

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

The first translation of the Torah into another language -- Greek -- took place in around the second century BCE, in Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy II. It is known as the Septuagint, in Hebrew HaShivim, because it was done by a team of seventy scholars. The Talmud, however, says that at various points the Sages at work on the project deliberately mistranslated certain texts because they believed that a literal translation would simply be unintelligible to a Greek readership. One of these texts was the phrase, "On the seventh day God finished all the work He had made." Instead, the translators wrote, "On the sixth day God finished." (Megillah 9a)

What was it that they thought the Greeks would not understand? How did the idea that God made the universe in six days make more sense than that He did so in seven? It seems puzzling, yet the answer is simple. The Greeks could not understand the seventh day, Shabbat, as itself part of the work of Creation. What is creative about resting? What do we achieve by not making, not working, not inventing? The idea seems to make no sense at all.

Indeed, we have the independent testimony of the Greek writers of that period, that one of the things they ridiculed in Judaism was Shabbat. One day in seven Jews do not work, they said, because they are lazy. The idea that the day itself might have independent value was apparently beyond their comprehension. Oddly enough, within a very short period of time the empire of Alexander the Great began to crumble, just as had the earlier city state of Athens that gave rise to some of the greatest thinkers and writers in history. Civilisations, like individuals, can suffer from burnout. It's what happens when you don't have a day of rest written into your schedule. As Ahad HaAm said: "More than the Jewish people has kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jewish people."

Rest one day in seven and you won't burn out.

Shabbat, which we encounter for the first time in this week's parsha, is one of the greatest institutions the world has ever known. It changed the way the world thought about time. Prior to Judaism, people measured time either by the sun -- the solar calendar of 365 days aligning us with the seasons -- or by the moon, that is, by months ("month" comes from the word "moon") of

roughly thirty days. The idea of the seven-day week -- which has no counterpart in nature -- was born in the Torah and spread throughout the world via Christianity and Islam, both of which borrowed it from Judaism, marking the difference simply by having it on a different day. We have years because of the sun, months because of the moon, and weeks because of the Jews.

What Shabbat gave -- and still gives -- is the unique opportunity to create space within our lives, and within society as a whole, in which we are truly free. Free from the pressures of work; free from the demands of ruthless employers; free from the siren calls of a consumer society urging us to spend our way to happiness; free to be ourselves in the company of those we love. Somehow this one day has renewed its meaning in generation after generation, despite the most profound economic and industrial change. In Moses' day it meant freedom from slavery to Pharaoh. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century it meant freedom from sweatshop working conditions of long hours for little pay. In ours, it means freedom from emails, smartphones, and the demands of 24/7 availability.

What our parsha tells us is that Shabbat was among the first commands the Israelites received on leaving Egypt. Having complained about the lack of food, God told them that He would send them manna from heaven, but they were not to gather it on the seventh day. Instead, a double portion would fall on the sixth. That is why to this day we have two challot on Shabbat, in memory of that time.

Not only was Shabbat culturally unprecedented. Conceptually, it was so as well. Throughout history people have dreamed of an ideal world. We call such visions, utopias, from the Greek *ou* meaning "no" and *topos* meaning "place." (The word was coined in 1516 by Sir Thomas More, who used it as the title of his book.) They are called that because no such dream has ever come true, except in one instance, namely Shabbat. Shabbat is "utopia now," because on it we create, for twenty-five hours a week, a world in which there are no hierarchies, no employers and employees, no buyers and sellers, no inequalities of wealth or power, no production, no traffic, no din of the factory or clamour of the marketplace. It is "the still point of the turning world," a pause between symphonic movements, a break between the chapters of our days, an equivalent in time of the open countryside between towns where you can feel the breeze and hear the song of birds. Shabbat is

utopia, not as it will be at the end of time but rather, as we rehearse for it now in the midst of time.

God wanted the Israelites to begin their one-day-in-seven rehearsal of freedom almost as soon as they left Egypt, because real freedom, of the seven-days-in-seven kind, takes time, centuries, millennia. The Torah regards slavery as wrong, but it did not abolish it immediately because people were not yet ready for this. Neither Britain nor America abolished it until the nineteenth century, and even then not without a struggle. Yet the outcome was inevitable once Shabbat had been set in motion, because slaves who know freedom one day in seven will eventually rise against their chains.

(On the wrongness of slavery from a Torah perspective, see the important analysis in Rabbi N. L. Rabinovitch, *Mesilot BiLevavam* (Maaleh Adumim: Maaliyot, 2015), 38-45. The basis of the argument is the view, central to both the Written Torah and the Mishna, that all humans share the same ontological dignity as the image and likeness of God. This was in the sharpest possible contrast to the views, for instance, of Plato and Aristotle. Rabbi Rabinovitch analyses the views of the Sages, and of Maimonides and Me'iri, on the phrase "They shall be your slaves forever" (Lev. 25:46). Note also the quote he brings from Job 31:13-15, "If I have denied justice to any of my servants...when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One form us both within our mothers?")

The human spirit needs time to breathe, to inhale, to grow. The first rule in time management is to distinguish between matters that are important, and those that are merely urgent. Under pressure, the things that are important but not urgent tend to get crowded out. Yet these are often what matter most to our happiness and sense of a life well-lived. Shabbat is time dedicated to the things that are important but not urgent: family, friends, community, a sense of sanctity, prayer in which we thank God for the good things in our life, and Torah reading in which we retell the long, dramatic story of our people and our journey. Shabbat is when we celebrate shalom bayit -- the peace that comes from love and lives in the home blessed by the Shechinah, the presence of God you can almost feel in the candlelight, the wine, and the special bread. This is a beauty created not by Michelangelo or Leonardo but by each of us: a serene island of time in the midst of the often-raging sea of a restless world.

I once took part, together with the Dalai Lama, in a seminar (organised by the Elijah Institute) in Amritsar, Northern India, the sacred city of the Sikhs. In the course of the talks, delivered to an audience of two thousand Sikh students, one of the Sikh leaders turned to the students and said: "What we need is what the Jews have: Shabbat!" Just imagine, he said, a day dedicated every week to family and home and

relationships. He could see its beauty. We can live its reality.

The ancient Greeks could not understand how a day of rest could be part of Creation. Yet it is so, for without rest for the body, peace for the mind, silence for the soul, and a renewal of our bonds of identity and love, the creative process eventually withers and dies. It suffers entropy, the principle that all systems lose energy over time.

The Jewish people did not lose energy over time, and remains as vital and creative as it ever was. The reason is Shabbat: humanity's greatest source of renewable energy, the day that gives us the strength to keep on creating. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"This is my God ve-anveihu, my father's God, and I will exalt Him." (Exodus 15:2) What is the best way to give thanks to God? As the walls of the sea come crashing down on the elite Egyptian chariots, and the Israelites realize that the Egyptians will never be able to attack or subjugate them again, a spontaneous song of gratitude and praise bursts forth. The Shira is Israel's magnificent cry of religious awe, an acknowledgment of God's "great hand" (Exodus 14:31) and direct involvement with their destiny.

To say that the Israelites were grateful would be a gross understatement. The accepted custom in most synagogues throughout the world, and for virtually all of Jewish history, is for everyone to rise when the Shira (Song of Praise at the Reed Sea) is read from the Bible. That Shabbat is known as Shabbat Shira.

Every single day, observant Jews recite the Shira, because it is included in the "Verses of Song" with which the morning prayer liturgy begins. The language of the Shira is highly charged and intense. The climactic exclamation of Israelite adoration and commitment is obscured by one word which is difficult to translate: "This is my God ve-anveihu, my father's God, and I will exalt Him" (Exodus 15:2). What does ve-anveihu mean?

Targum Onkelos translates the phrase as "This is my God, and I shall build a Temple for Him," – "naveh" (from ve-anveihu) being the Hebrew word for home.

Rashi prefers "This is my God, and I shall declare His beauty and praises [in prayer]"; "na'eh" or "noy" (from ve-anveihu) being the Hebrew word for beauty and goodness.

An anonymous Talmudic sage builds on the same verb root as Rashi, but gives it a somewhat different twist: "This is my God, and I shall beautify [His commandments before] Him by serving Him with a beautiful sukka, a beautiful shofar (Shabbat 133b)."

The opposing Talmudic view, in the name of

Abba Shaul, divides the Hebrew into two words: I and Thou – ani ve-hu – turning the verse into a ringing endorsement of proper ethical conduct: “This is my God, and I shall be like Him: Just as He is compassionate and loving, so must I be compassionate and loving...” (ibid)

These four views may be seen as an ascending order of commitment. The first opinion has the Israelites commit to building a Temple for God. The second view, sensitive to the fact that an external structure says nothing about the nature of the spirituality within it, insists that the Jews declare their intent “to declare God’s beauty and praise to all of those who enter the world” (Rashi, ad loc.); in other words, to publicly pray to Him.

The third level is not satisfied with prayers alone, but prefers a whole panoply of adorned rituals. The final position maintains that the most important issue is not what we build, what we pray, or even what we do; it is rather who we are – the personality and character which make up our essential being – that really counts.

Perhaps there is an even deeper level to this difference of opinion. The Midrash Mekhilta (Chapter 3) cited by Rashi (ad loc.) mystifyingly declares that a lowly maidservant at the moment of the splitting of the Red Sea had a deeper vision of the divine than even the great mystical prophet of the supernal chariot (ma’aseh merkavah), Ezekiel the son of Buzi.

The sages of the Talmud make another comparison involving Ezekiel, when they declare: “To whom may Ezekiel be compared? To a town dweller. To whom may Isaiah be compared? To a city dweller” (Hagiga 13b).

I heard a fascinating interpretation of this statement in the name of Rabbi Isaac Bernstein. When a city dweller from London, for example, has an appointment in New York, they go straight to the agreed-upon point of rendezvous. They are oblivious to the tall buildings and impressive plazas they are used to seeing at home anyway. Not so the unsophisticated town dweller. They are liable to become so distracted by the novelty of big-city architecture that they can miss their meeting altogether.

Isaiah and Ezekiel both have uplifting visions of divine splendor. Isaiah, the prophet of the Land of Israel, is likened to the city dweller who, used to living with spirituality all the time, goes straight to the heart of his vision: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts; the whole earth is filled with His glory” (Isaiah 6:3).

Ezekiel, on the other hand, lives in Babylon, and is therefore compared to the town dweller. He is so wonder-struck by his exalted picture of the divine that he seems to get lost in the myriad of details. Verse after verse describes the angels, the merkavah (mystical chariot), the accoutrements – with no mention of the Divine Presence itself, as it were.

From this perspective, the miraculous experience of the maid-servant at the Reed Sea enabled her, Isaiah-like, to have an even deeper perception than

Ezekiel; she got straight to the central core of the issue when she declared “This is my God.” She did not get distracted by the details surrounding the divine. ©2023 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There is a great difference in the perception of a momentous historic event, between the generation that actually experienced it, was witness to and perhaps even participated in it, and later generations who know of the event through tradition and history. The facts regarding events can be transmitted from one generation to the next, even for thousands of years, but the emotional quality, the pervading actual mood and atmosphere present at the time never survives the passage of time and distance from the event itself.

Perhaps nowhere is this truism more strikingly evident than in the drama of the salvation of the Jewish people at the shores of Yam Suf. At the moment of Divine deliverance, Moshe and Miriam and the people of Israel burst into exalted song, registering their relief and triumph over the destruction of their hated oppressors.

This song of triumph is so powerful that it forms part of the daily prayer service of Israel for millennia. But, though the words have survived and been sanctified by all generations of Jews from Moshe till the present, the original fervor, intensity and aura of that moment is no longer present with us.

The Pesach Hagadah bids us to relive the Exodus from Egypt as though we actually were present then and experienced it. But it is beyond the ability of later generations do so fully and completely. We can recall and relive the event intellectually and positively in an historic vein but the emotional grandeur of the moment has evaporated over time.

We are witness as to how the events of only a century ago – the two great World Wars, the Holocaust, the birth of the State of Israel, etc. – have begun to fade away from the knowledge, memory and recall of millions of Jews today, a scant few generations after these cataclysmic events took place. In this case, it is not only the emotion that has been lost but even the actual facts and their significance – social, religious and national – are in danger of disappearing from the conscious thoughts and behavior of many Jews.

In light of this, it is truly phenomenal that the deliverance of Israel at Yam Suf is so distinctly marked and remembered, treasured and revered in the Jewish memory bank. The reason for this exceptional survival of historic memory is that it was made part of Jewish religious ritual, incorporated in the Torah itself, and commemorated on a special Shabbat named for the event. It thus did not have to rely on historic truth and memory alone to preserve it for posterity.

Religious ritual remains the surest way of preserving historical memory, far stronger than May Day

parades and twenty-one gun salutes and salvos. Ritual alone may be unable to capture the emotion and atmosphere of the actual event but it is able to communicate the essential facts and import of the event to those who never witnessed or experienced it. The song of Moshe, Miriam and Israel still reverberates in the synagogues of the Jewish people and more importantly in their minds and hearts as well. © 2023 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

An examination of the first time Jews praised God after leaving Egypt offers an understanding of two distinct models of approaching God. In the song after the splitting of the sea, the Jews proclaimed: "This is my God [zeh Eli] and I will glorify Him [v'anvehu]; the God of my father [Elohei avi] and I will exalt him (va'aromemenhu)" (Exodus 15:2).

One approach to God is that of "Elohei avi" (the God of my father): to believe simply because of my inherited history, to believe because my parents believe. Hence, the text states va'aromemenhu, from the root rum, meaning "above." In other words, although God is above me, and I have little understanding of Him, nonetheless, I accept God because my parents accepted Him; doing so is part of my family DNA.

A second approach is found in the first part of the sentence. Here the Jews proclaimed, "This is my God [zeh Eli]," the God with Whom I have a very personal relationship. Hence, the modifying term v'anvehu (and I will glorify Him) appears here. Anvehu is a compound of ani v'Hu (I and Him). This points to one who feels a connection to God and believes independently, having been closely touched by the Almighty.

Which approach is more meaningful and more critical? Since both are mentioned, each has validity. Indeed, when reciting the Amidah (the central prayer of the thrice-daily prayer service), we refer to both "our God [Eloheinu]" and "the God of our patriarchs [Elohei avoteinu]." Note the inclusion of both personal relationships and a belief in God because He was the God of our ancestors. The sequence of these terms in both the biblical text and in the Amidah, however, shows us which approach has the most significance. In both instances, God is first described as being a personal God.

An important educational lesson emerges from this principle: It is not enough for parents to expect their children to believe simply because they believe. Transmission of belief in God is not automatic. What is most necessary is an atmosphere wherein a child comes to experience belief through personal strivings and

actions. Such children are in the best position to maintain their belief and to transmit it to their children and they to their children until the end of time. © 2023 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"I will sing to Hashem for He is higher than the high, [because] horse and rider did He lift in the sea." (Shmos 15:1) This opening line of the praise the Jews sang after the splitting of the Reed Sea, colloquially known as, 'Az Yashir,' seems to sum up the feeling of the prayer in one line. Indeed, the Torah only tells us that Miriam and the women sang this line, but the commentaries explain they sang the whole thing. In what way does this encapsulate the praise of Hashem and what is this praise that we offer?

Rashi says we should look at the Targum Onkelos for insight. There, he says that Hashem is "higher than the high," and "His greatness is that He lifted horse and rider in the sea." What does this mean? Are we perhaps trying to highlight Hashem's greatest miracles, like some sort of rating system of His wonders? Who are we to judge that anyway?

We must understand that when it speaks of Hashem's greatness or highness, it refers to things He can do that humans cannot, as Rashi explains further. By drawing a distinction between Hashem's actions and the capabilities of human kings, we come to appreciate how they are incomparable. The lifting of joined horse and rider must be a level of magnitude greater than any human is capable of. And now we will explain.

The Daas Zekainim says that when the Egyptians were chasing the Jews, Hashem asked them, "Why are you doing this?" indicating that He was not happy with it. They responded, "the horse is taking me; I have no choice." He asked the horses why they were chasing, and they said, "the rider is urging me on against my will." Therefore, Hashem connected the two and judged them together (much like the parable about the blind man who carried a sighted but lame thief on his shoulders to commit a crime.)

The greatness of Hashem which we praise each day, is that there is no such thing to Him as 'collateral damage.' In war, mortals must subdue the enemy, and innocent civilians may be harmed. It's terrible, but unavoidable – for Mankind.

Hashem is not that way. When he punishes - and the purpose when he punishes his chosen nation is purification, not retribution - He takes into account everyone and everything that will be affected or impacted. There's no such thing as getting caught in the crossfire.

When we say Hashem lifted horse and rider, we

acknowledge that Hashem had a way to deal with what each of them had done, though one could be more culpable than the other. This is the praise of Hashem, which name implies past, present and future. All that is, was or will be are taken into account in His dealings with this world, and that is something no human being can do. We do not know all. Our awareness and perception are limited. Only Hashem can be completely “fair” to all, and act with them as is appropriate. Only He can make sure no one is going through something they don’t deserve or need. This is something worthy of recalling every single day.

On April 15, 1912, the RMS Titanic sank in the North Atlantic. Supposed to be “unsinkable,” there weren’t enough life boats and over 1500 people died in the frigid waters. A man who heard the news of the tragedy prayed to G-d asking how He could let such a thing happen.

“Al-mighty G-d,” the man prayed. “You are all-powerful. You control the sea and the dry land, the heavens and the earth. Why did you let this tragedy occur? How is it that you did not stop the Titanic from sinking, and allowed all those people to perish?”

“Are you kidding?!” G-d replied. “Do you have any idea what I had to do to get all those people on one boat?!” © 2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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Preparation

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

Numerous laws are derived from the verse: “On the sixth day they shall prepare what they bring in...” (*Shemot* 16:5). First, we derive from it that one should prepare properly on Friday for Shabbat, so that everything will be ready by the time Shabbat starts.

Second, we derive the rule of *muktzah*: if an item was not prepared or set aside for Shabbat use in advance, it may not be used or moved on Shabbat.

Third, our Sages derive from the verse that one may prepare on a weekday for Shabbat, but may not prepare on Shabbat for a weekday. For this reason, many people do not wash dishes or pots following Shabbat lunch, because they know they will not need to use them again until after Shabbat. Some people do not fold their *tallit* after *shul*, as they consider it preparing for a weekday since they will not be wearing a *tallit* again until Sunday.

Based on the requirement to prepare during the week for Shabbat, our Sages derive that if Yom Tov is on Friday, it is prohibited to prepare on Yom Tov for Shabbat. The only way this preparation becomes permitted is if a person sets aside food for an *eruv tavshilin* before Yom Tov. By doing so, he is beginning preparations for Shabbat on the day preceding Yom Tov.

Up to this point, we have addressed preparation undertaken by people. However, why do we need the verse cited above to tell us about such preparation? We

have another verse which makes the same point: “Tomorrow is a day of rest . . . so bake what you want to bake now” (*Shemot* 16:23).

Therefore, the Gemara posits that our verse is speaking about something that was “prepared by heaven,” such as an egg that was laid on Shabbat. (This is one of the main subjects of the beginning of *Tractate Beitza*). Such an egg may not be used on Shabbat or the Yom Tov that follows it on Sunday. Similarly, if Yom Tov is on Friday, an egg laid on Yom Tov may not be used for Yom Tov or the Shabbat following it. Since these eggs did not exist before Shabbat or Yom Tov, they could not have been prepared or set aside beforehand. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Wipe Out Amalek

At the end of Parashat B'Shalach, the Torah tells of the attack on the B'nei Yisrael by Amalek: “Amalek came and battled Yisrael in Rephidim. Moshe said to Yehoshua, ‘Choose men for us and go out, do battle with Amalek, tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of Elokim in my hand.’ Yehoshua did as Moshe said to him, to do battle with Amalek, and Moshe, Aharon, and Chur ascended to the top of the hill. It happened that when Moshe would raise his hand, Yisrael was stronger, and when he lowered his hand, Amalek was stronger. Moshe’s hands grew heavy, so they took a stone and put it underneath him and he sat on it, and Aharon and Chur supported his hands, one on this side and one on that side, and he was with his hands in Faith until the setting of the sun. Yehoshua weakened Amalek and its people with the sword’s blade. Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Write this as a remembrance in the Book and recite it in the ears of Yehoshua, because I shall surely wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Moshe built an altar and he called its name ‘Heaven is my Miracle;’ and he said, ‘For here is a hand on the throne of Hashem, Hashem maintains a war against Amalek, from generation to generation.’”

Rashi explains that this section is tied to the previous section of the Torah which describes the rebellion against Moshe and Hashem when there was no water to drink. The people complained and said, “Is Hashem among us or not.” The parable that is quoted speaks of a father who carries his young son on his shoulders. After twice asking for and receiving an object from his father, the young boy asks a stranger, “Have you seen my father?” The father took his son off his shoulders and said, “Do you not know where I am?” The boy was then bitten by a dog. The test of Amalek was to show the people that Hashem was among them and would protect them.

The Kli Yakar explains that this rebellion is what enabled Amalek to attack. “This is how Amalek thought. All the time that the people were ‘whole’ with Hashem,

and there was also unity among the people, then he would not be successful against them." When Amalek saw the rebellion at Rephidim, and that its name was changed to Masa U'm'riva (a reference to the rebellion with the word "riv"), he saw disunity among the people and understood that this would be his only chance to defeat them. The Bal HaTurim explains that the name, Rephidim, also describes the arguments that took place. Rephidim comes from the words, "b'raf yadaim, their hands became lax," namely, they were so involved in their arguments that their hands were lax in performing mitzvot.

All the commentators focus on the first words of our section, "Amalek came." The Emek Davar asks why no reason is given for Amalek's attack. In other cases when the B'nei Yisrael fought battles in the wilderness, the Torah mentions that either the enemy was reluctant to let the B'nei Yisrael pass through their territory or they were afraid that the B'nei Yisrael would bring weapons into their land and a war would ensue. These were clearly defensive actions, whether or not they were justifiable. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the B'nei Yisrael had not approached the boarder of the Amalekites, yet Amalek traveled a great distance to attack them. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Amalek was the grandson of Eisav who wished to attack the grandson of Ya'akov. While other nations feared the presence of Hashem hovering over the nation, "it was only Amalek, completely unprovoked, who hurried out of his way to gain renown and take up arms against the Force which had laid even a Par'oh low."

HaRav Hirsch also viewed this confrontation as a battle between those who relied on the sword and those who relied on the power of prayer and faith in Hashem. "Attacked by Amalek, Israel had to wage war, but it is not Israel's sword but Moshe's staff that conquers Amalek; it is not any magic power in the staff but the Emunah (Faith) which is expressed and brought to the minds of the people by the uplifted hand, the giving oneself up with complete confidence to Hashem that achieved the victory." That is why Moshe sent Yehoshua to lead the battle with the sword while he, Aharon, and Chur ascended the hill overlooking the battle. The Ramban explains that, "Moshe went up there so that he might see the Yisraelim engage in battle and train his sight on them to bring them blessing. They too, upon seeing him with his hands spread heavenward and saying many prayers, would have trust in him, and they would thus be endowed with additional valor and strength."

After Amalek's defeat, Hashem instructed Moshe, "Write this as a remembrance in the Book and recite it in the ears of Yehoshua, because I shall surely wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heavens." While the ibn Ezra takes this instruction to mean a "Book of the Wars of Hashem," a book listing all the battles that Hashem fought for the B'nei Yisrael from

the time of Avraham, the Ramban and most commentators understood this to refer to the Book of the Torah. What is difficult to understand is how one can be required to remember that which Hashem says He will wipe out the remembrance of. Perhaps it means that one must remember what Amalek did in his attack on the B'nei Yisrael, but that any accomplishments of Amalek, any history of that people, any significance that it may have played in the history of the world will be wiped from memory.

According to HaRav Sorotzkin, Moshe waited until he heard from Hashem about the destruction of Amalek before he built an altar to honor Hashem. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Yehoshua was only capable of weakening Amalek but not defeating him. It was only with Hashem's help that Amalek's army was totally defeated. Moshe named the altar "Hashem nisi, Heaven (Hashem) is my Miracle." Moshe noted that all the miracles that Hashem had performed for the B'nei Yisrael until this time were all part of extracting the B'nei Yisrael from slavery in Egypt. This was the first miracle that pointed to Hashem's protection of His People for the future "from generation to generation."

In the Pesach Haggadah, we find a paragraph that states that in every generation there will be an enemy who will try to destroy the Jewish People. These enemies are often associated with the same ideas that encouraged Amalek to attack. But we are told that The Holy One Blessed is He will always be there to protect us. When we are in despair, we must focus on the upheld hands of Moshe, and place our prayers and our Faith and Trust in Hashem. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

One of the strangest pesukim in the Torah is the one that ends the account of the mohn. After stating that "the Bnei Yisrael ate the mohn for forty years, until they came to a settled land; they ate the mohn until they came to the border of Eretz Cna'an," the Torah continues, without so much as a segment break, to state that "The omer is a tenth of an ephah" (Shemos, 16:36).

Granted, an omer-volume was the portion each person received daily. But why do we need to know its relationship to a larger volume? And why is so seemingly banal a statement the one to culminate the mohn account? Something in the Midrash about the korban ha'omer, the offering of an omer of barley on the second day of Pesach, is enlightening here.

In Vayikra Rabba 28:1, Rabi Yanai says: "The way of the world is that a person buys a measure of meat in the market; how much effort he expends, and pain he suffers, in cooking it. And, as people sleep in their beds, Hashem brings the winds and raises clouds and causes plants to sprout and ripens crops... and all He is given in return is the payment of the omer..."

So the korban called omer implies a recognition

of the fact that, however we may feel about our own efforts, it is Hashem Who does the, so to speak, heavy lifting regarding our sustenance. And that, of course, is the message of the mohn, too. The miraculous all-purpose food that fell from the sky signaled that, whatever efforts we might make to sustain ourselves, it is Hashem's will that, in the end, in fact, does that.

And so Moshe was commanded to place an omer of mohn, that mere tenth of an ephah, into a container, to be preserved for all generations (Shemos 16:32). It is a reminder not only of the mohn miracle itself, but also of its implication, that, even in the absence of a korban omer, it is not our effort, in the end, that puts food on our tables. ©2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

This Shabbos makes me want to sing. (Don't worry... you won't hear me even if I do.) After all, it is Shabbos Shirah, the parsha with the Shir Shel Yumm -- Song at the Sea. But what I'd really like to do is sing the praises of Eretz Yisroel, since this Sunday night, b'ezras Hashem, is Tu BeShevat, when we do exactly that. I can't wait for the Seder to begin.

Seder? That's not for another couple of months when Pesach arrives. What Seder?

The Tu BeShevat Seder, of course.

There's a Seder on Tu BeShevat? Says who?

In the 16th century, the Arizal and his students created a Tu BeShevat seder, somewhat like the Pesach Seder, that celebrates the Aitz Chaim -- the map of the sefiros. The earliest published version of this seder is called the Pri Aitz Hadar, arranged by an anonymous student of the Arizal. It is a 50-page pamphlet with instructions regarding the fruits to eat, the verses to accompany them, and the order to follow.

The Tu BeShevat Seder is a lot of fun for the novice, and probably more people do it each year. It is also extremely deep for the kabbalist, and if you want to know why, check out the sefer Tuv HaAretz: Ma'alos Peiros Eretz Yisroel. The author, Rabbi Noson Shapira, the rav of Yerushalayim during the 1600s, explains, based upon the writings of the Arizal, how different fruits of Eretz Yisroel correspond to specific sefiros in the four worlds of Asiyah, Yetzirah, Beriyah, and Atzilus, or AYB"A for short.

They're called "worlds," but they are more like levels of spiritual consciousness. Asiyah, which means action, is the lowest of the four worlds and the one we live in physically, and the bulk of the world's population spiritually as well. Unfortunately, since most people relate to very little more than what they see or experience, they never tend to make it past the world of Asiyah.

Above that is Yetzirah, which means formation. It was on that level of reality that God formed physical Creation, yaish m'yaish, something from something. The

materials for Creation had already been made yaish m'ayin -- something from nothing -- on the level of Beriyah, which means creation (from nothing). God used those "supplies" to make the physical world on the level of Yetzirah, including Gan Aiden.

The "nothing" from which God made the "something" was actually not nothing at all. It was just completely spiritual so, compared to the physical world that followed, it was if it didn't exist, just as a soul compared to a body. This level of reality is called Atzilus, which means emanations, because the spiritual light emanates from here to create and maintain all the worlds below.

There are many kinds of fruit in the world, and it is interesting how they differ from one another. Some are large, some are small, some have big pits, some have small ones, some have thin skins and some are thick skinned, etc. Why? Perhaps because of the temperature of where they grow, the availability of water, etc. That is all physically true, but it turns out that there is a kabbalistic reason for this as well.

In Tuv HaAretz, the author explains which fruits of Eretz Yisroel correspond to which level of reality, Atzilus, Beriyah, Yetzirah, or Asiyah, and why this impacts their physical make-up. It has to do with another kabbalistic idea called the Klipos, which means "peels," because they act a spiritual barrier between a person and God. Not only do they undermine holiness, but they feed off it as well to become stronger and deadlier.

Consequently, we do our best to avoid "feeding" the Klipos any more than their Divine due (evil is necessary for free will). Simply, that translates into minimizing sin, because sin feeds the Klipos the most, and. We also protect whatever kedushah -- holiness -- we generate from the Torah we learn and the mitzvos we do. This is why we don't learn Torah at certain times of the year, and in places associated with spiritual impurity.

The fruits of Eretz Yisroel reflect this idea. Tuv HaAretz explains how the various fruits grow differently based upon the level of spiritual consciousness with which they are associated. The further down a fruit is in the spiritual realm, the closer it is to the Klipos and the more protection it needs, something represented by its physical reality.

There is more. Fruit (the pronunciation of the Hebrew peiros if you read the word without knowing the vowels), represents creative power. Adam HaRishon wasn't just told to have family. He was told to be "fruitful," a term that all cultures seem to have adapted to mean productive and successful. That is something the Klipos wish to inhibit if not stop altogether, and we are only as "fruitful" as we are because of God's help.

Therefore, Tu BeShevat is also a time to thank God for the fruits of our labors, the kinds that grow on trees, and the ones that result from the efforts we make to get ahead in life. But there is one particular task we are supposed to focus on, as the Pri Tzaddik (Fruit of the

Righteous) points out, alluded to by one word in the mishnah: elan -- tree. Tu BeShevat is called the "Rosh Hashanah of the Tree" in the mishnah, when it should really have written "trees."

There's a deep reason for that.

When you think of tree and fruit, what comes to mind? Okay, besides your favorite apple or lemon tree. Personally, I usually think about the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Ra, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, because it is such a central theme in my writings. This is not only because of what the Torah says happened through it, but because of what Kabbalah says has to happen with it, at least by the end of history.

What has to happen to the Aitz HaDa'as? What was supposed to have happened back in Gan Aiden, had Adam HaRishon only waited until Shabbos to eat its fruit. It would have joined together with the Aitz HaChaim, the Tree of Life, and become one with it. As the Pri Tzaddik explains, Tu BeShevat reminds us of this and celebrates our opportunity to do this. And just as the rabbis composed the Pesach Seder to help us gain personal freedom in our time, the kabbalists later composed the Tu BeShevat Seder to help us focus on our daily life task, and facilitate the tikun process.

Eating has a lot to do with it. As most of us merrily eat without giving much thought to what it is doing for the world in general, we are completing one of the most important tikun processes there are: Birur. Birur is separation, because that is what we're here to do: separate the holy sparks from the impure aspects of Creation in which they are absorbed.

Just as our bodies physically separate the nutrients in food from the waste and use the good while disposing of the bad, the eating process is doing the same on a spiritual level. If a food is "healthy," it is because of the holy sparks it contains. The "unhealthy" part is where the sparks are not (french fries taste great but they do not contain many sparks or they'd be healthy to eat).

While combined, the food (and we too!) have the status of an aitz haDa'as tov v'ra -- a tree of knowledge of good and evil. Once the good is removed and the "evil" is disposed of, that thing changes its status to an aitz hachaim, a tree of life, so to speak, and Creation is that much more rectified.

The holier the foods, the more sparks they contain, and no food is holier than food that is grown in Eretz Yisroel and then used for a mitzvah. Since there is a hierarchy of fruits that correspond to the hierarchy of worlds, the Seder takes us higher and higher to each of the four levels of spiritual consciousness.

Of course, wine is one of the ultimate symbols of the tikun process, and four cups of wine are part of the Tu BeShevat Seder as well, but with a twist. Though Kiddush is usually made with red wine on all other holy occasions, for the Tu BeShevat Seder it is made on white wine, representing the snow on Mount Hermon and the

cold winter season. For the second cup, one-third red wine is combined with two-thirds white wine, representing the beginning of spring.

The third cup is half white and half red, corresponding to the spring which has half rainy days and half sunny days. And the fourth cup is all red wine, symbolizing the hot summer days that end the agricultural season. Shlomo HaMelech wrote, "Do not look at wine when it is red; when he puts his eye on the cup, it goes smoothly" (Mishlei 23:31). But as Rashi explains, that is talking about the person who drinks only to get drunk. At the sederarim of Tu BeShevat and Pesach, we drink as a means to free our souls to come closer to God. ©2023 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Beshalach includes the famous splitting of the Sea (14:21), where Moshe led them into the water, and the sea split for them. Psalms 114 offers that "the sea saw, and ran", and commentators explain that what the sea saw was Yosef's remains, and withdrew in their merit. As Rabbi Shmulevitz asks, what was so special about Yosef's remains that the sea split because of them, rather than because of Moshe or the Jews?

Rabbi Shmulevitz answers by introducing a fundamental concept in Judaism: avoiding temptations. Yosef was in a position where he might have been tempted to sin (with Potifar, and generally living in Egypt as the only Jew), and rather than be placed in a position to overcome his urges, he avoided those urges altogether, even placing himself in danger by leaving an article of clothing behind. This great act is not only an example for us today, but it's also the reason why the Jews were faced with crossing the sea in the first place. Had human logic prevailed, the Jews would have headed straight to Israel, which would have taken them 4 days. However, that might have tempted the Jews to consider returning to Egypt, so G-d had them go the long way, which included crossing the sea. The splitting of the sea and Yosef's life join efforts in conveying a critical lesson: Avoid conflict as much as you can. Whether it's our internal temptations, friends, parents, spouses or those we share borders with, the Parsha offers us 3000 year old advice that we still holds true today: Avoid conflict and temptation by minimizing confrontations. ©2012 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

