



Kovetz

Chidushei Torah

A collection of Chidushei Torah through
the many dimensions of The Torah:
Peshat, Remez, Halacha and Chassidus.



Composed by:
Rabbi's, Yeshiva students and members of
The Buffalo Jewish Community.

Buffalo, NY

Yud Shevat, 5782





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B"H

Foreword

This year 5782 is unique as it is the Shemita year, The Torah states about the Shemitah year:

וּבִשְׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שְׁבַת שְׁבַתוֹן יִהְיֶה לָאָרֶץ שְׁבַת לַה' שָׁדֵךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכֶרֶם לֹא תִזְמַר (ויקרא כ"ד ה')

"For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in its produce. But in the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest, a Sabbath to the L-rd; you shall not sow your field, you shall not prune your vineyard, nor shall you reap the aftergrowth of your harvest . . . (Vayikra 25:3-5)

During the Shemitah year, the residents of the Land of Israel must completely desist from cultivating their fields.

One of the reasons for this Mitzvah is that we take a break from our physical work and spend more time on connecting to Hashem, through studying Torah and practicing The Mitzvos.

As The Sforno explains the Pasuk "The seventh year should be.. Sabbath on to G-d"—so that during this whole year the farmer instead of “serving” the soil which requires cultivation, will turn his efforts to serving G-d directly instead. Just as the weekly Sabbath is a day set aside for intensive service of the Lord, so the Shemitah year is to serve the same purpose.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe in a letter highlights the message and lesson of the Shemitah year:

“Similar to the Sabbath day, the holy day in the week, the Sabbatical Year (Shemitah) is the holy year in the seven-year cycle.

The Torah prescribes a special order for the year of Shemitah, forbidding the tilling of the soil, etc.: “The earth shall keep a sabbath (rest) unto G-d” (Lev. 25:2).

So much for the material aspect of Shemitah.

In a deeper, spiritual sense, the Torah indicates that the year of Shemitah should influence the Jew to a lasting cessation and rest from all that is “earthly” and coarse; that he must become more spiritual and refined. This spirituality, moreover, should be dedicated to G-d, and not to the cause of false ideals and ideas which, high sounding though they may be, drag down humanity into the mire of materialistic selfishness and coarseness. Only the ideal of the Torah and Mitzvot translated into every-day life leads to true refinement and elevation of the soul.

The message of the Shemitah year is, therefore, a call for lasting cessation from the earthly and material, and dedication to the higher things in life, in accordance with the Torah and Mitzvot, a call to spirituality which should permeate every phase of one’s daily life, one’s thinking, speech and every action, including eating, business, and general conduct”.

The Rebbe encouraged both laymen and Torah scholars to increase in studying Torah during the Shemitah year. Although the Mitzvah of Shemitah is fulfilled in Eretz Yisroel, the message of Shemitah to increase in Torah study and our spiritual connection to Hashem can be applied in the diaspora as well.

One of the ways to increase Torah study is through writing and publishing Chidushei Torah. Publishing Chidushei Torah benefits the readers as well as the writers, for when a person knows that he has

to explain his idea in writing, this will cause him to study the concept with more depth and clarity.

Baruch Hashem, The Jewish community of Buffalo is blessed with many great Rabbis, Yeshiva students and Torah scholars. This booklet is a collection of Chidushei Torah. It contains essays and insights on the different dimensions of the Torah, Peshat, Remez, Halacha and Chassidus.

We would like to thank all those who took the time and effort to write down and send in their Chidushim. A special thanks to Sholom Ber Gurary for his help with formatting this booklet.

May it be Hashem's will, that in the merit of these Chidushei Torah, we shall merit the coming of Moshiach—"The day that will be entirely Shabbos and rest for everlasting life".

For comments and feedback please email
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This must be a Jewish boy

Rabbi Yosef Alt

Mother Yocheved finds that she's no longer able to hide her new baby from the cruel mobs of Egyptians, who have been throwing Jewish baby boys into the Nile. In a desperate moment, she does the impossible: She places her newborn into a box of reeds, and sets him afloat on the waters of the Nile, never to see him again (so she thinks)—but perhaps he will live on.

The basket floats all the way to Pharaoh's daughter, who is bathing in the Nile.

Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe by the river, and her maidens walked along the river. She saw the basket among the reeds; she sent her maidservant, and she took it. She opened it and saw him, the child—and behold! Na'ar bocheh, the young one was crying. She took pity on him and said, "This is one of the Hebrew boys." (Shemos 2:5-6)

The simple read of this pasuk is that it was baby Moshe who was crying. Ba'al HaTurim, however, reads it differently. He posits that the youth who was crying was actually Aharon, Moshe's older brother—not the baby in the basket. Ba'al HaTurim writes that Yocheved had placed Aharon nearby, to keep an eye on Moshe's basket; he was the crying youth that Pharaoh's daughter heard. Ba'al HaTurim demonstrates that this p'shat is hinted to in the text by the gematria (numerical value) of the words. The gematria of "Na'ar bocheh, the youth was crying," is exactly the same as that of "Zeh Aharon haKohen, this is Aharon the Kohen!"

When Pharaoh's daughter opened the basket, she remarked, "This

is one of the Hebrew boys.” Some commentaries understand this to mean that she observed that he was circumcised, and therefore he must be a Hebrew.

Rabbi Menachem Goldberger, the Rabbi of Congregation Tiferes Yisroel in Baltimore, Maryland, explained that according to the Ba'al HaTurim, it is possible to offer another approach: One little boy is crying over another? Yl is must be a Jewish boy! The Egyptians were busy throwing babies into the river, and they weren't crying over anybody! The Jews, on the other-hand, were compassionate; they cared for one another. Therefore, this must be a Jewish boy.

We see this repeatedly with Moshe Rabbeinu him-self. As soon as he leaves Pharaoh's palace, he pays attention to the suffering of the Jewish people. Later, he notices an Egyptian man beating a Jew and he's compelled to stop him. Then he sees two Jews fighting, and he breaks up the fight.

This is the hallmark of the Jewish people. We care for each other, and we feel each other's pain.

May we continue to support each other and feel for each other, and through this may we merit to be re-deemed once again with the coming of the Mashiach.



Miketz – Mission Impossible

Mr. Ari Rashkin

You don't have to be a psychologist to look at Yosef's behavior when meeting the brothers and discover oddities. First, he recognizes them, but speaks harshly. He then "remembers" the dreams and accuses them of being spies. When they divulge that they are 12 brothers from one man, Yosef demands they bring *Binyomin*. Yosef then first says they should all be confined, less one brother who will go to Canaan to bring *Binyomin*. They refuse (seemingly), and he confines them all for three days. Yosef overhears the brothers conversation in the pit, cries and allows one (Shimon) to stay in Egypt, and the reminder to go and bring *Binyomin*.

The brothers return and are invited for lunch with Yosef. Yosef comes in, the brothers bow, and he asks "how is your father" Yosef talks to Binyamin and hurries out on verge of tears.

This is the straight order of the *pesukim*. If we look a little bit deeper, we are puzzled with so many questions. Why would Yosef treat the brothers as such? Was he being vindictive? Most obviously, why not reveal himself right away? What was the purpose in this entire deception?

Commonly, we say to test the brothers. Test them from what? There must be an overarching purpose. The question is what is it!

Ramban's mehalach answers these questions. He starts with a critique of Rashi on the following Pasuk.

וַיִּזְכֹּר יוֹסֵף אֶת הַחֲלֻמוֹת אֲשֶׁר חָלַם לָהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מִרְגְּלִים אַתֶּם לְרַאזֹת
אֶת-עֲרֹת הָאָרֶץ בָּאתֶם:

Recalling the dreams that he had dreamed about them, Joseph said to them, "You are spies, you have come to see the land in its nakedness

Rashi explains that Yosef knew the dreams were being fulfilled because the brothers bowed down. Ramban asks: Neither dream was fulfilled! Certainly, the second dream, where the sun and moon refer to his father and mother, was not fulfilled. However, the first dream also was not fulfilled. Binyamin was absent!

Ramban therefore explains, that Yosef "recalling the dreams", means that he realized NEITHER had been fulfilled, and that *Binyomin* had to come down to fulfil the first dream. In other words, Yosef recognized his two dreams as prophecies that needed to be fulfilled. Therefore, he starts this elaborate plot to bring ALL the brothers down, so they can bow down to him. Thus, immediately after Yosef recalls the dreams, and realizes *Binyomin* is missing, he says, "You are spies!"

The story continues. Yosef suggests **one** brother should go home and get *Binyomin*. This is sensible, as it maximizes the chances ALL brothers being in Egypt when Binyomin arrives. They refuse (implicitly) and Yosef is forced to throw them in prison. After THREE days. Yosef sees this plan is not working, and keeps one brother in Egypt, so to maximize the chances that ALL the brothers (sans shimon) would return with Binyomin. Shimon needed rescuing! However, Yosef still wants to supply food to his brothers/father, so he sends them with enough to eat for a bit, and keeps Shimon, hoping ALL l will return to accompany *Binyomin*. Notably, Yosef weeps when overhearing the conversation in prison, between the brothers and Reuven.

Eventually, the brothers return with *Binyomin*.

Yosef recognizes them, and tells the steward to invite everyone for lunch. (The brothers have not yet seen Yosef or Shimon) The steward brings in Shimon and all the brothers are united and settled in. Finally, Yosef arrives.

וַיָּבֹא יוֹסֵף הַבְּיָיִתָּה וַיְבִיאוּ לוֹ אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר־בִּידָם הַבֵּיתָה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לוֹ

אַרְצָה :

When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts that they had brought with them into the house, bowing low before him to the ground.

This is all to set up to this moment! Yosef delays arriving, comes in with much “pomp” and, accordingly, everyone bows. The first prophecy is fulfilled. Immediately after this Yosef asks about his father.

וַיִּשְׁאַל לָהֶם לְשָׁלוֹם וַיֹּאמֶר הַשָּׁלוֹם אֲבִיכֶם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתֶּם הָעוֹדְנִי חִי

He greeted them, and he said, “How is your aged father of whom you spoke? Is he still in good health?”

With the first prophecy fulfilled, Yosef can move to the second, which discusses his father. While implied he asked about Yaakov, this is the first time the pasuk tells us!

Ramban uses this Pshat to explain why in all those years that Yosef was in Egypt, he never reached out to his father or provide his brothers with food. Yosef understood that this was the way Hashem intended for the prophecy to be fulfilled. He was a “rising star” in Egypt, and becoming viceroy would be the way for his brothers and father to bow down. A father does not bow down to a son, but a father does bow down to a king. Thus, he could not journey to Cannan. He could not reveal himself to his brothers, and “mess up” the plan.

If we take a step back, according to this pshat, Yosef’s would have faced a tremendous trial in Egypt, cutting much deeper than the nisayon of poteifar’s wife. He is known throughout the whole land, but his father is 6 days away and thinks him dead. He has access to all the grain of Egypt, but cannot feed his family. Perhaps, this would have been a Mission Impossible. Too difficult to pass. Let’s look at the following *passuk*.

וַיִּקְרָא יוֹסֵף אֶת-שֵׁם הַבְּכוֹר מְנַשֶּׁה כִּי-נִשְׁנֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-עַמְלִי וְאֵת כָּל-בֵּית אָבִי:

Joseph named the first-born Manasseh, meaning, “God has made me forget completely my hardship and my parental home.”

This is an ODD name for a *Bechor*. Forgot your father’s house! To

the contrary! We constantly recognize we stand on the shoulders our ancestors. This name seems like the ultimate slap in the face!

Perhaps, Yosef had an impossible trial. He could NOT possibly do what needed to be done and stay the course in Egypt, all while being emotionally connected to his past. He had to “forgot his past,” including the house of his father, to complete his mission. Thus, Hashem gave Yosef, the Bracha of “forgetting,” or emotional discontent, which put his past behind him in order to enable everyone to come to Mitzraiym, bow down and fulfil the dreams. Thus, Yosef recognized this Bracha and named his firstborn as such. (side point: perhaps this explains why eventually Efraiyim, the younger son, supersedes Menashe, the Bechor. Menashe role was prominent when Yosef was disconnected from his family. (by necessity) However, once they reintegrate, Efraiyim, who is named as thanks to Hashem for the sustenance takes center stage. Thus, Efrayim represents the future and not the necessary past)

While Yosef needed to forget his “father’s house,” to carry out his mission, ultimately, he was to be reintroduced to the brothers, albeit as the “leader.” I’d like to suggest that the three points during the interaction where Yosef cries, is the reintegration between Yosef and the brothers, thus remembering his “fathers house” so he cannot just act emotionlessly, as he attempts to fulfil the prophecy.

1) The discussion in the pit.

The first time the brothers reference Yosef, they call him the “one who is no more.” At that point, Yosef can continue the act. However, when the brothers are in prison, Yosef now relives when he is sold, and learns that, Reuven, who lost the first born right to Yosef, actually protected him. This is this Yosef’s past really starts to come back, and is cause for tears. However, he turns away, and seemingly quickly regains composure.

2) Introduction to Binyomin

וַיִּמְתֵּךְ יוֹסֵף כִּי־נִכְמְרוּ רַחֲמָיו אֶל־אָחִיו וַיִּבְקֶשׁ לִבְנוֹת וַיֵּבֶא הַחֲדָדָה

With that, Joseph hurried out, for he was overcome with feeling toward his brother and was on the verge of tears; he went into a room and wept there

Yosef sees his full-brother, healthy and well. He can no longer shelter his past. It all comes back, as Binyamin is not only with his “mothers” son, but someone who had NOTHING to do with the pit. Yosef has pure Avaha towards *Binyomin*, and at this point, with the full brunt of emotion must step into the other room to collect himself. He can barely proceed, but collects himself and continues!

3) Yehudah's Plea:

In the Beginning of Vayigash, Yehudah, the son of Leah defends Binyamin, the son of Rachel. At this point, Yosef, sees the brothers facing the same circumstances as with Him, but protect, instead of destroy. Yosef recognizes the *Siman Teshuva*, the complete rehabilitation of the brothers, and feels not only pure love for *Binyomin*, but ALL this brothers.

After Yehudah's plea, the Torah tells us (וְלֹא יָבִיל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק) Joseph could no longer control himself, and breaks down sobbing. Yosef 's “act” is now over. He cannot continue. He is a sibling again.

Mission impossible.



Vayigash – Yosef and his father Yisroel reunite, after 22 years of separation

R' Mordechai of Nadvorna once said that learning *Chumash* with *rashi* is a *segula* for *emunah*. This may take us by surprise. *Chumash* with *rashi*? I know a quick perusal helps me answer the school's *parsha* questions, but how does that help with my faith? Can it really be so easy? I would like to suggest the following reasoning, illustrated by a classic *Rashi* in this week's *parsha*.

Yosef and his father, *Yisroel*, reunite after 22 years of separation.

וַיֵּאסֹף יוֹסֵף מִרְכַבְתּוֹ וַיַּעַל לְקִרְאֹת־יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיו גִּשְׁנָה וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו וַיִּפֹּל עַל־
צַוְאָרְיוֹ וַיִּבֶךְ עַל־צַוְאָרְיוֹ עוֹד

Joseph hitched his chariot and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel; he presented himself to him and, embracing him around the neck, he wept on his neck a good while. (Berashis 46:29)

The end of the *pasuk*, which discusses that ONE of them wept on the other, is riddled with ambiguous pronouns. Therefore, it's unclear if it was *Yaakov* or *Yosef* who wept. In fact, once we “figure” out who wept, we need to explain why the other party did not!

Rashi takes the approach that it was *Yosef* who wept, famously explaining that *Yisroel* did not weep because he was saying the Shema.

However, if we use our “adult brains” to analyze this exchange, we

are left with pressing questions. First, presumably *Yaakov* would have said *Shema* at the first available opportunity. Therefore, this episode would need to take place either right before *Neitz* or after *Tzais*. While possible, that's a very specific time, and the *pasuk* does not indicate such. Moreover, if the meeting was the exact time of day for *shema*, why did *Yisroel* not continue with *Shachris* or *Maariv*. Once we answer the above, we also need to understand why did *Yosef* not say *shema*. Surely, he should have followed his father's lead!

Thus, when we take a step back reexamine a *psbat* that we have heard dozens of times, we often have a series of questions that (most!) of us would not have thought of in Elementary school.

I'd like to suggest a *psbat*, based on a *Mishna* in *Brochos* (not the one you may be thinking of!), perhaps underscoring the importance of learning *Chumash* with *Rashi*, as it relates to our *Emunah*.

עֲשֵׂה מַעֲשֶׂה. מַעֲשֶׂה בְּרַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל חָתָן פֶּטוּר מִקְרִיאַת שְׁמַע בַּלַּיְלָה
הָרִאשׁוֹן עַד מוֹצָאֵי שַׁבָּת, אִם לֹא שִׁקְרָא בַּלַּיְלָה הָרִאשׁוֹן שְׁנֵשָׂא. אָמְרוּ לוֹ
תַּלְמִידָיו, לֹא לְמַדְתָּנוּ, רַבֵּנוּ, שֶׁחָתָן פֶּטוּר מִקְרִיאַת שְׁמַע בַּלַּיְלָה הָרִאשׁוֹן. אָמַר
לָהֶם, אֵינִי שׁוֹמֵעַ לָכֶם לְבַטֵּל מִמֶּנִּי מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם אֲפִלּוּ שָׂעָה אַחַת

A groom is exempt from the recitation of *Shema* on the first night of his marriage, until Saturday night, if he has not taken action and consummated the marriage, as he is preoccupied by concerns related to consummation of the marriage. There was an incident where Rabban Gamliel married a woman and recited *Shema* even the first night. His students said to him: Didn't our teacher teach us that a groom is exempt from the recitation of *Shema*? He answered them: I am not listening to you to refrain from reciting *Shema*, and in so doing preclude myself from the acceptance of the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, for even one moment. (Brachos 2:5)

The first *pasuk* of *Shema*, "Hear O Israel" is the Halachic acceptance of *Hashem's* Kingship. This is done in the evening and in the morning, to formally accept *Hasherm's* kingship for those periods.

Rabban Gamliel famously insisted on saying *Shema*, even if was

exempt, as he did not want to spend one second “precluding” himself from acceptance of the yoke of Heaven.

However, the last 7 words of the Mishna, לְבַטֵּל מִמֶּנִּי מַלְכוּת שָׁמַיִם, אֶפְלוּ שְׁעָה אַחַת have a difference connotation than merely “precluding for one second.” First, לְבַטֵּל means to actively cancel or nullify. However, avoiding saying *shema* would not be nullifying an existing status of accepting the Yoke of Heaven. Shema itself is how we accept Hashem’s Kingship! Rather, omitting shema is passively avoiding the acceptance of Hashem. Accordingly, “Bitul” would seemingly not be the appropriate word here. Secondly, the time-frame given is “even one second”. However, a *chosson* who omits the *shema* does not accept *ol malchus shomayim* for the entire day. That should have been *Rabban Gamliel* concern. Where did the one second come from? Bearing these two “diukim” in mind, *Rabban Gamliel* response should have been, ***I am not listening you to not say shema, as I do not want to avoid accepting Ol Malchus Shomayim for a whole day!***

R’ Chayim Volozhin suggests the following explanation. (He more or less asks the first question; not the second.) Generally, before saying *shema* we must distance ourselves from our mundane pursuits and get in the “headspace” of accepting God’s Kingship. Only then can we concentrate on the words and meaning of *Shema Yisroel* and fulfil our obligation to *Mekabel ol malchus shomayim*. Accordingly, a *Chasson*, who is preoccupied with a *Mitzvah*, is not required to expend that conscious effort needed to get in the proper frame of mind to accept God’s Kingship and say Shema. He’s otherwise distracted!

In contrast, R’ Gamliel, who was completely delved in matters of *Kedusha*, was in a perpetual state of being able to be *mekabail ol malchus shamiyim*. His concentrations are flipped! Meaning, when going to a bathhouse, a place where it’s forbidden to think *dvrain shebekedusha*, he needed a conscious effort to NOT think about *ol malchus Shomayim*! However, before saying Shema, since he was always in the proper headspace, he did not require any conscious effort. To the contrary! It was automatic! Following this logic, when R’ Gamliel got married, in order to NOT say Shema, he would have to remove

himself from the headspace of acceptance of *Hashem's* kingship. (*I think the *svara* is that when it came time to say *shema*, if he were to be in the “*kodesh*” state of mind, he would certainly say *Shema*. Thus, he would have to “remove” himself and actively concentrate on NOT accepting *ol malchus shomayim*.) Therefore, for Rabban Gamliel, being “*pattur*” from *Shema*, is an “interruption” akin to the Bathhouse, where he cannot think about *Ol Malchus Shomayim*. We can then read the Mishna as follows. “*If I were to refrain from the Shema, I would interrupt myself from the Yoke of Kingdom of Heaven for even one moment. (i.e the moment when the time for Shema comes, he is told NOT to recite Shema, which interrupts his default feeling of God’s kingship)*”

**I am pretty sure this is the logic. The kabati on this Mishna brings it down if you want to fact check. You could just say that he is being Mevatel for the whole day, because he is actively trying to NOT say Shema the WHOLE day, that means he must be mevatal ol malchus Shomayim for the whole day, and “even one second” is just hyperbole.*

Perhaps, we can apply a similar concept to discuss the questions which arise from *Yaakov* saying the *Shema*. First, let’s backtrack to when *Yaakov* hears the news that *Yosef* is alive:

וַיִּדְבְּרוּ אֵלָיו אֶת כָּל־דִּבְרֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲלֵהֶם וַיֵּרָא אֶת־הַעֲגֻלּוֹת אֲשֶׁר־
שָׁלַח יוֹסֵף לְשָׂאת אֹתוֹ וּתְהִי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם׃

But when they recounted all that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. (Berashis 45:27)

Rashi explains the “spirit” as the *Shechina*. Meaning, for the first time since *Yosef's* presumed death, *Yaakov* was able to clearly communicate with *Hashem*. With a renewed connection to *Hashem*, *Yaakov* departs to Goshen to meet *Yosef*.

This brings us to *Rashi's* explanation of the ambiguous *pasuk*. *Yosef* cries on *Yisroel's* neck, but *Yisroel* recites *Shema*. We can make a *kal vechomer*. If *Yaakov* felt the *shechina* return when merely **hearing** *Yosef* was alive, imagine the connection to *Hashem* he felt when **seeing**

Yosef and personally verifying what he had been told. Perhaps, in the same way *Yosef's* “lost control” when he collapses on his father’s neck in tears, *Yaakov's* emotional response was to “welcome back” *Hashem* who was filling his whole heart and mind. Thus, just like R’ Gamliel’s whole day and every action were infused with *Avodas Hashem*, *Yaakov* feels a closeness to God that had been missing for the last 22 years. Thus, at the pinnacle of this experience, where *Yisroel's* whole being is accepting *ol malchus Shomayim*, anything **other** than reciting the Shema would be *Mevatel ol malchus Shomayim*. Thus, just like Rabbi Gamliel, who had to actively suppress “*kodesh*” to avoid saying the *Shema*, *Yisroel* in the moment of seeing *Yosef*, full of reconnection to God, would not suppress those feelings of God’s kingship to cry on his son’s shoulder; rather, *Yisroel* declares *Shema Yisroel*, expressing his heart just like his son *Yosef* did through tears.

The Torah is the direct word of God, written down in a way we can learn and connect. Especially in *Sefer Beraishis*, we have the unique opportunity to understand God’s word through the experiences of our ancestors, applying many of these lessons to our lives. However, as an adult, I have found I understand many of these episodes at the same level I learned it as a child, without the emotional complexity and critical thinking (hopefully) of an adult! Thus, as we relearn “basic” *chumash* and *rashi* with our “adult brains,” we are not just left with *Pshat* in the *pasuk*, but an enduring change to our *Emunah*. Accordingly, when we say “Shema ***Yisroel***” we can tap into a modicum of what our father *Yisroel* felt, when his son returned and feeling *Hashem's* overwhelming presence, declared *Shema Yisroel Hashem Elokaunu Hashem Echod*



INSIDE OUT

Connecting the Dots of Chabad Customs

Rabbi Shmuel Shanowitz

One may often find Chabad customs different and sometimes bland or simple looking. The following essay explores, perhaps, the underlying principle behind many Minhogei Chabad.

Below are some examples, a short list of some differences between Chabad customs and those of other communities

We keep our Esrog in a plain cardboard box while some have fancy and expensive cases. Our Lulav (palm branch) is held together by plain rings, no Keishele (embroidered palm holder for the myrtle and willow twigs at the sides of the Lulav).

Our Sukkah has no decorations hanging. We have plain walls and lots of Sechach.

Notice how our Talis has no Atara (decor on top of the shawl). Many others have at least a strip of cloth and some have beautiful silver decorative Ataros.

Our Mezuzah is placed in a paper or plastic wrap while others have fancy cases of all types of materials.

We wear a plain black fedora, while others wear uniquely styled hats or an elegant fur shtreimel.

During the week, we wear plain suits, while others wear long kaftans, a Bekishe or Kapote.

On Chanuka, we light our menorah inside the house while others display their menorah at their front window for all passers-by to see. On the other hand, while others light their menorah at home, we place menorahs at the malls, public places and on top of our vehicles as well.

For others, eating before morning prayers is an absolute no-no. This is not the case with Chabad. Unlike other mainstream Yeshivos, our Yeshiva system requires an hour and a half of learning Chasidus. Others will either start their day with prayers or some will learn a blat (page of) Gemora.

Many shake their bodies and raise their voices during prayers. By us, there is almost no expression of emotion. Some then take out their Gemora after Shacharis, we add Tehillim.

For other Benei Hayeshiva, Erev Shabbos can be used to polish shoes, shave, shower, prepare food and dress well. We barely make it back on time from Mivtzoim (promoting the wearing of Tefilin and other mitzvos among Jews who are not yet observant) to dip in the Mikvah and rush into shabbos.

For many, the Shabbos meals are filled with Zemiros, while for us you can get some meditative Nigunim.

While many take part in Chalukas Hashas (Daf Yomi, Amud Yomi...), we also do Rambam and Chitas (Chumash, Tehilim and Tanya).

We study in Kolel for approximately 1 year after getting married while others spend many more years at times.

We observe the no-learning rule on the night of Nitel, December 25, while many other Bnei Yeshiva will be learning as usual.

We continue to say the Rebbe's Kapital — others don't understand why.

For us, a birthday is a time to celebrate, reflect and Farbreng, while for others having a birthday cake is commonly featured practice.

Finally, others place great emphasis on Shemiras Haloshon, yet by Chabad it appears not to be highlighted as much.

Is there a common thread to explain these various practices or are they just customs that developed over time with no connection?

While some of these customs are rooted in deep academic thought, or based on kabbalistic teachings, it appears that a common thread reflected in some of our customs is the focus on the internal versus the external, spiritual versus physical.

A thought on a Torah passage may help to focus on an underlying principle to unite these and other Chabad practices, On the verse, "You shall not plant for yourself an *asherah*, [or] any tree, near the altar of the Lord, your G-d" (Devorim 16:21) the Sefer Mayana shel Torah by Rabbi Alexander Zushe Friedman quotes the Avnei Ezel, written by the same author, that the reason trees and houses are not allowed to be built on the Har Habayis (Temple mount) is because there is potentially an implication that the spiritual uniqueness of this location does not suffice. External beauty could distract from the natural, spiritually inherent beauty that is always there.

Where do we invest? Do we want a beautiful Esrog or a beautiful case? Do we want beautiful, physical decorations, or Mehudardika, optimal walls and Sechach? Do we focus on physical beauty or show an appreciation for the spiritual guests that we talk so much about during each meal of Sukkos?

It is told about the Chasam Sofer, that his Esrog was used by thousands of followers and inevitably turned brown. He was asked why he would use a worn-down Esrog while he had access to much nicer ones. The Chasam Sofer responded, "Can there be a more Mehudar, beautiful Esrog than one with which thousands have performed a Mitzvah and said the blessing?"

For us, physical inconvenience that would usually exempt one from sitting or sleeping in the Sukkah, is a non-issue. Here in Buffalo, sports fans will sit in freezing, rainy or snowy weather while enjoying a home game. It's exciting! Not inconvenient. On the other hand, sleeping in

the presence of spiritual revelation is inconceivable. Would you sleep in the presence of a holy Rebbe? The requirement of sleeping in the Sukkah is clearly stated in the Mishna, Talmud and Halachik writings, including that of the Alter Rebbe. This requirement, however, seems to have already been out of practice in the 13th century as noted in the Mordechei (Sukkah 26a 741), the Meiri (Beis Habchirah Sukkah 26a) and the Darkei Moshe (Orach Chaim 639 sk3) amongst others. The three reasons generally given are the weather, the impracticality of sleeping with one's spouse and the fear of thieves or gangsters. As Chasidim we have an added spiritual inconvenience.

In a similar vein, the general Chabad custom is not necessarily to have bread for the Sholosh-Seudos meal, but rather use the time to share a Maamar, Chasidic discourse. See Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chaim 291.1 regarding the Sholosh Seudos requirement. The Bach (Orach Chaim 291) writes how this period represents the time of the world to come. At that time, there will be no eating, but rather full G-dly revelation. Hence, the Chabad custom has gravitated towards fulfilling the Sholosh Seudos obligation by eating something, yet primarily using the time for the study of Chassidus. The teachings of Chassidus primarily focus on G-d, G-d's revelation and penetration into this world and on the mission of the Jewish soul. See Shulchan Aruch Harav (ibid) where it states how one need not stress over eating Sholosh Seudos when not eating provides more pleasure than eating.

We make a Siyum in the nine days for spiritual joy and to fill the void and darkness of the loss of the holy temples with the light of Torah. Some may have a Siyum for physical pleasure, so fleishigs can be eaten.

Shabbos, by a Chabad Chasid, could include a long farbrengen after prayers instead of rushing home for a hot bowl of Cholent. The Oneg, pleasure of a Chabad Chasid, on Shabbos consists of a longer and more meaningful prayer, followed by an inspirational Farbrengen.

On Yom tov, Jewish festivals, it is common practice for Chabad

Chasidim to go on Tahalucha, a parade, sometimes of several miles, with the purpose of visiting other synagogues to share a Devar Torah and bring joy to others. Igniting the soul of other Jews is how we celebrate our Oneg, required joy of Yom tov.

The requirement of only consuming Cholov Yisrael is very dear to all Chasidim. Even Shluchim in far-flung places would not entertain another option. From an Halachik perspective, one can find leniencies. It is our appreciation for spiritual purity that drives us to maintain our commitment to Cholov Yisrael, nonetheless. The Rebbe Rayatz (in Sefer HaMaamorim Yiddish p57) brings a story of the Alter Rebbe who attributed the doubts in the faith of Hashem of an individual to eating Cholov Akum without his awareness.

We won't learn on the night of Nitel because of spiritual contamination in the atmosphere, just as we won't learn in a restroom. There is a hint to this idea in Rashi, based on the Midrash, on the verses in Shemos 9:9 and 12:1. Rashi relates that Moshe Rabainu would pray, and Hashem would only talk to him out of the city of Mitzrayim, since the city was filled with idolatry. Those who feel that the custom not to learn is due to the threat of physical danger, have no hesitation for learning on this night, since this threat no longer exists.

This brings to mind a story of the two brothers, Reb Zushe and Reb Elimelech who were thrown into a prison cell and were not able to pray, since there was a bucket of urine in the center of the room. At first, they were depressed. Then one brother said to the other, "The same G-d that told us to pray, tells us not to pray when urine is present. We should be happy that we are doing what Hashem wants!" The two brothers began to dance. When the guard realized they were

dancing because of the bucket, he quickly removed it and, of course, they got to pray and serve Hashem in the way they originally intended to.

Chabad is an acronym for Chochmo Bina Daas. This defines the type of service with which we are meant to serve Hashem. We are focused more on our individual intellect and inner conscience, rather

than external emotion and dress. This will explain why Chabad Chasidim dress more simple. We are not shaking during our prayers as much as others, as we focus on our inner change and connection with Hashem versus external emotion.

We will do what it takes to be able to concentrate with a clear mind and no distractions while we pray. While eating before praying is, generally, strictly forbidden, Halacha states that one who is hungry or thirsty may eat (OC 89.4). We do not want to be distracted by hunger or thirst so we can be fully present as we approach our meeting with the Almighty. To allow our prayers to penetrate even deeper and for greater impact, we study Chasidus as a warm up. This is different from studying the Daf before praying, which could make us feel good and intellectually stimulated, but won't necessarily help us connect in a deeper way during Tefila with the proper Koved Rosh, humility.

Daf Yomi is a noble and admirable way to connect many amongst Kelal Yisroel through Torah study. From the perspective of Chabad, Jewish unity will include and target every Jew gifted with a Neshamah, a G-dly soul. While Daf Yomi will achieve Jewish unity amongst the learned, The cycle of Rambam study is intended to go further in connecting all Jewish men, women and children, even those who may have initially less of a background. To include even more Jews, Sefer Hamitzvos has also been added as a choice to join the cycle of Rambam study. In the introduction to the Rambam it describes how it is written "in a clear and concise manner...for small and great alike". This is meant to connect all of K'lal Yisroel and fulfill our spiritual obligation of studying Kol Hatorah Kulah, the entire Torah.

While dedicating oneself to the study of Torah for many years in Kolel can be considered a noble aspiration for personal growth, our concern for G-dly and spiritual growth by all Jews around the world drives us to move on to Shlichus after a year or two in Kolel.

Focusing on Shemiras Haloshon, what we may or may not say about others is a late phase to tackle this immorality. At this stage, the negative talk may slip out, or a Heter, permissibility, may be found to

share this information. We need to tackle this evil in the more refined stage, the realm of thought. When studying the end of chapter 12 in Tanya, we learn to stop a negative thought about another in its earliest stage, in thought. We learn in Tanya chapters 30 and 32 how to view a fellow Yid with true love and how to genuinely not be able to see faults in others. This removes the possibility of even thinking negatively about another. It is somewhat unbecoming to talk about what to say and not to say, while we are already seeing negativity and judging our friend. Focus on inner change rather than on outer expression.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was not seen as Aschalta D'geula, a step towards Redemption, since it was not designed to be a religious entity. (In fact, many Middle Eastern Jews, most notably from Yemen, were dissuaded from continuing their dedicated practice of Judaism.) By contrast, in the late '80s, when Jews were given the liberty to leave the Russian oppression for religious freedom and spiritual growth, it was noted by the Rebbe as a sign of the footsteps of Moshiach. Our appreciation for Eretz Yisrael is a spiritual and holy one, rooted in the Torah and seen as a G-d given gift to the Jewish people over 3,000 years ago. This attitude makes giving up any part of Israeli territory non-negotiable. By basing our right to the land of Israel on UN recognition, and as a recent development resulting from our physical military power, we feed in to the narrative of the enemies of Israel who like to frame the Jewish people as invaders and as those who are destroying the lives of other indigenous people.

Why does the Rebbe play such a central role amongst Chasidim? There is indeed a Mitzvah of Uledovko Bo (Devorim 11.22) attaching oneself to Tzadikim (Rambam, Hilchos Dayos 6.2). Chasidim gravitate to spirituality. Our spiritual journey is that much enhanced by attaching ourselves to a Rebbe whose sole mission is to bring into the world G-dliness and spirituality in a revealed way. Our attachment is sure to have a positive impact on our Avodas Hashem, dedication to the service of G-d.

We are also less into *chaping* (grabbing) *shirayim*, the Rebbe's leftover food. The Rebbe Rayatz relates a story that was shared by his father, the Rebbe Rashab. There was a Chasid of Chortkov who took shiraim from the Rebbe Rashab, saying that he heard that shiraim from a Tzadik is Mezake, brings merit. The Rebbe answered, by us, it is Mechayev, obligates. For a Chabad Chosid, there is additional trepidation before taking from the Rebbe. It requires further introspection, dedication and spiritual growth.

Our Moshiach fervor is also a result of our yearning for a world of spirituality and revealed G-dliness. We are not looking for physical luxuries in the days of Moshiach, but rather for a time when Hashem feels at home in this lower world, Dirah betachtonim.

Note: By no means is this meant to belittle established customs of other Jewish communities. It is merely explaining the significance of the customs we follow.

