

ביכורי עם

שבועות תשפ"ה --- 5785 Shavuot



Community Beit Midrash at
Fuchs **Mizrahi** School

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ביכורי עמ

Bikkurei Am

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Contents

President's Message: What is *Bikkurei Am*?

By Ari Wiesen..... iii

Editor's Note

By Rav Emmanuel Sanders viii

Rabbi Meir and Revelation

By Noah Bickart 1

Ezekiel's Vision and the Challenge of Revelation

By Adina Blaustein..... 7

Cultivating an Attitude of שמחה

By Rav Gabe Falk 11

It was Never Supposed to be Easy: How עקדת יצחק Prepared us for מתן תורה and Beyond

By Elana Katz 14

Finding God and Self in the Wake of Loss: A Psychological Reading of Megillat Rut

Chapter 1

By Rav Michael Kurin..... 21

The Mistake of the Angels: The Gift of Humanity

By Rav Darren Levin 25

Divine Correspondence

By Rav Yonatan Gilbert 30

Depth to Dairy: The Meaning of Eating Dairy on Shavuot

By Danielle Rozensweig..... 33

***You've Got to Carry That Weight, Collective Responsibility as a Prerequisite to Kabalas
haTorah***

By Dani Schwartz..... 35

העז, הענווה והישועה לחי עולמים

By Rav Ezra Pacino 37

**“First is the worst, second in the best” Lessons Learned From Firstborns Before *Matan
Torah***

By Benny Statman 42

Sound and Sense: Alliteration in the Torah's Literature and Law

By Donial Ehrenreich and Avi Jacobs..... 45

On First Fruits and Divine Cunning: *Bikkurim* as a Model for Jewish Education

By Rav Rick Schindelheim 48

President's Message: What is *Bikkurei Am*?

This journal, the first printed *Torah* publication by the participants of the Community Beit Midrash is aptly titled, *Bikkurei Am*, literally meaning the first fruits of the people. *Bikkurim* appears in two different contexts pertaining to the Shavuot period. The first, the *Korban Shte Halechem*, the Sacrifice of the Two Loaves, is called “*Bikkurim LaHashem*” in the *Torah*.¹ After counting forty nine days from the second day of *Pesach*, *Bnei Yisrael* are instructed to bring two loaves of bread made from the harvest of the new wheat to the *Beit Hamikdash* on the holiday of Shavuot. The Kohen receives the bread at the *Mizbeach*, and ceremoniously waves it.

The second kind of *Bikkurim* is the actual mitzvah with that name.² The first crops of the *Shivat Haminim*, the seven species special to the land of Israel, are brought by the farmer to the *Beit Hamikdash*. The Kohen receives the fruits, and similar to the *Korban Shte Halechem*, the Kohen waves the fruit in a specific ceremony, and the farmer recites a specific text. This “Amira” includes praising and thanking God for the successful crop.³ (Going forward, the word *Bikkurim* will be used to reference this fruit offering.)

At first glance, there does not appear to be a clear connection between these two *korbanot*. However, much can be learned from developing their similarities and differences.⁴

Bikkurim is derived from the word *Bechor*, first born. With the birth of a first child, parents celebrate the culmination of a long process, one that begins with and endures hopes, aspirations, and also uncertainty. The *Shte Halechem* and the first of the *Shivat Haminim* are both designated with the name *Bikkurim*, because they also reflect our intense gratitude to Hashem for the culmination of their respective processes.

These two *mitzvot* are also connected in *Halacha*. One may not bring *Bikkurim* until after the *Shte Halechem* is brought.⁵ The *Shte Halechem* is actually the first stage of the entire *Bikkurim* process, as it comes from the new grain crop, and it is then followed by the first of the *Shivat Haminim*. The *Shte Halechem* sets up the *Bikkurim* and the *Bikkurim* build on the *Shte Halechem*.

While both of these *mitzvot* celebrate man's investment and gratitude towards Hashem, the differences between them also highlight the progression from one to the other. The funds for the *Shte Halechem* were drawn from the communal donations of the *Machatzit Hashekel*, the half

¹ Vayikra 23:17

² Shemot 23:16

³ Devarim 26:1-11

⁴ See הרב יהודה שביב, ביכורים. אלון שבות 150 upon whose ideas this article is based

⁵ Rashi Vayikra 23:16 s.v. בכורי מעשרך, Tlamud Bavli Menachot 84b

shekel each male Jew donated yearly to the *Beit Hamikdash*. The donor had no personal connection and the money had no actual relationship to the final product, the loaves of bread. Rather, the overall collection was used to acquire ingredients for various *korbanot*, as well as other mundane communal needs, such as road repairs.⁶ When the masses would then gather at the *Beit Hamikdash*, they would witness the transformation and elevation of their generic contributions into a specific ritual of the *Beit Hamikdash*. They would watch the public show of the Kohen waving the *Shtei Halechem*, however, the Kohen would do so without a declaration or specific text or personal mention. This is to remind the crowds of the unspecified humble beginnings of the bread. The *Shtei Halechem* represents the principle that an investment in a holy endeavor is still meaningful, even when the ultimate goal or outcome and the steps leading there, may not have been defined and or even known at the start.

In contrast, the goals and steps of farming are specified from the outset. The farmer plants his specific crop and places his trust in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to guide and support the process. In contrast to the investment of the “anonymous” half *Shekel* given in the *Beit Hamikdash*, the farmer invests in himself, his land and his resources. He relies on Hashem and prays for good weather and soil conditions. This is a much stronger expression of confidence in his relationship with the Almighty. Therefore, he has a personal obligation to bring his own finished product, the first fruits, to the *Beit Hamikdash* as a *Korban* and to make a public declaration (*Amira*) of thanks for the completion of the process.

Perhaps this is another reason for the order of bringing the *Shtei Halechem* first and then the *Bikkurim* of the *Shivat Haminim*. It is a progression of expressions of gratitude from the unspecified to the deeply involved. The experience of seeing these two *korbanot* brought one after the other in the *Beit Hamikdash* was a source of inspiration for the masses to introspect and have the confidence to invest their creative and religious energies in themselves, their spirituality and their communities with the faith that Hashem will bless those processes, as well. They should be confident that they can also accomplish many “fruits of labor” in *Avodat Hashem*. More than just gratitude, this is the valuable lesson of the whole *Bikkurim* process.

The mitzvah of *Bikkurim* is presented as the model for holy contributions and showing gratitude. It is mentioned three times in the Torah. It is also noteworthy that the Rambam includes the laws of the *Matnot Kehunah*, the gifts one gives to the *Kohanim*, in his section of *Hilchot Bikkurim*.⁷ Some examples of these gifts are *Hafrashat Challah*, bringing the portion of challah dough that is separated for the *Kohen*, and *Reishit Hegez*, bringing the first shearing of one’s sheep. Like *Bikkurim*, these gifts are personal contributions from one’s hard work as a gift to the *Kohen*. Furthermore, the *Mechilta* points out one may not bring a *Terumah* (dues for *Kohanim*) until one

⁶ Mishnah Shekalim 4:1-4

⁷ Mishneh Torah Hilchot Bikkurim Perakim 1-12.

gives *Bikkurim*.⁸ *Bikkurim* are more than just a standard for gratitude. They also illustrate man's appreciation to *Hashem* for His involvement and *hashgacha* in every stage of and the culmination of a specific endeavor.

Lastly, it is meaningful that *Bikkurim* is mentioned in the final set of *Mitzvot* given in *Torah*. The *Mitzvot* of writing a *Sefer Torah* and *Hakhel*, where the entire nation gathers to learn Torah, are also included. The lasting message of the Torah is to continue teaching its values and messages for generations, including the lessons of *Bikkurim*, so that we can always strengthen our relationships with Hashem.

The history of the Community Beit Midrash closely mirrors the lessons and processes of the two *Bikkurim*, the *Shtei Halechem* followed by the *Bikkurim* of the *Shivat Haminim*. It seems strange now, but 8 years ago, we did not have a true picture of what the CBM would look like. In the model of the *Shtei Halechem*, the community invested in an entirely new enterprise with a new *Rosh Beit Midrash* and an original program. Members gave and attended *shiurim*, as well as events throughout the year. Even through Covid, our community stepped up and innovated with *shiurim* and *tefillah* in a tent, and we emerged stronger than before. Now, *Baruch Hashem*, our commitment is just as strong, but different. We have grown accustomed to a schedule of diverse and exciting *shiurim* and *chaburot*, amazing events throughout the year, such as an inspiring *kumzitz* in *Elul* and a *Simchat Beit Hashoeva*, and many opportunities for connections with Hashem and with each other. We have been blessed to host community wide events, such as a *Tisch* with Rabbi Weinberger and Rabbi Kalish and the screening of the award winning film, "The 999," on *Yom Hashoa*. We have flavored our learning with *Torat Eretz Yisrael* and led our community with events that brought the challenges of *Medinat Yisrael* to our hearts, like working to bring the mother of hostage Ori Danino HYD and hosting the shloshim of Yehonatan Lober HYD at our *Tu Bishvat Seder*. Just like the farmer bringing *Bikkurim*, we know our potential and we invest our individual and collective efforts to help it be realized, while trusting that Hashem will guide and nurture our efforts.

We recognize that we only got to this point with much *Hashgacha*, hard work and contributions, for which we are incredibly grateful. First the Community Beit Midrash thanks *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* for bringing us to this moment.

The Community Beit Midrash exists, as its name states, only because of the tireless sacrifices, efforts and contributions of time, resources and love of *an entire community*. We express our deepest gratitude to you, our wonderful community, that makes the Community Beit Midrash a priority.

⁸ Mechilta Shemot 22:28

Thank you to our editor, Emmanuel Sanders, who graciously took on this project without hesitation and to all of the contributors.

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Thank you to Rav Ezra Pacino, our first Rosh Beit Midrash, and Tehilla who helped build the CBM from and imbued it with the goal of bringing *kedusha* into everything we do through Torah, *dibuk chaverim* (deeply connected friendship) and a connection to *Eretz Yisrael*.

Thank you to Jeff and Danielle Wild for your generosity and mentorship in moving our vision forward.

Thank you to my wife, board member and founder, Naomi Wiesen, an unsung heroine, who has done and does so much for the CBM in every aspect of its function and without the recognition. The CBM would not exist or run without you.

May we all, as a community, continue to help and inspire each other to grow in *Kedusha*, learning Torah and *Avodat Hashem*.

Ari Wiesen

President, Community Beit Midrash

Editor's Note

As I was considering what to write about Shavuot that would be relevant and meaningful to this moment, I found myself distracted by other questions that have been keeping me up at night.

What kind of Jew should one be when our shul bulletins remind us about upcoming security trainings? When Israel's existence is considered up for debate in Ivy League universities? When Young Jews and supporters of Israel are targeted and killed in the capital of the United State of America? Is the answer to pack up and go? To make Aliyah? To navigate American politics with pragmatic ruthlessness? What kind of Torah speaks to a moment like this?

I cannot but ask myself, what would my father have done? My father, Martin Sanders was born before Israel existed as a modern state, fell in love with it in his youth, and died before October 7th, 2023. He was spared witnessing the single greatest slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust, though sometimes I selfishly wish he were here to help me make sense of its aftermath.

His response, I suspect, wouldn't have been a simple call for Aliyah, though he'd beam with pride at children and grandchildren boarding El Al flights with one-way tickets. My father's Judaism was more capacious than that. He was a man who navigated multiple worlds. A classically trained violinist, a first generation American who graduated high school at 16, studied at NYU and then attended the Sorbonne; he enjoyed opera and collected modern German art, but always felt the pull and pride of being a Jew above all else. His Judaism wasn't diminished by his appreciation for music, art, history and literature; it was enriched by it. As was the Tel Aviv Museum of Art when he donated his considerable collection of modern German expressionist paintings to the Museum.

You might reasonably ask what any of this has to do with Shavuot. The connection is this: Shavuot embodies Judaism's intrinsic duality. It's a celebration of our tie to *Eretz Yisrael*, an agricultural festival rooted in the Land. But it's also a celebration of receiving the Torah - which, we might remember, occurred not in Jerusalem but in the Sinai. The arc of our history aims towards our homeland. But it's colored by - and can enrich and be enriched by- the many lands we have passed through along the way. And throughout that journey it is the Torah, our "portable homeland" (in the words of Heinrich Heine), that has sustained us through millennia of diaspora. And through it we can and should and do build and sustain and enlighten the world around us both in *Eretz Yisrael*, and here in America. Indeed, as Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch put it in his Nineteen Letters,

If the world worships wealth and lust, Israel is called to live a tranquil life of righteousness and love. If, while everywhere else humanity sinks into the depths of sensuality and immorality, Israel's sons and daughters were to bloom in the splendor of youth, purity, and innocence—ah, what a powerful instrument for good Israel could be!

If every Jew were a silent yet eloquent example and teacher of universal righteousness and love, if the dispersed of Israel were to show themselves everywhere on earth as the glorious priests of God and of pure humanity, if only we were, or would become, what we are meant to be; if only our lives were a perfect

reflection of our Law - what a mighty force we would be for steering mankind toward the final goal of all human education!

This influence would work quietly, but far more forcefully and profoundly than even our tragic record of suffering ever has.

The essays collected in this year's CBM Torah Journal ביכורי עמ explore these aspects of Shavuot and others, and represent our *Bikkurim*, the first fruits of Torah from but a handful of our many thoughtful and talented community members. This endeavor - a coming together of Jews in Beachwood, Ohio, along with the extended CBM family which stretches out to *Eretz Yisrael* - is the Torah our moment demands: a Torah that joins us together as a community celebrating out "portable homeland" and our physical homeland, and reflecting our commitment to God's Torah, to *Eretz Yisrael*, and to one another.

May the memory of my father, Martin Sanders z"l, and all those whose lives were extinguished on and since October 7th, inspire us toward a Torah expansive enough to embrace both our particular attachments and our universal responsibilities, wherever we find ourselves.

Emmanuel Sanders

May 21, 2025

כ"ד באייר תשפ"ה

Beachwood, Ohio

Rabbi Meir and Revelation

By Noah Bickart

Every year on Shavuot, we prepare to receive the Torah anew. Many of us, especially those inspired by Kabbalistic ideas, stay up all night hoping to recreate the experience of our ancestors, who had a direct experience of the Divine at Mt Sinai. For much of my life I have been challenged by such an idea, feeling somewhat suspicious of the desire for divine imminence. Fortunately, the corpus of Torah, written and oral together, is vast, and has many different things to say about how the divine might be experienced. So for a mystical skeptic like myself, a very powerful Talmudic passage, found at *Eiruvim* 13b, and ostensibly about the famous *Tanna* Rabbi Meir has resonated with me each Shavuot.

Our passage begins with a statement of Rabbi Aha son of Hanina, an *Amora* of the Land of Israel of the 3rd generation:

אמר רבי אהא בר חנינא: גלוי וידוע לפני מי שאמר והיה העולם שאין בדורו של רבי מאיר כמותו, ומפני מה לא קבעו הלכה כמותו - שלא יכלו חביריו לעמוד על סוף דעתו. שהוא אומר על טמא טהור ומראה לו פנים, על טהור טמא ומראה לו פנים.	Rabbi Aha son of Hanina said: It is revealed and known before the One Who spoke and the world came into existence, that in the generation of Rabbi Meir there was nobody like him. So why did [the sages always] fix <i>halachah</i> in agreement with his views? Because his colleagues couldn't understand him, for he would declare the unclean to be clean and defend his claims and declare the clean to be unclean defend his claims.
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Rabbi Aha seems to give Rabbi Meir a backhanded compliment. On the one hand, he is the greatest sage of his generation, but on the other hand, despite his greatness, his *halachic* opinions are not automatically accepted as normative. As Rav Sherira Gaon explains in his famous 10th century letter to Rabbi Jacob ben Nissim of Kairouan, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, the editor and compiler of the Mishnah, used Rabbi Meir's oral collection of *halachic* statements, presumably which he had received from his own teacher Rabbi Akiva, as the basis for the *Mishnah*. The anonymous portions of the Mishnah are thus understood to derive from Rabbi Meir, but his name has been severed from them. Even the way Rabbi Aha teaches this is somewhat strange. What does it mean that only God knows Rabbi Meir's greatness? What prevented humans from knowing this too? Seemingly, Rabbi Meir was simply too much for the other sages to handle. He was so learned, so intelligent, so able to work with logic so as thoroughly confuse everyone, arguing the opposite of the truth. The ability to somehow be on multiple sides of a Talmudic argument is one usually only applied to God, as we see from the following *Gemara* from tractate *Hagiga* 3a:

[דברי חכמים כקרבנות וקמשמרות נטועים] בעלי אספות [נתנו מרעה אחד:] - אלו תלמידי חכמים שיושבין אספות אספות ועוסקין בתורה, הללו מטמאין והללו מטהרין, הללו אוסרין והללו מתירין, הללו פוסלין והללו מכשירין. שמה	[<i>Kohellet</i> 12:11 reads: The sayings of the wise are like goads, like nails firmly planted by] <i>the masters of assemblies</i> [given by one shepherd] These are Torah scholars who sit in rows [in the <i>Beit Midrash</i>] and busy themselves with the Torah, some pronounce unclean and others clean, some prohibit and others permit, some render unfit and some fit. In case one might then
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יאמר אדם: היאך אני למד תורה מעתה? תלמוד לומר: כולם נתנו מרעה אחד - אל אחד נתנו, פרנס אחד אמרו, מפי אדון כל המעשים ברוך הוא, דכתיב וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאַמֵּר...	ask, How can I learn Torah? [the verse continues] <i>given by one shepherd</i> . One G-d gave [both sides of every opinion] one leader [<i>i.e.</i> , Moshe] taught [both sides of every opinion] from the Blessed Master of all creation, as [Exodus 20:1] says God taught <i>all</i> these things saying.....
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This *Gemara* presents the normal Rabbinic model. Humans have to take a stand on *Halacha*, each sage must decide for themselves how the Divine Law should be put into practice. But in some sense, G-d teaches both side of every *halachic* debate. Rabbi Meir is thus very strange, like Moshe and like G-d in his unwillingness to be pinned down, and this can be very confusing.

Our Talmudic passage now quotes a *baraita*, a much older tradition which seems to corroborate Rabbi Aha's understanding of Rabbi Meir.

תנא: לא רבי מאיר שמו אלא רבי מיישא שמו, ולמה נקרא שמו רבי מאיר - שהוא מאיר עיני חכמים בהלכה.	It was taught [in a <i>baraita</i>]: His name was not Rabbi Meir but Rabbi Misha. Why was he called Rabbi Meir? Because he enlightened the eyes of the sages in <i>halachah</i> .
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If Rabbi Meir was deeply hard to understand, this fact seems not only to refer to his personality, but even to his name. The notion that the name is associated with the essence runs deep in Judaism. He was called Meir in Hebrew or Nehorai, as he will be called shortly, in Aramaic, both of which mean “to enlighten” despite the fact that his true name seems to have been “Misha.” Those with deep *bekiut* in the Talmud will be surprised by the way I’ve quoted the Talmud here, as the I am departing from the reading in the printed editions of the Talmud which read, “His name was not Rabbi Meir but Rabbi Nehorai.” I believe that Misha here should be understood as “Moshe,” a notion which will be supported by the statement of Rabbi Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] in a moment. But before we get there the passage is now essentially repeated:

ולא נהוראי שמו אלא רבי נחמיה שמו, ואמרי לה רבי אלעזר בן ערך שמו, ולמה נקרא שמו נהוראי - שמנהיר עיני חכמים בהלכה.	His name was not Nehorai but Rabbi Nehemiah or, as others say: Rabbi Eleazar ben Arak. Then why was he called Nehorai? Because he enlightened the eyes of the sages in <i>halachah</i> .
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Again we are told that he is called “Meir” because he “enlightened the eyes of the sages in *halachah*” but that really he was someone else, either the *Tanna* of his own generation Rabbi Nehemiah, who rescued Rabbinic Judaism after the defeat of the Bar Kohba revolt, or even more implausibly Rabbi Eleazar ben Arak, one of the four famous disciples of R. Yoḥanan b. Zakkai in Avot 2:8, called by his teacher an “ever-flowing spring.” This latter association is fascinating for Rabbi Eleazar ben Arak was a Rabbi who did not see learning as only repeating existing wisdom, like his colleague Rabbi Eliezer, who was called “a cistern who never leaks a drop” but one who innovated, and taught new Torah as a spring or a well provides fresh (new) water. So who was Rabbi Meir? And what was it that was so wonderful and yet so problematic about him? The Talmud has presented the notion that the answer is deeply unclear.

Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] is now quoted to reinforce the comparison with Moshe:

אמר רבי: האי דמחדדנא מחבראי דחזיתיה לרבי מאיר מאחוריה ואילו חזיתיה מקמיה הוה מחדדנא טפי דכתיב וְהָיוּ עֵינֶיךָ רֹאִות אֶת־מוֹרֶיךָ.	Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] said: That I am sharper than my colleagues is that I saw the Rabbi Meir from his back; had I seen his front, I would be sharper still! as it is written [in Isaiah 30:20]: <i>Your eyes should see your teacher.</i>
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Here we are granted a window into the way the sages studied Torah in the 2nd century CE. Unlike in later generations in which the Rabbis studied in fixed academies, which outlasted the lives of any given master, here, a single master gathered a group of students and taught them orally as they were gathered around him. Much as in contemporary classrooms in which the students tend to sit in the same seats for the duration of the class, Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] notes that he tended to sit in a location such that he could only see Rabbi Meir's back. This text is a clear reference to Moshe's experience on Mt. Sinai, receiving the second set of tablets, as described in Exodus 33:18-23:

And [Moshe] said, I beg you, show me your glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of *hashem* before you; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And he said, You can not see my face; for no man shall see me and live. And *hashem* said, Behold, there is a place by me, and you shall stand upon a rock; And it shall come to pass, while my glory passes by, that I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and will cover you with my hand while I pass by; And I will take away my hand, and **you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.**
יִרְאוּ:

Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi]'s experience as the student of Rabbi Meir parallels precisely Moshe's own experience learning from G-d. This passage's anthropomorphism has occasioned a number of explanations, but here it seems clear that there is some definite advantage for Moshe to "only" see "G-d's back," as it were. Full experience of the Divine is impossible. Yet a mediated, partial experience of the divine is part of what makes Moshe, Moshe. And this relationship between Moshe and G-d is then mirrored when Moshe gets down the mountain. Exodus 34: 30-35 reads as follows:

And when Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moshe, behold, **the skin of his face shone**; and they were afraid to come closer to him. And Moshe called to them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moshe talked with them. And afterward all the people of Israel came near; and he gave them in commandment all that *Hashem* had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. And when Moshe had finished speaking with them, he put a **veil on his face**. But when Moshe went in before *Hashem* to speak with him, he took the veil off, until he came out. And he came out, and spoke to the people of Israel

אֶת־פָּנָי מִשָּׁה כִּי קָרָן עֹר פָּנָי מִשָּׁה that which he was commanded. And the people of Israel saw the face of Moshe, that the skin of Moshe's face shone; and Moshe put the veil upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

The Jewish people, when they learn Torah from Moshe, have much the same experience as Moshe has with G-d. For the people, seeing Moshe's face is too much in much the same way as Moshe is unable to see G-d's "face." Much as Moshe is permitted only a partial vision of the Divine, so too when the people study with Moshe, they are permitted only a partial vision of the teacher of Torah. This is reenacted in Rabbi Meir's own disciple circle- Rabbi Meir is to Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] as G-d is to Moshe.

The Gemara has this presented us with a fantastic problem- there are both positive benefits and negative consequences with this model of (only) a partial vision of the Divine. Despite the desire on the part of humans for a more direct experience of the Divine, G-d's "back," Moses' veil, and Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi]'s position in the disciple circle confer the significant benefit of being able to learn and transmit *practical* Torah. Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] might not have Rabbi Meir's own abilities, but he is able to create the Mishnah.

This point is underscored by the Gemara's next move, in which Rabbi Abbahu, a sage of the Land of Israel from around the turn of the 4th century CE, shows that despite Rabbi Meir's problematic nature, his students learned what they needed to learn, through the model of the (only) partial vision of the Divine:

אמר רבי אבהו אמר רבי יוחנן: תלמיד היה לו לרבי מאיר וסומכוס שמו, שהיה אומר על כל דבר ודבר של טומאה ארבעים ושמונה טעמי טומאה, ועל כל דבר ודבר של טהרה ארבעים ושמונה טעמי טהרה.	Rabbi Abbahu said in the name of Rabbi Yohanan: Rabbi Meir had a disciple of the name of Symmachus who, for every rule concerning ritual uncleanness, supplied forty-eight reasons in support of its uncleanness, and for every rule concerning ritual cleanness, forty-eight reasons in support of its cleanness.
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Rabbi Meir, it should be recalled, proved that the clean was unclean and that the unclean was clean. His student, Symmachus, on the other hand, was nonetheless able to learn from his teacher to do the opposite. We see many instances of this in the Talmud. For instance, at Kiddushin 52b, the Talmud relates the following *baraita*:

תנו רבנן: לאחר פטירתו של ר' מאיר, אמר להם רבי יהודה לתלמידיו: אל יכנסו תלמידי רבי מאיר לכאן, מפני שקנתרנים הם, ולא ללמוד תורה הם באים, אלא לקפחני בהלכות הם באים. דחק סומכוס ונכנס, אמר להם, כך שנה לי ר' מאיר: המקדש בחלקו, בין קדשי קדשים ובין קדשים קלים - לא קידש. כעס ר' יהודה עליהם, אמר להם, לא כך אמרתי לכם:	Our Rabbis taught [in a <i>baraita</i>]: After Rabbi Meir's death, Rabbi Yehudah announced to his students: Rabbi Meir's students shall not enter [the <i>beit midrash</i>], because they are annoying and do not come to learn Torah but to overwhelm me with <i>halachot</i> . Symmachus forced his way through and entered. He said to them: Rabbi Meir taught me: If one betroths [a woman] with his [priestly] portion, whether of the higher or of the lower sanctity, he has not betrothed [her]. So Rabbi Yehudah got angry and said: I told you that Rabbi Meir's
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אל יכנסו מתלמידי ר"מ לכאן, מפני שקנתרנים הם, ולא ללמוד תורה הם באים, אלא לקפחני בהלכות הם באים? וכי אשה בעזרה מנין! אמר ר' יוסי, יאמרו: מאיר שכב, יהודה כעס, יוסי שתק, דברי תורה מה תהא עליה! וכי אין אדם עשוי לקבל קידושין לבתו בעזרה? ואין אשה עשויה לעשות לה שליח לקבל קידושיה בעזרה? ועוד, דחקה ונכנסה, מאי?	students shall not enter [the <i>beit midrash</i>], because they are annoying and do not come to learn Torah but to overwhelm me with <i>halachot</i> . [This is a good example] how could a woman be in the Temple Court?' Rabbi Yosse said: Shall it be said: Meir is dead, Yehuda is angry, and Yosse in silent. [If that were to be the case] what is to become of the words of the Torah? A Father can accept <i>kiddushin</i> money on his daughter's behalf in the Temple Court? A woman could authorize a messenger to receive her <i>kiddushin</i> money in the Temple Court? Or, what if she forces herself in?
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Rabbi Yehudah was one of Rabbi Meir's colleagues who could not understand the depth of Rabbi Meir's mind, and thus did not fix the *halacha* in accordance with his views. Indeed, he seemed to have found Rabbi Meir's quasi-divine ability to make impossible arguments to be annoying, so much so that he was willing to prevent Rabbi Meir's Torah from being taught by his students. Yet Symmachus, the student who benefitted from the (only) partial vision of the Divine, pushed his way into the *beit Midrash*, and taught Rabbi Meir's Torah. When he does so, he forces Rabbi Yosse to take it seriously, to see that Rabbi Meir might be on to something, that even unexpected situations (like the proto-feminist notion that a woman might force her way into the *azara*) require a *halachic* response. Symmachus, like Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] are able to translate what they learn from their strange teacher into a language that the rest of the Jewish community can understand.

One final *baraita*, and a discussion thereof drives the point home:

תנא: תלמיד ותיק היה ביבנה שהיה מטהר את השרץ במאה וחמשים טעמים.	One taught: There was once an old student at Yavne who could prove that a <i>sheretz</i> was clean by means of a hundred and fifty proofs.
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A *sheretz* is the quintessential unclean thing. By its very nature it is unclean, and yet, much like Rabbi Meir, in every generation there are those with Rabbi Meir's. In Babylonia, among the latest sages of the Talmud suggests that this ability is a good one, that Rabbi Meir's abilities should be emulated:

אמר רבינא: אני אדון ואטהרנו; ומה נחש שממית ומרבה טומאה - טהור, שרץ שאין ממית ומרבה טומאה לא כל שכן?	Ravina said: I can also make logical arguments to prove it to be clean [as follows:] Just as a snake that kills and thus causes much uncleanness, is itself clean, the <i>sheretz</i> which does not kill and thus causes no uncleanness should be clean.
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Ravina (there are two sages by this name, it is unclear which of them is the speaker here) attempts to emulate Rabbi Meir. But the anonymous voice of the Talmud, rejects this easily:

ולא היא, מעשה קוץ בעלמא קעביד.	[Ravina's logic] is wrong [the snake] is only acting like a thorn.
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The uncleanness caused by the snake, according to the anonymous voice of the Talmud, has nothing to do with the ontology of the snake itself, and thus no analogy between the snake and the *sheretz* can be made. The Rabbi Meir approach is rejected in favor of the Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi]/Symmachus model.

The Talmud is thus teaching us a powerful lesson. On Shavuot especially one ought to caution against too much desire for full experience of the Divine. It might be exciting. But it is definitely dangerous. Instead we are encouraged to seek out an experience of revelation that is akin to seeing Moshe Rabeinu teach us through a veil. We know there is more divine light that we are precluded from seeing, but it is the lack of this full frontal Divine light that enables us to take the lessons of the Torah to heart to create the kind of world in which the Torah can actually be enacted.

Ezekiel's Vision and the Challenge of Revelation

By Adina Blaustein

On the first day of Shavuot, just after we recall the fire and thunder of Sinai, we encounter another vision of overwhelming divine revelation in the haftarah. Ezekiel witnesses the very fabric of reality tear open: a storm rushing in from the north, fire flickering within a dense cloud. From this cosmic rupture emerge creatures that defy comprehension—four-faced with the countenances of humans, lions, eagles, and oxen. Strange wheels spin alongside them. Wings beat in perfect unison. A throne of sapphire hovers above these impossible forms, surrounded by light and flame. And seated upon this celestial throne: the Presence of God.

The echoes of Sinai reverberate through every element of this vision. Fire, cloud, trembling ground, an unbearable voice—Ezekiel's experience mirrors the divine revelation the Israelites witnessed at the foot of the mountain. The connection suggests deliberate continuity across centuries. Just as we read about God's awe-inspiring presence at Sinai, Ezekiel's vision strikes us with the same force, the same divine weight.

But this is not Sinai. Ezekiel's vision unfolds not at the birth of a nation journeying toward promise, but in Babylon—where the first wave of exiles already mourns their distance from Jerusalem. At Sinai, the Israelites stood together as one people receiving their covenant; in Ezekiel's time, they are fractured, with some in exile while others remain in a homeland under threat. And there is one element that differs dramatically from the Sinai revelation: dominating the vision in Ezekiel is a divine chariot, with bewildering wheels within wheels, eyes that see in all directions, celestial beings guiding its movement. At Sinai, God descended upon a mountain. Here, God appears mobile, on a wheeled throne that can travel anywhere. Why does Ezekiel frame God's presence in this chariot? What symbolism does this divine vehicle carry for Ezekiel's generation, and as the haftarah for Shavuot?

To answer these questions, we must follow this chariot along two paths: first through Ezekiel's careful repurposing of Sinai imagery for an audience in exile, and then through the deliberate choices of the *mesadrei hahaftarah*, who transformed the chariot's message by what they included and excluded from our haftarah reading. The chariot will reveal not just a message for Ezekiel's world, but insights about finding God's presence that remain powerful for our own experiences of displacement and longing.

Sinai Reimagined

Ezekiel's vision appears deliberately constructed to overwhelm human perception, just like at Sinai. In Exodus 19 and 20, thunder and lightning envelop the mountain, manifesting the weight of divine presence. Ezekiel similarly witnesses natural order yield to revelation: "The heavens opened, and I saw visions of God" (1:1). His description—"a stormy wind swept from the north—

a huge cloud and flashing fire, surrounded by radiance... a gleam as of amber” (1:4)—directly recalls Sinai’s fire and cloud.⁹

Notably, Ezekiel repeatedly uses the term “sight”—“I looked” [וַיֵּרָא] (Ezekiel 1:4, 15, 27)—which parallels the moment after the Ten Commandments, when the Israelites are reminded of what they have seen and warned against misremembering it: “You yourselves saw [וַיֵּרָא] that I spoke to you from the very heavens” (Exodus 20:19).

This parallel extends into a blending of sight with the sensation of sound. Just as the Israelites at Sinai experienced a synesthetic phenomenon when they “saw the voices” of God speaking to them—an experience that transcends ordinary human perception—Ezekiel similarly describes a rich multisensory experience in his vision. At the climactic moment of divine encounter, Ezekiel’s account vividly captures this convergence of senses: “Like the appearance of the bow which shines in the clouds on a day of rain, such was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. That was the appearance of the semblance of the Presence of the LORD. When I beheld it, I flung myself down on my face. And I heard the voice of someone speaking” (Ezekiel 1:28). This seamless integration of dazzling visual imagery with divine speech reinforces the continuity between Ezekiel’s prophetic experience and the earlier Sinai revelation, suggesting a consistent pattern in how humans perceive divine communication that transcends ordinary sensory boundaries.

God’s Chariot

While the most prominent feature of Ezekiel’s vision—the divine chariot—seems unrelated to Sinai at first glance, there may still be meaningful connections to the Exodus narrative. Considering how thoroughly Ezekiel weaves Sinai themes throughout his vision, we should look to the Sinai account for possible chariot connections. As it turns out, a detail from the Sinai revelation that might initially seem minor takes on remarkable significance when viewed in light of these other parallels, potentially unlocking the mystery of this striking chariot imagery.

In the prelude to the Ten Commandments, God reviews the recent dizzying events of the past few weeks. After delivering the Israelites from the Egyptian chariots at the Sea, God summarizes their miraculous salvation by saying He bore them “on eagles’ wings [כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרִים]” as He guided them out of Egypt (Exodus 19:4). This language seems to echo in the image that Ezekiel describes. What was metaphorical at Sinai becomes literal and visible in Ezekiel’s vision—divine transportation

⁹ Biblical theophanies—visions of God’s presence—appear in several prophetic books, but none depict God enthroned upon a chariot as vividly as Ezekiel’s vision. Isaiah 6 describes a dramatic encounter in which Isaiah sees God “sitting on a high and lofty throne,” surrounded by fiery seraphim proclaiming His holiness. Similarly, 1 Kings 22 recounts Micaiah’s vision of God seated upon His throne, surrounded by the heavenly court. Daniel 7 presents a vision of the “Ancient of Days” seated on a fiery throne with wheels, though the imagery is less elaborate than Ezekiel’s. Yet in all these cases, God is depicted as enthroned in the heavens, a stationary figure of divine authority. What sets Ezekiel’s vision apart is its dynamic and almost mechanical imagery: God’s throne is mounted upon a chariot borne by four-faced, winged creatures with interlocking wheels, capable of moving in all directions.

manifesting in glorious detail. The text dwells obsessively on this mobility, describing the mechanics of divine movement with extraordinary precision. Ezekiel reports, “And when the creatures moved forward, the wheels moved at their sides; and when the creatures were borne above the earth, the wheels were borne too” (Ezekiel 1:19). Ezekiel’s creatures that allow for the coordinated movement of God’s chariot also have wings - כְּנָפִים, just like at Sinai. The vision continues with meticulous attention to this coordinated movement: “Wherever the spirit impelled them to go, they went, and the wheels were borne alongside them; for the spirit of the creatures was in the wheels” (Ezekiel 1:20). This elaborate system of wheels within wheels allowed for total divine mobility, allowing for the chariot to go “in any of the four directions without veering as they moved” (Ezekiel 1:17).

This emphasis on movement in Ezekiel’s vision transforms Sinai’s poetic metaphor into a powerful theological statement crucial for Ezekiel’s exiled audience in Babylon: The God who once carried Israel from Egyptian bondage on “eagles’ wings” remains just as mobile and sovereign in exile. The same divine presence that liberated them before now moves freely between Jerusalem and Babylon, never confined to a single place.

The Unspoken Context: A Startling Omission

Yet this comforting message of divine mobility conceals a darker reality—one that is deliberately omitted from our haftarah. Our liturgical reading includes Ezekiel’s initial vision in chapter 1, with its detailed description of the divine chariot, and then skips ahead to conclude with a single verse from chapter 3: “and I heard behind me a great roaring sound: ‘Blessed is the Presence of the Lord, in His Place’” (Ezekiel 3:12). This climactic ending underscores the impression that Ezekiel’s vision is in total harmony with the Sinai narrative.

But consider what this haftarah excludes. Between chapters 1 and 3, God delivers a devastating message to Ezekiel about Israel’s rebellion and coming destruction. More significantly, in the chapters that follow, Ezekiel witnesses God’s glory—the very Presence seated on the chariot—departing from the Temple in Jerusalem.

The contrast with Sinai is striking. Within Exodus, God explains the purpose of divine transportation: to establish an eternal covenant of blessing. But the full Ezekiel narrative reveals something entirely different. The truth transforms our understanding of the vision: this is not a chariot of revelation but of departure. The wheels are not bringing God closer—they are carrying Him away. With God’s glory missing from the Temple, it is just a building like any other, a structure vulnerable to destruction.

This gap between the *haftarah* reading and the complete text conceals this sobering reality. Ezekiel’s vision is not merely about divine glory; it is the prelude to divine abandonment. The chapters we don’t read show that Judah has reached a breaking point. The very wheels and wings that inspire awe in chapter 1 are, in fact, the mechanics of God’s retreat from His people.

Divine Mobility: A Message for those in Mourning

It cannot be coincidental that these negative messages are omitted and that the haftarah skips over Ezekiel chapter 2 to conclude with a phrase from Chapter 3. This is clearly a deliberate decision made by the *mesadrei hahaftarah*. Surely they didn't intend to deceive their audiences by omitting the negative context of Ezekiel's message; this is more than just a liturgical sleight of hand.

Rather, I believe they're offering us a framework—we who have mourned not only the first Temple Ezekiel grieved, but the second as well—to understand a key message. In this reading, the *mesadrei hahaftarah* invite us to see how the message of God's mobility provides deep comfort. Because while God's departure from the Temple is tragic, it affirms that divine presence was never limited to that structure alone. If God could be found in Babylon, then surely God's presence dwells among us still in our own dispersions.

The *mesadrei hahaftarah* weren't concealing Ezekiel's complete message but illuminating its most essential truth for a people no longer gathered around a physical Temple: authentic divine encounter happens anywhere. Just as revelation at Sinai occurred without a Temple and outside the land of Israel, we too experience God's presence regardless of location.

This understanding comes into focus most clearly on Shavuot, when we commemorate the revelation at Sinai—a covenant formed not in Jerusalem but in the wilderness. The holiday has transformed over centuries from an agricultural festival into a celebration of Torah study that binds Jews across all boundaries. This mirrors precisely what the *mesadrei hahaftarah* understood in Ezekiel's vision: that God's presence travels with Israel, never confined to a single location.

Through generations of diaspora, this insight has offered more than abstract theology—it has provided vital reassurance that divine presence remains accessible wherever Jews gather in study and prayer. What Ezekiel first witnessed as a chariot of judgment becomes, through the wisdom of the *mesadrei hahaftarah*, a powerful symbol of God's enduring covenant with Israel, sustaining faith across time and distance when temple and homeland were lost.

Cultivating an Attitude of שמחה

By Gabe Falk

Shavuot is one of my favorite memories from our time in Cleveland. The vibrant learning that happens in both the Main Sanctuary and the Beit Midrash is an incredible representation of the community's Ahavat HaTorah. And so, when Emmanuel asked me to write in a few words of Torah, I didn't hesitate.

Central to each of the של רגלים is the *mitzva* of שמחה – to be joyous on the holiday. This *mitzva* is spelled out explicitly with regards to the *chagim* of Sukkot and Shavuot and extrapolated to include Pesach as well. Of course, the *mitzva* of *simcha* on Pesach and Sukkot is overshadowed by the many other *mitzvot* that characterize those holidays. However, when it comes to Shavuot, the commandment to be joyful seems to be the *sole mitzva*. As such, I thought it would be appropriate in the pages of this journal to unpack the meaning of this unique commandment.

We'll begin with the פסוק. In *Sefer Devarim*, the Torah states:

וְשִׂמְחָתָּ לְפָנַי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וְהַלּוֹי אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ וְהַגֵּר וְהַיְתוֹם וְהָאֵלֶמְנָה
אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׂכְנוֹ שָׁמוֹ נָשָׂא:

Emotions are famously hard to legislate. This question pops up in a number of areas of the Torah, most famously with regards to the 9th commandment: לא תחמד. Can the Torah truly demand adherence to a specific emotional state? Surely those are beyond our control.

In response to this challenge, *Chazal* seek to ground the emotional commandment of שמחה in concrete, actionable directives. The Gemara in Pesachim 109a offers several definitions of שמחה: for the *Tana Kama*, drinking wine fulfills this חיוב for all, while R' Yehuda offers a differentiated definition: for men, wine creates שמחה whereas women find joy in new clothing. *Chazal's* task, however, is clear: to offer an actionable definition of the *mitzva* of שמחה and thereby avoid the messy work of legislating emotions.

While this *drasha* is halakhically true and correct, Rav Hershel Shachter שליט"א insists that we not abandon the פשט of a פסוק when trying to understand the full thrust of a *mitzva*. To fulfill the מצוה of שמחה on *Yom Tov*, we must both check the requirements of יין, בשר, and new clothing, but we must also seek to cultivate an internal emotional experience of שמחה.

What might this look like? What is שמחה and why is it such a critical aspect of our celebration of the רגלים?

There are surely many paths to defining the enigmatic term שמחה. The approach I seek to develop below takes a detour into the Ramban's commentary on *Sefer Bamidbar* but I believe emerges with a coherent and

The one I put forth in this piece steps away – momentarily – from the topic of the רגלים and into the Ramban's *peirush* to *Sefer Bamidbar*. Allow me to explain:

Sefer Bamidbar tells the story of *Bnei Yisrael*'s tragic abandonment of “Plan A” – entering into *Eretz Yisrael* immediately and miraculously – and arriving at “Plan B” – the punishment to wander the desert for 40 years before entering into the Promised Land. The pressing question is why? What led *Bnei Yisrael* to utter the fateful words: נתנה ראש ונשובה מצרימה – let us appoint a head and return to Egypt?

While most address this question locally with the sin of the *Meraglim*, the Ramban tells a story which is wider in scope and far more psychological in nature. In the Ramban's view, one “original” mistake precipitated the snowball effect which brought “Plan A” crashing down.

This original mistake, says the Ramban, was *Bnei Yisrael*'s departure from *Har Sinai*. The *Midrash* offers a famous metaphor, comparing *Bnei Yisrael* to a תינוק הבורח מבית הספר – like a child fleeing the schoolhouse. The Ramban, quoting this *Midrash*, adds a word pregnant with meaning: כתינוק. The child leaving school **joyfully**. הבורח מבית הספר בשמחה.

The Ramban's subtle emendation introduces a thesis that he will continue to develop throughout key events in the *Sefer*. This sin, of misplaced *simcha*, is the primary reason that בני ישראל's entry into the land is delayed. אלמלא חטאם זה...היה מכניסם לארץ מיד.

In this bold claim, the Ramban traces *Bnei Yisrael*'s חטא to its psychological core: not one particular action, but to בני ישראל's attitude toward their נחלה as עם ה'.

In this critical juncture, בני ישראל could and should have expressed a reluctance to leave the קדושה of הר סיני. However, their שמחה underscores that they were at הר סיני by force and not by choice. The attitude of joy underscores the alignment between the desire of the actor and the action they are performing.

The Ramban relates to the attitude of שמחה twice more in critical junctures of ספר במדבר. In the episode of the מתאוננים, when *Bnei Yisrael* complain about the arduous nature of their journey, Ramban offers the following explanation for Hashem's anger:

היה רע בעיני ה', שהיה להם ללכת אחריו בשמחה ובטוב לבב מרוב כל אשר נתן להם, והם היו כאנוסים ומוכרחים ומתרעמים על ענינם

In their journey, *Bnei Yisrael* are faced with a choice between two opposing attitudes: to embrace their mission בשמחה or to trudge through the journey against their will. The alternative to שמחה is a feeling of coercion and the absence of agency.

In the dramatic episode of the מרגלים, the Ramban again identifies שמחה as the critical failure of the generation. While רש"י struggles to understand why משה endorsed the mission of the מרגלים, for the רמב"ן, Moshe's motives are obvious:

הכל לשמחם כי צבי היא [ארץ ישראל] לכל הארצות ויעלו בה בחפץ גדול

Moshe hoped – perhaps as a last ditch effort – that the report of the מרגלים would generate an internal sense of רצון in the hearts and minds of בני ישראל, which, in turn, would engender a spontaneous attitude of שמחה as they journeyed to *Eretz Yisrael*. However, as we well know, this did not end well.

In each of these instances, *Hashem* and משה were surely capable of coercing the nation into submission. However, this would be a sorely incomplete form of *Avodat Hashem*. In *Avodat Hashem*, we find profound alignment between the רצון הבורא and the רצון העובד, between the commander and the commanded. And when this alignment is present, the entire being of the עובד *Eved Hashem* comes alive with pure, spontaneous שמחה.

The Ramban's thesis emerges clearly: שמחה is defined as the state of alignment between the רצון of the individual and the actions they are performing. The tragedy of *Sefer Bamidbar* is precipitated by this exact emotion – both by misplaced שמחה in the departure from הר סיני and the startling absence of שמחה as בני ישראל journey toward *Eretz Yisrael*.

The Ramban leaves us with a powerful charge as עובדי ה'. We certainly can and must follow הלכה out of a sense of מחויבות, commanded-ness. However, our aspirations are far loftier. In the words of the *Mishna* in *Avot*, our task is לעשות רצונו כרצונך – to internalize and assimilate the *Retzon Hashem* so that it becomes inseparable from our רצון. Then, and only then, can we truly serve Hashem בשמחה.

Perhaps this is the complete form of the *mitzva* of שמחת יום טוב. When we reflect on the broad sweep of our lives as עם הנבחר, we must ask ourselves: is our רצון fully aligned with רצון הבורא? Have we internalized the טעמי המצוות and the beautiful value system that emerges from them? Do we view Shabbos as an inconvenience or a spiritual opportunity? Do we drag our feet and arrive at shul late or do we spring out of bed, energized by the opportunity to encounter הקב"ה in *Tefila*? And on *Shavuot*, we ask: are we dragging our feet to receive the Torah, or do we spend a sleepless night eagerly anticipating the moment of מתן תורה? When we can answer in the affirmative, we will have truly fulfilled the *mitzva* of 'ושמחת לפני ה'.

I miss each of you dearly and wish I could be celebrating *Yom Tov* together with you. I hope this *D'var Torah* will bridge that gap, and *b'ezrat Hashem* I hope we will have the *zechut* to spend *Shavuot* together next year in ירושלים עיר הקודש.

It was Never Supposed to be Easy: How מתן תורה עקדת יצחק Prepared us for and Beyond

By Elana Katz

We often say “עם הנצח לא מפחד מדרך ארוכה” - the eternal nation isn’t intimidated by a long journey. Steadfastness and grit have been essential for our survival throughout the millennia, but had also been specifically programmed into our spiritual DNA before we were even a proper nation.

When Hashem informed Avram that his children would be as many as the stars, Avram sought to understand and asked Hashem how his future would unfold. Instead of receiving only positive news, Hashem explained to Avram: (Genesis 15: 13- 14)

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יְדַע תְּדַע כִּי־גֵר אֶהְיֶה זְרָעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעִבְדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה. וְגַם אֶת־הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר יַעֲבֹדוּ יִן אֲנִי וְאַחֲרֵי־כֵן יֵצְאוּ בְּרֶכֶשׁ גָּדוֹל:

“Know well that your offspring will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and they will enslave them and afflict them for four hundred years. But also the nation whom they will serve, I will judge, and afterwards they will come out with great wealth.”

While the specific word *nation* was not used here to explain Avram’s trajectory, the words strangers, oppression and enslavement were. Hashem informed Avram that his children would emerge with great wealth, without explaining how that wealth would be acquired. It is understood that Avram was informed that the nation that would enslave his children was Egypt. Thus, this tradition was passed down by our forefathers. But when stating that Egyptian oppression and subjugation would be the precursor to our nationhood, Hashem withheld information about the timing, location and manner in which these slaves will evolve into nationhood.

Three months after the exodus from Egypt, *Bnei Yisrael* arrived at *Midbar Sinai*.
(Exodus 19: 1-2)

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי:
(ב) וַיָּסֻעוּ מִרְפִּידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַּר גִּישׁוֹן־שֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל גִּגְד הַהָר:

Shemot 19

- (1) In the third month of the Children of Israel’s going forth from the land of Egypt, on that day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai.
- (2) They traveled from *Rephidim* and came to the Wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain.

The text informs us that they arrived at מדבר סיני and that they camped opposite the mountain. This mountain is not simply referred to as “a mountain,” rather **the** mountain, ההר. This should pique our interests and wonder: why was this mountain already referred to as **the** mountain? We are traditionally taught that *Har Sinai* was the lowest of all the mountains, so why would that warrant being singled out as **the** mountain? Additionally, Hashem had not yet offered *Bnei Yisrael* the covenant of being “a kingdom of priests and holy nation” and they had not yet accepted it, which would continue to support that this mountain should be viewed as random. But the text hints otherwise. Had something noteworthy already happened at this mountain?

Yes. Something monumentally significant had occurred at this mountain, albeit not in the specific, physical location where *Har Sinai* stood. Rabbi Ari Kahn quotes the *Midrash Shocher Tov* and explains:

מדרש תהלים (שוחר טוב, בובר) מזמור סח
 “...אין רצוני אלא בסיני שהוא שפל מכולם... וסיני מהיכן בא? אמר ר' יוסי מהר המוריה נתלש, כחלה מעסה, ממקום שנעקד יצחק אבינו. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא הואיל ויצחק אביהם נעקד עליו נאה לבניו לקבל תורה עליו את התורה...”

My desire is only for Sinai because it is the lowest of you all (of all other mountains in the range)...and Sinai, from where did it emerge? Rabbi Yosi says it was sliced off from *Har HaMoriah*, like challah from the dough, from the place where Yitzchak our father was bound. The Holy One Blessed be He said, “since this is the spot where Yitzchak their father was bound, it is right for his children to receive the Torah upon it.”

There are many textual similarities that give us added insight into the deep connection between *Akedat Yitzchak* and *Matan Torah*.

בראשית כ"ב:

(א) וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַהֲאֱלֹקִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:

(1) After these things, God tested Avraham, and said to him, “Avraham!” and he said, “Here I am.”

Upon receiving the test of sacrificing his son, Hashem related to Avraham with the Divine Name of אֱלֹקִים, which connotes strict justice. When Yitzchak inquired as to which sheep would be offered for this sacrifice, Avraham responded by stating:

בראשית כ"ב:ח'

(ח) וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֵלָיו הִנֵּה לְעֹלָה בְנִי וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו:

(8) Avraham said, “God will see to the sheep for the offering Himself, my son.”
 And the two of them walked together.

We continue to see that Avraham explained to Yitzchak that the experience that they lived through was one which reflects Divine strictness, as characterized by the name אֱלֹקִים. As the tension and

suspense filled scene of *Akedat Yitzchak* unfolded, Avraham and Yitzchak both accepted this command with the understanding that it came from a place of Divine strictness.

After Avraham and Yitzchak successfully passed this test, Hashem began relate to them through the Divine Name that represents mercy and compassion, יְקוֹק.

(יא) וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו מִלְאָךְ יְקוֹק מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲבְרָהָם | אֲבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי:
(יב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־תִּשְׁלַח גִּידְךָ אֶל־הַנֶּזֶר וְאֶל־תַּעַשׂ לוֹ מֵאוֹמָה כִּי־וְעַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־יִרְאָה אֱלֹקִים אֶתָּה וְלֹא
תִשְׁכַּח אֶת־בְּנֶךָ אֶת־יְחִידְךָ מִמֶּנִּי:

(11) An angel of Hashem called out to him from the heavens and said, “Avraham! Avraham!” and he said, “Here I am.”

(12) He said, “Do not stretch forth your hand against the boy and do not do anything to him! Because now I know that you are God-fearing and you did not withhold your son, your only one, from me.”

The same interplay of Divine Names is also found at the scene of *Matan Torah*. All the verses and instructions leading up to the revelation at Sinai, describe Hashem as *Elokim*. Once we were engaged in a covenant with Him, agreed to this binding treaty, and experienced the awesomeness and fright, Hashem transitioned to יְקוֹק, which is how He introduced Himself in the first commandment.

שמות כ:
(א) וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹקִים אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאַמְרָ:
(ב) אֲנֹכִי יְקוֹק אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֶּן יָת עַבְדִּי יָם: לֹא־יִהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עַל־
פְּנֵי:

The Torah informs us the reasoning for *Akedat Yitzchak*:

“וְהָאֱלֹקִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם.”

Elokim tested Avraham.

So too, the fright and terror that was experienced at *Har Sinai* was also “לְבַעֲבוֹר נִסּוֹת אֶתְכֶם בָּא” “הָאֱלֹקִים.”

שמות כ':ט"ז
(טז) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם אֶל־תִּירְאוּ כִּי לְבַעֲבוֹר נִסּוֹת אֶתְכֶם בָּא הָאֱלֹהִים וּבַעֲבוֹר תִּהְיֶה יִרְאַתוֹ עַל־
פְּנֵיכֶם לְבִלְתִּי תִחַטְּאוּ:

If we were to follow the same translation of the word נִסָּה based on the translation of the word נִסָּה used at עֲקֻדַּת יִצְחָק, we would explain that Hashem designed the revelation experience in order to test the nation. However, Rashi does not employ this translation here. Instead he explains:

רש"י שמות כ':

(טז) לבעבור נסות אתכם – לגדל אתכם בעולם, שיצא לכם שם באומות שהוא בכבודו נגלה עליכם.
נסות – לשון הרמה וגדולה, כמו: הרימו נס (ישעיהו ס"ב:י'), ארים נסי (ישעיהו מ"ט:כ"ב), כנס על הגבעה (ישעיהו ל"י:י"ז), שהוא זקוף.

The fright, terror and fireworks experienced prior to the revelation at Sinai were done so in order to uplift the nation, both in the eyes of the other nations of the world and for ourselves.

Essentially, Rashi is suggesting that the laws and responsibilities that were acquired at *Matan Torah* were designed to uplift us. Typically laws and responsibilities impart a feeling of trepidation and pressure, so how might we fuse these two approaches? If they can be fused, could we also apply Rashi's explanation of "נסה" (to uplift) backwards to the experience with Avraham?

When *Elokim* appeared to Avraham to test him, He stated:

בראשית כ"ב:

(ב) וַיֹּאמֶר קַח-נָא אֶת-בְּנֶךְךָ אֶת-יִצְחָק אֲשֶׁר-אַהֲבָהְ אֶת-יִצְחָק וְלֶךְ-לְךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרְיָה וְהַעֲלֵהוּ שָׁם לְעֹלָה
עַל אֶתֶד הַהָרִים אֲשֶׁר אֹמַר אֵלֶיךָ:

Bereshit 22:2

(2) He said, "Please, take your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak, and go forth to the land of Moriah, and raise him up as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you."

The *midrash* carefully notes that the word "please" seems inappropriate in this context. If *Elokim* was testing Avraham, there is no reason to qualify or soften this test with the word "please."

מדרש תנחומא, וירא כ"ב

... וַיֹּאמֶר קַח נָא, אֵין נָא אֱלָא לְשׁוֹן בִּקְשָׁה. מְשַׁל לְמַלְךָ בְּשׁוֹר נָדָם שְׁעָמְדוּ עָלָיו מִלְחָמוֹת הַרְבֵּה, וְהָיָה לוֹ גִּבּוֹר אֶחָד נֹצֵחַ בְּכָל מִלְחָמוֹת. לִימִים עָמְדָה עָלָיו מִלְחָמָה חֲזָקָה. אָמַר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאוֹתוֹ גִּבּוֹר, בִּבְקִשָּׁה מִמֶּךָ עָמוּד לִי בְּמִלְחָמָה זֹה, שְׁלֹא יֹאמְרוּ שָׂרֵי הַסָּיִלִים שְׁלִי, אוֹתָן מִלְחָמוֹת רְאוּשׁוֹנוֹת לֹא הָיָה בָּהֶן מִמֶּשׁ. אַף כֹּךָ אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְאַבְרָהָם, נְסִיתִיךָ בְּתַשְׁעָה נְסִיווֹת וְעָמְדָת בָּהֶן, עָבָדְךָ עָמוּד לִי בְּנִסְיוֹן זֶה, כְּדִי שְׁלֹא יֹאמְרוּ, רְאוּשׁוֹנִים לֹא הָיָה בָּהֶם מִמֶּשׁ.

...He said, "please take." The word please is only an expression of a request. A parable to a human king that had many wars brought upon him. And he had one special warrior that was victorious in all his battles. After some time, a particularly strong battle came upon him. The king said to that warrior: please, I ask of you, stand and fight for me in this war, so that my other officers will not say that the earlier wars weren't particularly challenging. So too, Hashem said to Avraham, "I

tested you with nine tests and you passed them all. Now, withstand this test, so that they won't say, the first ones were of no rigor."

This midrash is capturing the rigorous nature of the tests that Avraham was presented with. At first glance, it is hard to understand the analogy presented: why would the other officers conclude that the first battles lacked challenge or rigor if the warrior did not stand in for the final battle? Why would we have thought that the previous nine tests were easy for Avraham if he didn't stand in for the 10th?

Dr. Simi Peters of Matan explains that *Akedat Yitzchak* was consequential because this test proved that Avraham would uphold G-d's word unconditionally, **even if he was asked to perform a task outside his comfort zone**. Critics might have been able to reason that Avraham had passed the previous nine tests because they were not too rigorous and he did not experience extreme dissonance when asked to withstand them. *But there is no doubt the essence of the test of Akedat Yitzchak was indeed the discomfort he felt*. Hashem was asking Avraham to prove that no matter how uncomfortable the charge was, he was able to overcome that discomfort to uphold the will of Hashem.

This achievement is not for the weak of character. In order to become a holy nation and a kingdom of priests that would be uplifted amongst the nations, Avraham's descendants needed to be accustomed to the discomfort that they would experience throughout the millennia. In this regard, the entire experience of the revelation at Sinai intentionally involved traumatic discomfort.

שמות י"ט:ט"ז

(טז) וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בִּהְיוֹת הַבֹּקֶר וַיְהִי קוֹלֹת וּבְרָקִים וַעֲנָן כָּבֵד עַל־הָהָר וְקוֹל שֹׁפָר תָּזַק מְאֹד וַיִּתְחַד כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בַּמַּחֲנֶה:
(יז) וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹקִים מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיַּתְּצֵבּוּ בְּתֵהוֹתַיִת הָהָר:
(יח) וְהָר סִינַי עָשָׂן כִּלּוֹ מִפְּנֵי אֲשֶׁר יָרַד עָלָיו יְקוֹק בְּאֵשׁ וַיַּעַל עָשָׁנוּ כַּעֲשׂוֹן הַכֹּבֶשֶׂת וַיִּתְחַד כָּל־הָהָר מְאֹד:
(יט) וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְתוֹק מְאֹד מִשָּׁה יִדְבֹּר וְהָאֱלֹקִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְּקוֹל:

Shemot 19:16

(16) On the third day, in the morning, there was thunder and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain, and the sound of a horn, very strong. And all the people in the camp trembled.

(17) Moshe brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stationed themselves at the bottom of the mountain.

(18) And all of Mount Sinai was smoking because Hashem had come down upon it in fire, and its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace; and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

(19) The sound of the horn was growing exceedingly stronger and stronger. Moshe would speak and God would reply with a voice.

פרקי דרבי אליעזר - פרק ל (פרק לא)

...רבי חנינא בן דוסא אומר, אותו האיל לא יצא ממנו דבר לבטלה...שתי קרניו של איל שופרות. בשל שמאל נשמע קולו של הקדוש ברוך הוא על הר סיני, שנאמר, 'ויהי קול השופר'. וקרן של ימין הוא גדול מן השמאל, ועתיד לתקוע בו לעתיד לבא בקבוץ של גליות, שנאמר, 'והיה ביום ההוא יתקע בשופר גדול'..."

Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa explains that the noise of the shofar that was heard and experienced at מתן תורה was blown from the left horn of the ram that was sacrificed in place of Yitzchak. The ram's right horn is set aside and will be used in the future to gather in all of the exiled Jews and usher in Mashiach.

Avraham's final action at Har HaMoriah, the scene of Akedat Yitzchak, provides additional insight between these two events.

בראשית כ"ב:י"ג

(יג) וַיִּשָּׂא אַבְרָהָם אֶת-עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה-אֵיל אֲחֵר נֶאֱסָר בְּסִבְבּוֹ בְּקַרְנָיו וַיִּלְכֹּד אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הָאֵיל וַיַּעֲלֵהוּ לְעֹלָה תַּחַת בְּנוֹ:

(יד) וַיִּקְרָא אַבְרָהָם שְׁם-הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא וַיִּקְרָא: יְקֹנֶק | וַיֵּרָא אֲשֶׁר יֵאָמֵר הַיּוֹם בְּהָר יְקֹנֶק יֵרָאֶה:

Bereshit 22:13

(13) Avraham lifted his eyes and saw, and there was a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns. Avraham went and took the ram, and he raised it as an offering instead of his son.

(14) Avraham named that place "Hashem Yireh" as is said today, "On the mountain of Hashem, He will be seen."

Once the tight binds around Yitzchak were released and a ram was sacrificed in his place, Avraham named this place, יְקֹנֶק יֵרָאֶה. Passuk Daled is an interesting passuk to consider, as it seems like there are incomplete clauses or thoughts.

"Avraham named that place 'Hashem Yireh', as it is said today, "On the mountain of Hashem, He will be seen."

פירוש עקדת יצחק explains that Avraham specifically named this spot with a name in the future tense as a way of praying that Hashem continue to take note of his actions.

ויקרא אברהם שם המקום כו' – לפי שלא גמר המעשה ההוא כאשר עם לבבו והיה חושש אם שמא לא יחשב לו כאלו עשה, קרא למקום ההוא על שם מה שהיה בלבו לעשות והכונה ה' יראה אשר הייתי אומר בלבי ובפי לעשות לולי שמנעני המלאך. ואולם המחשבה הטובה ויושר לבבי היום בהר ה' יראה לעולם כי שם בניתי את המזבח ועשיתי כל המעשים האלה. והכונה כי המקום ההוא יהיה עד נאמן לפרסם בעולם עוצם האמונה האלהית המחייב האדם השלם לשחוט את בנו בעבורה כאלו עשהו אשר

זה ישוב לאמונת הצלחת הנפשות בעונג הנצחי כמו שכתבנו.

Since Avraham was told not to complete the action (of sacrificing Yitzchak) that his heart had intended to complete, he had concerns that it might be considered that he had not performed the entire act. Therefore, Avraham named this place to express the thoughts that were in his heart: Hashem will see what is in my heart and what I planned to do, had the angel of Hashem not prevented him from doing so...Avraham was also expressing that this specific location would be a reliable testimony to publicize to the world the depth of belief in G-d that obligates a person to slaughter his son.

I'd like to suggest that Avraham intuited that this location would again appear, although physically, in a different location. Rashi explains Avraham's words:

רש"י בראשית כ"ב:
(יד) י"י יראה – פשוטו ותרגומו: י"י יבחר ויראה לו המקום הזה להשרות שכינתו ולהקריב כאן קרבנות.
אשר יאמר היום – שיאמרו לימי הדורות עליו: בהר י"י זה יראה – הקב"ה לעמו.
היום – ימים העתידים, כמו: "עד היום הזה" שבכל המקרא, שדורות הבאים הקוראים את המקרא אומרים על יום שעומדין בו: 'היום הזה'.

When Avraham spoke about Hashem in the future tense, he meant: Hashem will choose and will show him this place to rest His שכינה and bring *korbanot* here. Before the *Beit HaMikdash* was built, the first place that this prophecy was actualized was on *Har Sinai*. It was, indeed, the first place that Hashem's שכינה was seen by all, *korbanot* were brought and the nation was uplifted.

By connecting the physical location of *Har Sinai* to עקידת יצחק, Avraham closed the circle of the prophecy of the בתרים ברית בין הבתרים. He understood and sought to clarify for us all that this would be the rigorous experience of closeness to Hashem and belief in G-d. After we are forced out of comfort zone, subjugated and oppressed, an uplifting will ensue. When we entered the eternal covenant with G-d, we entered a perpetual cycle of resistance from the other nations. Our survival requires grit, patience and steadfast belief in our mission. Avraham prayed: Hashem, may You continuously see what is in our hearts and our willingness to sacrifice on your behalf. Avraham's children continue his prayer as we pray the ram's right horn to be blown to usher in the next chapter, the Messianic chapter, of the הנצח.

Finding God and Self in the Wake of Loss: A Psychological Reading of Megillat Rut Chapter 1

By Rav Michael Kurin

Introduction

The opening chapter of *Megillat Rut* is deceptively simple. It introduces us to Naomi, a woman who suffers the tragic loss of her husband and two sons while living in the land of Moav. However, a closer reading of the narrative reveals a number of textual oddities that invite deeper exploration and interpretation. For example, why does Naomi wait until partway through her journey back to Yehuda to instruct her daughters-in-law to return home (1:6-9)? Why does the text repeat twice that she is returning to Yehuda, first without stating the destination (1:6), and then with an explicit destination (1:7)? Furthermore, why does the phrasing shift subtly between these verses—initially describing Naomi and her daughters-in-law as equal participants in the journey, and then repositioning the daughters-in-law as merely following Naomi?

These linguistic and structural anomalies are not accidental. Rather, they reflect the psychological reality of a woman engulfed in grief, acting initially without full awareness, and only gradually reawakening to herself, to others, and to God. This essay will argue that Naomi's journey in chapter 1 is a portrait of emotional disorientation followed by moral and spiritual renewal. It is also a story layered with symbolism, in which each character and name offers insight into broader aspects of the human condition. Thus, while *Megillat Rut* tells a story of specific individuals, it simultaneously serves as an allegory of universal human experience: loss, grief, identity, and the paths to healing.

Part 1: Naomi's State of Mind: Grief, Numbness, and Autopilot

The progression of Naomi's emotional state in the early verses suggests a profound shift in her psychological outlook following successive tragedies. After the death of her husband Elimelech, we are told: “*And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons*” (1:3). The Hebrew phrase *וְנִשְׁאַרְתָּ הִיא וּשְׁנֵי בָנֶיהָ*—“she was left, she and her two sons”—portrays a “glass half full” approach, focused on what she still has rather than what she has lost. Despite her loss, Naomi retains a family structure and purpose.

In stark contrast, after the deaths of both her sons, the tone becomes markedly more desolate: “*And the woman was left of her two children and of her husband*” (Ruth 1:5). The Hebrew *וְנִשְׁאַרְתָּ הָאִשָּׁה יְלָדֶיהָ וְיָמְאִישָׁהּ*—shifts the focus from what Naomi has to what she has lost. The optimism of verse 3 gives way to a more pessimistic framing in verse 5, highlighting the emotional toll and cumulative nature of her grief. This subtle change signals that Naomi is no longer simply mourning a loss—she is overwhelmed by it, rendered psychologically numb.

This numbness explains her subsequent actions. In 1:6, it says: *“Then she arose with her daughters-in-law, to return from the fields of Moab; for she had heard in the field of Moab that the Lord had remembered His people in giving them bread.”* The Hebrew—וַתָּקָם הִיא וְכַלְתֶּיהָ וַתָּשָׁב—features a rapid succession of verbs: “she arose,” “she returned,” connoting a sense of reflexive, unthinking movement. A similar literary device appears in *Genesis 25:34*, where Esav, in a moment of impulsivity, trades his birthright and the text notes: *“He ate and drank, and rose and went his way”* (וַיֵּאָכֵל וַיִּשְׂתֶּה וַיָּקָם וַיֵּלֶךְ). Like Esav, Naomi seems to be acting without full deliberation, propelled by inertia rather than intention. The destination is left unnamed. The verse simply states that she rose and returned from the fields of Moab.

It is not until verse 7 that we read: *“And she went out from the place where she had been, and her two daughters-in-law with her, and they went on the road to return to the land of Judah”* (וַתֵּצֵא ... וְהָיוּ הָאֲרוּסוֹת עִמָּהּ). The explicit mention of her planned destination is the first sign of her beginning to recover her emotional state. Additionally, the narrative subtly shifts the relational dynamic. In 1:6, Naomi and her daughters-in-law are portrayed as a collective unit—*“she and her daughters-in-law arose”*—while in 1:7, Naomi leads the journey and her daughters-in-law are described as walking *“with her”* (עִמָּהּ), as followers. These nuances suggest that Naomi initiates her journey in a state of internal disarray. The absence of an explicit destination in verse 6 and the vague group movement imply a lack of clarity and forethought. She is moving because something must be done, not because she has fully processed her losses or formed a plan. By 1:7, however, she has begun to regain her sense of purpose and is now leading the group towards a destination, finally recognizing that her daughters-in-law are accompanying her.

The turning point becomes more clear when Naomi stops mid-journey to speak directly to her daughters-in-law for the first time. In 1:8–9, she urges them: *“Go, return each to her mother’s house; may the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. May the Lord grant that you find rest, each in the house of her husband.”* This moment marks a profound psychological shift. Until now, Naomi had been consumed by grief, acting without full awareness. That she did not urge her daughters-in-law to return earlier suggests that she had not fully registered their presence as individuals. In her numbed state, they were more like extensions of her—companions in grief, but not separate people with independent futures. It is only now, as she reflects on their wellbeing, that Naomi reclaims her agency. Her desire to act with kindness—*chesed*—toward them is what catalyzes her emergence from emotional paralysis.

This impulse to care for others drives her emotional healing. Naomi’s compassion restores her sense of purpose. It is precisely through this ethical awakening—through recognizing and caring for the “other”—that she begins to find her way out of despair. Her moral clarity and spiritual language stand in stark contrast to the mechanical movement that characterized the earlier verses. Her re-engagement with the world begins with empathy, marking this moment as the pivotal turning point in her inner journey.

Part 2: The Universal Meaning of the Story, Through Symbolism

Having traced Naomi's emotional and spiritual transformation, we can now take a step back and consider the symbolic framework that undergirds the narrative. A closer look at the names and character roles in chapter 1 reveals that *Megillat Rut* is not only the story of Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah, but also a broader reflection on universal human experience.

Names in *Megillat Rut* are not incidental; they function as windows into the narrative's deeper symbolic structure. Naomi, whose name means "pleasantness" or "comfort," begins the story in profound sorrow. But over time, she reclaims her name—not by regaining what she lost, but by becoming a source of comfort for Ruth and later for Ruth's child. Ruth, derived from *re'ut* (רַעִיּוּת), meaning "companionship" or "friendship," personifies steadfast loyalty and relational integrity. Orpah's name, linked to *oref* (עֲרֵף), meaning "back of the neck," connotes turning away. She returns to her past life, perhaps symbolizing a more typical, culturally intelligible path forward. Her choice is neither vilified nor praised, but stands in contrast to Ruth's audacious commitment.

The names of Naomi's sons—Machlon and Kilyon—mean "sickness" and "destruction," prefiguring their fates and contributing to the overall theme of loss and impermanence. These names are not random; they are narrative tools that project emotional and existential truths. They represent different personalities with different modes of responding to and recovering from tragedy.

However, if we accept that these names and roles function symbolically—representing qualities or emotional responses—then we can reasonably infer an additional layer of meaning: the story is not just about different people, but also about different parts of a single person. Naomi's journey can be seen as an inner drama, with Orpah, Ruth, and even the deceased sons representing psychological or emotional forces within the self.

Orpah represents the part that turns back, that seeks familiarity in the face of fear and grief. Ruth is the force of loyalty, love, and connection. Naomi, at various points, embodies despair, awakening, compassion, and leadership. In this reading, *Megillat Rut* maps a journey not just across physical space but across internal transformation. It reflects the ways people respond to suffering—by retreating, by connecting, or by rediscovering meaning through acts of kindness.

This layered interpretation offers profound insight into the human experience. We are all, at times, Naomi: overwhelmed, disoriented, and searching. We are Orpah, tempted to return to the comfort of the known. And we are Ruth, choosing commitment and connection despite uncertainty. These are not merely characters but aspects of us all, and the journey they take is one we continually navigate within ourselves.

Conclusion

The first chapter of *Megillat Rut* is a masterful study of grief, recovery, and the rediscovery of self through others. The textual subtleties—shifts in language, repetition, delayed decisions—are not narrative flaws but deliberate devices that when noticed allow the reader to understand the psychological state of the characters the narrative describes.

At the same time, the symbolic resonance of the characters and their names reveals that this is not only Naomi's story, or Ruth's. It is a story about all of us—how we suffer, how we respond, and how we choose paths forward. Whether we withdraw, connect, or care for others, *Megillat Rut* offers a mirror to the soul, inviting us to reflect on the kind of people we are and the kind of people we wish to become.

The Mistake of the Angels, The Gift of Humanity

By Rav Darren Levin

In a generation replete with entertainment, exposure, and an abundance of options, perpetual distractions surreptitiously rip man away from his inner world. Advances in technology and societal trends have inspired a fixation on the other- both the fictional and real, oftentimes leaving us with a perceived perfection of those around us, while being consumed by our personal shortcomings. Moreover, the overflow of choice in the materialistic domain coupled with constant “on-demand” leisure engenders within us a sense of entitlement and impatience, and leaves us devoid of time and energy for personal growth and introspection.¹

Despite our constant focus on others and the world around us, an unconscious voice calls out from within, and daringly asks, “Does my existence really matter?”

If we assume that the notion of meaning and purpose is contingent upon the existence of a Creator, we must explore the nature of our relationship with God and the extent to which He values us; with an understanding of and appreciation for God’s perception of mankind, we will inevitably discover what our view of self should be. Upon reflection, one is compelled to consider a daunting question- “What purpose does a corporeal, infinitesimal being serve for the Infinite, Omnipotent Master of the World?”

In the eyes of some of the prominent philosophers of old, the realm of mankind is not one in which the Divine takes interest, let alone derives benefit from. As explicated in *Sefer Kuzari* (I:1), the philosopher maintains that “There is no favor or dislike in [the nature of] God, because He is above desire and intention...[God] therefore does not know you, much less your thoughts and actions, nor does He listen to your prayers or see your movements.” In short, the philosopher affirms our chilling suspicion; we serve no purpose! What is Jewish tradition’s perspective on this question? Is man created with power and responsibility? Are our lives meaningful? If so, what is the secret of our significance?

In *Sefer HaKuzari* (I, 11), R. Yehudah HaLevi contrasts the approach of the philosopher with that of the *Chaver*.² In his opening statement, the *Chaver* asserts God’s interest in the Jewish people, which is affirmed by God leading *Bnei Yisrael* out of *Mitzrayim*, granting them the land of Israel, and eventually entrusting them with the gift of the Torah at *Har Sinai*. Upon studying the written Torah, one discovers that God’s relationship with mankind is irrefutable. Nonetheless, one cannot help but notice the almost insignificant nature of man, as articulated in its first two *perakim*. After delineating the order of creation during the first seven days of existence, the Torah (*Bereishit Perek* 2) recounts the creation of man, yet again, followed by the well-known story of *Adam* and *Chava*

¹ See Abraham Joshua Heschel’s *The Sabbath* for a similar critique of contemporary civilization during his time.

² The representative of the Jewish faith

in *Gan Eden*. While the first account reports that *Adam* was created in the image of God (1:27), the second one highlights that man was formed “of dust from the ground” (2:7). In fact, as *Avraham* brazenly interceded for the people of Sodom upon hearing of the city’s imminent destruction, he humbly conceded that “I am but dust and ashes” (18:27). Lest one forget the evanescence of human existence, R. Akiva the son of Mehalalel (*Pirkei Avot*, 3:1) graphically reminds us that we have come from a “putrid drop,” and our demise ends in decay. Why would an Omnipotent God, whose existence is necessary and independent,³ forge a relationship with man, let alone invest a transient mortal being borne out of bodily fluid with any power or significance whatsoever?

It is precisely this question that the Talmud (*Shabbat* 88b) addresses through the medium of a poignant section of *Aggadeta*⁴ which explores what transpired in the Heavenly realm when *Moshe* ascended to receive the Torah. The drama begins as the angels catch a glimpse of a terrestrial being encroaching on their celestial grounds:

...The angels asked the Holy one Blessed Be He, ‘What business has one born of a woman amongst us?’ God answered them, ‘He has come to receive the Torah.’ They responded to Him, ‘Will You give your secret treasure, which has been hidden [by You] for 974 generations before the world was created, to [a being of] flesh and blood?’ “What is man that You should remember him, and the son of man that You should consider him” (Psalms 8:5)? ...

The physical nature of man should preclude his ability to relate to a spiritual Torah, one which preceded the creation of all that exists within the confines of the natural world,⁵ claim the angels, as they jealously observe *Moshe*’s readiness to receive this precious gift. The angels then fortify their assertion with a quotation from King David, a mortal who contemplates the unworthiness of man. Instead, they desire the honor of receiving this spiritual legacy, of which man is not fitting.⁶

Subsequent to the condescending remarks of the angels, God’s response is quite perplexing:

God commands Moses: ‘Answer them!’

Is God not capable of providing His own response to the enraged angels who were addressing Him? What is to be gained by persuading *Moshe* to intervene?

Moshe responds, ‘I fear lest the breath of their mouths burn me!’ God reassures him, ‘Hold onto my Throne of Glory (Kisei ha’Kavod) and answer them!’ ...

What is the *underlying* basis for *Moshe*’s fear? Why does God’s gesture serve as a support for *Moshe*?

³ See Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah* 1:3-4.

⁴ The homiletic sections of the Talmud which consist of elaborations of Biblical narratives and stories from the lives of the Rabbis.

⁵ See Maharal *Tiferet Yisrael* chapter 24.

⁶ See Maharsha *ad loc*.

Encrypted in this dialog is a profound insight with respect to the nature of mankind, and its relationship with the Divine. The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah*, *Parshat Bereishit* 12:8) asserts that God intentionally created man from both the *Elyonim* and the *Tachtonim*- the upper and lower worlds; man was meant to encompass both a Divine and physical existence. If the All-Perfect Creator fashioned man in this unique way, one must assume that man does, in fact, have an invaluable, unique role in this world. Despite this reality, *Moses* was reluctant to believe in his own potential, let alone his significance with respect to the angels; how can a physical being confront celestial beings? It was then that God reminded *Moshe* of his spiritual nature, and his Divine origin- none other than God's own *Kisei HaKavod* (Throne of Glory).⁷

What particular significance does the *Kisei HaKavod* have? Moreover, why does man now stand a chance against the angels, who are purely ethereal beings?

The story continues as *Moshe* musters up the courage to defend his receiving of the Torah:⁸

Moshe asks, 'God, what is written in the Torah You give to me?' "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt"
Moshe then says to the angels: 'Did you descend to Egypt?! Did Pharoah enslave you?!'
It says "You shall not have other gods before Me" - do you live among other nations that serve idolatry?!
It says "Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it" - do you do creative labor from which you must cease?!
It says "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" - do you do business [and have a need for oaths]?!
It says "Honor your father and your mother" - do you have parents?!
It says "You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal" - do you have envy and an evil inclination (Yetzer HaRa)[which brings one to commit these transgressions]?!

What results is a fascinating discovery. Man's empowerment is not solely a function of his spiritual aspect; rather, it is the confluence of both body and soul that makes him unique. The greatness of man lies not in his ability to rid himself of this world; rather, in the challenge of harmonizing his dichotomous existence. As a physical being, man possesses strong primal urges, an attraction to and perception of physicality, and a propensity for evil.⁹ Yet, he is also created with the potential to rise above his shortcomings and to utilize his base desires in the service of a higher purpose. This coexistence generates both a challenge and an opportunity; one which no other creature or being in existence, including the angels, is privy

⁷ Tractate *Shabbat* 152b; *Avot DeRebbe Natan Chapter 12*; see R' Tzaddok's *Takkanat HaShavin*, Letter 2, where he states that the source of all of the souls of the Jewish people lies beneath God's Throne of Glory.

⁸ In this Talmudic excerpt, Moses cites eight of the Ten Commandments that were given on Mount Sinai. See Exodus 20:2-17.

⁹ See Genesis 8:21, which states that the "...the design of man's heart is evil from his youth..."

to- free will (*Bechirah Chofshit*).¹⁰ Through our moral choices, we are blessed with the honorable privilege of spreading God's glory in the world.

While the angels exist in a spiritual reality where God's presence is apparent, humans inhabit a physical world where His existence is hidden.¹¹ Yet, man's existence in a world of concealment provides for the chance to achieve a greater consciousness of God's presence. The world was created precisely for this purpose- for man to facilitate a greater awareness of God's impact in this world, thus increasing His glory. This is the implication of having been fashioned from God's *Kisei HaKavod*.¹² The precious gift of the Torah, the blueprint of creation,¹³ serves to guide us in becoming more attuned to who we really are; agents of the Holy One Blessed Be He! As humans, we are entrusted with the mission of augmenting our perception of the Divinity that pervades our own reality, and sharing this awareness with others. It is this responsibility which places humanity above the celestial realm.

Although we are created with an unconscious awareness of our greatness, it is a struggle to turn inwards, reflect upon our true essence- a "piece of the Divine"¹⁴ which dwells in its bodily shell, and garner the strength to accept the great Divine mission. With an opportunity to stand up for *Bnei Yisrael* and defend God's decision to entrust "flesh and blood"¹⁵ with the Torah, along with a special reminder from God that he is backed with Divine assistance, *Moshe* was able to prove to even the angels that only man can foster Divine glory in a physical world; he has the exclusive privilege of sanctifying the mundane. The choices of man, in turn, make an indelible impact on the spiritual worlds, as well.¹⁶ *Moshe* needed this opportunity to rebut the position of the angels in order to remind himself of his own greatness. Once the angels understood this truth, they were grateful to *Moshe* for furthering their cause of carrying out the Divine mission.

*The angels admitted to God [that the Torah should be given to man] ...
Immediately, every angel loved Moshe, and gave him something...to compensate
for having contemptuously called him 'Adam' ...Even the Angel of Death (Satan)
gave him something...*

Unlike the ethereal existence of the angels which leaves no room for error, part and parcel of the life of the human being is the prospect of failure; we are imperfect creations. Our predilection for the mundane and the vain flows from our physical composition; we were created from dust!¹⁷ Nonetheless, our imperfect nature is our greatest gift.¹⁸ We were created

¹⁰ See R. Chaim Friedlander's *Siftei Chaim- Emunah Uvechirah*, vol. 2 pp. 68, 90), where he associates man's creation in the image of God with his free will.

¹¹ *Olam*, the Hebrew word for "world," is etymologically tied to the word *Neelam*, which means "hidden."

¹² See Rav Tzadok's *Takkanat HaShavin*, Letter 2.

¹³ *Bereishit Rabbah* 1:1; *Zohar* 2:161b

¹⁴ Job 31:2; see the Kabbalistic interpretation of these words.

¹⁵ See the aforementioned Aggadic excerpt from *Shabbat* 88b

¹⁶ See R. Chaim of Volozhin's *Nefesh HaChaim* 1:3-4

¹⁷ Genesis 2:7

¹⁸ See *Bereishit Rabbah* 9:7, where it explains that the description of man's creation as *Tov Meod* (Genesis 1:31) refers to the *Yetzer HaRa*, man's evil inclination.

inherently lacking so that we have what to constantly strive for.¹⁹ Having been formed from both the most exalted and lowly of things, we are afforded the opportunity to choose good in the face of evil, and bond with the Divine (*Deveikut*).

It is our struggles and human fallibility which can either hinder our growth or empower us most.²⁰ Do we treat ourselves as if we are fashioned from dust, or as if we descended from the *Kisei HaKavod*? As *Reish Lakish* eloquently asserted, commenting on the second verse of the Torah (*Bereishit* 1:2), “If man merits, he is told, ‘You preceded the ministering angels’; and if not, he is told, ‘[Even] A gnat preceded you...’” (*Bereishit Rabba* 8:1). If we embrace our base existence and live as if we are not part of something greater than ourselves, we will not even be worthy of consideration.²¹ Yet, if we live as if we are Divine messengers who broadcast the Glory of God to the world, we are living dynamic lives that are always “becoming,” thus leaving the stagnancy of the ministering angels behind.²²]

¹⁹ See Ramchal *Daat Tevunot Siman* 20.

²⁰ See Rav Tzaddok’s *Tzidkat HaTzaddik* 49, 70, where he explains that our weaknesses present the greatest opportunities for growth.

²¹ See Psalms 8:5

²² For a deep and comprehensive elaboration of man’s dynamic and ever-evolving “becoming,” see R. Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook’s discussion of *Shleimut* and *Hishtalmut*. See, e.g., *Shemonah Kevatzim*- Journal 1- 443- The purpose of Existence: *Shleimut ve’Hishtalmut*; Journal 2- 318- *Shleimut ve’Hishtalmut*.

Divine Correspondence

By Rav Yonatan Gilbert

Dear *Knesset Yisrael*,

I was moved by hearing Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Meir arguing about what I meant when I called you “My children”.¹ I understand this may sound conditional (you are called “My children” only if you behave as such), but I think you can find enough evidence to say that My love for you is unconditional. Otherwise, why would I have called you “foolish children” or “Sons in whom there is no faithfulness”? That is, even in our darkest hours, I kept calling you, My children.

Rabbi Loew, that great man you lovely call “the Maharal of Prague”, already noticed this to be true from the very beginning of My book.² He noticed that I chose Avraham without ever mentioning his righteousness, as opposed to Noach, “the righteous man of his generation” (I can’t believe it took you 2200 years to pick up that one!). And he explains it well. Had I chosen him because of his righteousness, My choice would have fallen under the category of “love that depends on a something (אֶהְיֶה לְךָ אֱלֹהִים כְּדָרְךָ)” so that when the thing ceases, the love ceases.

Far from it! I chose Avraham for reasons I cannot fully reveal but know that it was not related to his particular actions (as when I chose Noach) but because of his public role as a father of the nation. So be assured, no private sin any of you may do has an impact on my commitment to your nation.

I know this can be confusing and that some of you have found creative ways to negate the depth of our relationship. Many years before any of you were born, in the time of My beloved Yehezkel, you came to Me with strong argument. You quoted the law of a *Kohen*’s slave that, after being sold to a different person, can no longer eat *trumah*. And you claimed that since you were being ruled by foreign nations, it was as if I sold you to a new master and were no longer bound by the rules of your former, holier Master. But that was a mistake. As I sent you through Yehezkel (yes, I know it is not always easy to decipher his words), that law is only true if the former master has sold the slave to a new master.³ Allow me to remind you: you were never sold. Yes, sometimes I had to push away from My land, to send you to *galut*. But you were never given over to other nations. I have always been with you. It is not only you who have suffered the long exile. I have endured it with you, all the time by your side.

I understand you cannot fully grasp the depth of My care for you. Even great men, such as Hoshea, struggled with this idea. Since he was a prophet and a man of stature, I led him through an

¹ *Kiddushin* 36a

² *Netzach Israel* 11

³ *Yalkut Shimoni. Yehezkel* 359

unbelievable journey that helped him appreciate what I'm telling you. In case you were not paying attention to the *Bamidbar*'s Haftarah (although you should), let Me refresh your memory.⁴

I told Hoshea that "his children" had sinned. I expected him to fight back, as Moshe and many others did before. But not only he didn't do so, he even suggested that I exchange My people for another nation! I wanted to teach him a lesson. I told him to marry a certain prostitute and have children with her. Naturally, he loved his children and when I told him to leave them, he begged me not to do so to him. Of course, I rebuked him. How could he think that his love for his family was even close to My love for the children of the *Avot* and the *Imahot*? He badly underestimated my love for you.

Even after the terrible episode of the Golden Calf, when you thought I gave up on you, I was clear that that was not the case. Can a woman forget her suckling baby, that she would not have compassion for the child of her womb?⁵ And if you still feel unassured, contemplate on the following idea (of course NASA uses different names these days): I created twelve constellations in the firmament, and for each and every constellation I have created thirty armies, and for each and every army I have created thirty legions, and for each and every legion I have created thirty infantry division leaders, and for each and every infantry division leader I have created thirty military camp leaders, and for each and every military camp leader I have created thirty leaders of forts, and on each and every leader of a fort I have hung three hundred and sixty-five thousand stars corresponding to the days of the solar year. And all of them I have created only for your sake; and you said, "the Lord has forgotten me?"⁶

Yes, many people will question you about your *Am Segulah* condition. Like that *midrash* about a servant who believes her master will soon be his beloved wife and marry her just because the wife did one thing wrong. How foolish of her! Had she known how much He loved his wife, she would have never thought about that possibility.⁷

It may feel uncomfortable to you at times. "Why us?" Well, first, remember that Torah was offered to every nation and rejected.⁸ So technically, you chose Me as much as I chose you. I remember how lovingly you followed Me to the unknown after leaving Egypt⁹ and how you committed to Torah even before you fully knew what was in it.¹⁰

But more than that, you must remember that being part of My nation is not only a privilege but a great responsibility. I have big expectations from you, and I care for your actions and intentions

⁴ *Psachim* 87a

⁵ *Yeshayahu* 49:14-15

⁶ *Brachot* 32b

⁷ *Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 1:40

⁸ *Sifri, Devarim* 33:2

⁹ *Yirmiyahu* 2:2

¹⁰ *Shemot* 24:7

dearly.¹¹ I have commanded you to be a light unto the nations¹² and I expect you to sanctify My name in every possible moment of your lives.¹³

Do not be discouraged by the current status of events. You have spent most of your life as a Nation in exile and things are starting to change, that is no small thing. The war in Israel and rising antisemitism across the world are part of the birth pangs of *Mashiach*.¹⁴ But worry not, *Geula* will come and you will once again live safely in My land, in an age of unprecedented thirst for My word,¹⁵ where My kingdom will be once again known to all the people in this world.¹⁶

Prepare yourselves for receiving the Torah this *Shavuot* anew. Recommit to My laws, for they are your life and the length of your days.¹⁷ And remember that just as you commit to me saying “*Shema Yisrael*,” I hold you dear by claiming “Who is like Your people, Israel.”¹⁸

With Eternal love,

Ribbono Shel Olam

¹¹ *Amos* 3:2

¹² *Yeshayahu* 42:6

¹³ *Brachot* 6a

¹⁴ *Sanhedrin* 98b

¹⁵ *Amos* 8:11

¹⁶ *Tefilat Aleinu*

¹⁷ *Tefilah Ahavat Olam*

¹⁸ *Brachot* 6a

Depth to Dairy: The Meaning of Eating Dairy on *Shavuos*

By Danielle Rosenzweig

One of the things that I look forward to on *Shavuos* is planning my *Yom Tov* menu. The excitement of finding new recipes for a dairy dessert (which we never ever have), some sort of quiche and a hearty pasta dish replaces the monotonous Shabbos menu planning. The *minhag* to eat dairy on *Shavuos* is the accepted custom, even if some of us only eat a piece of cheesecake at *kiddush*. Each year as I review the reasons for this *minhag*, I notice a new one that resonates with me. This year I found that as I was learning about *Shavuos*, this *minhag* is a physical embodiment of what *Shavuos* is all about.

For myself, I was always taught that the reason why we eat dairy on *Shavuos* is because *Bnei Yisrael* received the Torah and the laws of *Kashrus* for the first time. *Bnei Yisrael* were not able to shecht and prepare their animals properly and in a timely manner on that day and therefore ate dairy as a default. This idea, as much as it is reminiscent of *Matan Torah*, came about from a non-ideal meal for *Bnei Yisrael*.

What I have found more meaningful are the reasons that parallel milk to Torah and therefore something we engage in on *Shavuos* - the day we receive the Torah. If we look in the Torah and *Gemara*, we can see that milk is likened to Torah, sharing the attribute of purity and purification. In a similar vein, the *Gemara* in *Taanis* tells us that the liquids that are compared to Torah, such as milk, can only be stored in lowly vessels, such as clay pots, and NOT the silver and gold vessels. The *Gemara* says that storing milk in these higher level vessels will cause the milk to spoil. The message being that just like milk, if Torah is kept in a high and haughty vessel, the Torah will not last - it will spoil. Torah can only be stored in a low level vessel, only one who is humble can be a vessel for Torah. As I read this idea, it resonated deeply. This fun and exciting *minhag*, actually embodies the entire essence of *Shavuos*. More than that, this *mashal* reminds us of the essence of *Sefira* leading up to *Shavuos*. As we count *sefira*, there is the *minhag* to learn a *perek* of *Pirkei Avos* each week until we reach *Shavuos*. Why? As we count towards *Matan Torah* and remember Rabbi Akiva and the grave sins of his *talmidim*, not treating one another with kindness, we are actively repairing this mistake. We learn *Pirkei Avos* in order to better ourselves, to improve our character, and to prepare for *Matan Torah*. This preparation for *Matan Torah* begins prior to us counting.

As we know from the verses in the Torah, *Pesach*, *Sefira*, and *Shavuos* are inherently connected to one another. Our *Shavuos* preparations begin with *Pesach*. As we ready our homes and selves for *Pesach*, we physically remove and burn our *chometz*. According to *chassidus*, physical *chometz* represents the spiritual *chometz* within ourselves. Spiritual *chometz* is the leavened aspect of our soul, which may have become puffed up with ego and has taken up space that should be used for personal growth. As we burn the physical *chometz*, we should also be reflecting and removing our

own spiritual *chometz*. On Pesach we start readying ourselves to accept the Torah when we remove our spiritual *chometz*. We refine that space within ourselves as we count up to *Shavuos* and on *Shavuos* we see the fruits of our labor when we can finally be *mekabel* the Torah.

As we celebrate *Shavuos* this year and finalize our preparations to be *mekabel* the Torah, let us not forget that this idea is all encompassing. We have just spent an entire 49 days readying ourselves to accept the Torah, preparing our souls and bettering ourselves. As we indulge in our delicious *Yom Tov* meals, let us remember that even our menu choices are there to emphasize the essence of *Shavuos*.

You've Got to Carry That Weight **Collective Responsibility as a Prerequisite to *Kabalas haTorah***

By Dani Schwartz

There is an apparent tension between the various understandings of the *Omer* period between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*. On the one hand, we often associate this time period with mourning including the prohibitions of shaving, cutting our hair, listening to live music etc. Famously, the *Gemara* in *Yevamos* on 62b relates the tragic demise of the 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva who died between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*, for whom we mourn.

Perhaps a lesser known reason we count is brought down by the Avudraham. He mentions an opinion which attributes our counting between *Pesach* and *Shavuot* to a state of anguish during that time. This is a period of great uncertainty regarding the grains and fruit trees which must bear a good crop in order for us to survive. As such, we remind ourselves to *daven* and do *teshuvah* so that Hashem will have mercy on us and allow us the sustenance we require.

On the other hand, the *Sefer Hachinuch* in *mitzvah* 306 writes that we count the *Omer* in order to relive the experience of leaving *Mitzrayim*. Just as the Jews anxiously and excitedly anticipated the giving of the Torah at *Har Sinai*, so too we count to engender the same sense of excitement as we await *Matan Torah* on *Shavuot*.

The Ramban on *Parshas Emor* presents an even more joyous description of these days. He writes that the seven weeks of the *Omer* are considered to be the *Chol Hamoed* between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*.

Seemingly, we are left with contradictory explanations as to how we relate the days of the *Omer*.

Rav Yerucham Olshin addresses this question. His question is specific to the reason brought by the Avudraham. What, after all, does recognizing the anguish of the world as it anxiously awaits a successful harvest, have to do with the receiving of the Torah? Perhaps this question could be extended to the *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva, who perished on account of their lack of respect to one another. What does this tragedy have to do with the receiving of the Torah?

Rav Olshin starts by quoting the *pasuk* in *Mishpatim*, 24:10 which reads

וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לִבְנֵת הַסַּפִּיר וּכְעֶצֶם הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר:

and they saw the God of Israel—under whose feet was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity.

This *pasuk* is describing the imagery which was seen by Moshe, Aaron, Nadav, Avihu, and the *shivim zekaynim* at *Har Sinai*. Rashi quotes the *midrash* and explains that this sapphire brick was present in front of Hashem during the slavery in *Mitzrayim* to remind Hashem of the suffering of *B'nei Yisrael* who were laboring with bricks.

Rav Olshin explains that this teaches us the great lesson of sharing in the burden of one's friend and taking part in his difficulties. Clearly this quality is of paramount importance if Hashem Himself chose to demonstrate joining in the pain of B'nei Yisroel with the sapphire brick.

He expounds on this by quoting the *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* which states that the Torah is acquired in 48 ways, one of which is *נושא בעול עם חבירו*, to share in the burden of one's friend. The reason this is a way to acquire the Torah, is because this attribute ensures that a person is part of the *klal*, and the Torah was given at *Har Sinai* to the *klal*, not to the individual. One who is separate from the *klal* is not in a position to acquire the Torah.

With this explanation we can gain better insight into the various themes of *sefiras HaOmer* which we are presented with. At first glance, the explanation of the Avudraham, that this is a time we share in the anguish of the world in their uncertainty of the fate of their crops, seems at odds with the idea of counting toward *Matan Torah*. Similarly, the mourning for the *talmidim* of Rabbi Akiva who were not able to show respect to one another may seem at odds with the joyous tone of the Ramban's description comparing the days of the *Omer* to a *Chol HaMoed*.

Ultimately, however, we understand that the way to prepare for the receiving of the Torah is in fact by sharing in the anguish of others. Just as Hashem joined in the pain of *B'nei Yisrael* by placing the sapphire brick at his feet, so too, we *daven* for the world so that their crops may grow and produce what is needed.

Perhaps there is no better lesson in becoming one with the nation than *וואהבת לרעך כמוך*, which Rabbi Akiva himself proclaimed as a great principal of the Torah, while his *talmidim* were unable to respect one another as such.

As we internalize these ideas relating to the *Sefiras HaOmer* which help us join together as one nation, we make the necessary preparations for *kabalas HaTorah* and the celebratory atmosphere which accompanies it. Considering Rav Olshin's elucidation, it is only through truly becoming part of the *klal* that we can receive the Torah. As the *pasuk* in *וְנָתַתְּ הַבְּרָכָה* states, *תִּוְרָה צִוְּהָ לִגְנוּ מִשָּׁה מוֹרֵשָׁה קְהֵלָת יִשְׂרָאֵל*.

העז, הענווה והישועה לחי עולמים

By Rav Ezra Pacino

קהילת CBM היקרה!

כ"כ משמח לכתוב לכם ולכבודכם דבר תורה לעלון של בית המדרש.

לפני הכל אני רוצה לומר ישר כח גדול לכל העוסקים במלאכה. מעלה גדולה יש בלכתוב תורה, כפי שנאמר "כתוב זאת זכרון בספר".

לפני מספר שבועות חגגנו והודינו לקב"ה על הקמת מדינת ישראל. מדינת ישראל חוגגת 77 שנים מאז הקמתה. אז כמו בכל יומולדת וכמו בכל שנה, עלינו לחשוב איך אנחנו כמדינה, כאומה נהיים טובים יותר, מכוונים יותר.

אז מה מוטל עלינו על מנת שנהיה טובים יותר?

ברשותכם, אני רוצה להתמקד במספרים. במשמעות של המספר - של הגיל, הגיל של המדינה.

המשנה במסכת אבות מלמדת אותנו שלכל גיל יש את המשמעות הייחודית שלו: בן חמש שנים למקרא... בן שלש עשרה למצוות... בן ארבעים לבינה... בן שבעים לשיבה... בן שמונים לגבורה.

אז המדינה, וכולנו כיהודים, נמצאים בין גיל 70 ל-80, בין שיבה לגבורה כלשונה של המשנה. מדינת ישראל בת 77, ובגימטריא מדינת ישראל בשנת ה'עז.

ברשותכם להתמקד במידת העז. איך ומה עלינו לעשות על מנת לחיות את חיינו בעז.

בלימוד קצר בספר הספרים (התנ"ך), בכתבי המלכים ודברי הנביאים, ניכר שישנו קשר הדוק בין ישועה וגאולה למידת העז. והרי כמה דוגמאות לפניכם:

- וַיִּתְּנֵם לְמַלְכּוֹ וַיִּרְם קֶרֶן מִשִּׁיחוֹ: (שמואל א)
- בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יוֹשֵׁר הַשִּׁיר־הַזֶּה בְּאֶרֶץ יְהוּדָה עֵיר עֲזַרְלָנוּ יִשְׁוּעָה לְשִׁית חַיִּים וְחַל: (ישעיהו כו)
- עוֹרֵי עוֹרֵי לְבָשִׁי־עֹז וְרוּעַ ה' עוֹרֵי כִימִי קָדָם דְּרוֹת עוֹלָמִים הָלֹא אֶת־הָיָא הַמַּחְצֵבֶת רַחֵם מְחַלֶּלֶת תַּנִּין: הָלֹא אֶת־הָיָא הַמַּחְצֵבֶת לִי מִי תְהוֹם רַבָּה הַשְׁמָה מַעֲמָקֵי־לִי דֶרֶךְ לַעֲבֹר גְּאוּלִּים: וּפְדוּיֵי ה' יִשׁוּבוּן וּבָאוּ צִיּוֹן בְּרִנָּה וְשִׁמְתָת עוֹלָם עַל־רֹאשָׁם שְׁשׁוֹן וְשִׁמְחָה יִשְׁיָגוּן גִּסּוֹ יָגוֹן וְאַנְחָה: (ישעיהו נא)
- ה' עֲזַרְלָמוֹ וּמָעֻזּוֹ יִשְׁוּעוֹת מִשִּׁיחוֹ הָיָא: הוֹשִׁיעָה אֶת־עַמָּךְ וּבְרַךְ אֶת־נַחֲלֶתְךָ וְרַעַם אֶת־הָעוֹלָם: (תהלים כח)
- עֲזַרְהֶם לְבוֹשֶׁה לְתַשְׁחֵק לַיּוֹם אַחֲרָיו: (משלי לא)

מהפסוקים שהבאנו ניכר קשר חזק בין העז לישועה. ניכר שמידת העז שייכת אל המשיח, אל השלב הבא של עם ישראל ומדינת ישראל. שנת העז של מדינת ישראל, מזמינה אותנו להתחבר אל מידת העז, וממילא לצעוד עוד צעד אל הישועה.

עלינו ללמוד להתלבש במידת העז (לְבָשִׁי־עֹז), לשיר את שיר העז (בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יוֹשֵׁר הַשִּׁיר), ומזה נצמח אל עבר ימות המשיח ונשחק ליום אחרון.

אז מה היא מידת העז ואיך מתלבשים בה?

על מנת לברר במידה זו, אני רוצה להתמקד בסיפור מקראי (שמואל ב פרק ו), שבו דוד המלך החזיר והעלה את ארון ברית ה' לירושלים. הנביא מתאר את הרצון והמעשים להחזרת ארון ברית ה' למקומו. תוך כדי החזרה, ישנם שני מקרים דרמטיים שמתוארים ע"י הנביא כמקרים השייכים למידת העז, פעם בשלילה ופעם לחיוב.

מקרה ראשון: וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־גֵּרֹן נָכוֹן וַיִּשְׁלַח עֲזָה אֶל־אֲרֹן הָאֱלֹקִים וַיֹּאמְרוּ בֹּו כִּי שָׁמָּה הִבָּקֵר: וַיַּחֲרֹאֶף ה' בַּעֲזָה וַיִּכְּהוּ שָׁם הָאֱלֹקִים עַל־הַשָּׁל וַיָּמָת שָׁם עִם אֲרֹן הָאֱלֹקִים: וַיִּסָּר לְדָוִד עַל־אֲשֶׁר פָּרַץ ה' פָּרִץ בַּעֲזָה וַיִּקְרָא לַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא פָּרִץ עֲזָה עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה:

מקרה שני ממש בהמשך הפרק: וַיְהִי כִּי צָעְדוּ נִשְׁאֵי אֲרֹן־ה' שְׁשֵׁה צָעָדִים וַיִּזְבַּח שֹׁר וּמְרִיא: וַדָּנָד מִכָּכָר בְּכָל־עֵז לִפְנֵי ה' וַדָּוִד חָגֹר אֶפֻּד בָּד: וַדָּוִד וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מַעֲלִים אֶת־אֲרֹן ה' בְּתַרְוָעָה וּבְקוֹל שׁוֹפָר:

מתוך התבוננות קצרה בפסוקים הנ"ל ניכר ההבדל בין העוז שמאפשר לדוד לבטא את האמת הפנימית שלו, לבין העזות השלילית המתבטאת במעשיו של עוזה. דוד רוקד בכל עז לפני מלך מלכי המלכים, כשהוא לבוש אפוד בד - אפוד של ענווה והתבטלות. כלומר מעשהו של דוד נעשה 'בכל עז' וחושף את המחשבות והרגשות שלו בעוצמה, בכנות ובאומץ ובאותו זמן הוא עטור בלבוש בד - בענווה. עוזה לעומתו, משתמש במידת העז- התעוזה בשימוש אינסטינקטיבי ולא מותאם. השתמשות שכזו במידת העז, איננה שימוש נכון במידה כ"כ עוצמתית. מידת העז, היא גילוי האמת (גם כשהיא נוקבת) באפוד בד. אמירת ועשיית האמת מתוך מחשבה עמוקה וענווה גדולה. אין מידה זו ככל המידות, היא עדינה בהגדרתה ויותר מכך בקיומה-בהתלבשות בה. אנו נדרשים לחידוד האמת התורית- פנימית וגילוייה במרחב מתוך ענווה ורכות.

זו מידה שמביאה לימות המשיח. מחברת אורות של תוהו בכלים של תיקון, אמת אלוקית שבאה בכלים של עדינות של מלכות. עדינו העצני.

מידה זו היא גם המידה המאפשרת לנו לחיות חיי תורה בגבורה ובעדינות.

העז והענווה למי ולמי? לחי עולמים!

מי יעלה בהר ה' ומי יקום במקום קודשו נקי כפיים ובר לבב.

Courage, Humility, and Salvation to the Eternal One

Dear CBM Community,

It brings me such joy to write to you and in your honor a *Dvar Torah* for this *Sefer* of the Beit Midrash.

Before anything else, I want to extend a heartfelt *Yasher Koach* to all those engaged in this holy work. There is great merit in writing Torah, as it is said: “*Write this as a memorial in a book.*”

A few weeks ago, we celebrated and gave thanks to the Holy One, Blessed be He, for the establishment of the State of Israel. The State of Israel is now celebrating 77 years since its founding. As with every birthday and every year, we must reflect on how we, as a country and as a nation, can become better and more focused.

So what is required of us to become better?

With your permission, I would like to focus on numbers—on the significance of the number that marks the age of the state.

The *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avot* teaches that every age has its unique significance:

“*At five years old for Scripture... at thirteen for commandments... at forty for understanding... at seventy for old age... at eighty for strength.*”

So the state—and we, as Jews—are between seventy and eighty years old; between “old age” and “strength,” in the language of the *Mishnah*. The State of Israel is 77 years old, and in *gematria* (numerology), this year can be seen as the year of “Oz” (עז)—“strength” or “courage.”

Therefore, I would like to focus on the trait of *Oz*. What should we do to live our lives with *Oz*?

A brief study of the Books of books, *Tanach*—in the books of the kings and the words of the prophets—shows a strong connection between salvation and the trait of *Oz*. Here are several examples:

- “*He gives **strength** to His king and lifts the horn of His **anointed**.*” (1 Samuel)
- “*On that day, this song shall be sung in the land of Judah: A **strong** city is ours; He sets up **salvation** as walls and ramparts.*” (Isaiah 26)
- “*Awake, awake, **clothe yourself in strength**, O arm of the Lord! Awake as in days of old, generations of long ago...*” (Isaiah 51)
- “*The Lord is their **strength** and the **stronghold** of salvation for His anointed... Save Your people and bless Your inheritance; shepherd them and carry them forever.*” (Psalms 28)
- “***Strength** and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the **last day**.*” (Proverbs 31)

From these verses, a strong link between *Oz* and salvation is clear. *Oz* is associated with the *Mashiach*, with the next phase of the Jewish people and the State of Israel. The year of *Oz* calls us to connect to this trait and, by doing so, to take one more step toward redemption.

We must learn to “clothe” ourselves in *Oz* (“clothe yourself in strength”), to sing the song of *Oz* (“on that day, this song shall be sung”), and from this, we will grow toward the days of the *Mashiach* and rejoice in the final day.

So what is the trait of *Oz*, and how do we embody it?

To clarify this trait, I’d like to focus on a Biblical story—2 Samuel chapter 6—in which King David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The prophet describes the desire and the actions to return the Ark to its place. During this process, two dramatic incidents occur—both connected to the trait of *Oz*, one in a negative sense and one in a positive.

First incident:

“They came to the threshing floor of Nacon, and Uzzah reached out to the Ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen had stumbled. The Lord’s anger burned against **Uzzah** (from the root word *Oz*), and God struck him there for his irreverence; and he died there beside the Ark of God. David was distressed that the Lord had broken out against Uzzah, and that place is called **Peretz-Uzzah** to this day.”

Second incident, later in the chapter:

“When those carrying the Ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his **might**. David and all the house of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of the shofar.”

A brief reflection on these verses reveals the difference between *Oz* that allows David to express his inner truth versus the negative brazenness (*azut- from root word Oz*) in Uzzah’s actions.

David dances “with all his might” (*b’chol oz*) before the King of Kings, clothed in a linen ephod—an ephod symbolizing humility and self-nullification. That is, David’s act is done “with all his might,” expressing his thoughts and emotions with power, honesty, and courage—while simultaneously adorned in humility.

Uzzah, on the other hand, uses the trait of *Oz*—daring—in an instinctive and inappropriate way. Such use of *Oz* is not the right use of this potent trait.

Oz is the revelation of truth (even when it’s sharp) in a linen ephod—with humility. Speaking and pursuing truth with deep thought and great humility. This trait is not like other traits—it is delicate by nature and even more so in practice.

We are called to sharpen the inner Torah truth and reveal it in the world with humility and gentleness.

This is a trait that brings the days of the *Mashiach*. In Kabbalistic terms, it connects the lights dispersed in this world in a chaotic manner, into vessels that repair—divine truth expressed with the gentle tools of kingship. *Adino HaEtzni* (a midrashic description of King David—strong yet gentle).

This trait also allows us to live lives of Torah with both strength and gentleness.

Courage and humility—for whom? For the Eternal One!

“Who shall ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.”

“First is the worst, second in the best”

Lessons Learned from Firstborns Before *Matan Torah*

By Benny Statman

The first Rashi on *Sefer Bereishit* asks a very basic question: Why does the Torah start with the creation of the world and not with the first commandment to *Bnei Yisrael*. Rashi provides an insightful answer, but an additional and somewhat obvious possibility is that there are valuable lessons to be learned in the events prior to the formation of the Jewish nation. Additionally, certain trends in the Torah prior to *yetziat Mitzrayim* help to establish values that were essential to our new nation's survival.

The tenth plague in *Mitzrayim*, *makat bechorot*, is in some ways quite puzzling. Why is this act chosen as the grand finale of all the plagues? The simple answer is what the *pesukim* say: וַאֲמַר אֵלֶיךָ שְׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתַמְאֵן לְשַׁלְּחֵם הַזֶּה אֶנְכִּי הֲרֹג אֶת־בְּנוֹךְ בְּכֹרְךָ *These pesukim* paint the punishment of makat bechorot through the lens of *middah k'neged middah* on a symbolic level. However, a slaying of *all* of the males of *Mitzrayim* would have been equally if not more dramatic while also being *middah k'neged middah* in that Paroh had decreed that all Jewish males should be thrown into the river.

By analyzing the episodes of the firstborns prior to *yetziat Mitzrayim* an additional insight into why specifically the firstborn was chosen for the final plague can be suggested. At this juncture when the Jewish nation was forming the rejection of this symbol sends a powerful message of how to value people and ideas.

There is a natural tendency to favor and hold closely our first possessions, opinions, and ideas. In behavioral economics, this emotional bias, referred to as the endowment effect, causes individuals to overvalue the merit and value of their own ideas and possessions while undervaluing those of others.

The stories in *Bereishit* through *yetziat Mitzrayim* almost uniformly have non-first born protagonists, and almost every firstborn who we meet has significant character flaws. The initial firstborn in the Torah Kayin perfectly exemplifies it. While his younger brother Hevel is willing to give up “מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאֲנוֹ וּמִקִּלְבָּהוּ”, Kayin's offering is rejected.

Avraham and Yitzchak both had surprising attachments to their firstborn. Hashem tells Avraham that he will be the father to a multitude of nations and that Sarah will have a child. What is his response? “וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם עַל־פָּנָיו וַיֹּצִיחַ... לֹא יִשְׁמַעֵאל יְהִיָּה לִפְנֵיךָ”. He felt that Yishmael was enough to be his sole progeny and to carry on his legacy. Hashem is forced to respond that while Yishmael would still produce a large nation the legacy and *Brit* of Avraham would be through Yitzchak. Similarly, Yitzchak had a deep attachment to Eisav despite his obvious problematic behaviors.

Yakov on the other hand represents the alternative approach. In contrast to Avraham and Yitzchak, Yakov, the forefather associated with *middah* of *emet*, seems to deny any inherent value to birth

order whenever given the opportunity. Instead Yakov bases his decisions on what he believed to be correct and true. He buys the *bechora* from Eisav and receives the bracha that Yitzchak intended to give to Eisav. He tries to marry the younger Rachel before her older sister Leah. He shows significant favoritism towards Yosef, swaps his hands on Menashe and Ephraim's heads when giving them a bracha, and tells Reuven that even though he is a *bechor* “*פָּחַז כְּמִלִּים אֶל־תּוֹמֵר כִּי עָלִיתָ*” “*מִשְׁכָּבִי אֶבְיָה אֲנִי חֲלֵלָה יִצְוָעִי עָלָה*”.

Given this trend throughout *Sefer Bereishit*, it is quite unsurprising that a non-*bechor* is chosen to lead *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. Moshe isn't chosen based on birth order, but on his characteristics. With this context and setup the final plague makes complete sense. *Makat bechorot* isn't just a plague to bring Egypt to its proverbial knees. It has a deeper symbolic message. We often suffer from the endowment effect. We overvalue that which we have and are blinded to the deficiencies in our thoughts. At the same time we misjudge the beauty and value in that which we don't have, and miss out on opportunities for the truth and for growth.

So what is the solution? How do we minimize this emotional bias and come to a more objective assessment? One recommendation for overcoming the endowment effect is to actively and deliberately imagine that your item or idea is not your own, sometimes even through physically distancing yourself from the object. Although doing this in practice may feel odd, the Torah seems to advocate this approach in multiple instances.

When Sarah wants Yishmael sent away Avraham struggles to part with Yishmael. Hashem reassures him that he should listen to Sarah and send Yishmael away because it was Yitzchak who the *Brit* would be continued through. Only after creating this physical separation Avraham has the clarity to more objectively see Yitzchak's merits. The next time Yitzchak is mentioned he is now described in more glowing terminology as *אֶת־בְּנֵה אֶת־יִתְיָדָה אִשְׁרָאֵלִיבֶת אֶת־יִצְחָק*.

Similarly, in the immediate aftermath of *makat bechorot* there is an interlude in the story in which we are instructed to consecrate to Hashem our first born children and animals, forcing us to view our closest and most precious possessions as no longer ours.

On *Shavuot* we read *Megilat Rut*, which so beautifully exemplifies these ideas. Rut, from the nation of *Moav* is not judged by who she was born to, but by the merit of her actions. When she asks Boaz why he was so kind to a foreigner, he responds “*הֲגֵד הֲגֵד לִי כָּל אִשְׁרָאֵלִי עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־חֻמּוֹתַי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת*” “*אִישׁוֹ וַתַּעֲזֹבִי אֶבְיָה וְאִמּוֹ וְאֶרֶץ מוֹלְדָתָהּ וַתֵּלֶכְי אֶל־עַם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הָיָה תְּמוּל שְׁלֹשׁוֹם*”. He was not blinded based on her nationality. He was able to see her actions for what they were. And they were righteous.

Megilat Rut ends with a genealogy of the tribe of Yehudah concluding with David. But it doesn't start with Yehudah. It begins with Peretz. There is only a single episode in the Torah describing Peretz, and it describes his birth. He was a twin and when Tamar was in labor his brother stuck out his hand. The midwife tied a crimson thread to his hand to signify him as the *bechor*. But his hand was retracted and Peretz burst forth.

Hopefully, we too, like Peretz, will not dwell on the mere fact that someone stuck their arm out for a brief moment. We should not give preferential treatment to someone based on when or to whom they are born. Instead let us be like Boaz and make our decisions and judgments based on a person's actions and behaviors.

Sound and Sense: Alliteration in the Torah's Literature and Law

By Doniel Ehrenreich and Avi Jacobs

The Torah, eternal in message and deliberate in medium, communicates not only through its semantics but through its sound. From the resonant rhythms of בְּרָאִישׁית בְּרָא (Genesis 1:1) to the final farewell לְעַיִי כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל, the Torah embeds musicality into its structure, employing literary devices such as parallelism, repetition, and notably **alliteration** — the deliberate pairing of consonant sounds — to reinforce memory, underscore meaning, and evoke emotion.

This stylistic phenomenon appears not only in the Torah's most lyrical or narrative passages but even in sections of civil and ritual law. Unlike the austere prose of Hammurabi's Code or the formal tone of modern constitutions, the Torah's legal and literary voice is textured, poetic, and designed for oral transmission. In a world where texts were memorized rather than read, such poetic devices were not ornamental — they were essential.

Genesis: Creation through Consonants

Consider the Torah's opening verse בְּרָאִישׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים (Genesis 1:1), with its conspicuous repetition of the first two letters of the first two word of the entire Torah.

How many different ways could this have been written?

בְּרָאִישׁית יצר אֱלֹהִים?

בתחילה בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים?

It would be difficult to attribute the interplay of sounds here to mere coincidence

The verse that follows deepens this auditory experience: הָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ (1:2)

Rare words on their own, the rhyming terms (תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ) are used together only here.

וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

The recurring מ and ר sounds mimic the murmuring of the רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, the Divine wind hovering over the waters. It is not only the image that is serene; the sound is too.

By Genesis 2:5, the Torah introduces another poetic pairing:

וְכָל שֵׁם הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יְהִי בְּאֶרֶץ

The term שֵׁית appears only twice in the Torah (four times in all of Tanach), and more common words — such as עץ, as Ibn Ezra *indeed suggests as the meaning of* שֵׁים — are passed over in favor of an alliterative sequence that links the soft sibilants of ש in שֵׁיה and שָׂדֶה.

Moments later, in the creation of man, the pattern continues: “וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפִּיו נֶשְׁמַת חַיִּים” (2:7) Here the פ sounds — plosive and breathy — simulate the very act they describe: the Divine breath entering the human form. The words echo the action itself.

Babel: Building and Babbling

The use of alliteration becomes especially poignant in the story of the Tower of Babel. There, the Torah showcases how language itself can be manipulated, shared — and ultimately shattered.

(11:3) הָבָה נִלְבְּנָה לְבָנִים, וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשֹׂרֶפֶה; וַתְּהִי לָהֶם הַלְבְּנָה לְאַבֵּן, וְהַסְמָר הָיָה לָהֶם לְחָמֶר

The repetition of the words required for building sound like the building of blocks, stacking sounds like stones. Ironically, the collective unity that enabled the people to build the tower becomes the pretext for Divine intervention to disrupt it. God “confuses” their language — נִבְלָה שָׁם שְׂפָתָם (11:7 — which shares letters and sounds, נ-ב-ל, with לְבָנֹת (to build), underscoring the collapse of communication and the paradox of their project. The city’s name, בָּבֶל, echoes both *balal* (to mix) and *livnot* (to build) — a brilliant double entendre revealing how a unified speech which enabled the people to build gave way to fragmented tongues.

Shemot: Moshe from the Mayim

In Exodus, the motif of sound persists in the naming of Moshe:

(2:10) וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה, וַתֹּאמֶר: כִּי מִן־הַמַּיִם מִשִּׁיתֵּהוּ

Here, the repetition of מ links Moshe, *mayim* (water), and *meshitihu* (I drew him out). The linguistic melody reinforces Moshe’s identity — both etymologically and theologically — as one drawn out for a purpose. As with וַיִּזַּח קִרְחָקֶת, the sound of the words ripple like water, sounding out the scene.

While we have seen that narratives in the Torah can have highly poetic aspects, it is nevertheless striking to observe how suffused the legal material that comprises the first three-quarters of *Parshat Mishpatim* is with linguistic artistry, especially in its use of alliteration and other sound-based techniques — not what one might expect from a purely legal section of the Torah.

For instance, out of the 86 psukim in this section, there are 23 examples of double language, such as וַרְפָּא וַרְפָּא (Ex. 21:19) and נָקָם יִנָּקֶם (Ex. 21:20), where a single root is repeated with slight variations. This technique not only emphasizes the legal principle but also creates a rhythmic cadence that draws attention to the verse.

One of the most famous examples of repetitive phrasing in this section are the *psukim* that contain עֵין תָּחַת עֵין (Ex. 21:24), as the second of eight such phrases that utilize the “תָּחַת” structure to express the principle of measure-for-measure justice. The repetition of sounds here underscores the precision and balance inherent in the legal concept.

Already in the second verse of *Mishpatim*, the Torah states, in a verse replete with repeating sounds:

כִּי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד עֲבָדִי אִשָּׁה יְעֻבֵּד וּבְשָׁבֵעַת יָצָא לְחֻפְשֵׁי חָנָם

Almost the entire verse here is taken up with the recurring “ש” and “ע” sounds, ending with a double ה. Notably, the familiar phrase עֶבֶד עֲבָדִי itself appears driven by alliteration, rather than simply opting for יִשְׂרָאֵלִי עֶבֶד, which would have been equally accurate, but less melodically impactful.

A further instance where alliteration seems to guide word choice is found in 21:26, which states:

וְכִי־יִבֶּה אִישׁ אֶת־עֵינָיו עֲבָדָיו אוֹ־אֶת־עַיִן אִמּוֹתָיו וְשִׁחַתָּהּ לְחִפְשֵׁי יִשְׁלַחְנָהּ תַּחַת עֵינָיו

Instead of “וְכִי־יִשְׁחִית אִישׁ,” the verse uses וְשִׁחַתָּהּ, situating the verb toward the end of the *pasuk* and thereby creating a chain of “ח” sounds: תַּחַת, יִשְׁלַחְנָהּ, לְחִפְשֵׁי, and וְשִׁחַתָּהּ. This choice heightens the auditory impact.

In 22:8, another example emerges with the list of property items for which a *shomer* must swear he has not appropriated:

עַל־שׁוֹר עַל־תְּמוֹר עַל־שֶׁה עַל־שִׁלְמָה

The list includes three animals followed by a general term for clothing. Rather than using the more common בְּגָד, the text selects שִׁלְמָה, a term that phonetically resonates with שֶׁה, the word immediately preceding it. This deliberate pairing enhances the rhythm and cohesion of the verse.

The next verse (22:9) continues the auditory motif in a way that is nearly palpable, with two words sharing almost every letter:

וּמֵת אוֹ־נִשְׁבֵּר אוֹ־נִשְׁבָּה

Here, נִשְׁבֵּר (literally “broken”) seems an unusual term to apply to an animal. However, its similarity in sound to נִשְׁבָּה (captured) suggests a deliberate choice to emphasize the paired nature of the threats to the animal, binding them together sonically, as well as thematically.

The Torah is often described as not being a history book. But it may be more accurate to say that it is not *only* a history book. It is a work of literature that incorporates history, law, and poetry in a single, complex structure. And one of the ways it engages with readers and listeners across these genres is through its carefully crafted use of sound, rhythm, and repetition — techniques more readily associated with poetry than with narratives, or certainly, legal codes. These literary devices have enabled the Torah to resonate — with Jews and non-Jews alike — throughout the ages.

On First Fruits and Divine Cunning: *Bikkurim* as a Model for Jewish Education

By Rav Rick Schindelheim

The mitzvah of *Bikkurim*—the bringing of the first fruits to *Beit Hamikdash* during the period from *Shavuot* to *Sukkot*—belongs to the class of *mitzvot* that necessitates traveling to and spending time in the holy city of Jerusalem. Other *mitzvot* in this category include *Maasar Behema* (a tenth of one's livestock), *Maasar Shen* (a tenth of one's produce in four of the seven years of the *Shemita* cycle) and *Neta Revai* (the produce of a tree in its fourth year). These latter three *mitzvot*—unlike *Bikkurim*, which are donated to the *Kohanim*—must be consumed (or transferred to money which is used to purchase goods to be consumed) by the owner, or someone from his household, in Jerusalem.

In his explanation of the purpose of the *Mitzvah* of *Maasar Behema*, the *Sefer Hachinuch* (360) explains:

...In His Wisdom, [Hashem] lured them [to Jerusalem] with this commandment so that they would study [and] draw moral teachings...So when each person brings up the tithe of all his cattle and his sheep each year to the place where the study of wisdom and Torah is found — that is Jerusalem, the seat of the *Sanhedrin*, those who master knowledge and understand wisdom [as well as the holy *Kohanim* and *Leviim*] — ...and therefore, the owner of [these items] will either go there and study Torah himself, or send one of his sons to study there and to be sustained by that produce [while he studies in Jerusalem].

And through this, **each and every household in all of Israel will have someone who is wise and knowledgeable in the Torah who can [then] teach all of the household of his father with his wisdom.** And with this, “the land will be filled with knowledge of the Lord.” ...And when the teacher is in each and every house, dwelling there evening, morning and afternoon and constantly reminding them, then they will all — men, women and children — be careful and aware and no matter of sin or iniquity will be found among them. And through this they will merit that which is written (Leviticus 26:11-12) “And I will place My dwelling amongst you [...] and you will be for Me a nation, and I will be for you God”...

To our great distress, these *mitzvot* do not quite apply today, and we have no *Beit Hamikdash* in which to spend time each year and from which to draw holiness and inspiration. However, the lesson of these *mitzvot* is surely relevant to us. On a national level, we should make efforts to spend time in the Holy Land and the Holy City of Jerusalem, absorbing the *kedusha* and uniquely powerful Torah of *Eretz Yisrael*, ensuring that “each and every household in Israel” will be infused

with such holiness and Torah wisdom. On a local level as well—we are blessed with a “*mikdash me’at*” (miniature sanctuary) in the form of the Community Beit Midrash. Just as *Yerushalayim* is the spiritual heart of *Am Yisrael*, pumping Torah knowledge and holiness throughout the body of the nation, so too, the CBM is the spiritual heart of the community. Guided by the spirit of *mitzvot* like *Maaser Sheni*, let us ensure that each and every household in our community contains within it individuals who dedicate time to Torah learning and spiritual growth. May Hashem grant us success in spreading His Torah throughout our nation and the entire world, one household at a time.