

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The parsha of Beha'alotcha speaks about the silver trumpets -- clarions -- Moses was commanded to make: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Make two trumpets of silver; make them of hammered work. They shall serve you to summon the congregation [edah] and cause the camps [machanot] to journey.'" (Num. 10:1-2)

This apparently simple passage became a springboard for one of the most profound meditations of the late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. It appears in his great essay Kol Dodi Dofek, on the Jewish approach to suffering.

There are, says Rabbi Soloveitchik, two ways in which people become a group -- a community, society, or nation. The first is when they face a common enemy. They band together for mutual protection. Like all animals who come together in herds or flocks to defend themselves against predators, we do this for our survival. Such a group is a machaneh -- a camp, a defensive formation.

There is another, quite different, form of association. People can come together because they share a vision, an aspiration, a set of ideals. This is the meaning of edah, congregation. Edah is related to the word ed, witness. Edot (as opposed to chukim and mishpatim) are the commands that testify to Jewish belief -- as Shabbat testifies to creation, Passover to the Divine involvement in history, and so on. An edah is not a defensive formation but a creative one. People join together to do what none could achieve alone. A true congregation is a society built around a shared project, a vision of the common good, an edah.

Rabbi Soloveitchik says these are not just two types of group, but in the most profound sense, two different ways of existing and relating to the world. A camp is brought into being by what happens to it from the outside. A congregation comes into existence by internal decision. The former is reactive, the latter proactive. The first is a response to what has

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happened to the group in the past. The second represents what the group seeks to achieve in the future. Whereas camps exist even in the animal kingdom, congregations are uniquely human. They flow from the human ability to think, speak, communicate, envision a society different from any that has existed in the past, and to collaborate to bring it about.

Jews are a people in both of these two quite different ways. Our ancestors became a machaneh in Egypt, forged together by a crucible of slavery and suffering. They were different. They were not Egyptians. They were Hebrews -- a word which probably means "on the other side," "an outsider." Ever since, Jews have known that we are thrown together by circumstance. We share a history all too often written in tears. Rabbi Soloveitchik calls this the covenant of fate (brit goral).

This is not a purely negative phenomenon. It gives rise to a powerful sense that we are part of a single story -- that what we have in common is stronger than the things that separate us: "Our fate does not distinguish between rich and poor...[or] between the pietist and the assimilationist. Even though we speak a plethora of languages, even though we are inhabitants of different lands...we still share the same fate. If the Jew in the hovel is beaten, then the security of the Jew in the palace is endangered. 'Do not think that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace.'" (Est. 4:13)

Our shared community's fate leads also to a sense of shared suffering. When we pray for the recovery of a sick person, we do so "among all the sick of Israel." When we comfort a mourner, we do so "among all the other mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." We weep together. We celebrate together. This in turn leads to shared responsibility: "All Israel are sureties for one another." And this leads to collective action in the field of welfare, charity, and deeds of loving kindness. As Maimonides puts it: "All Israelites...are like brothers, as it is said, 'You are children of the Lord your God' (Deut. 14:1). If brother shows no compassion to brother, who will?...Their eyes are therefore lifted to their brothers."

All these are dimensions of the covenant of fate, born in the experience of slavery in Egypt. But there is an additional element of Jewish identity. Soloveitchik calls this the covenant of destiny (brit ye'ud) -- entered into at Mount Sinai. This defines the

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people of Israel not as the object of persecution but the subject of a unique vocation, to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6).

Under this covenant, the we became defined not by what others do to us but by the task we has undertaken, the role we have chosen to play in history. In Egypt we did not choose to become slaves, that was a fate thrust upon us by someone else. We did, however, choose to become God's people at Sinai when r said, "We will do and obey" (Ex. 24:7). Destiny, call, vocation, purpose, task: these create not a machaneh but an edah, not a camp but a congregation.

Our task as a people of destiny is to bear witness to the presence of God -- through the way we lead our lives (Torah) and the path we chart as a people across the centuries (history).

G. K. Chesterton once wrote that "America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed." Chesterton was notoriously antisemitic, and this evidently prevented him from recalling that the reason America was founded on a creed was that its founders, Puritans all, were steeped in what they called the Old Testament. They took as their model the covenant made between God and the Israelites at Sinai, and it was this that linked nationhood and the idea of a specific task or mission. Herman Melville gave this one of its classic expressions in his 1849 novel, *White-Jacket*: "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people -- the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world.... God has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls. The rest of the nations must soon be in our rear. We are pioneers of the world; the advance-guard, sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the New World that is ours."

It is the concept of covenant that gives Jewish (and American) identity this strange dual character. Nations are usually forged through long historical experience, through what happens to them -- rather than what they consciously set themselves to do. They fall into the category of machaneh. Religions, on the other hand, are defined in terms of beliefs and a sense of mission. Each is constituted as an edah. What is unique about Judaism is the way it brings together these separate and quite distinct ideas. There are

nations that contain many religions and there are religions that are spread over many nations, but only in the case of Judaism do religion and nation coincide.

This has had remarkable consequences. For almost two thousand years Jews were scattered throughout the world, yet they saw themselves and were seen by others as a nation -- the world's first global nation. It was a nation held together not by geographical proximity or any other of the normal accompaniments of nationhood. Jews did not speak the same vernacular. Rashi spoke French, Maimonides Arabic. Rashi lived in a Christian culture, Maimonides in a Muslim one. Nor was their fate the same. While the Jews of Spain were enjoying their Golden Age, the Jews of northern Europe were being massacred in the Crusades. In the fifteenth century, when the Jews of Spain were being persecuted and expelled, those of Poland were enjoying a rare spring of tolerance. What held Jews together during these centuries was shared faith. In the trauma that accompanied European Emancipation and the subsequent rise of racial antisemitism, many Jews lost that faith. Yet the events of the past century -- persecution, pogroms, and the Holocaust, followed by the birth of the State of Israel and the constant fight to survive against war and terror -- tended to bind Jews together in a covenant of fate in the face of the hostility of the world. So when Jews were divided by fate they were united by faith, and when they were divided by faith they were united again by fate. Such is the irony, or the providential nature, of Jewish history.

Judaism in the past two centuries has fissured and fractured into different edot: Orthodox and Reform, religious and secular, and the many subdivisions that continue to atomise Jewish life into non-communicating sects and subcultures. Yet in times of crisis we are still capable of heeding the call of collective responsibility, knowing as we do that Jewish fate tends to be indivisible. No Jew, to paraphrase John Donne, is an island, entire of him -- or herself. We are joined by the gossamer strands of collective memory, and these can sometimes lead us back to a sense of shared destiny.

The duality was given its first expression this week in Beha'alotecha, with the command: "Make two trumpets of silver; make them of hammered work. They shall serve you to summon the congregation [edah], and cause the camps [machanot] to journey." Sometimes the clarion call speaks to our sense of faith. We are God's people, His emissaries and ambassadors, charged with making His presence real in the world by healing deeds and holy lives. At other times the trumpet that sounds and summons us is the call of fate: Jewish lives endangered in Israel or the Diaspora by the unremitting hostility of those who call themselves children of Abraham yet claim that they, not we, are his true heirs.

Whichever sound the silver instruments make,

they call on that duality that makes Jews and Judaism inseparable. However deep the divisions between us, we remain one family in fate and faith. When the trumpet sounds, it sounds for us. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd it came to pass, when the Ark traveled forward, that Moses said, "Rise up O God, and scatter Your enemies; and let them that hate You flee before You." And when it rested he said, "Return O God, unto the myriads [literally ten thousands] of the families of Israel." (Numbers 10:35–36) I would like to invite you to join me in a fascinating detective search, an intellectual journey whose destination is the understanding of a strange typographical biblical insertion in this portion of Behaalotcha, which gives rise to an even stranger rabbinical assertion. Tradition ordains that the two stirring verses quoted above be bracketed, as it were, by two inverted nuns, the fourteenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet. So strong is this scribal tradition that even the printed Bible texts set these verses off with the two inverted nuns. The Talmud raises the issue of this curious typography, explaining – in the name of R. Judah the Prince, primary transmitter of the Mishna – that "in the Torah parchment this section is preceded and followed by a reversed nun...because it ranks as a biblical book by itself" (Shabbat 116).

I would suggest that our sages are granting these verses the status of a separate book because they encapsulate the true potency of our Torah; indeed, these verses are teaching us that the true source of our strength, endurance, and eternity as a nation is our Torah, and our Torah alone!

Lest we make the mistake that might makes right, and that physical prowess ensures survival, we must be mindful of the fact that the Egyptian pyramids, Babylonian ziggurats, Olympian idols, Roman coliseums, Nazi swastikas, and Bolshevik hammer and sickles have indeed been scattered by the winds of history, while the pages of our Torah parchment – which in reality can be overturned by a strong wind – have nevertheless enabled our beleaguered and seemingly powerless nation (at least for two thousand years of exile) to emerge strong and influential; indeed, it is because of that Torah that we have succeeded in rising from the ashes of Auschwitz, returning as a sovereign nation to our homeland, and effecting an ingathering of exiles from Ethiopia, India, Bosnia, and Russia.

But why utilize the Hebrew letter nun to express the truth of the power of our book? In Berakhot (4b) we

are taught that the Ashrei prayer, comprised primarily of the 145th Psalm, which we are enjoined to say thrice daily, follows the pattern of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet by having each of its verses begin with another letter of the alphabet in proper order from aleph to taf. However, one letter is conspicuous by its absence: "Why is there no nun in Ashrei? Because the fall of Israel begins with it, as it is written: 'Fallen, [nifla], she shall not again rise, O virgin of Israel [Amos 5:2].'" This Talmudic passage states that nun is the last letter we would expect to find encompassing a "book" attesting to Israel's eternity. However, we must remember that the nuns which surround our verses are inverted!

If we turn to Nahmanides's explanation concerning the rainbow which God placed in the sky as an expression of His covenant with Noah, we find that, for this great sage, the symbolism of the rainbow is that of an inverted bow [as in bow and arrow]: He [God] has not made the rainbow with its feet bent upward because it might have appeared that arrows were being shot from heaven.... Instead He made it the opposite of this in order to show that they are not shooting at the earth from the heavens. It is indeed the way of warriors to invert the instruments of war which they hold in their hands when calling for peace. (Nahmanides on Genesis 9:13)

If the inverted bow, or rainbow, of the covenant with Noah symbolizes the very antithesis of war, the inversion expressing not war but peace, then it is logical to assert that the inverted nun of this portion symbolizes the ascent of Israel rather than her demise. Indeed, the Talmudic passage we cited previously goes on to reinterpret the verse from Psalms by merely changing the punctuation: "The fallen [daughter of Israel], she shall never [fall] again; Rise, O Virgin of Israel" (Amos 5:2). In effect, our two reversed nuns are a silent covenant between God and the Jewish people that the Torah, eternal source of strength of our nation, has the power to scatter all our enemies as long as we, the People of Israel, always move together with the Ark! In effect, ours is a portable Torah which we must always take with us.

Permit me to develop this idea one step further – and attempt to elucidate the deepest meaning of the words of these verses. "When the Ark traveled forward" alerts us to the significance of the necessity of the Ark, and the Torah it encompasses, to travel together with the nation, albeit a little bit ahead – but never so far ahead that it leaves the people behind. Perhaps this is the real significance of Rashi's comment: "Since the Ark was three days ahead of where the Jews were when they were traveling, therefore Moses said, 'Stand and wait for us; don't go further away'" (Rashi on Numbers 10:35). Rashi is teaching us that Moses was scrupulous about making sure that the Ark was never more than three days ahead. Remember the well-

known adage of folk-wisdom: If you're one step ahead of the generation, you're a genius. If you're two steps ahead, you're a crackpot! Obviously we require the proper religious leadership to ensure that the people are in step with the Torah – but the Torah must be in step with the people as well. Hence our sages are forbidden from legislating a decree that the majority of committed Israel cannot abide by.

Furthermore, the latter portion reads: "And when it rested he said 'Return O God unto the myriads [literally ten thousands] of the families of Israel.'" The root of the word "when it rested," nuho, derives from the same root as sweetness, gentleness (noah in Hebrew), expressing the idea that our Torah must be sweet and gently accepting and inclusive. Seen in this light, the verse enjoins us not only to endeavor to make Torah relevant, but also to see to it that it be an embracing and accepting Torah, a Torah of love and inclusiveness. After all, does not the Talmud teach: For three years the schools of Hillel and Shammai debated the law, until a heavenly voice declared... "These and those are the words of the living God, and the law is like Beit Hillel." If so [if both views emanate from God], then why is the law decided in accord with the school of Hillel? Because they are pleasant and accepting [nohin], always teaching their view together with the view of the school of Shammai and even citing the position of Shammai before citing their own position. (Eruvin 13b)

If our Torah is a law of accepting love and not of fanatic hatred, of warming light rather than of destructive fire, then the myriads of families of Israel shall truly return to the welcoming words of God. ©2019 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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In many respects this is the saddest chapter that appears in the Torah. The Jewish people, having successfully been released from Egyptian slavery and arriving at Mount Sinai and accepting the sacredness of God's Torah, they then embark on the building of the Tabernacle. They are then able to successfully complete that project and are ready to undertake the final mission that they are charged with in the desert of Sinai -- entry into the land of Israel, its conquest and settlement.

Here, on the threshold of victory and fulfillment, the whole project begins to unravel. The father-in-law of Moshe, Yitro, deserts them for reasons which the text of the Torah does not expand upon. Then the people begin to complain about the food -- miraculous as it was -- that is available to them in the desert and they complain about God and, naturally, about Moshe as well.

When people are in a bad mood, there is no way they can be satisfied, no matter what. We all know

that if we come home after a bad day at the office and a terrible commute and enter our homes in such a mood, then whatever delicious dinner may have been prepared for us tastes like ashes in our mouths.

We are always prisoners of our psyche. The Jewish people were afraid of having to enter the land of Israel and to somehow build the nation state on their own, even though they are promised, in fact guaranteed, divine aid. They are in a bad mood, so the food is not good, and Moshe appears to them to be the wrong man for the wrong job.

The mood eventually spreads even to the brother and sister of Moshe. Inexplicably, his beloved sister Miriam who saved him from the ravages of the Nile River when he was an infant and who rallied the women of Israel to his leadership after the miracle of the splitting of the sea at Yam Suf, now speaks critically about him.

His brother Aaron, who came out of Egypt to greet and strengthen him at the beginning of his mission to free the Jewish people from the bondage of Egypt, now also joins Miriam in criticism. They are reflective of the mood of the people. When such a mood exists, nothing is good, and no one is above criticism no matter how unjustified that criticism may be.

This mood will eventually result in the debacle of the spies that will dissuade the Jewish people from even attempting to fulfill their God-given mission of settling in the land of Israel. There really is no accounting for human moods. In fact, one of the great struggles of life is simply to overcome the moods that come over us. Most times external frustrations and unimportant things cause these behaviors.

The great men of the Chasidic and Mussar movements attempted to create mechanisms by which their followers would be able to overcome these bouts of depression and frustration. Judaism demands that we fortify our spirit with optimism and inner tranquility so that we can gain true happiness with our situation and circumstances. This is no easy task but all of us know that life demands it of us. ©2019 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DAVID LEVINE

The Special Trumpets

When we hear the words "teki'ah and teru'ah" our first thoughts are the sounding of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah. Yet this is not the only teki'ah and teru'ah that we find in the Torah. This week's parasha discusses the same sound but not in the same context nor sounded by means of a shofar. We are introduced to the two chatzotzrot (trumpets) that Hashem commands Moshe to make. The Torah tells us, "Make for yourself two trumpets of silver, beaten out

of one piece you shall make them, and they will serve you for the calling of the assembly and for the journeying of the camps. When they shall blow them all the assembly will assemble themselves to you at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. But if they blow with one, then (only) the princes will assemble themselves to you, the heads of the thousands of Yisrael. When you blow a teru'ah then the camps which encamp to the East shall journey forward. And when they blow a teru'ah a second time, then the camps that encamp in the South shall journey forward, teru'ah shall they blow for their journeys forward. But when the assembly is to be assembled you shall blow but not a teru'ah. And the children of Aharon the Kohanim (priests) will sound the trumpets and it will be for you as an ordinance forever throughout your generations. And when you go out to war in your land, against the oppressor that oppresses you then you shall blow a teru'ah with the trumpets and you will be remembered before your Elokim and you will be saved from your enemies. And on the day of your joy and on your festivals and at the beginnings of your months you will blow the trumpets at your elevating offerings and at your peace offerings and they will be for you a memorial before your Elokim, I am Hashem your Elokim."

Since the Torah discusses both the shofar and the chatzotzrah it is important for us to understand the significance of the chatzotzrah. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the root of the word is chatzar which is like a courtyard surrounding the general principle. "Transposed to bugle sounds, chatzar would be to let a signal be sounded, and chatzotzrot the instrument for producing such sounds." The instrument calls those for whom it is sounded to congregate in a centralized area. The major difference between a shofar and a chatzotzrah is that the shofar is made from the horn of an animal and the chatzotzrah is made of metal and fashioned out of silver. It is straight whereas the shofar is most often curved.

Moshe is told to make these particular chatzotzrot and they are used only in his lifetime. Normally when we see the words, "and Hashem spoke to Moshe saying", we find immediately that Hashem says, "speak to the Children of Yisrael and say to them...." In this case, however, the Torah does not include those words and is meant for Moshe, himself. Rashi explains that Yehoshua did not watch over them while Moshe was alive and they were buried immediately before his death so that they would not be used by a later generation. In the land, new chatzotzrot were sounded before the King as a warning of his approach. This should have been done with Moshe, but he passed on this honor because of his humility.

There is a great machloket, difference of opinion, on how many times and when the chatzotzrot were sounded when the people began their travels. The Torah speaks of only two times that the chatzotzrot

were sounded before the camp traveled, once before the East camp traveled and then again before the South camp traveled. Our Rabbis have added to this a third time before the West camp traveled and a fourth time before the North camp traveled. The Ramban suggests that this can be learned out from the phrase "they shall sound the teru'ah for their travels." The Torah felt that it was unnecessary to specify the third and fourth soundings for the travels since it could be understood from the text that a pattern had been established.

We find that the Torah gives us another time besides gathering the people or preparing them for travel on which we sound these trumpets. "And on the day of your joy and on your festivals and at the beginnings of your months you will blow the trumpets at your elevating offerings and at your peace offerings and they will be for you a memorial before your Elokim, I am Hashem your Elokim." Our Rabbis learn from this pasuk that the chatzotzrot were to be sounded on the Mo'adim (Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot) and on Rosh Chodesh, the beginning of each month. The Ba'al Haturim uses the word simchat'chem and applies its numerical value for the phrase gam bayom haShabbat (also on the day of Shabbat). He also notes that the word u'v'mo'adeichem is missing the letter vav which corresponds to the number six. He uses the number six to include other mo'adim, namely: (1) Pesach, (2) Atzeret, another name for Shavuot, (3) Rosh Hashanah, (4) Yom Kippur, (5) Sukkot, and (6) Shemini Atzeret.

The chatzotzrot were also used to call the people to war. "And when you go out to war in your land, against the oppressor that oppresses you then you shall blow a teru'ah with the trumpets and you will be remembered before your Elokim and you will be saved from your enemies." It appears that this is a call to Hashem to remember the B'nei Yisrael and fight for them. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that when the B'nei Yisrael journeyed from the mountain on which they received the Torah from Hashem, they understood that two obstacles were in their paths: (1) the nations of the world were also offered the Torah but they refused. They were then sure to be jealous and hateful to the one nation that answered "we will do and we will listen." These other nations were drawn to attack, and the chatzotzrot would remind Hashem of our willingness to accept His Torah and cause Him to protect us. (2) The second obstacle was that the protection which Hashem offered in the desert with His Cloud of Glory would not be the same protection that they would receive once they were settled in the land that Hashem promised their forefathers. The observance of the holidays which included Rosh Chodesh and Shabbat together with the sounding of the trumpets on those days would remind both the B'nei Yisrael and Hashem of the unique bond that they shared. This would act as the reminder to

Hashem to protect them as he had done in the desert.

We no longer have the Holy Temple in which we can sound the trumpets as a visual and audio reminder of Hashem's protection. Yet we see that protection regularly just as we see the hatred that the world has for those under Hashem's protection. It is our observance of Hashem's Torah and especially of His Mo'adim and His special days which can continue that miraculous protection for the future. May our efforts continue to demonstrate to Hashem our willingness to maintain that special bond which we share. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Complaining to Moshe (Moses), the Israelites cry out that they remember the fish served to them in Egypt that they received without price, "hinam." (Numbers 11:5) Could they really have received food with no strings attached? After all, these are the same Egyptians who refused to even give the Jewish slaves straw for bricks. As the Midrash asks: "If they wouldn't give them straw for naught, would they have given them fish for naught?"

Nachmanides believes that this is certainly possible because at the riverside, the Jews would be given small fish that had no value in the eyes of the Egyptians. Ibn Ezra reflects this line of reasoning but adds that the term "hinam" should not be taken literally – it should be understood to mean inexpensive. They received fish at bargain basement prices.

Rashi offers a most insightful answer to this question. "Hinam," says Rashi, means "free of mitzvot (commandments)." In Egypt, without the commandments the Jews felt unencumbered; as they were free to do as they pleased. Here, after the giving of the Torah at Sinai, with all of its prohibitive laws, the Jews felt that there were strings attached as they felt restricted by the commandments. This seems to make sense. Freedom and limitation are antithetical. If, for example, I'm not allowed to eat a particular food my options are severely narrowed and no longer am I feeling "hinam" or free.

However, there is another way of understanding the presence of the commandments. The mitzvot, even the laws that seem to be the most restrictive, can often teach self-discipline. Self discipline is a passageway to freedom. Limitation is, therefore, a conduit to freedom.

Additionally, we commonly associate freedom with the ability to do whatever we want, whenever we want. Freedom is not only the right to say yes, it is the ability to say no. If I cannot push away a particular food-my physical urges may have unbridled freedom, but my mind is enslaved. What appears to be a clear green light, can sometimes turn out to be the greatest of burdens.

The opposite is also true. What appears to be a burden, can often lead to unlimited freedom. A story illustrates this point. When God first created the world, the birds were formed without wings. They complained to God: "we're small, and feel overpowered by the larger animals." God responds: "Have patience, you'll see."

In time, God gave the birds wings. The complaining even intensified. "It's worse than ever," cried the birds. "Until now we were all small, but still quick enough to elude the animals of prey. Now we have these appendages by our side and we feel weighed down.

God gently took the birds and taught them how to fly high and then higher. They were able to reach above the clouds and escape all threats from their animal adversaries.

The mitzvot are like the wings of the Jew. When not understood fully, they can make us feel stifled and weighed down. Yet, when explored deeply and given significance they give us new ways of looking at the world, and looking at our selves. They teach us meaning and self-discipline. With these gifts we then can truly fly high and far---we then can truly be free – "hinam." ©2019 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Fish & Chip on the Shoulder

It seems that some people cannot appreciate something special. Imagine! The Jews were treated to a heavenly gift of manna, a supernatural delicacy that fell from the heavens, yet they complained about it. Not only did the manna sustain the Jewish nation during their 40-year sojourn in the desert; it had the ability to transform itself to please the palate of the most advanced culinary critic. It tasted exactly the way its eaters desired it to taste! Whether Belgian waffles with ice cream, steak, or hash browns, through mere thought the eater was able to transform the manna's flavor into the most delicious of delicacies. Yet, the Jewish nation was still not happy. "We remember the free fish that we ate in Egypt!" (Numbers 11:5) they exclaimed. The Talmud is troubled by the words 'free fish,' "since when," asks the Talmud, "was anything free in the land of slavery?" The Talmud answers that the word free, means free from mitzvos (commandments). The Jews had no mitzvos to observe during most of their exile in Egypt. They had not yet received their charge at Sinai. Therefore, they recalled the free fish that they ate during the Egyptian bondage.

The obvious question is, however, what does food -- fish or manna -- have to do with freedom? Why

did they complain about their new responsibilities and intrinsically link it with the miraculous bread? Was it the miraculous bread that changed their status? Why did they link fish with freedom? What was it about the manna that made them feel they had a chip on their shoulders?

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski tells a wonderful story that took place back in Europe.

Little Chaim sat in the back row of his cheder. One day the Rebbe, a stern fellow who had little patience with his young charges, called upon him to recite the letters of the Aleph-Bet from a small reader. The teacher took a long stick and pointed to the letter Aleph on the page. "Vos iz Das? (What is this?)" he shouted. Chaim looked him straight in the eye, shrugged his shoulders, and said nothing.

Whack! The stick came down solidly on the boy's hand. "I said, 'Vos iz Das!' " screamed the teacher tapping his stick fiercely on the letter.

Again, Chaim jutted out his lower lip and shrugged his shoulders even higher. He spread out his hands, palms up offering his hand as a sacrifice to the dreaded stick, while intoning, 'I have no idea what that letter is!

His offering was duly accepted, and once again, the frustrated teacher brought the stick down on poor Chaim's hand. After futile attempts to have Chaim pronounce the Aleph, the teacher went to the next student who proceeded to recite the entire Aleph Bet flawlessly.

After class, Chaim's friends surrounded him. "We don't understand." They stated in uniform amazement. "Everybody knows the letter Aleph! When the Rebbe pointed to the Aleph, why didn't you just tell him, 'It's an Aleph'?"

Chaim smiled. "I'm smarter than that. Of course I knew what the letter was! But I also I knew that the moment I say 'Aleph,' our Rabbi would point to the Bet and ask me, 'what is that?' Then he'd point to the Gimmel and Dalet! Soon I'd have to recite the entire Aleph-Bet! I'd rather take a few whacks at the beginning and not have to go through the whole ordeal!"

The commentaries explain that when the Jewish people reminisced about free fish they remembered an era when they had no spiritual or moral responsibilities. The Jews understood that when one eats manna & the fare of the angels & angelic responsibility accompanies his gastronomic actions. The Jews would have rather foregone the delicacies of miraculous manna to be freed of the responsibilities it entailed. They did not want to recite even the Aleph in the knowledge that an obligation to recite the Bet and Gimmel would follow naturally.

Often in life we hesitate to begin the first step. Though that step may be simple and uncomplicated, we fear to begin treading in full awareness of the responsibilities that those first steps may lead us.

Accepting responsibility is, however, the role of a people to whom the world looks for guidance.

The first bite of a new undertaking will be surely be deliciously challenging, though the second bite perhaps a little more difficult to swallow. But at the end of the meal you have will have not bitten more than you can swallow. Those who have dined on the fare of leadership and responsibility will realize that the food of accomplishment is truly more delicious than chewing over misery. The fare of leadership may even be spiritually delicious -- perhaps as delicious the manna. ©2019 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And Moshe cried unto the Lord, saying 'Please God, heal her (Miriam), I beseech you" (Numbers 12:13). Miriam, Moshe's sister, was stricken with tzoraas for speaking against Moshe! And what is Moshe's response? He prays for her to be healed! What can we learn from Moshe's behavior?

The Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, who lived 1288-1344) shares with us an illuminating insight. From here we learn that even if someone acts against you and is punished for his act, you should pray for him or her and do what you can to help. Keep this in mind for those you love!

Miriam's intent was well-intended. However, aiding those who wish to hurt you is definitely not a Jewish value, not a praiseworthy behavior and not a beneficial idea! *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2019 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI HERSHEL SCHACHTER

TorahWeb

The obligation to offer a korban Pesach begins at twelve noon on erev Pesach, and the korban must be offered in the Beis Hamikdash before shkia. One is considered to be "b'derech r'choka" if he is so far away from Yerushalayim on erev Pesach at noon that even if he were to walk non-stop at a reasonable pace he will still not arrive in Yerushalayim before the shkia. (The Rambam differs on this definition. See Eretz Hatzvi p. 81.) He simply does not halachically relate to Yerushalayim; even if he could travel by horse or car and easily arrive in Yerushalayim before shkia, he is still considered b'derech r'choka. Furthermore, even if he joined with others and became a partner in someone else's korban Pesach, and he managed to arrive before the shkia, he still has not fulfilled the mitzvah. (Pesachim 92b -- shelo hurtza) Only one who is b'derech k'rova can become a partner in a korban Pesach and fulfill this mitzvah. All of those who are b'derech r'choka at noon on the fourteenth of Nissan are obligated to bring a korban Pesach sheini one month later, on the fourteenth of Iyar.

After the passing of the Nodah B'Yehuda a dispute developed amongst his close talmidim regarding the nature of this din. Why should derech r'choka be determined by the distance one can walk by foot to Yerushalayim? Was setting the requisite distance based on the pace of travel on foot built in to the very definition of the halacha of derech r'choka, and therefore how fast one could travel by other means was and is entirely irrelevant, or was travel only used as an example, since the average traveler in the days of the second Beis Ha'mikdash would travel by foot, but now that we have trains and cars and the average traveler would certainly use other means of travel, the distance of derech r'choka should be adjusted accordingly? (Sefer Chaim U'Beracha L'Mishmeres Shalom, entry entitled Gadol Habayis, paragraph 12)

This debate regarding korban Pesach in the late 1700s was unfortunately not relevant halacha l'maaseh since there was no Beis Ha'mikdash at the time and the korban Pesach was not being offered. The rabbonim said that when the third beis ha'mikdash will be built, techiyas ha'meisim will take place and we will be able to ask Moshe Rabbeinu this shaila.

There is, however, another halacha which is a function of this din which is relevant today. The Gemorah tells us that if someone dies and the family starts sitting shiva, and a relative who is unaware of the death shows up in the home of the aveilim before shiva is over, he picks up shiva from what they are up to and he terminates his aveilus with those who started earlier. The Gemorah (Moed Kattan 21b, Tosafos s.v. Makom Karov) says, however, that this is only in cases where the relative in question came from a "makom karov". The rishonim borrow the definition of makom karov from the din of korban Pesach: if the relative was close enough to the beis ha'avel when shiva began that he would have been able to arrive within one day, his location is considered to be a makom karov. Regarding this din we cannot wait until techiyas ha'meisim and ask Moshe Rabbeinu -- this halacha is relevant every day of the year even when there isn't a Beis Ha'mikdash! Later poskim ruled that since we have a rule in the Gemorah (Moed Kattan 18a, halacha l'hakeil b'aveilus) that whenever there is any slight sofek in Hilchos Aveilus we go l'kula, we should be lenient and say that when the aveil was more than ten parso'os away from the beis ha'avel but could arrive within one day if he traveled by train or by car, which is the normal way of traveling a distance today, he should end his shiva with the rest of the family.

Today the average person traveling a long distance would certainly travel by airplane, via which one can get from one side of the world to the other within one day. Should we therefore say that there is no place in the world that is called a makom rachok or a derech r'choka? Rav Moshe Feinstein was of the opinion that this cannot be. The Torah has dinim that

apply only to one who is b'makom rachok and all aspects of the Torah are eternal. Rav Moshe suggested that of necessity we must limit this halacha and say that the person's location must at least be on the same continent as the beis ha'ovel in order to be considered a makom karov, and one does not halachically relate to a city on a different continent. It is for that reason that Rav Moshe felt that this din cannot apply connecting people in Eretz Yisroel and a beis ha'ovel in America.

Rav Yehuda Halevi lived in Europe when he declared, "Libi Bamizrach Va'ani B'sof Maarav", but those of us who live in America are on a different continent. As such, even if one living in America feels that his heart is really "Bamizrach", Eretz Yisroel can not be considered "his makom." ©2019 Rabbi H. Schachter and TorahWeb.org

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"Dayo Lavo Min HaDin"

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

This law cited in the title is a rule derived from the principle of "Fortiori" (Kal V'achomer), one of the principles of logic that are followed in the Torah from which our Sages derive laws. Thus, for example when the brothers of Joseph said to him "Behold the monies that we found in our sacks we returned to you..so how can we be accused of stealing from the house of your master silver or gold?" is not a logical conclusion for the brothers could not establish that they did not take the silver or gold using this logic. We must apply the principle that the derived law (the stealing of the gold or silver) cannot be more stringent than the source law (the returning of the money).

The basis for this principle is derived from the sentence that appears in this week's portion (12;14), "Were her father to spit in her face, would she not be humiliated for seven days?" Thus, if Miriam's father became angry at her, would she not be punished for at least seven days? Surely when Almighty G-d became angry at her she should be punished for more time than that! However Miriam's punishment was indeed only for seven days thus the stringent cannot be more stringent than the source law (the lesser punishment).

However, were it not for this principle of "Dayo" ("it is sufficient" cited in the title) how many days would Miriam be punished for? The Talmud states fourteen days.

How do we arrive at this assumption?

Some believe that logically the penalty from G-d should be double that of man, while others derive this amount from the portion in the Torah dealing with leprosy (Mitzorah) since each of the units for which one must be isolated before the Kohen declares one as a leper is seven days and the maximum time of isolation is fourteen days. Others simply state that if you wish to derive a number, you simply double it. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit