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Weekly Parsha

VaYeshev

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“They took him and threw him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it. They then sat down to eat bread, and they lifted their eyes and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels carrying wax, balsam and resin to take down to Egypt.” (Beresheit 37:24-25)

(continued on next page)



the Selling of Joseph

RABBI REUVEN MANN

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

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MEGILAS

ANTIOCHOS

THE HISTORY OF CHANUKA

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Upon hearing the threat of destruction of the Jewish nation, the five sons of Mattisyahu displayed much courage, although greatly outnumbered. They were inspired to battle against those who wished to strip them of their Jewish identity. The Greeks were intent on preventing Torah observance, and coercing idolatrous practice. However, Mattisyahu's sons

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(VaYeshev cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Our parasha discusses the conflict that developed between Yosef and his brothers. Ultimately, this conflict led the brothers to sell Yosef into slavery in Egypt. The parasha begins by describing the tension that existed among the brothers. Yosef believed that he would be the future leader of the family. The brothers distrusted Yosef's motives and resented his aspirations. When the brothers were presented with the opportunity to eliminate Yosef as a threat, they took advantage of it. How did this opportunity arise?

Yosef and his brothers were shepherds. On this occasion, the brothers were shepherding Yaakov's flocks in the vicinity of Shechem. Yaakov had some concern regarding their welfare and sent Yosef to Shechem to check on the brothers and to report back.

Yosef found his brothers. At first, they considered killing Yosef. However, Reuven suggested a more indirect approach. He advised the brothers to place Yosef in a pit from which he would not be able to escape. As they were eating, they saw a caravan. Yehuda suggested that rather than letting Yosef die, they should sell him to the merchants. His advice was accepted by his brothers. Eventually, the merchants brought Yosef to Egypt.

Our pasuk tells us that while their brother was imprisoned, they sat down to eat a meal. What is the significance of this detail?

Netziv suggests that this pasuk reflect the righteousness of the brothers. They were not at ease with their decision to kill Yosef or allow him to die in the pit. They were sitting on the ground

and eating a meal. From their position, it should have been difficult for them to see very far. Yet, they observed a caravan approaching. This suggests that they were looking around and seeking an alternative course of action. When the caravan appeared they seized the opportunity and formulated a less drastic solution to their problem.[1]

However, Sforno suggest that in order to answer this question, we must consider two issues. First, the brothers were willing to adopt extreme measures to rid themselves of Yosef. Initially, they considered killing him. They spared his life because they felt that selling him into bondage would eliminate him as a threat. What was their fear and how did they justify the actions that they took against their brother?

Sforno writes that Yosef's brothers did not sin in the actions that they took against him. They looked upon Yosef as a devious, egotistical foe, determined to destroy them. He had admitted to dreams of grandeur and rulership. On numerous occasions he had attempted to undermine their position with their father. Yosef used his relationship with Yaakov to accuse his brothers of wrongdoing. The brothers saw in these actions and fantasies a consistent and determined plan to destroy them. The Torah tells us that if one is accosted by someone who wishes to take his life, then the threatened person may take the life of his pursuer. In capturing Yosef and ridding themselves of their enemy, they acted to protect themselves.[2]

(continued on next page)

Students

Yosef's
ColumnHatred
vs Jealousy

YOSEF ROTH

In the beginning of parshas Vayeshev Yosef tells his brothers "Listen to this dream that I dreamt. We were binding sheaves in the middle of the field. Then behold my sheaf rose and stood up straight, and behold your sheaves surrounded it and prostrated themselves to my sheaf". The brother's reaction to this dream was hatred toward Yosef. He had another dream so Yosef told his brothers "Behold! I dreamed another dream. The sun the moon and eleven stars were prostrating themselves to me?" The brother's reaction to this dream was jealousy.

What is the difference between the two dreams that in the first dream the brother's reaction was hatred, but the reaction to the second dream was jealousy?

The answer is that the first dream demonstrated Yosef would surpass his brothers in physical power. The second dream foretold that Yosef would surpass his brothers in knowledge of God and the universe.

The brothers, being perfected people, reacted differently to each dream. When Yosef told them he would be greater than them in physical power the brothers hated him for thinking this was beneficial. However when Yosef told them that he would be greater than them in knowledge of God and the universe, they became jealous. ■

(VaYeshev cont. from pg. 2)

Weekly Parsha

But were the brothers correct in their conclusions or were they deceived by their own jealousy into thinking the worst of Yosef? Sforno points out that it seems that even years latter – after the brothers had ample time to reconsider their actions toward Yosef – they still believed that they had made the proper decision. Years latter, the brothers did conclude that they had acted improperly. However, they did not conclude that their analysis of the danger posed by Yosef was incorrect. Neither did they conclude that the action that they had taken against Yosef was improper. Instead, they were critical of themselves for being callous towards Yosef.[3],[4]

This leads to the second issue we must consider. The reaction of the brothers is difficult to understand. In what way were the brothers insensitive? What did they do that indicated this insensitivity? Sforno explains that our pasuk provides the answer to this question. The brothers sat down to eat a meal while they were contemplating and planning the destruction of their brother.[5]

However, Sforno recognizes that this explanation presents a second, more difficult problem. The brothers remained convinced that their analysis of Yosef was justified. If this is the case, why was their eating a meal an act of insensitivity? They had no reason to question their decision. They were confident that they were acting properly. Why should they have refrained from eating?

"And his sons and daughters rose up to comfort him. And he refused to be comforted. And he said, 'I will go to my grave mourning my son.' And his father cried for him." (Bereshit 37:35)

Sforno suggests that the answer lies in appreciating another incident in our parasha. The brothers deceive their father into believing that Yosef was killed by a wild animal. Yaakov refuses to be comforted. He declares that he will mourn Yosef for the remainder of his life.

It seems that Yaakov's reaction was unreasonable. We are required to mourn the loss of a relative. But we are also required to limit our mourning to appropriate boundaries. Why did Yaakov insist that these boundaries did not apply to him?

Rashi seems to suggest that Yaakov was not completely convinced that Yosef was dead. When we know we have lost a loved one, we mourn the person and eventually come to terms with our loss. However in order for this process to take place, we must be certain that the person has been taken from us. If we merely conclude that his death is likely – but remain unsure, it is difficult to move on. We cannot completely abandon hope. And with this lingering hope comes the continue pain of separation.[6]

Rashi's explanation is somewhat difficult to reconcile with the actual wording of the passage. Yaakov seems to say that he is justified in mourning Yosef for the rest of his life. He does not allude to any doubt as a justification. Instead, he seems to assert that his attitude is justified by the gravity of the tragedy. But it is difficult to understand this justification. Of course, the loss of a son is a terrible tragedy. But are we not required to eventually end our mourning and move on?

Sforno suggests that Yaakov was deeply bothered by his role in this tragedy. He had instructed Yosef to travel to his brothers. He believed that Yosef had been killed by a beast while fulfilling these instructions. In other words, he had – to some extent – played a role in Yosef's death. Sforno explains that although tragedies do occur, the righteous do not want to be the cause of these tragedies. Ideally, Hashem's providence protects the righteous from such roles. Yaakov concluded that his role in this tragedy was a reflection on his own shortcomings. He had not received the benefit of Hashem's providence in this instance. He had not been spared playing a role in this disaster.[7]

Sforno contrasts Yaakov's reaction to the attitude of the brothers. He explains that the sin of the brothers was that they did not realize the tragedy of these events. They may have felt compelled to sell Yosef into slavery, but they did not grasp that this act of violence against their brother should be a source of sorrow and mourning. Rather than bemoaning the tragedy that had befallen them, the brothers indulged in their afternoon meal.

The brothers should have recognized that G-d's displeasure with them was implicit in their situation. How could the Almighty allow the children of Israel to destroy one of their brothers? How could He allow fraternal strife among Yaakov's children? Certainly the Almighty had turned his back upon them, and was punishing them for some sin. Yet, the brothers showed no introspection or regret.[8] ■

[1] Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv), Commentary Hamek Davar on Sefer Beresheit 37:25.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 37:18.

[3] Sefer Beresheit 42:21.

[4] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 37:18.

[5] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 37:24.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 37:35.

[7] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 37:35.

[8] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 37:25.

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.

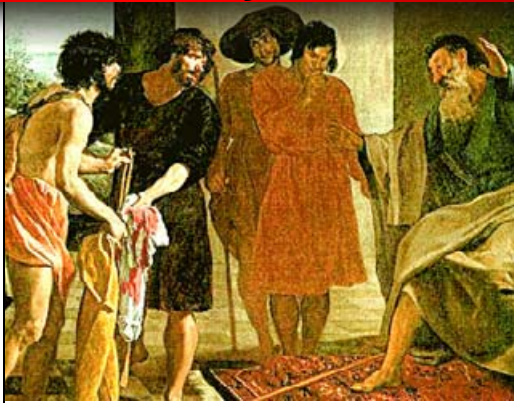
The Difficulty of Judah's Statement

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 vantage-point 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. ■

(Antiochos continued from page 1)

displayed unwavering devotion to what their minds held as true. We read in verse 39, "we remember that which G-d commanded us on Mount Sinai." They were convinced of the reality of G-d's revelation, His existence, and His commanding us in His Torah at Mount Sinai. No enemy could erase G-d's revelation, or the truths contained in His Torah. Without Torah observance, one's life is meaningless. Mattisyahu's sons took it upon themselves to fight to preserve Torah at all costs.

We must take this lesson to heart, as this is the sole reason for our celebration of Channukah: to proclaim G-d's performance of miracles and intervention when we adhere to His word. Conversely, our current leaders omit G-d from all political considerations, as if our history is false. Venomous Arabs attack us daily, but our leaders abandon Torah as a guide for their reactions. To them, world opinion outweighs human life and Torah truths. These leaders possess no regard for G-d's word, nor the courage befitting a true leader, as displayed by Mattisyahu's sons. This devotion to G-d's word earned the Jews of Channukah their salvation. But our leaders do not learn from history, and keep Israel under the sword. As long as G-d's word is not the essential consideration for all of their actions, G-d will not assist them. Their stubbornness is disturbing, and the silence of world Jewry compounds this crime.

Our leaders' reality is dichotomized; they celebrate Channukah, a publication of G-d's intervention when Torah is upheld, yet, they do not uphold the Torah. By our very act of lighting the menorah with our families, we testify to G-d's intervention, saving those Jews who followed Him by risking their lives. Those of us today cowering from following G-d's Torah due to political pressure, violate G-d's will. It is clear from the Channukah story recorded below, that G-d would have let die, those with no devotion. It was not until the five sons of Mattisyahu risked death for Torah, that G-d stepped in. The abandonment of G-d and His laws makes life worthless. Until the Jews demonstrated their devotion, there was no divine intervention. Once these five, brave souls declared the essentiality of Torah adherence through action, G-d protected them, and gave "the many into the hands of the few, the wicked, into the hands of the righteous."

Today we are slaughtered a great slaughter at the hands of those like Antiochos. Children of Israel, soldiers of the IDF, and leaders of the Israeli people must wake up. Our history

and our very celebration of Channukah attest to G-d's ability to enable five brothers to defeat the armies of our enemies. G-d is not sleeping. G-d is not weak. He sees our travail at this time too. G-d's word and history attest to the fact that He saves those who follow him. Until you follow His Torah, until you see with clear conviction that not based on military tactics alone will we be saved, but with Torah as our guide, we will continue to suffer.

Our nation must no longer deny G-d's ability to save us. See your contradiction, as you light the menorah, while you abandon so many historical events instructing us how we must now act. Have you forgotten Abraham defeating tremendous forces with just a few men? Or Jacob's salvation from his twin Esav? Recall the Ten Plagues, the Manna in the desert, and the splitting of the Red Sea, where every Egyptian soldier perished. And recall this: our claim to Israel is from no other source than G-d's Torah - His promise to Abraham. Yet you refuse His Torah, but desire His land?

We do not rely on miracles; this is against Judaism. Living by Torah ideals is the best life, and we do not uphold Torah simply to remove our current pain. But as the Torah is absolute truth, we must be frightened by G-d's "Shima" promise to abandon us if we abandon Him. But G-d also promises His protection when we live according to His word. In line with this promise, we may seek His assistance. We live by G-d's word, as it is absolute truth, which enables our best existence. When living in line with G-d's word, He has many vehicles to protect us. But as the Shima says, He certainly will not shield us when we abandon His word. Of course it is preferred that we attach ourselves to the truth of Torah when prompted by its perfect and pleasing laws, not because we need salvation. But many times G-d removes His protection to instruct us to return to Him. Now may be such a time.

Remember Channukah. Remember and proclaim it not just with your menorah, but with your daily actions. As someone wishing salvation for yourself and your fellow Jews, act now in accordance with G-d's law. As Mattisyahu's sons lived, and were saved by the Torah, with G-d's help we too can triumph over our enemies. But any leader wishing to lead based solely on political considerations, denying these truths, history, and G-d's abilities, is destined for failure.

Follow His laws, and even the few will be victorious over the many.



Megillas Antiochos was found in an old edition of a siddur printed in Solonika, Greece. Otzar HaTfilos refers to it as a "precious letter".

*Hebrew version located at the link below:
<http://www.mesora.org/megilasantiochos.html>*

MEGILAS ANTIOCHOS

ARBITRARY PARAGRAPH BREAKS HAVE BEEN ADDED EVERY

10 VERSES FOR EASE OF READING.

THESE BREAKS DO NOT EXIST IN THE ORIGINAL.

1. And it was in the days of Antiochos, king of Greece, a great, mighty king was he, and he was strong in his reign and all kings listened to him. 2. And he conquered many cities and mighty kings, and he destroyed their palaces and their temples he burned with fire, and their men he imprisoned in jails. 3. From the days of Alexander the king, there arose no king like him on all sides of the river. 4. And he built a great city on the sea shore to be his house of kingdom, and Antiochos called the city by his name. 5. And also his second in command Bagris built another city next to it and Bagris called it by his name, and so is its name until this day. 6. In the twenty third year of his reign, it was

(continued on next page)

(Antiochos continued from page 5)

the two hundred and thirteenth year of the building of the Temple, he gave face to ascend to Jerusalem. 7. And he answered and he said to his officers, "Do you not know that there is the Jewish people in Jerusalem amongst us? 8. To our god they do not sacrifice, and our religion they do not practice and the king's decrees they forsake, to do their religion. 9. And they also hope for the day of the dethroning of the kings and rulers and they say, "When will our King rule the seas and dry land, and the entire world will be given to our hand?" 10. It is not honorable to the kingdom to leave them be on the face of the earth.

11. And now let us come and we will ascend on them and nullify their treaty that was cut with them concerning Sabbath, the new Month and circumcision. And the matter was good in the eyes of his officers and in the eyes of his entire army. 12. At that time, Antiochos the king arose and he sent Nikanor his second with a great army and many people and they came to the city of Judah, to Jerusalem. 13. And they slaughtered a great slaughter and built an altar in the Temple in the place where the G-d of Israel said to His servants, His prophets "Where I will cause to dwell My manifested presence eternally", in that place, they slaughtered the pig and they brought its blood to the sanctified courtyard. 14. And as this occurred, when Yochanan son of Mattisyahu the High Priest heard these doings occurred, he was filled with anger and rage, and the countenance of his face changed, and he counseled in his heart what should be done on this. 15. And then Yochanan son of Mattisyahu made himself a sword two spans long, one span wide, covered under his clothing. 16. And he came to Jerusalem and stood in the gate of the king, and he called to the gatekeepers and he told them "I am Yochanan son of Mattisyahu, I have come to come before Nikanor." 17. And then the gatekeepers and watchers came and told him the High priest of the Jews stands in the opening, and Nikanor answered and said to them, "Let him surely enter." 18. And then Yochanan was brought in before Nikanor and Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "Are you one of the rebels that rebels against the king and desires not the peace of his kingdom?" 19. And Yochanan answered before Nikanor and said, "I am he, now I come before you, that which you wish I will do." 20. And Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "If as my will you will do, take a pig and slaughter it on the altar and robe in the king's clothing and ride of the king's horses, and as one of the kings beloved you will be."

21. And as Yochanan listened, he responded a thing, "My master, I fear from the children of



Israel, perhaps they will hear I have done so and they will stone me with rocks. 22. Now let all men leave from before you, perhaps they will make the matter known." Then, Nikanor caused all men to leave from before him. 23. At that moment, Yochanan son of Mattisyahu lifted his eyes to the heavens and assembled his prayer before his G-d and he said, "My G-d and the G-d of my fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, please do not give me into the hand of this uncircumcised, because if he will kill me, he will go and praise in the house of Dagon his god, and say "My god has given him to my hand." 24. At that

moment, he stepped towards him three steps and plunged the sword into his heart, and he threw that corpse into the sanctified courtyard. 25. Before the G-d of heaven, Yochanan answered and he said, "My G-d, do not place on me sin that I have killed in the sanctified (area), now, so also give all the people that come with him to pain Judah and Jerusalem." 26. Then went out Yochanan son of Mattisyahu on that day and warred with the people and slaughtered in them a great slaughter. 27. The number of the slain that he slayed on that day was seventy two thousand seven hundred that were killed these to these. 28.

(continued on next page)

(Antiochos continued from page 6)

On his return they built a pillar on his name and called it "Maccabee Killed the Mighty". 29. And it was that king Antiochos heard that his second in command Nicanor was killed, it grieved him much, and he sent to bring Bagris the wicked that mislead his people. 30. And Antiochos answered and said to Bagris, "Do you not know, have you not heard what the children of Israel have done? They killed my army and looted my camp and my officers?"

31. Now, on their money you are trusted or their houses are yours. Come, and ascend upon them and nullify the treaty which was cut with them (by) their G-d, Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 32. Then Bagris the wicked and all his camp came to Jerusalem and slaughtered in them a great slaughter and decreed a complete decree on Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 33. When this occurred that the matter of the king was urgent, there was found a man who circumcised his son and they brought the man and his wife and they hung him in front of the child. 34. And also the woman who bore the son, after her husband died and circumcised him at eight days, she went up to the walls of Jerusalem and her circumcised son in her hands. 35. And she answered and said, "To you, Bagris the wicked, you intend to nullify from us the treaty that was cut with us, the treaty of our fathers will not be nullified from us, Sabbath, the New Moon and circumcision from our children's children, it will not be removed." 36. And she dropped her son to the ground, and she fell after him and they both died together. And many of the children of Israel that did similarly in those days, and they did not veer from the treaty of their fathers. 37. At that time, the children of Israel said, "These to these, let us go and rest in the cave, lest we desecrate the Sabbath day, and they slandered them before Bagris. 38. Then Bagris the wicked sent men girded for battle and they came to the opening of the cave and said to them, "Come out to us, eat of our bread and drink of our wine and our actions you shall do." 39. And the children of Israel answered, "These to these, 'we remember that which G-d commanded us on Mount Sinai, 'Six days you shall work, and do all your labor, and on the seventh day rest'. Now it is better for us that we die in this cave than desecrating the Sabbath day." 40. When this happened that the Jews did not come out to them, they brought wood and burnt it at the opening of the cave and there died like a thousand men and women.

41. Afterwards, there came out five sons of Mattisyahu, Yochanan and his four brothers and they warred with the people and slaughtered a great slaughter and drove them to the isles of the



sea because they trusted in the G-d of heaven. 42. Then Bagris entered one ship and fled to king Antiochos and with him were men, escapees of the sword. 43. And Bagris answered and said to king Antiochos, "You the king, placed a command to nullify from the Jews Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision, a great deceit and rebellion in its midst. 44. That when there went all the people and nations and languages, they could not defeat the five sons of Mattisyahu. From lions they are stronger, and from eagles they are more swift, and from bears they are more quick. 45. Now king, I offer you good counsel, and do not war with few men, for if you war, you will be embarrassed in the eyes of all kings. 46. Therefore, write and send books in all cities of your kingdom, that there come officers of war and not leave one of them, and also elephants wearing armour with them." 47. And the matter was good with king Antiochos, and he sent books to all cities of his reign, and there came officers of all the people and kingdoms, and also elephants wearing armour came with them. 48. A second time Bagris the wicked arose and came to Jerusalem, he broke the wall, and he cut off the water supply, and he broke in the Temple thirteen breaches and also from the

stones he broke until they were like dust and he thought in his heart and said, "This time I will not be overtaken because of the numbers of my army and might of my hand". But the G-d of heaven did not think so. 49. And when the five sons of Mattisyahu heard, there arose and came to Mitzpeh Gilead, that were there the remnant of the house of Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet. 50. They decreed a fast, and sat on ashes to seek out mercy from before G-d of heaven.

51. Then there fell good counsel in their hearts, Judah the firstborn, Simon the second, the third Yochanan, the fourth Yonasan, the fifth Elazar. 52. And their father blessed them and so he said, "Judah my son, I liken you to Judah son of Jacob who was equated to a lion. 53. Simon my son, I liken you to Simon son of Jacob who killed the inhabitants of Shechem. 54. Yochanan my son, I liken you to Avner son of Ner, officer of the army of Israel. Yonasan my son, I liken you to Yonasan son of Saul, who killed the Philistine people. 55. Elazar my son, I liken you to Pinchas son of Elazar who was jealous for his G-d and saved the children of Israel. 56. On this, there went out the five sons of Mattisyahu on that day, and warred with the people, and slaughtered in them a great slaughter, and there was killed from them Judah. 57. At that moment when the sons of Mattisyahu saw that Judah was killed, they returned and they came to their father. 58. And he said to them, "Why have you returned?" And they answered and they said, "On account that our brother was killed who was equated to all of us." 59. And Mattisyahu their father answered and said to them, "I will go out with you and I will fight with the people, lest the house of Israel perish, and you are frightened on your brother." 60. And Mattisyahu went out on that day with his sons and fought with the people.

61. And G-d of heaven gave all the mighty of the nations into their hands. And they slaughtered a great slaughter, all who seized the sword, and all who drew the bow, officers of war and the seconds in command, there was not left one remnant, and there fled the rest of the people to the cities of the sea. 62. And Elazar was involved in killing the elephants and he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants, and when they returned, they looked for him among the living and among the dead, and they could not find him. And afterwards they found him that he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants. 63. And the children of Israel were gladdened that there was given to their hands their enemies. From them they burned with fire and from them they pierced with the sword, and

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(Antiochos continued from page 7)

from them they hung on trees. 64. And Bagris the wicked that misled his people, the children of Israel burned him with fire. 65. And then, Antiochos the king heard that Bagris the wicked was killed and all officers of war with him, he entered into a ship and fled to the cities of the sea, and it was that each place he came to there, they mocked him and called him "the runaway". 66. Afterwards, the children of the Hasmoneans came to the temple, and they built the broken gates and they closed the breaches, and purified the courtyard from the casualties and from the impurities. 67. And they searched for pure olive oil to light the candelabrum, and they did not find but one canister that had the seal of the ring of the High Priest and they knew that it was pure, and it contained a measurement to light for one day. 68. And G-d of heaven Who causes to dwell His name there, gave a blessing and they lit from it eight days. 69. Therefore there established the children of the Hasmoneans a fulfillment, and they forged a law, and the children of Israel with them as one, to make these eight days days of drinking and happiness as the appointed days written in the Torah, and to light on them lights to make known what was done to them (by) the eternal G-d of heaven. 70. And on them, one may not eulogize, nor to decree fast days, or have a fast, except if it was accepted on it prior to this and pray before their G-d.

71. But the Hasmoneans and their children and their brothers they did not decree on them to nullify service of work. And from that time, there was no name to the kingdom of Greece. 72. And there received the kingdom, the children of the Hasmoneans and their grandchildren from that time until the destruction of the Temple two hundred and six years. 73. Therefore, the children of Israel from that day in all their exiles guard these days and call them days of drinking and gladness from the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, eight days. 74. From that time and eternally, there should not be removed from them, that were in their Temple, priests, Levites and their wise men who established upon them and upon their grandchildren eternally.

Other prayer books add these verses:

"And these days, they arose and accepted on themselves and on their children and on their grandchildren eternally, the priests, Levites and wise men that were in the temple, and they were not removed forever. The G-d that did with them a miracle and a wonder, He should do with us miracles and wonders and sustain with us the verse that was written as the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I display wonders, Amen." ■

Halacha – Jewish Law



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

RABBI DANIEL MYERS

Unveilings on Channukah

Q. Naomi Ackerman: Is one allowed to do Hakamat Matzaiva (unveiling) on Chanukah?

A. First of all, it is interesting to note that the concept of a Matzaiva (monument) is already found in the Torah (Gen. 35:20) when Yaakov set one up on Rachel's grave - and in the Mishnayot (Shekalim 2:5). Regarding the time to set up the stone, there are various Minhagim, ranging from immediately after Shiva until after Yud Bait Chodesh. (See Pnai Baruch 36:2) Technically, there is nothing wrong with simply unveiling the monument on Channukah. However, the Minchat Yitzchak (3:51) writes that since the custom is to eulogize the deceased at the time of the unveiling, one can not set up the stone on a day when eulogies are prohibited, such as Channukah and Purim. He adds that one cannot even publicly read the monument on such days, since that too is a form of eulogy.

Errors Reciting V'tain Tal Umatar

Q. Moshe Hadas: Why is the Halacha regarding one who omits V'tain Tal Umatar in the winter different than the Halacha regarding one who omits V'tain Bracha in the summer?

A. Good question! Before we answer your question, let us first review the Halachot of Baraich Alainu:

1. If one says V'tain Tal Umatar in the summer

and he did not yet complete Shmoneh Esrai (S"E), he must return to the beginning of Baraich Alainu. (S"A 117:3, M"B 14)

2. Even if he realizes his mistake immediately, he must still return to the beginning of Baraich Alainu. (Implication of the Biur Halacha 117:3: "Im Shaal") B'dieved, if he did not finish Baraich Alainu and returns to V'tain Bracha, he is Yotzai. (Ibid. It is difficult to understand why Toch K'dai Dibbur (immediate correction) does not help L'chatchila by V'tain Tal Umatar, while it is effective by Hamelech Hakadosh (582:2), Birkat Hanehenin (209:2) and Amida L'regalim. (487:1) Maybe it is effective L'chatchila only when the mistake is limited to the Chatima of the Bracha; here, however, since the mistake is by the main text of the Bracha, it is best to Mitakain the whole Bracha by beginning it again. Tzarich Iyun.

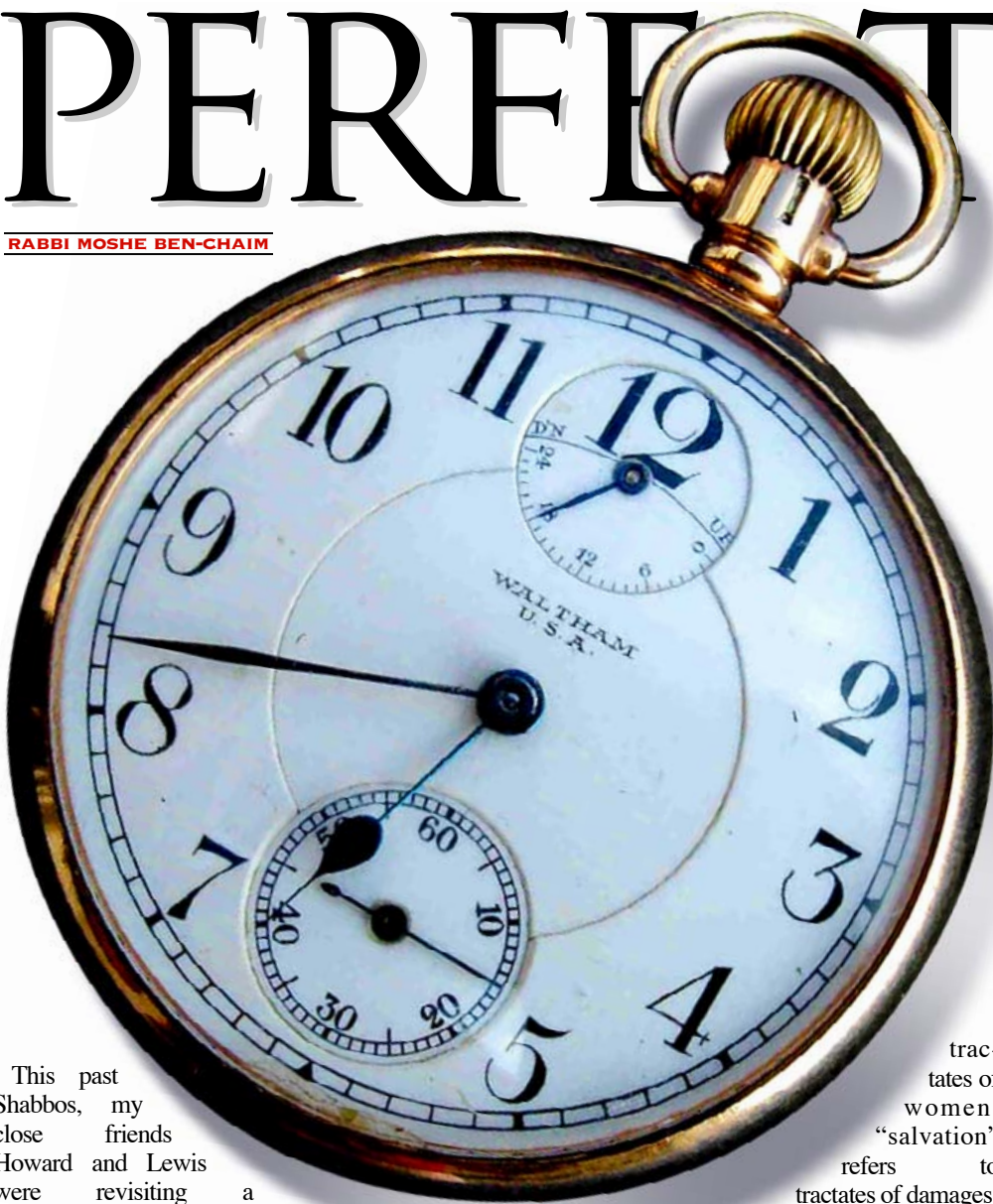
3. If he completed S"E, he must repeat the whole S"E. (S"A 117:3)

4. If he says V'tain Bracha in the winter and did not yet say Shma Kolainu, he must request Matar in Shma Kolainu. (S"A 117:5)

5. If he passed Shma Kolainu, he must return to Baraich Alainu. If he completed S"E, then he must repeat the whole S"E. (Ibid) The question is: Why is there no option in the summer to rectify the mistake in Shma Kolainu? I think the difference is that one who mistakenly said V'tain Bracha in the winter did not request anything negative; he simply asked for a Bracha and did not ask for rain. Therefore, he can simply request rain in Shma Kolainu. However, one who asked for rain in the summer actually requested a curse in the Bracha of Baraich Alainu, since rain is usually undesirable in the summer. Therefore, he must return to the very Bracha and correct it. ■

PERFECTION

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



This past Shabbos, my close friends Howard and Lewis were revisiting a previously studied section of Talmud, and we discussed it again this morning. It discusses man's perfections. As we studied, we noted some interesting insights.

The Talmud (Sabbath 31a) cites a passage in Isaiah 33:6:

"And it shall be, [that] the faith of your times will be the strength of your salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of God is his storehouse [treasure]."

This verse is cryptic, but the Talmud elucidates two explanations. The first view suggests that each word in this verse refers to one of the six tractates of the Mishna. The Mishna – the Oral Law – is divided into six portions, which govern each area of human existence. In our verse, says the Talmud, "faith" refers to tractates of planting; "times" refers to tractates of holidays; "strength" refers to

tractates of women; "salvation" refers to tractates of damages; "wisdom" refers to tractates of things sanctified; and "knowledge" refers to tractates addressing ritual purity. That view concludes as does the verse, "even so, the fear of God is his treasure".

The second view – that of Rava – states the following: "At the time when man is entered for judgment [after death] they say to him, 'Have you dealt honestly in business? Have you fixed times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you anticipate the ultimate salvation? Did you debate in wisdom? Did you deduce new understandings from comparing ideas?' But even so: if the fear of God was his treasure, then it is good. But if not, then it is not good."

Both views correlated individual topics to each of the words in the verse. According to the first view, each of the six words refers to one of the six

tractates of the Mishna. According to Rava's view, each word is a reference to some activity. The question is, what is the dispute...or is there one?

I suggest there is no dispute; rather, each view alludes to a unique topic. But let us understand the verse. Read it again, "And it shall be, [that] the faith of your times will be the strength of your salvation, wisdom and knowledge; the fear of God is his storehouse [treasure]." Isaiah teaches the people that our salvation is dependent. Meaning, our good lives are based on something. The first view suggests our good depends on the adherence to the complete Oral law, the Mishna. But it is only through a devotion to the "entire" six tractates that we realize the true good. This is why this first view clearly states that each of the six words in the verse refers to each of the six tractates. What does this uncover? It reveals that man must guide "every" area of his life by God's word. To assume we possess greater knowledge than God – in even one area – we make a grave mistake, and thereby forfeit our good. Therefore, the first view states we must follow all six tractates of the Mishna.

In this view, Isaiah is addressing the part of man who wishes to escape from Torah adherence. True, Torah can be perceived as 'restrictive', but this emotional response exists only as long as one is ignorant of the good contained in each area of the Oral Law. However, once one engages in study of the Oral Law – realizing the perfections afforded – he no longer runs from Torah observance, but he runs towards it. Thus, the verse concludes, "the fear of God is his treasure." This means to say, that man's study of these tractates must have the objective of arriving at a fear of God, or rather, an understanding of God's ideas, referred to as a fear; since we are awed at God's immense wisdom. When man's study is not for ulterior motives, but rather, for the "fear of God", then he is living a perfected life. When man views God as his "treasure", then he has reached perfection.

Rava had a different view. He held that this verse addressing man's ultimate good is not so much addressing the 'body of law', as it is addressing man's "application" of the law. Thus, Rava cites six "actions", which epitomize man's perfection: "faith" refers to faithful business practice; "times" refers to fixed times of study; "strength" refers to procreation; "salvation" refers to the ultimate salvation; "wisdom" refers to debating Torah with others, and "knowledge" refers to deriving insights through critical thought. But Rava too

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concludes, "But even so, if the fear of God was his treasure, good, but if not, than it is not good."

How are these six actions more indicative of human perfection over others? Let us review these six actions: honesty in business, fixed Torah study, procreation, anticipation of the salvation, Torah debate and deductive reasoning. At first glance, we feel these are arbitrary. Wherein lies the rhyme and reason for Rava's selection of these six? However, with some thought, we expose primary categories.

The Self: Rava's First Two Perfections

What causes a person to cheat in business? Maimonides states in his Commentary on the Mishna, that in business, one must seek a deal equally fair for all parties. And if one cheats, he displays an overestimation of the self; he feels more entitled to success, than the other party. However, this is generated from his ego. The ego is constantly seeking gratification, and expresses itself in a myriad of areas: evil speech about others (to raise one's self esteem), cheating in business, clothing, cutting off someone in traffic, impatience in all areas, arguments in relationships, controlling children, seeking position of power, gambling, the list is endless. However, one who is objective, and views every other person with an equal right to existence, will not cheat in business. He will seek a fair deal for both himself, and his partner. He appreciates that God created the other person, just as He created himself.

We learn that honesty in business is an expression of one, whose ego is in check. However, if all this person does is work, bereft of learning, or with no "fixed learning schedule" – the second perfection – he displays more of a value for wealth, than for his soul. Thus, one who fixes times for his learning expresses a priority for learning: he cannot let a day go by where learning is absent from his schedule.

So these first two topics cited by Rava address the "self". Moreover, these two perfections address man's two faculties: his instincts and his intellect: man addresses his instincts, primarily by refining his ego, and he addresses his intellect, by fixing times of study.

Others: Rava's Second Two Perfections

Rava's next two areas of perfection are procreation, and anticipation of the future salvation – the days of the Messiah, when all peoples will recognize God.

If one is not involved in procreation, he thereby displays a concern for the self, and not for others. Thus, one who engages in procreation displays his alignment with God's will: that "mankind" continues. He is not concerned with "his" life alone, but with the lives of all people. However, without his anticipation of the salvation, he does not express a desire for the "best" state for man.

We now understand Rava's next two perfections: procreation expresses man's perfection in aligning his will with God's will, that mankind continue even after his demise, and he also desires the greatest state of existence for mankind, that the ultimate salvation arrives. Unlike the first two perfections, these second two perfections deal with mankind, not the self.

Wisdom in Both Roles: Rava's Third Two Perfections

Now, although man must restrain his ego, fix study times, procreate and anticipate the salvation, these first four perfections have a higher goal, above these actions themselves. These four are not "ends" in themselves, but have as their goal an additional, ultimate good. That good is "knowledge of God". This brings us to Rava's last two perfections – debating Torah with others, and using critical thinking – what is clearly "knowledge of God".

Rava says the words "wisdom and knowledge" in Isaiah's verse, refer to debating Torah with others, and using critical thinking. My suggestion is that these last two perfections, are actually teaching the "objective" of the first four. They are not necessarily actions independent of the first four, but actually compliment the four, by describing what our goal must be when refining our ego, learning, procreating and waiting for the salvation. In all of these first four actions, we must have as our underlying goal, the last two: "wisdom and knowledge". These last two perfections are not on par with the first four mentioned, but they come to "compliment" the four. Meaning, these last actions of debating and using reasoning, refer to both roles we mentioned: the self and others. We said that the first two address the individual, and the second two address others. In his last two perfections, Rava refer to actions, which address the individual (critical thought) and others (debating Torah). Rava states that man's ultimate objective when alone or with others must be wisdom.

This is why God granted us the "Tzelem Elokim", intelligence. A Rabbi once explained the reason why our intellect is labeled, "Tzelem Elokim", or "form of God". Of course, God has no form. However, this term means that man possesses that faculty, through which he may understand God. So vital is the intellect, God underlined its elevated status by joining His name to it, in the "form of God". Therefore, Rava's final two perfections are debating Torah with others, and deductive reason, a solitary activity. These two reflect back on the ultimate good for both the self (deductive reasoning) and others (debate in Torah). In essence, Rava's view is that man perfects himself when alone, and while engaged in society. These two capacities explain all of Rava's

six perfections. However, there is more to our verse.

Something Higher than Knowledge

How did each party conclude his words? What is the final quote in the verse? It is this: "But even so, if the fear of God was his treasure, good, but if not, than it is not good." What does this add?

Both parties agree: man's perfection cannot be limited to the sphere of the self, to others, or to the six tractates of the Mishna...his ultimate perfection depends on his underlying relationship with God. This is man's third role, above his solitary life, and his life among mankind.

For in all six areas of perfection cited, man might yet perform these perfections in "action", but harbor a distance from God, or lack a relationship with God. Actions might be easily accomplished, but true perfection requires that we relate to God, that we pray to Him, and truly feel we are created entities, with a deep feeling of thanks and a desire to express this gratitude. Even Torah study can be divorced from a relationship with God, if for example one learns to surpass others, for mental gymnastics, or even if he truly enjoys the ideas. But if man's six perfections do not eventuate in a closer attachment to God, he misses the mark. This is the lesson of the ending of our verse: "But even so, if the fear of God was his treasure, good, but if not, than it is not good."

Man's ultimate perfection is his attachment to God, and this is achieved only through the constant, preoccupation with a study of the universe, and the Torah. Man has the capacity to find the deepest, most enduring and satisfying life through his realization of new truths. When man uses his intellect, he realizes how perfect the world is, from biology to physics, from the words of the patriarch's to God's commands...all is revealed by God to avail us to a life of a delight in knowledge. Physical enjoyments are limited, novelty wears off, and conditions are required for these temporal, instinctual satisfactions. In stark contrast, the enjoyment of wisdom, and feeling we receive when understanding a new truth, permeates our entire being, and through it, we realize answers to our questions, and develop a lasting appreciation for God's world and Torah. Our attachment to God is the final objective.

We marvel at how precise is this verse in Isaiah. This one verse is but a single drop in the endless sea of knowledge. But simultaneously, this one drop fills our souls as if it is the entire sea. The precision and perfection of design realized in but a single verse, must awaken us to a new appreciation of how much more knowledge exists...we are excited at the prospect of the next Talmudic section we will learn.

But ultimately...we must arrive at a love for God. ■

Channukah



Channukah Philosophy

Events

&

Laws

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



When studying the sources dealing with Channukah, 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 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 (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

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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 Amek 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 understood God's oil 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. ■

CHARITY



KINDNESS

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

“On three things the world stands...”

We last explained that the phrase “on three things the world stands,” means that these factors are essential to maintaining the correct social atmosphere. The next step is to understand these factors and how they work together in this framework.

When we begin to analyze these elements on a social level, we must keep in mind that society is composed of individuals: these elements must first be understood on an individual level. This contrasts to certain theories of the social sciences that maintain there is a ‘herd instinct’, which means that individuals in a group are a new phenomenon behaving with a new quality of instinct in their makeup. People act differently in crowds, not because of something new that suddenly appears in them, but rather because a certain part of the individual’s makeup, which was always there, grows exaggerated. This part is not new - it exists in the individual level as well.

Our Mishna is teaching us that these three factors combine to maintain a productive social environment. This means that without these three elements, man would be destructive and bring about the downfall of society. How do these factors remove man from acting destructively?

The first factor in the Mishna is Torah. The Rambam on the Mishna says this refers to “chachma”, wisdom. How does this play a role in preventing man from becoming destructive? Through intellectual involvement, man’s energies, including the aggressive, are channeled and given an outlet so that no harm will result. The area of knowledge is harmless in that one individual’s gain, says nothing about nor takes away from another individual’s knowledge.

The next factor we will take up is that of “Gemilut Chassadim”, acts of kindness. Rashi makes a few, interesting remarks on this element. He says that it refers specifically to one who lends money to a poor person because this is greater than Tzedaka, charity. Furthermore, he continues, acts of kindness are greater than

charity because they can be done whether one is poor or wealthy and this is what our Sages say “greater are acts of kindness than charity”. Rashi then quotes the verse “The Kindness of God is forever on those that fear Him” to teach that the world stands on kindness.

This commentary of Rashi is quite perplexing. Let us focus on one basic, logical problem: if giving charity is itself an act of kindness than how can an act of kindness be better than charity? Charity is the act itself!

The Rambam, at the end of the Moreh Nevuchim explains that whereas the term Chesed, kindness, refers to an excess of some moral quality, the term Tzedaka, charity, refers to giving each being its due and showing kindness to the degree that each individual deserves. Kindness, then, expresses itself differently from charity - acts of kindness are expressed wherever one overextends himself in a situation, helping someone more than they deserve. In contrast, charity stems from the existence of an intolerable situation - so, for example, in the case of giving money to a poor person, the giving expresses the perception of the right of the poor person to exist, so you help him sustain himself.

Let us clarify this distinction by emphasizing the difference in how the performer of the act relates to the poor person - whereas one who gives charity relates to the poor person purely on an objective level based on the intolerability of the situation, one who does kindness overextends himself so that he identifies with and relates to the person on a more personal level. This is what Rashi means that giving a loan to a poor person is greater than charity, for in a loan there is an ongoing relationship between the giver and the poor individual, whereas giving money represents how the giver cannot tolerate the situation.

Now we are in a position to understand what our Mishna means that acts of kindness are one of the elements that the world stands on. Since in these activities there are relationships created between people, and society is founded upon such relationships, they are integral to maintaining a proper social environment. ■



GOD *is* NOT UNLIMITED

In our new Discussion Forum on Mesora.org, one person wrote the following: "Logically, one must arrive at the conclusion that G-d is all capable and has absolutely no limitations, and can do literally anything."

In dispute, God states He has limitations, and reason dictates this to be so: "Each man in his own sin shall be killed". God CANNOT punish one above 13 who has not sinned. God CANNOT become physical. God CANNOT share any qualities of the created world. God CANNOT simultaneously make a square a circle. These all fall under the realm of the "impossible". God performing the impossible is impossible; it is not a perfection.

It is a childish notion to suggest that God is like "Superman", capable of anything He wishes. These limitations are not imposed, but are His by nature, and contribute to His perfection. Similarly, a judge who is "limited" and cannot make an incorrect decision, is not said to be flawed by this limitation. But said limitation contributes to the judge's perfection. God's perfection negates His ability to be ignorant, to become physical, and all such nonsense. But according to the view above, God may become ignorant or physical if He desires. Christianity's fantasy claims this dangerous and incomprehensible imagination. It is heresy to suggest that God may do all He wishes, for these reasons. This false view that God is unlimited, also contains an internal contradiction, for accordingly, God might also render Himself "limited". ■



CHRISTMAS PARTIES

Maimonides teaches a fundamental purpose to our observance of the Sabbath: to display a deviation from other nations, as we rest, while they work. This is to induce a question from other peoples, so that we might explain our strange behavior: we are mimicking the Creator Who rested on the seventh day. Through our rest, and response, we successfully imbue others with the knowledge of God's existence, and His exclusive role as Creator.

Other laws insulate the Jew from inter-marriage, such as drinking with idolaters, for fear, lest we marry their daughters through close ties forged in the act of drinking. Not that all drinking is prohibited, or all parties forbidden, for some parties are merely to sustain friendships with coworkers, and in fact, do not contain any alien, religious ceremonies, although labeled as such. This article is not meant as a halachik ruling but as a suggestion.

We have another opportunity to remain true to Jewish philosophy by abstaining from Christmas parties. Our country guarantees freedom of religion, for which, we must be grateful to God, and the United States. Never before were Jews offered the opportunity to flourish in our Judaism with no oppression, and even with respect. By

abstaining from Christmas parties, we must not fear the ridicule of others, for we know God gave Judaism as the only religion to mankind. Such parties quite often enforce the false religion of Christianity into Jewish consciousness.

Unless our job is at stake, we are wise to refrain from attendance, even if the party is not of any religious nature, but merely an office gathering. For idolatry is the antithesis of Judaism, and God.

We do not proselytize, but we must remain focused on truth, and refrain from any recognition of idolatry. We do not enter Churches for this reason. If asked, we can very politely explain our reason for our absence at such parties: the Jew's role is to adhere to monotheism, and educate the masses when inquired. By recognizing other religions as we join in their parties celebrating Jesus, we fail in our role designated by God, and harm ourselves, as we compromise eternal Torah virtues, for the sake of fleeting vanities. By not attending these parties, we remain true to God's law, and afford others an opportunity to inquire and learn the difference between idolatrous rites and Jewish law; between fantasy and absolute truth; between false religions, and the only true religion given by God. ■

Letters

Noachides: Resting & Working on Sabbath

Reader: Dear Publishers of the Jewish Times, As a Ben Noach, I appreciate very much your article in the JewishTimes of Dec. 16th for the Noachides about the Sabbath. As family we kindle one candle at Friday sundown and pray to thanks Elohim for His creation and the sanctification of the seventh day. And we pray that Israel may keep The Sabbath in shalom and a good manner and also all the Jews in the Diaspora. At Saturday sundown we do the same but we thanks Adonai that He will work again in the universe to keep it alive and expand it and we thank Him that His people the Jews kept the Sabbath. At Saturday we work (we work in the garden, we cook food, we do the laundry, we drive our car to visit the shul, etc.) Is there something wrong with that? Is it wrong to commemorate that Hashem rested on the Seventh day?

*Yvan "Ben Noach" Kimpen
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Mesora: According to Jewish law, a gentile must not observe the Sabbath, as we have explained, and to which, you admirably adhere. I commend you on your philosophical outlook, and your actions to commemorate the Sabbath. For by doing so, you too recognize in a permitted manner, the Sabbath, the Creator and His Sabbath institution. There is no contradiction for your performance of work on Sabbath, together with your commemoration. For law forbids your complete rest, but human perfection allows for your recognition as well.

"True", for Me

Reader: Why do I have to believe in God as the Bible sees God? Why can't I believe in what God, is based on my own experiences? Why are writings from ages ago necessary? Didn't they believe that the world was flat?

Mesora: The answer is precisely for the very same reason you do not administer your own injections, but take counsel from a physician: you recognize that greater knowledge is available, aside from your own experiences and conclusions. We are not born with all the answers. Your very question here attests to your belief in this truth. Writings from long ago, or from today, may afford your increase in what is real and true, and simultaneously, your abandon from falsehood. Although we realized the Earth is a globe, and previous views were wrong, shall we discount all else that we learned from others, which remains true? Not only do others teach us great amounts of knowledge, one cannot live practically without relying on second hand knowledge. If we only believe what we witness, we will not trust doctors, or any professional claiming knowledge in any area. We cannot eat in someone's home, lest he lie about being a Jew. We cannot send our children to school, maybe all the teachers are liars and are not educated. Finally, if you are only convinced of your own, subjective experiences, and you are sure it is true, why, according to your view, would it be wrong for another person to agree with "your" experiences? But you must claim he is wrong, for he is not following "his" experiences, but yours. This view is self-contradictory and must be abandoned.

Creation

Reader: How did God create the physical world?

Mesora: If we knew that, we would be God. Man will discover much in his life, and in the lifetime of mankind. However, whatever knowledge we obtain, is but a drop in the sea of all knowledge. We are limited by design, and are limited in our thinking as well. We realize when we know truths, and when we do not know. We also realize when we CANNOT know something. Since our minds function according to cause and effect, and prior to creation, cause and effect did not yet exist, we cannot know how God created "something from nothing." (We are trying to breathe under water, in a sense.) Yet, He did somehow, for nothing physical can create itself, nor did it exist always. Matter cannot be infinite in size, or in time. Something - God - must have created the universe, for it too cannot create itself. But in this lifetime we will not know how God created the physical world.

Seeing God?

Reader: "And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram." (Genesis 17)

"And the Lord appeared unto him [Abraham] by the terebinths of Mamre, as he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day, and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood over against him." (Genesis 18)

From these passages and other passages regarding Moses and more on Abraham, the Lord "APPEARED" to man in a form that could be seen.

Mesora: You have interpreted the Torah without reading it entirely: (Numb. 12:6) "I appear to prophets in a dream or vision." (Paraphrased) This means all prophets but Moses experienced "visions" or "dreams" since God is not physical, and thus, cannot be perceived by the senses. Even Moses did not "see" God for this very reason: God is not, and cannot become physical. Furthermore, God predates the physical world, and created it. Therefore, He cannot not be physical.

Reader: Reading further in Genesis 18 the text is even more specific that the Lord appeared to Abraham in a physical form that could eat food Abraham prepared for Him, drink, talk and had feet for Abraham to offer to wash.

Mesora: Assuming God to be physical is a sin, which forfeits one's Olam Haba, "World to Come". Offering your own explanations, which contradict the Torah, violates the Torah's demand of referring to the "Torah She B'Al Peh" the Oral Law. Not one of the Rabbis or Sages throughout history accepted that God is physical, but they unanimously denied such an imagined notion. Many of these greats, including Maimonides and Unkelos went out of their way to explain seemingly anthropomorphic understandings of God. It is mandatory that you refer to their writings, and understand why minds far greater than we, went to such lengths to avoid any corporalization of God. Additionally, as God created the physical world, He must not be subject to its laws or features. He cannot be physical.

Letters

Mesora invites your questions, letters and suggestions for topics.

"The only poor question is the one not asked."

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