

מתוקים מדבש


Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

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Bemachshvah Techilah

The *parashah* opens “*Vayhi mikeitz sh’nasayim yamim* – and it was at the end of a pair years of days”. After Yosef spent two years in prison, Par’oh’s dream leads the wine steward to remember Yosef and eventually leads to his redemption. But why does the *pasuk* say “*sh’nasayim yamim*”, rather than just “*shenasayim*”?¹

Second, why is the term used here for the arrival of the denoted time “*mikeitz*”, at the endpoint (from “*katzeh*”, edge²)? How does it differ from saying that the “*z’man*”, or “*eis*” (both meaning “time”) had arrived?

This duplication of terms for time is echoed in next week’s *parashah*, when Ya’akov describes his age to Par’oh as “The days of the years of my travels...”³ as well as at the beginning of *parashas Vayechi*, in counting out Ya’akov avinu’s lifespan, “... And the days of Ya’akov was, the years of his life...”⁴ The repetition implies that there are distinct concepts. *Yom* and *shannah* refer to different things.

Most ancient societies viewed time as cyclic. Among the motivations sug-

gested⁵ for the building of the Tower of Bavel was the fear that the flood was part of a 1,656-year cycle, and they would need to prepare for a second flood.

The position is understandable. Plato⁶ concludes that since our means of measuring time was the cyclic movement of astronomical objects so must the time they define be cyclic. The month and its cycle of phases, the year and its cycle of seasons define a cycle of time. The seasonal cycle also shapes the farmer’s lifestyle into cycles. Time cannot be measured without a predictable repetition of events, be it the falling of grains of sand, the swing of a pendulum, the escapement of a clock, the vibration of a quartz crystal or the waves of light emitted by cesium atoms.

This mindset is alien to modern man. The contemporary western view of time is linear – a progress from the primitive to the advanced. This notion that history progresses comes from Judaism, from our view of time as running from First Cause to Ultimate Purpose, a history spanning from Adam to the Messianic Era and beyond. This acceptance is an accomplishment of the *Chashmona’i* revolution against the Greek mindset. Linear time gives us a view of man in which he can redeem himself; he is not doomed to repeat the same mistakes over and over.

On the other hand, Judaism simultaneously embraces a cyclic view of time. As the Hagaddah

phrases the purpose of the *seder*, “A person is obligated to see himself as though he himself came out of Egypt.” Every *Shavuot* we are to accept the Torah anew. Our holidays not only repeat the cycle of the Exodus, they are tied to agricultural events and thereby the cycle of seasons. The holiday is both reliving the *Sukkos* of the desert as well as celebrating bringing in our crops.⁷

The Zohar⁸ describes a system of grammatical gender follows the conventions of sexual reproduction: Biblical Hebrew uses masculine nouns for those things that we think of as initiators that start a process. Feminine nouns take that seed and develop it into something more complete and usable.

“*Yom*”, being in the masculine is therefore an initiator. “*Yom*” represents a unit of progress. It is a unit of linear time, a progress from birth to death. The culmination of history is notably called “*acharis hayamim*”⁹ and in the *navi*, “*yom Hashem*”¹⁰.

In contrast, “*shannah*” is from the same root as “two”, “to repeat”, “to learn”, or “to change”, and perhaps even that of “to age” and “to sleep”, as in “*venoshantem ba’aretz*”¹¹. *Shannah* speaks of a retreat. A person can actively embrace that retreat, use it as a chance to build on what one already has. Or, it can be a time when he simply is a victim of circumstance.

¹ We find the exact same turn of phrase in Shmuel II 14:28 and Yirmiyahu 28:3. In all three cases, the time measured is one in which someone (here – Yosef, Avshalom in Shmuel II) or something (the utensils of the *Beis HaMikdash* in Yirmiyahu) was in hiding.

² C.f. Shemos 36:33, “And he made the middle bar to pass through the boards [of the *Mishkan*] from the *katzeh* to the *katzeh*.”

³ Bereishis 47:8

⁴ Ibid. v. 28. Notable is the use of singular “*hayah*” referring to the days.

⁵ Bereishis Rabba 38:1, third opinion

⁶ Timaeus 36c-d

⁷ Vayikra 23:39,43

⁸ Pinechas 249a-b

⁹ Eg. Sukkah 52b

¹⁰ Eg. Malachi 4:5

¹¹ Devarim 4:25

While there is a need for progress, there is also a need to step back, to review, to develop the idea into something we can incorporate within ourselves and can use as a basis for future growth. It can be a time to regain a balance between technological progress and one's basic humanity and values. If he embraces and uses the time, then he has achieved productive review, "years of days".

Perhaps this is why the Malbim¹² explains Ya'akov avinu's reply to Par'oh as having two parts. To Par'oh's question about years, he answers that he traveled this earth 130 years. About days, Ya'akov laments that he did not use his time as productively as did his fathers,

¹² Bereishis 47:8

"Few and insufficient were the days of my life's years, and they never reached the days of the years of my forefather's lives."¹³

R' Aharon Kotler zt"l commented to a student on the occasion of the birth of the student's son about the phrase "The *bris* should be *be'ito ubizmano*", using both "*eis*" and "*z'man*" to denote its proper time. Rav Aharon explained the difference. If the baby is healthy, then the *bris* is at the pre-decided time, on the eighth day. If not, then it will be at the right time for that individual baby. Ideally the *bris* would be at both.

A *z'man* is a time that comes according to a pre-scheduled appointment, ready or not. It is a point in a *shannah*, in cyclic time that runs its

¹³ Bereishis 47:9

celestial heartbeat regardless of human action. And so, the repeat of the exodus is "*Z'man Cheiruseinu*", our time of freedom. An *eis* is a landmark in the course of progression. And so, one is "*kovei'ah ittim baTorah*", one sets aside times for Torah.

But neither a *z'man* nor an *eis* can represent the goal of the trip. Reflection without progress and progress without reflection as to its purpose does not get one to a meaningful goal. A *keitz*, an endpoint, can only come from both.

Yosef's experience in the pit was not simply measured in years of survival, but also in personal progress. After the culmination, the *keitz*, of *shenasayim yom*, he was ready to emerge a leader.

REB GIL STUDENT

Bakeish Shalom

This difficulty was not lost on the commentators and many explanations have been offered to solve this puzzle. The father of the Mussar Movement, R' Yisrael Salanter, offered the following understanding. There are two approaches to trusting in G-d, *bitachon*. One is to place everything in G-d's hands. When one is sick, one does not go to the doctor but rather prays to G-d. One does not work for a living but trusts that G-d will provide for one's livelihood. This approach, championed by the Ramban², argues that true *bitachon* demands total reliance on G-d in all matters. The other approach is to place one's trust in G-d but to also expend effort so that G-d's blessing can be fulfilled through natural

² See Ramban on Vayikra 26:11 for one example of this consistent theme in his writings. See also Rabbeinu Bachya, Kad HaKemach, *bitachon*.

The midrash states the following about Yosef:

"Praiseworthy is the man who has made G-d his trust..." (*Tehillim* 40:5) – this is Yosef – "...and turned not to the arrogant" (*ibid.*) – through his saying to the Wine Steward "remember me" and "mention me" (*Bereishis* 40:14) he added two years [to his imprisonment], as it says "It happened at the end of..." (*Bereishis* 41:1).¹

In an apparent contradiction, the midrash offers two very different portraits of Yosef's behavior. When Yosef was in prison, his faith in G-d sustained him and gave him hope. It was this trust that allowed him to survive with confidence during that difficult period. Regarding this, the midrash says that Yosef was praiseworthy. He

¹ Bereishis Rabba 89:3

was one about whom could be said that he placed his trust in G-d.

However, the midrash also says that Yosef was someone lacking trust in G-d. After interpreting the Wine Steward's dream, something that he performed with confidence because the interpretations were divinely revealed, Yosef hatched a clever plan to secure his own release from prison. When he asked the Wine Steward to remember him after his prediction comes true and the Wine Steward returns to Par'oh's favor, Yosef was expending effort to achieve his means. Rather than simply relying on G-d's providence, Yosef was attempting to realize his goal through his own efforts. This, the midrash implies, was improper.

Thus, on the one hand, Yosef placed his trust in G-d. On the other hand, Yosef did not place his trust in G-d. Which is it? Was he the paragon of trust or lack of trust?

means. Rather than demanding a miraculous healing, one utilizes the latest medical breakthroughs and allows G-d to heal through them. This approach, R' Yisrael Salanter says, is that of the Chovos HaLevavos³.

R' Chaim Volozhiner utilized these two approaches to explain a famous disagreement between two tannaim:

"You will gather in your grain" (Devarim 11:14) – what does this teach us? Since it is said "This book of Torah shall not depart from your mouth" (Yehoshua 1:8) one would have thought that the words are meant literally as written [and one may never stop learning Torah], thus we are taught "you will gather in your grain" – follow the ways of nature; these are the words of Rabbi Yishmael. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: It is possible that a man will plough during ploughing season, plant during planting season, harvest during harvest season, thresh during threshing season and winnow during winnowing season. What will happen to Torah?... Abaye said: Many acted according to Rabbi Yishmael and succeeded; many acted according to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and did not succeed.⁴

According to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, like Ramban many centuries later, man need not put effort into earning a living. Rather, his entire effort should be placed in studying Torah and his earthly needs will be taken care of. This, R' Chaim Volozhiner says, is only

correct for the select few on the uppermost spiritual level. That is why Abaye concluded that many acted according to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and did not succeed. Only a small group of elites can succeed under this difficult regimen. Rabbi Yishmael's approach is the same as the Chovos HaLevavos. Man should study Torah but must still put in natural

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effort to take care of his needs. Both Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's and Rabbi Yishmael's views, as well as Ramban's and the Chovos HaLevavos', are correct but for different people. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's/Ramban's approach is for the spiritual elite and Rabbi Yishmael's/Chovos HaLevavos' is for the masses.

To all this background, R' Yisrael Salanter added that just like, as opposed to the attitude most people must take to the world, there is a proper approach to not assert effort to achieve a goal, there is also an improper approach that would discourage effort. Someone who believes in fate, that a particular outcome is destined to occur regardless of anything anyone will do, will similarly not see any need to apply effort. While the former is limiting his effort because of his trust in G-d, the latter is doing nothing because of his despair.

Thus, R' Yisrael Salanter explains, Yosef did not despair while in prison. Rather, he had trust that G-d would help him leave captivity.

This attitude of trust is certainly praiseworthy. However, Yosef underestimated his standing and considered himself to be one of the masses. He did not think that he was a member of the spiritual elite who had no need for effort and could rely entirely on G-d. This was wrong. He should have known himself better and recognized that he was on the level of utilizing Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's approach of absolute trust without natural effort. For placing himself among the masses and utilizing natural effort, Yosef was criticized by the midrash.

The conclusion that R' Yisrael Salanter draws is that Yosef was not criticized for lacking trust. Rather, he was chastised for insufficiently recognizing his own stature. What he lacked was self-awareness. He evidently had not spent enough time looking inside himself, analyzing his own flaws and merits. Perhaps he had looked at his flaws, and therefore underestimated his standing. However, introspection requires looking at the whole person. A person is obligated to spend time sitting quietly and looking deep inside his soul. Only with a full awareness of oneself can one assess what flaws are most important and need immediate addressing. Furthermore, only when one truly knows one's strengths and weaknesses can one choose the proper approaches in life. Just like Yosef needed to recognize his righteousness in order to adopt the proper method of *bitachon*, so too we must truly know who we are in order to know which approaches in *avodas Hashem* are appropriate for us.

³ Sha'ar HaBitachon ch. 4. See R' Yisrael Salanter, *Even Yisrael*, drush 3. R' Shlomo Wolbe disagrees with R' Yisrael Salanter's depiction of Ramban's view in his *Alei Shur*, vol. 2 pp. 588-600.

⁴ Berachos 35b

REB JONATHAN BAKER

Sefasai Tiftach

As we wrote recently¹, a bracha (*Baruch atah H' Elokeinu Melech Haolam*) declares our joining with the immanent and transcendent G-d in dedicating objects or actions to His service. The two brachot *Asher Yatzar* and *Elokai Neshama* begin this process when we awaken, thanking G-d for our physical health (*Asher Yatzar*) and for our spiritual existence (*Elokai Neshama*).

The morning berachos continue, thanking G-d for granting the rooster the ability to distinguish between day and night. Then come three berachos defining us as members of groups which are variously commanded in the mitzvot. What links these four?

Having thanked G-d for physical and spiritual existence, we now thank Him for our intellectual ability, that which separates us from animals. The Rosh sees "*sechvi*" as the heart, rather than the rooster – our heart is given an ability similar to the rooster's in being able to discern light from dark.

Much of Torah and halacha consists of distinctions, many of which are mandated by G-d (day and night, *kodesh* and *chol*, *kohen/levi/yisrael*) and many of which we must sanctify ourselves (*kiddush*, *shechitah*, *kashering*, granting honors to castes). The berachos defining us as members of one or another class of those who are commanded in the mitzvot demonstrate our ability to distinguish.

The berachos continue with short berachos of *shevach* (praise), many based on Biblical references.

The baraisa in Berachos 60b mandates them for a sequence of actions taken upon awakening and preparing to face the world. Today, we say them rapidly in synagogue, apparently unrelated to much of anything.

The berachos metaphorically link our actions to Torah ideas:

Pokeiach ivrim: for the ability to see (even the blind say it, as it is communal thanks). What first opened (*pokei'ach*) our eyes? Eating from the tree of knowledge (*eitz hada'as*) – the awakening of human judgment, the ability to choose good or evil.

Malbish arumim: for the ability to dress – because our eyes were opened, we gained modesty and free will. In a larger sense, then, we thank G-d for *da'as*, knowledge, the minds which separate us from the animals, allowing us to choose Divine service.

Matir asurim: in sleep, our actions are involuntary, bound, so we thank G-d for the ability to move volitionally ... and *Zokeif kefufim*: for our acting on that volition. The pairing reminds us of the connection between will and action.

The sequence, thus far: we have ability to distinguish, we distinguish among categories, we recapitulate the actualization of human intellect and will in the Garden, and we celebrate the ability to act on that will. Intellect and Will, combined with Torah's commands, lead to choice which leads to action – and our actions praise and serve G-d.

The next three thank G-d for our ability to walk: *Roka ha'aretz al hamayim*: from Tehillim 136:6, not only is the ground flat for us to walk upon, it hints at the earliest stages of creation.. *She'asa li kol tzorki*: who has helped me get all ready for the day, so I can walk out

of the house with my shoes on (this berachah was to be made when putting on the shoes). *Meichin mitz'adei gaver*: The ground is flat, my shoes are on, and You help me to walk (from Tehillim 37:23).

These connote (following R' SR Hirsch) all the walking metaphors: *halacha*, *derech hachayim*, *shvil hazahav* (the path of moderation).

Other berachos thank G-d for belts, implying the separation brought about by waistbands or gartles; for hats, recognizing Him who is Above, etc.

These short berachos, then, break down the activity of awakening into its component parts. An efficiency expert might make these actions flow as quickly as possible. The berachos encourage us to think about each action, and what they imply about our relationship to G-d, Torah and all Israel. Action is not simple, it relates to ideas, which link to the totality of Torah.

The siddur is based on progressions: large-scale progressions among sections, smaller-scale progressions within each major section of the service, and smaller-yet progressions within each prayer. The morning berachos progress from simple existence (physical, spiritual, intellectual) through ability to physically act, to our place among people, and with G-d.

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