

Afterthoughts

by

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ANINUT

Essay by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I believe it is no accident that the word used to express the initial period of grief after the loss of a loved one is **ANINUT**. And although the root of the word is often used to mean **AVEILUT**, grief and mourning, I cannot ignore the fact that it is also related to the word **ANI**. Technically speaking, certainly from a Halachic perspective, this is the period of time during which one is to be involved with preparations for the funeral, with thoughts of the deceased. But, in reality, despite that, it is a period of intense aloneness; a preoccupation with the self and a justified wallowing in self-pity. Inability to cope with the reality that has just become, one can only focus on **ANI** (me) – how will I survive this loss? What will I do? Can my life ever be the same? My loss, my pain. And, as if to emphasize this (or could it possibly be intentional?) one is told not to relate to the Almighty in any positive way. Exemption from all positive mitzvot, regardless of any desire to perform them, shuts one out of the world of Gd. The only way you may relate to Him is out of **YIR'A** (fear) – a weak basis for any positive relationship. We are bidden to obey all the prohibitions. We are permitted to express our anger at Gd – if that be the case – by not being expected to perform positive mitzvot; we may not express that feeling through disobeying or

misbehavior. That is where the line is drawn.

But the other side of the coin, that relationship with Gd which is based upon love and rooted in a sense of trust and need, seems to be denied. When everything falls apart and no one can really make you feel better so you turn to Gd, you are told 'no'. You may cry to Him, ask for help, talk to Him, but you may not exhibit the behavior that has always represented your wanting to please Him and praise Him. And although this may be for our benefit in some way, it leaves the person more alone than alone. You are only **ANI**.

MA YIT-ONEIN ADAM CHAI, GEVER AL CHATA-AV – Why should a living man complain? A man for his sins (Eicha 3:39).

REUVEN, B'CHORI ATA, KOCHI V'REISHIT ONI, YETER S'EIT V'YETER AZ – Reuven, you are my firstborn, my strength and the first of my might; [you should have been] superior in rank and superior in power (B'reishit 49:3).

If the word **ANI** is, indeed, related to the root **ALEF-VAV-NUN**, – it has a double meaning of **AVEILUT** in the pasuk from Eicha, and **KO'ACH, G'VURA**, strength, from the pasuk in B'reishit.

Regarding the quote from Eicha, perhaps, one who is to be an **ADAM CHAI**, a person who is truly alive, **MA YIT-ONEIN** – how can he be one who is focused on the **ANI**, only on himself? That cannot be true life. But rather he

should be **GEVER AL CHATA-AV**, be strong, overcome his sins and then truly achieve life.

If a person is only involved in self, thereby becoming the center of his universe, he cuts himself off from achieving what he should during his lifetime because he does not relate to the world which is outside of him, sufficiently; he does not consider his fellow-man as worthy as he himself is. In this sense, it is to be mourned that he has thrown away his life. But on the other hand, a person must have a feeling of self-worth, must know his own strengths and value so that he can interact positively and effectively with those outside of himself. His greatest strength stems from within and then he can give of himself to others and, in turn, be strengthened by them:

IM EIN ANI (ON, OZ) LI, MI LI? UCHSHE-ANI L'ATZMI, MA ANI (ON, AVEIL)...

Borei N'fashot

Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I found that especially after my son, who has Down's Syndrome, was born, old things took on new meanings. Things I had never thought twice about. Most specifically and most often, this expressed itself in the words of the davening. I began to realize how brilliant and how divinely inspired the men of the Anshei Knesset HaGedola were when they coined the formulae for b'rachot and davening. For although the surface meaning of the words was one thing and very clearly that one thing, so much more could be read into them even at a p'shat level.

The first thing I noticed was the new meaning I found in the b'racha of BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT. It no longer only referred to food or sustenance. It also became very literal:

BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT V'CHESRONAN
- Gd created all beings, even those with 'chesronot'- lackings- large or small. He created my special son.

AL KOL MAH SHEBRATA - He created these particular beings in addition to everything else He created. Why?

L'HACHAYOT BAHEM NEFESH KOL CHAI
- so as to instill through them real "life" and meaning into other people's lives. How their presence enriches and enhances us all. How wealthy we become when we allow ourselves to be open to these nefashot with chesronan and to be touched by them.

Along the same lines, I noticed that its partner b'racha had similar meaning: **SHEHAKOL NIHYAH BIDVARO**. Yes, even people like my son were created for a purpose with the same "words" as all other beings, all as the will of the Ribono Shel Olam. (Could this even be considered a type of Tzidduk hadin?)

It was interesting how the request in the Shmoneh Esrei of ATA CHONEIN LA'ADAM DA'AT also took on a special meaning. It was no longer simply a statement of gratitude for our intellect and a request to use it properly. Now it was a plea that my son, too, could be granted DE'A, BINA, V'HASKEL to the extent that Gd would permit.

Mashiv HaRu'ach / Morid HaTal

Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

The second b'racha of the Shmoneh Esrei is referred to as G'VUROT (powers). The primary gevura of Gd that is mentioned is T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM, the revival of the dead. Depending upon the season, we insert one of two different phrases between the opening sentence and the rest of the b'racha. We refer to the particular gevura of Gd in terms of bringing either rain - MASHIV HARUACH U'MORID HAGESHEM - or dew: MORID HATAL. According to Bartenura in the Mishna of B'rachot (5:2) rain is considered a gevura based upon p'sukim in Iyov (5: 9-10). The main theme of the b'racha, however, is the revival of the dead, so how do these phrases about rain and dew fit in?

We have been taught that receiving rain is similar to T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM because it makes possible the growth or rebirth, of a 'dead' seed in the ground into a plant. Given that the main idea, then, is T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM, perhaps another way of understanding these words is appropriate:

MASHIV HARU'ACH - When it comes time for Hashem to "return the spirit"

(soul), the time of T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM, He will also

MORID HAGESHEM - return it along with the physical body (GASHMIYUT) from which it came (as Ramban says, that the physical will be elevated to the level of the neshama so that there will no longer be any conflict between the two.)

What further supports this kind of understanding is the phrase used during the other part of the year: MORID HATAL. (26:19) The dead shall live... awake and sing you who dwell in the dust, for Your dew is the dew of light. Chazal, on the Yerushalmi (B'rachot 5:2), explain this as: this is the dew through which, in the future, the dead will be revived.

How perfect! MORID HATAL - at the time of T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM, Gd will bring down the TAL that will do just that - revive the dead.

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### While We Are Alive

If you want to MASHIV HARU'ACH, to return the spiritual to your life and enrich it, then you must MORID HAGESHEM - you must lessen and minimize the role and importance of GASHMIYUT, the physical and material in your life.

# NEVONIM

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

In this week's Parsha, Rashi points out something interesting which we might, otherwise, not notice. When Moshe recounts his difficulty in handling all of B'nei Yisrael (1:9), he relates the solution of appointing others to help him: HAVU LACHEM ANASHIM CHACHAMIM UNVONIM VIYDU'IM L'SHIVTEICHEM... [provide for yourselves men who are wise, understanding, and well known to your tribes... (1:13).] But when he tells what he did, he says VA'EKACH ET... ANASHIM CHACHAMIM VIYDU'IM... (1:15) [so I took... men who were wise and well known...], the description of NEVONIM - 'understanding' is absent. As Rashi says: AVAL NEVONIM LO MATZATI [I didn't find men who were 'understanding'.]

In order to suggest an answer to this, I would first like to take a seemingly different idea to connect to this:

According to Chazal (referenced by Rav Moshe Shapiro in MiMa'amakim on D'varim p.20), the book of D'varim, also called Mishneh Torah, is actually a bridge between TORAH SHEBICHTAV [the written law] and TORAH SHEB'AL PEH [the oral law]. The Zohar tells us there is a hint to the Oral law in this parsha: VAYHI B'ARBA'IM SHANA... HO'IL MOSHE BEI-EIR ET HATORAH HAZOT... (1:3;5) [In the 40th year...

Moshe began (desired - Ramban) to elaborate on this Torah]. According to Megaleh Amukot (Ofen 246), the Zohar is telling us that the concept of 'Mishneh Torah' is the "secret of TORAH SHEB'AL PEH" that the Jews received after 40 years - MEM SHANA (written in Hebrew, this spells out Mishna). [He adds a kabbalistic statement: "In my opinion, this is the 'secret' (SOD) of VAYHI YITZCHAK BEN ARBA'IM SHANA B'KACHTO ET RIVKA" [Yitzchak was 40 years old when he took Rivka (as a wife).] The initials of B'KACHTO ET RIVKA, are BET ALEF REISH which spell BEI-EIR 'explained' (as Moshe does at the beginning of D'varim). Since Yitzchak is the secret (SOD) of TORAH 'SHEBICHTAV and Rivka is the secret (SOD) of TORAH SHEB'AL PEH. And Yitzchak had to wait 40 years before taking Rivka since the Jews waited 40 years to get TORAH SHEBE'AL PEH.

How does this relate to our opening question? I would suggest the following:

The miraculous existence of the people in the midbar, under the direct involvement of Gd to sustain them, is now coming to an end as they prepare to enter Israel to live a 'normal' life where these "open" miracles will be hidden. The leader of the people during their supernatural travels, Moshe, is being replaced by Yehoshua, the one who will lead them into and in Israel, conquering the land in a way that might have involved occasional miracles, but the supernatural was not the rule of the day.

Returning to NEVONIM, Rashi defines this as M'VINIM DAVAR MITOCH DAVAR (1:3) [they can derive one thing from another]. A NAVON is one who can take the information given, that which is placed before him and understand the meaning beneath the surface to be able to use it to apply elsewhere. He can take the knowledge before him, expand upon it and gain more understanding than that which would superficially be apparent. If I may be so bold as to suggest this, I would posit that TORAH SHEB'AL PEH, its development and usage would be something that is HAMEVIN DAVAR MITOCH DAVAR - it is something developed through BINA. If this is true, then it could explain the lack of NEVONIM at that point in time. The people had been taught TORAH SHEBICHTAV all by Moshe, not having been exposed to developing deeper ideas yet in the way it would be in the future. The generation of the midbar

had no reason to have developed NEVONIM. Now, as they prepare to enter Israel, what do we find? USHMARTEM VA'ASITEM KI HI CHOCH-MATCHEM UVINATCHEM L'EINEI HO'AMIM... V'AMRU RAK AM CHACHAM V'NAVON HAGOI HAGADOL HAZEH" (Va'etchanan 4:6). [You shall guard them and perform them for that is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the people... and they will say certainly, this great nation is a wise and understanding people.] B'nei Yisrael are being charged USHEMARTEM - which Rashi defines as ZU MISHNA - this is study.

When they finally enter Eretz Yisrael they will be developing that aspect. As Chazal tell us, TORAH SHEB'AL PEH was initiated only when they began to settle the Land. And it is only then that the other nations refer to them as NAVON.

# KAVANA

## Afterthoughts

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Davening with kavana (concentration) has always been a struggle for me. I believe I'm not alone in this. But I'm very conscious of my failings here. Sometimes, this awareness helps achieve greater concentration and sometimes, it does just the opposite by discouraging me. Occasionally, if only rarely, this very despair, the feeling of shame it engenders in me, brings about the kavana unexpectedly. When I said the words ZOCHER CHASDEI AVOT (He remembers the kindnesses of our fathers), I thought of what it must be like for HaKadosh Baruch Hu to listen to the vast amount of prayers like my own, prayers recited dutifully but by rote, religiously, but without feeling. How He must "hurt", how much pain it must cause Him to see what is available today compared to once upon a time. ZOCHER CHASDEI AVOT - when He remembers our forefathers, their greatness, their kindness, their unparalleled devotion and attachment to Him, how He must bemoan the change. And yet, despite this, He still will MEIVI GO'EL LIVNEI V'NEIHEM - He will bless us, ultimately, with the GO'EL, the Redeemer we so pray for, despite our shortcomings.

When I feel lacking kavana, as above, the following comes to mind as well: ELOKAI, N'TZOR L'SHONI MEIRA USFASAI MIDABEIR MIRMA (My Gd,

guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully). This pointedly reminds me at the end of my Shmoneh Esrei - which may not have been said with the best kavana - that I also don't want to deceive when I daven and say words I don't mean or even pay attention to, resorting to simple lip service. Is this not also deception?

But when all is said and done, I think of this: YIHYU L'RATZON IMREI FI V'HEGYON LIBI LIFANECHA..." (May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be favorable to you...). We beseech the Almighty to accept our prayers, hoping that our IMREI FI - the words of our mouths and HEGYON LIBI - the thoughts in our hearts - be desirable to Him. Why do we separate the context of our davening into two categories, one of words and the other of thoughts from our hearts? Why not use a single phrase to describe our prayer? Perhaps, this can be understood in two different ways:

First, there are different kinds of prayer. One of them is prayer that is uttered with the mouth, expressed verbally. Another kind is the prayer that is wordless, that which is in our hearts, that which cannot find expression in speech. So maybe these two descriptions of IMREI FI and HEGYON LIBI, are meant to thereby include all prayers, silent as well as audible, those defying expression as well as those clearly articulated.

Then, there could be a deeper level to this explanation that is, perhaps, not quite so noble. As a matter of fact, in all honesty, it is an understanding that would be a condemnation of our ability to pray as opposed to a concession to different types of prayer. It might even be a more realistic assessment of most of our prayers, unfortunately. And that explanation would be to understand the words IMREI FI as just that: something that came from my mouth, without kavana, without connection to soul or thought. My mouth rambled on out of habit while my thoughts were else-

where. But lest we be led to think that we are empty and our prayers are meaningless, we must recognize that although some of our prayer might leave much to be desired, we still do have HEGYON LIBI, the thoughts in our heart. There, indeed, is part of us that in the depth of our hearts says the words of these prayers, as well as its own words, with feeling and sincerity and truly means all that was expressed, if only by our tongues.

And so, we request and hope that both kinds of prayer be accepted.

# POTE'ACH ET YADECHA

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The Shulchan Aruch tells us that we must say the above pasuk with special kavana and if we forget to, we need to repeat from Pote'ach et Yadecha until the end of Ashrei (O.C. 51:7; Mishna B'rura 15-16). We learn from Chazal (see Rashi, Radak, Metzudos Dovid, et al.) that this pasuk tells us that HaKadosh Baruch Hu provides food, parnasa, and other desires according to what people want. Accordingly, the traditional translation of this verse is, "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." Technically speaking, however, in order to mean this, it should say ... R'TZON KOL CHAI not L'CHOL CHAI RATZON. The technical translation then should be "You open Your hands and fill every living being with desire."

My problem with the explanation of Chazal is twofold:

1) we know that Gd doesn't give us everything we want. (The world simply could not survive were we all spoiled brats.)

2) the pasuk before this one states very clearly that He provides everyone with food: EINEI CHOL EILECHA Y'SABEIRU V'ATA NOTEIN LAHEM ET OCHLAM B'ITO (The eyes of all look to You with hope and You give them their food in its time). In addition, it says two verses

later that R'TZON Y'REIAV YA'ASEH (He does that which those who fear Him desire). Again, seemingly the same thought, so why repeat it?

I am not about to dispute Chazal, they know a lot more than I do. There must be something here that I don't understand. But because these questions stand, it would imply that we are to learn an additional message.

To be true to the p'shat, I offer the following: To be MASBIA RATZON, would seem to mean that Gd satiates, gives to all a complete portion of RATZON - of will. Meaning that He makes sure all of us are blessed with the necessary desire to continue living our lives regardless of the portion that has been meted out to us - rich or poor. So, if what one receives from Gd is sparse and one is an oni, what enables him to continue and go one and not give up? RATZON. What makes it possible for anyone who has been handed difficulties to continue and not give up? RATZON. And that will, that RATZON, is what Hashem gives us so that we can successfully deal with the lot we have been given. We have always been told that Gd never gives a person a NISAYON or burden that he can't handle. It must be because He has blessed us with the necessary amount of RATZON to continue.

If this is true, then it is easier for me to understand the halacha that requires us to repeat from POTE'ACH ET YADECHA

until the end of Ashrei, if we haven't properly concentrated on those words. Why not simply repeat that one verse? Because if the above meaning is true, then the verses are all one unit: What helps the person activate this RATZON to continue? What assurance does he receive? The knowledge that although TZADIK HASHEM B'CHOL D'RACHAV (Hashem is righteous in all His ways), although Hashem is a Gd of DIN and justice, He is CHASID B'CHOL MA'ASAV (magnanimous in all His deeds) - He operates LIFNIM MISHURAT HADIN, not in strict judgement, and so we are dealing with a compassionate Being and there's every reason for hope. Especially since KAROV HASHEM L'CHOL KOR'AV, L'CHOL ASHER YIKRA'UHU VE'EMET (Hashem is close to all who call to Him, to all who call him in truth) - when we are having difficulty with our portion, despite being blessed with the necessary RATZON, Gd is close to us when we call out to Him sincerely for His help. And R'TZON Y'REI'AV YA'ASEH ... - He won't ignore our pleas, but will respond and redeem. SHOMER HASHEM ET KOL OHAVOV V'ET KOL HOR'SHA'IM YASHMID. And for those who are on the high level of coping without complaining and operating purely out of a love of Gd, He responds by protecting them so there is no need for them to call out, while He deals with their enemies. Therefore, T'HILAT HASHEM Y'DABER PI VIVARECH KOL BASAR SHEM KODSHO L'OLAM VA'ED (My mouth will speak the praises of

Hashem...), it more than behooves us to proclaim the praises of He Who granted us the will, the desire, the strength to continue against all odds and to be able to trust in His help always.

I can't ignore, however, the understanding of Chazal so, perhaps, the meaning that is eluding me is something like this:

If we look at the word RATZON in a different way, understand it on more than a superficial level, a truer meaning can emerge. We have RATZON of which we are aware and RATZON of which we are not aware. The RATZON of which we are aware would, more often than not, fall into the category of material needs and desires. We know what we want. And, very often, what we want is not necessarily what we need or even that which is good for us. The RATZON of which we are less aware is the one that is related to our spiritual needs, the desires of the NESHAMA. We are usually not tuned in to those desires. Our lives are spent in a struggle between the desires of the NESHAMA, indeed, its needs, and material desires. Sometimes, they are in harmony with each other, but, more often than not, this is not the case. Despite this, we know that what is truly best for us is that for which the unsullied NESHAMA longs.

An example of this true desire of each person is in the Rambam (Hilchot Gerushin 2:20) where he discusses forcing a man to give his wife a get. On the one hand, a get that is given through

coercion, is not valid. On the other hand, we are told that the Beit Din can administer lashes, they are KOFIN OTO, they force him until he agrees to give the get. So how is this not coercion? Because, says the Rambam, the man is actually doing what he wants to do - as a Jew, he wants what his NESHAMA wants, to do the right thing.

If this is so, if we place that definition of RATZON into the verse in Ashrei, it becomes more believable. Because Gd, indeed, does satisfy the desire, this inner RATZON of everyone. For the desires of the NESHAMA are pure and are exactly what is good for the person and the same desires that He would want for us as well.

# LO TIT-GO-D'DU

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I've been reviewing parsha every week for quite a few years and once in a while, I am lucky enough to notice things I've never noticed before which give additional meaning to what I'm learning. Very often, it comes in the form of a certain usage of a word where it can be understood in more than one way.

For example, in Va'etchanan (5:19) which we read a few weeks ago, Moshe recounts the scene at Mt. Sinai and describes how the 'voice' of Hashem was a KOL GADOL V'LO YASAF - [a great voice which didn't cease] (according to the Targum as cited by Rashi). A few verses later, he tells how the people were afraid of hearing this voice: "Why should we die for this great fire will consume us if we continue to hear the voice of Hashem Elokeinu." Whenever the Torah uses similar wording in two (or more) places that are close to each other, it's always a good idea to look for a reason for it, even if the reason is simply a play on words. So here we have the word YASAF/YOSFIM meaning 'to stop' in one verse and meaning 'to continue' in the other. There is a similar occurrence of this debated definition of YASAF in Parshat Vayeishev (B'reishit 38:26) in the story about Yehuda and Tamar. After Yehuda publicly admits that it was he who impregnated Tamar, the verse tells V'LO

YASAF OD L'DA'ATAH [and he didn't continue/didn't cease being intimate with her]. This translation reflects Rashi's informing us that the word can be understood in two different ways. If so, then using that information in Va'etchanan maybe we can understand the verse about the people not wanting to continue to hear the voice of Hashem as an implied warning to us: "If we stop listening to the voice of Hashem VAMATNU - we will die." True.

Similarly, I found an additional message in this week's parsha of R'ei, based upon different legitimate understandings of certain words. It is also, I believe, an appropriate message as we approach Elul. BANIM ATEM LASHEM ELOKEICHEM LO TITGOD'DU V'LO TASIMU KORCHA BEIN EINEICHEM LAMEIT (14:1) [You are children to Hashem your Gd, you may not cut yourselves and you may not make a bald spot between your eyes over the dead]. The content of this verse tells us of the limitations in the way we are allowed to mourn over the dead. In essence, we are not to indulge in the practices of the other nations. Why? Because you are a holy nation to Hashem your Gd. And Hashem chose you to be a treasured nation for Him out of all the nations on the face of the earth (14:2).

TANYA: LO TITGOD'DU - LO TA'ASU AGUDOT, AGUDOT... Don't create separate groupings for yourselves, e.g., a beit din in the city where part of the members holds according to the opinion

of Beit Shammai and another part holds according to the opinion of Beit Hillel.

It's interesting that Chazal in the gemara (Y'vamot 14a) choose to define LO TITGOD'DU in a way that differs significantly from the p'shat, the simple meaning, a way that doesn't seem to fit into the context of the verse. They see it as meaning that we shouldn't behave in a way that breaks us into separate groups. There is even a halacha derived from here that a city should not have two batei din with each one holding according to a different authority (Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara 12). The reason I find this interesting is because of what follows in the pasuk: V'LO TA'ASU KORCHA BEIN EINEICHEM. The simple meaning of this half of the pasuk is consistent with the first half - don't behave in self-mutilating ways because of mourning a death. But the wording also seems consistent with the first half on a deeper level. Look at the root of KORCHA. Is it not KORACH - the master of machloket and divisiveness? (V'LO YIHYEH K'KORACH UK'ADASO (Korach 17:5) - don't be like Korach and his group).

LO TA'ASEH KORCHA - don't let there be splits among you; distance yourselves from divisiveness. BEIN EINEICHEM - don't let your eyes see things in a way that separates you from others. Because this can only result in LAMEIT - whether actual death (as in the SIN'AT CHINAM present during the siege of Jerusalem before the

destruction of the Second Temple) or in the punishment of TZORA'AT for the unavoidable LASHON HARA that will result from MACHLOKET, and one with TZORA'AT is considered as dead.

This would mesh well with the Ha'amek Davar on the pasuk, for he questions the use of apparently two reasonings for this warning.

1) BANIM ATEM LASHEM - you are HaShem's children, and

2) KI AM KADOSH ATa - because you are a holy nation. Since we are separate from the other nations, unique, and holy to HaShem, we should demonstrate this by not using their practices, such as those in the pasuk.

In understanding the meaning behind BANIM ATEM LASHEM, however, he uses Chazal's second understanding of LO TITGOD'DU while combining it with the simple meaning of the second phrase: Since you are children to HaShem, therefore it isn't proper that you should appear separate in customs belonging to the Torah, for the nature of children is to go in the same path.

My conclusion has to be that there are, indeed, two messages here and the entire pasuk can be read and understood each way:

1) Since you are children to HaShem your Gd, you may not cut yourselves and you may not make a bald spot between your eyes over the dead and thus

**behave like the other nations who practice such acts of self-mutilation.**

**2) Since you are children of HaShem, don't break up into differing groups and don't behave like Korach to cause divisiveness and machloket which will only lead to death.**

# T'SHUVA, CIRCLES, AND THE UNIVERSE

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I usually try to prepare myself, during the month of Elul at least, for the approaching New Year. T'shuva is not a new concept for me and I probably read some of the same things year after year for inspiration. Among the reasons that t'shuva at this time is difficult for me is that I try to do t'shuva most of the time during the year. I believe that any good, religious Jew does the same. We take account of our behavior on a regular basis and don't really need the blast of the shofar during Elul to wake us up to the fact that we are always accountable for our deeds. I think that what makes this time of year a time of more focus - aside from the fact that Chazal emphasize that this is an EIT RATZON for t'shuva - is that the judgment factor comes into play. When we do a CHESHBON HANEFESH - a self-evaluation - during the year, it's more with an eye to improving and to undoing improper behavior (yes, this is still considered t'shuva) with little, if any, thought given to DIN, to judgment. Now, however, the very real and almost palpable atmosphere of judgment makes us very aware of the fact that we have to account for our actions before Gd.

All that said, I need to read something

during Elul that might help inspire me. So, I was reading (re-reading) material about t'shuva by Rav Kook zt"l - whom I greatly admire. He explains that t'shuva is a universal phenomenon, not something limited to the Jew or even to mankind in general. The gemara (Pesachim 54a) lists t'shuva as one of the things that was 'created' before the creation of the world. This idea that "t'shuva predated the world" is not a chronological statement, but a causal one. In other words, "t'shuva makes the world go round" - it enables the world to exist. If, indeed, t'shuva existed before the world, by definition, there was yet no sin nor sinners to necessitate it. It is the "foundation of the universe, the energy that pushes the world onward to elevate it to its true nature and destiny... waves of t'shuva cascade all over existence... the universe calls out for perfection... The voice of the universe cries out to mankind: Can't you hear? Can't you feel the pain? Aren't you ashamed?" (Moadim L'Simcha, pp. 14-15 by Rav Shlomo Aviner). Our thoughts of t'shuva are actually caused by these "waves" filtering in from the world outside. In essence, t'shuva is a return to the point of birth. The world needs to be perfect, as intended; we need to return to the pure nature with which we were created.

Thinking about the way this whole process of t'shuva was described, and recognizing that its root, SHUV, shares a cognate meaning with SOV (turn

around) and SOVEIV (surround) led to my seeing this process as a circular one: when we say someone returns to from whence he came, it implies a movement in a circle, as opposed to linear - at least, that's how I envision it. Given that, I started thinking about some "universals".

The universe is round in nature. The cosmos, planets, everything is circular. There seems to be a natural flow in Nature. Thinking about this circular formation led me to focus on the fact that not only did Gd create the world "circular" but also the systems that exist in the world are also cyclical: physical Mankind begins and returns to dust; spiritual Mankind (the neshama) begins and returns to its source; many creatures (animals, fish, birds) return to the places of their birth to recreate - and in some cases, to die; Nature recycles itself: seeds to plants to seeds; animal carcasses replenish the earth; water is recycled - there is the same amount of water in the world now as there was at the time of Creation. The movement of the Sun, Moon, and planets is circular; planets rotate and revolve. Everything goes around.

What about the cyclical nature of time? We Jews believe that certain periods of time have certain characteristics. Historic events that have occurred stamp their imprint on a given time for all the future, which means that when that period of time returns (implying a cycle) it is colored with the effect of

that event. From a mystical point of view (I don't have the sources), time is defined by the different energies and emanations that infuse it. And when these times re-occur those energies are at their fullest and can be tapped into and captured. (This would seem to fly in the face of our belief that we shouldn't hold by "good luck" or "bad luck" times. But we do hold this to a certain extent: the 9 days, the 9th of Av, 40 days from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom Kippur... They don't, however, determine history and events and we have the power to overcome those "negative" times or ignore the "positive" ones.)

So, what is it about circles (and cycles) that describe the act of t'shuva that makes it such an important force in the universe? One possibility could be in the message of HaRav Ben Tzion Firer about the merits of the circle (Eileh Heim Mo'adai: SOD HAMA'AGAL p.191). "The circle is eternity. There is no beginning and no end. It represents equality - in a circle, every point is equidistant from the middle. Nothing closer or farther, no concept of greater or lesser importance. The secret of the circle was placed in the creation of the world ..." The ways of the Torah are referred to as a circle by Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch in his definition of MAG'LOSECHA (T'hilim 17:5) and MAG'LEI TZEDEK (23:3). These words mean "your circles". "MAG'LOSECHA are the circles or bounds drawn by Gd's Law which circumscribe all our acts" (Hirsch

T'hilim, Feldheim, p.125). T'shuva pre-dated the world; Torah pre-dated the world. The universe is based upon these circles.

Coming full circle: we return to our original selves, full circle; we return to the boundaries, the circle of the Torah which surrounds us; we return to the essence of the universe.

And I always thought t'shuva was simply a personal thing.

P.S. Just wondering: is it at all possible that this SOD HA'IGUL (secret of the circle) has anything to do with what B'nei Yisrael saw at Mt. Sinai that influenced them to form davka an eigel?

# T'KA B'SHOFAR GADOL

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

...L'CHEIRUTEINU ... V'KAB'TZEINU  
YACHAD MEI'ARBA KANFOT HA'ARETZ

Sound the great shofar for our freedom  
... and gather us together (YACHAD)  
from the four corners of the Earth.

(from the weekday Amida)

Could the word YACHAD be considered  
an extra or unnecessary word? Would  
V'KAB'TZEINU meaning "gather us"  
automatically imply that this would  
mean "together"?

If this is a possibility, then I suggest that  
the word YACHAD is referring to Gd  
together with us. May we gather  
together Klal Yisrael from galut along  
with (YACHAD) the Sh'china in exile - to  
return to Israel. We daven for kibutz  
galuyot (the ingathering of exiles) and  
make the mistake of thinking that its  
purpose is simply to bring all Jews back  
to Israel. But the reason we want all  
Jews out of galut involves more than  
that. For when we all return, it means  
that the Sh'china will return as well; for  
we know that Gd promised us He would  
be with us in galut. And so, if we are  
lacking all Jews here, we are lacking -  
more significantly - the presence of the  
Sh'china.

With this backdrop, I prefer to under-  
stand a quote in our morning daily

davening from Tz'fania 3:20, differently  
than it is usually translated:

... BA'EIT HAHI AVI ETCHEM U'VA-EIT  
KAB'TZI ETCHEM ... B'SHUVI ET  
SH'VUTEICHEM L'EINEICHEM... [at that  
time I will bring you and at that time I  
will gather you ...when I bring back your  
captivities before your eyes]. "When I  
bring back your captivities". The word  
SHUVI, however, in its correct  
grammatical form doesn't mean "when I  
bring (you) back; it means "when I  
(Myself) return". If so, the p'shat  
(simple) meaning of this would use the  
word EIT in its meaning of 'with' and  
thus be: "When I return with your  
captivities". Gd's Sh'china will, indeed,  
return when we have all returned.

Along the same lines, the b'racha that  
closes this request could be interpreted  
accordingly, as well: M'KABEITZ  
NIDCHEI AMO YISRAEL - the simple  
meaning is - "He Who gathers together  
the NIDACHIM - the dispersed of His  
nation Israel." Alternatively, it is  
possible to understand this as meaning -  
"He who gathers together those who  
were NIDACHIM, dispersed because of  
His nation Israel." The Sh'china was  
NIDACHAT because the nation of Israel  
was in galut - for Gd promised that He  
would remain with us in exile and not  
forsake us. Therefore, this ending would  
refer to the gathering in of the Sh'china  
as well.

It's time to bring Him back.

# L'OLAM Y'HEI ADAM...

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

L'OLAM Y'HEI ADAM Y'REI SHAMAYIM...  
UMODEH AL HA'EMET, V'DOVEIR EMET  
BILVAVO

One should always fear Heaven... and admit the truth and speak the truth in his heart. (from the morning davening).

The importance of truth is fairly obvious. Without it, the world would be even more absurd than it already is, even more confusing. The confidence that things were truly as they seemed would be gone and, as such, we could not possibly function effectively; we would flounder even more. Simply put, the world couldn't survive. As if to underscore the seemingly obvious need for truth, we are told here to speak the truth even in our hearts - to be honest with ourselves. And what might appear to be a simple statement, is advice that isn't as easy to follow as it might seem.

Most of us find it quite difficult to do, I believe. We've all been there. It's called rationalizing. We make all kinds of excuses to justify certain behaviors or conclusions - not just in order to look good in the eyes of others - but to be able to live with ourselves. It is interesting how effective we can be in lying to ourselves. But we couldn't really do this if we were able to DOVEIR EMET BILVAVO. I understand why we might find it difficult to admit the truth to

others, we may feel embarrassed about our opinions or our behavior. But why is it so difficult to admit the truth to ourselves?

I'm not really sure, but I do have some thoughts. One reason could be that by being truly honest in our deepest selves, we rob ourselves of any illusion we may have had about who we really are. We also destroy our rationalizations for behavior that is beneath us, yet to which we still cling. To a certain extent, we are baring our souls to ourselves and, sometimes, it might not be such a pretty picture. Obviously, being honest with ourselves would afford us the opportunity to evaluate, to change, to do t'shiva where necessary. After all, what kind of a vidui (confession) can a person do if he is clueless as to his faults?

On the other hand, we might very well discover positive elements, admirable traits we hadn't focused on and, perhaps, even a greatness of being.

Having said that, I think there is a more profound importance to being able to recognize and admit the truth to ourselves: after 120 years, we are told, some of the YISURIM we will have to endure in order to purify our souls in the OLAM HA'EMET (world of truth) is just that: facing the EMET. Scrolling through scenes in our lives in which we may not have behaved the best possible way; times we did wrong and knew - deep down - that we were wrong. To the extent that we hide these truths from

ourselves during our lifetimes, to that extent will the experience be more painful. The humiliation felt while "watching" these scenes while in the presence of the most merciful Father is, indeed a GEHINOM. Emotional pain, as we all know, is greater than physical pain; and that's exactly what we will have to expect at that time.

With that insight, I would like to try to get a better understanding of what we are told about Yitzchak (Toldot 27:33): When he becomes aware of the fact that he has just been fooled by Yaakov and with Eisav standing now before him, it says "and Yitzchak trembled with an extremely great trembling". Many suggestions for his trembling have been offered but I would like to focus on the Rashi which says 'he saw GEHINOM open before him'. The Gur Aryeh says that Yitzchak experienced a "taste" of GEHINOM. Again, there are a few explanations of why the concept of GEHINOM suddenly appears here (e.g., see Targum Yonatan). But the bottom line is that he saw GEHINOM associated with Eisav. And that means - according to those who hold that Yitzchak truly had been deceived all these years by Eisav and really believed him to be good - that Yitzchak realized that he had been living in a world of deceit and falsehood; that he had been wrong all along. "Yitzchak sensed deceit; but he wondered who was the guilty one: was it Yaakov, who had acted, outwardly, at least, with deceit? Or was it Yitzchak himself, who had allowed himself to be

misled?" (Strive For Truth, part 1; Eliyahu Dessler; pp.268-269). And only now did the EMET - the unvarnished truth - appear before him. This was shades of GEHINOM, hints of that emotional torment one experiences after 120 years when confronted with the truth.

And if this is the reaction to recognizing the truth in a situation where, through no fault of his own, Yitzchak was "living a lie", so to speak, then certainly we can expect the reaction to "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" that will confront us after 120 to be no less.

I submit, then, that the authors of our prayers were giving us more than just good advice when they said L'OLAM Y'HEI ADAM Y'REI SHAMAYIM... UMODEH AL HA'EMET, V'DOVEIR EMET BILVAVO. One should always (forever - l'olam) fear Heaven... and admit the truth and speak truth in his heart. In order for us to have as smooth a transition as possible L'OLAM - to that eternal world, it behooves us to 'fear Heaven', etc. and to have the ability to recognize the truth and admit it - even to ourselves.

P.S. Interesting footnote: consider T'hilim 15 which is commonly read at funerals: Mizmor l'Dovid... A psalm of David. Gd, who shall live in Your Tabernacle, who shall dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks in moral integrity and speaks the truth in his heart...

# **GADOL, GIBOR, NORA**

**Afterthoughts**  
**by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

## **THOUGHTS ON GD AS GADOL, GIBOR, NORA**

If I were to be asked what Gd's primary description or characteristic would be, I would say GADOL - which Chazal identify as His attribute of CHESED V'RACHAMIM, kindness and mercy. For despite what we do and what we see in the world, a reality that would clearly not be what He wants and for which we would deserve punishment, if He operated exclusively out of His MIDAT HADIN (attribute of justice), our very existence would be in jeopardy. And, from a personal standpoint, I have been most fortunate to feel myself the beneficiary of Gd's CHESED V'RACHAMIM, of His goodness and love, B"H, as opposed to the opposite. Gd is known as the GOMEL CHASADIM par excellence. Chazal tell us that He created the world as an act of CHESED because of His 'desire' to give.

If, however, we leave this as the final conclusion as to the nature of Gd, we are left with the problem of His G'VURA, of this MIDAT HADIN. If He is both equally and entirely CHESED and G'VURA and we cannot conclude that He is primarily one or the other, how, then, are we to balance this picture? Perhaps, we need to return to the previous thought that if Gd were to

judge us according to our deeds, through MIDAT HADIN alone, the survival of humankind would be in doubt. If then, that is so, how is it that it doesn't happen? Because of that self-same G'VURA: EIZEHU GIBOR? HAKOVEISH ET YITZRO. Who is considered a GIBOR? One who conquers his YETZER. Gd activates His G'VURA to conquer and overcome His MIDAT HADIN and allows the MIDAT HARACHAMIM to reign. This means that at the same time that Gd's MIDAT HARACHAMIM functions, His G'VURA does as well. Otherwise, the CHESED couldn't be operative.

Similarly, when we see or feel that Gd is behaving towards us through G'VURA, through His MIDAT HADIN, here, too, it is not operating by itself. For, in truth, when this happens, is it not because He wants what is, ultimately, the best for us? Punishment is never given for its own sake. We are, after all, dealing with Master of the universe, not with a human motivated by petty concerns. If Gd deems us deserving of punishment or of difficulties, then when He punishes, or deals us a rough hand, it is only because that is what is best for us - even if it doesn't feel that way - so our souls would not forfeit their rightful place in OLAM HABA. And so, the punishment, too, is an act of CHESED.

This understanding now gives us the true combination of CHESED and G'VURA, of RACHAMIM and DIN, in equal measure. And, in essence then, it

would seem that the two are inseparable and blend together as one - which would explain the paradox of Gd's being entirely CHESED and entirely DIN at the same time. This combination is what Chazal refer to as NORA. Describing Gd through these character traits is an invention of the human mind to help us understand how He functions. As odd as it may be and as foreign as it may be to our limited understanding, in reality, Gd is, indeed, ECHAD - there is no compartmentalization. And that is EMET.

# GRATITUDE

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

While reading Rav Schwab's book on prayer, I was stricken with the fact that there seemed to be a certain pattern presented in P'sukei d'Zimra. According to the Ashkenazic siddur, we precede BARUCH SHE'AMAR with MIZMOR SHIR CHANUKAT HABAYIT L'DAVID in which we recognize how Gd keeps us alive and functioning even in difficult times and so we conclude HASHEM ELOKAI L'OLAM ODEKA (HaShem, my Gd, I will always thank You.) The theme of gratitude is introduced. We now proceed in BARUCH SHE'AMAR, to recognize Gd for Who and What He is, which is - in truth - unknowable, so we can only "bless" His name, that which we know of through His behavior. Being recipients of all this, we are directed to HODU LASHEM, don't take it for granted, thank Him. Indeed, we then respond with MIZMOR L'TODA, a psalm of thanks. Having expressed our gratitude to Gd, His honor and glory have been enhanced and, therefore, Y'HI CH'VOD HASHEM L'OLAM (may Gd's honor endure forever). Gratitude to Him increases His honor. (As a matter of fact, the very psalm with which we started, lays down this very rule: L'MA'AN Y'ZAMERCHA... - in order for honor to 'sing' to You, I will first offer up my thanks.)

I was unsuccessful in trying to follow this concept of gratitude through the rest of P'sukei d'Zimra, so I stopped trying. But what I found pre-occupying my thoughts was this very concept of gratitude which involves much more than what we find in the daily davening. We are taught that gratitude is a fundamental tenet of Judaism. The mitzva of honoring parents, for example, is totally based upon it; we acknowledge - repeatedly - our debt to Gd for having redeemed us from Egypt; we say blessings over everything from which we derive benefit; we are not allowed to hate the Egyptians because we "owe" them for having hosted us in their land (before slavery), etc. As such, the lack of gratitude is seen as a heinous offense. We are not allowed to permit Moavite males to come into K'HAL HASHEM. Why? Just because they didn't provide us with food when we were travelling in the desert? Is that really so terrible? Obviously, the reason must be of significantly greater import. We are all familiar with the explanation of how this was a blatant display of ingratitude on their part, given that as descendants of Lot - who benefited from and owed so much to Avraham - they really "owed" this to the Jewish people, his descendants. Rav Eliyahu Dessler says "the true service of Gd is built on a foundation of gratitude" (Strive For Truth - vol 1; p. 153). Ingratitude in Judaism is not tolerated. Rav Saadia Gaon and Rabbeinu Bechaye

say that "the sense of gratitude is the basic religious emotion in Judaism, for the whole Torah is based upon it" (The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways, Rav Soloveitchik, p.70).

Why should this be so? What is it about gratitude that bestows upon it such importance? Perhaps, a hint to a possible answer can be found in the Hebrew term for it: HODA'A - TODA. The root of the word is identical to that of VIDUI - confession. A statement of thank you is an admission - a confession, if you will - that you owe something to someone else. It could mean you had been lacking in an area and they filled the need; or it could mean that even though there was no need, you benefited in some way from someone else. It could also be an admission that you cannot properly repay the other person.

The importance of recognizing this might be reflected in the very fact that people often find it difficult to express gratitude. What is so frightening or difficult about this "admission"? I think what could be unsettling is the following: firstly, it would mean you were unable to function adequately on your own - you needed help. And maybe that makes you aware that you are not self-sufficient. There is nothing wrong with that for, indeed, we are not self-sufficient, nor were we meant to be. But for some people, this could be a blow to a fragile ego: we don't like to feel dependent. Secondly, accepting

help, or gifts, very often leaves you feeling beholden to someone else. You feel you "owe" them, whether or not this is true. And if you can't "pay them back", you feel less of a person. Again, it is an affront to the ego. Thirdly, it simply means that now you are "connected" to someone else and you may not want to be.

All of the above share one common thread and that is an involvement with another person. A recognition that "no man is an island". It is humbling to be a recipient of deeds or gifts even though it can also be uplifting. But regardless, it means you need to interact with another person and in a kind and grateful way. Maybe that is why gratitude is considered so important. You are placed (sometimes, forced) into a situation that insists that you interact positively with another being so that you are forced to admit, perhaps, that you need others in order to be whole. We see the opposite in ingratitude. Ingratitude could very well reflect a dangerous tendency. Not that you are afraid to admit that you needed or benefited from someone but that you are so self-involved that you might not even be aware that someone else did something special for you. You are only thinking of yourself, you actually expect others to do for you. The ultimate in conceit. And a world or people who cannot think of others is the opposite of what Gd wants. We know what happened to the Generation of the Flood.

And maybe this is what Gd wants us to realize: we do need each other. We are not gods; we cannot survive on our own - we were not meant to. BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT V'CHESRONAN AL KOL MA SHEBARATA L'HACHAYOT BAHEM NEFESH KOL CHAI - we were created with our deficiencies so that we could interact with others and benefit each other. Going the obvious step further then, we arrive at our need for the Highest Being, the Adon Olam. Being dependent upon Gd should be a liberating experience. It's call BITACHON. This awareness requires a constant state of gratitude to Gd. Yes, even to the extent that we are expected to bless over the bad as well as over the good. It makes it impossible to forget about Gd or even be unaware of His presence.

Aside from this obvious need and reason for our gratitude to Gd, I think the true importance rests on the previously mentioned fact that showing gratitude is an admission that we are not all-powerful and that we have needs. If I can recognize that and accept that, it will be simply impossible to make myself into a god or create anything that would resemble a god. If I am at peace with the fact that I am not in control - nor am I meant to be - then I won't be tempted by false idols or ideals but will recognize the true source of all I need.

We have, then, in gratitude, a heightening of our behavior - person to person - and the basis of our behavior toward Gd.

In view of all this, I would like to propose that we understand the psalm of the day for Shabbat in a significantly different way. Our davening on Shabbat says: ... TOV L'HODOT LASHEM..." (...and the seventh day praises and says: a psalm for the Shabbat day: it is good to give thanks to Gd...). Shabbat is our MEI'EIN OLAM HABA - a taste of the world to come. And what is the essence of this world to come; what is its ultimate praise, its song? TOV L'HODOT LASHEM - it is good to be grateful to the One Above. We achieve the future world through this attribute and it is the essence of that world.

# CREATION

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

Here is a problem I've always had with the story of B'reishit: How could (why would) Gd create the world in such a way that it was CHASEIR (incomplete)? Not just CHASEIR but full of disobedience on the part of the animate and the inanimate, making it seem that it was possible (or maybe even probable) that the world would be TOHU VA'VOHU even after creation.

Maybe the answer lies in the understanding of what Chazal meant when they said it was up to Man to complete the work and be a "partner" in Creation. I had always understood this in a simplistic manner: Gd made the physical world, Man was to bring it to fruition. But after reading a d'var Torah of R. Moshe Tzvi Neria, zt"l (Ner La'Ma'or, p.86-87) about Avraham, I think I have a better understanding that might explain this more adequately. He notes the Gemara (Bava Metzia 87a) that AD AVRAHAM LO HAYA ZIKNA (Until Avraham, there was no sign of old age) - that Avraham requested signs of ZIKNA so that the elders would be respected (Tanchuma Chayei Sara 1). Then he asks, how is it that Avraham felt it necessary to make a minor adjustment in MA'ASEI B'REISHIT (and that Gd agreed)? And he answers that, of course,

Gd had intended this and had "created" this but waited for Avraham to propose it so that it would be associated with Avraham.

Now I can better handle my inability to understand Gd's way of "thinking" by creating a "flawed" world. It's just like the second chapter in B'reishit where it tells us that everything, the raw material, was ready, waiting for Man to act upon it. So, too, then, with all other matters, including the conquering of evil and the perfection of those "imperfections" in Creation. It's all there, waiting for the person Gd chooses to activate them, to put them into effect - just as He had planned.

(Of course, this doesn't explain the disobedience present in nature, but that's for another time.)

# Gd's Modus Operandi

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I noticed that there are certain similarities in the episodes described in the Parashot of B'reishit and No'ach, which - as usual - I had not noticed before. Specifically, I am referring to the sin of Adam and the sin of DOR HAFLAGA:

### SIN

Adam - sins against Gd by not listening to the one command he had. The lure of the sin was "to be like Gd" - VIH-YITEM KEILOKIM

Dor Haflaga - sins against Gd by challenging His authority; wanting to fight Him. They want to be like Gd (or greater).

### INGRATITUDE

Adam - shows ingratitude when he responds to Gd's question by blaming Chava: HA'ISHA ASHER NATATA IMADI, as if it were Gd's fault, chas v'chalila, for having given him Chava to begin with.

Dor Haflaga - shows ingratitude in their "attack" on Gd, ignoring the fact that He promised not to bring a flood upon them.

### PUNISHMENT

Adam - Gd prevents Adam from eating from Etz HaChayim: - lest he become too

powerful with his 'knowledge of good and evil' by living forever - and He expels him from Gan Eden.

Dor Haflaga - Gd's response seems similar: - the same concern over Man's overstepping his boundaries and becoming too powerful. And he punishes them by confusing their language which leads to His scattering them out from there all over the earth. They, too, are displaced.

The punishments put Man in a position where he is weaker (as opposed to his desire for power) and, perhaps, this is meant to make him feel his dependence upon Gd even more (as opposed to becoming Gd-like).

When compared to the other two major catastrophes, in terms of punishment, that appear in B'reishit, these consequences are different.

1) The world was destroyed by flood - not because people challenged Gd's power - but because they didn't care about each other and wronged each other.

2) S'dom and Amora, too, were totally destroyed, again - not because they challenged Gd's power - but because their behavior towards other people was despicable. One must conclude that Gd cares more - "feels" more strongly about, and will not tolerate humans hurting each other - than about any "threat" to Himself by Man.

# ...B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA UVCHOL M'ODECHA

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

As usual, something which should have occurred to me a long time ago, first hit me now. We say in Sh'ma, we shall love HaShem our Gd with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our might. And we've been taught over and over again how these three descriptions refer to the ways in which we are to serve Hashem:

B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA - as its simple meaning, emotionally, with all our heart;

UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA - even with our souls, if, Gd forbid, we are required to sacrifice our lives for Him

UVCHOL M'ODECHA - with all our "means" - financial; and/or B'CHOL MIDA UMIDA SHEHU MODED L'CHA HEVEI MODEH - BEIN TOVA, BEIN RA'A... (Brachot 54a) - no matter what MIDA with which Gd treats us.

Suddenly, the fact that these requirements are three in number struck me. My first thought was the three AVOT - our forefathers. And with that, the three-character traits that are attributed to them: GADOL, GIBOR, NORA - this is how each of them related to Gd.

What if these three B'CHOLs are meant to coincide - or even if not meant to, do - with these three midot:

B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA - would imply unconditional love which, to my way of thinking, would be a natural and easy way to respond to a Gd Who treats us with chesed as Avraham did.

UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA - sacrificing our lives - which would require the MIDA of GEVURA, which Yitzchak exhibited.

UVCHOL M'ODECHA - this would require our serving Him regardless of what He metes out to us chesed or gevura, or both, as is defined in NORA, as depicted by Yaakov in his very complicated life.

It occurred to me (about 60 years late) that if we are interpreting B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA and UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA as referring to OUR hearts and OUR souls, why should we switch in terms of M'ODECHA to mean Gd's behavior towards us? If M'ODECHA can be used to mean MIDA then there should be no reason that we can't use it to refer to OUR midot, not just those of HAKADOSH BARUCH HU. Therefore, it can additionally mean that we should love Him B'CHOL M'ODECHA - with all of OUR midot.

# MUSAF AMIDA of SHABBAT & YOM TOV

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I've always wondered about the sequence of requests in the Amida on Shabbat and on Yom Tov:

**KAD'SHEINU B'MITZVOTECHA** [sanctify us with your commandments]

**V'TEIN CHELKEINU B'TORATECHA** [and give us our portion in Your Torah]

**SAB'EINU MITUVECHA** [sate us from Your goodness]

**V'SAMCHEINU BISHUATECHA** [and gladden us with Your salvation]

**V'TAHEIR LIBEINU L'OVD'CHA BE'EMET** [and purify our heart to serve You truthfully]

I, personally, felt that the need for service with a pure heart was the primary one. And if I could achieve that purity in my service of Gd, if only I could approach Gd with love and not because I needed something from Him - no ulterior motive - I'd then be deserving of **SAMCHEINU BISHUATECHA** - the yeshua would then come (understanding yeshua in terms of the ultimate one, the geula). But after some thought, I had to sadly admit that truly pure service of Hashem is probably not achieved prior to the geula. It is only after we merit the arrival of the mashiach that we can hope to serve with a pure heart.

The **SAB'EINU MITUVECHA** also posed a problem for me. It seemed inappropriate to insert a "gimme" request amidst the more noble things we were mentioning: **KAD'SHEINU B'MITZVOTECHA** - make us more sensitive to your mitzvot to seek to do them and to sense opportunities for this; **V'TEIN CHELKEINU B'TORATECHA** - let our portion be among those who learn Torah. Asking for the more mundane in **SAB'EINU MITUVECHA** seemed inconsistent. Perhaps, it is meant to be understood in a different way. Gd always blesses us with His good - we may not realize it, but it's there. The request here is not for more good things, it is a request that **SAB'EINU** - we feel fulfilled and satisfied with whatever good He gives us, not that we feel lacking and want more. And so, it really is a request for us to elevate ourselves to a level where we can appreciate that good and be grateful. As such, we are not asking for the mundane, for "more", we are asking for help in being satisfied with anything we receive. This, then, would also fit in terms of the sequence in general:

A person who

- 1) has become more sensitive to the opportunity to do mitzvot, who seeks them out more;
- 2) one who devotes time to Torah study - not as an afterthought, but as a goal - this kind of person will be one who, indeed,

3) feels satisfied with the good Gd grants him and will reach the level of

4) being deserving of the yeshua and, after which,

5) will merit to serve HaShem with a pure heart.

# WHY THE BOOK OF B'REISHIT?

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

When Rashi brings the question of R' Yitzchak regarding the opening of B'reishit (who questions why the Torah didn't start with the first mitzva, as opposed to the story of Creation), he is informing us that the essence of the Torah is not a recounting of history but rather a halachic guide to life according to the commandments of Gd for the Jewish people. If so, why does the Torah begin with the many stories in B'reishit? How do we explain the recorded details of the lives of our ancestors? With the exception of the seven Noahide commandments - which, in truth, are not clearly listed - the mitzva of brit mila; and the prohibition of eating gid hanasheh - both of which could have been learned in the course of the Torah's specifying the other mitzvot and not in the context of a story - B'reishit doesn't fit the description of the purpose of the Torah.

The answer, as Rashi records, is that we are to learn something other than mitzvot from the first book of the Torah. The first thing we can learn, as explained by Ramban, is something about how Gd functions. According to Ramban, R' Yitzchak's question of why start the Torah with an account of Creation is basically implying: we don't understand anything about Creation.

The concept of 'creatio ex nihilo' is beyond us. Understanding the creation of Woman from Man - let alone the creation of Man - is also beyond us, as is much of this story. But, as Ramban explains, we are being told these things to understand that, yes, Gd owns everything and He can give to and take from anyone or any nation what He chooses. And the story of the expulsion from Gan Eden, the flooding of the world, the dispersion of the nations, illustrates for us that when you don't live by Gd's rules - Jew or not - you will be expelled from your place.

But again, what about the Avot, our forefathers? Indeed, we can also learn lessons from their lives as to how Gd functions. But, oftentimes, we are left with many questions about this that are left unanswered: e.g., why does Gd deem it necessary to decree that Avraham's descendants must be enslaved and that has to be for 400 years? Why need Yitzchak become blind? Why go through the whole charade with Eisav and Yaakov? Why is trickery necessary? Why does Yaakov have to go through the myriad complications in his life (his father and grandfather didn't)? Chazal succeed in suggesting many solutions to the various questions. But the bottom line is we will never really understand how Gd functions and that's the way it's supposed to be.

Therefore, I believe we need to conclude that the purpose of our knowing about the trials and tribulations of the Avot is

in order to prepare us for the receiving of the Torah that follows the book of B'reishit. Despite any questions we might have about why Gd or why the Avot acted in certain ways, we are being informed, at the very least, of their noble attributes. And that is the necessary precondition for a Jew to receive the Torah. Whatever weaknesses they exhibited, we are to learn from them. Whatever strengths, whatever midot they displayed, we are not only to emulate them, but to realize, even more, that we have inherited them. They are part of our ethnic DNA, and only a people which exhibits these characteristics is a people that can receive the Torah and abide by its laws. Put differently in Chazal's famous words: DERECH ERETZ KODMA LATORAH.

These thoughts came to me when I noticed in the davening in T'hilim 34, that I could read a different message in the famous quote MI HA'ISH HECHAFEITZ CHAYIM [who is the one who wants life]. If I may be allowed poetic license, I saw the following:

MI HA'ISH HECHAFEITZ CHAYIM - we know that the Torah is also referred to as CHAYIM (as in EITZ CHAYIM HI) so maybe, homiletically, we can read this as 'Who is the man who wants to learn Torah, to live a life of Torah?'

OHEIV YAMIM LIR-OT TOV [who loves days, to see goodness] - be a person

who sees the good in others. Be a ba'al chessed like Avraham.

N'TZOR L'SHONCHA MEIRA [guard your tongue from speaking evil] - restrain yourself, hold back from speaking poorly of others. Practice GEVURA to limit yourself just as Yitzchak, who exemplified GEVURA.

USFATECHA MIDABEIR MIRMA [and your lips from speaking deceitfully] - and don't engage in trickery and deceit as Yaakov had to, but remain truthful, be involved in EMET, which Yaakov represents.

By emulating the midot of the Avot, we are ready to receive and live by the mitzvot of Gd in the Torah which He gave us. And that's why the Torah had to begin with B'reishit.

# DUDA'IM, CHANUKA, RACHEL AND LEAH

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

"HADUDA'IM NAT'NU REI'ACH" - EILU DUDA'EI REUVEN. "V'AL P'TACHEINU KOL M'GADIM" (Shir haShirim 7:14) - EILU NEROT CHANUKA (brought in the Chasam Sofer and K'sav Sofer on the Torah: Vayeitzei)

*The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and at our doors are all manner of precious fruits...*

The Midrash somehow connects the episode of the Duda'im of Reuven with Chanuka. In an effort to understand this mysterious connection, R. Moshe Zvi Neria zt'l (Ner LaMa'or, p. 117) suggests the following:

On the surface, the behavior of the Chashmona'im in the Chanuka story, their successful fighting and ruling, is something not only out of the ordinary, but not right. Kohanim are not supposed to fight, not supposed to rule, U'MIN HAMIKDASH LO YEITZEI" (Vayikra 21:12) [He shall not leave the Sanctuary]. What they did goes against what they are supposed to do. And yet, as a result, they succeeded in freeing the Jews of Greek rule and in re-instilling Torah among the people. According to Torat haSod, however, it was necessary, in particular for the Kohanim to be the ones to do this in order to counteract the effect of the tum'at Yavan [impurity

of Greece]. The political framework of the time required an abundance of the influence of Priestly Kedusha.

In a similar fashion, Leah's going out to greet Yaakov to inform him of the exchange with Rachel for conjugal rights that night is something frowned upon by Chazal as not appropriate, not tzniusdik, modest, for a Mother of Israel. Gd, however, sees the truth and shows His approval by granting the subsequent union the gift of Yissachar - the tribe of Torah scholars, the YOD'EI BINA L'ITIM (Divrei HaYamim Alef 12:33). The tribe of Yissachar had the BINA to know how to determine ITIM: times that were set, and those times that required bending - EIT LA'ASOT LASHEM, HEIFEIRU TORATECHA [when it is time to act for HaShem's sake, modify the Torah]. It was the sons of Yissachar, maintains Rav Neria, who understood that the period of the Chashmona'im was a 'time' that needed flexibility, that needed Kohanim to take on a role foreign to them. And thus, they established the holiday of Chanuka: B'NEI VINA, Y'MEI SH'MONA KAV'U SHIR URNANIM (from Ma'oz Tzur).

After reading the explanation of Rav Neria, citing 'Torat haSod', I saw the episode of the duda'im in a different light. I must admit, I never saw anything wrong in Leah's actions to begin with. After all, she wasn't "going out" in the marketplace to wait, she waited in the field for Yaakov's return. And, according to Yonatan ben Uziel, she only did this

when she heard the sound of his donkey, so she knew that he was approaching. Through her actions, she also prevented an embarrassing encounter between Yaakov and Rachel, not making it necessary for Rachel to "throw him out", as it were. It was a sensitive act.

As for Rachel, Chazal also fault her for 'swapping' a night with Yaakov and, as a result, she forfeits her place beside him in M'orat HaMachpeila. I prefer, however, to choose the explanation of Rashi about her burial place: "...but you should know that according to the word of Hashem, I buried her there so that she would be a help to her children when Nevuzaradan would exile them and they would pass by the road there, so Rachel would come out of her grave and cry, begging for mercy on them" (Vaychi 48:7). This was not a punishment; this was meant to be. Rachel, who is considered 'Rachel Imeinu' - Rachel, our mother, the one who is "M'VAKA AL BANEHA, crying over her children", earned this title and this right since it was only because of her, that Yaakov ended up marrying his other three wives and thus producing the 12 tribes of Israel.

So, although Chazal see this episode of the duda'im as a negative one, both on the part of Leah and on the part of Rachel, I humbly see it differently. The birth of Yissachar proved this to me. And how about understanding the famous quote from Yirmiyahu in an additional way? KOL B'RAMA NISHMA,

N'HI B'CHI TAMRURIM. RACHEL M'VAKA AL BANEHA... KO AMAR HASHEM: MIN'I KOLECH MIBECHI V'EINAYICH MIDIM'A KI YEISH SACHAR LIF-ULATEICH N'UM HASHEM... (Yirmiyahu 31: 14-15) [A voice is heard in Rama, a bitter wailing cry. Rachel is crying over her children... So says HaShem: hold back your voice from crying and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your deeds, says HaShem.] Yes, no denying the Chazal that tells us that 'your deeds' refers to her switching with Leah on what was to be her wedding night and giving her the secret signs to fool Yaakov so as not to have her be humiliated. But look at the words carefully: YEISH SACHAR LIF-ULATECH - YISSACHAR - was the result of your actions (P'ULATEICH) with the duda'im. And, as my husband pointed out, both these acts were acts of 'exchanging' - of allowing Leah to take her place on the wedding night and of allowing Leah, once again, to take her place in exchange for the duda'im. P'ULATEICH, both the first time and the second, were actions that were sanctioned and blessed by Gd.

# **SHELO ASANI ISHA**

## **SHE'ASANI KIRTZONO**

### **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

We are told that men say the three b'rachot of SHELO ASANI GOI; SHELO ASANI AVED; SHELO ASANI ISHA in the negative sense to express what the male adult Jew is not, and, therefore, by default, what he is: a free Jewish male and thus responsible for all the mitzvot (which a goy, eved, or isha are not). The first two of these b'rachot are also said by women and they express the same idea. For although a woman and an eved share the same positive mitzvot that are not bound by time, a woman is obligated in certain positive commandments, e.g. separating challah, Korban Pesach (and others) that an eved isn't, so she too is obligated in mitzvot more than an eved.

The traditional understanding, or perhaps, not traditional as much as popular - in a negative way - of the third bracha OF SHE'ASANI KIRTZONO is that it is basically a form of TZIDUK HADIN: 'I accept upon myself my lot, this is what Gd has meted out to me and I accept it' - implying a making-of-peace with a role that is not ideal. And this understanding remains the most common one, despite the abundance of commentaries that reject it.

The problem with accepting this as the real meaning is that these two b'rachot, male and female, don't parallel each

other in outlook, as do all the other b'rachot. We have the male version proudly proclaiming contentment and pride in his role. In the female version, however, although it begins with the same proud note, it suddenly switches gears to humbly accept the lot which the Almighty has determined for her. The inconsistency in the statements is disturbing. Perhaps we can look at both sets with two different meanings each: one where all three b'rachot are meant to be a statement of pride and another where the statements recognize that despite our (male and female) satisfaction with our roles, we are each missing something that the other has, and we accept it as a TZIDUK HADIN - acknowledging that Gd, in His infinite wisdom has created us in these two different ways intentionally and therefore, each way must be good as it is, and we need to recognize that in the other and value it.

#### **APPROACH #1 - Positive**

**Male** - As stated above, the b'rachot tell what the man is not, emphasizing what he is and extolling the opportunity to perform the 613 mitzvos as he has been commanded.

**Female** - The first two b'rachot are understood as above but, the third, rather than a TZIDUK HADIN, is to be seen as Rav S.R. Hirsch and others see it. Woman was created KIRTZONO - according to the will of Gd alone without "consulting" the angels as He did with

Man; KIRTZONO - that she is innately closer to what Gd wants mankind to be like, more spiritually - oriented.

Gd-given, deficiencies and recognizes the greatness in the other to appreciate rather than to begrudge it.

## APPROACH #2 - TZIDUK HADIN

Male - The first b'rachot are understood in the same way but, the third, is a TZIDUK HADIN that although he is not a goy or an eved and can, therefore, do 613 mitzvot, man is lacking. He is lacking those positive qualities that HaKadosh Baruch Hu granted to women and not to men - e.g. not having the ability to be MOCHEL BICHVODO as much as a woman (see Sforno on EIZER K'NEGDO); and, being accustomed to a role of more power, a man has more difficulty fulfilling those very 613 mitzvot (11 more than women) which a woman might not need, given how she was created. This idea is expressed by Kalonymus ben Kalonymus: "Why do I make the blessing 'that He hasn't made me a woman'? Because we have an obligation to bless over the bad as much as over the good" [V'AHAVTA L'RA'AYASECHA KAMOTCHA; R. Shlomo Aviner, p.115].

Female - The first two b'rachot remain understood in their usual form. But the third is a TZIDUK HADIN. Indeed, it was the will of the Creator to create woman in such a way that she is not expected to perform 613 mitzvot and is physically incapable of doing some, even if she wanted to, and it leaves a feeling of lacking.

In the TZIDUK HADIN approach each gender comes to terms with innate, yet

# MI HA'ISH HECHAFETZ CHAYIM

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

The Midrash (Vayikra Raba; Midrash Tanchuma) tells a story of how R. Yannai heard a peddler selling the "elixir of life" and he asked what it was. The peddler proceeded to show him these famous p'sukim from T'hilim: MI HA'ISH HECHAFETZ CHAYIM, OHEIV YAMIM LIR'OT TOV; N'TZOR L'SHONCHA MEIRA USFATECHA MIDABEIR MIRMA (T'hilim 34) [who is the person who wants life; loves days that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceitful speech]. R. Yannai then responded, saying, "All my days, I would read this text and I never understood how simple it was until this peddler came and informed me."

Could the great R. Yannai really not understand the simple meaning of the verses when they seem obvious to lesser folk such as ourselves? It is truly difficult to understand this story. Maybe that is what prompted me to try to understand a different meaning from these verses.

Let's read the first verse as a question and an answer in itself, rather than just a question with the answer coming in the next phrase:

MI HA'ISH HECHAFETZ CHAYIM? - who is the person who wants to merit Olam HaBa?

OHEIV YAMIM LIR'OT TOV - that person is someone who loves and looks forward to spending days LIR'OT TOV - in seeing the good in everything. He is more than an optimist; he simply develops the ability to see the good that is truly present in everything.

And because this is how he is, he doesn't speak LASHON HARA or behave in a deceitful manner; he is automatically repulsed by RA and does that which is good; seeking and chasing after peace. I found this approach verified in Mima'amakim on Parashat Metzora (p. 184; based upon the lectures of R. Moshe Shapiro zt'l): "...it is simple. Only one who himself is 'good', who appreciates the true reality - he is one who is accustomed to praise and speak well of all the creations that were created to honor HaShem... good speech demonstrates appreciation and recognition of the true roots of the world." One who is "good" tends to see the good in the world around him and to speak well of it.

In addition to the above, I learned an explanation for the punishment of the sin of the spies - why 40 years, a year for a day, that the spies were gone and not just for the one hour in which they spoke LASHON HARA? It was explained that the LASHON HARA began way before their report. It was present in their negative attitude toward the Land. Everything they saw, they saw with a jaded eye, wanting to find the bad and

not the good. From this, one must conclude that one way to avoid the sin of LASHON HARA is to see the positive in things and not the negative.

In essence, then, how is this really different than simply understanding the whole first phrase as the question and the following one the recommendation? After all, it is basically telling us the same thing. I think the difference is on the focus of the behavior. In the first 'simple' understanding, we are given guidelines that seem to basically say: "Listen, if you want to earn Olam HaBa, you'd better not speak LASHON HARA, etc." It is almost like taking a medicine which you're not thrilled about. According to the second interpretation, the emphasis seems to be a more positive one: "Do you want to earn a place in Olam Haba? Then recognize all the good and wonderful things in life." So, although the outcome is, indeed, the same, it feels different. It is more upbeat. We know this makes a difference in how one approaches a challenge. The more positive the attitude, the greater the chance of success.

Maybe this way of understanding these phrases in T'hilim escapes us because we are accustomed to having to focus on the LO TA'ASEI, on restrictions, in order to succeed. We're not that used to looking at a life requirement in a positive way. And maybe we should.

# HAL'LU ET HASHEM

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I have found that most of my "profound" thoughts, ideas with the most meaning to me, have come by accident, almost as afterthoughts rather than by intention. Maybe it is meant to be that way. The harder we look for something, the more it escapes us. But leave the mind blank for a moment so it can be impressed with words and ideas unbidden and we perceive with greater depth than before.

Have you ever noticed the following in the Hallel in the following pasuk?

HAL'LU ET HASHEM KOL GOYIM... KI GAVAR ALEINU CHASDO VE-EMET HASHEM L'OLAM, HALLELUKAH

Praise HaShem, all nations... For his LOVINGKINDNESS is MIGHTY over us; and the TRUTH of HaShem endures forever. Praise HaShem.

- that these three words describe our Avot: Avraham - CHESED; Yizchak - GAVAR (G'VURA); Yaakov - EMET. Very interesting.

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Years ago, my Down's syndrome son, Yaakov Mosheh, pointed out something that I surely should have seen by myself, way before then. He showed me that the word MISHPACHA (one of his favorite words) was centered around the word SHIFCHA (maidservant). I had, indeed,

never noticed that before and it had been staring me in the face all the time. I wasn't able to attribute any significant meaning to this fact or to figure out any connection for quite a while until a possibility popped into my mind. And even though this clearly may not be the source of the connection, it certainly teaches a lesson worth learning.

I believe that the presence of the word SHIFCHA in the middle of the word MISHPACHA (family) tells us that in order for a family to be truly successful and unified, everyone in it has to be MESH'ABED ('enslave') him/herself to it. There is no room for selfishness and self-centeredness. There needs to be a SHI'ABUD - a submission, that trait demonstrated by a SHIFCHA to the members of the family and to the concept of the family as a whole in order for the family to remain healthy and intact.

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We, as Jews, are fully aware of the importance and value of humility and the negative connotation of GA'AVA - conceit: "The abomination of HaShem are all who are haughty of heart" (Mishlei 16:5). I see a hidden reference to the effect of humility in the Hallel HaGadol (T'hilim 136). Towards the end of the list, it says SHEB'SHIFLEINU ZACHAR LANU, KI L'OLAM CHASDO (in our lowliness, He remembered us...). If we want HaShem to "remember" us and show His chesed to us, we need to show SHIFLENU - our humility.

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B'CHOL YOM AVAR'CHEKA... (T'hilim 145). We know that David HaMelech had Ru'ach HaKodesh and it was through this ru'ach that he composed all of his T'hilim. But despite the fact that he was not a prophet, I believe we can find a situation of NIVA V'LO YADA SHENIVA (he prophesied and wasn't aware of it) in at least one of the T'hilim. At the beginning of Ashrei, he says AROMIMCHA ELOKAI HAMELECH VA'AVARCHA SHIMCHA L'OLAM VA'ED. David could certainly praise and 'bless' HaShem all his life, but no one lives 'forever' - L'OLAM VA'ED. And yet, that is exactly what has happened. Jews throughout the centuries have been using his words to do just that. And David's words of praise will, indeed, be said L'OLAM VA'ED by the Jewish people.

# **BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT / POTE'ACH ET YADECHA**

## **Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

While enjoying the unique feeling that comes upon us only on Shabbat, I was able to understand the bracha of BOREI N'FASHOT in yet another way.

The Bartenura, in explaining the meaning of that bracha, tells us that it refers to Gd's creating, along with the many souls He created, that which is also CHASEIR - that which is missing from them to make them complete. We are incomplete for six days of the week. Then, on Shabbat, Gd gives us a N'SHAMA Y'TEIRA, the 'extra' soul that is V'CHESRONAN - that we lack so much on every other day. And with this N'SHAMA Y'TEIRA, He renews us so that LHACHAYOT BAHM NEFESH KOL CHAI - so that we are able to continue refreshed and revitalized through the rest of the week.

I believe that it is this N'SHAMA Y'TEIRA that makes my davening and concentrating so much greater on Shabbat. That's when the following occurred to me:

In an earlier entry, I mentioned how we are taught that the verse of POTE'ACH ET YADECHA UMASBIYA L'CHOL CHAI RATZON is of critical importance in the ASHREI. The standard understanding of this is that it relates to how HaShem provides for our physical survival,

whether it be through food and parnasa or with the necessary desires (ratzon) and instincts crucial for our survival. Using the literal meaning of the words that Gd opens His "hands" and satiates us, fills us with desire, I would like to suggest that there is another message here on a spiritual level that is, perhaps, also as critical as the other ideas in terms of what enhances our survival. When Gd opens His "hands", that very act fills us with the desire to reach out and hold them as in "I am always with You; You had grasped my right hand (T'hilim 73:23).

T'hilim 27:8 tells us LICHA AMAR LIBI... and the following translation and explanation of Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch reinforces the above idea: "Of You does my heart say, Seek My countenance; Your countenance, O Gd will I seek"; Of You, on Your behalf, my heart tells me that You have said, 'Seek My face'... It is Your own will, Your command that men should 'seek Your face'... If, then, my heart strives for Your presence, it does so only in answer to the call that came to it from You." And if we are sensitive to when Gd opens His "hands" so that we want to cling to Him, we ensure our survival in this world and the next.

# AHAVA RABBA AHAVTANU

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

"...for the sake of our fathers who trusted in You, and whom You taught the statutes of life..."

Although one English translation of this sentence chose to see it as referring to the wisdom with which Gd endowed Chazal in the Gemara, to me it says something else. I have always felt that AVOTEINU - our fathers - referred to THE AVOT, to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. I've never understood avot to mean Chazal, although the term certainly has been used to refer to our forefathers in Egypt. That's why this sentence says something totally different to me.

We have been taught that the avot kept the whole Torah even before it was given. And the best way for me to understand this is to recall what I was once taught - that this means they were blessed with the ability to inherently know what Gd would desire, in terms of mitzvot. Given this explanation, I can't help but understand these words as meaning the following: "...for the sake of our forefathers, whom You taught the 'tenets' of life..." that Gd blessed them with this innate ability. After all, chukim are laws we don't necessarily understand or for which we know the reasons. CHUKEI CHAYIM, therefore, could well mean these laws for which they may not

have known the reason, some of which, based upon events that were yet to happen, were CHUKIM - laws they did regardless of their meaning.

So, too, if we look at the words that follow, it becomes clearer that this is what we are requesting: Please also be gracious to us and teach us... give us understanding and discernment, so that we can grasp all the words of Your Torah's teaching... We implore the Al-mighty to bless us, as well, with the ability to intuit His desires and act accordingly.

[What supports this idea is the following from Tanchuma Vayigash 11: From where did Avraham our father learn the Torah... he learned it from himself.]

Upon paying more attention to this passage of AHAVA RABBA, I saw what I consider to be an important addition to this. At the beginning of the sentence, it says BA'AVUR AVOTEINU SHEBAT'CHU BECHA VATELAM'DEM CHUKEI CHAYIM - I had ignored the cause and effect of the reason Gd blessed the avot with the ability to intuit what He wanted - so that they are said to have observed the Torah before it was given - was because SHEBAT'CHU B'CHA - that they had such total bitachon in Him. And the result of that bitachon was the gift He gave them of VAT'LAM'DEM CHUKEI CHAYIM.

At the end of the passage, we find support for this idea of bitachon producing these kinds of positive

**results: When we trust, have bitachon in You, we merit rejoicing in Your salvation.**

**Postscript to the above:**

**In davening Shemoneh Esrei, I never paid much attention to the part that says ZOCHER CHASDEI AVOT in the first bracha. I had always assumed that it simply meant that Gd 'remembered' their exemplary behavior, their wonderful deeds, etc. But upon concentrating more on it and with the backdrop of what I wrote above, I believe that the CHASDEI AVOT that is being remembered is their total and complete bitachon in Gd. How else could they have functioned as they did, in the world in which they lived, influencing and succeeding in their mission in such an incredible way? There were never any doubts or questions. Absolute bitachon. And what was the result of this? What is Gd's reaction to this bitachon? U'MEVI GO'EL LIVNEI V'NEIHEM - He brings a redeemer to their children's children. Again, just as in AHAVA RABBA, the promise of GEULA is assured when BITACHON is ever-present.**

## **Afterthoughts**

**by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

"HIS SONS ... WITH HIM, HIS DAUGHTERS AND HIS SONS' DAUGHTERS... HE BROUGHT WITH HIM (Vayigash 4:7)

In his work, HAGUT B'PARSHIYOT HATORAH, Rav Yehuda Nachshoni comments on the above verse in Vayigash (p.180). He references the Netziv in Ha'amek Davar who points out that the verse can be divided, as it were, into two halves. Regarding those mentioned in the second half of the verse, the women, it says HEIVI ITO (he brought with him), while BANAV UVNEI BANAV ITO - the men, 'came with him'. The Netziv concludes that this difference in the choice of words implies that the men came willingly - ITO, while the women came BAL KORCHAN, unwillingly - HEIVI ITO; that the men accepted upon themselves the 'decree of The King' whereas the women didn't. I would like to suggest a reason for this apparent refusal to accept the G'ZEIRA. As we have learned from incidents in the Torah, the women had an intense love for the land of Israel, more so than the men. Is it possible that the women didn't want to leave Eretz Yisrael simply because it was Eretz Yisrael?

The Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh says the same thing as the Netziv, strengthening the idea by pointing out the hefsek - break - in the te'amim (Torah notes) after the word ITO and only then continuing with B'NOTAV UVNOT

BANAV (his daughters and the daughters of his sons). He then suggests that this attitude had consequences: Chazal tell us that as long as someone from that generation was alive, the SHI'ABUD - enslavement - didn't begin. The Ohr HaChayim posits that this was a reward for accepting the decree of Hashem. With this understanding, he concludes that the fact that, of that first generation, Yocheved and Serach bat Asher were still alive when the SHI'ABUD began might be because they came unwillingly and forfeited the reward.

Given my bias about the attitude of the Jewish women towards Eretz Yisrael, I still see this differently. The Ohr HaChayim has brilliance, wisdom and, probably, a bit of RU'ACH HAKODESH backing up his explanations, so there is no questioning it. All I have is an emotion which cannot stand in the face of all that. But it still allows me to express my read of this, even if based on emotion alone. I think the SHI'ABUD began for all the women, as exemplified by Yocheved and Serach, the minute they came to Mitzrayim. Their love for the Land of Israel was so intense that as soon as they were in this foreign land, it felt like SHI'ABUD to them. Shouldn't there be TAGMUL - a reward for that love? I think there was. Serach merited to return to her beloved Land and live there for many, many years. And both Serach and Yocheved were ZOCHEH to be present at MATAN TORAH.

Not bad.

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

**KI B'YAD CHAZAKA HOTZI'ACHA  
HASHEM MIMITZRAYIM (Sh'mot 13:9)**

**"And it shall be for you as a sign upon your hand and as a remembrance between your eyes for with a mighty hand HaShem took you out of Egypt}.**

The Netziv, in his Ha'amek Davar, says something unique. This mitzva of Tefillin is mentioned here amid the mitzvot of the Korban Pesach and the holiday of Pesach along with the concept of **PETTER RECHEM** (opener of the womb), to serve, along with those mitzvot, as a reminder of the exodus from Egypt (13:3; 13:8; 13:14). He tells us not to be astonished at the fact that we were given so many reminders and mitzvot to aid in our **BITACHON** and Gd's providence because, he says, "you know that the Exodus from Egypt was not accepted so willingly, so that **BAL KORCHACHA... HOTZIACHA** (He took you out against your will)". He shows how the Jews were not so thrilled to accept upon themselves Gd's hashgacha, by citing the Midrash in Va'era on "and they didn't hearken to Moshe because of (their) shortness of breath and hard labor." He then points out that the first reaction of the Jews to Moshe, after he introduces himself and relays the promise of Gd, was that they believed him - "the nation believed and hearkened... and they bowed down" (Sh'mot 4:31). The second time,

however, he tells them, among other things, that **V'HOTZEITI... V'HITZALTI... V'GA'ALTI... V'LAKACHTI ETCHEM LI L'AM V'HAYITI LACHEM LEILOKIM...**" (6:7) that now they have an obligation to Gd - they will be His nation and He will be their Gd. The reaction there is **V'LO SHAM'U** - they did not hearken. They were not so happy that this involved a commitment on their part and that Gd's behavior towards them would depend upon their own behavior.

Based upon this interpretation, the above pasuk in Bo about Tefillin (as well as the final verse in the parsha: "And it shall be for a sign upon your hand and for ornaments between your eyes for with a mighty hand did HaShem take us out of Egypt", is telling us that the purpose of the Tefillin is to serve as a reminder that HaShem took us out of Egypt **B'CHOZEK YAD** - against our will. Given this understanding, then, this would serve as a reason why the mitzva of Tefillin is for the men and does not apply to women. The women were not part of the people who did not want to leave Egypt. They were the ones who had the faith - who encouraged their husbands to have children; who brought drums with them when they left, convinced that they would use them to celebrate the Geula - and who, consistently, throughout the travels in the desert, exhibited the desire to go to Israel and not to lose hope. The women did go into Eretz Yisrael but not all the men. If this is a reason for women not to

require Tefillin then, to a certain extent, for a woman to wear Tefillin is a step down, in that she is saying that "I need this to remind me of something" that they don't need to be reminded of - it simply doesn't apply to them.

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **HASHEM S'FOTAI TIFTACH U'FI YAGID T'HILATECHA**

Before we begin the Shmoneh Esrei, we say the above - HaShem, open my lips and my mouth will tell Your praises. I am requesting that HaShem give me the ability to speak by opening my mouth and then I can proceed with His praises as I say the Shmoneh Esrei. Given the way I often daven, however, I think to myself that I need help in "opening my mouth" literally - in being careful in pronouncing the words and not davening the gibberish that often comes out.

In addition, these words tell me even more. If Gd is behind my opening my mouth, then what will come out will serve as a praise of Him. If I open my mouth on my own, however, and not HaShem, I can't be so sure that what will emanate from it will be praiseworthy. More likely than not, this won't be the case. Therefore, it would be best to speak only when I'm sure that it is HaShem Who is there in the opening of my mouth.

I find a hint to this idea in T'hilim 81:11. King David tells us 'I am HaShem, your Gd, who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth wide and I will fill it.' Gd is reminding us that if we follow Him, He is willing to do anything we request: "just open your mouth wide

and I will fulfill your request." Unfortunately, in that chapter of T'hilim, Gd bemoans the fact that V'LO SHAMA AMI L'KOLI - His nation did not listen to Him.

If I can be allowed to wax homiletic a bit, I learn something else from this verse. HaShem is telling us HARCHEV PICHA - open your mouth - and when you do, let VA'AMALEHU - let it be Me who fills it - anything that reflects who I Am, which will result in My praise. And a different text from King David's T'hilim tells us what the result of this will be: T'HILAT HASHEM YIDABEIR PI - My mouth will declare the praise of HaShem - if what my mouth produces is a praise of HaShem; VIVARECH KOL BASAR... - and all people shall bless His holy name forever - the result will be that it leads to all of humanity "blessing" His holy Name. Our mouths will produce a Kiddush HaShem.

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **KAFA ALEIHEM HAR K'GIGIT**

In a shiur given by my husband a few years ago, he discussed this midrash about Gd lifting Mt. Sinai over the heads of the Jewish people like a barrel, basically 'forcing ' them to accept the Torah. He discussed the obvious problems associated with that statement: if the Jews said 'na'aseh v'nishma' {'we will do and we will listen'} before even hearing the commandments, how could we say Gd 'forced' them with 'har k'gigit'? And if there was force, how could the Jews be blamed for not keeping the Torah when they never really voluntarily accepted it? Many theories and explanations are offered and my husband presented many of them.

In the course of the shiur, I found myself actually visualizing ma'amad Har Sinai with and without this 'har k'gigit'. But this visualization was so constant that it reappeared to me a number of times much later that evening. Maybe this happened because the scene was a very pleasant one to me, and I think that was because of one of the explanations which spoke to me because it was a positive one. It's the one that explains the occurrence simply as the Jews not having bechira - free choice - not because of force, but through reality - it was a "no-brainer". How or why would they not accept the Torah after all Gd

had done for them, after seeing the revelation - as R' Yonatan ben Uziel put it "k'aspaklaria" - clear as glass? In addition, one of the explanations offered, actually said that this 'har k'gigit' was to shelter them from the intense heat of the midbar (desert).

The positive associations of 'har k'gigit' added a dimension to something in davening that always affected me. In the Shabbat morning davening, we include T'hilim 91 - Yosheiv b'seiter Elyon". Since on Shabbat I tend to have more kavana in davening than during the week because I take my time and focus more on what I'm actually saying, this mizmor usually moves me.

After expressing how one who lives in Gd's "shadow" can feel real bitachon in Him, the mizmor paints this picture of HaShem as the loving care and protection of a mother bird for her young: "He will cover you with His pinions and you will take refuge under His wings, His truth is His shield and armor."

There are times when I can imagine and feel these "wings" actually holding me around comforting and assuring me. So, after hearing the shiur on 'har k'gigit', I thought that maybe this picture of His covering us with His wings could also be describing this mountain experience, especially because His 'truth' is His shield; His emet is Torah. In other words, the Torah, which Gd is giving us, is the protection - the shield and armor

**we need in life. As the Etz Yosef on t'fila says: He will cover and protect you... on condition that you will take cover under His wings. Whoever walks in the ways of His Torah, HaShem will be a shield and armor for him.}**

**[It's also interesting that this is one of the chapters of T'hilim that Moshe Rabbenu authored. Reading the Mt. Sinai experience into these words would not be such a stretch.]**

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **MISHENICHNAS ADAR (part 1)**

Ever since my mother a"h, passed away in Adar, Adar has not necessarily been a month of simcha for me. This feeling was only reinforced when, soon after my mother's death, my oldest sister was in a car accident serious enough to place her in the same hospital in which my mother had died. After a little thought, I realized that my paternal grandfather, my maternal grandfather and one of my great-grandmothers also died in Adar. So, when I put all this together, it made me worry a bit about this 'joyous' month of Adar. As a matter of fact, my siblings and I adopted our own version of mishenichnas Adar marbim b'simcha. Our own personal version was mishenichnas Adar - DUCK!

And although this can be seen as humorous, it made me focus on a more serious dimension of the month when my husband pointed out some unusual things about the simcha expected in Adar, and it made me think: Why is there all this emphasis on joy in Adar and on Purim more so than at any other time?

First of all, we already have a Yom Tov that is mi'd'oraita (from the Torah) that is totally defined by simcha: Sukkot. Yet, we find no requirement or request to enter into the holiday with increased joy. Certainly, we could not expect this advice to apply to the entire month of

Tishrei given the very solemn nature of the Yamim Nora'im at the month's outset. But beyond that, we find no requirement to approach Sukkot, even if only in terms of mere days, with additional joy.

Second of all, we know that halachically, we define simcha as involving eating meat and drinking wine at the meals, but since when are we enjoined to display our joy by becoming drunk? On the contrary, Rambam tells us that there were people appointed as overseers to make sure that on these Yamim Tovim, the expressions of joy didn't degenerate into inappropriate frivolity. The requirement on Purim to drink so much that we become confused enough to mix up our "blessing of Mordechai and cursing of Haman" is unique in our celebration of religious rites. Not only is it unique, but it is not at all consistent with our demeanor in general. Jews are, after all, known for their abstinence and limited consumption of alcohol. Real joy doesn't require one to become inebriated to express it or to realize it. It is almost as if we need this semi-intoxication to produce joy that wouldn't be there otherwise. It seems unnatural.

Third of all, this month of supreme joy is due to a one-day holiday which is preceded by a day of fasting. Not exactly in keeping with a joyous month, is it? Think about it: Adar begins with simcha and then, quite suddenly, we are told to push the 'PAUSE' button, as it

were, and put everything on hold: no more silliness, no more shtick in school. And then, this fast - whose purpose is to remind us of the sins of our ancestors so that we don't repeat them and to urge us to introspect and do teshuva - culminates in the reading of the megila - the equivalent of the Hallel recitation - and in rejoicing. A fairly good example of a non-sequitur at best. Once again, something quite strange.

Maybe our concept of simcha in Adar and on Purim is not the same as that which is expressed on all other Jewish holidays. Perhaps, we need to examine these two kinds of happiness and see wherein lies the difference.

(to be continued next week, be"H)

## **MISHENICHNAS ADAR part 2**

The simcha we feel on the shalosh regalim is one that reflects gratitude to Gd for some favor or wonder He performed for us:

1) We celebrate our freedom from slavery and birth as a nation on Pesach - all due to Gd's miracles.

2) We celebrate our acceptance of Gd as our King, our chosenness as His people, our receiving of the Torah and, along with it, the charge of a mission to spread Gd's glory throughout the world - on Shavuot.

3) We express our gratitude for the miraculous sheltering and protection of our nation during our travels in the wilderness to the Promised Land - on Sukkot.

All of these share a theme of gladness and gratitude over the past along with hope and optimism for the future.

Chanuka is different inasmuch as we are not obligated to demonstrate our simcha with meat or with wine, yet, it too, reflects joy and gratitude for a miraculous saving and a promise for the future as we re-established a Jewish government for approximately 250 years.

What about Purim? Yes, we are celebrating our escape from the 'jaws of death', from annihilation as a people by Haman and the apparently willing

Persian population. But there is something about having survived a near-death experience that cannot truly be expressed in joy and happiness, especially when the salvation was not miracle-based in the traditional sense.

There is, first and foremost, I believe, an enormous sense of gratitude to the Almighty for His mercy, kindness, and deliverance. Perhaps, if the happy ending would include a hope for the future, we would be able to rejoice. But there is no real future here. We were saved and we thank Gd for that. Nonetheless, we remained an alien people on foreign territory and even those in Israel were still ruled by a foreign power and the exile remained. Therefore, even though there is happiness and gratitude for the salvation, it is accompanied by the sobering recognition that we almost didn't make it. Gd remained hidden. And the lack of a future to anticipate, leaves us with the feeling that maybe Gd isn't so happy with us. Maybe we were getting what we deserved and were lucky that Gd had mercy on us. This is, indeed, reason to celebrate but one doesn't really feel like dancing.

The simcha generated by Purim, then, differs from the rest. It remains connected to the act itself, in the present, and not in its promise for the future. Its true essence, however, lies in the profound realization that we are inextricably bound up with Gd and His Torah, even while in galut and that we

will always be punished for being unfaithful, but - and this is the source of the simcha - He will never allow us to be destroyed. We, as a people, are immortal. It is a deep sense of contentment and happiness that carries with it a responsibility of major proportions. This is not the light-hearted joy of the other holidays. This is a simcha that is felt deep inside and is expressed, perhaps, merely with a Mona Lisa smile on the outside. It remains, at its core, internal.

Now, perhaps, it is possible to understand or to posit, at least, a guess as to why we are enjoined to be **MARBEH B'SIMCHA** on this particular holiday and not the rest. The additional amount of wine is needed to help transform the solemn sense of happiness into an expressive form of joy. And this transformation doesn't happen overnight, so we need to provide a setting that will enable it to happen more readily from the beginning of Adar. And ultimately, we pay respect to the true meaning of this holiday's simcha through the reminder of ta'anit Esther before exploding into an unusual form of revelry on Purim itself.

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **MIPI OL'LIM V'YON'KIM...**

Out of the mouths of children and sucklings have You established might... (T'hilim 8:3)

Rav Shimon Schwab, in his book on prayer (p. 135), in explaining DIRSHU HASHEM V'UZO - seek Hashem and His strength, cites Shir HaShirim Rabba (2:3:3) as equating OZ with Torah. In addition, we have learned that Torah brings SHALOM and is SHALOM. Certainly, one of the source texts for this is EITZ CHAYIM HI... - it is a tree of life for those who hold on to it and all its pathways are peace. If so then, when it says HaShem OZ L'AMO YITEIN..., we can understand it as follows: when HaShem gives His people the Torah, He thus blesses them with peace.

With this understanding of the word OZ as referring to Torah, the title phrase of this "Afterthought" - MIPI OLALIM V'YONKIM - becomes very telling.

It has happened, more than once, that one of my grandchildren has explained the pshat of a verse in a way that I never saw! It was with clear, unjaded, uninfluenced eyes that they found an "obvious" meaning that escaped us adults. When that would happen, I would often say to myself the above phrase - that it was "from the mouths of babes" that true Torah comes forth. To deepen this idea, the gemara (Bava Batra 12)

says: "after prophecy had been taken from the prophets, it was not taken... from children." Rav Sorotzkin, in Oznayim LaTorah, refers to this fact when he comments about the K'RUVIM on the KAPORET of the ARON. Why, davka, the image of children? Gd was to communicate with Moshe (and thus, the people) from between the cherubs. He continues: Prophecy continues from between the Cherubs. Through the learning of the children, based upon Torah, we achieve a relationship with HaShem.

Pay attention to what our little children are telling us, through their special form of 'prophecy', about Torah. There is more hidden in it than we realize.

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **TZADIK HASHEM ...**

Gd is just in all His ways and full of loving-kindness in all His works. (T'hilim 145:17)

We are told in various places by Chazal that the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed for any of a few reasons: sin'at chinam (baseless hatred) - probably being the most well-known one, murder, improper sexual behavior, and idol worship. But there are others cited as well: because they didn't make the blessing over learning Torah (referring to the learning as a mere intellectual exercise - N'darim 81:1); because they kept the letter of the law (Bava Metzia 30:2); because of the actions of Zecharia ben Avkulos who advised against offering up the imperfect animal sent by the emperor of Rome (Gittin 56:6); et al.

One element though appears more often than not among the many explanations and that is, the shortcomings in areas of bein adam l'chaveiro - matters between man and man. The list is clear: Sin'at chinam; keeping the letter of the law; bringing each other to court over matters worth a mere p'ruta instead of being able to overlook it and go beyond the letter of the law; and following the letter of the law regarding the sacrifice of the imperfect animal rather than take into account the horrendous ramifica-

tions of that act which led to dire consequences.

I think we have all been told at one time or another that there are times when we need to place the bein adam l'chaveiro before the bein adam laMakom. This is not to suggest, Gd forbid, that one may defy the Halacha, but getting some priorities straight is essential. For instance, I could choose to refuse to assist another person in their davening because in so doing, I might be sacrificing my own proper kavvana. But that would probably be the improper choice. My guess is that if there were no other option, Gd would prefer I help that person at the expense of my own kavvana.

Given this basic idea, I think we can even attribute this behavior - this kind of prioritizing - to Gd Himself. We are told TZADIK HASHEM B'CHOL D'RACHAV V'CHASID B'CHOL MA'ASAV - Gd is just in all His ways (He is Tzadik; He embodies midat hadin). And yet He is Chasid, the essence of kindness in His actions. So even though, in principle, He runs the world by tzedek, He is known to us mostly by His deeds of lovingkindness - His ma'asav. Similarly, OHEV TZ'DAKA U'MISHPAT - this is what Gd loves: righteousness, justice. True enough, and yet, CHESED HASHEM MAL'A HAARETZ (T'hilim 33:5) - what is it that "fills the world"? His lovingkindness.

Perhaps, that is the message to us, that when we have to weigh choices and our behavior in these two areas, we should opt for the one which Gd also opts for and in so doing, imitate Him by letting everyone see our deeds of loving-kindness.

**Afterthoughts**  
**by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

**Y'HI RATZON ... SHEYIBANEH**  
**BEIT HAMIKDASH**

At the end of the Sh'moneh Esrei, as well as in various other places, we recite the above request for the speedy rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash. According to the Rama (123:1), we recite this after the Sh'moneh Esrei since prayer takes the place of our service in the Beit HaMikdash, and we are hoping to return to the original form of Avoda (service) in order to serve Gd properly, as in bygone days.

We then insert a seemingly intrusive statement about learning Torah (V'TEIN CHELKEINU B'TORATECHA) before we return to the theme of the Beit HaMikdash. The Vilna Gaon (Avot 5) explains that the placement of this request here is because since the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, "there is no Torah" as it says in Eicha (2:9), "...her king and princes are [exiled] among the heathens, [and] there is no more teaching (TORAH)..." We want the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, so that we will finally be able to understand the deep meanings of the Torah and grasp them properly. We follow this request with the hope that our future service of Gd in the Beit HaMikdash will be proper, so that it will be pleasing to Him.

Given that we know that Chazal didn't write prayers in random fashion, we can suppose a possible sequence here: we want to witness the speedy rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash, but we already know that we had two of them and they were destroyed because of us - it was our fault. Why should the next time be any different? Answer: because now we ask that Gd will (V'))TEIN CHELKEINU B'TORATECHA - that, given our new understanding of it, our lives should be influenced, informed, shaped by Torah and directed by it. Then, as a result, V'SHAM NAAVODCHA B'YIR'A - we will serve Gd with proper fear and awe. And if we do, then certainly "the offerings of our people will be sweet to Him as in the days of Moshe and Shlomo."

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **MARBIN B'SIMCHA - HOW?**

I have already written my thoughts about Purim and the requirement of MARBIN B'SIMCHA where I tried to understand this law. But something I have been reading has added another dimension to the conclusion at which I arrived then.

Rav Moshe Shapiro zt"l, as is his wont, understands the directive of MISHENICHNAS ADAR MARBIN B'SIMCHA in a deeper way. Given that Haman's decree against the Jews was never erased, this decree to destroy Jews still exists. Adar contains within it a "death sentence" as Jewish history over the ages has shown. "Adar is an ominous month. Its essence is a 'reversed' month (V'NAHAFOCH HU), and reversed, by definition does not alter the nature of a thing" (Reflections and Introspection: Chanuka and Purim; Chapter: Renewal of Life, p.370). This was the month in which Moshe died - Moshe, who is completely linked to the Torah - and so, the natural state of this month is actually the departing of the Torah. According to the opinion that Nissan was the month in which the world was created, (Rav Yehoshua), Adar is the month that ends what began in Nissan.

Nissan is the month in which the Jews started on their path to our covenant with the Torah at Har Sinai. In order to

'deserve' the new beginning of the year with Nissan, we have to still be partners in that covenant. But, since, after the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and the subsequent exile, we lost all the elements of the covenant: prophecy, the Beit HaMikdash, the land of Israel, and the Torah (... her king and officers are among the nations there is no Torah; her prophets as well didn't find any visions from Gd - Eicha 2:9), the Jewish people argued that the covenant at Sinai was severed and the "giving of the Torah ended" (p.367).

To merit the beginning, a new Nissan, the covenant has to be re-accepted. Adar needs to be devoted to that acceptance. We are already familiar with the Chazal that teaches that on Purim the Jews, indeed, re-established this covenant: KIYMI V'KIBLU - KIYMU MA SHEKIBLU K'VAR - they confirmed and undertook that which they had already received.

Given this understanding that our involvement in Torah is so critical to "protect" us during Adar, I would like to suggest another meaning of the dictum of MISHENICHNAS ADAR MARBIN B'SIMCHA. There are no descriptions of how to increase this SIMCHA in Adar, as opposed to Av, when we are told to do the opposite and minimize joy, and are directed by the Shulchan Aruch to limit certain activities. Therefore, I would like to define SIMCHA as Torah - the learning of Torah. Upon what is this based? SAS ANOCHI AL IMRATECHA

**K'MOTZEI SHALAL RAV - I rejoice in Your Words like one who finds great spoil (T'hilim 119:162) - the joy we derive from learning Torah. But, more specifically, mourners are told they are not allowed to learn Torah during shiv'a, as we are also told on Tish'a B'Av. Why? Because it brings joy and happiness: PIKUDEI HASHEM Y'SHARIM, MISAM'CHEI LEIV - The mandates of Gd are upright, rejoicing the heart (T'hilim 19:9).**

**If the Torah brings simcha, then maybe the best way to guarantee an Adar that will bring in its wake the rebirth of Nissan, the renewal of the covenant and the promise of redemption, is to increase simcha - our study of Torah.**

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **LIV'SUMEI B'PURYA**

One of my pet peeves - and I believe a justified one - has always been the practice of the requirement of LIV'SUMEI B'PURYA AD D'LO YADA BEIN ARUR HAMAN L'VARUCH MORDECHAI - to imbibe intoxicating drink until one can't tell the difference between 'cursed be Haman' and 'blessed be Mordechai' - as drinking more than usual on this holiday LIV'SUMEI B'PURYA (Shulchan Aruch 695:2).

If I look at the Rama on these words, he clearly says it's not necessary to become drunk but to merely drink more than one is usually accustomed to and then fall asleep, thus fulfilling the requirement of not knowing the difference between the above phrases. The Mishna B'rura adds to this: V'CHEIN RA'U'I LA'ASOS - and it is fitting to do thusly. In the Sha'arei Teshuva's comment, he adds "and one who has a weak nature, who acts foolishly so that it is possible for him to behave improperly through this drinking, should not drink too much." The Bi'ur Halacha, in explaining the reason for this requirement, adds: "nevertheless, this is to be for a mitzva and not as an impediment", implying moderation.

Given that the reason for LIV'SUMEI B'PURYA is to commemorate the fact that the salvation (or miracle) of Purim

came about through wine (with all the various 'wine parties' that were involved along the way), I have always found it difficult to understand why this mitzva is too often fulfilled by getting "stinking drunk" with liquor. That's not wine, and more likely, commemorates one's desire to simply get drunk rather than perform a mitzva. I prefer to understand the definition of the word LIV'SUMEI as related to its root, which doesn't mean drunk. It means to 'perfume' oneself (b'samim) so that you have the air, the fragrance of wine. To me, this is a far cry from becoming drunk.

Unfortunately, in my personal experience, I've known more people who threw up on their host's furniture, behaved badly, etc. than not. I was fortunate enough to have one beautiful experience where this mitzva was done, in my opinion, to perfection. We were sitting down to our se'uda when two Rebbes from the local cheder came in dancing and singing. They sat down at the table and said to my husband (in their obviously tipsy state) "Rebbe, give us a d'var Torah." That's what should result from the right measure of LIV'SUMEI.

In one of the books by Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky zt"l, I found the following, which expresses some of my confusion:

"Have you ever wondered why it is that the beginning of a secular new year is so widely celebrated with revelry and intoxication? Reflect for a moment.

Everyone is shouting "Happy New Year!" If they are really happy about this great moment, why would they want to be intoxicated and, therefore, unaware of that sensation of happiness? After all, alcohol is technically an emotional anesthetic, and it is absurd to kill a pleasant feeling of accomplishment. If one were truly happy, he would wish to savor happiness and preserve it rather than abolish it with a chemical." (I'd Like to Call for Help... But I Don't Know the Number p.128.)

Do these Purim 'revelers' even realize it's Purim in their state of intoxication? Those who do it properly, L'SHEIM MITZVA, probably do. But the rest of them may realize it only inasmuch as that's their excuse for getting drunk.

The Midrash Shmuel on Avot 4:26 explains the metaphor of YAYIN YASHAN (old wine) mentioned in that Mishna as referring to the secrets and mysteries of the Torah. Indeed, wine has the ability to do this: NICHNAS YAYIN, YATZA SOD - wine leads to revealing that which is secret (Eirubin 65a). The numerical equivalent of YAYIN is 70, as is SOD = 70; SHIV'IM PANIM LATORAH - the Torah can be explained in (at least) 70 ways. With this read, we can certainly understand V'YAYIN YISAMCH L'VAV ENOSH - Wine gladdens the heart of man (T'hilim 104:15) just as Torah does.

It would be so nice if I could, somehow, equate YAYIN with TORAH more directly, just as we know that water, light, truth, etc. are also metaphors for

Torah. Then the 'fragrance' coming from us would be that of Torah and not of alcohol. But then we would have the problem of how does this lead to AD D'LO YADA?

Oh, well...

*Editor's note: Although Yocheved Bienenfeld's Afterthought discusses a serious issue concerning Purim (with which I totally concur), allow me to add a flippant comment in the spirit (pun intended) of Purim Torah. It is so, that wine is The Drink for Purim, as stated above, yet, there is one other beverage mentioned repeatedly in the Megila. And that is beer - specifically SHUSHAN HABIRA, mentioned 10 times in the Megila.*

*And on the mathematical side -*

*ARUR HAMAN = 1+200+6+200 (407) + 5+40+50 (95) = 502.*

*BARUCH MORDECHAI = 2+200+6+20 (228) + 40+200+4+20+10 (274) = 502.*

*Hey, with regular gimatriya, there is no difference between ARUR HAMAN and BARUCH MORDECHI.*

*So let us apply the Adar-Purim concept of V'NAHAFOCH HU - turn it upside down.*

*AT-BASH is a reverse gimatriya, with TAV = 1 and ALEF=400, SHIN=2 and BET=300, and so on. With AT-BASH, ARUR HAMAN = 400+3+80+3 (486) + 90+10+9 (109) = 595.*

*BARUCH MORDECHAI = 300+3+80+30 (413) + 10+3+100+30+40 (183) = 596. Very close. If you can't do this arithmetic in your head while a bit tipsy on Purim, you got to AD D'LO YADA.*

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

### BARUCH SHE'AMAR

It is recorded in kabbalist literature (Tola'as Ya'akov in the name of Or Zarua) that Baruch She'amar was established by the Men of the Great Assembly when PISKA SHENAFAL MIN HASHAMAYIM - a note fell from Above upon which this prayer was written. For this reason, we are to recite it while standing (Mishna Brura 51; s"k 1).

The more I paid attention to this prayer, the more I found within it what might explain its importance to the extent that it "came from Above". It doesn't simply extol the virtues and powers of Gd, it includes certain fundamentals of our religion.

When He decided to create the world, Gd's intention was to do so with MIDAT HADIN, the attribute of pure justice, as we can see by the exclusive usage of the word ELOKIM (connoting the attribute of justice) throughout the Creation narrative. Gd realized that the world couldn't survive this way and He tempered it with RACHAMIM - the attribute of mercy. One of the first things BARUCH SHE'AMAR tells us is that, indeed, Gd did not follow through on His original intention. The Acharis L'shalom (R. Yitzchak Eliyahu Landau) on the siddur, points out that despite the consistent use of the name ELOKIM, there is another factor to consider: we

know that the term L'DABER implies forceful, harsh speaking while the term AMAR implies a softer form - milder. Throughout the Creation chapter, it doesn't say VAYDABER ELOKIM but only VAYOMER. This combination tells us that the attribute of justice was already tempered by the attribute of mercy. And so, we immediately praise Gd - BARUCH - for having used AMIRA and not DIBUR in that Creation = BARUCH SHE'AMAR. The Acharis L'shalom brings out the verse in T'hilim (89:3) to further this idea: KI AMARTI OLAM CHESSED YIBANEH - I have said the world is built on kindness - 'the fact that I used the language of 'saying' during Creation indicates My intention that the world should be built upon mercy and kindness.' We praise Him for creating our universe with kindness.

*By the way, if this is, indeed, how to understand this verse, then the previous one would verify it: CHASDEI HASHEM OLAM ASHIRA, L'DOR VADOR ODI'A EMUNAT'CHA B'FI - I will sing of the lovingkindness of Gd forever; generation after generation I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth. It would basically be thanking Gd for creating the world this way.*

BARUCH SHE'AMAR V'HAYA HA-OLAM;  
BARUCH HU. BARUCH OSEH V'REISHIT  
- We praise Gd as the Creator par excellence and not only of our world.

BARUCH OMER V'OSEH - in order to make worlds come into being, Gd merely needs to "speak" to "say" something and then it happens.

**BARUCH GOZER UMKAYEIM** - and if the worlds do not conform with His desire, He decrees to have them destroyed, as we have learned: this world of B'reishit is not the first one. And by destroying those worlds, He enables the new world to exist.

**BARUCH MERACHEM AL HA'ARETZ** - But in order to keep this from happening again and again, Gd created this world, not with the attribute of justice, but with mercy.

**BARUCH M'RACHEM AL HAB'RI-OT** - Similarly, He created Man also with this attribute of mercy so that we could survive more than a moment. Additionally, in His mercy, He blessed us with **HASHGACHA P'RATIT** - personal supervision.

**BARUCH M'SHALEIM SACHAR TOV LI-REI-AV** - Another key ingredient in ensuring the survival of the world which has been placed into the hands of Man is to lay down the ground rules. Every action has a consequence. There is reward and there is punishment. We are accountable for our behavior. And the sum total of our actions will affect the survival of the world.

**BARUCH CHAI LA'AD V'KAYAM LA'NETZACH** - Given the eternal nature of Gd, we know He can always deliver on either side of the scale, and He will.

**BARUCH PODEH U'MATZIL** - We have learned that the world exists through the adherence to Torah, through the

Jewish people's commitment to it. When Gd "forced" us to receive the Torah by holding Mt. Sinai over us, it was because if we would not accept it, the world would cease to exist, for this was why the world was created. 'The Holy One, Blessed be He, made a condition with the work of B'reishit: if Israel accepts the Torah, you will continue to exist. And if not, I will return you to TOHU VAVOHU - chaos' (B'reishit Rabba). But given our history in exile, we are occasionally in danger of not being around to follow the Torah. Therefore, we need Gd to be **PODEH U'MATZIL** - we need Gd's intervention as our Redeemer. He ensures our continuity.

**BARUCH SH'MO** - But when all is said and done, as much as we "know" and "understand" about Gd through His actions and 'character traits' (as enumerated in **BARUCH SHE-AMAR**), He is, ultimately, unknowable. And so, we can only bless His Name.

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

# **V'AHAVTA...**

## **EIT HASHEM ELOKECHA B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA...**

As usual, something which should have occurred to me a long time ago, only hit me recently. We say in Sh'ma, V'AHAVTA EIT HASHEM ELOKECHA B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA UVCHOL M'ODECHA. And we've been taught over and over again how these three descriptions refer to the ways in which we are to serve HaShem:

**B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA** - as its simple meaning - with our hearts, emotionally;

**UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA** - even with our souls, if (Gd forbid) we are required to sacrifice our lives for Him;

**UVCHOL M'ODECHA** - with all our "means" - financial and material; and/or **B'CHOL MIDA UMIDA...** (B'rachot 54a) - no matter what mida (trait, positive or negative) with which Gd treats us, to be grateful.

Suddenly, the fact that these requirements are three in number struck me. My first thought was the three Forefathers. And with that, the three character traits that are attributed to them: GADOL, GIBOR, NORA - this is how each of them related to Gd.

What if these three B'CHOLs are meant to coincide - or even if not meant to, do - with these three attributes:

**B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA** - would imply unconditional love which, to my way of thinking, would be a natural and easy way to respond to a Gd Who is seen as a Gd of chessed, as Avraham did.

**UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA** - sacrificing our lives - which would require the trait of **GEVURA** (which is identified with Yitzchak) when Gd treats us with the attribute of justice and by holding back from us.

**UVCHOL M'ODECHA** - this would require our serving Him regardless of what He metes out to us: chessed or gevura or both, as is defined in nora, as depicted by Yaakov in his very complicated life.

Quite an interesting coincidence, or a message to us that by emulating the avot, we can learn the proper way to serve HaShem.

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **Thoughts on the Moon**

As the Jewish people, we are acutely aware of the changing of the months. They don't just slip one into the other without notice. As one lunar month ebbs and the other comes to life, we greet it with much fanfare. The waxing and waning of the moon are noticed and celebrated with special prayers for the day and with Kiddush L'vana - the blessing of the Moon.

I've always felt that the Moon was given "short shrift" by tradition in being maligned for presenting the truth about two kings not being able to share the same crown (Rashi, B'reishit 1:16). After all, in the blessing for Kiddush L'vana, it says SASIM USMEICHIM LA'ASOT R'TZON KONAM - They are joyous and glad to perform the will of their Owner. Not only does this refer to the Sun - like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber rejoicing like a mighty man running along a path, but also to the Moon who, when told by HaShem to minimize himself, did so happily to satisfy Gd's will.

What made me feel this way was the name for the Moon - YAREI'ACH - which would imply an entity above the putative pettiness attributed to the Moon. YAREI'ACH is a word related to the spiritual: REI'ACH (smell), RU'ACH (spirit) - things that have no material

essence. This seemed in direct contrast to the word for the Sun, SHEMESH, which, in my opinion, implies the material: L'SHAMEISH (to serve), hinting to MAMASH - something tangible. Even the alternate words for these orbs project a similar distinction: L'VANA (white) vs. CHAMA (hot or heat).

In addition, Rashi in Bamidbar 28:15, on the words describing the offering for Rosh Chodesh - and one he-goat for a sin offering to HaShem, says that Gd is asking us to bring a sin-offering "for Him, on His behalf" to atone for His having reduced the size of the Moon, which certainly puts the Moon on a different level and implies that Gd might 'think' (so to speak) that the Moon was correct.

Part of the Shabbat davening, I think, affirms my understanding. In Shacharit, we say HAKOL YODUCHA... - all things will thank You and all will praise You, and within that paragraph, it says: Who brings out the Sun from its place and Moon from its dwelling. The MAKOM of the sun is a set place. But the MACHON L'SHIVT'CHA of the Moon gives the impression that this is a temporary dwelling place, not its real MAKOM.

When I read in Rav Schwab on Chumash (p.481) his comments on Parshat Pinchas, it seemed to support my impression about the Moon. Rav Schwab talks about this whole idea of HaShem having reduced the size of the Moon. Among other things, he refers to a

Chazal that teaches that the Moon was originally the carrier of Or HaSh'china, the spiritual light of Creation. When the Moon "complained" that the Earth should be illuminated either by the physical light of the Sun or, if it deserved it, by Or HaSh'china, Gd removed the spiritual light from the Moon and set it aside for the future world for the tzadikim to enjoy. If, indeed, the Moon was the original "container" of this spiritual light, then my impression that there was something spiritual about the Moon is validated.

Something else that would seem to imply the spiritual nature of the Moon is the fact that the Mikdash itself is described as being in "m'chon shivta". In Az Yashir, towards the end, it says - You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance a place (shrine) for You to dwell. The place of the Mikdash is called machon l'shivtecha (similar to the words describing the location of the Moon). Could this imply a temporary place? Is this related to the fact that in Parshat R'ei, the place of the Mikdash is referred to 15 times and never as a Mikdash but rather as a MAKOM ASHER BACHAR HASHEM - a place that HaShem has chosen? That the place Gd decides to choose as the place for His Mikdash is not necessarily one specific spot. After all, wasn't the Mishkan in various places for different periods of time before the actual Temple was built? Maybe this is

hinted to in the same verse in AZ YASHIR. First, it was in a place temporarily, a MACHON L'SHIVTECHA; and only afterward was it MIKDASH - where it emphasizes KONENU YADECHA - Your Hands established it there.

And so, it appears that not only is the Moon, indeed, of a spiritual nature but that its tenure as a mere reflection of the sun is a limited one. And Gd will return Or HaSh'china to it and we will then benefit from Two kings who will use one crown.

N.B. I humbly admit that the Kabbalistic view of the Moon isn't as forgiving or as generous as mine and explains its 'sin' very differently.

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

# HAMA'ALCHA MEI'ERETZ MITZRAYIM

In Parshat Sh'mini, we are told, "For I am HaShem who is bringing you up from the land of Egypt to be your Gd; and you shall be holy because I am Holy" (11:45), immediately after being informed of all the unkosher animals, etc. which we are not allowed to eat. And this verse tells us clearly that this is for the purpose of our being holy, as Gd is Holy.

Usually, when referring to the Exodus from Egypt, the Torah says HAMOTZI'ACHA or ASHER HOTZEITI - Who took you out. Rarely does it use the verb of V'HA'ALEITI or HAMA'ALEH ETCHEM - Who brought you up - as it does here. Even Rashi comments on this and says: "In all others, it writes 'and I took you out' and here it is written 'Who is bringing you up'. He references the Tanna d'vei Yishma'el who explains that had the Exodus from Egypt been for no other reason than to elevate them (VIH-YITEM K'DOSHIM) by having them distance themselves from the impurity of eating 'swarming things' - something mentioned immediately preceding this verse - it would have been sufficient.

When I searched for this phrase elsewhere, I was only able to find two other places in Tanach where it was used. One in Amos 2:10: "and I brought

you up from the land of Egypt because I am HaShem" - and one in T'hilim 81:11 - "I am HaShem your Gd who brought you up from the land of Egypt; open your mouth and I will fill it."

Coincidentally, or not so coincidentally, the parsha immediately following Sh'mini is Tazria, which deals primarily with TZARAAT. As is well known, TZARAAT is linked to the sin of LASHON HARA, serving as a "supernatural" manifestation of Gd's reaction (punishment) to one who indulges in it.

As "luck" would have it, I was learning from R. Moshe Shapiro's MIMA'AMAKIM on that parsha and, as would be expected, he deals with LASHON HARA. He points out that the Egyptian exile traces its roots back to this sin, the misuse of the power of speech. When Yosef spoke LASHON HARA about his brothers to his father, it brought about the hatred of his brothers towards him, leading to his sale to Egypt. And the rest is history.

*The Chida relates each of the simanim of the seder (Kadesh, urchatz, karpas...) to the length of time the Jews spent in Egypt. He says that the 10 brothers who sold Yosef for 20 pieces of silver account for 10x20=200 years and 10 more years are attributed to Yosef for having spoken lashon hara to begin with, equaling the 210 years of servitude. This is hinted to in the siman of 'matza' - a word which is related to matzusa which means machlokes - controversy.*

The enslavement in Egypt, in general, is related to matters of speech. R. Shapiro points out how speech was misused when Par'o spoke about HaShem: MI HASHEM ASHER ESHMA B'KOLO? - Who is HaShem that I should listen to Him? In Par'o's name we see PEH RA (This works with Hebrew letters which we are not using because of the plain text file.) We also know that the Jews were guilty of this in Egypt. When Datan and Aviram reveal to Par'o that Moshe killed the Egyptian, Moshe concludes that this must have been the reason the Jews deserved this enslavement. Rav Shapiro explains that a fundamental point in the essence of GEULA is hinted at in the very name of this holiday: Pesach = PEH SACH - the mouth that speaks; that from now on, the mouth will be able to speak about all the wonders of HaShem, which is exactly what we are commanded to do at the Seder, showing that the PEH was no longer enslaved. And, as if to "prove" this theory, the Sfas Emes says "And every day, we need to be aided in remembering the Exodus from Egypt in order to merit the opening of the mouth. And this is seen in the juxtaposition of redemption (geula) to t'fila (shmoneh esrei).

The end of Sh'mini tells of HaShem bringing us "up" from Egypt, while the parsha following tells us of the consequences of lashon hara. The verse in T'hilim cited above, which also refers to Gd's 'bringing us up' from Egypt, is

traditionally understood as HaShem telling the Jewish people that they should have learned from His taking them out of Egypt that He has the ability to satisfy their desires. Therefore, HARCHEV PICHA - open your mouth and make your requests VAAMALEIHU, and I will fill them.

But given all of the above, I would like to suggest the following. Maybe the pasuk is saying: I elevated you from Egypt; therefore, when you open your mouth (learn the lesson from the enslavement) - let Me be the One Who fills it - let what you're saying reflect My Essence.

BARUCH ATA HASHEM, GA'AL YISRAEL  
HASHEM SEFATAI TIFTACH.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## SALVATION

Quite a few years ago (but, certainly, too late - given how many years I had already been davening), I came to the (rather obvious) observation that Y'SHUA and SHAV'A (crying out) have the same root. I concluded that they must go together: Y'SHUA should come as a result of crying out: V'ONEH L'AMO B'EIT SHAV'AM EILAV - He answers his nation when they cry out to Him. When are we answered? When we cry out. Other phrases would also support this idea, for example: HASHEM HOSHI'A, HAMELECH YA'ANEINU V'YOM KOR'EINU - Hashem save (us), The King will answer us on the day we call out. Again, He will answer when we call out. There is no guarantee, of course, that the answer we get is the one we hoped for. But odds are better that we will be answered more if we call out, than if we don't. Does this mean that we don't receive Y'SHUA unless we call out? I would venture to say that this is not so and at least one verse indicates that this is not the case: HAR'EINU HASHEM CHASDECHA V'YISH'ACHA TITEN LANU - Gd, show us your kindness and give us Your help (T'hilim 85:8). This would seem to be saying that we are asking for a chesed from HaShem - not necessarily because we deserve it or cried out for it - that He "give" us His Y'SHUA, a 'freebie', if you will.

Jewish history is a record of this relationship between SHAVA'A and Y'SHUA. At what point does Gd become involved in the Exodus from Egypt? "... and they screamed and their crying out went up to HaShem... and HaShem heard their cry (Sh'mot 2:23-24). Look at the book of Shoftim. We are good; we leave HaShem and do avoda zara; He punishes us; we cry out; He saves us. Over and over again.

There is a very interesting book that gives the account of how the Jews in Israel were able to keep Rommel from reaching Israel. \* It is clearly a religiously-oriented take that documents the many fasts and prayers that were offered by various groups in various places. The author concludes (not unconvincingly) that these prayers were, ultimately, what kept Rommel away. He suggests that not enough crying out was done by world Jewry to save more of the Jews in Europe during the Holocaust. Whether he is right or not is really irrelevant because our history has proven that this is the approach to take.

I would like to apply this understanding to a phrase in T'hilim 81:11 which I never really understood because the p'shat (simple) meaning is too materialistic and even a deeper understanding - such as 'ask Me anything and I will do it' - doesn't sit well with me: "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. Maybe it could hint to opening our mouths in prayer, in reaching out to Him, at which

point, Gd will "fill it" - will satisfy our request. Could be.

**[Guess what! I discovered that my above opinion is just what Ibn Ezra says!]**

*\*Miracle at El Alamein, (The story of the Rabbis who stopped the Nazi onslaught at the gates of Eretz Yisrael), Rabbi Zev T. Paretsky*

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## T'CHEILET

MA NISHTANA T'CHEILET MIKOL MINEI TZIV'ONIN? (Why is T'cheilet different from all other colors?)

"Because the color T'cheilet is like the color of the sea and the sea is like the color of the firmament and the firmament to the Throne of Glory: (Menachot 43:2) (Rashi: the power of t'cheilet reminds us of the One who sits on the Throne of Glory.)

I have been wondering on and off for years about the above Chazal that explains the reason for the p'til techeilet (blue thread) on the tzitzit. I couldn't understand why it was necessary to have the blue remind me of the ocean which reflected the sky which is where we envision the "domicile" or the Throne of Glory of HaShem. Why all the steps? I would venture to say that the average person thinks of the sky as blue way before thinking of the ocean as blue (especially since city-folk usually only see the ocean as green). Blue equals sky, to which we look when in prayer.

Then I started thinking that maybe this was not meant to be taken literally, but rather symbolically: maybe YAM (sea) represents something as does RAKI'A (sky) and maybe one leads to the other in some way. So, what does YAM represent? It could be Torah, "...and the

earth will be filled with knowledge of HaShem as water fills the sea" - but then that really refers to water, not the sea. So, I looked at the verse attributed to the YAM in Perek Shira: YAMIM OMRIM: MIKOLOT MAYIM RABIM, ADIRIM MISHB'REI YAM, ADIR BAMAROM HASHEM (T'hilim 93) - More than the voices of mighty waters, than the mighty waves of the sea, Gd on high is mighty. R. Nosson Slifkin, in his book on Perek Shira, Nature's Song, says that the ocean is the most powerful force in nature; the waves being their most devastating feature. Witnessing the might of the ocean strikes fear of Gd into people: "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do their work in great waters; they saw the works of Gd and His wonders in the deep. For He commanded and He raised the stormy wind, and it lifted up the waves." (T'hilim 107:23-25). I can then conclude that it is possible that YAM would represent fear, YIR'AT HASHEM.

What about RAKI'A? Again, if we look at the verse attributed to the RAKI'A in Perek Shira, we learn more: "The heavens (SHAMAYIM) speak of Gd's glory and the skies (RAKI'A) tell of His handiwork" (T'hilim 19). R. Slifkin defines SHAMAYIM here as the heavens, outer space; and RAKI'A as earth's atmosphere. The atmosphere is responsible for weather phenomena. Weather is one way that Gd demonstrates His active involvement in Man's affairs (as is clearly depicted in the second para-

graph of the daily Sh'ma, (V'HAYA IM SHAMO'A...). The RAKI'A tells us that Gd is closely involved in a relationship with us. And although this relationship carries within it the possibility of ONESH - punishment - as well, it is a relationship nonetheless, and that allows me to feel closer to Gd. Perhaps this could represent AHAVAT HASHEM - the love of Gd.

So now, I'm beginning to understand the need for the blue to represent YAM as well as RAKI'A, which ultimately would lead to KISEI HAKAVOD. What confirmed this conclusion for me was a Kli Yakar I found on the parsha of tzitzit. He asks, how can looking at a 'blue thread' remind us to do mitzvot? (UR-ITEM OTO - can't refer to the tzitzit because that is feminine and it should say UR-ITEM OTAH, so it must refer to the blue thread. This would create a problem in our understanding of Rashi's take on the gematria of 'tzitzit').

In answering, he cites the Sifrei in Ha'azinu: "Look at the heavens that I created to serve you; have they changed their measurements or has the orb of the sun risen from the West? Not only that but it is happy to fulfill my desire, as it says '...and it is like a bridegroom leaving his marriage canopy, rejoicing as a 'gibor' to run on his route'(T'hilim 19). Will you not fear Me... who has placed the sand as a border to the sea as an eternal law (Yirmiyahu 5:22); has it changed its qualities? Not only that, but it regrets wanting to and cannot as it

says 'and they storm (the waves) but they cannot overcome'. From here is proof that the sea doesn't change its ways - its qualities - out of fear, for it regrets that it is not permitted to do what it wants; and the heavens do not change their qualities out of love."

"...One who performs out of love and serves HaShem with joy, is greater than one who merely fears Gd... therefore it is as if the sea is always before his eyes and afterwards... like one who looks at the sky; for the sea (YAM) resembles the heavens and from it he will learn to fear and to do. Just as the RAKI'A, not only doesn't change but rejoices to serve, so too, he should also serve HaShem with joy and from love. And if you say, what is the advantage of one who serves HaShem out of love over one who serves out of fear, this is why we are taught 'the RAKI'A resembles the Throne of Glory', for through this, he will remember that through love (raki'a) he will come to cling to the Sh'china".

The Kli Yakar, then concludes that the first stage is YIR-A, fear. It would seem to be a more natural instinct towards the Almighty. Then, this recognition of Gd's might lead one to realize that this same power provides us with our needs, relates to us through natural phenomena in a personal way; a realization that would encourage AHAVAT HASHEM, the love of Gd. And serving Gd from love would, ultimately, lead to His throne, representing our clinging to Him.

This explanation of the Sifrei appears to support an impression I had of a chapter in T'hilim that had always struck me as giving a message beyond the simple meaning, beyond what appeared on the surface. In describing the praise of Gd from the heavens and their contents, T'hilim 148 attributes their praise - Y'HAL'LU ET SHEM HASHEM - to the fact that - KI HU TZIVA V'NIVRA'U VAYA'AMIDEM LA'AD L'OLAM. CHOK NATAN V'LO YA'AVOR. They praise Gd because He set them in an unchangeable, eternal way and this pleases them. When the chapter continues and describes the praise of the lower spheres, however, - HAL'LU HASHEM MIN HA'ARETZ - it is a different praise: Y'HAL'LU ET SHEIM HASHEM KI NISGAV SH'MO L'VADO, HODO AL ERETZ V'SHAMAYIM. It seems that the source of their praise is recognition of the overwhelming power of Gd. It would seem to stem from a sense of awe as opposed to an appreciation. YIR-A from the lower spheres and AHAVA from the celestial. This would correspond with the Sifrei.

Now I have a way of understanding that original Chazal much more than before. I learned something.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

**HASHIVEINU AVINU...**

**V'KORVEINU...**

**V'HACHAZIREINU**

Bring us back... to Your Torah, bring us close... to Your service, return us in repentance

Could this request in the Sh'moneh Esrei be a sequence of events, rather than a disconnected list? It would seem to make sense regarding the first two: return me to Your Torah; have me learn it and follow its ways. And if, indeed, I do that, and do it properly, then - by definition - I am doing the Avoda (service) You want me to do. I am coming close to truly serving You, almost as if I were doing such Avoda in the Beit HaMikdash. This sequence would then be in accord with V'TEIN CHELKEINU B'TORATECHA, V'SHAM NA'AVADCHA B'YIR'A - grant us our share in Your Torah and we will serve You there in awe, which also has our involvement in Torah preceding our service to HaShem in the Beit HaMikdash.

But if this is to be seen as a sequence, why would 'return us in full repentance before You' be the last step? If anything, it would seem to precede the others. I would like to suggest that t'shuva should be understood as having a few stages. This concept is brought clearly

in Nitzavim (30:1-10)- ... you will return it to your heart... and you will return to Gd... and you will return and listen to the voice of Gd... you will return to Gd. These verses refer to the Jews "returning" at four different times. After the Jews take notice and realize what the real reason for their suffering is (V'HASHEIVOTA), then V'SHAVTA AD HASHEM ELOKECHA - which Malbim explains as referring to the beginning of religious awakening and a turning "toward" - in the direction of - Gd. Ultimately, this culminates in KI TASHUV EL HASHEM ELOKECHA referring to the actual return to HaShem Himself and not just turning "toward" Him.

In the Akeidat Yitzchak, Rav Yitzchak Arama also states that the process of t'shuva is not a single act but proceeds in stages. We can then draw a conclusion that the feeling of t'shuva, the desire to want to change, is that with which begins it all. Then it is followed by the learning and the behavioral changes which transform the t'shuva from the emotional stage into that of action.

Now, we can also continue the analogy of the Beit HaMikdash and suggest that in the past, true t'shuva always involved the bringing of a sacrifice: a sin offering or guilt offering, or burnt offering, in addition to the vidui (confession) and changed behavior. In which case, the phrase of V'KORVEINU MALKEINU LA'AVODATECHA - bring us close to

Your service - also refers to this bringing of the appropriate sacrifice which will complete the t'shuva process and then, indeed, V'HACHAZIREINU BITSHUVA SH'LEIMA L'FANECHA. We will have taken all of the necessary steps for a complete t'shuva.

Notice the different verbs referring to our process of t'shuva: HASHIVEINU - return us - to Your Torah; and KORVEINU - bring us close - to Your service. Why the difference? I think that it's simply based upon our origins. We can hope to achieve a complete return to the Torah because, after all, we were taught the whole thing before, when we were being prepared by the mal'achim to come into this world. But when it comes to serving Gd, to knowing how to do this and succeed, we cannot accomplish it. All we can do is KORVEINU - we can only come close to it.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## P'TACH LIBI...

B'TORATECHA UVMITZVOTECHA  
TIRDOF NAFSHI

'Open LIBI (my heart) to Your Torah and NAFSHI (my soul) will pursue Your commandments. And all who plot evil against me, quickly nullify their plans and disrupt their thoughts.'

At the end of the AMIDA, these words are presented as separate requests of HaShem, just like the previous request that He 'guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully'. But I believe these can also be understood as a sequence: the result of my heart being involved in Torah and my chasing after mitzvot will be that anyone intending to harm me will have their plan thwarted with the help of Gd because of that involvement.

However, while reading the Mima'ama-kim [Alexander Mandelbaum; based upon the lectures of Rav Moshe Shapiro zt"l] on Parshat Tazria, I learned something that gave a deeper meaning to the above phrase. As usual, I never paid particular attention to this, other than the simple meaning of the words: We hope Gd will grant us the ability and desire to learn Torah and will help us run after His mitzvot. But this is what I learned from Mima'amakim:

Man is comprised of three aspects: NEFESH, RU'ACH, and NESHAMA. Each

one of these realities differs from the other and plays a different role in our behavior. The NESHAMA is that part of us that Gd "breathed" into us. It "resides" in the SEICHEL (brain, mind) and is the root of thought. (It is also, given its source, the most spiritual.) The NEFESH is the opposite. It contains the most physical aspects. It carries out actions; it is the root of activity and is the seat of our physical desires. It "resides" in the liver. The RU'ACH is the middle between the two. It is linked to the body in its ability to desire but is not chained to it as is the NEFESH. It can receive and accept messages from the NESHAMA and, as such, is the connection between the NESHAMA and the NEFESH. It "resides" in the heart.

Given that information, I understand that sentence in ELOKAI NETZOR to mean more than what I had thought. Now, it seems to be a cause-and-effect statement, not two requests, albeit connected. 'If You open my heart to Your Torah - the heart that receives messages from my NESHAMA and transmits them to my NEFESH - then the result will be that NAFSHI, that part of me will chase after Your mitzvot.

(After further thought, maybe this understanding gives new meaning to the statement of Chazal: RACHMANA LIBA BA'I - Gd wants what is in the heart - which is KAVANA in davening. It can also mean that Gd desires the action of the heart (over that of the NEFESH) given that He doesn't expect - or even want - anyone to be pure NESHAMA.)

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## V'HU RACHUM Y'CHAPER AVON...

'He, the Merciful One, forgives iniquity and doesn't destroy; and many a time withdraws His anger and never lets all His wrath be stirred' (T'hilim 78:38).

KI REGA B'APO, CHAYIM BIRTZONO - for His anger is just for a minute; His desire is life (30:6).

How do we know that even in His anger, Gd retains mercy for us? KI REGA B'APO...

Since I have been so very fortunate in my lifetime, B"H, to have every reason to see Gd as Gadol - giving - and merciful, it was easy for me to understand the above phrase (KI REGA B'APO) in such a way that it hinted to my perception. The word REGA - moment - contains the root of RAGU'A - calm, complacent. This allowed me to see the expression as meaning "even in His anger, there is part RAGU'A, something calm that keeps Him from expressing all this anger, Gd forbid.

In reading about Purim in Rav Moshe Shapiro's Reflections and Introspections: Chanuka and Purim, I came across another way in which I could introduce into this verse something that would "limit" APO - His anger. Or, put

differently, to direct his anger at someone else.

Rav Shapiro was talking about Amalek and what it was about Amalek, as compared to all the other nations, that made it an anathema to the Jewish people. Amalek has a philosophy that the world was created B'MIDAT HADIN - with strict justice. It declares that the world, as it is, must exist. "Existence is absolute, not due to any cause: The established order of the world is absolute. As such, strict justice negates continuation." Why didn't Gd create the world with His attribute of DIN, strict justice? Because it couldn't survive; there would be no continuation. Only with the attribute of mercy could there be a continuation. That would also explain why the verse says: REISHIT GOYIM AMALEK, V'ACHARITO OVED - Amalek is the first of nations, and its end is eternal destruction (Bamidbar 24:20). Its end must be annihilation, given its philosophy. What Amalek represents is the exact opposite of Gd's intention in the act of Creation. As Rashi explains, He created the world for REISHIT - for those things referred to as REISHIT, e.g., Torah, Israel, etc. A B'REISHIT as espoused by Amalek, means no future, no continuation. Our understanding of the very word REISHIT - first - implies there will be a 'second' coming after it. (Note the Maharal points out that the word for mercy - RACHAMIM - (with which Gd created the world) contains the root RECHEM -

womb, which carries the future of the world. "It holds the world's tomorrow, MACHAR, a word that also uses the same letters as RECHEM and, therefore, it embodies the attribute of mercy"; p.483)

According to the Rama MiPano and in the Megaleh Amukot of the Sh'lah HaKadosh, the initial letters of REISHIT GOYIM AMALEK spell out REGA. If so, I would like to think that the phrase KI REGA B'APO can also imply that Gd's anger is at RAGA, i.e., Amalek.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## HAZOR'IM B'DIM'A...

This week is sandwiched in between my son, Yaakov Mosheh's Hebrew and English birthdays. We just passed his Bar Mitzva Parsha of Balak and are in the week preceding Pinchas. As such, I want to take the opportunity to express some thoughts I've had over the years about this gift of my 'special needs' son.

SHIR HAMA'A LOT... HAZOR'IM B'DIM'A B'RINA YIKTZORU. HALOCH YELECH U'VACHO, NOSEI MESHECH HAZORA; BO YAVO V'RINA, NOSEI ALUMOTAV - Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy; He who goes out weeping, carrying precious seed, will come back with songs of joy, carrying his sheaves (T'hilim 126). HAZOR'IM B'DIM'A - those of us who bear children, - ZERA - and those children are cause for tears, not because they are bad, but because they have extra needs, because they are handicapped in some way and we are at a loss as to how to succeed with them; those of us who have these children and we deal with them through tears, ultimately, B'RINA YIKTZORU - we will reap the benefits and rejoice. HALOCH YELECH U'VACHO - As we walk with these children and they grow and we help them do whatever they're supposed to do, whatever they are capable of doing, shedding tears, occasionally, along the way because we

are NOSEI MESHECH HAZORA - carrying the MESHECH, everything that is NIMSHACH, that flows from that child, that comes along with that child, we will certainly arrive at the point where BO YAVO V'RINA - we sing, carrying not the baggage that comes with it, but NOSEI ALUMOTAV. ALUMA means something that is bound together, something that is united. We carry with us all of those things that his child has brought together in our lives. All the people he has touched and affected and who became connected to him. Everyone who has been drawn together and united because of this child.

HODU LASHEM KI TOV, KI L'OLAM CHASDO

Many are the moments when, I will hold and hug my Down's Syndrome son, Yaakov Mosheh, and, out of the blue, feel so grateful for him that I would think to myself: HODU LASHEM KI TOV, KI L'OLAM CHASDO - Give thanks to HaShem because He is good, for His kindness is forever. I give thanks to HaShem because He is, indeed, so good, even though - at the time my son was born - His kindness to me was NE'ELAM - hidden from me. Who knew how great this bracha of my son would be!

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## HASHEM ELOKAI ...

### SHIVATI ELECHA VATIRPA'ENI

- HaShem, my Gd, I cried out to You and You healed me(T'hilim 30:3)

The Eitz Yosef on the siddur quotes the Zohar's question about the wording of the request for healing in the Shemoneh Esrei. If it says R'FA'EINU, heal us, why is it necessary to say V'NEIRAFEI, and we will be healed? Of course, if Gd heals us we will be healed! And if it says HOSHI'EINU, save us, what is the purpose of V'NIVASHEI'A, we will be saved? Isn't that a given?

He suggests an understanding that these first two requests are similar to that made in Eicha of HASHIVEINU HASHEM EILECHA V'NASHUVA - return us, HaShem to You and we will return - that if Gd would start the process, we would then complete it.

The requests of R'FA'EINU and HOSHI'EINU refer to R'FUAT HANEFESH - the healing of the soul. And what is R'FUAT HANEFESH if not T'shuva? We want Gd to help us begin the T'shuva process and if He does, we will be able to complete it. So, in the Shemoneh Esrei, we first ask for the health of our souls, that we do T'shuva, and only then, for our bodies. This is expressed in the later words of the request for health - V'HA'ALEI R'FU'A SH'LEIMA L'CHOL MAKOTEINU - bring

complete recovery for all our ailments, which indicates that we are not partners in this process but that it is completely up to Gd. And we have been taught that, certainly in ancient times, illness was seen as an indication of spiritual problems, the spiritual health of the person. This illness would then lead the person to do T'shuva and he would be healed physically as well.

Given this understanding of R'FU'A, we can find deeper meaning in the above verses of T'hilim (30). The person is rejoicing because Gd didn't allow him to be swallowed up by his sins, but rather responded to the person's attempt at T'shuva: SHIVATI EILECHA - I cried out to You - and He, indeed, VATIRPA'EINI - helped him complete the process and thus, saved him from being cut off; HE'ELITA MIN SH'OL NAFSHI - You raised my soul from the lower world; CHIYITANI MIYORDI VOR - You preserved me from my descent to the pit." You saved me from losing my portion in OLAM HABA by helping and accepting my T'shuva.

The result of this prayer and declaration then gives Dovid HaMelech ample reason to rejoice: ZAM'RU LASHEM CHASIDAV - sing to HaShem, pious ones, because REGA B'APO - His anger is brief and really, CHAYIM BIRTZONO - His desire is life - He doesn't want the death of a person but rather KI IM B'SHUVO MIDARKO V'CHAYA - but rather, that he return from his wayward ways so that he might live."

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## B'CHIYA L'DOROT

I was reading the work of Rav Moshe Shapiro zt'l, on the Three Weeks, in Reflections and Introspections: Building from the Ruins. In one of his essays, he talks about the crying we do at this time. He uses the Maharal's explanation of the word BECHI (crying), explaining that it comes from the word MEVUCHA - confusion. Crying is what we do when we don't know what to do, where to go. Things are confused and not clear. Similarly, LAYLA is related to Y'LALA - wailing. Nighttime is a time of crying because at night, we are alone. There is no one else with us, no one to direct us, confusion regarding what to do, where to go.

We find this same idea of confusion and crying in T'hilim 30: BA'EREV YALIN BECHI V'LABOKER RINA - at nightfall, weeping ensues; but in the morning, joy. Somehow, there is crying at night but rejoicing in the morning. Why is this so? If we look at the words themselves, they will give us the answer. BA'EREV - when all is M'ORAV, when things are all B'IRBUVIA, confused and mixed up, it's difficult to make heads or tails of things and to know how to proceed. We are left at a loss. When, however, things are clear, as in the BOKER, when it is possible to make a BIKORET (examination) and see things with a critical eye as

opposed to a jumble, solutions aren't far behind - a reason for RINA, joy.

Using this understanding of BECHI, gave me an insight into the Torah's description of the sending of the MERAGLIM, as related in D'varim. Although in Sh'lach it sounds like this is HaShem's idea, in D'varim, it is the people who approach Moshe. Rashi tells us that they came B'IRBUVIA, in a disorganized, disorderly fashion: young pushing the old, no respect, a mob. The way they came hints to the fact that this would be a cause for weeping. They were all mixed-up, each one pushing the other: confusion. And, indeed, it resulted in B'CHIYA L'DOROT - weeping for generations.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## MATAN TORAH

In parashat Va'etchanan, after recounting the Aseret HaDibrot and the Mt. Sinai experience, the text says ET HAD'VARIM HA'ELEH DIBEIR HASHEM... MITOCH HA'EISH... KOL GADOL V'LO YASAF - HaShem spoke these words... from amidst the fire... a great voice that didn't cease. Targum Onkelos translates YASAF as PASAK - the voice did not stop. When the people approach Moshe afterwards to request that he be the go-between lest they die from hearing the voice of HaShem, they say LAMA NAMUT... IM YOSFIM ANACHNU LISHMO'A ET KOL HASHEM ELOKEINU OD VAMAT'NU - why should we die... if we continue to hear the voice of HaShem, our Gd anymore, we will die.

The p'shat, simple understanding is clearly that YOSFIM here means 'to continue'. But this word has been used in other contexts of the Torah where this meaning is not so clear. In parashat Vayeishev (32:26), the Torah tells us that after Yehuda realizes that he is the one who impregnated Tamar, V'LO YASAF OD L'DA'ATAH. Rashi tells us this can be understood in two different ways: 'there are those who say that he didn't continue (being intimate) and there are those who say that he didn't stop. In addition, we find this same split in parashat B'ha'alot'cha (11:25) when

the Torah talks of the 70 elders who received the spirit of prophecy from Moshe. It says: VAYITNAB'U V'LO YASFU. Onkelos and Targum Yonatan both translate this as LO PASKU - they didn't stop prophesying.

If this is so, perhaps we can use this option to understand the sentence in Va'etchanan. Instead of it meaning "if we continue to hear His voice, we will die", we can hear a warning here: "If we POSKIM - stop - listening to HaShem, then we will die!"

Indeed.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## T'SHUVA

### ATA GIBOR L'OLAM...

Either when it is the time to do t'shuva officially, as from Elul through the Yamim Nora'im, or simply when I'm more aware of my need to do t'shuva and of my failure in achieving what needs to be done, I tend to see the above phrase in the Sh'moneh Esrei in a different light.

If I understand Gd's g'vura (ATA GIBOR) as described in Pirkei Avot as meaning: EIZEHU GIBOR? HAKOVEISH ET YITZRO - His MIDAT HARACHAMIM, attribute of mercy, overcoming His MIDAT HADIN, the attribute of judgement, this would address my frustration in not succeeding in doing t'shuva.

I am grateful that Gd is a GIBOR now, so that He waits for me to succeed in t'shuva and doesn't judge me for my failures. And in so doing, He is M'CHAYEI MEITIM, He is keeping alive those of us who might, otherwise, be judged severely and who would be lost. He is therefore, RAV L'HOSHIA, abundantly able to save. He saves our souls.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## CONCEPTS OF HASHEM

Rabbi Akiva and three others NICHN'SU LAPARDES - involved themselves in the deep secrets of the Torah and universe. The Gemara tells us that only R. Akiva emerged intact. What the others saw and understood in terms of how Gd functions in this world was too difficult for them to contend with and to remain unchanged. R. Akiva had the ability to see unity and completeness in the world despite the contradictions and apparent conflicts in it. He could make peace with what he "saw" in the PARDES and with HaShem, even though there were things that didn't make sense. He was not bothered by TZADIK V'RA LO - why the innocent suffer. He could combine all aspects of the world with the ostensibly conflicting attributes of Gd and thus still see in the world, the clear Hand of HaShem - and it was always L'TOV - for the good.

This concept of Gd being "self-contradictory", as it were, expresses itself many times in the Tanach and in prayer, e.g. -

- every time we see Gd referred to as HaShem Elokim, combining the attribute of mercy of Y-H-V-H with the attribute of justice of Elokim. These two are antithetical to each other.

- TZADIK HASHEM B'CHOL D'RACHAV

V'CHASID B'CHOL MA'ASAV - despite the fact that the "way" of Gd is one of Tzedek, of justice, He functions B'CHOL MA'ASAV - in all His deeds, as CHASID - beyond the letter of the law.

- In the Shemoneh Esrei, Gd is referred to as haKeul HAGADOL, HAGIBOR V'HANORA, KEIL ELYON. Gd is first and foremost GADOL - a giver, One Who does CHESED. He is also equally a GIBOR - One who holds back and limits - the opposite of GADOL. And Chazal tell us that Gd is KULO CHESED V'KULO DIN. He is entirely each one of these and both at the same time - this is the concept of NORA. But how this is possible, is beyond our understanding = KEIL ELYON, we cannot fathom this.

- In the Az Yashir we proclaim HaShem ISH MILCHAMA. HaShem - which is the attribute of mercy; is ISH MILCHAMA - a Man of war?

- And we end the NE'ILA of Yom Kippur proclaiming seven times: HASHEM HU HAELOKIM; HASHEM, who is RACHAMIM - mercy, is ELOKIM - the Gd of DIN, justice.

We are taught by Chazal that our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov exhibited and represented these same attributes. Avraham is known as GADOL, the giver, the man of CHESED. Yitzchak is known for G'VURA, for holding back, one who could give his life up, one who recognized Gd as the Judge. Ya'akov, Chazal tell us, combined both of these

attributes, CHESSED and G'VURA: "TIF'ERET which is NORA, is Ya'akov for he combined the attributes of his fathers... and TIF'ERET is the (BRI'ACH HATICHON) middle bolt between G'DULA and G'VURA" (Dover Shalom on the siddur). The ability to combine things that appeared to be opposites was to be found in Ya'akov. Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner zt"l, explains: "Ya'akov had the best ability to recognize the spiritual mission behind everything material. He best understood that everything in the physical world is a manifestation of Gd's will and that material things were created only to serve a spiritual presence. This unity of physical existence with spiritual purpose is known as EMET - truth." (The Art of Jewish Prayer; p.85)

And now, returning to R. Akiva and his ability to make harmony between the 'opposites', it's interesting that in the letters of his name is 'Yaakov'. Isn't it?

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## Opposites & Balance

One of the most common arguments to "prove" that the world was created by a Divine Being is the symmetry, balance, and order that exist in the universe. If we look closely, it becomes clear that the form of symmetry is not simple but quite unusual in a very fundamental sense. For rather than being two equal halves of a whole, the picture that emerges is one of opposite forces balancing out. Magnetic force, as well as electrical energy, is based upon positive and negative poles or opposite charges interacting. The atom is stable because electrons and protons are able to balance out. There is harmony because the opposites can function cooperatively. One of the fundamental laws of physics, as expounded by Sir Isaac Newton, is "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." This appears to be the way Gd created His universe.

I believe this is reflected in the spiritual, religious realm as well. We see it in our prayers; we see it in the Tanach. We see it in Gd Himself: He is called an ISH MILCHAMA - a Man of war, using the very title that indicates mercy - HaShem. This would certainly seem contradictory. We refer to Gd as HASHEM ELOKEINU, again a combination of two opposite traits. But as we

see in the Sh'ma, He is, nevertheless, ECHAD. The two aspects co-exist. The attributes of HaShem that are listed in the Shemoneh Esrei also express this. Gd is called GADOL (giving), GIBOR (holding back) and NORA (a combination of both attributes). What is interesting is that while Avraham is associated with GADOL and Yitzchak with GIBOR, it is Yaakov - who is associated with NORA, and the Zohar tells us Yaakov TUSHB'CHAN D'AVAHAN HAVA - is considered the "choicest" of the Forefathers. Why is this? Because he embodies both CHESED and G'VURA. We must conclude, then, that the co-existing of opposites is a standard toward which we should strive.

Another form of opposites can be found in our very essence: the NESHAMA within the physical GUF. The nature and needs of the body would seem to be diametrically opposed to the nature and needs of the spiritual NESHAMA. The material and spiritual are at opposite poles. And yet, that is exactly how Gd created human beings. We have a YETZER HARA as well as a YETZER HATOV. He expects us to have these two forces co-exist, one influencing the other; one serving and enabling the other, empowering each other.

We are directed, as Jews, that "the world was created for me"; and at the same time, "I am only dust". We are expected to balance the two extremes. We learn in Yish'ayahu: YOTZER OR U'VOREI CHOSHECH OSEH SHALOM

**UVOREI ET HARA - He creates light and darkness, makes peace and creates evil (45:7). The two halves of this verse should parallel each other, one half equaling the other so that just as 'creates light' is the opposite of 'creates darkness', 'He makes peace' is the opposite of 'He creates evil'. Notice, then, that the opposite of 'evil' here is not 'good', but rather 'peace'. This means that the lack of peace and harmony is what is considered "bad".**

**Rav Moshe Shapiro zt"l, defines 'bad' and 'good' in an essay on Parashat Bamidbar: 'bad' is from a root (ra'u'a) connoting something shaky and unsound... meaning something that stands by itself and doesn't join with his friend...'bad' indicates a reality that considers itself totally complete so that it isn't interested and doesn't even see a need to join with a more complete system... he feels self-complete and isn't ready to go out of himself and join true completeness... The concept "good" refers to something that joins with his other and with a form of completion outside of himself... we therefore find that the definition of "good" is joining to the true reality and to the process and content of Creation." (MiMa'amakim; Bamidbar, p.53-54).**

**Evil, then, is when I cannot tolerate anyone or anything being different than myself in a way that disagrees with me or with my perception of the way things should be. We tend to think that peace is the absence of conflict. This is not**

**really true. Rather, it is the co-existence of opposites or of differing things. Musical harmony is not when all the notes are the same but when different notes blend together to produce a pleasing sound. So, too, in the real world. SHALOM comes from SHALEIM - complete. But SHALEIM is more than just 'whole'. It implies a completeness created by the harmonizing of various opposing elements.**

**As in all other matters, a source for this thesis can be found in the Tanach. I believe we may see a hint to the concept that we are supposed to be living in a world of contrasts and colors and we are expected to unite it all into a sensible whole from what Gd tells us in B'reishit. LO TOV HEYOT H'ADAM L'VADO. E'ESEH LO EIZER K'NEGDO - It isn't good for Man to be alone; I will make him a helper opposite him (2:18). Man was not supposed to be a single unit. Not only must he have a counterpart but that counterpart must be K'NEGDO; not a clone, not a xerox copy, but an opposite that completes him and creates a balance.**

**Gd created people to be different. Yaakov gives his sons different blessings, recognizing that their personalities and abilities are different from each other and that's what would create the community of Israel. We are all different, and it is supposed to be that way. The world was meant to be full of variety and diversity, and man's challenge is to find the balance and**

harmony in what appears to be confusion.

Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop expresses this idea in explaining the midrash about why the Torah begins with the letter BET (2) as opposed to the letter ALEF (1) (as quoted in Artscroll Aseret HaDibrot, p.26, footnote #1): "The ALEF argued that because it stands for 'oneness' and 'unity' symbolizing consistency and harmony - it is the most appropriate letter with which to keynote Creation. The Holy One Blessed be He, however, had a different thought. Better that the whole world should be created with the letter BET, the numerical equivalent of 2. 'Two' represents plurality, diversity, contrast - even conflict. And it is this that is essential to the success of Gd's plan. Namely, to establish a world full of challenge and opposition so that Man can strive to bring harmony and purpose to all the diverse elements of the universe."

Not everything will make sense to us and there will be conflicts that we can't resolve. Even if we chance upon things that we can't reconcile, opposite concepts - let alone people - ideas that we can't imagine coexisting, we need to remember that even if we don't see the possibility of harmony, Gd does. And we need to trust in that knowledge.

How peaceful.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## WAVES OF T'SHUVA

*"...waves of t'shuva cascade over all existence in a perpetual movement of growth and ascendance... These voices that we hear are known as 'thoughts of t'shuva'. They do not originate inside us, but rather filter in from the world around us. We absorb the echo of the voice of the Universe which awakens thoughts of t'shuva" (Moadim LeSimcha; R. Shlomo Aviner; p.14 -15).*

The concept of "waves" of t'shuva is a fascinating one to me and I think it has far-reaching implications. The above-quoted concept from the teachings of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt"l, would seem to imply that the more sensitive a person is to these "voices" or more receptive to the influence of these "waves", the better a person he will be. The Forefathers, the Tzadikim, the Rabbanim, who are our models, would then be those whose receptors are more attuned to the need to aspire toward the perfection of the Universe.

It would be interesting to know whether this description of "waves" of t'shuva is meant to be literal or merely descriptive. Because, if literal, there are broad ramifications. The waves "vibrating" into and within a person will influence his behavior. And, although this behavior would be directed toward

perfection - of one's self or of the Universe - it would vary from person to person. Otherwise, we would all be doing the same thing in t'shuva. The extent to which a person would react to these "waves" and the effect they would have would depend upon one's personality. Avraham, then, would have been more sensitive to t'shuva in the area of chesed, in matters bein adam l'chaveiro - between man and man; while Yitzchak would grow in yir'at HaShem - fear of Gd; Yaakov, in each area, etc.

Could this possibly explain the concept of being ARAL LEV - a heart with a barrier - as in ...UMALTEM ET ORLAT L'VAVCHEM... - You shall cut away the barrier of your heart (D'varim 10:16); ...AZ YIKANA L'VAVAM HE'AREL... - then their unfeeling heart will be humbled (Vayikra 26:41), when Gd talks about the people misbehaving? AREL implies a barrier - that there is something blocking the waves from entering the heart. And it is only by removing this ORLAT HALEV that t'shuva can be initiated.

Consistent with this idea that we could be affected by "waves" cascading in the Universe, is the understanding of Chazal that our behavior here affects the upper worlds and vice versa. It is difficult for me to think of "waves" and their effect upon us without thinking of music (and its sound waves) and its similar effect. We know that the Leviyim would sing and play instruments in the Beit HaMikdash during the sacrificial service

- the AVODA. One of the purposes of this was to help move the individual, who might be bringing a sin-offering or guilt-offering, to feel the desire to do t'shuva. We know how much music affects the soul. The Arugat HaBosem (in Otzar HaT'filot) cites the Ma'avar Yabok from Tikunei Zohar HaKadosh (Tikun 12) regarding the music in t'fila: "There is a HEICHAL above that is hidden which cannot be opened except by music... and the neshama enjoys this music since it is accustomed to the tunes from the songs of the heavenly angels... and when the neshama is in the body, and hears the music, it enjoys it as it did when still attached to her source; and from the abundance of the sweetness, it is fitting that the spirit of Gd rest upon it ..."

In addition, I was fascinated to discover that the connection between how music functions and how our behavior influences and is influenced by other spheres is found in an essay by the Akedat Yitzchak (part 1, gate 12 - Nigun Ha'Olam) as cited by Rav Moshe Shapiro in MiMa'amakim on Parashat Sh'mot, p.21: "There is a great relationship and strong connection between activities of Mankind and the nature of the reality in which we live... And it is possible that this relationship is even greater than that described by musicians in how playing one note on a particular instrument will activate (cause vibrations?) the same note on its sister instrument because of this relationship..." Imagine,

then, how our behavior affects everything around us and how, when we do t'shuva, the "waves" we create changes these effects.

Maybe the idea of "waves" is not so far-fetched. We have sound waves, light waves, electric waves, magnetic waves and probably more.

Who knows?

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## V'HAYA HASHEM L'MELECH ...BAYOM HAHU ...U'SH'MO ECHAD

"On that day, HaShem will be One and His Name will be one." We are about to proclaim HaShem as Melech on Rosh HaShana and I wanted to try to understand what it means when it says that 'His Name will be One.' Rav Shimon Schwab (Rav Schwab on Prayer) explains: "Despite having revealed certain aspects of His Name, HKB"H tells us ZEH SH'MI L'OLAM - This is My Name forever (Sh'mot 3:15) with the word L'OLAM written as if it could be read L'ALEIM, meaning 'hidden'. Just as I am beyond your comprehension, so shall My true Name, My essence, remain unknown and hidden to the human mind. So, we humbly say: BARUCH SH'MO - blessed is His Name. Since there is no way to "know" Gd, then when we refer to SH'MO, His Name, we are referring to those behaviors He exhibits to us from which we can draw conclusions as to His nature. If this is true, then I think I finally understand what it means when it says that "His Name will be one."

BAYOM HAHU YIHYEH HASHEM ECHAD - On that day Gd will be One - that will be the day when the whole world recognizes and admits that there is only One Gd. But that really isn't enough. For example, the Jews and the Moslems also believe in only one Gd. But

is it the same Gd? The "name" of Gd means one thing to a Jew and something quite different to a Moslem. The Jew sees Gd, first and foremost as Y-H-V-H, merciful, giving, beneficent; a gomel chesed - after all, aren't we taught that this is why He created the world?

[Derech HaShem (Ramchal) Chapter 2:1: Gd's purpose in Creation was to bestow of His Good onto another.]

Only then, do we say He is Elokim, the all-powerful One Who can initiate this very Creation. But a Moslem sees Allah as 'akhbar' - first and foremost Kabir, gibor - powerful, mighty. That is a very different deity than the one in Whom we believe. So, although we both believe in only one Gd, it clearly doesn't mean there is any unity in understanding just Who this Gd is, what His true Nature is. But BAYOM HAHU, on that day, not only will there be an agreement that there is only one Gd, that all good and bad derives from Him, but also USHMO ECHAD - there will be agreement, as well, as to that nature. And that Gd is HASHEM TZ'VAKOT SH'MO, K'DOSH YISRAEL, the Sanctified One of Israel.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## V'ZOT HAB'RACHA

"...And He showed him all the Land, the Gilead until Dan... until the last sea (AD HAYAM HA'ACHARON)... And HaShem said to him 'This is the Land I swore to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov... I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there" (34:1-4).

Reading the end of V'zot Hab'racha has always been very emotional for me. The death of Moshe feels almost real. And if you read the Da'at Z'keinim on how Gd has to convince Moshe's neshama to leave his body, it can bring you to tears as well. One thing that always bothered me, though, was how Gd seems to 'rub it in' (Gd forbid) when He tells Moshe that He is showing him all the land but V'SHAMA LO TA'AVOR - you shall not cross over there. Moshe knows this already. We all do. It just doesn't seem nice. But most importantly, it doesn't demonstrate the merciful, caring Gd that we know.

I finally came up with a possible understanding that would explain why it really was appropriate for Gd to say this. Not only appropriate, but sensitive and caring. According to the Midrash (and Yonatan ben Uziel), what Gd was showing Moshe was not simply the geographic land, but the incidents that would occur there: wars, victories, and

destruction. According to some, Moshe was shown the entire future until AD HAYAM HA'ACHARON - read HAYOM HA'ACHARON - the times of the Mashiach. I would venture to say that much of it wasn't a pretty picture. On the contrary, it must have been quite painful. And that is why Gd reassures Moshe that SHAMA LO TA'AVOR - you won't have to witness or live through all that.

This modus operandi of Gd has been demonstrated before. In Lech L'cha, during the B'RIT BEIN HAB'TARIM, Gd tells Avraham that his descendants will be strangers and will be slaves and suffer for a period of 400 years. Why was it necessary for HaShem to tell him this? And we know it was distressing because the Torah tells us that a 'feeling of dread' comes upon Avraham. But what does HaShem say to Avraham after reassuring him that, ultimately, his descendants would grow, survive, and succeed? V'ATA TAVO EL AVOTECHA B'SHALOM, TIKAVEIR B'SEIVA TOVA - You will go in peace to your fathers, and be buried in good old age. He tells him he won't have to witness any of it. Very similar to our case with Moshe.

In Melachim Bet (32) we are told about Yoshiyahu who, after finding a Sefer Torah open to the graphic description of the TOCHACHA, tears his clothes, and sends for the prophetess Chulda to find out what this meant. In response, Hashem sends a message to Yoshiyahu through Chulda that He will indeed do

what was written but, because of Yoshiyahu's response, "Because of your soft heart and you submitted yourself to Me and you tore your clothes and cried before Me, HaShem promises to have Yoshiyahu not live to see the destruction "you will go in peace to your grave and your eyes will not see all the evil I will bring." If Gd does this as an act of kindness and mercy because of Yoshiyahu's goodness, why not also posit that this is why Gd reassures Moshe that despite what he sees, he won't have to witness it? This then was a gesture of love and caring, as befits the picture we have of Gd.

What I still can't understand, however, and it is clearly because I'm human, is what is gained by letting them know this information at all. Maybe because of who they are and what they are, Gd doesn't want to hold anything back from them but wants to be truthful. I'm sure there is a reason but it is beyond me. And all I can do is trust that Gd knows what He's doing and would NEVER intentionally hurt these people. There was a reason, but only He knows what it is (and perhaps these people also knew and weren't as disturbed as I am). As usual, I will continue to be baffled.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## AZ YERANENU

### ATZEI HAYA'AR... KI VA LISHPOT ET HA'ARETZ

The Hodu we recite in Shacharit every morning has much of it taken from Divrei HaYamim. The text is talking about what things will be like when the Mashiach comes. One of the verses is the above one, "Then, the trees of the forest will sing before HaShem who has come to 'judge' the land." A simple, p'shat meaning is that this is part of a description of how the natural world will react when that time comes. But I think it's possible to learn something deeper.

If we remove it from the p'shat, we have the question: why would the trees rejoice "because Gd has come to 'judge' the land"? These are not people who would be affected by it (although, in this day and age, we might be able to suggest that the trees are happy that Man will finally be judged for all his destruction of trees, rainforests, etc.).

I would like to suggest something different, based upon the definition of the root SHIN-PEI-TET, according to Rav S.R. Hirsch (see Etymological Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew by Matityahu Clark). This root means to create harmony, to put things into order - the way they should be. If we look back in B'reishit, we see that the trees

originally were supposed to have their trunks, the bark, taste just like the fruit: ...EITZ P'RI OSEH P'RI L'MINO - Let the earth sprout vegetation... trees of fruit yielding fruit (1:11). But when the land responded to Gd's command, it didn't fulfill it properly, as Rashi tells us: "that the flavor of the tree be like the flavor of the fruit. But the earth didn't do this..." The earth brought forth... trees yielding fruit, but the tree itself was not fruit. And the earth was, ultimately, cursed along with Adam later on.

So, the trees have been living an unfulfilled existence, given their original purpose. The Ohr HaChayim HaKadosh points out that we don't find anywhere in the story of Creation that there are trees that are not fruit-bearing, but are simply for man to use as necessary. And yet, the amount of trees in the world that are not fruit trees, greatly outnumber fruit trees. He suggests that, perhaps, originally, all trees were meant to be fruit trees but after the land was cursed by Gd, these fruitless trees resulted.

Given all this, maybe the trees are rejoicing because Gd will "put in order" (LISHPOT) all the land; that what was originally supposed to be, would finally happen. All trees would revert to the original intention of being EITZ P'RI.

[Rav Chiya bar Ashi said in the name of Rav: All the barren trees in Eretz Yisrael are destined to bear fruit] (Ketubot 112b).

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## POTEI'ACH ET YADECHA... II

The usual interpretation of these words is that Gd sustains all living beings by providing them with the nourishment they need. Aside from the fact that the words themselves do not reflect the message that He fulfills our "needs" (as opposed to ratzon - desire), it would seem to be a mere repetition of the previous verse of EINEI KOL EILECHA Y'SABEIRU... - the eyes of all look hopefully to You and You give them their food in its proper time, where it clearly specifies OCHLAM - nourishment.

There also seems to be a difference in the manner in which Gd functions in each of these statements. The first one, EINEI KOL EILECHA Y'SABEIRU', presents Gd as in complete control: He is giving; you are not taking, you are receiving. POTEI'ACH ET YADECHA..., on the other hand, shows Gd in a "passive" role, as it were, - His 'hand' is open. Whatever we may benefit from His hand's being open is dependent upon us: will we take from His hand? That will depend upon our RATZON - do we want to take what Gd offers? If we don't have that RATZON, then the open 'hand' of Gd is of no benefit to us. That is why Gd provides us with that RATZON: UMASBI'A L'CHOL CHAI RATZON - He satiates us, fills all living

beings with desire. He does not give us everything we desire. He fills us with RATZON, He gives us the ability to know that we want something, to feel the desire. Whether or not we can satisfy that desire will depend upon whether or not we take advantage of the open 'hand' He offers us. I would even suggest that this RATZON could translate into "instinct" when it refers to an animal, KOL CHAI, the instinct not only to find its food, but the ability to protect itself and defend itself, to procreate, to find and/or create a home for itself.

Does Gd's open 'hand' mean we can take anything we "want" from there, even if it is not a good thing for us? Yes. All material things are in His Hand! That is what the 'open hand' is telling us. It's all there for the taking, even that which we shouldn't want. After all, we know that Gd "forms light and creates darkness, He makes peace and creates 'evil'" (Yish'ayahu 44:7). We were given free choice and how we use it is up to us. This, too, is a message hidden in POTEI'ACH ET YADECHA. But remember, TZADIK HASHEM B'CHOL D'RACHAV V'CHASID B'CHOL MA'ASAV - Gd is just in all His paths and magnanimous in all His ways - the One Who is presenting you with your choices from an 'open hand' is also the One who is "just in all His ways", the just, judging Gd who will respond appropriately to your choice either with TZEDEK or with CHESED. It's up to you.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## AHALELA HASHEM B'CHAYAI

What a shame that I never appreciated the power of the letter BET. If re-used to mean one of its alternate meanings, rather than 'in', many new insights can be gained. We can understand it as 'in', 'with', 'through', 'when'. Those are quite a few options to play around with. Of course, as usual, I came to this realization rather late in life, only because something struck me out of the blue, for the first time. Rashi cites B'reishit Rabba on the words B'REISHIT BARA - "in the beginning" He created - as meaning b'= BISHVIL; that the world was created BISHVIL - for the Torah and for Israel, both of which are referred to as REISHIT. Despite this B'reishit Rabba, it makes more sense to me if we could also translate 'b' as 'with'. We have the famous Zohar in T'ruma 161:1 that says "When Gd began Creation, He looked into the Torah and created the world - that when Gd wanted to create the world, He used the Torah as a blueprint. If so, the word B'REISHIT could seem appropriately understood as 'b' = 'with' REISHIT - the Torah, He created the world.

Given the freedom of using BET in

other ways, I noticed an alternate meaning to part of the davening. In T'hilim 146, it begins ...AHALELA HASHEM B'CHAYAI' - I will praise Hashem while I live. How about "I will praise HaShem through my life' - by how I live my life, by being a source of kiddush HaShem in my lifestyle and behavior? This of, course, doesn't replace the simple meaning, it just adds a little more depth - at least, for me.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## V'YACHEID L'VAVENU L'AHAVA ULYIRA ET SH'MECHA

- unify our hearts to love and fear  
Your Name

In the paragraph preceding the Sh'ma, we make this request of Gd to "unify" our hearts. We assume that this refers to the two halves of a whole that reside therein: the YEITZER HATOV and YEITZER HARA - our two opposing inclinations. This is what we are taught by Rashi in the explanation of the first paragraph of Sh'ma: V'AHAVTA EIT HASHEM ELOKECHA B'CHOL L'VAVCHA UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA... - Rashi: B'CHOL L'VAVCHA = with your two inclinations, YEITZER HATOV and YEITZER HARA. But here, in the above quote, the request doesn't seem to apply to these inclinations. It is a request to help us serve Gd equally with fear and love, which are not in the realm of YEITZER TOV or YEITZER HARA. This kind of service, the combination of these two attributes - fear and love - isn't the easiest thing to do. In addition, some people find it easier to serve Gd through fear while others are more motivated by love. The two are totally different emotions stemming from

different understandings of, and relationships, with Him: one more "Chassidish", as it were, and one more "Misnagdish". If, indeed, this is the case, then it becomes clear that we need assistance in achieving it.

I believe T'hilim 33:15 gives us the answer to the help we seek: HAYOTZER YACHAD LIBAM - He creates their hearts together. If we are allowed to interpret it in this way, it is meant to reassure us that this is possible because this is the way Gd created us - with a heart that is YACHAD, that can be unified to do both forms of service. Given this, perhaps all the dissension that existed years ago, when the movement of Chassidism began, between that world and the misnagdish world was not necessary because they are clearly meant to co-exist. The proof of the pudding is in the history since then when we have seen so many great 'gedolim' come from each camp. We can pick and choose which path is the better one for us, which one 'speaks' to us more, BUT the requirement is to somehow incorporate both of them. T'hilim tells us it is, indeed, possible.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## R'EI NA V'ONYEINU

### V'RIVA RIVEINU, UG-ALEINU...

'See our suffering and fight our battles and redeem us." Rav Soloveitchik zt"l, defines the concept of GE'ULA, redemption, for which we are asking here, as the ability we will have to know exactly what we are supposed to do in order to actualize ourselves. When we ask Gd to RIVA RIVEINU, we are asking Him to help us fight our yeitzer hara which is what is keeping us from fulfilling our "tasks" in this world and actualizing ourselves, thus achieving real ge'ula.

In terms of this request in the Shemoneh Esrei, I would like to look more closely at the meaning of ONIENU, in order to understand exactly what the 'suffering' that is keeping us from this GE'ULA is. The root of the word is ONI, which can be understood in different ways. One meaning is INUI - affliction - referring to our suffering and afflictions from the outside. Therefore, we ask Gd to 'fight our battles' - to help us overpower our enemies.

Additionally, this root can also be understood as 'poverty', a lacking. In that case, we ask Gd to see how poor

we are, how weak in our ability to combat our yeitzer hara from within. Therefore, RIVA RIVEINU we need Your help, Gd, in combatting it because we can't do it by ourselves. The Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) certainly supports this reading: R' Yitzchak said: A person's (evil) inclination renews itself against him every day... And R. Shimon ben Levi said: A person's (evil) inclination threatens to overpower him every day... And if not that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, aided him, he would be unable to withstand him.

If both of these understandings of ONYEINU are equally valid, then I would connect them. If we are being oppressed and afflicted from the outside, and we are suffering from it, perhaps it is because we are weak in confronting our yeitzer hara from the inside, giving in to it, thus causing this punishment from the outside. We, therefore, most assuredly, need Gd's help in each area.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## MA NORA HAMAKOM HAZEH / VE'EZUZ NOR'OTCHA YOMEIRU

The most famous descriptions of Gd are probably GADOL, GIBOR, and NORA. There are various definitions of these characteristics. One of the definitions of NORA is that it is a combination of GADOL - CHESSED, and GIBOR - DIN, judgment. Regarding Gd, it means that He is 100% GADOL - giving and full of CHESSED, at the same time that He is 100% GIBOR - holding back, the trait of DIN. Of course, to us, this seems impossible - to be completely each of these things - and so we say in the Shemoneh Esrei after these descriptions, KEIL ELYON, which means He is above our understanding and we cannot really fathom how He functions.

There is another meaning of NORA that adds meaning to part of my davening. This understanding is that NORA refers to the presence of the Shechina in the ARON in the Beit HaMikdash (see Mima'amakim on Parshat B'ha'alot'cha; p.144-148). [Not so coincidentally, NORA spelled backwards is ARON]. The fact that Gd wants an ARON on earth, the fact

that His presence is in the ARON, tells us that NORA implies a connection between heaven and earth. When Ya'akov has his dream of the ladder connecting heaven and earth, he describes it as MAH NORA... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of Gd and this is the gate of the heavens. This tells us that the characteristic of NORA has to do with the connection of that which is heavenly with that which is earthly. Gd 'restricted', as it were, His heavenly aspect to allow Himself to be revealed in the lower world, on earth. This same connection that Ya'akov witnessed is expressed in the giving of the heavenly Torah to the Jews on earth many years later. [Interesting: the 'gimatriya' of SULAM (ladder) equals that of SINAI, 130].

This idea of the awareness of the presence of Gd here on earth can be seen from what the gemara tells us about this word. In discussing the greatness of the Men of the Great Assembly, it refers to their having reintroduced the characteristic of NORA into the description of Gd, when composing the Shemoneh Esrei. Previously, the prophet Yirmiyahu referred to Him only as GADOL and GIBOR, feeling that he couldn't use NORA to describe Gd when goyim were prancing through

the Beit HaMikdash. And the reasoning behind the return of the word NORA to the description was: "were it not for this 'fear' (attribute of NORA) of Gd, how could one nation (Israel) continue to exist among the nations? (Yuma 69:2). The continued existence of Israel, of the Jewish people alone among the nations of the world is a result of Gd's attribute of NORA - His clear presence here on earth. In addition, all that Israel does to spread the knowledge of Gd and to succeed, despite the exile, all increases Gd's being known as NORA in the world. And this was the role of the ARON with the presence of the Shechina on it - to pronounce Gd's involvement in this world.

Given this, I choose to understand a phrase in ASHREI in an additional way: VE'EZUZ NOR'OTACHA YOMEIRU - when the nations of the world talk of Gd's being NORA, it is a sign that Gd is being GADOL - good to the Jewish people and having mercy on them, helping them to survive among the nations. Therefore, when the world's nations talk of this power of nora, then UGDULAT'CHA ASAP'RENA - I will tell of His goodness to us, the people of Israel.

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

### HAZAN ET HAOLAM KULO B'TUVO...

When I finally concentrated more on the words I was saying in Birkat HaMazon, something came to my attention that, as usual, I hadn't noticed before. One sentence says: HU NOTEIN LECHEM L'CHOL BASAR, KI L'OLAM CHASDO - He gives food to all flesh for His kindness is forever. This clearly spells out the message that Gd provides us with food. Then what does it mean when in the previous phrase it says HAZAN ET HA'OLAM KULO B'TUVO, B'CHEIN, B'CHESED, UVRACHAMIM - Who feeds the whole world in His goodness, with grace, with kindness, and with compassion? This sentence would seem to make the following one redundant. Why the need for both statements?

Maybe it can be understood in a different way. The word ZAN which we usually understand as meaning 'to provide food', also means 'to sustain', 'to fortify' (as in K'LEI ZAYIN - weapons). In this case, we can translate the first sentence as, "He sustains (fortifies) the whole world in His goodness" - and how does He do

this? By filling the world - B'CHEIN, B'CHESED, UVRACHAMIM - "with graciousness, kindness, and mercy." He 'injects' the world with these things. Just as we request of Him in the Shemoneh Esrei: SIM SHALOM... - Place peace, goodness, blessing, graciousness, kindness, and compassion upon us and upon all of Your people Israel.

Along the same vein, I'd like to suggest a similar understanding of something in the Shabbat Amida. Among other requests we make of HaShem in this paragraph, we ask: SAB'EINU MITUVECHA V'SAMCHEINU BISHU'ATECHA - we ask Him, in His goodness, to satiate us, we want Him to be good to us and gladden us with His salvation. Using the insight from the bentching, couldn't it be possible that we can understand this request in another way? SAB'EINU MITUVECHA - 'Gd, please fill us with Your goodness - that we should be good, as He is - Imitatio Dei. Then, indeed, if we behave as He does - or at least try to emulate Him - if we are good, then we will certainly deserve that which comes next in our requests, V'SAM'CHEINU BISHU'ATECHA - we will achieve the long-awaited Geula.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## ERETZ K'NA'AN

I've always wondered about the name K'na'an for the land of Israel. Hebrew names of people, places and things have always held importance for the Jew. We find many hidden meanings or hints to meanings within these words. The name Yisra'el is clearly explained in the Torah (B'reishit 32:29) and transferring that name to the land given to Ya'akov and his descendants is understandable.

But the name K'na'an puzzled me. L'HIKANA, to be subdued, would be implied in the name. But the nations who lived there were a far cry from a "subdued" people, so that didn't seem to make sense to me. If I choose to use that explanation as referring to the Jewish people, that in order to live in K'na'an, one must exhibit humility, then the name K'na'an should have remained and not been replaced.

I finally read something that made it possible for me to understand the name and a possible meaning within it. In discussing Parshat Va'etchanan, the sefer Mima'amakim (R. Moshe Shapiro zt"l) focuses on the verse: V'ASITA HAYASHAR V'HATOV - You shall do what is fair and good in the

eyes of HaShem, so that it will be good for you and you shall come and possess the good Land that HaShem swore to your forefathers (D'varim 6:18). We are commanded to behave in a way that is YASHAR. Gd demands YOSHER. In defining YOSHER, the author uses the picture of a straight line (YASHAR). A straight line demonstrates continuation from a starting point and a loyalty to that point of origin, not wavering to the sides. Chazal tell us that we are referred to as Yisra'el and Yeshurun because of the characteristic of YOSHER. Behaving in a way that is faithful to its source, to the way Gd told us to behave, is YASHRUT. That is what Yisra'el represents.

Given that YOSHER is represented by a straight line, one that indicates honesty and loyalty to the Torah, then anything that deviates from that line, that tries to bend it, essentially turning away from that which Gd wants, would be illustrated by a bent line.

"...UCHMA'ASEI ERETZ K'NA'AN... - ...and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you and do not follow their traditions (Vayikra 18:3). K'na'an has deceitful scales in his hand... (Hoshei'a 12:8). K'na'an is described as a nation which is deceitful - the opposite of the characteristics exem-

plified by Ya'akov - Yisra'el.

Now I am comfortable using this understanding to define K'na'an. A person who is the opposite of YASHAR is 'bent', not 'straight'. What is the posture of one who is NICHNA? I would suggest he is bent over. Those nations, indeed, 'bent' away from YASHRUT, demonstrated by the bent-over posture: K'na'an.

**\*\*[Interestingly, the same Mima'ama-kim gives a totally opposite understanding of the name K'na'an. See Parshat R'ei, p.81ff.]**

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## HOSHI'A ET AMECHA

...UR-EIM V'NAS'EIM AD HA-OLAM

'When Moshe Rabeinu was shepherding Yitro's sheep in the desert, one little lamb fled from him. He ran after it until it came upon pool of water where it stood and drank. When Moshe reached him, he said, 'I didn't know that you ran because you were thirsty. You are tired.' He then lifted it up on to his shoulder and went. HaShem said 'you have such mercy caring for the sheep of man, so too, I swear you will be the shepherd of Yisrael, my sheep' (Sh'mot Rabba 2:2).

According to this Midrash, Gd's choosing of Moshe to lead the Jewish people was based upon this incident. On the surface, this would seem a relatively "weak" reason to choose a leader. But maybe it's because Gd saw in Moshe's behavior a reflection of His own. After all, how does Gd "save/help" (HOSHI'A) His nation? He shepherds them: UR-EIM V'NAS'EIM AD HA-OLAM - He shepherds AND carries them just as Moshe did with that one lost kid.

As an additional aside, this phrase, UR-EM V'NAS'EIM can tell us some-

thing else as well. One of the reasons Moshe was hesitant to accept the role of "saving" the Jews was because he thought they were too far gone in terms of the level of TUM'A, impurity or because of LASHON HARA (depending upon which Midrash you read). The message of the SNEH, the burning bush, according to Rav Soloveitchik, where the fire remained in the middle and didn't affect the outside, was to demonstrate that the outside of a person could be gruff and thorny, while inside remained the "pintele Yid", the internal fire. This was, after all, what Moshe wondered: 'how it could burn inside and not affect the outside. The message was, indeed, transmitted and it was Moshe's job to lead the people (UR-EIM) but also to elevate them (NAS'EIM) to what they could really be - which is what would actually occur at Har Sinai, eventually.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## ...DAVAR TZIVA L'ELEF DOR; B'DVAR HASHEM SHAMAYIM NA'ASU

ZICHRU L'OLAM B'RITO, DAVAR TZIVA L'ELEF DOR - remember His covenant forever, the word He commanded for 1000 generations. (Divrei HaYamim Alef 16:8)

CHESED HASHEM MAL'A HA'ARETZ, BID'VAR HASHEM SHAMAYIM NA'ASU - the kindness of HaShem fills the earth. By the word of HaShem, the heavens were made. (T'hilim 33:6)

We are told by Chazal that HaShem "looked" into the Torah in order to create the world; the Torah was the blueprint of Creation. I see this hinted to in a combination of the above two verses.

In explaining the verse ZICHRU L'OLAM B'RITO, DAVAR TZIVA L'ELEF DOR', Rav Shimon Schwab (Rav Schwab on Prayer, p.135) says that DAVAR refers to the Torah and we are required to remember His covenant, the Torah that He commanded for 1000 generations. If I may be permitted to use this definition of DAVAR in another place, the verse in T'hilim when it says CHESED HASHEM MAL'A HA'ARETZ, B'DVAR HASHEM SHAMAYIM NA'ASU,

beyond stating that it was that the kindness of HaShem fills the world, it also tells us that B'DVAR HASHEM SHAMAYIM NA'ASU - the heavens were created through Gd's Torah.

Along the same lines, it's possible to understand the following verse in T'hilim, HASHEM MALACH, GEI'UT LAVEISH, LAVEISH HASHEM OZ HIT'AZAR. AF TIKON TEVEL BAL TIMOT - HaShem has begun His reign; He has girded Himself with majesty; Gd has clothed Himself, He has girded Himself with strength; now the world of men, too, shall be firmly established and sway no more (T'hilim 93:1) in a similar way. Rav Schwab refers to Rav S.R. Hirsch's explanation of OZ as meaning "invincible", something which cannot be overcome (T'hilim 8:3) "which is why the Torah is called OZ." If we take the word OZ to refer to the Torah, then this verse from T'hilim can be understood thusly: Gd has begun His reign... and girded Himself with Torah ('that source of strength that none can withstand' - S.R. Hirsch). Given what we are told, that Gd looked into the Torah and created the world, this tells us that it was with OZ, that AF TIKON TEVEL BAL TIMOT, He then set up the world so that "it would not sway". He created the world with Torah.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT #3

Aside from the previous entries on this blessing, another understanding of it can be gleaned from the insights of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l:

ET SH'NEI HAM'OROT HAG'DOLIM - "Gd's diminution of the Moon, P'GIMAT HAL'VANA, is symbolic of the fact that Gd left Creation incomplete. This imperfection is reflected in the fact that Man constantly struggles with nature and its catastrophes. Nature's hostility to Man is represented by P'GIMAT HAL'VANA. Gd wants Man to rule and be victorious over nature. Man must symbolically reverse P'GIMAT HAL'VANA and thus become a partner with Gd in Creation." (Chumash Masoret HaRav, B'reishit p.9)

The blessing that admits imperfection and lack of completion - BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT V'CHESRONAN - who creates many souls and their lackings - indicates that that is exactly how Gd wanted the world to be. Indeed, He wanted Man to partner with Him in the completing of the work and, in so doing, L'HACHAYOT BAHAM NEFESH KOL CHAI - to give life through them to all living beings; to add life to ourselves as individuals

and to Creation as well.

Seeing Gd as an integral part of this process with us is also evident in the words of this blessing. He created His many souls on this Earth with CHESRONOT, with needs and lacks, for one purpose, L'HACHAYOT BAHAM NEFESH KOL CHAI, to enable them to achieve true life - in this world and in the next. For, in effect, by creating us incomplete, Gd has set up a situation where we must turn to Him, relate to Him and ask Him for help in fulfilling these needs. As such, we must be constantly mindful of, and in touch with, Him. And this connectedness with Him, this ever-present consciousness is what gives our lives true meaning and value and paves the way for our share in the world to come.

## **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **TZUR YISRAEL, KUMA B'EZRAT YISRAEL...**

Rock of Israel, arise to the aid of Israel...

As I've mentioned in previous entries, we use the preposition BET to mean a number of different things. It can mean 'with', 'in', 'through', for example. With this in mind, I would sometimes think that the above statement in TZUR YISRAEL which immediately precedes the Shemoneh Esrei of Shacharit could be understood in a way other than the simple one of 'rise in helping Israel' - asking Gd to bring the ultimate redemption.

What if we could translate the BET here to mean 'through'? In other words, "through Your helping and redeeming Israel, You will 'rise' - Your reputation will become greater" (in the eyes of the world, of course). But it was difficult for me to justify or support this kind of idea until I paid attention to something in AZ YASHIR.

It says: Nations heard and trembled, terror gripped the inhabitants of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom were dismayed... by the power of Your arm, they were as still as stone.

The nations of the world, upon seeing what Gd had done in Egypt and at the Reed Sea, were terrified, dumb-founded and paralyzed - because of the might He displayed. So, perhaps, here too it isn't so far-fetched to think that the words in TZUR YISRAEL could also be understood as 'You will be seen as great, Your name and reputation will "rise" through Your saving of Israel.'

After a while, I realized that there is a much more clear and direct "proof" for this understanding. In the paragraph preceding the AZ YASHIR in the siddur, it states right out: V'CHAROT IMO HABRIT... and You made a covenant with him... You sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh, all his servants and all the people of his land, because You knew how arrogantly the Egyptians treated them. You created for Yourself renown that remains to this day.

The result of Your saving the Jews from Egypt through Your miraculous powers was that Your 'Name' became known. Your reputation grew. And this is what it could mean when we ask HaShem to help us - KUMA B'EZRAT YISRAEL - that through this help, His reputation will grow.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## YITPAR'DU

## KOL POALEI AVEN

For behold! Your enemies, HaShem, for behold! Your enemies shall perish, YITPAR'DU KOL POALEI AVEN - all doers of iniquity shall be dispersed. (Tehillim 92:10).

I've often wondered about the meaning of the phrase - YITPAR'DU KOL POALEI AVEN. YITPAR'DU literally, means they would be 'separated'. What does it mean that they would be 'separated'? The common translation is 'dispersed' or 'scattered'. Exactly what does that mean in terms of a punishment? Then I thought that maybe it could be related to another word with the same root - PEI-REISH-DALET - PERED, a mule. The mule is an end product in the truest meaning of the word. It cannot reproduce. The message, then, could be that POALEI AVEN, evildoers, would not be 'productive' - that they would not be able to continue on or have any lasting future, which is the exact opposite of what is said two verses later: TZADIK KATAMAR YIFRACH... the righteous shall flourish like the palm tree... planted in the house of

HaShem, they shall flourish (92:13-14); the righteous would flourish.

It is important for this point to be made here because we were just told 'the wicked flourish like grass and all evildoers thrive... (92;8) - which seems to be stating the opposite of what was said above. And even though we are told that, ultimately, it is "it is only that they may be destroyed forever", the implication of 'mass proliferation' is there. That is why we are told that this is not true, that it is really YITPAR'DU - they and their acts will not reproduce while "the righteous will flourish like the palm tree..."

This very idea is stated at the beginning of T'hilim when David describes the righteous man and says (1:3) "He is like a tree planted beside streams of water that yields fruit in season and whose leaf never withers"; while (1:4) "It is not so with the wicked. They are like chaff which the wind blows away." Simply, no reproduction, no continuation.

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## REFA'EINU HASHEM V'NEIRAFEI...

**HOSHI-EINU V'NIVASHEI'A KI T'HILATEINU ATA** - Heal us HaShem and we will be healed; save us, then we will be saved, for You are our praise.

The above request from the Sh'moneh Esrei is the first of the two 'material' requests we make in the first group of requests, the 'personal' ones. After asking for the more spiritual needs of knowledge, repentance, forgiveness and personal redemption, we suddenly jump, switch gears, as it were, and proceed to ask for health and sustenance. But I think the gap between the spiritual and physical can be closed if we look more closely at the wording in the request for health.

In trying to understand how we ask R'FA'EINU and then state V'NEIRAFEI; and similarly ask HOSHI-EINU and again state the obvious V'NIVASHEI'A, we are faced with something which, on the surface, makes no sense. If Gd heals us, of course, we will be healed. Rav Schwab (Rav Schwab, On Prayer,

p.455) suggests we look at the source for these words which come from Yirmiyahu 17:14, REFA'EINI HASHEM V'EIRAFEI, HOSHI-EINI V'IVASHEI'A KI T'HILATI ATA'. These words are preceded, however, by the statement in verse 9: The heart is crooked, more than any other organ and it is very sick... Given the context, we can see that the request R'FA'EINU' is not for physical healing but rather spiritual healing. As Rav Schwab reminds us, the purpose of all physical illness is to make us aware that our nefesh, our spiritual existence, is in need of repair. If Gd will aid in healing us spiritually (R'FA'EINU), then we will do our part to complete the process of spiritually healing ourselves via teshuva, repentance (V'NEIRAFEI), and then we will warrant the blessing for physical health. So, too, with the next sentence. Only when we say V'HA'ALEI R'FU'A SH'LEIMA... - bring complete recovery - are we addressing our physical needs. So, this bracha actually incorporates both the spiritual and the physical and, as such, serves as the link between the two sections of requests.

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

### V'ASU LI MIKDASH

### V'SHACHANTI B'TOCHAM

In explaining to Moshe how to build the Mishkan, HaShem tells him, as well, the purpose: They shall make for me a Mikdash and I will dwell among them. Grammatically speaking, we are aware of the fact that V'SHACHANTI B'TOCHAM - 'I will dwell among them should more properly be V'SHACHANTI B'TOCHO - I will dwell in it, since the Mikdash is what is being discussed. Regarding this intentional use of words, the Kotzker Rebbe concludes that this is to teach us that a person needs to build a Mishkan in his heart and HaShem will then dwell within. When asked further where Gd's Mishkan was, he responded - 'wherever you let Him in. Make your P'NIMIYUT - your insides - full of love and fear of HaShem and He will dwell there.' Certainly, once there was no longer the Mishkan or Beit HaMikdash, Gd's dwelling "among them" meant that He would be found in the hearts of the people themselves.

Given this explanation of that phrase, I would like to see it hinted to in a verse in T'hilim 78:60 - VAYITOSH

MISHKAN SHILO, OHEL SHIKEIN BA'ADAM - He abandoned the Mishkan of Shilo, the tent in which He dwelt among men. The Malbim interprets this as follows - "HaShem left the Mishkan because of sin. And the reason was because OHEL SHIKEIN BA'ADAM - the tent in which He dwelt among men - for the essence of the Mishkan, as being His dwelling place, was dependent upon man, if they were worthy. And since they were not worthy for Him to dwell among them, He abandoned the Mishkan.

This verse refers to the time when the Mishkan had been located in the city of Shilo and had been captured from there. But I think it is most noteworthy that the spelling of the city of Shilo here is very unusual. It is normally spelled SHIN-YUD-LAMED-HEI. Here, it is spelled SHIN-LAMED-VAV - which can be read as SHELO which means 'His'. That VAYITOSH MISHKAN SHELO means that Gd left "His Mishkan" and thus began the process of OHEL SHIKEIN BA'ADAM. That the focus and center of AVODAT HASHEM - of serving Gd, would be in the person himself as in V'SHACHANTI B'TOCHAM' as the Kotzker Rebbe held.

*Ed. note: With the next Beit HaMikdash, we will have a chance to do things in it the right way.*

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## MORE ON PURIM

Chazal ask (Chulin 139b): where is Esther hinted to in the Torah? It answers - V'ANOCHI HASTEIR ASTIR PANAI (D'varim 31:18) - from the phrase "I will surely hide My face". From this phrase, we can certainly see the hint - not only to her name but to the whole situation of Purim. Similarly, they ask the same about Mordechai: DICHTIV 'MOR D'ROR' (Sh'mot 30:23) and the Targum is 'MIRA DACHYA' - where is Mordechai hinted to in the Torah? For it says 'pure myrrh' which is translated in the Aramaic as mira dachya. Their conclusion is based upon the translation of Onkelos for the spice 'mor d'ror', which is 'mira dachya', sounding a little like Mordechai. I was given to understand that the reason Chazal are trying to find sources for these names in the Torah is because these names are not Hebrew/Jewish names, but rather Babylonian. And in order to strengthen the legitimate Jewish origins, they search for the hints in the Torah.

I must admit that I've always found it difficult to connect an Aramaic translation of a spice ingredient to the man Mordechai. It's easier for me

to see the connection between the name Esther and the verse Chazal cite than to see this regarding the name Mordechai. Fortunately, I have recently come across something that, if I use it correctly, hints to an incredible connection between 'mira dachya' and Mordechai, the hero.

In the Haftara for Shabbat of Parashat Zachor, the story of Sha'ul's mistake in not completely destroying Amalek, as he had been commanded, is told. After Shmuel has heard all he needs to from Sha'ul to "justify" his actions (or lack of same), he has Agag, the king of Amalek, brought before him to kill him. When Agag sees Shmuel, he says: ACHEIN SAR MAR HAMAVET (Shmuel Alef 15:32) - Indeed, the bitterness of death has turned aside. One explanation of the "bitterness of death" turning aside is simply that Agag had thought he would be killed by a "nobody" - a simple person - which would be humiliating for him. But when he sees Shmuel, he knows he will be killed by a person of greatness and this minimized the bitterness of death for him. But I recently found an understanding of the Chida on this, that opened the gate for me to think further. (see Vayomer Eliyahu, by R. Mordechai Eliyahu, p.103.) He points out that MAR in gimatriya (numeric value) equals AMALEK (both equal

240). With this, he says that Agag was hinting to Shmuel that the bitterness of death is less because he had impregnated his wife and he, therefore, would have descendants (one of whom, of course, was Haman) so the "bitterness left" him. What came from him was MAR, a continuation of Amalek and, therefore, the bitterness of death has lessened since he knows his descendants would continue to exist.

If I take the word MAR (as in 'mor d'ror' or mara dachya) to refer to Amalek, then using the Hebrew translation (not Aramaic) of 'dachya', as meaning to oppress and subdue, I end up with 'mara dachya' meaning "subduing Amalek". It is clearly not a translation (for 'dachya' in Aramaic does not mean subduing) but more of a "Rabbinic or homiletic" license to read a possible hidden message. At any rate, it helps make sense to me of the connection of these words with 'Mordechai'.

**Afterthoughts**  
**by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

# **MI HA'ISH**

## **HECHAFEITZ CHAYIM - 2**

In previous entries (Nov 2 & 30, 2021), I had suggested that it's possible to understand this verse as question and answer, rather than only a question: Who is one who desires life? One who loves to see 'good'. I recently saw an additional meaning in this.

In commenting on the davening in the blessings preceding the saying of the SH'MA, the Eitz Yosef comments on the words: TOV YATZAR KAVOD LISH'MO... "He has formed goodness to reveal His name", thusly: Just as in "give thanks to Gd because He is good", we see that HaShem is called 'good'. He understands the verse which is often explained to mean: HaShem created goodness (TOV), or it refers to the creation of the world ("and He saw that it was GOOD") which serves as great honor to His name. In a different way, he suggests that the word TOV is another name for HaShem, as in the phrase HODU LASHEM KI TOV - give thanks to HaShem for He is TOV. (The Artscroll and Koren Siddurs do translate it this way). If this is so, maybe we can understand MI HA'ISH... OHEIV YAMIM LIR'OT TOV in the same way: Who is the man who wants to earn life in OLAM HABA? One who loves days during which he can see TOV - HaShem, and he sees everything as touched and influenced by HaShem.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## ELOKAI, N'TZOR L'SHONI MEI'RA

I was trying to figure out a way to undo some lashon hara that I had spoken one evening because I had "lost it". It seems like it's only after the fact that the guilt over speaking lashon hara is effective. Even those times when we realize, during the act itself that we are wrong, it doesn't necessarily stop us from continuing. And so, it was this time, as well, that I didn't stop myself.

Somehow, I had to convince my audience from the previous evening that what I had said couldn't be accepted at face value, that I had been wrong, that there could have been extenuating circumstances to explain the incident to which I had reacted so negatively. And I had to make it sound real, not like I was a "holier than thou" person showing how wonderful I was because I was publicly admitting my guilt.

As usual, Gd came through with the solution. He allowed me to have an insight into part of the davening that I had been saying for years but that had eluded me, even when I did have proper kavana.

Three times a day, we end the sh'moneh esrei with - ELOKAI, N'TZOR... My Gd, guard my tongue from evil... Let my soul be silent to those who curse me and let my soul be as the dust to all things. We request that we receive Divine help in avoiding lashon hara and misuse of speech, in general. But what is the connection between that request and the ones that follow, of 'let my soul be silent to those who curse me and let my soul be as the dust to all things'? I had learned, previously, that 'let my soul be as dust' was an emphasis on the need for us to be extremely humble and to react to insults and slights as if we were 'dust', almost worthless. But now it spoke to me differently and I realized an alternative meaning that might also be appropriate and still related.

When am I particularly vulnerable to speaking lashon hara? What triggers it more often than not? My anger. If I feel someone has been guilty of what I consider a wrongdoing or is espousing a doctrine with which I strongly disagree, then very often my anger takes over as expressed in the words: 'let my soul be silent to those who curse me.' How would one (certainly, I) react to an antagonist - even if it weren't to the extent of one who curses me? It's a reasonable conclusion that it would be with

anger. Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch addresses this clearly as not only referring to those who actually curse me, but to similar triggers: "He implores Gd to be at his side so that his lips and tongue may not become soiled with evil or enter the employ of falsehood and deceit. He needs the aid of Gd if he is to remain in control of himself, if he is to permit no insult to provoke his wrath if he is to be able to remain calm and silent even in the face of a curse" (Hirsch Siddur, p.158-159). And if my reaction is at all indicative of a common behavior, then this is the message here: Please, RIBONO SHEL OLAM let NAFSHI TIDOM, let me remain silent, help me control my words in all situations, even - maybe especially - in response to M'KAL'LAI to someone who has angered me. Because that is exactly when I am most likely to fall prey to the sin of lashon hara. If, however, I am able to respond as NAFSHI K'AFAR LAKOL TIHYEH, as Dovid HaMelech responded to Shim'i ben Gera, then I will be able to succeed in N'TZOR L'SHONI MEI'RA.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## YOM L'YOM YABI'A OMER...

Day to day utters speech and night to night speaks knowledge.

When concentrating on these words from T'hilim 19, which we say in the context of Shacharit on Shabbat, I started to pay attention to the different way in which the two times of day mentioned, are described. YOM - the day: YABI'A - expresses OMER - speech; tales; stories. But the night, LAYLA, Y'CHAVEH - bespeaks; proclaims; communicates DA'AT - knowledge.

I believed there is a reason, beyond poetic usage, that these different descriptions were chosen; a deeper message lies within. What one experiences during the 'day' when things are bright and clear, causes a person to tell of things. But their import isn't necessarily great, as can be seen through the use of the verb YABI'A - to express. This word is related to BA'ABU'A - a bubble - something which has little or no substance and which is short-lived.

Nighttime, however, when things are dark and tend to be scary; when life

brings things our way that are difficult and not particularly enjoyable, that Y'CHAVEH DA'AT. Y'CHAVEH - as in CHAVAYA - a living experience; that creates real knowledge. That is what leaves a deep impression, that is what we learn from.

YOM L'YOM YABI'A OMER - what happens during the "days" of our lives, we share and talk about. V'LAYLA L'LAYLA Y'CHAVEH DA'AT - but what occurs during the "nights" of our lives, that knowledge which is etched into our consciousness, those are lessons we don't forget.

## **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **GADOL HASHEM UMHULAL M'OD...**

**V'LIGDULATO EIN CHEIKER - Gd is great and is to be greatly praised; His greatness is unfathomable - T'hilim 145 (Ashrei)**

**MA GAD'LU MA'ASECHA HASHEM, M'OD AMKU MACHSHEVOTECHA - How great are Your deeds, Lord, and how very deep Your thoughts - T'hilim 92**

**We know in our heads that everything Gd does is good and is for the good, even though, sometimes, the good we receive from Him doesn't feel that way. It often takes years to be able to look back upon something we lived through and saw as "bad" to realize how good it really was. Maybe we can see this as hinted to in the davening that we do every day. In Ashrei we say: GADOL HASHEM... When we describe HaShem as GADOL, one of its meanings is His greatness in giving and in His doing good. (I wonder if the word "good" goes back somewhere to GADOL or even is related to GD.) This phrase in Ashrei tells us that EIN CHEIKER - there is no way of successfully investigating and understanding G'DULATO - we**

**can't understand His "goodness" when it doesn't feel so good to us.**

**Similarly, in T'hilim 92 which we say on Shabbat, it tells us MA GAD'LU... - how "good" are Your deeds and M'OD AM'KU... - but Your accountings and thoughts, Your reasons and intentions in that goodness is too deep for us to fathom. We can only trust.**

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## KOL ADAM NIF'AL

## K'FI P'ULOTAV

"Every man is acted upon according to his actions"

The book of Vayikra contains all the details of the various sacrifices that would be brought on different occasions. It's difficult for us in our times to understand the purpose of these sacrifices as being more than symbolic; that bringing the korban symbolizes our coming closer (karov) to HaShem and offering the animal as if we were offering up ourselves. So, we need to look deeper. The reason we need the physical sacrifice and that simply understanding what it represents is not sufficient, is because in order to perform a mitzva in its most perfect form, we need to be aided by the physical action involved and not simply by our thoughts. "A person needs to perform the action of the mitzva in a way that involves the parts of his body as in KOL ATZMOTAI TOMARNA... - all my bones will say... (T'hilim 35:10, Minchat Yisrael - Vayikra, p.6 - Rav Yisrael Druck).

As the Sefer HaChinuch says in explaining the detailed laws involved

in eating the Pesach sacrifice: Why would Gd command us to do all this just to remember the miracle of the Exodus? Isn't it sufficient to learn about the event and tell our children so that it wouldn't be forgotten? "You must know, that a man is acted upon according to his actions; and his heart and all his thoughts always follow after the actions that he does - whether good or bad... for the hearts are drawn after the action... For it is known and true that every man is acted upon according to his actions, as we have said. (Parshat Bo; the prohibition of breaking a bone of the Korban Pesach)

Regarding the original point, about the need for the sacrifices, even there, now that we don't perform these actions, we are told that UNSHALMA FARIM S'FATEINU - we can perform that mitzva by simply using our mouths. Notice it doesn't say "learning about it" but we need to actively use our mouths to substitute for these sacrifices.

Although I was already aware of the principle stated in Sefer HaChinuch, it only occurred to me recently that maybe we can see this put into action in one of the most common parts of our prayer: the Sh'ma. We are told in the first paragraph: These words should be 'on your heart'. This is

thought, belief. But in order to guarantee that there will be a greater chance that this will happen, the Torah suggests how to put "these words" into physical action which would surely lead to keeping them "on our hearts". We are told: we need to teach it -

1) V'SHINANTAM L'VANECHA - to our children by

2) V'DIBARTA BAM - speaking about it

3) B'SHIVTECHA B'VEITECHA - at home

4) UVLECHT'CHA VADERECH - on the road

5) UVSHACHB'CHA - before resting

6) UVKUMECHA - upon awakening.

Additionally, there are T'filin to wear, and we are required, as well, to write these words on the doorposts of our homes. Quite a lot of actions to ensure "keeping these words on our hearts".

I don't know if this was Gd's intention when dictating these words to Moshe but it would certainly seem to be quite a coincidence, wouldn't it?

## **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

## **HU NOTEIN OZ V'TA'ATZUMOT LA'AM**

You are awesome, Gd, in Your holy places. It is the Gd of Israel who gives might and strength to the people. May Gd be blessed! (T'hilim 68:36)

The above verse also appears in our daily davening, in the HODU. Basically, we are thanking Gd for having given His nation strength. Rav S.R. Hirsch defines OZ as 'irresistible' or 'invincible' (see The Hirsch T'hilim 8:3), something that cannot be overcome, and that is why Torah is called OZ (Shir HaShirim Rabba 2:3;3). With this identification of OZ as Torah, we can understand the above phrase as meaning that He gave us OZ - the Torah - and, in that way, gave His people invincibility. If we would only keep the Torah, we would, indeed, be invincible.

Additionally, if we use this meaning of OZ, we can understand the famous phrase - HASHEM OZ L'AMO YITEIN, HASHEM YIVAREICH ET AMO BASHALOM - HaShem gives OZ to His nation, He blesses His nation with peace - in a similar manner: HaShem

gave the Torah to His people, thus blessing them with peace. Not only is the Torah the source of our invincibility, it is also the source of peace.

I recently came across a commentary of R' Zalman Sorotzkin zt"l in his Oznayim LaTorah that would support this understanding. The Mechilta comments in Parshat Yitro on VAYICHAN SHAM YISRAEL - although Rashi says they camped there as 'one man with one heart', all the other encampments were with arguments and disagreements. Rav Sorotzkin points out that there are various things that will serve to unite people, ultimately creating a nation (language, customs, etc.). The one single factor that most often would lead to nationhood, would be a common ancestor, one family. But this was not always a guarantee. We can see this in Avraham's family (Yitzchak and Yishmael); in Yitzchak's family (Yaakov and Eisav); and even in Yaakov's family, that the brothers didn't always get along. We also see this in the way Yaakov blesses them, comparing them to very different animals, people with different natures and abilities. Even in Egypt there was evidence of LASHON HARA among them. But it was only when they finally reached Mt. Sinai, to accept the 'yoke of heaven' with the receiving of the Torah, that

something happened. The Torah was something that touched the common element in the soul of Israel - The entire nation responded together and said "Everything that HaShem has spoken we shall do!" (Yitro 19:8). And later on, in D'varim, Moshe says "On this day, you became a nation - this was the day on which they entered into a covenant with Gd, referring back to the acceptance of the Torah. The day when they received the Torah was the day they truly became a nation. It was only the Torah that unified the Jews into a nation. And when there is unity, there is peace.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## B'SHUVI

### ET SHVUTEICHEM L'EINEICHEM

"At that time, I will bring you home, and at that time I will gather you, for I will give you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I bring back your exiles before your eyes, says the Lord" (Tzefania 3:20).

We daven for the ingathering of the exiles (kibutz galuyot) and make the mistake of thinking that its purpose is simply to bring all Jews back to Israel. But the reason we want all Jews out of exile involves more than that. For when we all return, it means that the Shechina, Gd's presence, will then return as well; for we know that Gd promised us He would be with us in exile. And so, if we are lacking all Jews here, we are lacking - more significantly - the presence of the Shechina.

With this backdrop, I prefer to understand a quote from our morning daily davening, from Tzefania differently than it is usually translated: ...Fulfill for us, Lord our Gd, that which is written... "At that time, I will bring you home and at that time I will gather you, for I will give

you renown and praise among all the peoples of the earth WHEN I BRING BACK YOUR EXILES BEFORE YOUR EYES..." The phrase in uppercase translates the words B'SHUVI ET SHVUTEICHEM as 'when I return your exiles'. The word SHUVI, however, in its correct grammatical form doesn't mean 'when I bring back; it means 'when I return - when I come back'. If so, the simple meaning of this would use the word ET in its meaning as 'with' and thus be: "When I return with your captives". Gd's Shechina will, indeed, return when we have all returned.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## Jewish Brilliance

The Jews have always been known to be creative and productive. The number of Jews who have won Nobel prizes in various areas is clearly out of all proportion compared with the rest of the nations in the world, given our small number. Today, Israel is known to be one of the top - if not the top - nations producing start-up companies with the newest technology. I'm sure our anti-Semitic friends go crazy trying to understand this. Rather than imitate a successful people, they would rather malign us, claiming that the Jews are in charge of everything and are "taking over the world". But really, how come we are so smart, successful, innovatively far ahead of the rest of the world?

Other than feeling that we are certainly special people, I never really gave any serious thought to this phenomenon. But in reading material from the shiurim of Rav Moshe Shapiro zt"l, I think I came across the answer. He discusses how the six days of Creation all lead up to the destiny of Shabbat: "When the Creator gave the Torah to us, He gave us the power of creation. And the meaning is that He granted us the

power of creating true existence, of creating the very same existence that He created. Accordingly, when the Torah was given to us, it gave us the ability to form six days and the Shabbat on our own. It gave us the ability to form a system of time, focused on a destination that is part of it. This is practically the simple definition of the giving of the Torah - the "giving" of the power to create worlds." (Reflections and Introspections: Sabbath & Prayer; Torah Insights of Rav Moshe Shapiro by Moshe Antebi; p.135).

There you have it. We received the Torah and with it, the ability to create new worlds. And that's exactly what we're doing.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## NOTEN LECHEM

L'CHOL BASAR KI L'OLAM CHASDO

Who gives food to all flesh, His loving kindness is forever.

I have never been able to clearly understand this penultimate line of T'hilim 136 in terms of how it fits in at this point. Not surprisingly, the psalm begins with the greatness and kindness of Gd from the time of Creation and then jumps to the episode of Egypt and our redemption (this is the same sequence as in the previous psalm, 135). And although the line of NOTEN LECHEM L'CHOL BASAR is certainly a proper addition in terms of praising Gd for all His chessed - not just for us but for the whole world - it seems disconnected to me. But when I focused on my earlier understanding of SHEB'SHIFLENU ZACHAR LANU - Who remembered us in our lowly state, I was able to see a possible connection between all of those final lines. I understood that phrase as underlying the importance and value of humility, meaning that if we want HaShem to "remember" us and show His chessed to us, we need to show SHIFLEINU - our humility. Thus:

V'NATAN ARTZAM NACHALA - And gave their land as a heritage - Gd gave the land of those kings defeated, to the children of Israel. To whom?

NACHALA L'YISRAEL AVDO - A heritage for His servant Israel - to the Jewish people when they behaved as AVDO - when they served Gd properly.

SHEB'SHIFLENU ZACHAR LANU - for when we behaved with humility, He remembered us and...

VAYIFR'KEINU MITZAREINU - And rescued us from our tormentors - saved us from our enemies so that we might retain that land that He gave us.

NOTEN LECHEM L'CHOL BASAR - Who gives food to all flesh - And if the land is truly ours, we will have the Beit HaMikdash which, as we know, is the source of all blessing to the world: "As long as the service in the Holy Temple exists, the world is blessed and rains come in their time (Avot d'Rabi Natan 4:85, al ha'avoda); as well as the words of the Zohar on Parashat T'ruma: Through the Shulchan and the Altar, food comes down to the whole world.

Not such an obvious or strong connection, but maybe...

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## L'HITLONEIN

### to complain

In this week's Parsha, there is an episode where the people are complaining: VAYHI HA'AM K'MIT'ON'NIM... - The people took to complaining. The Torah doesn't specify what the complaints were but the commentators offer their various opinions. Regardless of the reason, I've always seen the word MIT'ON'NIM as related to the word ANI - I. Whether or not this is true, I read a lesson in it: complaining this way is usually all about 'me'; it's something I don't want, I don't like, I don't agree with, etc.

In a similar way, I find I can learn something about the Hebrew word L'HITLONEIN, to complain. When things go "wrong", we complain. When something happens that displeases us because it makes life more difficult, or because it was unexpected; or, perhaps, it didn't fit into our plans, or even if it was because it really was painful and trying, or worse - we complain. And the complaining isn't really intended to make things better; it usually serves the purpose of venting - unless, of course, the complaining is to the right people or agency who can

correct the problem. But, otherwise, we complain to relieve our distress and discomfort. And although this doesn't mean we aren't justified in our feelings, it does indicate a lacking nonetheless.

What makes me say this? The Hebrew word for complaining is L'HITLONEIN. Perhaps it is related to the root for LINA - sleeping. And if so, it may be implying that part of us is "asleep" when we complain: the part that should recognize that whatever happens to us is for the good - all that HaShem does is for the good - that there isn't anything that occurs to us, whether we perceive it as good or bad, that isn't, ultimately, for our own benefit. That's how Gd functions. It's all for our own good. And so, when we fail to recognize this, even though it is sometimes very hard to do so, it could be because we are MITLON'NIM - an important part of us is LAN, asleep to that critical reality.

[Apropos of the above, the word ELEM - youth - would seem to express a similar message. Perhaps a youth is called an ELEM/ALMA because this period of life is characterized by HITALMUT - an obliviousness to what is going on in the real world, to consequences of certain behaviors, and replaced with a preoccupation with their own teenage world.]

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

### Thoughts on parts of the Amida

A) In the opening paragraph of the Amida, we describe Gd in a number of ways. One of the characteristics that we list is GOMEL CHASADIM TOVIM - Who bestows acts of lovingkindness. It occurred to me that these familiar and simple words might say more than the obvious. The primary and most important meaning is that Gd is a GOMEL CHESSED; He acts with kindness and we benefit from this. Indeed, the bottom line about Gd is just this - He is a GOMEL CHESSED. But I was thinking that maybe this could also be saying an additional thing. In Hebrew, when a person is an expert at something, the noun describing the person is often vowelized with a PATACH and then a KAMATZ - e.g., sailor = MA-LAWCH; painter - TZA-YAWR; writer = KA-TAWV; tourist = TA-YAWR; violinist = KA-NAWR, and so on. (In Israeli pronunciation, no distinction is made between a PATACH and a KAMATZ GADOL, so TA-TAWR, above sounds like TAYAR.) Is it possible that CHASADIM here could refer to those people who are adept at chessed? So that the meaning would be that Gd repays those who are CHASADIM, with TOVIM - with good

things. Of course, this could not be a primary meaning because it would be scary to think that Gd does this kind of thing only to people at that level. And we know that most of us, unfortunately, do not fall into that category. Oh well; just a thought.

#### B) Birkat HaShanim (prosperity)

For a while now, I have been saying this b'racha in the Amida with a different understanding in my mind. Although the blessing is really a request for good produce and a plentiful year, I find that by focusing on a different meaning, this becomes more personal for me.

We say BARECH ALENU... ET HASHANA HAZOT V'ET KOL MINEI T'VU'ATA L'TOVA - Bless this year for us... and all its types of produce for good. The simple meaning of T'VU'ATA and the one which makes the most sense in a blessing that requests the appropriate amount of rainfall, is "its produce". Since my mind is usually occupied with concerns about the future, what the year will bring for my family, for all of Israel, the word T'VU'ATA has come to mean something else to me. I understand it as all that will come - TAVO - in the coming year. T'VU'ATA - all that will come with this year. So that I am asking "this year for good" and that KOL T'VU'ATA - all that comes with it also to be good.

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

### MIMITZRAYIM G'ALTANU ... B'RA'AV ZANTANU

You redeemed us from Egypt... and freed us from the house of bondage. In famine You nourished us; in times of plenty You sustained us...

In the Nishmat prayer which we say on Shabbat and Yom Tov, we basically praise and thank Gd for the myriad good things he has done and has provided for us. Among the many things listed are the times He has saved us from ill fortune. It is clear that the p'shat - simple meaning, here is readily understandable and means exactly what it says. I do find, however, an additional level to one of the phrases. As I suggested in a previous entry about Birkat HaMazon, I would like to translate the word ZANTANU as meaning not only 'You fed us during times of famine', but that through RA'AV, through hunger and famine, You strengthened us, You "armed" us (to arm = L'ZAYEIN). This meaning would be consistent with the verses in Eikev (8: 2-5): "You shall remember the road on which HaShem... led you... so as to afflict you, to test you...; He afflicted you and caused you hunger...; [so that] You should know in your heart that just as a father will

chastise his son, so HaShem, your Gd, chastises you."

There are times when, for our own benefit, even when it doesn't feel like that, Gd makes things hard for us. In T'hilim (23:4), we are told SHIVT'CHA U'MISH'ANTECHA HEIMA Y'NACHA-MUNI - Your rod and staff, they will comfort me. Metzudot David on these words says, 'when You strike me with the rod of afflictions and then You return and support me with Your staff, that consoles me and I can see that you haven't left me to happenstance'.

Given the above Metzudot David, we can suggest that that is why immediately after B'RA'AV ZANTANU is UVSAVA KILKALTANU - in times of plenty You sustained us - showing, indeed, that 'you have returned and supported me'.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## ASHREI HAGEVER

### ASHER T'YASRENU KAH

(T'hilim 94:12)

Fortunate is the man whom Gd afflicts.

These past few months have brought with them, unfortunately, numerous incidents of terror; brutal, callous, cold-blooded murdering of innocent men, women and children at bus stops, driving in cars, buying gas at a gas station... It reminds me of the wave of stabbings that were occurring back in October of 2015. Given the feeling of utter helplessness since these "people" are coming out of the woodwork, one is moved to do whatever he can for protection. So, unless you have some form of weaponry, we need to be extremely alert and are, perhaps, nervous and feeling vulnerable. But, knowing that only Gd can stop this, there is precious little the individual can do. And that's where our Yiddishkeit comes in. We recite T'hilim, we daven, cry to HaShem and are M'FASHPEISH B'MA'ASAV - we 'investigate our ways'.

Brachot 5a - If a person sees that afflictions are befalling him, he

should investigate his deeds as it is stated: "let us search and examine our ways and return to HaShem" (Eicha 3). If he examined his deeds and did not find anything, he should attribute (his afflictions) to neglect of Torah study as it is stated: "Fortunate is the man whom Gd afflicts and whom You teach out of Your Torah."

Why is one whom Gd afflicts fortunate? One reason might be because of what these afflictions lead to. Usually, this is understood as meaning that a person will the 'examine his ways'. Scrutinize his behavior to correct those things that might have brought on these YISURIM, to perhaps, see what lesson Gd is trying to teach him. Another possibility is also that as a result of this message from Gd, a person will be moved to learn Torah.

Unfortunately, during the relatively short period of time that Israel has been in existence, there have been numerous times of YISURIM. Often, the reaction of the Jewish world is to set up a SHMIRA to protect the Jews in Israel by arranging 24/7 learning of Torah. And we, too, as individuals, take upon ourselves extra Torah learning to do. The ultimate protection. How 'fortunate' is that.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## V'CHULAM... ZEH MIZEH...

V'CHULAM M'KAB'LIM ALEIHEM OL  
MALCHUT SHAMAYIM ZEH MIZEH...

All accept upon themselves, one from another, the yoke of the kingdom of heaven, granting permission to one another...

In their brilliance, Chazal will often include messages that lie under the words of the prayers that they have written. I believe that this is the case in the above words which are a part of the kedusha in p'sukei d'zimra. Notice how the mal'achim first accept upon themselves the yoke of Gd's kingdom and then give each other "permission", so to speak, L'HAKDISH L'YOTZRAM, to sanctify the One Who formed them. Maybe we should learn from them. First, we need to accept upon ourselves 'the yoke of the kingdom of heaven' and all that this entails: behaving in a way that would receive Gd's approval; then and only then, can we get to the point where we can "permit" each other to continue and behave L'HAKDISH L'YOTZRAM, in a way that is fitting before the Almighty. Only then can we "fargin" each other to be who we are and to behave the way we do and look beyond imperfections

and frailties and faults and not be judgmental of each other.

## **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **T'KA B'SHOFAR GADOL L'CHEIRUTENU**

#### **Sound the great shofar for our freedom**

During this period of the 'three weeks' (BEIN HAMEITZARIM), it is difficult if not impossible for the mood of a believing Jew not to be affected. Hopefully, we are more aware of the consequences of our actions as individuals and, more specifically, of our behavior as part of Klal Yisrael. The specter of SIN'AT CHINAM - baseless hatred - serves as a backdrop to much of our days. As a result, it's very easy to view things pessimistically and, consequently, to be influenced to read things with a more fatalistic eye. Unfortunately, this feeling is exacerbated by the current state of affairs within the population or, more specifically, with the vocal minority which has served to re-awaken SIN'AT CHINAM. That is why the request in the AMIDA for the ingathering of exiles has begun to scare me.

How nice it would be to innocently and naively envision Eliyahu HaNavi blowing a shofar to signal the end of galut for us. V'SA NEIS L'KABEITZ

GALUYOTENU - raise high the banner to gather our exiles - and we would all rally around the standard-bearer to return to our Holy Land. But how often in the prophets do we hear the use of the word SHOFAR in the context of war? Can a shofar be sounded in the city and the nation not tremble? - Amos 3:6. This, and in more places. Are we really saying that the ingathering of exiles will come as a result of a SHOFAR GADOL - a big war (Gd forbid)? And what only serves to increase my fear is the verse in Yirmiyahu which incorporates both phrases we use to express the cause of the ingathering of the exiles: MEI-AI MEI-AI... AD MATAI... My innards, my innards - I shudder; the walls of my heart - my heart murmurs within me; I cannot be silent for you have heard the sound of the shofar... How long will I see (the banner of the enemy) and hear the sound of the shofar? (Yirmiyahu 4:19,21)

This would seem to suggest that the more probable cause for the ingathering of exiles will not be as wonderful as a shofar blast by Eliyahu, but something significantly less pleasant - a war! And given the time we are living in, can we ignore the truth in this warning? And if that is what it means, why are we asking Gd to do this for us in this way? Why

not in the manner of  
V'LIRUSHALAYIM IR'CHA B'RACHA-  
MIM TASHUV - And to Your city  
Yerushalayim may You return in  
compassion. Why not ask for great  
mercy regarding the ingathering of  
exiles as well?

There clearly seems to be a double  
message. The shofar: a foreboding  
blast that war is coming, or a joyous  
call that redemption is nigh. Maybe  
it's the same idea as always: ANI  
HASHEM, B'ITAH ACHISHENAH"  
(Yishayahu 60:22) - I am HaShem, I  
will hasten it in its time. It will be  
Eliyahu if we deserve it, or a war, Gd  
forbid, if not.

Maybe we should jump the gun and  
return on our own not just to the  
Land, but return to HaShem, to a  
feeling of AHAVAT CHINAM -  
baseless love as HaRav Kook taught -  
and not wait for outside circum-  
stances to force us to do so.

## **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **K'DOSHIM TIHYU - IMITATIO DEI**

My davening is usually rote. That doesn't mean without kavana, but it means I see it, as I usually do, with no deeper meaning. That's normal and probably how it is with everyone. But that changes when circumstances around me change. They can be personal, close to home, or they can be events which are occurring in the larger world: in my community, country, or the world.

Right now, the country is going through a trying time where different parts of the population are demonstrating for or against the government. And although this kind of thing isn't that unusual for Jews, it has taken on more importance given the political ideology (and the politicians behind it) that fuels it, as well as the financial backing (from outside Israel as well as inside) that is encouraging the split. The media know how to take advantage of this and exploit the situation for all it's worth. Truth, as usual, gets lost in the reports as long as the sensationalism is present. Because of that, the situation appears significantly worse than it is. Regardless, it isn't wonderful that

the nation is so publicly divided and that the world has found fit to judge and criticize, based upon all the misinformation it has been fed. Internally, we feel the tension and, personally, I worry more from a religious perspective.

Jew vs Jew is never a good thing. Historically speaking, there have been disastrous results. This is what led to the Churban of the Second Beit HaMikdash. Although, unfortunately, we still don't have the Beit HaMikdash, we know that Gd is watching and taking notes. I can't imagine He is too thrilled with what is going on. Chanting "we want Mashiach now!" isn't going to do it. Saying that is meaningless if it isn't backed up by actions and, in terms of being more united, it isn't easy.

Aside from the obvious, what does Gd expect from us? K'DOSHIM TIHYU - He wants us to be like Him: ACHAREI HASHEM ELOKEICHEM TEILEICHU (R'ei 13:5) - You shall walk after Gd. How does one "walk after Gd"? Rashi: 'Is it possible for one to walk after the Shechina? ... Rather, follow His midot: Just as Gd clothes the naked, so you should clothe the naked; just as Gd visits the sick, so should you visit the sick... (Sota 14a).

This idea is nothing new. It is called Imitatio Dei - imitating, emulating Gd.

It's interesting that it's relatively "easy" to copy Gd in acts of chessed, visiting the sick, helping the poor, and the like. But Gd has other attributes that we choose to ignore. All of this has influenced me to see in my davening an additional meaning to a very standard part of our daily prayers. We say in the Sh'ma every day that HASHEM ELOKEINU, HASHEM ECHAD. He is One. It means more than that He is unique in the universe and that He is alone. I believe it also implies a oneness where there could be a split. HaShem - the Y-H-V-H, the merciful Gd is also Elokeinu - the Gd of din, of justice, the opposite of Y-H-V-H, and yet, He is One - unified. For some reason, we have chosen to ignore this trait. Why don't we try to emulate that one-ness? Why can't we be unified (even when not threatened from outside)?

We did it once before VAYICHAN SHAM YISRA'EL NEGED HAHAR - and Israel camped opposite the mountain. Rashi: K'ISH ECHAD B'LEIV ECHAD - as One person, with One heart. We can certainly do it again. We must.

# **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

## **What is my AVODA?**

I have noticed that, for me, it is easier to see the Hand of Gd in positive events, and even in the negatives of life, if my emotions are not tied into them. What do I mean? In general, it is easier for me to deal with issues, major or minor, as long as they are not in the realm of the spiritual. When the disappointment or 'negative' impinges upon that spiritual area, however, it seems to take on a different feel for me so that it becomes more difficult to see Gd's orchestrating the events.

To illustrate: why can't I go to shul every Shabbat? Why couldn't I go to the shiur I wanted to attend? Why can't I find the proper time to daven? If these were issues that were not religious ones, if it were something like not being able to go shopping or catch the bus that I wanted to get, I find that I handle those situations much better.

But I need to be honest. We need to see the truth and be honest with ourselves in order to see His Hand everywhere! We think, and sincerely believe, we want that which is spiritually and religiously desirable. When those intentions and desires

are thwarted, we feel lacking - like we've missed something - in that most important area. Why is Gd keeping us from becoming "all that we can be" in a spiritual sense?

The answer is to simply admit that we are wrong in how we evaluate the events in our daily lives. What we have decided is our spiritual necessity has been deemed otherwise by Gd. If I can't daven because I have to take care of children, to help a friend who needs someone to talk to, etc.; if I can't go to shul because there are children who need me, and the like, then the conclusion must be that that is what Gd wants of me. And that is no less a spiritual fulfillment. That mitzva is the one that Gd has determined I be involved with, not with shul or davening.

And not only is it not of less importance, it is probably of greater importance because it is Gd Who has brought this all about. If my kavana in davening is disturbed because I feel an obligation (not a charitable feeling but more of a guilty one) to help the person next to me follow along in the davening and know where the place is, then I cannot dismiss that act as meaningless and interfering. Perhaps, that is just what Gd wants of me at that time, as opposed to my remaining selfishly wrapped up in a

cocoon with only myself and Gd. And even though it feels very different and doesn't provide the satisfaction I sought or fill the religious need within me, it is the avoda Gd has handed me.

When I daven Mincha in a private corner on a private street hidden by parked cars, I am annoyed that a man who sees me, approaches and asks for tzedaka. I wasn't in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei, only Ashrei, and I could have responded. But I didn't, just motioning that I was davening and couldn't give him anything. Why? When he left, I felt horrible. Gd had given me an opportunity to do an important mitzva and I missed it because I was so sure that my davening was more important. Guess what? I was wrong. Searching for the man when I finished davening proved futile. I could only mourn the lost opportunity Gd had given me. If I am so ready to thank Gd when He brings me an unexpected opportunity to do a mitzva like paying someone's bus fare, giving directions, helping someone who has fallen get up from the ground, and the like - why am I so oblivious to such mitzvot when they come my way when they impinge upon what I had considered to be my spiritual fulfillment?

Why? Because the "halacha", according to me, blinded my ability to be

honest with myself.

How often does this occur in our lives when our plans are disturbed, and what we thought we could or should do, we can't? I'm sure, very often, and this is in both the material and spiritual realms. We don't pause to examine what our true 'avoda' is at that moment. Honesty requires that we look beyond the moment and notice Who is above, conducting the music of our lives.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## LISHMAT KOL CHAI

**The soul of all that lives shall bless Your name... we could not thank You enough... for even one of the... favors You did for our ancestors and for us. You redeemed us from Egypt... freed us from... bondage. In famine You nourished us; in times of plenty You sustained us. You delivered us from the sword, saved us from plague, and spared us from serious and lasting illness...**

I have always had a little trouble with the above excerpt from NISHMAT. We are thanking Gd for all the good He has done to and for us by saving us in all the listed cases and more. But it bothered me because He is the One Who put us into all these situations to begin with. Some we deserved and some not (e.g., slavery in Egypt). So what, exactly are we thanking Him for?

Since this is a kind of 'blasphemous' way of thinking, I knew this couldn't be the message being conveyed and I was happy when I finally (quite belatedly) realized the true meaning behind all this - at least I think it is.

We are thanking Gd for all His goodness, listing only the acts of salvation but, contained within those

very phrases that include the trouble, we are admitting that even those ills that befell us were for our own benefit and were, indeed, acts of chessed.

We are taught, after all, that our experience in Egypt was a necessary prerequisite for our becoming molded into one nation. Similarly, the other disasters, punishments, or whatever you would label them, were, ultimately, for our own good, even though they might have been painful and difficult.

Support for this idea is in this week's Parshat Eikev. Gd tells the people to remember their traveling in the desert for 40 years - L'MA'AN ANOT'CHA L'NASOT'CHA... (8:2-3) - so as to afflict you, to test you ... He afflicted you and let you hunger... And further on in 8:16, ...in order to afflict you and in order to test you, to do good for you in your end.

But rather than leave us languishing in those negative situations, Gd did redeem us and permitted us to regroup and proceed forward. Whether we chose to learn the intended lesson or not, was up to us. But indeed, as it continues in NISHMAT - until now Your mercies have helped us. Your love has not forsaken us.

And so will it continue: May You, HaShem, our Gd, never abandon us.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## HAKEIL... V'HANORA

When I succeed in davening Sh'moneh Esrei with kavana, my mind tends to wander to different meanings of the texts. I've lately begun to see something that is obviously due to the fact that we are approaching Rosh HaShana and my mind is on trying to see where I am lacking, what I will be held accountable for, etc. While I always focus on the description of Gd as GADOL, GIBOR, NORA as having the traditional meanings of GADOL - giving, kind; GIBOR - withholding, withdrawing; NORA - the combination of both, something else occurred to me.

When Gd is GADOL to us, He is giving, kind, a ba'al chessed', if you will. We certainly feel good. When He is holding back, or in MIDAT HADIN, we are not so sure - unless His holding back is in the form of KOVEISH ET YITZRO - overcoming His role as judge and giving in to mercy - and thus is not angry with us. But NORA - which has always posed a problem for me - means some combination of the two. We use the word nora to connote 'awesome'. Now, 'awesome' can mean simply a being of greatness that

inspires awe; but NORA also tends to refer to something terrible - that's the word we use to describe something awful. Why should this be, if it is merely a combination of the two previous character traits?

The word is a form of YIR'A - fear. What is the fear? I think it's because when we have a combination of GADOL and GIBOR, we don't really know what to expect and are at a loss. What is interesting is that YUD-REISH-ALEF is related to the root of to see, as a 'gradational variant' (in the Hirschian system). That means that the two letters of the root that are the same (REISH-ALEF) show that the words are related but there is a shift of focus. When what is clear and understood in RA-A (saw), is not clear, it becomes a source of fear in YIR-A. I think that not knowing how Gd is going to treat us in certain situations, which cause us worry to begin with, can be very frightening and, indeed, nora in the common sense of the vernacular.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## ZERA YISRAEL AVDO...

Descendants of Yisrael His servant, sons of Yaakov His chosen ones.

We know simply from Jewish midot - character traits - as well as from common sense, that one who feels lowly shouldn't allow that feeling to rule him, but he should know that he is worthwhile and important; and one who is rich and powerful shouldn't bask in that feeling either since that could easily change.

One place in the davening where I believe this idea is reinforced is in T'hilim 136 which we say on Shabbat and on Yom Tov - the HODU LASHEM KI TOV.

Towards the end of the 26 verses of the Psalm, it says SHEB'SHIFLEINU ZACHAR LANU - Who remembered us in our lowly state. I think this can be easily understood as instructions on how to be "remembered" by Gd. How? B'SHIFLEINU - when we behave in a humble way. If we are too "full of ourselves", it will work against us. However, B'SHIFLEINU, our humility makes room for Him to enter and affect us.

I think this same concept is alluded to in a phrase used by David HaMelech

as written in Divrei HaYamim Alef 16:13, and which is also incorporated into our daily davening. He refers to us as ZERA YISRAEL AVDO, B'NEI YAAKOV B'CHIRAV - descendants of Yisrael His servant, sons of Yaakov, His chosen ones. We know that the name YISRAEL is the one that connotes greatness and the ability to "struggle with Gd and Man and to overcome"; on the other hand, the name YAAKOV refers to the lowlier and more dependent persona. In this verse, it hints to the fact that even if you are a YISRAEL, you are still AVDO, His servant; and even though you may be a YAAKOV, you are still B'CHIRAV, His chosen one.

Each character trait is balanced by the adjective accompanying it so that honest humility and pride remain.

The message these verses convey helps me in trying to prepare myself during this month of Elul for Yom HaDin.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## TORAH'S PHILOSOPHY

The Parsha of Ki Tavo is well-known, mostly, because of all the curses that are forecast for the Jewish people when they don't follow the mitzvot of the Torah. To me, at least, it is a very unpleasant Parsha to read, and usually, it moves me to tears. I know these words are true and these curses have, sadly, come upon us throughout our history – its most horrific manifestation occurring in the Holocaust.

It's clear to me that the importance of Torah (aside from its being Divine) lies in just what its name implies: Torah – it teaches, directs. In His infinite wisdom, Gd has given us the tools with which to create and live in a world that is just and humane. Not following these laws leads to evil and even to chaos. The twelve ARUR (curse be) statements in this Parsha consist of 10 which are BEIN ADAM L'CHAVERO - between man and man – and are sandwiched between two that are BEIN ADAM LAMAKOM – between man and Gd. More than anything else, Judaism, as depicted in the Torah, is an "other-centered" theology; an "other-involved" way of life.

Think about it: all of the commandments, all mitzvot, are to be observed for one reason – Gd said so. In doing the mitzvot, beyond the specific intent of the act, we do it to please and obey THE other – Gd. The commandments of BEIN ADAM L'CHAVEIRO, which are the focal point of the ARUR list, can easily be summed up as being based upon V'AHAVTA L'REI-ACHA KAMOCHA – an overriding concern for the other – the requirement to exit ourselves and restrict our behavior when it infringes upon someone else's welfare. There is no place in Halachic Judaism where man is permitted to think only of himself, except when it comes to saving his own life – a situation (fortunately) far from common. But our daily routine and way of life insist that man not be self-centered.

Understanding and accepting this basic fact, that Judaism is, above all, an 'other-oriented' religion would help us to deal with our own religious 'problems' and internal struggles.

A closer look shows that the Torah actually prepares us for life in this way. We are given rules, a book of halachot to guide our lives. These mitzvot unpack the 'other-oriented' ethic contained in obeying Gd's Will by requiring us to engage in the

negation of self. Many mitzvot declare: 'You can't do this - even if you want to and even if you don't understand.' Following these laws accustoms us to 'not getting our way' all the time, and in life, we cannot always get our way.

Men, by nature, might have more difficulty with this since they are accustomed to being 'movers and shakers', often having their own way.

Therefore, Gd has added another few mitzvot to their regimen; mitzvot that remind them who they are, what they are, what their role is, and Who is in charge. Women, by nature, apparently, have less difficulty with this, thus not requiring those few extra mitzvot. They have the nature of being more accepting and flexible probably because they've had lots of practice in putting themselves 'second', in not being too self-involved, by virtue of their roles.

Simply put, being wives and mothers makes self-centeredness impossible. The two just don't go together. (Perhaps this ability to see beyond the self is what led women throughout the generations to see beyond the moment and their self-interests and understand what was best for the nation.)

Bottom line: a Jew cannot be self-indulgent. If we could all

subscribe to this, life would be ideal. But it isn't easy to subscribe to. Life, in a word, is not ideal.

Men can be power-crazed and abusive; women can feel incomplete, unhappy, and blame it on the men and the rabbis; people who want to call themselves Jewish might do so only if it doesn't restrict their freedom or cramp their life style; people who call themselves pious can find all kinds of excuses to justify ignoble and immoral acts, acts contrary to the spirit of Torah if not actually a violation of the letter of the law. It seems to all stem from the same thing - a damaging self-centeredness.

When we are too involved with self, we tend to behave in inappropriate ways.

And we do this as individuals and as communities. We do 'what is best' for our group, masking other baser intentions as L'SHEIM SHAMAYIM and thus declaring everything as kosher. We fail to ask ourselves whether our behavior will lead toward shalom in the larger community or towards its disintegration. We are blinded by our self-involvement to the realities and moral obligations around us. Whether on an individual or communal level, being too involved in our own concerns leads to a tragic

denial of the what we ought to be doing with our lives.

Unfortunately, we see this in our own time. Personal and political priorities override what is best for the Jewish nation – unity and genuine fellowship.

Oddly enough, I believe this whole concept can be illustrated in the Biblical story of Hagar which contains an important lesson for us. When Hagar is banished from Avraham's house along with Yishmael, she loses her way in a desert, a place with which she had been previously familiar. Perhaps she was preoccupied with her own thoughts. After all, she had just been made homeless – what was her next step to be? Go home to Egypt? Stay away? Follow Avraham's Gd? Or not? And so, she gets lost. Her self-preoccupation extends to her son, even placing him – whom she thought was dying – far away from her, so she wouldn't see his death. This is a mother!? No mother, Gd forbid, wants to witness the death of her child, but wouldn't the 'motherly' thing be to hold her child in her arms, to offer comfort in his last moments? True, but not if you can't be 'motherly' because you can't think beyond yourself. And that is why Gd listened to Yishmael and answered him. Hagar was too self-involved to

pray for him. Only later, when the MAL-ACH tells her not to fear and go back and get Yishmael and HACHAZIKI ET HANA'AR – take hold of your son – instead of abandoning him, only then, when she reconnects with what is outside of herself does she become PIKEI-ACH – bright – and her eyes are opened; she opens her eyes and she can now recognize the desert-place and get water for survival. And what is the first act she does upon getting the water? VATASHK ET HANA'AR – she gives her son to drink. She fulfills her proper parental role, negating herself and begins taking care of Yishmael.

Reality is colored or lost when we are blinded by self-interests and self-concerns. The wisdom to recognize its truths can only come as a consequence of our ability to transcend ourselves and behold the 'other'. This, according to our Torah, is how the world is meant to be – 'other-oriented'. HALEVAI we can internalize this lesson before it is too late.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## IMPERFECT MAN

At this time of year more than at any other time, I am more conscious of my behavior, hoping to correct the flaws I notice and, perhaps, even to increase my knowledge of what I should be doing. So, I try to get through Mesillat Yesharim – or at least part of it; I review the laws of Shabbat in Sh'mirat Shabbat K'hilchita – those aspects in which I feel I'm weak, being careful about even those things about which I don't have enough knowledge. I list the areas in which I've grown over the year and those areas which, unfortunately, don't seem to reflect much growth, and I list what I would like to attempt to accomplish this year. I believe most people feel the same as I do and focus more on our relationship to Gd in both the areas of YIR'A (awe) and AHAVA (love) as we come closer to our encounter with Yom HaDin.

Regarding this preoccupation, I remembered a column that appeared in the Torah Tidbits in August of 2016. According to Rav Kook, when Gd created Man as finite, with limitations, He actually gifted us with the ultimate good. Why?

Because it is the nature of that which is finite to be drawn to the infinite. The sense of distance and awe (YIR'A) that we have for the One Who is perfection, leads us to yearn to lessen that distance. "The positive attraction to good and holiness inevitably leads you to wisdom and love... Because of our attraction to good, we are repelled by evil..." This generates an intense love (AHAVA) and longing to become closer to Gd through His Torah and Mitzvot. As we approach Yom HaDin, feelings of fear and awe fill us. But that is exactly what will lead us to seek comfort in coming closer to Gd.

I find it interesting to see this very idea clearly expressed in the blessing of BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT that we recite after eating many foods. After all, in that blessing we are thanking Gd for making us imperfect – BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT V'CHESRONAN – He creates many souls with their deficiencies. We are finite and far from perfection, and far from HaShem as well. If we use Rav Kook's logic, we can then understand the words L'HACHAYOT BAHM NEFESH KOL CHAI – that the reason Gd created us like this is in order to "give life through them to all living things." This distance leads us to yearn deeply for a closer connection with

the Source of Infinity. And in order to achieve this, we abide by His Torah and Mitzvot. We are thus not only lessening the gap, we earn CHAYIM; in the future world, the world of the infinite.

## **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **N'SHAMA SHENATATA BI...**

The soul You gave me is pure.

Usually, when I finally manage to accomplish something, or figure something out, or when, unexpectedly, things finally fall into place, I will thank Gd for having "put the idea into my head" for having reminded me of something, for having me think a certain way to clear things up. On the surface, this would sound like I'm taking no responsibility or ownership for what I'm doing, giving all the credit to Gd. Obviously, Gd is the director of all that happens, but we have to steer clear of the idea that we have no B'CHIRA CHOFSHIT – no free will, given all of Gd's involvement. Since I feel Gd's involvement in these things very strongly, I had to make peace with these two seemingly opposite concepts. It finally occurred to me how these could coexist.

We know that our N'ESHAMA is T'HORA for it is CHEILEK ELOKA MIMA'AL. In other words, there is "part of HaShem" in each of us. So it is that part of HaShem that comes through strongly in such a way as to influence our thoughts and behavior.

So we are really in control; we are the ones acting and thinking. But the influence of Gd that we feel so strongly at times, is simply the bursting out of that part of us, that Divine n'shama that is directing us.

I think Rosh HaShana would be the perfect time to be aware of this N'SHAMA T'HORA that resides within each of us. In the N'TANEH TOKEF prayer that we recite, the scene depicted describes the awesome time of judgement for the world. "When the great shofar sounds, the angels hasten, trembling, and terror seizes them and they say: 'This is the Day of Judgment.' After the "great shofar" sounds, a KOL D'MAMA DAKA NISHMA - a still, thin sound is heard. In the words of R. Moshe Zvi Neria z"l: "This thin voice can only be reached through a great noise (sound of the shofar). The role of this introduction is to soften the soul, to break the shells, so that it is then ready to hear this thin, still voice" (Ner LaMa'or, p.470).

For me, this intervening phrase of KOL D'MAMA DAKA NISHMA is what touches me and brings me to tears. Rav Moshe Shapiro z"l reminds us that the very first expression of life, the first recognition that we are alive and that which forms the first connection between the self and all

that is outside of it, is a cry – a cry coming from the depths of the human heart and this cry says: "Listen to me." It is a cry that expresses both joy for my existence and fear that I am alone and no one is listening. And it cries "Who will hear me? Who will help me?" The sound of the shofar is the great cry that emanates from man (SHUVI V'NECHEZEH – Elul-Sukkot; p.318-319).

And so, I understand this KOL D'MAMA DAKA – this still thin sound – to not only signify Gd's arrival (as in the story of Eliyahu in Melachim Alef 19:12), but to describe something else. To me, it is the sound of the N'SHAMA who, even in its weakened state in the body, is responding to this call from on High, the call that brings to mind the revelation at Sinai, the revelation of Gd, the closeness the soul felt at the moment it received the Torah. It is the N'SHAMA begging to be heard by us: "I'm here; I'm within you; I am the best part of you; please pay attention, please listen to me."

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## YOTZ'EIR HAM'OROT

I've always wondered why there is so much written in the blessings preceding K'RI'AT SH'MA about the sun and the moon: "He gives light to the earth... prepared and made the rays of the sun... surrounding His power with radiant stars... be blessed for the radiant lights You have made... praise Him who made the great lights... (on Shabbat)... and brings out the sun from its place and the moon from its abode... - one half of the Keil Adon talks about these creations.

It gave me the impression that it was a "dangerous" thing to do - that it could lead one to believe in the divine essence of these orbs, as opposed to that of the Creator. I found something in the writings of R. Moshe Shapiro zt I, (Reflections: Chanuka and Purim) that helped me to understand this emphasis on these M'OROT. When Bilaam "blesses" the people of Israel, we are told that he knew the exact moment of the day when HaShem would become angry: KI REGA B'APO (T'hilim 30:6) and why the anger?

EIMATAI RATACH? Tanya mishmei d'Rabbi Meir... the Maharsha explains this quote from B'rachot 7a that this is the cause of Gd's anger: "crowns and kingship belong to Gd, the true King. He, in His wisdom, allots a certain measure of stature to mortal kinds among the nations. When these kings credit false gods for their majesty, this is a betrayal of Gd's sovereignty and Gd is angered." (Artscroll 7a B'rachot #30).

If this is true, then I think I can better understand the emphasis on the M'OROT despite the danger entailed. Within the very quotes, noted above in the prayers, are included references to help dispel the notion that these celestial objects are divinities in and of themselves. The first five quotes from the daily davening all mention how it was Gd Who created and controls them: HAMEI'IR LAARETZ - it is Gd; HEICHIN U'FA'AL - who set them where they are and puts them into action? HaShem! M'OROT NATAN - who put them there? HaShem! And so on... May Gd be praised for the light source He made; He takes the sun and moon out; great are these light that our Gd created. If we look at all the references to these luminaries, we will find that the same verse let us know who is in charge of all this.

So, basically, I had been focusing on only half of the picture. I saw the part that praised the light and overlooked the other half of the picture that loudly proclaimed that it was all because of HaShem.

The question remains, though as to why do we have to include this in the davening to begin with? Why not mention other creations of Gd which are great and mighty, e.g., oceans and mountains? Why the great focus on the heavenly bodies? I think I might have an idea. The prophet Yechezkel prophesied while the Beit HaMikdash was being destroyed. He "witnessed" the slow departure of the Shechina from the Temple and warned the people what was going to happen and why. In the eighth chapter, we are exposed to a very disturbing - if not disgusting - scene: V'HINEI K'ESRIM VACHAMISHA ISH, ACHOREIHEM EL HEICHAL HASHEM ... Rashi explains: Yechezkel was brought to the east side of the AZARA in front of the altar and HEICHAL (in which were the Aron, Menorah...). And the verse states the obvious - (if their faces were toward the east, then obviously, their backs (defecated) towards the Heichal while bowing to the east, to the sun. Aside from the fact that this is a disgusting act and we cannot even imagine it, the 25 men were Kohanim!

Who else would be near the Heichal? Kohanim, whose job was to serve Hashem and to teach the people to do the same and they were the ones engaged in this act?! How much more so was this despicable. Now, if the REGA B'APO of HaShem was because the kings of the nations worshiped the sun at that moment, can you imagine the fury that these were Gd's chosen people? Can we understand the fact that Gd "had enough" and destroyed the Beit HaMikdash?

Maybe the depths to which we plunged in those days is why there is such emphasis on the blatant error made, not simply by the kings of the world but by our ancestors. That might explain why every day we tell of these "lights" and that, with all their greatness, they are only what they are, because of HaShem.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## M'CHAYEI HAMEITIM

During this post – Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur period, I still feel the effect of these special Yomim Tovim, as I'm sure most people do. After all, Sukkot is almost upon us. The recitation of Yizkor on Yom Kippur and again on Sh'mini Atzeret, as well as the influence of the oft-repeated concept about the new beginnings heralded by Rosh HaShana and of "let the past k'lalot – those difficult times of the previous year – be ended", brought to mind the different way I was able to understand the blessing of M'CHAYEI HAMEITIM in the Amida years ago.

It came as a result of the drasha my husband gave then, based upon the learning from a shiur he heard from Rav Moshe Shapiro zt'l, about the need to see k'lalot in our lives as a part of life; as something to integrate into the whole, as something to come to terms with. Only in this way could we approach the New Year without having any 'complaints' against Gd. Although my husband's words were directed at everyone, for who can say they didn't have any problems in the course of a year; I felt them more than appropriate for myself, since,

having lost both my parents, unexpectedly, in the course of only one month that year, it had been easy for me at first to be angry with Gd and to have a wedge created in a once close relationship. I felt the message directed to me, as if my mother (whose 7 month 'yahrzeit' happened to be that day) was talking to me. The message of the d'rasha was something she surely believed in and lived. So much so that, in my mind, it was she who brought about the choice of the d'rasha. The immediate effect of this was how the blessing of M'CHAYEI HAMEITIM in the Amida, that I would say in the immediately following Musaf, took on a new meaning. It was no longer limited to the physical revival of the dead. It became a statement of another of Gd's merciful acts.

All of the acts listed in the blessing are things that are not on the plane of revival the dead – they are not what one would refer to as G'VUROT, which is the theme of this blessing. They are all acts of chessed: SOMEICH NOFLIM, ROFEI CHOLIM, MATIR ASURIM (supports the fallen; heals the sick; frees those bound up) and as the whole passage begins, M'CHALKEIL CHAYIM B'CHESED (sustains the living with loving kindness). One of the ways He sustains (M'CHALKEIL) us is

**M'CHAYEI MEITIM B'RACHAMIM RABIM (and with great compassion revives the dead). Why would we describe the act of reviving the dead as a 'merciful' one? It would seem to be a miraculous thing, a 'mighty' thing – a G'VURA – a powerful thing. But 'compassion' seems to be a strange adjective for the act.**

**Maybe it means something additional: one of the many ways Gd sustains us, especially mourners, is by keeping the dead alive for us, having mercy on our grieving souls. He permits us to be affected by them, to be influenced by them, to see them in different things, to read them into certain settings. And that contact, the belief in that connection, is a merciful gift to us. It keeps us from falling (SOMEICH NOFLIM), it helps heal us (ROFEI CHOLIM); it helps free us from the heavy chains that bind a mourner and limit him in his mind and in his spirit (MATIR ASURIM). In this way, He also maintains the faith in Him that even the dead have (UMKAYEIM EMUNATO LISHEINEI AFAR) for He allows them to help their grieving relatives and so rids them as well in their own mourning. There is no question in my mind that this is not what the blessing was meant to teach but it spoke to me this way and I found comfort in it.**

**And yes, if this could truly be so, we must proclaim: MI KAMOCHA BAAL G'VUROT UMI DOMEH LACH (Who is like you, Master of might, and to whom can you be compared).**

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## Parshat No'ach

Parts of this parsha puzzle me. No'ach the man and No'ach the parsha. In terms of the parsha, I have difficulty understanding the apparent importance of knowing exactly how many days it rained; how many more days until the underground springs ceased to pour forth water; exactly how high the water rose above the mountains; how many days it took for the water to subside; how many days passed between the times No'ach sent forth the raven and the dove.

Obviously, these things puzzled Chazal as well since there is so much discussion about the dates in the Gemara, and so many different opinions about the timing (e.g., Rashi; Ramban – and even within Ramban himself). It would seem clear to me that the simple fact that the world was engulfed by water and that all life perished is enough to inform me of the magnitude of the event and of the tragedy.

Since the Torah seemed to be stressing the importance of time, it leaves me wondering about the passage of time after No'ach and his family leave the ark.

The whole incident with the planting

of the vineyard and of No'ach's subsequently becoming drunk – when did that happen? The day they left the ark? How long after No'ach offers up his sacrifices and is assured by Gd that this will never happen again, does this event occur? Chazal fill in some missing information when they explain how and from where No'ach, all of a sudden, has vines to plant. How long did it take for the grapes to grow? To ferment? At what point did it become possible for Noach to become drunk? And did this occur immediately after he sees the enormity of the destruction and of the job that lay ahead of him? Was it after he determinedly began to rebuild a better world and realized how meek his efforts were compared to the results? All this period of time which might offer us some insight or a guess as to what and why this happened, is ignored. It, apparently, isn't deemed important for the average mind. Gd clearly has His reasons and, just as clearly, I am not privy to them.

(Ultimately, I would guess that all these unknowns were purposely left that way to wait for Chazal to tackle them. Because they, who were vastly brighter than I and blessed with RU'ACH HAKODESH, use these very details that confound me as sources for Halachic conclusions. Gd's purpose, indeed.)

Regarding No'ach the man. Who is he? We do know more about him than we do about Avraham when he first appears on the scene. We know, at least, that Gd considers No'ach to be **ISH TZADIK TAMIM** - a righteous man, perfect in his generations, which we are not to learn about Avraham until much later. And it's interesting that, despite Gd's declaration about No'ach, Chazal feel impelled to question the nature of this man. Why? Is it because he doesn't seem to relate to the world around him or to what is occurring? This probably was what was bothering them. No'ach's only relationship is that which he has with Gd.

Something is missing.

Given all this, I was thinking about the story as a whole to try to make some sense of it for myself (aside from the details regarding the description of the flood). In climbing "into No'ach's skin", as it were, this is one take that spoke to me even though it's just one possibility. Based upon the opinion that says that No'ach was lacking, that he didn't succeed in influencing others to do teshuva, there were consequences. Can you imagine what it must have been like in the Ark for a year? Even if we ignore the Chazal that says that

Noach never slept (which I can truly believe), the logistics speak for themselves. He is living all this time surrounded by a countless number of animals of all types. (Just think about the smell!) He had to see to their individual needs, feed them accordingly; sanitation (?). How long would that have taken on a daily basis?

Even with help from his family - and, I imagine from Gd Himself - he probably didn't have a moment's rest. We are told that this year of forced caring for and about others, even though they were animals, was to impress upon him and inculcate in him the concept of **chesed**. Something which might have helped him avert the disaster of the flood, as Avraham tried to do regarding the fate of Sodom and Amora.

I would like to suggest an additional point: could this have been more than a learning experience? Could it have been a form of punishment for his lack of caring and involvement? Is it possible that after No'ach emerges from the ark, despite Gd's reassurance, that the overwhelming devastation was too much to bear? Did he see himself as greatly responsible in not have tried to prevent it?

He no longer hears from Gd as he did before, he is merely **ISH HAADAMA** - a man of the earth - now. Did he try

to lose himself from this reality by becoming drunk? This approach makes a lot of sense to me. It sees No'ach as a human being, perhaps not with the necessary outgoing personality, or self-assured enough to tackle the problem. It doesn't offer any solutions, but it's a different way of thinking about No'ach, the man of the earth - that he now was.

Before, Gd was communicating with him but no longer. He was unique, only in his having been saved. Now, he was your "normal" human - man of the earth, human with all the emotions that come along with that. Poor No'ach. One can feel for him.

I would like to conclude with a wonderful positive comment about No'ach that is contained in an explanation of a Rashi by Rebbe Yitzchok Isaac of Zidichov:

When the Torah tells us that No'ach finally went into the Ark, it specifies MIPNEI MEI HAMABUL - because of the waters of the flood (7:7). Rashi offers the following: "No'ach, too, was one of those with little faith; he believed yet he did not believe fully that the flood would come..." Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac chose to understand it in the following way: "Noach was one of those with little faith - HAYA MA'AMIN; V'AINO MA'AMIN SHEYAVO HAMABUL - Even though

No'ach was among those with little faith (in that generation), HE believed!! And so, he could not believe that the flood would actually come (given his belief that Gd had mercy on all His creations) until the waters actually came.

[There is a Chassidic legend that tells that when Rebbe Yitzchak reached the "heavenly Yeshiva", Rashi came to greet him and thanked him for his unique and pleasant interpretation of his words on No'ach.]

## **ATZABEI HAGOYIM...**

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands... Those who make them will become like them: so, will all who trust in them (T'hilim 135: 15, 18).

If you want to understand (if it is at all possible) how the Arab terrorists, part of the Islam community can behave the way they do; how they can kill others, innocent civilians sleeping in their homes, hiding in shelters, men, women and children, forcibly abduct innocents, without any compunction, how bestial groups like this can come into being, look at the above quote.

David HaMelech told us of this millennia ago. And although we don't consider Islam a form of avoda zara

because of the technicality that they don't have images they serve or because they believe in only one Gd, they are, indeed, serving avoda zara. The Gd they serve is one they have created and defined, and that is the essence of avoda zara. The god they have created is a god that is AKHBAR - KABIR - great and powerful. Theirs is a service of power and might, ruling the world, and killing anyone unfortunate enough to get in their way. K'MOHEM YIHYU OSEIHEM - if you create a god who is identified by his might, you will behave just like him.

And why won't a Jewish soldier kill an Arab who is holding a baby for protection? Why not kill him and not worry about the baby? Because the Jew has a Gd Who is defined as YUD-HEI-VAV-HEI, a Gd of mercy. He is gomel chasadim. He created the world in order to give - not to take and conquer and rule. And so, the Jew is a BA'AL CHESSED; a giver, not a taker. A survivor, not a killer.

Perhaps, this is why in the blessing preceding the Shmoneh Esrei, (GAAL YISRAEL), we spell out exactly who our Gd is: GO'ALEINU - our Redeemer is HASHEM TZ'VAKOT SH'MO - the Lord of Hosts is His name - Hosts, as in armies of His celestial creation, not the armies who take innocent lives; because He is - K'DOSH YISRAEL -

the Holy One of Israel - the Gd the Jews hold by; the Jews who are RACHMANIM, BAISHANIM, V'GOM-LEI CHASSADIM - merciful, retiring, doers of kind deeds - not just any Gd.

And that is the Gd who will redeem and bring salvation to the world.

Have no fear of sudden terror or of the ruin when it overtakes the wicked: Devise your strategy but it will be thwarted, propose your plan, but it will not stand, for Gd is with us.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## T'HILIM

It's not only at times like these when we're all saying T'hilim for the sake of Am Yisrael and for the protection of our soldiers and for the speedy release of all the hostages in good health, that this thought comes to me. I have always wondered about the efficacy of these prayers. Personal prayers that are accompanied by tears and crying feel more personal and I can more readily understand why Gd would accept my pleas and requests. But I wonder when I say T'hilim for the sick or for some other misfortune, how it really helps, especially if I don't truly understand all the words. Unfortunately, we probably all have all had the experience that, despite our amassing multitudes of T'hilim, the result is not what we prayed for. The words of T'hilim are holy, without a doubt. We know they were written with Ru'ach haKodesh by Dovid HaMelech - someone whose life had more suffering than one could bear. There is no questioning that. What happens to all those T'hilim that don't produce our desired outcome? Our Rabbis tell us that if these words didn't bring about what we prayed for, they were used to help someone

else. Again, how does that work?

The established prayers that we say, the blessings, Sh'moneh Esrei, etc. were composed by the Men of the Great Assembly, great men, some of whom were prophets, with the help of Ru'ach haKodesh. The coinage of the words is "untouchable" - we are directed by halacha that we are not allowed to change them or alter them in any way to fit our personal preference. A woman who, although new to mitzva observance, was very careful about the laws of family purity and dutifully went to mikva, related to me how she would say the blessings there in an amended fashion. Instead of saying BARUCH ATA... MELECH HA'OLAM..., she said B'RUCHA AT... MALKAT HA'OLAM... She feminized the blessing because she didn't like treating Gd as a male (even though in the process, she was attributing a real gender to a genderless Being). It was difficult for me, as her Rebbetzin to tactfully tell her that these weren't "kosher" blessings. Why not? What is it about the exact formulation of the words set by the Rabbis millennia ago that makes them unchangeable? The answer to that would then address the same question I have about T'hilim. How do these particular words in this particular order produce desired results, whether for

us or for others? Is it some sort of magic?

Yes and no. It is magic in that it works but it is natural and "scientific" as well. The magic is that this exact combination of words somehow brings about a positive effect somewhere in the world. It is the combination of these exact letters that leads to results. The "scientific" way is simple chemistry. For example, if I, as a scientist, can posit and believe and prove that when two atoms of hydrogen "bump into each other" in some way with one atom of oxygen, the result is a molecule of water; if otherwise invisible elements, all of a sudden, create a physical, visible product; if I can see and accept that the "random" combination of atoms produce various elements that were, heretofore, non-existent, then I should be able to believe this about the specific combinations of letters and words that Chazal (and Dovid HaMelech) composed for us. Yes - these exact combinations of letters and words produce an effect in both Upper and Lower Worlds that we are unaware of. And so, if the words we say don't produce the result that we want, they are not going to waste. The results produced in the upper spheres impact the world down here.

That's how I can help myself understand the power of T'hilim and prayer - for my benefit or for the benefit of others. But it will always be for some benefit.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## YITZCHAK

In this parsha, Yitzchak comes on the scene. We are told of his future birth. He is not yet in existence. And by the end of the Parsha, he is almost killed. A life in a nutshell?

What is he? Who is he? This most-yearned-for son is taken by his father to be sacrificed. Perhaps, the most talkative Yitzchak is, in the entire story in the Torah, is this one episode. We know he went willingly and together with Avraham. But we don't know he came back. The text is so preoccupied with what occurred on the way to the Akeida: how they both walk YACHDAV - together and the preparations for the Akeida. But when it's over, Avraham is blessed by Gd and VAYASHAV - HE returns - but alone?

In Chayei Sarah, Yitzchak continues to be a backstage figure. He is constantly acted upon: Avraham was to sacrifice him. He allows this. Avraham then sends out to get a wife for him. He again is passive and accepting. (Does he even know about this? Could Avraham have been an overwhelming figure? Could Yitzchak have, indeed, been very much his mother's child?). And further on in

Yitzchak's life, he is again maneuvered and manipulated by Rivka and Yaakov. Maybe Yitzchak is this way because he has the ultimate BITACHON: he trusts his father completely; his mother, totally; his wife, unquestioningly; and most of all, Gd (perhaps we should learn from this).

Yitzchak hardly utters a word in the Torah. We hear not one word he says to Gd, something not at all true for Avraham or for Yaakov. We see him pray only once (aside from the interpretation of LASU'ACH BASA-DEH). At the beginning of Toldot, it says VAYE'ETAR YITZCHAK - he prays explicitly just once and that is for the sake of Rivka - so that they may have children.

His name is hardly fitting. Avraham is given his name by Gd, a name that describes who he is. Yaakov is first given a name that describes him as he is born, holding the heel (EIKEV) of Eisav. And later, he is given the name Yisrael by Gd - through His MAL'ACH (angel) - again - to describe what he is: "a successful struggler with man and Gd". Avraham fits his name as does Yaakov (or Yisrael). But Yitzchak? It's not about him. He's given the name for the laughter of other people. Maybe we have to look at Yitzchak as, indeed, being in the

future tense as his name is. One day, ultimately, he may perhaps, laugh - as we all will - but not now.

As Eliyahu Ki Tov says in his Sefer HaParshiyot (p.271): "From the day Gd created the world until the announcement of the birth of Yitzchak from Sarah, there was not yet any TZ'CHOK - laughter in the world. When there is peace and tranquility in the world, there is no laughter; any good that comes to a person is expected from beforehand. Similarly, at a time of distress in the world when there is fear in one's soul, certainly TZ'CHOK cannot be found. When, then, is there TZ'CHOK? When there is worry and fear, and terror overwhelms a person and he sees his nemesis right before him, ready to come upon him, and that terrible threat ultimately passes away and in its place there is salvation and redemption - only then will HAPEH YIMALEI S'CHOK V'HALASHON RINA (T'hilim 126:2) - the mouth will be filled with laughter and the tongue with songs of joy.

May that time come swiftly.

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## TZITZIT

The mitzva of tzitzit has yet to appear in the Torah, certainly not in the Parsha of Chayei Sara. But under the current circumstances, the "war" in which we are now waging with the forces of an evil incarnate in "human" form, the image of tzitzit has come very much into focus. We have all been hearing about how soldiers, who never wore them before, have been requesting them, believing that they are the real 'bullet proof' vest. We have seen videos of the Chareidi community, as well as others, busy tying tzitzit fringes onto multitudes of khaki talitot ketanim. And so, this mitzva has been on my mind.

According to the Yalkut Shim'oni, the mitzva of tzitzit came about as a result of the desecration of Shabbat by the M'KOSHEISH EITZIM. In trying to understand his behavior, Moshe responds to Gd when Gd says - "he desecrated the Shabbat" - that on every other day, the man would be wearing tefillin on his head and arm which would serve as a constant reminder of the mitzvot. But on Shabbat, there would be no reminder. In response, Gd tells Moshe to devise a method which would guarantee remembering the mitzvot every

single day. And that's how this mitzva was born.

Regardless of whether, at least according to the Yalkut Shim'oni, Moshe is the one who came up with this mitzva or it was Gd, I have one problem with it. The purpose of the mitzva was that it would serve as a reminder at all times of the mitzvot. But while the requirement of tefillin included creating additional items to put on, this reminder of tzitzit would only hold if a man wore a four-cornered garment. Wasn't the clothing of all (men and women) at that time robes? Robes, as a rule, don't have four corners. Unless they wore something else, or unless the way I picture robes is really different than what they wore, why give a mitzva that didn't apply to their garments? I know the Kohen Gadol wore a tunic-like garment over his robe and that would require tzitzit since it had four corners but did the average person wear such a garment? So, was this really a mitzva to remind the people of all the mitzvot - only if they chose to wear a four-cornered garment - or was this a "test" or an opportunity to see how far they would go; that is, would they be challenged to create an additional garment just to ensure that they would not forget the mitzvot? If this is true, then did the people wear

**tzitzit in the wilderness? All of them? Only a few? Or did they only wear tzitzit when the occasion would arise in future times?**

**It seems like a very unusual way to establish a mitzva. It leaves me puzzled.**

**But maybe now, under the current state of affairs, I would like to attempt to possibly see more behind this, certainly in a symbolic way. Rav Shimshon Rephael Hirsch points out that there is a reason the mitzva involves wearing a four-cornered garment. These four corners represent the fact the Gd is to be found in all corners of the world and, similarly, it reminds the Jew that he is to behave as a Jew wherever he is in the world. This four-cornered garment is referred to as a tallit - whether small or large. The root of this word is NUN-TAV-LAMED - to take and lift (as in AL NETILAT YADAYIM). This mitzva is to elevate the person.**

**Even though many of the soldiers don't know that the purpose of the tzitzit is to remind them of the mitzvot (many of which they may not be aware of), when they see them, there is still a special SACHAR, reward. As the Radvaz explains, the whole purpose of having the mitzva apply to one who wears a four-**

**cornered garment, is to give SACHAR - reward - simply for getting that garment. Whether or not these many tallitot ketanim will serve as bullet proof vests, we can only hope so. But we DO know of the possibility: the Menorat HaMaor brings a Midrash that tells us that the merit of tzitzit protects the wearer from many P'GA'IM - injuries, just as it protected Chanania, Misha'el and Azariah; or as, according to Midrash Tanchuma, it protected Shaul in the cave. A tie-in to the current Parshiot of the Torah is that we are taught that when Yitzchak wore tzitzit, his image was "like an angel of Gd".**

**If it is, as the Tanchuma says, that tzitzit saved the people of Israel when they stood in the Yam Suf simply because in the future, they would receive the mitzva, then we would hope that these tzitzit on our soldiers would save them since, in the future, they would hopefully fulfill this mitzva in its entirety. The Zohar (in the Yalkut Ruveni on Sh'lach) tells us, "If one wraps himself in tzitzit, angels proclaim before him: 'give honor to the son of the King'."**

**Isn't it interesting that we learn that "in the future, at the time of the GEULA, the Jews will excel in the mitzva of tzitzit" (P'til UGdilim; R. Yoel Schwartz; p.34)?**

None of this answers my original question but, maybe that's just not so important now. 🌸

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## CHESSED

Often, we see certain things in the weekly Parsha that relate, in some way, to current events. I can't help but notice how true this is in the series of Parshiot we have been reading.

Lech L'cha: there is disagreement, machloket, between Lot and Avraham, which leads them their separate ways: - one goes to the RIGHT and one goes to the LEFT; Avraham tries to avoid a confrontation and says: we shouldn't argue, WE ARE BROTHERS; and then there is a war and there is PIDYON SH'VUYIM - redemption of captives; there is a covenant where Gd promises Avraham all the land of ten Canaanite nations; but precedes this promise with the information that there will be trouble and affliction beforehand - taking and keeping the Land will only be through YISURIM ('three gifts were given to Israel and they were only given through yisurim: Torah, the Land of Israel, and olam haba' -Sifrei, Va'etchanan).

In Vayeira, we learn of the cruel and uncivilized behavior of the cities of Sodom (sound familiar?); Yitzchak comes close to being killed but is

saved and goes from there to learn in Yeshivat Sheim. (see Yonatan ben Uziel).

Chayei Sarah: Rivka comes on the scene. What is interesting in this Parsha in so far as how it would relate to what is going on now, is the explanation the Maharal gives to the episode of Eliezer and Rivka.

Eliezer gives Rivka "a golden nose ring, its weight a beka and two bracelets... ten gold shekels their weight". In citing the Midrash, Rashi tells us that 'beka' is a hint to the 'beka', the sh'kalim the Jews would bring in the future for the acquisition of daily sacrifices, and the two bracelets hint to the two tablets, luchot, on which the Ten Commandments were written, hinted to by the weight of the gold. The Maharal (Gur Aryeh) sees in these things - and in Rivka herself - the three things upon which the world stands: Torah, Avoda, and Gemilut Chassadim. The Luchot represent Torah, the sh'kalim represent the avoda (that would be done in the Beit HaMikdash) and Rivka herself epitomizes acts of Chessed. But then he arrives at an incredible conclusion. The gifts that Eliezer puts on Rivka are only jewelry, accessories. Rivka is the main focus, the subject which they are "decorating". In other words,

Torah and Avoda are accessories to Gemilut Chassadim, which is the essence!

Using this understanding of the Maharal, I am forced to see the incredible ramifications. The Sh'la HaKadosh (Masechet P'sachim) as well as the Chatam Sofer in his Drashot, both emphasize how it is so important for a person to do chessed every day, to arouse chessed from Above and to strengthen Gd's trait of mercy. "...every day, our sins activate the strength of din - justice- against us, Gd forbid, therefore, a person must increase Gd's trait of rachamim by doing chessed." The Chofetz Chayim (Ahavat Chessed) says our doing chessed "arouses the trait of chessed Above", as the Zohar says: 'when the Jews do chessed with each other, it arouses the midat harachamim.' "There is a heichal of angels... who are appointed to receive the acts of chessed that a person does... and when the attribute of justice accuses, immediately, the angels show the chessed that was done and the Holy One, Blessed Be He, has mercy on Israel" (R. Moshe Cordovero, Zohar).

And, concluding, the Chofetz Chayim says, "Chazal tell us that HaShem says: if these people, who need chessed themselves, are showing

chessed to each other, I, Who am full of rachamim and chessed, how much more so must I perform chessed with my creations".

In case you haven't noticed, there is an awful lot of chessed going around the Jewish world now in all shapes and forms and among all "brands" of Judaism (as compared with a whole world going nuts with hatred and antisemitism). This is who we REALLY are. And this is the way we can, justifiably, expect the same from HaShem. We need it. What a shame that this had to come about the way it did. Let's go back to AL NA T'HI M'RIVA BEINI UVEINECHA... KI ANASHIM ACHIM ANACHNU - we are brothers!!

Please note: the Ba'al HaTurim (25:18) - the end of one Parsha tells of the death of Yishma'el - AL P'NEI KOL ECHAV NAFAL - and the Torah immediately introduces Toldot Yitzchak. "To tell us that when Yishma'el falls in the 'end of days', ben David will then grow, for he is from the 'offspring' of Yitzchak". ✨

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## V'YAAKOV HALACH L'DARKO

According to Rashi, the mal'achim (angels) that Yaakov "meets" as he travels to Israel, are those who would escort him in Israel who came to greet him, while those who had been escorting him while outside of Israel went no further. Ramban has a problem with this Rashi for, after all, Yaakov had not yet reached Israel. He had quite a distance to go and had even sent messengers to Eisav from far. He had not yet crossed Nachal Yabok which was the border of Ammon, southeast of Israel. He had yet to go through Ammon and Moav. He first enters Canaan at the city of Shechem.

Although Ramban offers his own explanation, I'd like to suggest (in my extremely humble opinion) that Rashi is, indeed, correct. When Gd first promises Avraham to give him and his descendants the land of Canaan, He lists ten nations, not only the ones to which we are accustomed (K'na'ani, Chiti, Emori, Prizi, Yevusi, Girgashi). The ones we rarely hear are actually the first ones mentioned: (Lech L'cha 15:19-21) Keni, Kenizi, Kadmoni: Chiti Prizi Refa'im: Emori, K'na'ani

Girgashi, Yevusi". And here, it is critical to cite the Rashi there: "There are 10 nations here, but He gave the Israelites the lands of only seven nations and the other three, Edom, Moav, and Ammon, who are the Kenite, Kenizzite, and Kadmonite of our verse, are destined to be an inheritance for Israel in the future..."

The lands of Edom, Moav, and Ammon are promised to Avraham in the distant future. And this exactly where Yaakov was when the mal'achim of Israel come to meet him. The message? This, indeed, is also part of Eretz Yisrael! 

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## SH'MA YISRAEL HASHEM ELOKEINU...

One understanding of these words, as explained in the Zohar, that we - especially as Jews - need to understand is that HaShem, as He is known to be in the 4-letter spelling of His name (Y-H-V-H) - the Merciful One, is also ELOKEINU, that Gd of strict justice - MIDAT HADIN. Nevertheless, these two traits co-exist in the One Being, HASHEM ECHAD. This idea is given expression in many places in the siddur, not the least of which is this phrase used countless times in every bracha: BARUCH ATA HASHEM ELOKEINU... Perhaps, it is possible to follow this theme even further as the Sh'ma continues:

BARUCH SHEM K'VOD MALCHUTO L'OLAM VA'ED - may His name be blessed eternally - even in those times when He expresses Himself as ELOKIM, times when we are not inclined to feel like praising Him. Nonetheless, we recognize that this, too, is part of His essence and we are obligated to be M'VOREICH AL HARA as well (Orach Chayim 222:3).

V'AHAVTA EIT HASHEM... B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA UVCHOL M'ODECHA - our love for

Gd must be expressed in all these ways. And although these words are written in the singular as a mandate to each and every individual, it is part of the exclamation "Sh'ma YISRAEL" an address to us as a nation as well. In that context, could this reminder to us about loving Gd be a national charge that holds true under different circumstances and times? That this love is for both Gd Who is merciful, as well as Who is Elokeinu, the judge.

B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA - even these words express the same idea with the dual nature of the heart: serving Gd wholly - the Gd (Y-H-V-H) Who is merciful as well as when He is the judge.

UVCHOL M'ODECHA - we know that one of the understandings of this is B'CHOL MIDA UMIDA SHEHU MODED L'CHA - that this love includes even the times when what Gd metes out to us is not what we would consider very desirable or comfortable.

V'HAYU HAD'VORIM HA'ELEH - these words, this idea that Gd is the same Being who is merciful as well as One Who delivers justice and punishment, needs to accompany us as well as our descendants - V'SHINANTAM L'VA-NECHA V'DIBARTA BAM at all times: B'SHIVTECHA B'VEITECHA - when we are dwelling in our Homeland, in

Israel; UVLECHT'CHA VADERECH - and even in the times when we are in galut; and B'SHOCHB'CHA - when the Jewish people appear to be dead, Gd forbid, and certainly UVKUMECHA - when we are reborn and are recreated in our homeland again.

UKSHARTAM L'OT AL YADECHA - this idea of the unity yet dichotomous nature of Gd must guide our actions even as a nation; V'HAYU L'TOTAFOT BEIN EINECHA - and serve to direct our eyes toward the proper goal. As in Amos (7:16) where the word TATIF (related to TOTAFOT?) is defined by Rashi as 'a language of prophecy', there is a hint of prophecy, a proper reading of the future, when we can direct our eyes and thoughts in the direction Gd would want.

*I wonder if TOTAFOT is somehow related to TAF - our children. If so, it might imply that HAD'VORIM HA'ELU' - these matters, this philosophy, should mean as much to us as our children (TOTAFOT) are in our eyes. [A little far-fetched, but...]*

UCH-TAVTAM AL M'ZUZOT BEITECHA UVISH-ARECHA - And this force will invariably inscribe this lesson in how we live in our individual homes as well as in the cities of our Land.

We don't need to be reminded, as a nation, that there are times when our faith and trust in Gd are tested. We have been miraculously reborn in the Land promised our forefathers, a dream none would have ever thought could be realized; and yet, we struggle every day for our right to exist, to live safely, to protect ourselves against a reality that seems inhuman. Even now or, actually, especially now, we need to remind ourselves that the Gd Who brought us back here, will fight our fight and protect us and get us through these times not only as a Merciful Father, but even as a Judge, because we deserve it: HaShem is BA'AL MILCHAMOT - HE is the one running the war - ZOREI'A TZ'DAKOT - He 'plants' the TZ'DAKOT, the good deeds we are doing, especially at this time - and that is MATZMI'ACH Y'SHU'OT - it causes salvation to sprout. Yes, even according to 'justice', we deserve it. 🌸

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

**KUMA HASHEM V'YAFUTZU  
OYVECHA...**

**KI MITZION TETZEI TORAH...**

Arise, Lord and may Your enemies be scattered, may those who hate You flee before you,

For the Torah shall come forth from Zion and the word of Lord from Jerusalem.

These two verses are quotes from two different places in Tanach. The first is from B'ha'alot'cha and the second from Yishayahu. It scares me to think that the authors of the Siddur put these two phrases together as dependent. What if the only way in which we will see the enemies of Gd disperse and flee - is when Tzion becomes the place from which Torah emanates and from where we hear the word of Gd, as opposed to the many other things we also hear nowadays out of Yerushalayim. If this be the case, we have much work to L'HAGDIL TORAH UL-HAADIRAH in the Holy City. 🌟

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## ELOKAI, NETZOR LESHONI (2)

At the end of the Amida, in the ELOKAI, NETZOR LESHONI MEIRA - My Gd, guard my tongue from evil..., we beseech Gd to open our hearts to Torah, etc. - P'TACH LIBI - open my heart to Your Torah; and let my soul pursue Your commandments... - all those who plan evil against me, thwart their counsel and frustrate their plans.

I always related to these three things as three separate requests. But, perhaps, the intention is different. Maybe it is truly meant to be sequential: if Gd opens my heart to Torah, then it will follow that NAFSHI, my soul, will choose to chase after the mitzvot; and in the merit of those, Gd will see fit to befuddle and confuse my enemies and thus, keep me protected. We are, after all, told in a number of places in the Torah that this would follow, e.g. -

1) D'varim 11:22-23 (Eikev), "for if you will observe this commandment that I command you... HaShem will drive out all these nations from before you;

2) D'varim 28:1-7 (Ki Tavo), "If you listen to the voice of HaShem... to perform all of His commandments...

HaShem will cause your enemies who rise up against you to be struck down before you..."

In a previous entry, I had mentioned how I understood the verse from T'hilim 91:3 - He will cover you with His pinions... "His faithfulness is an encircling shield". The Torah is occasionally referred to as EMET and I chose to use that meaning here which would then mean AMITO - the Torah is the armor and shield. It protects us.

In terms of the Torah being that which protects us, I can't help but see how clearly this worked at the beginning of the horrible events that began on October 7th. The story that I've heard from a number of different sources tells about the Yeshiva of Tifrach, way down south, which was spared the devastation and murder carried out by Hamas (this is known to be a fact). When one of the terrorists was being interrogated, and asked why they didn't attack and destroy the Yeshiva - which they had originally intended to do - he responded "we saw that it was already on fire so there was no need to do more." The Yeshiva was not on fire. What they must have seen was Eish HaTorah. ❄️

## Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

### V'SHAM'RU B'NEI YISRAEL ET HASHABBAT...

The children of Israel shall keep the Shabbat...

In the Shemoneh Esrei of Shacharit on Shabbat, we say the above words. In terms of keeping a "Sabbath day", the Christians and the Moslems both took the concept of a Sabbath and chose - on their own - to make it on a different day: the Christians on Sunday and the Moslems on Friday. And although they, apparently, randomly chose their days, I find it fascinating that this was "predicted" by Chazal.

The bulk of the davening, as we know it today, was set by the Men of the Great Assembly. Certainly, this applies to the Shemoneh Esrei. Following the above quote, the paragraph continues, relating how the other nations were not given the Shabbat and then makes the statement V'LO N'TATO... L'GOYEI HA'ARATZOT... You did not give it to the other nations of the world, V'GAM BIM'NUCHATO LO YISHK'NU AREILIM - and in its rest, the uncircumcised will not dwell. What appears to be a mere description of

what Shabbat was to be, really can also be seen as a command, or a prophecy. For, indeed, the non-Jews will not rest on what we know to be Shabbat, on the seventh day.

Without their realizing it, these goyim fulfilled the words of Chazal. Indeed, they chose not to rest on the 7th day. It's interesting to note that whatever their reasons were, they unknowingly fulfilled what Chazal said. ✨

*Ed. note - even if they had make Saturday their day of rest, it would not be a day of rest by Torah standards. It follows that even the Seventh Day Adventists and any similar non-Jewish sect are not keeping the Shabbat.*

## **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **TZUR YISRAEL, KUMA B'EZRAT YISRAEL...**

Rock of Israel! Arise to the help of Israel. Redeem, as You promised, Yehuda and Yisrael... HaShem Who redeemed Israel.

Every day, before we recite the Amida of Shacharit, we approach with the preface of the above TZUR YISRAEL. Three verbs are used to describe the process of Ge'ula which we are requesting - EZRA, PIDYON, GEULA. In his book, The Art of Jewish Prayer, R. Yitzchak Kirzner zt"l explains the adjectives used to describe Gd at the end of the first blessing of the Amida - OZEIR U'MOSHI'A UIMAGEIN - He helps, saves and shields. Rabbi Kirzner says that the word OZEIR refers to the "help" Gd gives us when, despite our best efforts to improve ourselves and to achieve our spiritual goals, we don't quite succeed. He bases this definition upon the Gemara in Sukka 52a-b: AMAR RABI YITZCHAK... A person's (evil) inclination strengthens itself against him every day... And if not for HKBH Who aids him, he would be unable to withstand it...

Using this understanding of the word OZEIR, I began to see the prefatory

TZUR YISRAEL in a different way. Unfortunately, within all the major brands of Judaism today, there are many improper understandings and interpretations of our religion. Regardless of the sect, Judaism seems to have become a "do what feels right" religion, one that makes me happy, makes me feel good, regardless of the Torah and/or halacha.

Subjectively speaking, it pains me more when this is also found within Orthodoxy, where, while clearly going against the halacha, people still claim they are "orthodox". As such, it seems obvious to me that we are in dire need of outside help, help that can only come from Above. That's where this definition of OZEIR comes into play. If I use the meaning brought to my attention by Rabbi Kirzner, then I can see the Tzur Yisrael in a deeper way:

...KUMA B'EZRAT YISRAEL - help us spiritually, help us reach the spiritual levels and goals that we are supposed to reach and not the ones we've made up to suit ourselves.

UFDEI CHIN'UMECHA - if You do this, then it will lead to a redeeming of our nation. PIDYON, redemption - refers to returning something to its previous state. When slaves are "redeemed", when there is a 'pidyon',

it is a returning to their original status of free people. If we succeed in elevating ourselves spiritually with Gd's EZRA, we can return to our original state of spirituality (K'SHANIM KADMONIYOT - see Metzudot Dovid, Mal'achi 3:4 - as in the time of Shlomo when our sacrifices were willingly accepted; as in the time of Hevel when there was not Avoda Zara - see Malbim, Mal'achi 3:4, DAVAR ACHEIR).

As Ramban says in his introduction to the book of Sh'mos: "the exile is not over until the day they return to their place". And although Ramban is referring to the Jews returning physically to Eretz Yisrael, it's easy to see this as a spiritual return as well, to the pidyon referred to above, since our return to the land is dependent upon our own return - our teshuva.

Given this, we will finally be able to achieve GEULA. It will have been a "done deal" - BARUCH ATA HASHEM, GA'AL YISRAEL. To buttress this idea, see the sequence of verses that Chazal put into the daily HODU:

KUMA EZRATA LANU,  
UF'DUYENU L'MA'AN CHASDECHA...  
HAMA'ALCHA MEI-ERETZ  
MITZRAYIM... (= GE'ULA). 

## **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **HASHEM POKEI'ACH IVRIM...**

HaShem gives sight to the blind; He raises those bowed down; He loves the righteous... (T'hilim 146:8).

In these unfortunate times, there are, B"H, many individuals and groups who volunteer their services in numerous areas. People donate money to keep our soldiers properly equipped; to provide food, clothing and other necessities for the displaced families; they organize play activities, read to the children; professionals offer their therapeutic services free of charge; tzitzit are being made and delivered; meals are being sent or catered to the soldiers at the various camps. The list goes on and on.

One of the groups that provides packages for displaced families was recently requested by the recipients not to include any "religious items" (like candles for Shabbat and the like). Despite the unexpected and disappointing response, the volunteer group then asked if there were any people they would like them to daven for. They received a list of five names and so proceeded with their prayers. A number of days later,

they received a call from the recipient group with a different request: "Could we give you some more names to pray for? Because those people for whom you are praying are doing significantly better than the others."

Even people who aren't interested in any kind of spiritual change despite all that has happened, are eventually forced to see that it's just not as simple as "don't send us any religious items".

This reminded me of how I've often wondered and tried to figure out if I could find any rhyme or reason for the descriptions of Gd's kindness in T'hilim 146 and how they are broken up into various verses. I must admit that I come up empty. But when I say the Shemoneh Esrei, I sometimes add a personal request in the paragraph on repentance (HASHIVENU AVINU L'TORATECHA) for the sake of those people I know and care about who are "off the derech" or who don't even know about "the derech" to begin with. I pray that Gd help them find the right way and help them towards becoming Torah and mitzva observant. I often address Gd here as POKEI'ACH IVRIM in requesting Him to help these people "see" what they are not seeing.

In light of this, it occurred to me that this usage could be helpful in

understanding the sequence of at least three of the descriptions: if Gd is POKEI'ACH IVRIM - in the spiritual sense - then it would lead to ZOKEIF K'FUFIM - the straightening of those people who are "bent", not upright in their Torah observance; and, as a result, would become observant, leading Gd to relate to them as OHEIV TZADIKIM.

Although this way of thinking was initially brought about by my personal concern for friends and relatives, I certainly believe it holds true for all of Klal Yisrael.

May the positive growth and change occur swiftly. 🌸

## **Afterthoughts**

**- Yocheved Bienenfeld**

### **VASHEM HOLEICH LIFNEIHEM... L'HA'IR LAHEM...**

HaShem went before them... to give them light... (B'shalach 13:21)

The Yalkut Yehuda concludes from this verse that HARAV SHEMACHAL AL K'VODO, K'VODO MACHUL - a Rav who willingly foregoes the honor due to him, his honor is forgone; because - 'we find that HaShem forewent His honor and lit up the way for the benefit of klal Yisrael' (footnote 11).

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 11a) reinforces this message in relating the story of how the Roman emperor tried to seize Onkelos after he converted to Judaism, by sending troop after troop to arrest him. Onkelos, however, managed to influence all these troops to such an extent that they all converted. The Caesar then ordered the next ones not to speak with him or say anything to him. On their way aback, Onkelos simply reviewed with them their hierarchy system in which the lowest officer would light the torch for his superior and so on up to the emperor. When he asked if the emperor would then light the torch for the people, the officers answered, of course, in

the negative; that would certainly be beneath his dignity. AMAR L'HU: V'HAKADOSH BARUCH HU NAKAT NURA KAMEI YISRAEL... - he said to them that HaShem held the light before Israel - and he quoted the above verse from B'shalach. As could be anticipated, this group also converted.

The fact that Gd is mochel on His kavod is attested to, as well, in the episode of the Sota. We are taught that the parchment which contained a Torah passage with the name of Gd on it was placed in the water the woman was to drink and thus erased. Gd was willing to have His name erased just so that there could be shalom between husband and wife: "...to make peace between husband and wife... let it be erased in the water."

Since this is a common understand of one of the attributes of HaShem, I found it hinted to in the KEIL ADON which we recite every Shabbat morning in Shacharit. The To'elet Yaakov quotes Rashbi in the Zohar of Vayakhel (25:2), according to which, the KEIL ADON is considered SHEVACH GADOL V'NECHMAD. Apparently, when this song rises before KISEI HAKAVOD, "60 chariots raise it up to crown it with lights; and tzadikim from Gan Eden are crowned with it as well", and more. Clearly,

there is, for some reason, great importance to this poem. Basically, it tells of the greatness of HaShem, listing some of His attributes, then proceeding to talk of the Creation and roles of the sun and moon. While describing His greatness in terms of being 'surrounded by knowledge and understanding' (DA'AT UTVUNA SOV'VIM OTO) and the like, it also mentions how 'kindness and mercy are before Him (CHESED V'RACHAMIM LIFNEI CH'VODO). Although the intent of this work is to illustrate for us what "surrounds" Gd, I can't help but see an additional understanding of one of these descriptions based upon the previous examples of Gd being mochel on His kavod: Z'CHUT U'MISHOR LIFNEI KIS'O - merit and fairness are before His throne; CHESED V'RACHAMIM LIFNEI CH'VODO - kindness and mercy are before His glory. Instead of simply being a description of attributes surrounding Gd's throne, I believe there is an additional message in this phrase. This tells us how He functions. CHESED V'RACHAMIM, kindness and mercy LIFNEI CH'VODO, are more important to Him than His honor. He would (and does) forego honor due to Him in order to behave as the Master of kindness and mercy. That's how I can't help but see Him. 🌸

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## MIZMOR L'TODA

D'U KI HASHEM HU HA-ELOKIM, HU ASANU V'LO ANACHNU AMO V'TZON MAR'ITO... - know that the Lord is Gd. He made us and we are His. We are His people and the flock He tends (T'hilim 100).

It often happens that the obvious eludes us. It's right in front of our eyes and we don't notice. I know this happens very often with me. As I've grown older, I'm realizing this more and more, especially regarding davening and learning Torah. Things I have said, read, or learned many times, take on a new meaning. That's why when I started writing these thoughts down 27 years ago, I referred to them as "afterthoughts" because they never came automatically (they were too obvious), only in retrospect. And I believe that as the years go by, our ability to retrospect improves. That's why I think that it's possible that this was the intent of David HaMelch when he first composed this psalm and, perhaps, it was obvious to anyone who paid proper attention to the words; but I finally came to understand what could be the true message in this song.

MIZMOR L'TODA was said after bringing a KORBAN TODA - a

Thanksgiving Offering - which was brought in gratitude for a miracle the person experienced. Although we no longer bring sacrifices (not yet), this psalm is to be said every day; for, as a commentary in Siddur HaShelah says, "There is no day upon which a miracle doesn't happen to a person; and one is required to give thanks over a miracle..." One stands when reciting it and this psalm is important enough for the Shulchan Aruch to specify that "it should be sung; for in the future, all songs will be nullified except for Mizmor L'toda" (Shulchan Aruch 51:9) Interestingly, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach questions why congregations don't follow this directive of the Shulchan Aruch, especially if they do sing the KEIL ADON on Shabbatot.

When I paid more attention to the words of the psalm, I realized what should have been obvious. IVDU ET HASHEM B'SIMCHA - why should we serve Gd "with joy"? BO'U L'FANAV BIRNANA - Why come before Him in song? Simply because ... HU ASANU V'LO ANACHNU... - what greater cause for joy and contentment could there be if not the knowledge that Gd, our Creator, is our stronghold; He is the one who takes care of us, His nation, His flock. What a source of joy! And, therefore, we are most grateful and are moved to express this gratitude in song. ✨

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## ZICHRU L'OLAM BRITO

Remember His covenant forever; the word He commanded for a thousand generations (Divrei HaYamim Alef 16:15)

We often find that the words of Dovid HaMelech from T'hilim are repeated in other places in Tanach, most notably in Divrei HaYamim. For example, every morning we say the HODU which contains in it a whole portion from Divrei HaYamim Alef, chapter 16, from verse 1 to 36. Radak points out that we also find part of this with minor changes in chapter 105 of T'hilim in the first 14 verses. As Rashi explains to us, Divrei HaYamim was written by Ezra through the prophets Chagai, Zecharya, and Mal'achi, during the 18 years from when Zerubavel and Yehoshua the Kohen Gadol returned to Yerushalayim from exile during the reign of Koresh, king of Persia, until the days of "Koresh ben Esther" (Daryavesh?); and so, Ezra was recounting the words of Dovid HaMelech from T'hilim, which he used in his time.

In the Divrei HaYamim version, which is the one quoted in the HODU, Dovid sings to us ZICHRU L'OLAM BRITO, DAVAR TZIVA L'ELEF DOR - "remem-

ber His covenant is forever" or remember His covenant forever". Since these words come right before recounting the brit that Gd made with Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, it would seem reasonable to assume that 'brit' refers to the covenant regarding Gd's promise to give them (and their descendants) the Land of Israel. According to some commentaries, however, it may not be as straightforward as it appears.

Rav Shimon Schwab tells us that "this 'davar', the Torah, was commanded to us for all time to come" (Rav Schwab on Prayer, p.135). Rashi also explains in Divrei HaYamim, as well as in T'hilim, that this refers to the Torah. The problem is that we are told to remember the 'brit', and if 'davar' refers to Torah, we have to fit 'brit' into this meaning. I believe we can do this by looking at Mishpatim 24:7 - VAYIKACH SEFER HABRIT VAYIKRA B'OZNEI HA'AM - He took the Book of the Covenant and read in earshot of the people..." The Mechilta tells exactly what this "Book of the Covenant" was: MIB'REISHIT AD MATAN TORAH V'HAMITZVOT B'MARA - from the book of B'reishit until the giving of the Torah and the mitzvot they learned at Mara. In the next verse it says: HINEI DAM HABRIT ASHER KARAT HASHEM IMACHEM... -

'behold the blood of the covenant that HaShem sealed with you...' These words clearly refer to the Torah as brit. As Metzudot Dovid comments on ZICHRU L'OLAM BRITO: HATORAH NITNA BIVRIT - the Torah was given as a covenant.

If I can understand this 'brit' and 'davar' as referring to Torah, then perhaps this verse can also be understood as: "Remember His brit, Gd's Torah, and it is that which will bring you L'OLAM - to the next world. So instead of telling me to simply remember the Torah, it also tells me that if I want to merit Olam Haba, remembering the Torah inspires me to observe it as well. 🌸

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## PARSHAT HAKETORET

The Rama (132:2) and the Beit Yosef as well as the Zohar, advise saying PITUM HAKETORET morning and afternoon. The reason given, according to the Zohar, is that its segula is great: "All who read the procedure of the ketoret every day will be saved from all bad things... bad injuries... and will not be harmed all that day... therefore one should concentrate on it" (Zohar, Vayakhel, 218:2). The KETORET is known for its power of atonement and of saving one from death. It was with the ketoret that Aharon was able to stop the plague that struck the people after the rebellion of Korach (Bamidbar 17:11). The Gemara (Shabbat 89a) tells us that this ability was given to Moshe by the Angel of Death when all the angels were gifting him with various things. The Mabit informs us that just as the sh'kalim would serve as a prevention or atonement for the people during a census, so too, the ketoret.

What intrigued me about this whole parsha was the fact that at the end of it, we are to say three well-known verses: HASHEM TZ'VAKOT IMANU, MISGAV LANU... The Lord of hosts is

with us, the G-d of Jacob is our stronghold}; HASHEM TZ'VAKOT ASHREI ADAM BOTEI'ACH BACH - Lord of hosts, happy is the one who trusts in You} HASHEM HOSHI'A, HAMELECH YA'ANENU V'YOM KOR'EINU - Lord, save! May the King answer us on the day we call.

R. Chayim Vital, in Pri Eitz Chayim (Sha'ar HaKorbanot 83) tells us that every time one says PITUM HAKETORET, we must add these three verses. The Yerushalmi (B'rachot 85, H'A) says about these verses: Speak these words forever and never forget them. Although it doesn't specify why we must add these three verses, the Mabit says: "These three verses are effective for every trouble... and they are the ends of three chapters of T'hilim which are special for t'fila." He points out that each of these three verses is the last verse in three different chapters of Psalms. One is the last in chapter 20; one is the last in chapter 46; and one is the final verse in chapter 84. What makes these verses so special?

What only increased my curiosity is the fact that these same three verses are said together, not only after PARSHAT HAKETORET but also in the HODU that we say in Shacharit and in UVA L'TZION as well as in Havdala. Why these three? Why are

they from three chapters of T'hilim that are considered MIZMORIM M'YUCHADIM LITFILA - psalms that are special for prayer? I tried to understand it by looking at each one of these psalms. Their contents contained themes that can be found in many other chapters: crying out to HaShem; difficulties facing Israel; Divine intervention; yearning to return to the Holy Land. This gave me no hint as to why these verses were chosen from these particular chapters.

Then I came across a Gemara (B'rachot 28b) that might help provide some insight if not an actual answer: 'These 18 (blessings - the Sh'moneh Esrei), to what do they correspond? R. Hillel ...said they correspond to the 18 mentions of Gd's Name that David said in Psalm 29; Rav Yosef said: corresponding to 18 repetitions of Gd's Name in Sh'ma; R. Tanchum, in the name of R. Yehoshua ben Levi, said: corresponding to the 18 vertebrae in the spine.'

The Maharal explains these as follows: In the opinion of R. Hillel, he is emphasizing the Divine attribute of mercy as expressed in His 4-letter name (Y-H-V-H). So, the t'fila alludes to its association with Gd's mercy. R. Yosef's opinion focuses more on Gd's

being Melech - the King. The Sh'ma is our daily acceptance of Gd's kingship. Relating to Gd as the King is clearly necessary as we approach Him in prayer. Finally, the Maharal explains the opinion of R. Yehoshua ben Levi as a focus on our obligation to remember our dependence upon Gd and on the goodness He gives us. The 18 vertebrae bend over, admitting this close relationship and dependence.

Is it possible to relate these three views of what is involved in t'fila to our three verses? I think it might be possible:

- HASHEM TZ'VAKOT IMANU... - this verse tells us of the hashgacha pratit - Divine Providence - with which Gd relates to the Jewish people. The Ibn Yachya teaches that "He help us always in the merit of our fathers." This would seem to correspond to the opinion of R. Hillel, who focuses on HaShem's RACHAMIM.

- HASHEM TZ'VAKOT, ASHREI ADAM BOTEI'ACH BACH - this verse emphasizes our depending upon Gd which would correspond with the opinion of R. Yehoshua ben Levi who focuses on our bent position, showing the close relationship and dependency upon Gd.

- HASHEM HOSHI'A, HAMELECH... -

this would certainly seem to reflect the opinion of R. Yosef who emphasizes our need to accept Gd's Kingship when we approach Him in prayer. As Rav S.R. Hirsch says, 'HaShem will answer us when we recognize Him as our King'.

These verses, then, seem to be dealing with our relationship with HaShem, with how we approach Him in prayer; with how he responds to us. Briefly, it is reminiscent of T'fila, of the crux of our daily prayer. Maybe that is their importance and emphasis. Maybe. 🌸

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## PO'EL G'VUROT

For it is He alone who does mighty deeds (PO'EL G'VUROT) and creates new things, who is Master of battles and sows righteousness, who makes salvation grow and creates cures...

I've been taught and have always held that the characteristic that most exemplifies Gd is that of RACHAMIM - mercy. We always pray, especially during the Yamim Nora'im, that Gd should move from His KISEI HADIN - seat of judgment - and go to His KISEI HARACHAMIM, the one of mercy. When we talk of the G'VURA of HaShem, we are often referring to the "might" it requires for Him to overcome His MIDAT HADIN - as in "Who is the mighty one? One who can conquer his inclination" - and allow His MIDAT HARACHAMIM to take over.

During this dangerous period of war, we certainly beg for this to happen. But while it is so easy to "be angry" at what is happening and to "fault" Gd (Gd forbid) for allowing our soldiers to fall in battle and not stepping in Himself to destroy the enemy, I often think about what this must be like for Him. We know that it is "painful" for Gd to punish us - to

discipline us - because even if it is for our own good (and it always is), it doesn't make Gd happy. There is no joy in it for Him.

I remember how, as a parent, I would have to punish or rebuke my children for something. Even though I knew I was right and that this was necessary "for their own good", I would walk away and cry, because it hurt me to see them sad. Gd, I believe, is no different. Disciplining is "painful" for Him and He "cries". So, this time of war must be especially difficult. (I can't imagine what pain the Holocaust must have caused Him.) And although it's easy for us to say 'then why don't You relieve Yourself of the pain?', it's just not that simple.

With this new outlook, I saw something in the davening today in a way that was different from my usual way of thinking: In one of the paragraphs preceding the Sh'ma, we say ...KI HU L'VADO PO'EL G'VUROT... I usually choose to understand this as His employing His G'VURA to overcome His MIDAT HADIN and, in that way, OSEH CHADASHOT - He allows new things to be: He re-creates His world; He lets us become new people by accepting our t'shuva instead of punishing us, and the like. But now, I thought that maybe, sometimes the G'VURA which He is PO'EL, putting

into effect, is not to overcome the MIDAT HADIN, but to overcome His great desire to be M'RACHEIM.

Hashem needs the DIN to be active in order to succeed in the discipline He knows we need - again, for our own good - even though He may be "crying" during the process. And so, He needs to have this G'VURA, and through this process, as painful as it may be, He creates a new reality, one which has been rectified from the way in which we had been functioning. And in that process, He is BA'AL MILCHAMOT, governs the war that must be, but despite it all, He takes the acts of chessed (ZOREI'A TZ'DAKOT) that we are doing during all of this and plants them to be MATZMI'ACH Y'SHU'OT - to lead to the salvation He and we desire. Thus, He is BOREI R'FU'OT - heals an ailing world; NORA T'HILOT and receives the praises due to Him, ADON HANIFLA'OT, because of all the things He does, "hidden" from us as they may be, and thus M'CHADEISH B'TUVO... MA'ASEI V'REISHIT, really re-creates a new world - one, more to His liking.

Wouldn't it be nice if we would help ease His "pain" and stop His "crying"?

"If only My people would listen to Me, if Israel would walk in My way, I would

soon subdue their enemies, and turn My hand against their foes" (T'hilim 81:14-15). 

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## NA'AR

What an interesting word. One that we tend to dismiss because we all know it means "a kid". Why is this word used to describe youngsters? Because its root means "to shake off"; "to empty" (VAYNA'EIR HASHEM... - And Hashem emptied (shook off) Mitzrayim into the sea (Sh'mot 14:27 - Parshat B'shalach). At first, I thought, semi-humorously (?) that it correctly described its use as meaning "youth" since at that stage, they are usually "empty" of wisdom and can be influenced one way or another. We can see this in NA'AR HAYITI, GAM ZAKANTI - Once I was young, now I am old... (T'hilim 37:25). We are told that ZAKEIN means ZEH SHEKANA CHOCHMA - one who has acquired wisdom; as opposed to a NA'AR - who is empty of same. One who is a NA'AR is "empty" and, therefore, available to be used for various purposes.

We see this, for example, in B'reishit, en route to the Akeida: VAYIKACH ET SH'NEI N'ARAV ITO... - ...and he took his two young men with him and his son Yitzchak (23:3 - Parshat Vayeira). These are two people who are ready to perform any task that is required

of them and so, they accompany Avraham on his journey to do whatever needs to be done. Interestingly, the same word is used a few verses later to describe Yitzchak himself. Avraham tells the two young men to remain where they are while VA'ANI V'HANA'AR... - while I and the lad will go yonder... (22:5), as well as in verse 12 when Avraham is told AL TISHLACH YADCHA EL HANA'AR - do not touch the NA'AR. Yitzchak is "empty". "Empty" of any self-centeredness or self-involvement in all this. He is considered an OLAH T'MIMA - a whole, complete offering. TAMIM - complete in his giving himself over totally to HaShem.

A final example we find in our parsha in the description of Yehoshua: YEHOSHUA BIN NUN NA'AR...- Yehoshua..., a lad, would not depart from within the tent. The meaning of the word is the same, "empty"; and here it is also beneficial because this makes Yehoshua a K'LI - a vessel, prepared and able to receive and accept all that he learns from Moshe. Thus, he merits to be the one to succeed Moshe in leading the people of Israel to Eretz Yisrael. 🌸

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## ATA GIBOR...

...M'CHAYEI MEITIM - You are eternally mighty, Lord, You give life to the dead and have great power to save.

There are times when there are people around me, friends, close ones, relatives, who are sick. Some are not merely sick but dangerously so. And in some cases, they appear to me and to all around them to be near death (Gd forbid). When this happens, I can't stop thinking about them and davening for them. Since it is this with which I am preoccupied, it invariably affects how I understand my usual davening.

And so, in the second b'racha of the Amida, the one called G'VUROT, I am reading into the phrase of M'CHAYEI MEITIM ATA, RAV L'HOSHI'A an understanding that differs from the original one. This paragraph mentions a number of times, the G'VURA of HaShem in His being M'CHAYEI MEITIM, resuscitating the dead, referring to when it will occur in Olam HaBa:

1) ATA GIBOR L'OLAM, HASHEM, M'CHAYEI MEITIM ATA, RAV L'HOSHI'A

2) M'CHAYEI MEITIM B'RACHAMIM RABIM

3) M'KAYEM EMUNATO LISHEINEI AFAR - referring to His keeping His promise to those who are dead (by resuscitating them) (Daniel 12:2);

4) MELECH MEIMIT U'MECHAYEI.

Given all these references, apparently, to the same thing, maybe I can understand one of these as referring to something else. The word MEITIM means 'the dead'. But that word is one that we use, as well, to describe those who are not dead but who (we think) are dying. If so, then I choose to see the opening of the b'racha thusly: ATA GIBOR L'OLAM HASHEM - You are indeed the One with the G'VURA to do all the following things, one of which is M'CHAYE MEITIM ATA - the ability to revive those who (we think) are dying - by having them be healed and recover and in that way RAV L'HOSHI'A - You bring great salvation. After all, this same b'racha lists Your G'VURA as being a ROFEI CHOLIM, Healer of the sick.

This, then, becomes my plea to Him to use that power to fool us and prove us wrong about those we fear might be dying but rather be M'ECHAYEI them. 🌸

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## KI-Y'MU V'KI-B'LU

The Gemara in Shabbat (88a) tells us that Purim marks the reaffirmation of Israel's acceptance of the Torah on a higher level than when it was accepted at Sinai. There, it was KAF ALEIHEM HAR K'GIGIT - Gd held the mountain over them like a barrel - Torah was accepted under duress, which could have given later generations an excuse for not adhering to its mandates. Now, they re-accepted the Torah out of great love for Gd.

I think the reason for this can be seen in the history of the events. When the Jews received the Torah at Sinai, they were relatively unified, VAYICHAN SHAM YISRAEL NEGED HAHAR - Rashi: K'ISH ECHAD B'LEIV ECHAD, they encamped opposite the mountain as one man with one heart. They had experienced a slavery together, for many years. They shared the same experience, the same hardships, they could understand each other; there was a strong common background that molded them together. We may be able to suggest, as well, that their experience with Gd was close to one-dimensional. He was their Redeemer and Savior. Their association with Gd was primarily positive,

with them being on the receiving end of His goodness and mercy; they had yet to experience His displeasure and anger. Receiving or accepting the Torah, then, could be seen as a "no-brainer"; they more than owed it to Him, and they would want to tie themselves to Him out of gratitude and out of anticipation of a continuation of this kind of relationship in the future.

Given this background, I believe there is a stark contrast between them and the Jews in Persia at the time of the story of Purim. We are told by the Gemara that they were known for their lack of unity - as it says in the Megila: YEISH AM ECHAD M'FORAD UMFUZAR... LEICH K'NOS ET KOL HA-Y'HUDIM - there is a nation dispersed and separated... (Esther): go gather all the Jews together. The purpose of the mitzvot of mishlo'ach manot and matanot la'evyonim is to counteract this negative trait, by emphasizing the need for and importance of brotherhood.

The experience of the Jews in Persia with Gd must have been strained. Some, who remembered what it had been like in Yerushalayim, felt His wrath firsthand and knew what it was like to be rejected by Gd. The newer generation didn't even have the opportunity to experience Gd's

immediate presence. It was NISTAR, hidden. They lived in a period of HESTER PANIM, where Gd's Presence was concealed. They only knew the result of His anger: exile. And a realistic personal fear of Gd must have been greater for them than for the generation at Sinai. They didn't know how to rejoice at Gd's clear(?) and powerful intervention in redeeming them. This escape from the death plotted by Haman could be attributed to Gd only through their faith. They couldn't even know that it was, indeed "miraculous". If, then, at this point they overwhelmingly accept the new religious dictates of Mordechai and Esther (the Oral Law) in terms of the event's significance in Jewish history and for future generations, then, I believe, it was done out of a different sense than the acceptance of Torah at Sinai. Now, there was a realization that the Gd Whom they feared and Who seemed so distant, could and would still act on their behalf, even while angry enough to remain hidden. I imagine that the depth to which this perception penetrated their souls would probably have been deeper than the same religious undertaking at Sinai, before the receiving of the Torah.

Maybe this is what is meant by V'KI-B'LU: that this stage of the acceptance of the Torah - really

reflecting the nature of their relationship with Gd - was significantly greater. For whereas, originally, they had experienced first-hand, open miracles and redemption, so that accepting Gd and His Torah was at that level; now, they are re-affirming that attachment out of a clear recognition that this covenant holds even in times of Gd's anger, in times of hester panim. And, as such, it is a truer acceptance that was, indeed, on a higher level. 

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## V'HAYU HAD'VARIM HA'ELEH

The first passage of the Sh'ma tells us to love HaShem in various ways: B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA UVCHOL NAFSH'CHA UVCHOL M'ODECHA - "with all your heart, your soul, your means". It then continues and instructs us to follow the dictates of the Torah, to teach them to our children, to don Tefillin and to fulfill the mitzva of Mezuzah, both of which remind us of the mitzvot of the Torah.

I had always seen this continuation of V'HAYU HAD'VARIM HA'ELEH as a list of requirements added to those at the beginning. Maybe I was wrong and it is actually telling us more. Certainly, these are requirements but, in addition, it could be a description of how we are to show V'AHAVTA - to show Gd we love Him. Beyond the opening list of B'CHOL L'VAV'CHA..., this is adding and saying: you also demonstrate your love of Gd by V'HAYU HAD'VARIM HA'ELEH - doing His mitzvot and teaching His Torah.

After all, we learn from Hoshei'a (14:3), which we read on Shabbat Shuva: K'CHU IMACHEM D'VARIM...

"take with you, words". Isn't it possible that aside from the traditional understanding that D'VARIM means "words" - that we should verbally confess our sins as part of t'shuva; isn't it possible that D'VARIM refers to V'HAYU HAD'VARIM HA'ELEH, these things - the Torah and mitzvot is what you should bring with you to show your t'shuva? The Malbim says that K'CHU IMACHEM D'VARIM refers to T'SHUVA MEI'AHAVA, repentance that reflects your love of Gd, things that will serve as a merit, which is "mitzvot and good deeds" - things that are sourced in the Torah. This, then, is indeed, something that shows V'AHAVTA EIT HASHEM - how we love HaShem.

Although Rashi (Va'etchanan 6:6) does state that V'HAYU HAD'VARIM HA'ELEH is the AHAVA, I believe there is a little difference between what he says and what I am referring to. Rashi: "And what is the love spoken of in the previous verse? V'HAYU HAD'VARIM HA'ELEH; as a result of this (the words of the Torah) being on your heart, you become aware of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and attach yourself to His ways." Rashi tells us that the way to come to love HaShem is to follow the Torah, thus getting to "know" Him and cling to Him.

What I am suggesting is rather how we can express that love. And so, even though the understanding of V'HAYU HAD'VARIM HA'ELEH in both cases is related to V'AHAVTA EIT HASHEM, their direction is different. Rashi = How to achieve that love; my suggestion = how to express that love. 🌸

# Afterthoughts

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## AMALEK TODAY - THOUGHTS

I've always wondered why, after the ALEINU, we are to say three verses that, at least to me, are totally unrelated to it. The verses that are added seem to serve as a reminder of Gd's connection with us and as our Protector:

1) AL TIRA MIPACHAD PIT'OM... Have no fear of sudden terror or of the ruin when it overtakes the wicked (Mishlei 3:25).

2) UTZU EITZA V'TUFAR... Make your strategy but it will be thwarted, propose your plan but it will not stand, for Gd is with us (Yishayahu 8:10).

3) V'AD ZIKNA ANI HU... When you grow old, I will be the same; when your hair turns gray, I will still carry you. I will bear you, I will carry you, I will rescue you (Yishayahu 46:4).

I've looked at various sources to find an explanation for this connection and the only one I've found explains the verses but not why they are placed here. These are the three verses that the children told Mordechai they were learning and these encouraged him to believe that

the Jews would be saved from the threat of Haman. I was unsuccessful, though, in finding an answer to my question.

In the process, however, I found an interesting background for these verses presented by Rav Mordechai Eliyahu (Vayomer Mordechai, p.94), who cites the Vilna Gaon. According to him, the three verses refer to three times that the Jews encountered Amalek. The first verse - AL TIRA...- refers to the first time we meet Amalek when they attacked us suddenly and for no reason. The verse tells us - there is no reason to fear a sudden attack.

I find it impossible not to apply this to current events in our dealing with Amalek. "Sudden"? Did you say "sudden"? SUDDEN! Even though we fear what began on October 7th, there is no need to worry because MISHO'AT R'SHA'IM KI TAVO - as the Malbim and others explain, Gd is promising destruction upon the R'SHA'IM which will not affect us. Just as we overcame that first attack of Amalek, so too, will we do so again.

The second verse - UTZU EITZA... - relates to when we again warred against Amalek. After the death of Aharon, the Torah tells us: The Canaanite heard that Israel was coming... and they fought against

Israel (Bamidbar 21:1). Rashi explains how this K'NA'ANI was actually Amalek (given the description of where they came from); but they spoke the language of the Canaanites to convince the Jews of this so that they would pray to Gd to have them defeat the K'NA'ANI and not them, so their prayers would be ineffective against them. Israel does, indeed pray, not about K'NA'ANI, but rather about HA'AM HAZEH B'YADI - give this nation into my hands. Thinking that speaking the language of the Canaanites would trick the Jews and give them victory, Amalek was wrong. Their plan, UTZU EITZA, didn't work - V'TUFAR. DAB'RU DAVAR - speaking another language, LO YAKUM - did not stand, for it didn't give them the upper hand.

Again, today if our Arab neighbors in the south behave as helpers, workers, "friends" to their Jewish neighbors, trying to fool us and give them the upper hand, ultimately, it will not work. Indeed, these workers we hired and befriended, did fool us. They proceeded to inform all their terrorist friends every detail of where and when everything was so that they succeeded in the massacre that followed. BUT - LO YAKUM - it cannot and will not last; KI IMANU KEIL".

The Vilna Gaon says that the last verse refers to the story of Purim.

Just as the Jews in the time of Haman were saved through T'SHUVA, so too, will we (hopefully, having learned the lesson of machloket and sin'at chinam). Then, indeed, Gd will V'AD ZIKNA... V'AD SEIVA ANI ESBOL... VA'ANI ESA... V'ANI AMALET - Even when the Jews don't have merits (Rashi), Gd, in His infinite Mercy, will carry us, tolerate those past sins and allow us to escape our enemies and return as the nation Gd will always protect. ✨

# Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

## YASOR YISRANI KAH...

HaShem chastised me severely but He did not hand me over to death (T'hilim 118:18).

The proper p'shat understanding of this is that although HaShem had afflicted David, He didn't allow him to die. Or, Chazal also understand this as referring to the Jewish nation - that despite the fact that HaShem punished us with the afflictions of galut in order to atone for our sins, He did not permit us to be destroyed by our enemies.

I would like to add another possible read. When we think of all the people we know who, upon nearing death, suffer so, we try to make sense of it; to "justify" it. The only understanding I have of this, that not only makes sense to me, but gives meaning to the suffering and, to a certain extent, is comforting, is the following:

HaKadosh Baruch Hu may afflict us either as a punishment, atonement, or as a means to elevate us (as in Happy is the man whom You discipline, Lord, and teach him out of Your law - T'hilim 94:12), but the purpose and end result of the affliction is positive. It either leads us to learn more Torah or V'LAMAVET LO NETANANI. I would like

to refer to a Malbim who says on the words: V'LAMAVET LO NETANANI - the soul will not 'die' and his sins will have been atoned for through all the suffering he endured. It is M'CHAPEIR for us so that we don't "die" - lose our portion in OLAM HABA. 🌸

# Afterthoughts

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## PO'EL G'VUROT #3

When it happens that people close to me, whether relatives or friends, are dealing with severe illness, it takes over my thoughts, especially when I'm davening.

And so, in this frame of mind, I find different meaning to words I've prayed many times before. This is what happened recently when I reached L'KEIL BARUCH N'IMOT YITEINU - To the blessed Gd they offer melodies. I understood it in a way that was different from the two other ways I had always understood it. I would usually see the phrase PO'EL G'VUROT as referring to Gd's overcoming either His MIDAT HADIN to show RACHAMIM or overcoming His MIDAT HARACHAMIM to show DIN, when that became necessary. But now, thinking of those who are sick, I realized that one of the G'VUROT of HaShem is healing the sick. This is clearly spelled out in the second b'racha of the Amida, the one we refer to as G'VUROT. It lists there a number of His G'VUROT: granting parnasa, freeing captives, reviving the dead, as well as healing the sick - ROFEI CHOLIM.

Given this understanding of G'VUROT, the b'racha before the Sh'ma took on a

different meaning for me. We praise and exalt Gd because He is PO'EL G'VUROT - He uses the G'VURA of healing the sick and, in that way, is OSEH CHADASHOT - He gives the sick a new lease on life. As BA'AL MILCHAMOT - He fights the disease; is ZOREI'A TZ'DAKOT - The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed (T'hilim 103:6) - actually uses His righteousness to be MATZMI'ACH Y'SHU'OT - to bring forth His salvation by BOREI R'FU'OT - having created the healing necessary, thus leading to NORA T'HILOT, One Whose praises are more than we can give because He is ADON HANIFLA'OT, Master of all wondrous things, even though they may be hidden from us.

It amazes me how many possible meanings Chazal put into the words of our davening. It only waits for us to discover them.

May we all be able to. ❀