

Kovetz

Chidushei Torah

A collection of Chidushei Torah through
the 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 Alef Nissan, 5783
Year of Hakhel



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B"H

Foreword

This year 5783 is unique as it is the year of Hakhel, The Torah states about the Mitzvah of Hakhel:

"...מִקֵּץ שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים בְּמוֹעֵד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה בְּחַג הַסֻּכּוֹת. יֵאָבֵוא כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל לִרְאוֹת אֶת פְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר תִּקְרָא אֶת הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת נֹגֵד כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֻזְנֵיהֶם. יב הַקְהֵל אֶת הָעָם הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׁים וְהַטָּף וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וּלְמַעַן יִלְמְדוּ וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיכֶם וְשָׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דְּבַרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת.
(דברים ל"א י - י"ב)

"At the end of every seven years, at an appointed time, in the Festival of Sukkot [following] the year of Shemitah. When all Israel comes to appear before the Lord, your G-d, in the place He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all Israel, in their ears. Assemble the people: the men, the women, the children, in order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear the Lord, your G-d, and they will observe all the words of this Torah"

The History of Hakhel

In ancient Israel, every seventh year was a Shemitah ("sabbatical") year. For an entire year, the nation's economy came to a standstill as all farmers and agrarian workers abandoned their fields and flocked en

masse to the study houses where for a full year they focused on their spiritual, rather than physical needs.

Now, at the onset of the eighth year (the first in the new seven-year cycle), the nation is ready to head back to the fields and orchards. But first, on the second day of the holiday of Sukkot, sixteen days into the new year, all gather in the Holy Temple for a dose of inspiration. Inspiration to tide them over for the next six years, most of whose time would be spent in business endeavors.

Once the entire nation had gathered, the king, situated on a specially constructed platform in the Temple's courtyard, was handed the Torah scroll that Moses himself had written. The king recited a blessing and then read aloud several portions from the Book of Deuteronomy, and then concluded with several more blessings.

One of the reasons for this Mitzvah is as The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 612) explains:

"The talk of all the nation – men, women and children – would then be: "Why have we assembled for this large gathering?" And the answer would be: "To hear the words of the Torah—our essence, glory and pride!" This would lead them to praise the Torah and speak of its glorious worth, and implant within their hearts a desire and motivation to study and know G-d. Thus they will merit the ultimate good, and G-d will rejoice in His creations" ...

Hakhel Today

The "Hakhel Year" is an opportune time to promote Jewish unity and gatherings. The biblical mitzvah of Hakhel is only in effect when all the Jewish people reside in the Holy Land. Nevertheless, the Lubavitcher Rebbe repeatedly encouraged all Jews to utilize this auspicious time to assemble— men, women and children – and encourage each other to increase in Torah observance and study, and foster an environment of fear of G-d.

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 my dear brothers Shmuly and Sholom Ber Gurary for their help with editing and formatting this booklet.

May it be Hashem's will, that in the merit of these Chidushei Torah, we shall merit the coming of Moshiach and the fulfillment of the Mitzvah of Hakhel with Moshiach in the Bais Hamikdash.

For comments and feedback please email
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**Yud Alef Nissan, 120 Years
5783 - Year of Hakhel
Buffalo, NY**

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Desert Adoption

Rabbi Yosef Alt

In the beginning of this week's Parsha, the Torah describes the Jewish people as ascending from Egypt "chamushim." There are several ways to interpret this word:

1. Rashi explains that the simple translation of this word means "armed with weapons."
2. Rashi goes on to cite a well-known midrash that the word "chamushim" is derived from the word chamesh, five, or in this case chomesh, one fifth. This is because, according to the midrash, only one fifth of the Jewish people left Egypt, four fifths died during the plague of darkness.
3. Targum Yonason ben Uziel also explains that the word is related to the number five; but, unlike the midrash, he writes it is because each Jewish family had five children.
4. Targum Yerushalmi, translates the word to mean armed, but unlike Rashi he writes that they were "armed with mitzvos."

The sefer Be'er Yosef raises a number of questions which reveal that many of these explanations are truly interrelated. Firstly, he asks on the Targum Yonason be Uziel, how is it possible that every family leaving Egypt had exactly five children? The Targum Yerushalmi is also difficult; there are clear sources that indicate that the Jews in Egypt were devoid of mitzvos and needed to be given the mitzvos of Pesach and bris milah to have enough merit to be worthy of redemption. How then is it possible that they were "armed with mitzvos"? How did they accumulate their new arsenal so quickly?

The Be'er Yosef answers these questions with the midrash's explanation that four fifths of the Jews died in Egypt during the plague of darkness. Why did they die? Because they did not want to leave Egypt. They were therefore not worthy of redemption and were punished during the plague of darkness. But what about their children? Certainly, their children wouldn't be punished. This would mean that for every five families, four were left parentless. The Be'er Yosef suggests that the entire Jewish people performed an awesome act of kindness and adopted all the parentless children. Every family left Egypt with four additional sets of children. This explains the Targum Yonason ben Uziel, every family did leave Egypt with exactly five children, five **sets** of children! This also explains the Targum Yerushalmi; they were indeed armed with mitzvos as they left Egypt. As they marched into the desert unprepared for their trip, they nonetheless took responsibility for many orphans that would have otherwise been left stranded.

The Be'er Yosef uses this fascinating piece of the storyline that he has created to answer yet another question. According to both the midrash and the Targum Yonason ben Uziel, the Torah uses the word "chamushim" to express the number of Jews leaving Egypt, either one fifth or five children. Why then does the Torah place this detail in the beginning of Parshas Beshalach? The Torah records the number of Jews who left Egypt at the end of Parshas Bo; wouldn't that be a more appropriate place for this detail? The Be'er Yosef explains that the Torah includes this detail in the beginning of Parshas Beshalach to emphasize the great kindness they had done. The beginning of Parshas Beshalach describes that Hashem took the Jewish people out of Egypt, and He took them on the scenic route. It is one thing to bring an orphaned child with your family to the museum or to the zoo but taking that responsibility for a long journey through the desert is much greater. Despite all this, the Jewish people were willing to bring many orphaned children along.

The Be'er Yosef quotes "one wise man", who suggested that this explains the language of the pasuk we recite in the Rosh Hashana

Musaf Zichronos, "... I recall the kindness of your youth, when you followed me out into the desert, into an unsown land" (Jeremiah 2). Why does Hashem mention the "kindness" of our youth; it should be our faith and trust in Hashem to journey out into a barren desert? Hashem is recalling the kindness of caring for the many helpless children that we took along as we left Egypt!

Loving kindness has been the hallmark of the Jewish people from the very beginning. In Cincinnati we have continued this tradition. Whenever a baby is born, when a family is in need, help and support comes pouring in from all directions. May we continue to embrace the ways of our ancestors, and may we be zocheh to be redeemed from our current exile armed with those very same acts of kindness.



Foiled Plans

By Rabbi Yosef Alt

“Yisro rejoiced over all the good that Hashem had done for Yisroel, that He has rescued it from Egypt. Yisro said, ‘Blessed is Hashem, Who has rescued you from the hand of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, Who has rescued the people from under the hand of Egypt. **Now** I know that Hashem is the greatest of all gods, from in the very matter (the Egyptians) had **conspired** against them...!’” (Shemos, 18:9-11)

Why did Yisro emphasize “now” what exactly happened now? Why did Yisro mention that the Egyptians “conspired”, they didn’t only conspire, they enslaved and tortured the Jewish people as well?

I once heard an amazing p'shat from one of my Rebbeim, Rabbi Tzvi Einstater. He referenced the Talmud (Kiddushin 39B)

מחשבה רעה אין הקדוש ברוך הוא מצרפה למעשה

Hashem does not link a bad thought to an action (Hashem only punishes for a sin that was committed, not for a thought or plan to commit a sin).

Tosfos explains that this principle only applies to Jewish people; regarding non-Jews, Hashem executes punishment for thoughts and plans to sin, as well as action. Tosfos uses Eisav as an example; he never successfully harmed Yaakov, yet he is punished for his attempts and desire to do so.

There is a well-known Midrash that Pharaoh had three advisors, Bilaam, Iyov, and Yisro. Bilaam encouraged Pharaoh to follow

through with his plan to enslave and torture the Jews, Iyov was silent, and Yisro opposed the idea and therefore fled to Midian to escape punishment.

Rabbi Einstater explained that in this week's parsha Yisro joins the Jewish people. His son-in-law, Moshe Rabbeinu, tells him all the intricate details of the many miracles they witnessed in Egypt. Yisro responds, "now", now that I know all the details of how the Egyptians were punished "I know that Hashem is the greatest of all gods." Yisro was one of Pharaoh's advisors, so he had insider information; he had knowledge of the many unexecuted plans of the Egyptians. Yisro understood the precision of Hashem's punishment, how every last detail of the plagues was calculated. No one else could appreciate this as much as Yisro could, because only he understood all the thoughts and plans for which they were also being punished!

A story is told of a non-Jewish fellow who approached the great Mussar master Rav Itzele Peterburger, close disciple of Rav Yisroel Salanter. He was bothered by a pasuk in Tehilim (which is part of Hallel), "Praise Hashem, all nations; praise Him, all the states! For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of Hashem is eternal, Halleluyah." (Tehilim 117:1-2) The fellow asked Rav Itzele, why should "all the nations" be the ones to praise Hashem for His kindness, wouldn't it be more befitting for the Jewish people to praise Hashem themselves? Rav Itzele responded that only the nations of the world know the full extent of Hashem's kindness. We only know of our salvation from dangers that became a reality, but Hashem has saved us from endless plans and attempts to destroy the Jewish people which we never knew existed. In the end of days when Hashem is revealed to the entire world, only the nations will fully understand Hashem's kindness in protecting the Jewish people from both actual threats and potential threats that never became a reality at all.

May we merit to arrive at that great day *b'mbeira v'yameinu, amen!*

Shemos – The importance of a name!

Mr. Ari Rashkin

After years of slavery, the Torah discusses the events which lead to Moshe's return to Egypt and the redemption from Egypt. Pay close attention to detail. There's a theme!

A new Pharaoh arises over Egypt, and begins subjugating the Jewish people. He tells Yocheved and Miriam to make sure the baby boys do not survive; the girls will live. The midwives defy Pharaoh, the Jewish people increase and become strong. This plan having failed, the boys are decreed to be thrown into the river. This sets the stage for the birth of Moshe. Yocheved and Amram reunite and a boy is born. He is hidden, but eventually put in the river in a basket, under the watchful eye of Miriam, his sister. Bisyah and her entourage save the lad, and Miriam suggests a Jewish wet-nurse. The "wet nurse" is actually, Yocheved the boy's mother. The boy is eventually returned to the palace, and named Moshe. One day, Moshe goes outside the palace and witnesses an altercation between a Mitzri Taskmaster and the husband of Shelomis Bas Divri. Moshe kills the Mitzri. However, the next day, Moshe sees Dasan and Aviram fighting, he confronts them, and they say, "Will you kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" Fearing for his life, Moshe flees to Midyan, where Yisro is introduced. Eventually, Moshe builds his family, speaks to Hashem and returns to Egypt.

Did you figure it out?

We use Rashi and the midrashim to identify many of the people in this summary. However, as we will see, the Torah does NOT identify many by name. Even when identified, birth names are NOT used. The Torah uses the following alternative names, pronouns, or descriptions.

- Shifra and Puah = Miriam and Yocheved

- A man from the house of Levi and the daughter of Levi. = Yocheved and Amram

- Yeled and Naar = (Avigdor/Tuvia) Indeed, he is only called Moshe **after** he's in the palace.

“His sister” or “young girl” = Miriam

Daughter of Pharaoh. = Bisya

Hebrew man = Husband of Shelomis Bas Divri –

Two Hebrew men = Dasan and Aviram

-Yisro is not introduced by his name; rather as a Cohein of Midyan.

-Even Pharaoh many times is “Melech Mitzraiym” – King of Egypt.

The pattern is clear. In this part of the Parsha, names are veiled. Why?

This anonymity is more striking as the sefer starts with the exact opposite approach. “Eileh Shemos Beinai Yisroel Habaim Mitzraimah”. These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Mitzrayim. The Torah, seemingly redundantly, names each tribe, even though they have already been counted in Parshas Vayigash. Rashi, quoting the midrash, offers a beautiful pshat. The tribes are mentioned here, after their death, because Hashem compares them to the stars which are precious to Him. Just as Hashem, brought out and counted each star, so too each Shevet is brought out and counted. Perhaps this is analogous to examining a picture of those who are

close to us. We point out details, fondly recall and sometimes name , “look there’s Tanta” each of those within.

If we apply this Midrash to the pattern demonstrated immediately after, perhaps the lack of calling by first names or using non-birth names implies a lack of Chavivos- closeness. Indeed, for the duration of these pesukim, Tzaddikim, reshayim, Egyptian and Mitzri and not called by their birth names. Therefore, there would seem to be something about this time period which necessitates this change.

What about this time period makes anonymity paramount, as a direct shift from the beginning of the Sidrah, where the Tribes mentioned by name? Moreover, this period must certainly be different from next week’s parsha, where shortly after Moshe’s return, the Torah lists, by name the descendants of Kehos. Why this is part of our History unique?

This theme of namelessness starts within the following passuk,

וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף וְכָל-אָחָיו וְכָל-הַדּוֹר הַהוּא:

Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation.

About a 100 years pass and the previous generation has passed on. While Yosef’s legacy remains, very few would remember Yosef face to face. (The whole generation died). Certainly, the tradition passed from the 3 avos, recalling their journeys, trials and connection to Hashem, are now less vivid, and with each generation another step removed.

Moreover, we are not told of prophesies and revelation from Hashem. Think about the Ooshpizen. There, is a gap from Yosef to Moshe. Seemingly, in this time of slavery, before Moshe’s return, Hashem is not revealed, but hidden. Indeed, those who experienced the direct revelations from Hashem, likewise are gone. Their legacies now relayed distantly. What holds the people together? What is the Tradition? Perhaps, the promise made to Avraham, their forefather, that his children would be in a land not their own and subjected,

eventually leaving with great possession. This promise, made hundreds of years ago, is what remains, and gives this people, faith in God and hope for the future. They will be redeemed. Thus, in these 90-110 of slavery, while Hashem is hidden, the people hold on to this promise.

Perhaps this starts to answer our question. If repeating names, is a form of open fondness and endearment, the opposite means distance. A "first name basis" is defined by closeness and comfortability. Titles and pronouns mean distance and being impersonal. Thus, during this time of slavery, where Hashem appears distant, first names are not mentioned. The open love from Hashem to His people is concealed right now. This message is perhaps most evident with Miriam. Miriam is first called by her name in Parshas Beshalach! The splitting of the sea where Hashem who has openly revealed his love for this nation, if a fitting time to "reveal" her name, as she sings to Hashem. However, during the period of slavery, before Moshe's return, Miriam is Puah – the midwife, or "the young girl" who saves Moshe.

Therefore, all of the names, not just Tzadikim are veiled. The open miracles and face to face conversation of Sefer Bereshis, is not evident at this point. Likewise, the hope and beginning of the redemption that will occur with Moshe's return is still many years away. For perhaps the first time, Hashem is hidden. That is the challenge of the time, perhaps alluded to by the distance caused though namelessness.

Using this approach, perhaps, the actions of Shifra and Pua have extra meaning. The **king** of Egypt tells them to actively kill the Jewish boys. They do the exact opposite. They nourish the boys, keeping them alive. The **king** summons them.

וּתְאִמְרוּן הַמִּילֵדֹת אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כִּי לֹא כַנְשִׁים הַמִּצְרַיִת הָעֵבְרִיֹת כִּי־חַיִּוֹת הֵנּוּ
בְטָרִם תִּבּוֹא אֵלֵהֶן הַמִּילֵדֹת וַיֵּלְדוּ:

The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth"

They stand firm and respond back to **Pharoah**. They don't respond as one would to a king. Rather, they give an excuse, mindful of their mission, and the True king above Hashem does good to them, and they are rewarded.

וַיְהִי כִּי־יִרְאוּ הַמִּיִּלְדוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בְּתִים:

And Hashem established households **households* for the midwives, because they feared Hashem.

Why?

Amidst, this time period where Hashem was hidden, and the faith was from a lingering promise made to Avraham years ago, the midwives reject Pharoah as the ultimate entity to fear. Hashem was hidden, leaving a vacuum of authority that could easily filled by the powerful king, who fancied himself a god. The midwives reject this, and place faith and fear of Hashem above all. This now paves the way for the building of the nation, it's kings and priests, and the coming redemption. Belief and fear of God, understanding He is pulling the strings, even if we cannot understand or see Him, is what starts the chain of events leading to the redemption. (Pharoah would never have decreed on the boys, meaning Moshe would not be put in the river etc....)

I could not help but draw a parallel to the times we live in. While we have it much better, (not literal slaves) Hashem is not revealed in the way of previous generations. However, just like the generation in Egypt were only told of the great people who preceded them, we too, while we learn the Torah and legacy of our ancestors, lack their closeness to God. What keeps us going? What is our faith? Let's look to that generation. While they were slaves, they had the promise of the Bris Bein Habesarim, Perhaps this gave hope amidst this dark time, and helped Shifra and Puah, disregard the King of Egypt, and fear the King of Kings, hearkening a time where Hashem was revealed.

We too have a promise: *Ani ma'amin b'e munah sh'leimahb'viat ha mashiach, veafal pi sh'yitmameah im kol zeh achakeh lobehol yom sheyavo.*

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah, and, though he tarry, I will wait daily for his coming.

May our promise of redemption, strengthen us through the days of Galus, and bring us to do actions which will bring upon the time where Hashem again openly displaces His closeness to us, with the coming of Moshiach.



Stumped by a question

Mr. Ari Rashkin

At a Torah class recently we were discussing the 4 Mitzvos of Purim. We then asked a very basic but fundamental question. Why do we give Maatanos Levayonim and Mishloach Manos on purim? Other than, "Because the Megillah says so," I was stumped.

The question made me introspect. While I look forward to the unique tunes and festivity of the Megillah reading and the yummy food and "drink" of the purim seudah, the other two mitzvos, -Mishloach Manos and Matanos La'evyonim -unfortunately, are less of a focus. Mishloach manos can seem a bit of a schlep. Mataanos Levayonim is somewhat of an afterthought. However, all 4 are integral Mitzvos of the day. Yet, the "giving" Mitzvos, resonate less. Why?

What is the reason for all of these Mitzvos? The Megillah tells us:

בְּיוֹם-שְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר וְנוּחַ בְּאַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וַעֲשָׂה אֶתֹּו יוֹם
מִשְׁתָּה וּשְׂמֵחָה

That was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar; and they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking

עַל-כֵּן הִיהוּדִים (הַפְּרוּזִים) הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּעָרֵי הַפְּרוּזוֹת עֹשִׂים אֶת יוֹם
אַרְבַּעָה עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר שְׂמֵחָה וּמְשִׁתָּה וַיּוֹם טוֹב וּמְשַׁלַּח מְנוּת אִישׁ לְרֵעֵהוּ

That is why village Jews, who live in unwalled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and make it a day of merrymaking and feasting, and as a holiday and an occasion for sending gifts to one another.

In other words: Our merriment on Purim, the 14th of Adar, commemorates that the Jewish people in the time of Mordechai and Esther, celebrated and were merry on the 14th.

Therefore, underlying the mitzvos of Purim is the idea of happiness. Perhaps, this starts to answer WHY we commemorate purim with these Mitzvos. Firstly, of course, we are going to read the megillah, which tells the story of the miracle! Furthermore, we know “Ain Simcha El Bibasar o'yayaim” A Seudah with libations and good food sounds like a great way to be merry. This brings us to the two “giving” Mitzvos: Matanos Levyonim and Mishloach Manos. While this happiness is a little more abstract, to “give is to get,” and generosity certainly makes us content, if not outright happy.

This resonates a bit, but there are many ways to “be happy.” Why gifts to the poor? Why not invite people to our seudah? (like pesach) What does the Megillah reading have to do with being happy? It seems like there may be another layer...

In fact, at the time, when we asked the question, my father suggested a pshat. Underlying these “giving” Mitzvos is a commemoration of the Jews who unified in prayer after the decree of sanctioned genocide, which would eliminate the Jewish people. Therefore, we perform mitzvos which unite us as well.

In fact, I found a source which says something very similar. (in the artscroll Mikros Gedolos)

He explains that prior the decree the Jews were dispersed though the land. Not unified. Indeed, disunity allows Tumah to take hold, Kodusha clings to unity. We see this in Haman's pitch to Achashvairosh to allow him to deal with the Jews.

וַיֹּאמֶר הֵמֶן לְמַלְךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ יִשְׁנֶנּוּ עִם־אֶחָד מִפְּנֵי וּמִפְּרֵד בֵּין הָעַמִּים בְּכֹל

מְדִינֹת מְלֻכֹתָּהּ וְדַתִּיהֶם שָׁנוֹת מִכָּל־עַם וְאֶת־דַּתִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵינָם עֹשִׂים וְלִמְלֶךְ
אֵין־שׁוּהָ לְהַנִּיחָם

*Haman then said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people, **scattered and dispersed***

In other words, because they are spread out, we have an opportunity to defeat them.

In response to the decree of sanctioned genocide, the Jews gather together!

וּבְכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דִּבְרַה־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מִגִּיעַ אֲבָל גְּדוֹל לְיְהוּדִים
וְצוֹם וּבְכֵי וּמִסַּפֵּד שָׂק וְאִפְרֵ יֵצַע לְרַבִּים

Also, in every province that the king's command and decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Finally, the Jews band together and fight on the 13th and 14th of Adar and defeat their enemies.

וְשָׂאֵר הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ נִקְהָלוּ | וְעָמְדוּ עַל־נַפְשָׁם וְנָחֻ
מֵאִיבֵיהֶם וְהָרוּג בְּשֵׁנָאֵיהֶם חֲמֵשֶׁה וּשְׁבַעִים אֶלֶף וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם

The rest of the Jews, those in the king's provinces, likewise mustered and fought for their lives. They disposed of their enemies, killing seventy-five thousand of their foes; but they did not lay hands on the spoil.

All came to daven to Hashem for salvation. All came to fight on the 13th of Adar to destroy those who would seek to annihilate the Jewish people. Therefore, the theme of Purim is truly that of unified purpose with a community.

Therefore, the Mishloach Manos, is a perfect Mitzva for the day as it creates unity among the Jewish people. While this is certainly the case for Mishloach Manos, I think if we analyze each Mitzva of

Purim, and pay attention to their specific Halachos, we can see these theme throughout.

1. Megillah reading: All come. Men woman and children. The laining is made more exciting for the kids to enjoy as well. (provided the adults can hear all the words) Indeed, the nation was going to destroyed and therefore gathered to pray. Perhaps, correspondently, we gather as a community in shul. Indeed, even someone one who has 100 people at this house should go to shul to read with the tzibbur! This is not merely a numbers game. Tzibbur – communal unity- is paramount.
2. Maatanos Levyomim. This gift is Halachically separate from a Tzedakah(cannot be from maasar), and must be given on Purim itself to a Jewish person who is in need. With our unity/ community theme in mind, perhaps, we can suggest as follows

A community is a group of people who live close to one another, are unified in purpose and have many common values. One of the responsibilities of a community (as in the whole) is to ensure that those members who have it harder are supported, emotionally and physically. Meal trains, shiva calls, and financial support would all be examples of such. From this perspective, Matanos Leavyonim is not merely gifts to the poor, but rather an exchange between giver and receiver, which by virtue of this exchange, identifies them both as members of a community, both responsible for one another. Furthermore, as Matanos Levyonim is truly a reflection of a communal obligation, it's logical the money is given through a gabbai Tzedukah. This is not about building personal relationships. It's about demonstrating we are part of community, who will support each other as needed.

Therefore, the Megillah and Matanos Levyomim are really part of demonstrating our Achdus to one another. We will read the Megillah in a unified way, and support each other in times of hardship, not because we are close friends, but because we are joined by community.

However, a community is only as strong as the sum of its parts. The social circles within must be robust. Perhaps, the remaining two mitzvos, Mishloach Manos and the seudah reinforce our individual relationships within our community.

3) *Mishloach manos, Ish lerayahu* – Sending gifts - man to his friend.

Perhaps, this “friend” has a double meaning. Of course, it’s important to reaffirm our love to our close friends. A gift is a wonderful way to do so. It shows care and brings us closer. However, “friend” in the Torah, does not always mean “Burt and Ernie” (Lehavdil) “If a man “hits” his friend” may indicate a similarly strong, albeit negative relationship, between this man and his friend.

However, even a negative relationship is still a close relationship. Therefore, Mishloach Manos, is perhaps not only an opportunity to fortify our close positive relationships but to mend our close, albeit negative relationships. Indeed, less you think that there’s only “one bullet” in the gun, and only one Shaloch mannos to give, the Shulchan Oruch says, “Kol Hamarbeh” that it’s good practice to give many Shalach mannos!

Thus, Mishloach mannos, a gift, an affirmation of closeness, can reinforce or repair our existing social bonds, strengthening our social circles, and ultimately building a stronger community.

Finally, the Seudah. A feast. The Mishna Brurah says that certainly there’s more simcha when enjoying this meal with family and friends. That’s simcha. We culminate the Achdus of the three mitzvos, with experiencing the company of our close friends and family, in an environment built for simcha.

Just like in the purim story, we find ourselves *מפוזר ומפזרל בין העמים* - spread out among the nations.

May these Mitzvos strengthen our unity and help bring our redemption, where we will unify in place and purpose, with the Bais Hamikdash. May Moshiach come speedily in our days!

Attending A Parent's Second Marriage: May Children Attend?

Rabbi Moshe Taub

The Minhag

“Fourteen months ago, my mother died. But it wasn't until tonight, at my father's [second] wedding, that I lost her”

The above snippet is from an Our Days column published several years ago (*Ami Living*, 10 Kislev/November 13 5774/2013, pages 54 and 55).

There, a woman tells the story of attending a parent's second marriage and how bewildering it was for her.

In response to this, Ami received a well-written and well-tempered letter seeking to correct an oversight that relates to a most fascinating issue of *halacha* and/or *minhag yisroel*: the question of children attending the second marriages of their surviving (or divorced) parents.

The writer of this letter is a noted *rav* and composed a Hebrew letter. What follows is a translation:

“First, my thanks for your magazine...although the magazine is not a ‘sefer halacha’ readers still assume that you would not, heaven forefend, publish something against minhag (Yisroel), therefore an impression exists

(among readers) that if a story is published the actions taken in it were appropriate.

“The custom is that a child does not attend the *chuppah* of a parent’s second marriage – due to the fact that it goes against the proper *kibud* we are to have for the (deceased) mother or father by seeing the surviving one marry another.

He goes on to describe the pain that this woman felt at the wedding and explained that it would be worthy to explain to readers that this can be avoided due to this *minhag*.

While the writer of this letter brings up a very real *minhag*, not all of his points are universally accepted. My feeling is that this *rav* too was aware of this and was therefore not coming to *correct* an issue of *halacha* or *minhag*, rather he was seeking to urge the magazine to publicize a *tool* that –in his mind –can be used at one’s discretion.

However, in truth, it is very rare today for adult children to not make every effort to attend such weddings. Contrary to mixed or hurt feelings, I plainly lament not being able to go to Israel for just such a wedding in my family, and most adults that I inquired from in such situations feel only joy for the parent. Nevertheless, it would not be unheard of for a child, especially a non-adult, to react in any number of ways, and we must be sensitive to that.

Yet, as we shall see, *not* attending such a wedding leads to its own *halachic* issues as well.

What makes this matter so fascinating is that it touches upon so many imponderables of *halacha* and *minhag*. These are issues about which many wondered yet which few have an understanding of.

The Reasons

Let us first respond directly to the points this *rav* made.

1 – He asserts that there is a general custom as described – this is not exactly accurate.

(In fairness, the term he used (*'nohagin'*) could have been a reference to his *Chassidic* branch in particular (i.e. 'we have a custom'). However this does not seem to be the point he was seeking to make, nor could I find any source that his *Chassidic* group in particular is in fact stricter than others about this custom; if anything I found to the contrary)

2 – He implies that this custom is that the children not attend the *chuppah* specifically – this has no source that I am aware of (see below).

3 – He also writes that this custom is due to *kibbud av v'eim* – this too is just an assertion (although, perhaps, a good one). In addition, if indeed it is a real *kibbud* issue why then call it a *minhag*? Should it not then be a *halacha*?

4 – The reason for this *minhag*, based on this writer's final paragraph, could be inferred as applying only when there is a dead parent, *l'a*, as opposed to a divorced one. Would such a distinction exist?

So, what *is* the history of this *minhag*? What is its reason? To whom does it apply?

The Source

The only source I am aware of is the 18th century *sefer Minhagim Varmeisa*, a book about the customs of the Jewish community of Worms.

As quoted in *Minhagei Yisroel Torah* (vol. *Evha'z*), as well as in *Nittei Gavriel (Hilchos Nisuin* vol. 1) on page 51 of the aforementioned book it is recorded that in Worms there was a custom of children not attending the weddings of their parents. The language used is that “*sons and daughters of a widow or widower do not go to the shul, all the more so they do not attend the chuppah, and they do not attend the (wedding) feast...*”

[I am unsure what is meant by ‘...not go to the shul...’; perhaps this is where most weddings took place; cf; *Shu't Igros Moshe ev'b* 1:93 who discusses the permissibility, if any, of *chupas* in a shul. However the next sentence in *Minhagim Varmeisa* would imply that something else was being referred to, which eludes me]

What becomes clear is that according to this custom, while attending the *chuppah* is a greater concern than the children ‘going to shul’, attending the wedding feast equally falls under the prohibition.

Many questions remain, aside for just the *reason* behind this *minhag*. Was this *minhag* meant just for the community of Worms or for all of us? And even if it were meant for all of *klal Yisroel*, would this fact alone have the power to obligate us to follow it? The *Chasam Sofer* (*Shu't Chasam Sofer* 6:52) explains that any one person can obligate themselves to do or not to do anything through a *neder* or *shevuah* –even things explicitly allowed by the Torah –yet one certainly lacks the power to obligate someone *else*! The one exception to this would be the leader of the generation (what *chazal* in a number of places term as the ‘*gadol hador*’), who *can* obligate others in new *issurim* and *minhagim*. The simplest example of this phenomenon, and the one to which the Chasam Sofer was in fact addressing, is the *Cherem Rabbenu Gershom* for marrying two wives.

While any one community can accept upon themselves certain customs, one way that *all* Jews may become obligated in this new *minhag* or *issur* is if the vast majority of communities and their respective *rabbanim* all agree to it, say, prohibiting *kitniyos* on Pesach (see *Magen Avraham* 690:2 regarding a *minhag* one hears from a noted *posek*)

Even if one could get around those criteria, the reason for a new custom –according to many –would have to be based on some other *halacha* that we are seeking to protect (see Rambam, end of *hakdama* to *mishnayos*, “...once the Talmud closed one is not allowed to add to its laws”; *Shu't Noda B'Yehudah eh'z* [2] *siman* 79; Radvaz in *Shu't Hon Yosef siman* 9. For further study on this subject see ‘*Tzavaas Rebbe*

Yehudah HaChassid Ham'ifour' Gumbo/Otzar HaPoskim edition; Cf. *Shu't Rashba* 1:9, *Shu't Chasam Sofer* 51 in *oh'c*, and *Sdei Chemed*, *Mem' klal* 38).

Are There Limits?

Now, even if we momentarily postulate that this *minhag* is in affect for all of us, we must be careful; often a *minhag* is taken to its extreme. Even if a *minhag* is real, nay, ***because*** a *minhag* is real, it would then mean that, like all other issues of *halacha*, there are times that it is not followed, where conflicting obligations must be weighed, etc. It is incongruous to watch people rightfully consider when one must desecrate Shabbos but refuse to do the same for their particular group's customs.

As *Taamei HaMinhagim* (*siman* 840) wonderfully put it: '*If only the Aseres haDibros were written in the Tzavah (ethical will) of Rav Yehudah HaChassid, then certainly people would care for them more!*'

With all of this in mind, let us delve into this mysterious *minhag*, its reason(s), application, and the many beguiling subjects it touches upon.

Further Reasons Offered For This Minhag

The reason the aforementioned letter-writer gives for this particular custom was *kibbud av v'em* for the deceased parent. This is the generally assumed reason that is given for this custom, yet one riddled with difficulty.

While there is certainly an obligation to honor one's parent even after death (*Shulchan Aruch siman* 240:9), although it is debated if this is a biblical or rabbinic obligation (refer to *Shu't Yabia Omer* 2:66:9), it is hard to fathom how the child attending this wedding would be thereby disrespecting the deceased parent. The logic in this seems to suffer from *reductio ad absurdum*. In addition it can be assumed that the deceased parent would *want* the child to make an effort to

attend! In fact, Reb Moshe uses such logic to allow –at times – an *avel* in their twelve months of mourning –where large meal gatherings are disallowed – to attend an annual *yeshiva* or *chesed* organization dinner, for since the obligation to mourn for one’s parent for the full year (as opposed to just the thirty days demanded for all other immediate relatives) is by dint of one’s obligation of ‘*kibud*’ for the deceased parent we are, then, given the power to *assume* that in such a case the deceased parent would forgo their own honor for the benefit of the institution one desires to assist (quoted in Rav Felder’s Laws of Mourning, Feldheim, p. 112 and 118, footnote 115). This would certainly apply here!

There are further difficulties that arise with the *kibud av v’am* theory. First of all, there is the obvious obligation of honoring the *surviving* parent – and therefore, again, one has reason to make every effort to attend. Not to mention that the *kibbud* demanded for the surviving parent is greater than that demanded for the deceased one.

Furthermore, there is the obligation to honor one’s step-parent (*Shulchan Aruch Y’D siman 240:21*)!

Further still, if the reason for this *minhag* is due to *kibbud av v’em*, why does *Minhagim Varmezia* only mention the example of the parent who is getting married after being *widowed* and not also a divorcée? For, at least in the latter there is the real possibility of hurt feelings from the former –and still alive –spouse!

Due to all of the above, I am not convinced that *kibbud* is the reason for this *minhag*. However, playing devils advocate, an argument can be made in defense of this indeed being the reason. As we pointed out above, whatever the reason is for this *minhag* it can’t be *too* good. For if it would, then it should be a *halacha* and not a *minhag*! So, perhaps what those who explain this *minhag* as being predicated on the *kibud* for the dead parent mean is as follows:

Precisely *due* to the fact that one is obligated to honor the step-parent as well as the surviving parent, there is a fear (according to the

leaders of Worms, at least) that the *halacha* of maintaining *kibbud* for the deceased parent will be forgotten as soon as his/her place is filled with another. In order to counter this they asked that children not attend the wedding so as to bore into the tablet of their heart that nothing will *halachikly* change in their relationship with the deceased parent.

This too, at least to me, seems forced.

Although I maintain that unless one's *rav* tells one otherwise (or if there are a young children involved) one should not follow this custom, I do have a theory as to its creation.

Before I reveal it, let me share from some additional research I discovered as I embarked to understand this subject matter.

(My thanks go out to R' Yehoshua Greenberg of Buffalo and R' Mechel Gruss of Lakewood for their help locating some of the forthcoming sources in their Bar Ilan/Otzar Hachachma and vast library, respectively)

Aside for the sources for this *minhag* quoted above, some *achronim* do discuss it. The *Shu't Davar Yehoshua* (vol. 2 *siman* 113) was asked if children could attend the second marriage of their mother who was divorced from their father.

Without quoting the source (*Minhagim Varmezia*) he does point out that children seem to have the custom not to attend. The reason he gives is fascinating, although limiting in its application. He explains that until the divorced wife/mother gets remarried it is still possible for the first couple to get back together. In other words the very act of this new *chuppah*, and the meal that will follow it, is the very moment and celebration of the severing of all bond(s) between their two parents!

While even the writer of this *teshuvah* was not certain that this is the reason for the custom, if he is right it would only apply in such a case (divorced parents and the mother's wedding).

The difficulty with the *Dvar Yehoshua's* approach is that the actual source of this custom goes out of its way to mention the case as being where one of the parents has passed-on, without even mentioning the case of divorced parents. It would be hard then to use his logic to explain the initial custom (although, if this *minhag* is older than *Minhagim Varmizia* and only happened to be recorded there then perhaps he can be correct).

Another possible reason for this *minhag* can be based on another custom. The *minhag* is to place an invitation by the grave of a loved one before a family *simcha*. The reason for this is because the *neshomos* of loved ones attend our happy occasions (for sources to this see *Minhagie Yisroel Torah* vol. 4 p. 101 and R' Aryeh Kaplan's 'Made in Heaven').

For this reasons *rabbanim* will often say in their speeches by *simchos* something to the effect of the *bubbes* and *zaiedes* looking down from *shomayim* and smiling.

I dismissed this as the reason behind the *minhag* of children not attending such weddings because A) I could not prove that a deceased spouse would also be a soul that attends and B) I could not explain why –should the *neshama* anyway be attending – the children being there would be its focus.

However, I later found in *Shu't Ateres Paz ev'h siman 1* where he makes just this argument. After proving that those *neshomos* also attend he then innovatively explains that it is not the sight of his/her living children that will cause the *neshama tzar*, but the children of the other side.

As we see thus far this *minhag* is shrouded in mystery, unconvincing logic, and certainly not universal practice. If someone protests a wedding due to this *minhag* that may in fact be causing themselves other, more serious *halachic* problems.

A Final Theory

Now let me share with you my own theory (although I still maintain we do not follow this *minhag*), which demonstrates that this custom of Worms had everything to do with sensitivity to the living more so than with those departed.

But first a story:

Several years ago we invited some travelers to our house for Shabbos lunch. The husband explained how he had lost his father when he was a young boy. Somehow it came up that his mother decided that she would not remarry because she thought that if she did she would then be unable to be buried alongside her first husband, the father of her children.

After asking around it seems (anecdotally, of course) that this is a general assumption. Aside for the fact that this issue, as we will soon demonstrate, may relate to our topic, I feel it is important that the record be set straight so that no one should make decisions based on what might be untrue. Further, these issues are so sensitive that if we would not write about it then they might never be asked.

The *pasuk* in *Yeshayau* (54:5), based on the *Gemara* (Sanhedrin 22b), teaches of the unique bond one has (especially a woman) with their first spouse. Based on this *some* say that contra to public belief one is always buried with their first spouse. The *Zohar* (*Bereishis* 21) seems to also suggest that by *techias hameisim* it is to original spouses that one will be returned to. The Ben Ish Chai (*Sod Yesbarim* #2) says the same.

However not all seem to agree.

The *Nittei Gavriel* (*Aveilus*, 2, p. 699, footnote #13) brings from ‘*Sefer HaNitzchon*’ that after revivication one will be united with their *last* spouse.

The *Chasam Sofer* (brought in *Sdei Chemed*, *Aveilus*; *shu't* 355) – whose first wife died without bearing any children – would also seem

to disagree, suggesting that the second marriage removes all bonds to the first.

But there seems to be a complication: the Chasam Sofer seems to say the opposite elsewhere! He writes (*shu't* Chasam Sofer 7:34, as brought in *Shalal Rav, Bereishis*, p. 42), based on the *Ari'z'l*, that when *Moshiach* comes everyone will be reunited with their first *zivvug* (what he means by '*first zivvug*' is beyond the scope of this essay).

The Gesher HaChaim (p. 246), while not mentioning this contradiction, demonstrates that the Chasam Sofer (in the first *teshuvah* quoted) was only speaking about when the second wife is still alive.

Confused? Let me explain.

The *Gemara* (Moad Kattan 21b, based on Rashi) rules that should someone get remarried he must be careful regarding receiving condolences for their first wife in front of the second, for this may yield insecurity and discomfort (see guidelines to this *halacha* in Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 385:2). Explains the Gesher HaChaim that in truth someone can choose to be buried next to his or her first or second, or latter, spouse, and if they die without expressing their wishes we would likely bury them with whom they had (the most) children (in other words, we will make an educated guess as to who they would want to be buried next to). As for the Chasam Sofer, his first *teshuvah* was regarding one who was remarried and his first wife was disinterred. Although usually this would demand some type of *aveilus*, here, because of the feelings of his present wife, he need not, *should not*, mourn.

What comes out from all of this, thus far, is that one can be buried with whichever spouse they wish; however should one choose to be buried with their first spouse they should not make such arrangements in front of the second. For this reason many *rabbanim* would tell someone not to keep pictures in the house –once remarried– of the first spouse.

So, what does all of this have to do with the *minbag* found in *Mihagim Varmezia* stating that children not attend the weddings of their widowed (and, perhaps, divorced) parents? Perhaps, since we are sensitive to a second wife in not reminding her of the bonds of the first, at the moment of *chuppa* and at the celebratory feast perhaps having the children of the first wife their will seem like a *pgam* in the husband's new dedication to her. Seeing them there – like the law of condolence – can serve as a source of insecurity in her new marriage.

Although I have not seen this reason brought in print (until now!) I feel it best explains both the *minbag* and why we are so lax regarding it. For if this *minbag* is simply to protect the feelings of the living they most certainly can be *mochel* and explain that their desire *is* to have the children there.

While everyone should follow their *minbagim* and the rulings from their respective *rabbanim*, I hope this monograph reminds us that just because a *minbag* is real does not make it universally held, understood, or give it the power to outweigh other *halachic* concerns.

As the Netziv wrote: “Sometimes (in the name of being strict) we run away from a fox...and into the head of a lion”

