



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.

Yud Alef Nissan, 5785

Foreword

“If not for Hashem who was with us, let Israel say now”
(Psalms 124, 129).

It is known that the Torah has two aspects: the aspect of the giver and the aspect of the receiver. That is, how the Torah is from the perspective of Hashem, the giver of the Torah, and how it is from the perspective of the Jewish people, the receivers of the Torah.

One of the distinctions between these aspects is that from the perspective of the giver, the Torah was given in a complete and exact manner—nothing more and nothing less. However, from the perspective of the Jewish people, through their engagement in Torah study, they have the power to innovate and expand upon the Torah so that it becomes “longer than the earth in measure and broader than the sea.”

Accordingly, we found this verse **“Let Israel Say Now”**, fitting to this collection, emphasizing the power of the Jewish people to speak, add, and innovate in Torah—so much so that God Himself comes to hear the new Torah insights of the Jewish people. This is similar to what is stated in the Talmud (Gittin 6b):

“What is the Holy One, Blessed be He, doing? They said to him: He is engaged in the discussion of the episode of the concubine at Gibeah. And what is He saying? He said to him: My son Avitar says such-and-such; my son Yonatan says such-and-such.”

And to the point that “The Holy One, Blessed be He, smiled and said: My children have defeated Me, My children have defeated Me” (Bava Metzia 59b).

It is worth noting the Midrash Tehillim’s interpretation of the verse

“Let Israel say now”—referring to Israel Saba (the Patriarch Jacob). It is well known that Jacob’s defining attribute is truth, and his essence is the “Torah of Truth,” as it is written: “And Jacob was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents”, referring to the tents of Shem and Eber.

At the conclusion of Psalm 124, the strength of Israel is again emphasized through their engagement in Torah study and the novel insights they bring forth in Torah. It is through them and in their merit that the Holy One, Blessed be He, renews the heavens and the earth. As it is written: **“Our help is in the name of Hashem, Maker of heaven and earth.”**

This is explained by the Alshich in his commentary Romemut Kel on Tehillim, based on the introduction to the Zohar:

“Maker of heaven and earth”—it is noteworthy that the verse uses the present tense (“עושה” – “Maker”) rather than the past tense (“עשה” – “made”). This aligns with the teaching of our Sages on the verse: “For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before Me, so shall your offspring and your name remain” (Isaiah 66:22). Our Rabbis explain that the verse does not say ‘I made’ (past tense) but ‘I make’ (present tense), teaching that the making of the heavens is an ongoing, spiritual process. Just as the heavens and the earth are continually renewed, so too shall our offspring and our name endure.”

This suggests that our help (עזרנו) is found in the fact that Hashem is continuously creating the heavens and the earth. Since these new heavens and earth are sustained by the Torah and mitzvot of Israel, and since they will never cease to exist, it follows that the offspring of Israel—who bring about this renewal—will likewise endure forever.

Furthermore, it is known that every individual has the capacity—and more than that, the obligation—to innovate in Torah, as this is integral to the completeness of their soul. As the Tanya (Iggeret HaKodesh 26) states:

“Every Jew has the ability to reveal hidden wisdom and to innovate new insights—whether in legal rulings or in homiletics, whether in

the revealed or the mystical dimensions of Torah—according to the level of their soul’s root. And they are obligated to do so in order to complete their soul, by elevating the sparks that have fallen into their portion and inheritance, as is known.”

Based on this, since every person is connected to innovating in Torah, the Lubavitcher Rebbe encouraged that everyone should write and publish their Torah insights. The Rebbe explained that writing and publishing Torah insights has a twofold benefit:

1. It benefits the public who study these insights, thereby fulfilling the commandment to “expand and glorify the Torah.”
2. It benefits the writer themselves, for the process of articulating their insights to others enhances their own understanding and depth of knowledge.

Baruch Hashem, the city of Buffalo is filled with Torah scholars and writers. With God’s help, we have gathered Torah insights from the holy community of Buffalo—from rabbis, Torah scholars, and yeshiva students—spanning all areas of Torah: peshat (simple interpretation), remez (allusion), halacha (Jewish law), and Chassidus. The insights have been written in Hebrew and English for the benefit of the broader public.

A special addition this year is the inclusion of Torah insights from Buffalo’s previous generation of rabbis, some of which are being published for the first time from handwritten manuscripts.

Our gratitude goes to the rabbis and yeshiva students who dedicated their efforts to writing their insights in order to expand and glorify the Torah. A special thanks to HaTomim Shalom DovBer Gurary for his assistance in editing this compilation.

It is our hope that, with God’s help, studying the insights in this booklet will lead to even more Torah innovations, enabling us to publish additional collections of Torah insights.

May it be God’s will that we soon merit the ultimate renewal in Torah, as it will be revealed in the teachings of Moshiach: “A new Torah will go forth from Me” (Isaiah 51:4). May we merit the revelation

of the hidden wonders of the Torah, as Rashi explains on the verse “Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth” (Song of Songs 1:2):

“We are assured by Him that He will appear to them again to explain to them the secret reasons and the hidden mysteries of the Torah.”

As Maimonides writes at the end of Hilchot Melachim (12:5), in the days of Moshiach:

“At that time there will be no famine, no war, no jealousy, and no competition, for goodness will be abundant, and all delicacies will be as common as dust. The entire occupation of the world will be solely to know God. Therefore, the Jewish people will be great sages and will comprehend the hidden matters, attaining knowledge of their Creator to the fullest extent possible, as it is stated: ‘For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.’”

For comments or feedback on this collection, please email:

BUFTorahChidush@gmail.com

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Chidushei Torah



Where does Haman's name occur in the Torah?

RABBI SIMCHA PALTROVICH Z”L*



The Talmud (Chulin 139b) asks: From where in the Torah can one find an allusion to Haman?

The verse states that after Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, God asked: ‘Have you eaten from [hamin] the tree about which I commanded you not to eat?’ (Genesis 3:11). (The word hamin is spelled the same way as Haman—Heh, Mem, Nun).

What prompts the Talmud to ask this question? Why should the despicable Haman deserve mention in the Torah?

The reason for this becomes clear through the moral of the following story:

Once, there was a wealthy man known for his generosity and philanthropy. However, he had a son who behaved recklessly, kept company with dissolute individuals, and brought great disgrace upon his father's good name. Eventually, the father was forced to send his wayward son away.

*) Rabbi Simcha Paltrovich (1842-1926) served as a rabbi in Buffalo from 1890 to 1914. He passed away on the 27th of Elul, 1926.

Penniless and without means, the son wandered from town to town, surviving as best he could. For a while, he managed, but when winter approached, his hardships intensified. His clothes were in tatters, and he had long since discarded his shoes, leaving him barefoot. With no food or shelter, he wandered in despair.

Late one night, he arrived at a farmhouse. Weak from hunger and shivering from the cold, he knocked on the door and pleaded, “Please let me in! Have pity on a half-starved, half-frozen man!”

But the merciless farmer, enraged at being woken, shouted, “Scoundrel! How dare you disturb me at this hour? Leave immediately, or I will set my dogs upon you!”

Realizing that further pleas were futile, the young man, tears streaming down his face, resumed his journey. As he walked, he reflected bitterly, “How foolish and shameful I have been! I disobeyed my parents and caused them so much sorrow and humiliation. Oh, how I long to return to them! I will change my ways and become an honorable man. But how can I return home? Winter is here, and I have nothing—no money, no way to travel.”

As he trudged on, he spotted another farmhouse. Desperate, he knocked and called out, “Have mercy on a poor, unfortunate soul! I am freezing—please, let me in to warm myself.”

This time, the farmer was kind-hearted. He welcomed the boy inside, and his wife quickly served him a hot meal, reviving his strength. After eating, the farmer inquired about his background and destination.

The boy, seeking sympathy, claimed that his father had cruelly cast him out, leaving him destitute. Outraged by such apparent cruelty, the farmer’s wife immediately denounced the father.

But her husband, more thoughtful, replied, “My dear wife, things are rarely as simple as they seem. I do not believe the father acted without cause. A man of such good reputation would not send his son away without a reason.” Turning to the boy, he asked, “Tell me

truthfully—did you honor and obey your parents as every good son should?”

Ashamed, the boy admitted, “No, I was not a good son. I disobeyed them and caused them much grief. That is why my father disowned me.”

The farmer nodded. “Now that I know the truth, I can advise you. I will buy you a ticket home, and you must return to your parents. Ask their forgiveness and prove to them that you have changed. I will accompany you to plead on your behalf.”

Deeply moved, the boy thanked the farmer and acknowledged that, even before receiving this kindness, he had already decided to return—especially after the cruelty of the first farmer.

Wasting no time, he set out for home. When he arrived, he fell to his knees, weeping, and begged his parents to take him back. He promised to reform his ways and become a worthy son. At last, his parents relented.

A few days later, during a family meal, they asked him what had led him to return.

He recounted his ordeal—the rejection by the first farmer, whose harshness forced him to reflect on his actions, and the kindness of the second farmer, whose generosity encouraged him to change. He concluded, “It was because of these two men that I came home.”

His parents, tears in their eyes, responded, “You must visit both farmers and thank them. But above all, you owe the greatest gratitude to the one you call ‘cruel,’ for his harshness spurred your realization and return. Had he shown you kindness, who knows how much longer you would have wandered? His actions, though painful, led you to the right path. Still, you must also express gratitude to the kind farmer, whose warmth helped you follow through on your decision.”

A Lesson from Haman

Similarly, the holy one —blessed be His name—gave us all the bless-

ings we could desire, like a loving father. Yet, we sinned against Him, and as a punishment, we were exiled from our land to Babylon.

Haman, the “cruel farmer,” sought to destroy us. Yet, his wicked decree did more for our spiritual awakening than the fiery speeches of forty-eight prophets. Despite their passionate words, the prophets failed to stir us to repentance. But when faced with Haman’s threats, we fasted for three days and nights, prayed with sincerity, and returned to God wholeheartedly. In response, He reversed our fate and made our enemies suffer the very punishment they had devised for us—fulfilling the words of King David: “He who digs a pit for another falls into it himself.”

Thus, through repentance and return to God, we were saved. In this way, Haman—though wicked—played a role in our redemption. It is fitting, therefore, that he be mentioned in the Torah. This explains the Talmud’s question: “Where is Haman’s name found in the Bible?”

The answer lies in Bereishis:

The verse states that after Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, God asked: ‘Have you eaten from [hamin] the tree about which I commanded you not to eat?’ (Genesis 3:11). (The word hamin is spelled the same way as Haman—Heh, Mem, Nun).

Indeed, Esther and Mordecai dined at Achashverosh’s table, where Jews were forbidden to eat according to our laws. Their disregard for these dietary rules gave Haman the power to bring suffering upon our people.

Yet, in the end, the Jews repented, renewed their faith, and were saved. Through suffering, they were led from darkness to light, from the brink of destruction to a joyful life.



One Request

RABBI YEHOShUA ZAMROWSKI Z”L*

Translated by Rev. Amiel Bender
(Rabbi Zambrowski’s great grandson)



One thing I asked of Hashem, that I shall seek: to live in the house of Hashem all the days of my life; to behold the sweetness of Hashem and to contemplate in his sanctuary. (Psalms 27:4).

Rav Yehoshua Zambrowski Z”L, asks the following question: The verse begins with King David asking one request of Hashem, yet the continuation of the verse suggests three requests and not one?

Rav Yehoshua brings a parable: There was a well-to-do man in

*) Rabbi Yehoshua Zambrowski. Born in Poland in 1874, Rabbi Zambrowski was a respected rabbi and teacher in Warsaw. In 1923, he emigrated to the United States, initially settling in Syracuse, New York, where he served as a rabbi until 1933. He then moved to Buffalo, where he became the chief rabbi of the Buffalo Jewish community, a role he held until his passing on the 11th of Elul 1939.

Rabbi Zambrowski authored two books: Ateres Yehoshua on Tehillim and Chemdas Yehoshua on Ein Yaakov. He served as the rabbi at Anshe Lubovitz Shul and is interred in Buffalo’s Lubovitz Cemetery.

town who had an only daughter. In his family there were very many poverty-stricken people. On an occasion, these relatives were with him and one by one, they shared their financial woes with him. One person needed money for rent, another to educate his small children and yet another needed money for expenses to marry off his daughter. One of the family members remained quiet. The wealthy man asked him about his financial challenges. The gentleman answered that he couldn't go into details as he had many needs.

Therefore - the gentleman continued - I have one request, that you give me your only daughter as a wife and then I will have everything!

Rav Yehoshua explained King David's message: We all have many needs and requests. How do we dare to go to Hashem, the King of kings, with requests for all our needs? King David teaches us the answer through the verse: One thing I asked of Hashem, that I shall seek: to live in the house of Hashem all the days of my life - King David willed the privilege to sit in Hashem's house, to learn and live a life of Torah and then everything that was willed by him would come to fruition.

To dwell in the house of Hashem all the days of my life... and then all that I desire will be fulfilled." What does this mean in practical terms? How does living a life of Torah lead to the fulfillment of all one's wishes?

I understand this to mean as follows: When I am in shul davening, I have an open line to Hashem. I separate my worlds. I leave my outside world with all its challenges, and I walk into my spiritual world. When I am in shul davening, there is a sense of peace, of spiritual completion. My connection with our Creator is so strong, that I am not perturbed by the many challenges in my life. They are set aside - they belong to my world outside the shul.

My connection with Hashem gives me the confidence that all will be okay - that everything will come together. My Shul and prayer moments give me the strength and encouragement to negotiate my outside world. The privilege of living in the house of Hashem all the days

of my life is what brings my world together. My faith in Hashem as our father in heaven, who looks out for me, strengthens my own faith in my existence, and then handling the many challenges in my world.



Overpowering Haman’s Shekalim

RABBI YOSEF ALT

Parshas Shekalim is the first of what’s known as the Arbah Parshiyos, four Shabbosim with special Maftir readings: Shekalim, Zachor, Parah, and HaChodesh. The reason for this practice is because the communal sacrifices of the times of the Beis Hamikdash had to be purchased with funds that were collected for that specific year. The cutoff for when the new funds would be used was Rosh Chodesh Nisan. Therefore, the month of Adar was designated as the time to announce the collection of the shekalim for the korbanos. We commemorate this announcement by reading a special Maftir about the collection of the half shekel taken from the beginning of parshas Ki Sisah. (Shulchan Aruch A”C 685:1 MB 2)

On a deeper level this reading comes at the beginning of the month of Adar to prime us for the avodah of Purim.

“(Haman speaking to Achashveirosh) If it pleases the king, let it be recorded that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand silver talents into the hands of those who perform the duties, for deposit in the king’s treasuries.” (Esther 3:9)

Reish Lakish said, “It is revealed and known before He who spoke and the world came into being, that in the future, Haman would weigh out coins against the Jewish people. Therefore, He preceded their shekels before his. As is stated in the Mishna, On the first of Adar they announce the shekel (collection)...” (Talmud Megillah 13B)

Digging deeper, what was the power of the shekel that Haman was trying to use against the Jewish people? The Imrei Noam explains with an amazing idea. What is the language used by Chazal for making a decision? **Shikul** HaDa'as, weighing your thoughts. That was the **shekel** that Haman was after! Haman wanted to control our thoughts and decisions.

Where is Haman found in the Torah? “HaMin ha'eitz ha'zeh” (from this very tree, the tree of knowledge). Haman is rooted in the sin of the tree of knowledge, when mankind chose to pursue their own independent knowledge rather than subject their thinking to the will of Hashem. This is the shekel of Haman, the shikul ha'da'as, to “develop our own thoughts” and disregard Hashem’s will.

Rabbi Eytan Feiner added an amazing idea: Haman wanted us to bow to him, to lower our head, the place of knowledge and decision-making, to him. We respond with the Maftir this Shabbos, we give our shekel to Hashem to build the Beis Hamikdash, we surrender our knowledge and our decisions to Hashem. “Ki Sisah es rosh bnei Yisroel... When you lift up the heads of the Jewish people...” Rather than bow our heads to Haman, we lift our heads up to Hashem.

This concept also explains what is perhaps the most perplexing halacha in all of Shulchan Aruch: “One should drink (alcohol) on Purim until they do not know the difference between ‘cursed is Haman’ and ‘blessed is Mordechai.’” (Shulchan Aruch A”C 695:2) Since when does the Torah promote drinking alcohol to such a level of extreme intoxication? How does this align with any Torah principles or values? Perhaps, the value of this mitzvah is to surrender one’s da’as, to relax our grip on our thoughts and decisions, as an act of surrendering them to Hashem.

This is the avodah of Purim, to internalize and celebrate that Hashem runs the world. This is, without question, the message of the Purim story of Megillas Esther. What appears to be a terrible tragedy at our doorstep can transform into a brilliant celebration in a moment.

We must let go of our human perspective and embrace our trust in Hashem.

Haman continues to haunt us, challenge us, and ridicule us until this very day. He taunts us to give up our old ways and get with the times. He demands that we leave the Torah behind and develop our own so-called sophisticated opinions. He asks us to bow our head to him. We respond with Ki Sisah, we raise our heads up high, surrendering our da'as to embrace Hashem's da'as HaTorah.



Beginning Wedged in the End: Purim and Pesach

REB YAAKOV CHANIN

One of the fundamental Kabbalistic ideas (Sefer Yetzira 1:7), expanded upon in Chassidus, is “**the end is wedged in the beginning, and the beginning is wedged in the end.**” This concept highlights the interdependence of all stages in any creative process or spiritual development and underscores the ultimate purpose of Creation: to establish a dwelling place for the Creator in the lowest—physical—world. We can see how this idea is realized in Purim and Pesach.

In the annual cycle of holidays, Pesach is the first, followed by a series of holidays that progressively increase in holiness, in accordance with the principle of “**increasing in sanctity and not decreasing**” (Menachos 99a), culminating in Purim. At the same time, there is a Rabbinic directive to mention Purim on Pesach, as it was on Pesach that Esther approached Achashverosh, risking her life to save the Jewish nation. The connection between these two holidays goes beyond mere historical coincidence.

Even the vegetable we eat during the Pesach Seder to intrigue the children is called **karpas**—the same word used for the fancy draperies at Achashverosh’s banquet, which set the stage for the entire Purim story. The connection between these two holidays is still much more profound.

The Rebbe, in the kuntres Inyana Shel Toras HaChassidus, explains that Chassidic interpretations of the Torah express the highest level of

the soul—Yechidah—which is inherently connected to Moshiach. Since Yechidah represents an all-encompassing unity, Chassidus unifies all aspects of Torah, and this unity is ultimately expressed in the concept of Moshiach. Thus, by identifying the element of Moshiach in any two ideas, their deepest connection is revealed.

Moshiach and Pesach

The connection between Pesach and Moshiach is evident. The Rebbe Rashab explains that the entire Pesach Seder is about immediate redemption. He interprets the Four Questions as follows:

“How is this night different from all other nights?”—How is this exile different from all previous exiles?

All four questions hint at the idea that this exile is unique because it will transition directly into the final redemption and the era of Moshiach. The theme of redemption intensifies throughout Pesach, culminating in the eighth day, when we read the Haftarah about Moshiach and conduct Moshiach’s Seudah (meal).

Moshiach and Purim

Regarding Purim, the Midrash (Mishlei 9:2, based on Esther 9:28) states that in the World to Come, all holidays will be nullified except Purim. While this refers to the distant future, we can find a present-day connection to Moshiach by comparing Purim and Yom Kippur.

The Zohar states that Yom Kippurim can be read as “a day like Purim,” implying two things:

1. These days share similarities.
2. Purim is even higher than Yom Kippur.

On Yom Kippur, there are five prayers corresponding to the five levels of the soul:

1. Maariv – Nefesh
2. Shacharis – Ruach

3. Musaf – Neshama
4. Mincha – Chayah
5. Ne'ilah – Yechidah

Similarly, there are five mitzvos on Yom Kippur, all prohibitions, each progressively more external to the person:

1. No eating or drinking
2. No washing
3. No anointing
4. No wearing leather shoes
5. No marital relations

Eating is the most internal action. Washing purifies the skin, which is more external. Anointing provides pleasure to the skin, though it is not as essential as washing. Wearing shoes protects the limbs, making it even more external. Finally, marital relations involve uniting with an entirely separate person.

As one moves outward to increasingly external aspects of life, one continuously diminishes their yeshus—ego—until reaching a state of harmonious unity with another. This is emphasized in the fifth prayer of the day, Ne'ilah, when the highest level of the soul, Yechidah, directly actualizes its connection and oneness with Hashem.

On Purim, we also find five concepts: four mitzvos, one of which is performed twice. However, instead of prohibitions, these mitzvos involve positive actions:

1. Listening to the Megillah at night
2. Listening to the Megillah in the morning
3. Giving charity to the poor
4. Sending gifts to friends
5. Having a festive meal

These mitzvos progress in a similar direction—starting with personal spiritual reception (Megillah reading) and culminating in outward acts of kindness and unity, bringing one to the ultimate connection with Hashem.

Megillah Reading - Night & Day

The reading of the Megillah is essentially one mitzvah performed in two parts. The sages in Tractate Megillah 4a cite verses from Psalms to support this practice. However, the very fact that it must be read twice indicates that the two readings are distinct, each possessing its own unique qualities. In a talk on Purim 5713, the Rebbe explains that the nighttime reading brings light to an obvious and visible darkness, while the morning reading illuminates a darkness that disguises itself as light—a more subtle and insidious darkness, akin to the imperfections of those who are content with their spiritual level and state of affairs.

In a sense, this parallels the two stages of circumcision: (1) the removal of the thick skin and (2) the removal of the thin membrane. Chassidic teachings explain that these two stages correspond to spiritual cleansing. People are both capable of and obligated to remove gross spiritual impurities on their own, while the impurity embedded in the very essence of the material world will be eradicated by Hashem Himself with the coming of Moshiach.

The first reading of the Megillah can be compared to the Seder of Pesach, which is linked to the original Exodus from Egypt, while the second reading of the Megillah corresponds to the last days of Pesach, which are more closely associated with the future Redemption through Moshiach.

Regarding the correspondence between Purim and Yom Kippur, the evening reading of the Megillah corresponds to Malchus (nefesh), the basic recognition of Purim’s holiness. The morning reading corresponds to Z”A (ruach), representing a leap beyond the previous night’s level. The Baal Shem Tov explains that the Mishnah (Megillah 2:1) states, “One who reads the Megillah backwards has not fulfilled his obligation,” meaning one must not see it as merely a past event but as something happening now.

(This idea parallels Pesach Sheni, which represents a second, higher leap beyond the first Pesach. Just as we are commanded on Pesach to

see ourselves as personally leaving Egypt, so too on Purim, we must recognize that redemption is unfolding in our time).

At both readings of the Megillah, the person is a mekabel—receiving and internalizing the G-dly light that comes through the reading of the Megillah.

Matanos Laevyonim

Then comes the work directed outward: giving gifts to the poor. This is a prime example of a “mashpia” (giver) action, as explained in Tanya. It is a tangible act that positively impacts another person, with the emphasis placed on the recipient. As is frequently quoted, this is an action that brings the Redemption closer.

Mishloach Manos

The next mitzvah is giving food gifts to a friend. Since the friend may not need the food as much as a poor person, the emphasis here is on the act itself, which serves as an expression of unconditional love. As the Alter Rebbe explains in Likkutei Torah (Ma’amar “Heichaltzu”), the cause of our current exile is unwarranted hatred, and the way to undo this cause is through unconditional love.

(When comparing these two obligations—1) giving gifts to the poor and 2) giving gifts to friends—we see a contrast that further illustrates the principle of “the beginning wedged in the end.”

The obligation to give gifts to the poor is more physical in nature and, therefore, holds greater significance in Jewish law. A person is encouraged to allocate significantly more resources to gifts for the poor than to gifts for friends. This is because physical charity more directly fulfills the ultimate purpose of Creation—creating a dwelling place for Hashem in the physical world—than any other spiritual activity.

As the Alter Rebbe explains in Igeret HaKodesh, the commandment of charity is the most physical of all mitzvot. It involves a person’s tangible effort to earn money through work, which in turn serves as the

foundation for their engagement with the material world. Since charity transforms the elements of existence that are furthest from spirituality into something holy, the Jerusalem Talmud refers to it simply as the mitzvah.

In contrast, gifts exchanged between friends, though involving physical food, are not necessarily a physical necessity. Rather, they serve as expressions of friendship. Meanwhile, gifts to the poor provide essential material support, directly sustaining physical existence.)

Purim Seudah

Finally, we reach the Purim Seudah (festive meal). While this might seem to focus back on the individual, by this point, the person has internalized the day's lessons, uniting completely with Hashem's will. This mirrors the Ne'ilah prayer on Yom Kippur—except that on Purim, this unity is achieved through engaging with the physical world, truly making it a dwelling place for Hashem.

Actually, the primary aim of gifts to the poor and to friends, as explained in the works of the codifiers, is to ensure that every Jew has the means to hold the Purim Seudah. This, in a sense, parallels the obligation to contribute to the Maos Chittim (“money for wheat”) fund, which ensures that all Jews can conduct the Seder and have matzah on Pesach. In both cases, the emphasis on the participation of the entire nation hints at the Seudah of Shor Habor and Leviathan with the coming of Moshiach when all Jews will feast together.

The Idea of Bittul as an Expression of the World to Come

The similarity between Ne'ilah, the Seder, and the festive meal of Purim in their connection to Moshiach can be explained as follows. The Rebbe Rashab explains in the ma'amar Heichaltzu that the root of all negative phenomena in our world is yeshus—the sense of self-importance and considering oneself an independent entity, rather than having bittul (self-negation) toward Hashem. Therefore, achieving

bittul is the actualization of Moshiach's presence, as it eliminates the root of all negativity.

Throughout the year, the moments when we most tangibly experience bittul are during Pesach, Yom Kippur (especially during Ne'ilah), and Purim.

Pesach, for instance, is celebrated by eliminating chametz, which represents yeshus, and consuming matzah, which symbolizes bittul. Interestingly, this means that someone who becomes proud of their stringencies in avoiding chametz is actually contradicting the very essence of Pesach—since pride itself is the spiritual chametz.

During Ne'ilah, particularly when proclaiming Shema Yisrael, we completely divest ourselves of yeshus, merging entirely into Hashem, so to speak. This is a clear expression of bittul toward Hashem.

Since the Purim seudah is, in a way, similar to Ne'ilah and Pesach and is directly connected to Moshiach, it follows that bittul is the central spiritual foundation of this festive meal. As The Rebbe quotes the Rambam, who states that one should eat and drink at the Purim seudah until they fall asleep. The Rebbe explains that sleep, a state in which a person is devoid of conscious self-awareness, represents true bittul—complete self-nullification.

Thus, even the physical enjoyment of eating is not for personal pleasure but is entirely l'shem Shamayim (for the sake of Heaven). When celebrated properly, the Purim festivities bring joy not only to the individual participating but also to their family, friends, and others around them.

The Deeper Meaning of Drinking on Purim

Furthermore, the concept of the Purim seudah expressing bittul and the spirit of Moshiach can be illustrated by the obligation to drink **“until one cannot distinguish between ‘Cursed Haman’ and ‘Blessed Mordechai’”** (Megillah 7b).

The Alter Rebbe in Torah Ohr explains that “Cursed Haman” alludes to the prohibitive commandments, while “Blessed Mordechai”

refers to the positive commandments. As mentioned above, the spiritual source of the positive commandments lies in the last two letters of Hashem's Name—Vav and Hei—whereas the source of the prohibitive commandments is in the first two letters—Yud and Hei.

However, regarding the time of Redemption, it is written (Zechariah 14:9), "Hashem will be One, and His Name will be One." Kabbalah explains that this means the last two letters of Hashem's Name will be elevated to the same level as the first two letters. This is why the verse states, "will be One." The Hebrew word for "will be"—"yihyeh"—is spelled with Yud and Hei written twice, symbolizing this unification.

As a result, in the time of Redemption, the positive and prohibitive commandments will share a similar transcendent spiritual energy, essentially making them one and the same. This explains the idea that there will be no difference between "Cursed Haman" and "Blessed Mordechai." Therefore, the obligation of the Purim festive meal is to drink in a way that reveals Moshiach—right then and there.

Conclusion: The End is in the Beginning

As the Rebbe explains in his Ma'amar Kimei Tzeischa, the miracles of the final redemption are not separate from those of the Exodus but rather their continuation. In this sense, the Purim Seudah is the culmination of the Pesach Seder, fulfilling the principle that "the beginning is wedged in the end, and the end in the beginning."



When Adar Arrives.. The Balance of Opposites

REB YAAKOV CHANIN

It is mentioned in many places in the teachings of Chassidus (for example, in the ma'amar “Heichaltzu” of the Rebbe Rashab) that while the spiritual world of Tohu is higher than the world of Tikkun and possesses an infinitely stronger revelation of G-dly light, the advantage of Tikkun lies in its ability to foster peaceful coexistence, integration, and the harmonious operation of different—even opposing—modes of G-dly influence. Through the implementation of this balance, a world emerges that is capable of serving as a dwelling place for Hashem Himself.

For this reason, we are encouraged to practice a combination of opposites—chesed (kindness) and gevurah (severity)—in our daily lives and spiritual service. Unrestricted giving, which expresses chesed, can lead to corruption and the emergence of negative qualities, as seen in Yishmael, who embodied chesed in opposition to holiness. Conversely, unmitigated restriction, an expression of gevurah, can also lead to corruption, as exemplified by Esav, who embodied gevurah in opposition to holiness. However, when these two forces are harmonized through tiferes, which originates in a high spiritual source where opposites unite, the result is positive and balanced.

An example of gevurah mitigated by chesed would be the advice to increase charitable giving during times of financial hardship. Monetary constraints represent gevurah, while giving charity represents chesed.

An example of chesed tempered by gevurah can be found in the second letter of Igeres HaKodesh. The Alter Rebbe's release from imprisonment and the subsequent vindication of spreading Chassidic teachings from Above were clear expressions of chesed. However, the Alter Rebbe instructed his chassidim to remain reserved, to refrain from unrestrained celebration, and to act respectfully toward the opponents of Chassidus. He urged them to truly humble their spirit and heart before every person, which is a clear representation of gevurah.

This pursuit of a harmonious balance of opposites is also reflected in the months of Adar and Av.

After listing five calamities that occurred on the 17th of Tammuz and five that took place on the 9th of Av, the Mishnah (Taanis 4:6) states: "When Av comes, we decrease in joy." The Gemara, commenting on this, adds: "Just as when Av comes, we decrease in joy, so too, when Adar arrives, we increase in joy."

The word Av means "father," which can be seen as an allusion to chesed. In Kabbalistic teachings, chesed is associated with male energy, while gevurah is linked to female energy. The rule, then, is that when there is a revelation of chesed—"when Av comes"—we must decrease (*mema'atin*), and this decrease, representing gevurah, is performed with joy.

The word Adar carries connotations of "awesome," "mighty," and "powerful"—all qualities associated with gevurah. Yet the rule is that when there is a revelation of gevurah—"when Adar arrives"—we must increase (*marbim*), and this increase, representing chesed, is also performed with joy.

Thus, whether we are decreasing (*mema'atin*)—introducing gevurah—or increasing (*marbim*)—introducing chesed—we do so with joy, emphasizing the harmony of opposites in our spiritual service.



Connecting Redemptions: The Deeper Meaning of Purim and Pesach

REB MOSHE HEIMOWITZ

The Gemara in Megillah 6b discusses the case of a leap year, in which there are two months of Adar. In which Adar is the Megillah read?

The logic for reading the Megillah in the first Adar is very compelling: **Ein ma'avirin al ha-mitzvot**—whenever we have a mitzvah to fulfill, we perform it as soon as possible. As we learn from the pasuk in Vayera: “**Vayashkem Avraham baboker**”—Avraham arose early in the morning to fulfill Hashem’s command. If so, what is the reasoning for reading the Megillah in the second Adar, as we actually do? The Gemara explains: **Somechim geulah l’geulah**—we juxtapose the geulah (redemption) of Purim to the geulah of Pesach.

But how does this aggadic reasoning of “somechim geulah l’geulah” override the strong halachic principle of “ein ma'avirin al ha-mitzvot”?

Clearly, somechim geulah l’geulah teaches us something deeper than we may have initially thought.

Let’s digress. We are all familiar with the famous Gemara in Shabbos 88b, which expounds on the words from the Megillah, “**kiymu v’kiblu haYehudim**”—“the Jews established and accepted.” In a nutshell, the kabbalas haTorah on Purim was, on some level, greater than the kabbalas haTorah at Har Sinai.

But what could possibly be greater than Ma’amad Har Sinai, where Bnei Yisrael actually heard Hashem’s voice?

The answer to this question will hopefully shed light on the geulah of Purim and, in turn, answer our original question.

At Har Sinai, in a sense, the Torah was given on a silver platter. The Jews accepted it by proclaiming na’aseh v’nishma—“we will do, and we will hear.” However, beyond that, they did not exert great effort to receive the Torah.

Purim, however, is entirely different. One could superficially view the story of Mordechai and Esther as a gripping novel, a tale of suspense, without Hashem’s involvement at all. But we know that beneath the surface, every step of the way was guided by hashgachah pratis (divine providence) through hidden miracles. The Vilna Gaon even wrote a sefer analyzing every detail of the Megillah, revealing its profound depth of hashgachah pratis.

Thus, Purim is the Yom Tov of effort—of analyzing and uncovering our relationship with Hashem and all that it entails.

The key point is that effort must be invested to truly see and feel Hashem’s involvement in our lives. When that effort is expended, it leads to a profound sense of connection and accomplishment in our relationship with Hashem. This is why the kabbalas haTorah on Purim, in some ways, was greater than at Har Sinai—because it was earned through effort and recognition rather than being handed down in an overwhelming display of divine revelation.

To prevent the misconception that Hashem is only the orchestrator of grand miracles—such as the Ten Plagues or Krias Yam Suf—which could potentially minimize our awareness of His direct involvement in our personal lives, the Megillah and all that it represents must be placed as close as possible to the geulas Mitzrayim.

Geulas Mitzrayim teaches us that Hashem is present in the grand, world-altering miracles. Geulas Purim teaches us that Hashem is just as involved in the seemingly small, everyday moments of our lives.

Our relationship with Hashem is a fusion of both geulos—and for this reason, they must be placed close together.

May we all toil in strengthening our relationship with Hashem, and may we soon merit to witness great miracles with the coming of Moshiach, b'karov mamash.



True Individuality

REB SHMUEL LOKSHIN

Bamidbar 24:4-5

א וַיֵּרָא בְּלִעָם כִּי טוֹב בְּעֵינָיו ה' לְבָרֵךְ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־הֵלֵךְ
בְּפַעַם־בְּפַעַם לְקִרְאֹת נְחָשִׁים וַיִּשֶׁת אֶל־הַמִּדְבָּר פָּנָיו:

1 Balaam saw that it pleased Hashem to bless Israel; so he did not go in search of omens as he had done time and time again, but instead turned his face toward the desert.

ב וַיִּשָּׂא בְּלִעָם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטָיו וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹקִים:

2 Balaam raised his eyes and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes, and the spirit of God rested upon him.

Balaam worked tirelessly to curse the Jewish people, but no matter how much he tried, he could not receive permission from God to do so. Nothing seemed to work. Even though he was being paid by Balak, Balaam himself was no lover of the Jewish people. He was determined to carry out his mission, no matter the cost. However, when the moment arrived—despite not receiving divine permission—he climbed a mountain to overlook the nation he was about to curse. And suddenly, something changed.

He saw something.

This sight not only prevented him from cursing the Jewish people but actually awakened within him a desire to do the exact opposite—to bless them.

As we see in verse 2:

“וַתָּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים”

“And the spirit of God rested upon him.”

Rashi explains:

“וַתָּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים. עָלָה בְּלִבּוֹ שְׂלֵא יִקְלְלֵם”

“And the spirit of God rested upon him”—it entered his heart not to curse them.

Rashi uses the phrase “עָלָה בְּלִבּוֹ”, which literally means “it rose in his heart”—a desire to bless the Jewish people instead of cursing them.

What Did Balaam See?

Balaam, who had such hatred for the Jewish people that he later advised sending harlots into their camp to seduce them into sinning—hoping that this would anger God and allow him to curse them—saw something that transformed him.

In verse 2, it says:

“וַיַּרְא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטוֹ”

“Balaam raised his eyes and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes.”

Rashi explains:

“שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטוֹ. רָאָה כֹּל שִׁבְט וְשִׁבְט שׁוֹכֵן לְעַצְמוֹ וְאִינּוּן מְעַרְבִין, רָאָה

שָׂאִין פְּתַח־יָהֶם מְכֻנְיִין זֶה כְּנֻגַד זֶה, שְׂלֵא יִצִּיץ לְתוֹךְ אֹהֶל חֵבְרוֹ.”

“He saw each tribe dwelling by itself, not intermingling, and he saw that the openings of their tents did not face each other, so that they should not peer into each other’s tents.”

Let’s analyze what Balaam saw:

After all his efforts to gain divine approval to curse the Jewish people, Balaam climbed to the top of the mountain, ready to unleash his curses.

“וַיִּשָּׂא בָלָעַם אֶת־עֵינָיו”

“And Balaam raised his eyes.”

And what did he see?

“וַיֵּרָא אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל”

“And he saw Israel!”

He saw Am Yisrael—what a spectacular sight! A nation of over 600,000 people, all camped around the Mishkan (Tabernacle) in perfect unison. Three tribes on each side, all facing the Mishkan, demonstrating the strength and unity of the nation of Israel.

But this alone did not yet change his heart.

What truly struck Balaam was something deeper—something unique to this nation that no other nation possessed.

“שֹׁכֵן לְשִׁבְטוֹ”

“Dwelling according to its tribes.”

Even though they were one nation, united for a common purpose, each tribe still maintained its individual identity.

Yet even that was not enough to turn Balaam’s heart.

Rashi explains further:

“רָאָה שְׂאִין פְּתֻחֵיהֶם מְכֻנְיִין זֶה כְּנֶגֶד זֶה, שְׁלֹא יֵצֵץ לְתוֹךְ אֹהֶל חֵבְרוֹ”

“He saw that the openings of their tents did not face each other, so that they should not look into their neighbors’ tents.”

This was the revelation! Not only were they a unified nation, and not only did each tribe retain its unique identity, but even within each tribe, every individual maintained their own privacy and dignity.

This was what transformed Balaam.

“וַתְּהִי עָלָיו רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים”

“And the spirit of God rested upon him.”

Rashi explains:

“עָלָה בְּלִבּוֹ שְׁלֹא יְקַלְלֵם”

“It arose in his heart not to curse them.”

The Power of Tznius (Modesty)

“מה־טבו אֱהִי־לְיָ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁכְּנֵי־יָדָיו יִשְׂרָאֵל”

“How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!”

One of the most well-known sources for the power of tznius comes from this very story—the way the Jewish people encamped, with each tent positioned carefully so that no one could see into their neighbor’s home. This led to Balaam’s great blessing:

Perhaps this story reveals a new dimension of tznius.

One obvious aspect of tznius is the way a person dresses. But what power do garments really have?

Let’s use a practical example:

Imagine walking into a large synagogue where over 1,500 men are praying the morning services. At first glance, it looks like everyone is wearing the same thing—tallit (prayer shawl) and tefillin—performing the same motions and reciting the same words. It’s a beautiful sight, a moment of perfect unity.

But then, a person might wonder: Where is the individuality? Shouldn’t people dress in their own way, say their own words, and express themselves uniquely?

Yet, upon closer observation, something amazing happens. Though everyone looks the same, each person is praying from his own siddur (prayer book), expressing his personal needs.

When everyone wears flashy clothing or expensive accessories, does that truly express individuality? Or does it merely distract from a person’s true essence?

Similarly, when people conform entirely to a group, they risk losing their identity. But when everyone does as they please, the same problem arises—true individuality gets lost in the chaos.

So what is the solution?

This is exactly what astonished Balaam. He was struck by the mi-

raculous balance within the Jewish people: they were fully unified, yet each individual retained their unique identity.

How amazing! We don't see this in any other group, whether a military, a sports team, or a religion—that an individual still holds on to who he is and does not lose himself in the group, all while being fully part of it. This is unique to the Jewish people.

May we merit to reveal and express our true individuality within the unity of Am Yisrael with the coming of Moshiach, when we will all be one and yet remain our true, unique selves.



Community, Friendship, and Responsibility

RABBI AVI OKIN

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:5) states, “do not separate yourself from the community,” The question is why is it so important to live and participate in a Jewish community? Why can I not live alone and do my own thing?

There are many reasons it is beneficial to live in and participate in a Jewish community. The first is based on a Gemara in Masseches Shavuos (39a). The Gemara states, “All Jews are responsible for each other.” Jewish communities are renowned for their communal organizations, which assist people in coping with the challenges that life can bring. Many communities have a Tomchei Shabbos, which helps people who cannot afford food for Shabbos and Yomim Tovim, while Bikur Cholim provides for the ill and their families. The Chevra Kadi-sha provides for the needs of the dead and their mourning relatives. In addition, by living among a Jewish community, one can avoid the many spiritual pitfalls that can result from living alone. Jewish communities have Rabbeim who are there to advise their members on how to live as Torah Jews in a complex world.

Another reason it is important to be a member of the Jewish community is to have good friends. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (1:6) says that one must “acquire a friend” because friends aid one’s personal growth. The Torah states in Parshas Kedoshim (19:17) “...You shall surely rebuke your fellow and you shall not bear a sin because of him.”

Not only is a friend supposed to prevent you from sinning, but also a friend is anyone who is willing to share in your joy and pain, to be honest and give you advice, to help you to grow and succeed, and to always be there for you when times are hard and when times are good. Such friends are what Choni Hama'agal desired when he said (Masseches Tanis 23a) "either friends or death."

A Jewish Community is more than a bunch of Jews who live near each other and support one another with their physical needs. The most critical thought that needs to be kept in our mind is what are we doing this for? Hashem put us on this earth in order to sanctify His name through the performance of His commandments. The only way to fulfill His commandments properly and without sacrificing any aspect of their observance is by sticking together and living in a Jewish community, with real and honest friends to achieve the highest levels of spirituality. Shlomo Ha'melech concludes Koheles "Serve Hashem and observe His commandments, **because that is the essence of mankind.**"



The Pause That Connects: Unlocking the Meaning of the Shel Yad

MOTTY OKONOV

There are two main opinions on how to put on Tefillin: one from the Tur, Beis Yosef, and Shulchan Aruch, and the other from the Arizal.

The Two Opinions

According to the Tur, Beis Yosef, and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim, Siman 25), one should place the shel yad on the bicep and then immediately put on the shel rosh. The Tur even brings a story of his father, the Rosh, who did just that—placing the shel yad and going straight to the shel rosh without delay.

The Arizal, on the other hand, holds that the seven krichos (wraps) of the shel yad are an essential part of the mitzvah. This suggests that the pause is there to focus on them before moving on to the shel rosh.

Now that we have our two main opinions, let's explore them further.

The Tur's Perspective

The Tur emphasizes the importance of the shel rosh, quoting the pasuk from Devarim (28:10):

“וַיִּרְאוּ כָּל-עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שָׁם ה' נִקְרָא עֲלֶיךָ וַיִּרְאוּ מִמֶּנִּי”

“And all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of Hashem is called upon you, and they will fear you.”

The Gemara (Menachos 35b) explains that this refers to the shel rosh, which represents chochmah (wisdom).

The Arizal’s Perspective

The Arizal teaches that the seven krichos of the shel yad represent, the seven Sefirot:

The ring we make with the strap around the finger, is similar to a wedding band that seals the connection between us (Malchus) and Hashem (Chochmah). It’s not just a symbol—it solidifies our commitment, tying our actions to His will with a final, firm knot.

The Rebbe’s Explanation

The Rebbe (in the Maamar “V’Chazakta V’Hayita L’Ish” 5728) quotes the Shelah HaKadosh, who compares the tefillin shel rosh to Yaakov and the tefillin shel yad to Yosef:

Yaakov represents chochmah and dveikus—uplifting the world through connection to Hashem.

Yosef, on the other hand, represents avodah—going into the darkest depths of Mitzrayim, working hard to elevate the world from spiritual scarcity.

The Rebbe explains that becoming an ish (a complete person) happens through avodah, which the shel yad represents.

This helps us understand why the Tur focuses more on the shel rosh than the shel yad.

The Tur suggests that while we need to control our middos with the shel yad, the main goal is the chochmah of the shel rosh. Because if you don’t build a solid foundation with the shel rosh, your middos can be misdirected. You might think you’re inspired and connected, but without that foundation, you could still go off track—like what hap-

pened to Elisha ben Avuyah or Shabbetai Tzvi, who had chochmah but lost their way.

The Arizal, in contrast, insists that the shel yad's wraps aren't just a warmup—they're the key to grounding us. They ensure our middos and connection to Hashem stay steady before we reach for the chochmah of the shel rosh.

What Does This Teach Us?

The Tur emphasizes reaching straight for the shel rosh, treating it as the big reveal—Hashem's name shining through our chochmah, uniting heart and mind in one swift move. However, this view is not the halacha, because it skips the shel yad's full role, leaving the mitzvah incomplete.

The Arizal teaches that the seven krichos of the shel yad build us up step by step through the sefirot, binding us to Hashem like a kallah to a chosson, ensuring that our chochmah has a strong foundation.

The Lesson for Us

We are not here to prove which opinion is more correct but rather to learn from both—about tefillin and about becoming an ish.

The Tur's view reminds us to aim high with chochmah.

The Arizal's view, which is the halacha, teaches us to start strong with avodah.

The Rebbe's Maamar clarifies why we follow the Arizal. Becoming an ish means building ourselves through avodah, like Yosef did. Every time we put on tefillin, we should wrap the krichos carefully. While making the krichos, we should think about our middos and how our avodah solidifies our bond with Hashem.

That pause when wrapping the straps on the hand before putting on the Shel Rosh isn't just a break—it's a moment to connect, to get it right, ensuring that our Shel Yad is complete before elevating our Chochmah to the Shel Rosh.

Tefillin isn't just about straps and boxes—it's about connecting our actions to our thoughts, our middos to our chochmah, and ourselves to Hashem. That's what becoming an ish is all about: building connection and refining our middos, one wrap at a time.



Vayakhel – The Mishkan of Destiny

REB ARI RASHKIN

Question #1

Why do so many Parshios discuss the Mishkan? Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Sisa, Vayakhel, Pekudei, Vayikra, Tzav, and Shemini collectively cover the commandment, collection, construction, and inauguration of the Mishkan.

Certainly, the Mishkan, as a resting place for God and a symbol of atonement for the Jewish people after the sin of the golden calf, is highly significant. However, it seems to have little practical purpose beyond the desert. If so, why does the Torah include all the construction details—many of which are repeated two or three times?

Question #2

Shabbos and the Mishkan seem to be inseparably linked. In Parshios Ki Sisa and Vayakhel, the discussion of Shabbos immediately precedes that of the Mishkan. Moreover, the 39 Melachos (categories of prohibited labor on Shabbos) are derived from the activities necessary for constructing the Mishkan. Why should Shabbos and the Mishkan be so intertwined, with the Mishkan defining the prohibited activities of Shabbos? What is the connection?

Answering Question #1: Why So Much Torah is Devoted to the Mishkan

Rabbeinu Bachya essentially asks this very question and answers based on a similar pattern found in a Midrash on Chaye Sarah. When Eliezer meets Besuel and Lavan, he recounts the entire story of meeting Rivka at the well (the camels, the water, etc.). The Torah does not merely summarize this in one or two pesukim but includes Eliezer’s entire dialogue. This seems excessive—why include the full recounting of the tale?

The Midrash answers: Hashem includes the words of Avraham’s servant (Eliezer’s speech to Besuel) because Avraham is so precious to God that even the words of his servant are recorded in the Torah!

In other words, Hashem includes redundancies when the subject matter is especially dear to Him. Rabbeinu Bachya extends this idea to the Mishkan. Clearly, the Mishkan is so beloved to Hashem that its discussion spans multiple parshios.

While there are great lessons to be learned from the inclusion and repetition surrounding the Mishkan, the core reason for these redundancies is that the Mishkan is incredibly dear to God. But why? What makes the Mishkan so precious?

The Purpose of the Mishkan

What was the Mishkan’s purpose? On a basic level, we understand (Ramban’s perspective aside) that the Mishkan serves as atonement for the sin of the golden calf. For example, Aharon offers a Par (a bull) as a Chatas offering instead of a goat, directly atoning for the sin of the golden calf (egel), which was also a bovine.

Indeed, this week’s parsha begins with Vayakhel, directly paralleling when the nation gathered (vayikahel) around Aharon to create the golden calf. The connections continue—many aspects of the Mishkan are interwoven with elements of the egel because the Mishkan func-

tions as a direct kaparah (atonement). The Jewish people sinned but were given the opportunity to do teshuva, and they embraced it fully.

However, teshuva is not the only force behind the Mishkan's construction. Its architect, Betzalel ben Uri ben Chur, was endowed with intelligence, understanding, and wisdom—qualities the Midrash describes as having been used in the creation of the world.

Why Was Betzalel Chosen?

What made Betzalel special? The Midrash explains that his grandfather, Chur, stood up for God when the rabble demanded an alternative to Moshe. Chur was killed for his resistance. Perhaps Chur learned this courage from his mother, Miriam, and grandmother, Yocheved, who also feared God rather than man. Miriam and Yocheved defied Pharaoh. Chur defied the mob. It is therefore fitting that the Mishkan—where Hashem rests His presence—was built by someone who embodied unwavering faith.

Thus, while the Mishkan serves as atonement for the egel, which represented a lack of faith, its architect personifies emunah—faith and reverence for Hashem. And this requisite of emunah applies not only to Betzalel but also to all those who serve in the Mishkan.

The tribe of Levi, and by extension the kohanim, who answered Moshe's call of "Mi LaHashem Ailai", safeguard and serve in the Mishkan. Moshe himself, who ascended the mountain, was the first Kohen Gadol. We now have a structure that represents both teshuva and unwavering faith—built and maintained by those who embody these qualities.

Why Was the Mishkan So Pleasing to Hashem?

The Mishkan represents a fusion: those who have always been faithful to Hashem alongside those who once erred but desperately sought to return. This unity materializes in physical form as a Mishkan

of faith—a subject so dear to God that it is extensively discussed and repeated in the Torah.

Answering Question #2: The Connection Between Shabbos and the Mishkan

Shabbos testifies to God’s existence and the creation of the world. By working for six days and resting on the seventh, we affirm that Hashem did the same. In essence, observing Shabbos declares that there is a Creator.

But if Shabbos fundamentally testifies to creation, shouldn’t it be a universal concept, relevant to all of humanity? Why, then, is it a bris—a covenant—between Hashem and the Jewish people alone, as stated in the Torah? Furthermore, why are the melachos of Shabbos defined by the Mishkan?

The Shift from Strict Judgment to Mercy

Hashem created the world with both din (strict judgment) and rachamim (mercy). Before the sin of the golden calf, midas hadin (strict judgment) seemed to dominate. Adam sinned and was expelled from Gan Eden. The generation of the Flood perished while Noach survived—not because he repented, but because he was righteous. Sodom was destroyed. The pattern was clear: wrongdoing led to swift and absolute punishment.

On the other hand, Avraham’s righteousness led to Hashem’s promise that his descendants would inherit the land. This promise was fulfilled through midas hadin: they received the Torah because the promise had to be kept. Action led to consequence.

But where do we see rachamim—a case where someone sinned egregiously yet was given an opportunity to repent?

Enter the sin of the golden calf. The people sinned. According to din, just as Noach was saved while his generation perished, Moshe should have been spared while the rest of the nation was destroyed.

Yet Moshe prayed, and Hashem introduced the 13 Attributes of Mercy. Until this point, din had ruled prominently. Now, for the first time, rachamim was revealed in its fullest form.

Why Shabbos Needs the Mishkan

If Shabbos commemorates creation, then a Shabbos without connection to the Mishkan is incomplete. The world was created with both din and rachamim, but only after the golden calf did rachamim manifest so powerfully. Creation itself was infused with both justice and mercy, but only through the Mishkan—born from sin, teshuva, and faith—was rachamim fully expressed.

Thus, Shabbos, as a covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people, must incorporate this revelation. The melachos, derived from the Mishkan, reinforce this connection.

Final Thoughts: The Beauty of Mercy

Din is safe—it rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. But rachamim allows for second chances. It acknowledges that people can change. The Jewish people, deserving of death after the egel, were instead granted mercy. How would they respond? Would they prove that mercy was justified?

The Mishkan answers this question. It embodies a blend of those who have always feared Hashem and those who proved themselves worthy of His mercy. Din and rachamim fused together—forever pleasing to Hashem.



The Breath of Life

RABBI SHLOMO SCHACHTER

As a general rule of thumb in Judaism, the more important something is to us, the more rules we have about it. Shabbat, for example, is the archetype of holiness in time and a central pillar of Jewish practice. We have an entire tractate of Talmud dedicated to the laws of Shabbat going into great detail about what is obligatory, what is permitted and what is prohibited. We even have another whole tractate on Eruvin, a Rabbinic enactment aimed to facilitate community by allowing us to carry... on Shabbat. Food is heavily regulated with complex laws about what foods are and are not kosher, what blessing to say before and after and how to conduct oneself during a meal. Accordingly our sages say (Brachot 55a) that today a person's table brings atonement like the sacrificial order did when we had a Temple. Marital relations are regarded as sacred, with the Cherubim in the Holy of Holies depicting angels in a lovers' embrace. Consequently there are 'family purity' laws which govern marital intimacy. Business, agriculture, clothing, the list goes on. Even the most seemingly trivial elements of life such as how to conduct oneself in the washroom and how to put on your shoes have rules. Having more laws about something draws our attention to it more closely and invites us to approach it with more intentionality. Halacha thereby allows us to engage even the most mundane, normative and those parts of our life not generally regarded as "religious" in a mindful and Holy way, thus elevating everyday occurrences by filling our actions with mitzvot.

Ok, then what about breathing? Breathing is the most mun-

dane, common and unremarkable thing we do, and yet it's absolutely essential to life. We each take approximately 20,000 breaths a day without thinking about it. Wouldn't it make sense for the Torah to draw our attention to our breathing as a way of connecting to Hashem? Is not all breath a gift from The Creator? Wouldn't an injunction to conscious breathing be an essential ingredient in cultivating spiritual consciousness? Conceptually there is clearly a connection between breathing and spirituality. In fact, almost all of our words for spiritual matters are breath related. The very word spirituality comes from spirit - breath, like respiration.

In Hebrew the innate connection between breath and spirituality is even more pronounced. The three words which the Torah uses that are usually translated as 'soul', Neshama, Nefesh, and Ruach are all words about breath. Neshama comes from נשימה Neshima which quite literally means breath, and more specifically to draw breath in. נפש Nefesh is closely related to the verb לנשוף which means to exhale. Ruach which can be translated as wind, spirit or breath is also used to describe being filled with the Spirit of God, like when Pharaoh meets Joseph and proclaims (Genesis 41:38) "Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?"

It is not accidental that breath is associated both with human respiration and the Divine presence. Looking back at the creation of Adam, we find (Genesis 2:7) "The LORD God formed Adam of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and Adam became a living creature". More on this verse later, but for the moment it is suffice to say that the very act of breathing inherently connects us to God. The mystical tradition takes this verse a step further, such as the Ramban who wrote,

"The One who blew, blew some of his own essence". Meaning, the spirit which is blown into Adam was not only the breath of life, it is also God's Divine Spirit which is now permanently invested into each person. Our Neshama - the part of us which breathes - is a spark of Godliness.

This makes a lot of sense on an intuitive level. Just as we always keep breathing whether we are conscious of it or not, so too God is always with us, whether we are conscious of it or not. Even if we were to consciously choose to not breathe for a time, eventually we would lose consciousness, and our soul's innate will to live would take over and we'd breathe again, even against our conscious will. This is analogous to the statement of our Sages that (Pirkei Avot 4:22) "Involuntarily you were created, involuntarily you were born, involuntarily you live..." The 'choice' to breathe and to live is not being made by our conscious mind, it is our Neshama, embedded within us by God, and like God, even when we neglect it, it continues to be there for us whether we like it or not.

Just because we can't control our Neshama doesn't mean we can't be active participants with it. The more attention we invest in our breathing, the more meaningful it becomes. Noticing one's breath is the cornerstone of nearly all meditative practices. Becoming conscious of our breath merely requires actively directing our mind to it. It is an act of mindfulness, and effectively places us in the presence of God, recognizing each breath as a summons to life from the Divine. With this meditation we fulfill the familiar verse, (Psalm 150:6) כל הנשמה תהלל יה, "All souls praise Hashem, Halelukah" However, with this understanding we can now translate it as "every breath praises Hashem" or "the entire breath praises Hashem, Halelukah".

All this only further reinforces the question of 'if being conscious of our breath is so foundational to spirituality, why don't we have rules and rituals about breathing'?

The first level answer is that rabbinic jurisprudence has a principle that "we don't make a rule which the community cannot abide by". Breathing is so autonomic that making rules about when to breathe and when not to breathe would likely only serve to instill needless guilt among those of us who fail to live up to whatever standard was set. We Jews have plenty of guilt already without being told that we're breathing wrong. That being said, there are a handful of instances when we

do in fact have customs regarding breath. One well known example is that when reading the Megillah on Purim we customarily read the names of all ten of Haman's sons in one breath. Similarly, in the Yishtabach prayer there are fifteen articulations of praise, and it is customary to recite them all in a single breath. Neither of these customs are 'rules' per se, but they are instances in which our attention is being purposefully drawn to our breath. These two however are when not to breathe, and both are ideal (lechatchila) and do not invalidate the mitzvah if done after the fact (b'dieved).

To the extent of my knowledge, there is but a single instance in all of halacha that specifically mandates taking a breath (according to Ashkenazi tradition). This singular moment of conscious intentional breath is during the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. The Shulchan Aruch, the most authoritative code of Halacha reads as follows (Orech Chayim 590:5): "The 3 shevarim must all be done in a single breath, but the shevarim and teruah, there are those (Ashkenazim) that say that they must be done in two breaths so long as there is no delay except to breathe..." The Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserles who is the ashkenazi editor of the Shulchan Aruch adds, "And our tradition is to do it always in two breaths, and one must not deviate from it." The following paragraph states: "If one blew Tekiah-Teruah-Tekiah all in one breath, they have still fulfilled their obligation, but some (again, Ashkenazim) say you have not". Anyone who has blown the shofar before knows that it is not difficult to blow the shevarim-teruah in a single breath, and even the Tekiah Shevarim-Teruah Tekiah can also be done all in one breath without great difficulty. We see clearly from both of these halachot, that (at least for Ashkenazim) breathing during shofar blowing is not out of practical necessity, but is halachically mandatory and an essential part of the performance of this mitzvah.

Ok, why is this breath different from all other breaths? Why on Rosh Hashanah, and why during shofar blowing specifically is the halacha instructing us to intentionally breathe? Is there some inherent

symbolic connection between hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah and breathing? Yes indeed there is!

The Midrash Rabbah (Vayikra 29:1) tells us that the creation of the world began on the 25th of the month of Elul. As such, the first of Tishrei, the day we now know as Rosh Hashanah, is actually the anniversary of the sixth day of creation. The sixth day is when Adam and Eve were created, the day on which they sinned by eating the forbidden fruit and the day they were judged by God. In our Rosh Hashanah rituals we reenact that fateful day of creation. We eat apples (this time with honey), Stand before Hashem to be judged and hear the shofar. So what then is the shofar blowing reenacting?

Remember that verse we looked at earlier about Hashem blowing the breath of life into the dust of the Earth, imbuing Adam with the Holy spirit and bringing him to life? Yeah, that! The Sfat Emet, Shem MiShmuel and several other Chassidic masters all understand the moment of the shofar blowing to be not only a reenactment of the investment of the Divine spirit into Adam, but also the very moment when Hashem renews our souls for the coming year. If indeed this is the moment in which Hashem blows our souls into us, how perfectly fitting that this is the one and only time in which there is a specific halachic injunction to consciously breathe! We receive our soul anew and are essentially re-created every year on Rosh Hashanah. By the Torah mandating that the Shofar blower breathe at just the right moments, he essentially serves as the conduit for God’s Holy Spirit to come into each of us through the shofar. While it’s true that the halachah only specifically mandates that the one actually blowing the shofar must breathe between the various intonations, nevertheless it is an incredible opportunity for us all to be aware of our breath as we literally inhale Godliness.

The word Tekiah comes from the root תקע which means to “insert”, like a tent peg ‘driven in’ to the ground. The Tekiah then is the moment of being breathed into by Hashem, our souls perfectly unified with the Source of Life and yet fully invested in our earthly bodies.

The Shevarim and Teruah sounds are different ways to mimic human crying (which is always done in an outbreath) and symbolize the suffering the world endures because we are alienated from Hashem and our own Godly souls. Then we always return to the Tekiah, breathing in, reconnecting to our souls and returning to Hashem. The Shofar blowing, as the one and only moment of commanded intentional breathing, assures us that throughout the entire coming year, Hashem will never be further from us than our own breath.



Strength in Trials: Hashem’s Challenges Are Within Our Ability

RABBI SHMUEL SHANOWITZ

Understanding Rav’s Statement on Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah

The Gemara in Kesubos 33b presents a puzzling statement by the Talmudic sage Rav. In a discussion regarding whether death is a harsher punishment than lashes, the Gemara quotes Rav as saying that had Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah been flogged instead of cast into the fiery furnace, they would have succumbed and worshipped the graven image.

This statement raises an obvious question: Why would Rav seemingly point out a weakness in these three great individuals? We know they were willing to give up their lives rather than bow to an idol—why introduce the idea that, under different circumstances, they might have faltered? What purpose does this serve?

To answer this, Rabbi Yaakov Elye Undsdorfer, Rosh Yeshiva of Me-sivta Reishis Chochma in Montreal, Canada, quotes the Veitzner Rov, who explains that Rav is teaching us a profound lesson about human challenges and Divine tests.

Some may feel that their struggles with faith and observance are insurmountable, believing they lack the strength to overcome them.

Rav is revealing that Hashem never tests a person beyond their capabilities. Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah were given the test of martyrdom because they had the strength to endure it—but had they been subjected to prolonged torture, it would have been too much for them. And Hashem does not impose trials that are beyond a person's ability to withstand. This aligns with the principle stated in Avodah Zarah 3a: Hashem does not act tyrannically toward His creations.

A Story from the Lubavitcher Rebbe

This idea is reflected in a story shared by Rabbi Slavaticki from Antwerp, Belgium, about an interaction with the Lubavitcher Rebbe:

A young man named Daniel was on a path toward greater religious observance. However, one issue held him back—he was in a relationship with a non-Jewish woman and was not ready to end it. Various rabbis warned him about the spiritual consequences of intermarriage, yet their words did not move him. Seeking guidance, he agreed to visit the Rebbe during the weekly Sunday dollars distribution of Tzedaka.

When Daniel finally stood before the Rebbe, he took the offered dollar, but the Rebbe did not immediately let go. The moment lingered.

“I have a problem,” Daniel finally admitted.

The Rebbe tilted his head, listening attentively.

“I’ve started becoming more observant,” Daniel continued, “but I have a non-Jewish girlfriend, and I’m planning to marry her.”

Expecting a stern rebuke, Daniel braced himself. Other rabbis had warned him about divine punishment—surely, the Rebbe would do the same.

But the Rebbe's response stunned him:

“I envy you.”

Daniel was bewildered. Why would the Rebbe envy him?

The Rebbe explained:

“The test you are facing is a challenge that has the potential to elevate you to great heights. I have never been given this test. But if Hash-

em has given it to you, it means He believes in your ability to overcome it. He is giving you the strength to succeed.”

With that, the Rebbe released the dollar into Daniel’s hand.

This perspective changed everything for Daniel. He eventually ended the relationship, married a Jewish woman, and built a Torah-observant home.

This story reinforces Rav’s message: Hashem does not test a person beyond their ability. Whatever challenge one faces is only given because they have the strength to pass it.

A Similar Approach to Noach

This idea can also shed light on another question regarding Noach.

The Torah states (Bereishis 6:9), “Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations.” Rashi brings two interpretations:

1. One praises Noach—if he was righteous in a corrupt generation, how much greater would he have been in a righteous one?
2. The other is critical—Noach was only righteous relative to his own generation; had he lived in Avraham’s time, he would not have been remarkable.

Why present Noach in a negative light when a more favorable interpretation is available?

The Rebbe explains in his Sichos that highlighting Noach’s imperfections teaches us valuable lessons. Later in the Torah (Bereishis 7:7), it says Noach entered the Ark because of the floodwaters. Rashi comments that Noach was of little faith—he believed and doubted simultaneously and only entered when the flood forced him to. Additionally, unlike Avraham, Noach did not influence others or intercede on behalf of his generation.

By acknowledging his shortcomings, we learn that while Noach displayed righteousness in his own way, there is an even greater level to strive for—one that includes greater faith, praying for, and influencing others.

Making Our Heroes Relatable

There is another perspective that connects this to Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah.

Sometimes, a person may think, Who am I to stand up against a corrupt society? I'm not Avraham Avinu. I'm not one of the great tzadikim of history.

By emphasizing that Noach, though righteous, was not on Avraham's level, the Torah teaches that even someone less extraordinary can resist societal pressures. Noach wasn't perfect, yet he still stood apart from his generation.

Similarly, by mentioning that Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah might not have withstood torture, Rav makes them more relatable. They weren't invincible, but they still demonstrated immense faith. We, too, can summon the courage to stand strong in our beliefs, even if we are not perfect.

Indeed, the concept of mesirus nefesh—self-sacrifice—is something we encounter daily. In Tanya, Chapter 25, the Alter Rebbe explains that every Jew has the innate ability to overcome their daily struggles by recognizing that they would be willing to give up their life rather than be disconnected from Hashem for even a moment by worshiping idolatry. If one is prepared for such extreme sacrifice, surely resisting everyday temptations should be much easier.

A Hopeful Conclusion

May we merit to see the day when all trials and suffering come to an end. May Hashem bring the final redemption, when His presence will be revealed to all, and the world will be filled with peace and tranquility, speedily in our days.



