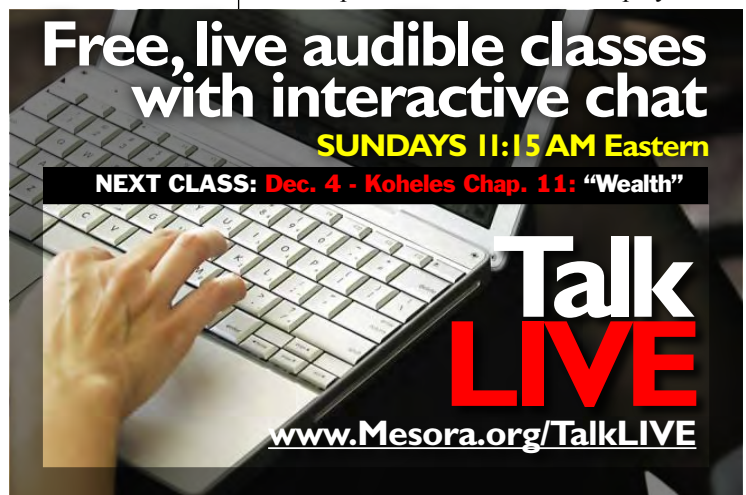
from Him, and how limited we are in our knowledge of Him.

There is another interesting concept about Yishtabach that helps solidify this idea, and demonstrate how this prayer is of utmost importance. The Avudraham comments that the fifteen praises of Yishtabach (shir ushevacha, hallel v’zemira, etc) correspond to the fifteen Tehillim of “Song of Ascent” composed by King David, as well as the fifteen ascents of Dayeinu, found in the Haggadah. What is the significance of these comparisons? The answer to this question fits in to the overall idea concerning the mindset we must have when reciting this prayer. The different praises found throughout the Tehillim and Dayeinu all have individual concepts. However, they are tied together by one overall praise, whether it be the idea of Song of Ascent or Dayeinu. This is the key idea by the prayer of Yishtabach. There are many different praises throughout this prayer, each referencing a universal praise about God. Yet they should be viewed as well as one entity. The purpose of Yishtabach, and to a certain extent pesukei dezimra, becomes more apparent. Pesukei dezimra was set up as a preparation for the specific praises to be recited in the brachos of Kriyas Shema. The brachos of kriyas Shema contain detailed thematic praises. Before engaging in these detailed praises, Chazal felt it was important to have the idea of praise per se, and what it means to give praise to God, as clear as possible. When one studies the different concepts of pesukei dezimra, there is a significant amount of focus on the importance of giving praise to God. And this culminates with Yishtabach, where, reciting these categorical praises, a person now becomes defined, to a certain extent, as a “gavra hameshabeach”, one offering praise, or one who is now fit to give praise to God. The idea of how he is limited in his knowledge is secure, his understanding of the importance of praising God is complete, and he now can proceed with the rest of his prayer. ■

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