



קובץ תורת אולפנה

DIVREI TORAH BY PARTICIPANTS IN THE
JUDAIC ENRICHMENT PROGRAM (JEP) PROGRAM

ULPANAT OROT

התש"פ-התשפ"א · 2020-2021

Now in its second year, the Judaic Enrichment Program (JEP) at Ulpanat Orot consists of a core group of Grade 9 and 10 students who are committed to fostering an atmosphere of religious growth and engagement in Torah at school. This collection of Divrei Torah is a culmination of the students' individual *Torah L'shma* projects undertaken over the course of the past year. These Divrei Torah show effort, critical thinking skills, and meaningful engagement with the topics that JEP participants have tackled. May these students continue to grow from strength to strength in their Torah learning and religious development.

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INTRODUCTION

In Parshat Korach, we read of the miraculous blooming of Aharon HaKohen's staff. From a quick reading of the pesukim, we would assume that all three things – the blossom, the bud and the almonds – appeared within the Ohel Moed. The Rashbam says that the appearance of the bud and the almonds was “in front of the eyes of all of Israel,” after Moshe Rabbeinu took the staff out of the Ohel Moed. The flower appeared in the Ohel Moed and then the bud and the almond outside.

Rabbi Yissachar Frand quotes from Rav Avraham Gurwicz, the Rosh Yeshiva of Gateshead in asking, why did they have to put the staffs in the Ohel Moed in the first place? Leave them outside so that everyone can see, so they can all witness the miraculous process – the flower, the bud and the fruits, the almonds.

And – based on the Rashbam – he answers that every living thing should come from the best possible source. In spirituality, the holier something is in its formation, the holier the thing that grows from it will be.

Therefore, when the flower begins to grow “before Hashem,” it has an impact on the fruits that grow after it. If the environment in which it grew is “before Hashem,” the entire growth process is transformed.

A similar idea can be found in Masechet Gittin (22a) regarding a tree whose roots are in Eretz Yisrael and its branches and fruits hang over the border, in Chutz LaAretz. Are the fruits considered fruits of Eretz Yisrael or not? The ruling is that as long as the roots are in the earth of Eretz HaKodesh, then the fruits too – no matter where they grow – are also holy.

The blossoming Judaic Enrichment Program (JEP) at Ulpanat Orot can be compared to the Ohel Moed and the fertile ground of Eretz Yisrael, giving our Grade 9 and 10 students a solid and well-rooted foundation “before Hashem” for their future growth in Torah and in life.

Over this past year, which has been full of uncertainty, upheaval and change, the JEP participants have exemplified the perfect Jewish response by turning to the one constant, immutable truth we are so privileged to possess – Torat Yisrael.

When young Jewish women want to study Torah in a holy environment – despite the many other attractions and opportunities outside the “Ohel Moed” – it is a sure sign that their שְׂקִידָה, their dedication and hard work, will produce the אֲמִדָּה, the almonds of true Bnot Yisrael.

I am honoured and humbled to write the introduction to this volume of such variety, creativity and enthusiasm, and I salute the teachers and the students involved in this incredible program.

May their commitment to learning and growth be an inspiration to us all.

Warm Regards,

Rabbi Seth Grauer

Rosh Yeshiva & Head of School

OPENING REMARKS

One can tell a lot about a school by looking at the students it produces. Not only do we look for students who excel academically in graded subjects, but we look to what they do beyond the classroom and the type of learning they engage in without the incentive of good grades or public applause.

The Gemara in Shabbat 127a teaches us about a number of Mitzvot that have no measure, and that through them one reaps the benefit of their “fruit” in Olam HaBah. Most notably, the Mishna concludes with “ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם” – and the study of Torah is equal to them all. There is no greater value of mitzvot than the study and transmission of Torah, especially for its own sake (Lishma). This value imbues Torah study at Bnei Akiva Schools.

The following volume presents a collection of Divrei Torah written by the Grades 9 and 10 students of the Judaic Enrichment Program (JEP) at Ulpanat Orot. JEP students apply and are selected to this program based on their commitment to fostering an atmosphere of religious growth and engagement in Torah Lishma. In addition to participating as the core of Matmidot and attending monthly JEP Lunch & Learns, JEP students also pursued a weekly Lishma learning opportunity of their choosing. These commitments ranged from the Shnayim Mikrah program run by Rabbi Jeff Turtel, a Hilchot Shabbat chaburah with Rav Eitan Aviner, a Chevrutah with Ms. Noa Muscat, an independent study examining key issues in medical ethics, preparation for Chidon HaTanach and more.

The Divrei Torah in this volume are a culmination of each student’s individual *Torah L’shma* project undertaken over the course of the year. These Divrei Torah show effort, critical thinking skills, and meaningful engagement with the topics that students have tackled, attesting to the caliber of students who participate in the program. Many of the Grade 10 students are second year participants in the program, which demonstrates their ongoing commitment to enhance their learning beyond excelling in the regular classroom.

It has not been an easy time to take on additional learning, and the JEP students truly rose to the challenge. Please join me in wishing these students a resounding Kol HaKavod for their efforts this year. May they go from strength to strength, and continue to contribute positively to the atmosphere of spirituality and Torah learning within Ulpanat Orot and beyond.

Best wishes for a happy, healthy summer,

Ms. Lea New Minkowitz

JEP Coordinator, Ulpanat Orot

GRADE 9



THE POWER OF HUMILITY

We all know that Moshe Rabeinu was one of the greatest leaders in Jewish history. He was chosen by Hashem for the loftiest role of leading the Jewish people out of Mitzrayim and getting the Torah. But what specifically about Moshe made him so great? After all, he began his life as an abandoned baby, grew up in Pharaoh's palace, had to run away from the only home he knew, and then found himself tending to his father in law's sheep. He literally went from being a prince, to a fugitive, to a shepherd! So what were the characteristics that elevated him to the point of being chosen with the great and holy task as leader of the Jewish people?

Moshe exemplified the Middah of humility and humbleness. When describing Moshe, the Torah doesn't list most of his actual character traits. Rather, we ourselves piece together what Moshe was like, based on his actions. Throughout the Torah, we see his courage, his honesty, and a passion for justice. We see his intelligence, his loyalty, and his devotion. But one character trait is an exception, and is listed explicitly in the Torah. This Middah is humility. In Bamidbar, Perek Yud Bet, Pasuk Gimmel, it says: **וְהָאִישׁ מֹשֶׁה עָנָו מְאֹד מִכָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה** (“and the man Moshe was very humble more so than any other man on the face of the earth”). He was so humble in fact, that the Torah had to make sure to let us know, and not wait for us to figure it out on our own!

This humility of Moshe is seen time and time again throughout his life, and what we can learn from it is remarkable and eye opening. Let's take a closer look. We see Moshe's humble character from when Hashem first calls to him from a burning bush. Moshe hides his face, thinking he is not nearly worthy of seeing Hashem's countenance. Hashem calls out to him again and again, for a total of five times, asking Moshe to begin the process of taking the Jewish people out of Mitzrayim. Moshe's responses are attempts at proving he is not deserving of such an important job. In Parshat Shemot, Perek Gimmel, Pasuk Yud Aleph, he says, “who am I to stand before Pharaoh and take Bnei Yisroel out of Egypt?” He then mentions his speech impediment. He questions how Bnei Yisroel will believe him. He even begs, as we see in Shemot, Perek Daled, Pasuk Yud Gimmel, “Please Hashem, make someone else your agent.” Moshe genuinely did not feel qualified for this enormous leadership role, this incredibly holy task that Hashem was asking of him.

An important point to make here, and one that can teach a tremendous lesson, is that Moshe actually got punished for questioning Hashem and not wanting to accept this role. When he wanted to see Hashem's face after receiving the Torah, he was not allowed. In other words, he got punished for being too humble! We learn from this that humility does not mean being unaware of one's own greatness. It does not mean talking down about oneself or having no self-esteem. Rather, it is recognizing the greatness you have and using it to serve Hashem. It is striking a balance between staying humble and still having a healthy dose of self-worth. If you don't do so, like Moshe, you will not be properly using the skills and strengths given to you, in a way that Hashem expects.

Along these lines, it now makes sense that the Torah was given on Har Sinai, known by the Midrash

as the most humble mountain of all. But if that's the case, why not give the Torah in a valley? Why use a mountain at all? The answer is exactly what we just learned: because humbleness means combining humility with self-worth. The Torah was befitting of something more than a valley. Its greatness deserved a mountain. But, it didn't need the tallest or widest or most beautiful mountain of all. Once the appropriate respect was in place, then the small humble mountain was the perfect mountain on which the Torah should be given.

Moshe learned this lesson and was then able to epitomize the combination of humility and pride. He received the Torah on Har Sinai and studied with Hashem there for forty days and forty nights. Being in Hashem's presence made Moshe feel insignificant, as he understood that he could never achieve even a fraction of Hashem's greatness. Yet with that humility, he also realized that he possessed great attributes that he was to use for his task of being a leader. Moshe himself wrote in Devarim, Perek Lamed Daled, Pasuk Tet, בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמוֹתָהּ, וְלֹא קָם נָבִיא עִוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמוֹתָהּ (“And there never arose in Israel, a prophet like Moshe”). He knew his greatness, but by always keeping the majesty of Hashem in mind, he was able to maintain his humility.

What an unbelievable lesson for us to take away and try to apply to our own lives. Humility and pride are not mutually exclusive. In fact, “humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less” (Torah.org). How powerful are those words! We are all created in the image of Hashem and therefore shouldn't feel like we are nothing. We should all feel a sense of self-worth and pride in the ability to succeed, while at the same time recognizing that whatever strengths we have were given to us by Hashem. And that is what real humility is. It is understanding that the strengths and talents we each have were given to us specifically for a reason. We are each to use those unique gifts to do our part in making the world a better place. Let us all learn from Moshe and be able to practice this combination of humility and pride, and use our special gifts to elevate ourselves and those around us.

UNDERRATED CHARACTERS OF THE TORAH

A pillar of salt. An unnecessary conversation. A protagonist without a speaking part. All of these are elements of stories recounted in the Torah, yet they feel distinctly secondary to the main events that form the basis of our history. Lot's wife – we are not even told her name – turned around and became a pillar of salt. Pharaoh's daughter – again no name – discussing nursing arrangements with Miriam. Dinah, yes, this time we get a name, yet barely playing a part in what is known as Dinah's story. If they are meant to be footnotes in history, why write these women's stories in the Torah, our most important book? And if their stories are important, why not give us more developed characters so we can better appreciate their contributions?

It is a well-understood concept that there are no extra words in the Torah. We find this idea brought up multiple times in various Mefarshim on the Chumash. Similarly, the Gemara is full of debates where different halachos are derived by looking into what appear to be extra words or letters in the text. Therefore, there is no question that these three stories were written down to teach us important lessons. But if that is the case, why not give us the full story? Why not give us context and background on these characters? Wouldn't the story –and its lesson–be more complete if we could learn why, and how, they arrived at each of these critical moments?

Let's begin with Lot's wife. In Bereishit Perek Yud Tet, we are presented with a lengthy, detailed narrative around the entire episode of Sedom. We can learn many moral lessons from Avraham's strong defensive actions to the wicked behaviour of the people of Sedom to the story of Lot and his daughters. In contrast, the story of Lot's wife seems an afterthought, barely mentioned as an aside, hardly given any relevance as a "main character" referenced in the Torah by name.

The same is true with Pharaoh's daughter in Shemot Perek Bet. Again, we are presented with an extensive narrative on the circumstances around Moshe's birth and the key role that Bat Pharaoh played in rescuing Moshe from the river. Furthermore, we are also presented with a discussion between Bat Pharaoh and Miriam around nursing arrangements for the found baby. Again, the text includes details that seem irrelevant to the underlying story and yet the name and motivations of Bat Pharaoh, the key savior of the story, are left out.

Finally, we reach Dinah in Bereishit Perek Lamed Daled. Yes, Dinah is mentioned by name and we know more about her family background. She goes to see her friends, gets forcefully taken by Shechem, and this causes her brothers Shimon and Levi to trick the entire town and kill them. As a result, they are at odds with their father Yaakov and do not receive blessings before he dies. Although this story starts off with Dinah, after the first few pesukim she hardly gets mentioned again. Furthermore, she never even receives a speaking part in the Torah, although her involvement is necessary to the story.

Nevertheless, there seems to be unneeded details. Do we need to know that Dinah was going out to see her friends? We could have just been told she was out or she was taken.

I believe that there is a common theme and an important lesson to be learned from these seemingly irrelevant or secondary stories, and the lesson lies not just in the moral of the stories but precisely in the lack of background and detail given for each of its protagonists. The fact that each of these individuals is presented by the Torah as a regular, “anonymous” individual that did not merit special recognition makes their lessons that much relevant.

For instance, with Lot’s wife, Radak explains that her actions showed a lack of faith. Despite being told by the Malachim not to look back at Sodom, the same Malachim that had already performed several miracles in front of her and her family and could clearly be trusted, she did not have enough faith to believe what they were saying and follow their commands. Instead she turned around to confirm for herself what was happening to her people. Now, had Lot’s wife been identified and her back story presented, we might have attributed her punishment to a specific character fault. Maybe her family, her childhood, her influences etc. led to this outcome. However, by telling us this story and not emphasizing her specific character, the Torah makes the story relevant to every one of us by allowing us to more easily place ourselves in Lot’s wife’s shoes.

Bat Pharaoh shows us the importance of compassion. She took in a baby boy who she clearly knew was part of Bnei Yisrael. She knew that she could possibly be punished for her actions. Yet that didn’t stop her from helping this baby. We know this and have heard this part of the story, but this does not tell us why the discussion for the nursing arrangements was mentioned. In my opinion, she knew who baby this was. I believe that Bat Pharaoh made the connection between Miriam watching and offering her mother to nurse the baby. The reason the Torah tells us about this discussion is to show us a different type of compassion, a compassion to the baby’s mother. She realized that Miriam was speaking about the baby’s mother and agreed to the arrangement to show some compassion towards her. Again, by keeping her name anonymous, the Torah is encouraging us to imagine ourselves in Bat Pharaoh’s place.

Dinah’s story shows us how important it is to make the right friends. Perhaps, Dinah going to visit some of her friends might have contributed to her being taken. We do not learn the exact how or what happened, but these friends obviously influenced her into a position she wouldn’t have been in otherwise. The Torah is showing us that our friends make a huge impact on our lives and our choices. It teaches us that like Dinah, it is about who we choose to visit and allow to influence us. Dinah was not anonymous but she was still a very secondary character in the story. She never speaks and the only way we know about her is by who her family is. The story of Dinah was not about who she was or what family she came from, but about who she chose to be friends with and the results of that friendship. This is something we can, and should, very much relate to.

The Torah tells us these secondary stories, not just to teach us important lessons, but to teach them to us through characters that we can all see ourselves in. By downplaying the specific details of the protagonists of these stories, the Torah encourages us to see ourselves in their place and absorb the morals of these stories deep into our hearts. In essence, the Torah is encouraging us to imagine ourselves as the protagonists in these stories and connect the moral lessons.

DOUBLE TROUBLE: TWINS IN THE TORAH

We all know the phrase *הִנֵּה מַה-טּוֹב וְנָעִים שְׂבֹת אָחִים גַּם יָחַד* (“Behold how good and how pleasing for brothers to sit together in unity”). However, if we look at siblings in the Torah, the opposite tends to be true. More often than not, siblings are rivals and not best buds. While there are many sets of siblings in the Torah, there are only two pairs of twins. In my view, these twin stories shed insight on the Torah’s sibling stories. Specifically, the twin stories teach us that sibling rivalry is not something that is learned or that develops over time. Rather, it is something innate and natural, and can actually be used as a force for good if used positively.

The first siblings mentioned in the Torah are Kayin and Hevel. These two were opposites, and they had an unfortunate ending. Although they were both born to Adam and Chava, life took them in two different paths. Kayin was a shepherd, and Hevel was a soil tiller. Their tragic ending took place one day when they were offering *Korbanot* to Hashem. Hashem only accepted Hevel’s *Korban*, which angered Kayin. In *Bereshit Perek Daled*, *Pasuk Chet* it says: *וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בִּהְיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה* *וַיִּקְרָם קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ*. After words were exchanged, Kayin killed Hevel in the field. The world’s first siblings take their rivalry to the utmost extreme, and it doesn’t get much better from here.

Another story that depicts the idea of sibling rivalry is the relationship between Yitzchak and Yishmael. Yitzchak and Yishmael both had very different hobbies and personalities. Yitzchak was more reserved and enjoyed learning, while Yishmael was more extroverted and participated in more “wild” activities. These differences hurt the family dynamic, to the point where Sarah wanted to send Yishmael away as she was worried that he would be a bad influence on her dear son Yitzchak.

Finally, the famous twelve, the *Shevatim*. Once again, siblings don’t get along, with dramatic results. Yosef’s brothers were jealous of him, and resented that fact that their father favoured him, which led to them committing some unforgivable acts. This unstable relationship began in *Bereshit Perek Lamed Zayin*, *Pasuk Daled*. It says: *וַיֵּרְאוּ אָחָיו כִּי אֶתוֹ אָהַב אָבִיהֶם מִכָּל אָחָיו וַיִּשְׁנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ לְשָׂלָם* (“And when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of his brothers, they hated him so that they could not speak a friendly word to him.”) When Yosef shared his dream with his brothers, an even stronger sense of hatred developed among them. A certain degree of division is to be expected in such a family dynamic, however what Yosef’s brothers did next crossed the line. In *Pasuk Kaf-Daled*, Yosef’s brothers took him and threw him into an empty pit. Yosef was ultimately sold to a group of passing traders, and the rest is history.

What we see from the Torah’s sibling stories is that siblings tend to not get along. However, a question remains. Is sibling rivalry something that is natural and inevitable, or is it something that is learned or developed over time – for example, as a result of bad parenting or *Middot* that are not corrected?

Twin stories in the Torah teach us that—spoiler alert—sibling rivalry is innate.

The first set of twins in the Torah are Yaakov and Eisav. Even before they were born, Hashem warned Rivkah what they would be like. In Bereshit Perek Kaf-Hey Pasuk Kaf-Gimmel Hashem said: 'וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לְרִיבְקָה: לְךָ שְׁנֵי גֵימִים [גוֹיִם] בְּבִטְנֶךָ וְשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעַיֶן; פְּרִדּוֹ וְלֵאמֹם מִלְאָם יֵאָמֵץ וְרֵב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר that there were two nations inside of her! One will be stronger and that the older one will serve the younger one.

When the twins were born, Yaakov (the second twin) held onto Eisav's heel, holding him back. This alludes to the power struggle between the two, teaching us that conflict can arise even at the time of birth. Throughout their lives, they have issues with the firstborn Bracha, their parents, and among themselves. These struggles took shape from even before they were born. In all stages of their lives they feuded: from in the womb, to their birth, to teenagehood, and eventually to adulthood.

The second set of twins in the Torah are Peretz and Zerach. They were born to Yehuda and Tamar, and perhaps had the most unusual birth story in the Torah. Zerach stuck out his arm, then returned inside, and then Peretz jumped out (therefore was the first born).¹ We don't hear much else about Peretz and Zerach in the Torah, however their birth story is an example of a dynamic between sibling that contains rivalry and competition. The main parallel between these two sets of twins is their sense of competitiveness. They all had a drive to be first, whether that is first to be born or to be seen first in their parents' eyes.

With the twin stories, the Torah is telling us that struggle and rivalry is natural and inevitable. So what? What does it matter whether something is learned or innate?

If something is learned or an acquired behaviour, it can be criticized as bad or evil, but if something is natural, it is more difficult to criticize, and puts pressure on us to look for both the good and bad aspects. For example, natural human instincts, like greed or jealousy or rivalry are part of what it means to be human. We shouldn't be so quick to criticize them, and instead should look at all aspects and how they can be harnessed for good. Rivalry is human nature, and should be looked at from all angles before deciding whether it is good or bad.

So what can be positive about rivalry?

Rivalry pushes us to find our own path and to continuously try to do better, and it gives us a different opinion instead of groupthink. For example, dealing with someone who has different views can force you to question and refine your own views, and not just assume that your way is the right way. Rivalry can also be a motivating force to drive you to find your own path instead of following someone else's.

In fact, the Torah's view of brothers getting along is not necessarily a positive one. For example, Shimon and Levi who are best friends in the Shevatim. Their bond becomes a bit too strong, and they collaborate to kill all the people of Shechem. When it comes time for them to receive their Brachot in Parashat Vayechi, Yaakov curses them for this and tells them אָרוּר אַפִּים כִּי עָז, וְעִבְרָתָם כִּי קִשְׁתָּהּ; אָחִיךָ לְקַח בְּיַעֲקֹב, וְאַפְיָצִים בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, to scatter i.e., to be rivals and not friends.

To conclude, with the twin stories, the Torah is adding a layer to its sibling stories. The sibling stories teach us that rivalry among brothers is common, and the twin stories tell us this is part of human nature. We should look for ways to utilize that natural rivalry for productive uses. This is the proper way to take advantage of natural rivalry.

SIBLING RIVALRY IN THE TORAH

Almost everyone has had an argument or conflict with a sibling at one time or another. Siblings in the Torah are no exception. Specifically in Sefer Bereshit, many conflicts arise between siblings as a result of jealousy. Kayin and Hevel, Yaakov and Esav, and Yosef and the Shvatim are just a few examples. In all these examples, the conflict was caused by jealousy, especially competition for love from the father.

One of the first times that sibling rivalry occurs in the Torah is in בראשית, in פרק ד', פסוקים ד-ח:

וַיְהִי מִקֶּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לֵּה'. וְהֶבֶל הֵבִיא גַם הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוּ וּמִחֲלִבָּהּ וַיִּשַׁע ה' אֶל הֶבֶל וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ. וְאֶל קַיִן וְאֶל מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל קַיִן לָמָּה חָרָה לְךָ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָּנֶיךָ. הֲלוֹא אִם תֵּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב לִפְתּוֹחַ חַטָּאת רִבֵּץ וְאֵלֶיךָ תִּשְׁקָתוּ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ. וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בֵּהֵיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן אֶל הֶבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:

It happened after some years that Cain brought an offering to Hashem from the fruit of the ground. Also Hevel brought of the firstborn of his flock and of its fattest, and Hashem favorably regarded Hevel and his offering. But He did not favorably regard Cain and his offering, and Cain was very angry, and his face fell. Hashem said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be uplifted? And if you do not do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you shall rule over it." Cain spoke to Hevel, his brother, and it happened that when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Hevel, his brother, and killed him.¹

Kayin had brought a korban of fruit to Hashem, while Hevel brought his best sheep. Hashem only accepted Hevel's korban, which caused Kayin to be jealous, and eventually kill Hevel. This is the first time siblings fight because of jealousy in the Torah, and it is not the last.

Yaakov and Esav also have disputes in פרשת וישלח. Years after Yaakov received the blessing of the b'chor, which causes Esav to hate Yaakov and want to kill him, Esav meets Yaakov with 400 men (פרק ל"ג, פסוק א'). The Pasuk describes how "Esau ran toward Yakov and embraced him, and he fell on his neck and kissed him" – וַיִּרְץ עֵשָׂו לִקְרֹאתוֹ וַיַּחְבְּקֵהוּ וַיִּפֹּל עַל צַוְאָרוֹ –. At first glance, it does not seem like there was any fight or conflict between the brothers in this situation. However, the Midrash in Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer explains that Esav actually tried to kill Yaakov and he bit him in the neck². Miraculously, Yaakov's neck became hard, saving his life and causing Esav's teeth to become blunt. This is yet another case in the Torah in which jealousy between siblings caused a conflict. If Esav had not been so upset that Yaakov had received the Bechor's blessing from their father Yitzchak, he would not have eventually tried to kill his brother.

Later on in פרשת וישב there is sibling rivalry between Yosef and the rest of his siblings. Yaakov's favouritism towards Yosef caused his siblings to hate him out of jealousy, as seen in פרק ל"ז פסוק ד' when the Pasuk says that וַיִּרְאוּ אָחָיו כִּי אֵתוּ אֶהָב אֲבֵיהֶם מִכָּל אָחָיו וַיִּשְׂנְאוּ אֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֵם – "His brothers

saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, and they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.” Later, Yaakov asked Yosef to check on his brothers in the field, and they plotted to kill him when they saw him coming. Although Reuven convinced the rest of the Shvatim to spare Yosef’s life, they still took drastic measures. When Yosef reached his brothers they took his multicoloured coat (a sign of love given to him by their father Yaakov) and threw him in a pit. They later sold him, causing him to be brought to Egypt. Yaakov’s special treatment of Yosef caused the rest of the Shvatim to become jealous and sell him as a slave.

Jealousy, or more specifically, jealousy relating to parental love stood at the core of each of these conflicts. Kayin was jealous that Hashem—our Father in heaven—accepted Hevel’s Korban but not his own. Esav was jealous that Yaakov had gotten the blessing of the firstborn from their father, Yitzchak, instead of him. The Shevatim were jealous that Yosef was Yaakov’s favourite. If we all (not just parents) make sure that everyone feels loved, wanted and appreciated, conflicts (especially between siblings) will be less likely to happen. We can learn from these situations to try and prevent jealousy by treating everyone the same way. If we try to treat everyone with the same love and respect, they will be less likely to become jealous³ which is a source of rivalry and conflict.

THE LESSON OF YITRO

As we go through the year and read a different Parsha every week from the Torah, we can see the changing or consistent characteristics that shape a person, just like we see the continuous or changing character traits of our friends and family as they change and grow up. We can learn many things from people's characteristics which we can use to better ourselves like being kind, caring and other good Middot.

A person in Tanach with fascinating characteristics is Yitro. Yitro is Moshe's father-in-law and the father of Tziporah, Moshe's wife. Yitro is a kind, caring and hospitable person. He is also devoted to Hashem. These characteristics of Yitro are significant because it is important to be kind and caring to people and love and fear Hashem.

We first meet Yitro in Shemot Perek Bet, when his daughters come home after watering their sheep. When Yitro asked them how they came home so fast, they told him that an Egyptian saved them from the shepherds and even watered their flock. When Yitro heard this, he asked his daughters why they left the man and didn't bring him to eat some bread. Sforno says that the words "לָמָּה זָּה עֲזַבְתֶּן?" (why did you leave him?) in Pasuk Kaf means that Yitro is believed that since Moshe performed an act of kindness to the family then that kindness must be returned by inviting him to their home. This shows Yitro's kindness and hospitality.

At the beginning of Perek Yud Chet, Yitro heard of what happened in Mitzrayim, about all of the miracles that Hashem had done for Moshe and Bnei Yisrael and how Hashem brought Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim. Yitro brought Moshe's wife, Tzipora and their two sons, Gershom and Eliezer to where Bnei Yisrael were encamped. According to Tur HaPeirush Ha'Aroch, Yitro thought that Tzipora and the sons no longer needed to be away from Moshe because Bnei Yisrael were now safe and out of danger. We see from this that Yitro is kind and caring because he reunited Moshe with his family.

Rashi says that the words "אל המדבר" in Perek Yud Chet Pasuk Hey come to teach us something else praiseworthy about Yitro. Rashi says that these words are emphasizing that Yitro was living a wonderful life in Midyan but nevertheless decided to go "to the desert" (a wasteland) in order to learn Torah and be with Bnei Yisrael. This shows that Yitro cares about Hashem and is devoted to Hashem.

As a visitor, Yitro saw that Moshe was surrounded by Bnei Yisrael who asked for guidance from morning until evening. Yitro asked Moshe why he was doing this by himself because he thought that the way Moshe stood for hours answering all of Bnei Yisrael's questions did not make sense. Yitro showed kindness and empathy towards Moshe and offered advice to help lessen Moshe's burden. He told Moshe to get trustworthy men that fear Hashem to solve the minor disputes and problems that Bnei Yisrael have and that Moshe will solve the bigger ones. This story shows that Yitro cared about Moshe's wellbeing and wanted to help make it easier for him.

Nevertheless, in Sefer Bamidbar Perek Tet, Yitro bid farewell to Moshe and returned to Midyan. This raises the question: if Yitro was so devoted to Hashem, why did he leave Bnei Yisrael instead of remaining with them?

Rashi comments that Yitro left Bnei Yisrael in order to convert people in his family to Judaism. This shows that Yitro's belief in Hashem was so great that he wanted his family to be able to be a part of His great nation as well. Not only did Yitro want to be a part of this nation (Bnei Yisrael) but also wanted his family to have the opportunity to be a part of Bnei Yisrael too.

As we can see throughout the Torah, Yitro was a man of compassion and faith. He told his daughters to be kind to Moshe and invited him to their home, he reunited Moshe with his family, he gave helpful advice, he recognized Hashem's miracles and wanted to share Judaism with his family, all of which show the strength of Yitro's personality.

A life lesson that we can learn from Yitro is to be kind and caring to others. If you see that someone needs help or is carrying a large burden, try and help them. By trying to help someone you show that you care and are kind.

GRADE 10



מֵעַז יֵצָא מִתּוֹק

FINDING THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

In the days of the Shoftim, Shimshon was once sitting at a table full of Plishtim and gave them all a riddle with exactly seven days to solve, equivalent to the seven days of the feast he would be having with them. Whoever successfully solved the riddle, Shimshon declared, would receive thirty sheets and thirty pieces of clothing in return. The riddle was as follows: “מִהָאֵכֶל יֵצָא מִמָּאֲכָל וּמֵעַז יֵצָא מִתּוֹק” (Shoftim 14: 14). This translates as “from the eater came forth food, and from the strong came forth sweetness.”

Three days went by and none of the Plishtim were able to find the answer to the question. It was not until the seventh day of the feast that the Plishtim begged Shimshon’s wife for the answer, and even then she had no idea as to what the solution may be. Shimshon’s wife became deeply aggravated regarding this puzzling riddle, and so she went up to Shimshon to find the answer to relate back to the Plishtim. Shimshon, after relentlessly refusing, finally gave up the answer for the sake of their relationship. In the end, the Plishtim were able to give the correct answer to Shimshon’s riddle due to the information he gave to his wife. Shimshon got angry and killed thirty Plishtim in Ashkelon to gather their clothing as reward.

What did Shimshon have in mind when he shared this riddle? The “אֵכֶל” and the “עַז” from the riddle he gave referred to the lion that Shimshon had killed with his bare hands earlier in Perek Yud Daled. The food from the “eater” and the “sweetness” are references to the honey that Shimshon was able to take from the lion. Shimshon was able to take on a lion by himself, with no weaponry, and in the end find something beneficial from it: the honey. He took a difficult moment in his life and extracted something good from it.

While this may seem like somewhat of an unusual passage, the small sentence of “וּמֵעַז יֵצָא מִתּוֹק” – “from something bitter/strong came something sweet”, teaches us a novel idea. Shimshon used physical strength to produce something physically sweet. This is a metaphor for overcoming challenges to achieve something positive. Where else can this message of taking something sweet from something bitter be found hidden among other stories in Tanach?

One example that relates to this message includes the classic story of Yaakov fighting with the angel. In Bereshit Perek Lamed Bet, Yaakov sent a message to Esav through angels/messengers to give an update on his life in order to “gain favor in his eyes”. Esav, in response to that, sends out four hundred messengers to meet Yaakov. Yaakov became deeply distressed from this, as he thought that

Esav was coming to war against him to kill him and his family (as seen in Bereshit 27:41, where Esav clearly says that he wished to do this after Yitzchak would no longer be alive). Yaakov split his belongings into two and placed them into two separate camps. He prayed to Hashem the whole evening and night that nothing bad will happen to him, his wives, his children, or his belongings. But his difficulties were far from over. At the river, Yakov wrestled with a “man” until the break of dawn. When this “man” saw that Yakov had refused to allow him to leave, he struck Yaakov’s hip socket, causing Yaakov to walk with a limp. Yakov persisted until he got the blessing that he wanted. The “man” said to him, “No longer will your name be Yaakov, but you will now be known as Yisrael, because you fought against Hashem and against people and you won” – “כִּי שָׁרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים וְעִם אַנְשֵׁים וַתִּוָּכַל”. This “man” turned out to be an angel of Hashem.

Yaakov was able to find sweetness, something good, from a hard, miserable time. This is proved from Yaakov in this Perek working hard, being persistent and not ever giving up. Although it would have been easier for him to just give up against the “man”, he still kept going and endured the pain to receive the Bracha. This teaches us not only that something good can come from something not so good, but sometimes one is required to put in the effort to cause a positive result.

We can also uncover the theme of “וַיַּעַז וַיִּצָּא מִתּוֹקֵן” through the story of Yosef in Mitzrayim. Yosef’s brothers agreed to throw him into a pit, where he was then sold to the Yishmaelim who were carrying different types of spices to Mitzrayim. In Mitzrayim, he became Potiphar’s (a prominent Egyptian at the time) personal attendant. One day, Yosef was accused of committing a certain crime against Potiphar that he did not commit and was imprisoned. Yosef interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh’s Chamberlain of the Cupbearers and the Chamberlain of the Bakers who were also imprisoned. As a result, Yosef made his way out of jail thanks to the Chamberlain of the Cupbearers, who remembered Yosef and told Pharaoh about his ability to interpret dreams. Yosef then interpreted Pharaoh’s dream, and became responsible for stockpiling grain ahead of the seven years of famine that Yosef had predicted would arrive.

When the seven years of famine began, Yaakov sent his sons to go find food since Eretz Yisrael was affected by the famine. They all made their way to Mitzrayim to buy food and as they were there, Yosef recognized them, but they did not identify him. They just thought that Yosef was an ordinary Egyptian. After Yosef accused his brothers of being spies, they try to make sense as to why Yosef was being very difficult and harsh on them for not bringing their youngest brother, Binyamin down to Mitzrayim. After this entire situation, Yosef finally “re”introduces himself to his brothers (Bereshit 45:3-5). After introducing himself as their brother and asking about their father, Yosef continues, אָנִי יוֹסֵף אַחֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר מָכַרְתֶּם אֵתִי מִצְרַיִם: וְעַתָּה אֵל תַּעֲצְבוּ וְאֵל יַחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי מָכַרְתֶּם אֵתִי הֲנֵה כִּי לְמַחֲיָה יוֹסֵף אַחֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר מָכַרְתֶּם אֵתִי מִצְרַיִם: – “*I am Yosef your brother whom you sold to Egypt. Now don’t be afraid because you sold me here. It was to save lives that Hashem sent me here in front of you.*”

Yosef lived for the majority of his life in Mitzrayim because his brothers had thrown him in a pit and shipped him off to another country. Yosef emphasized that he was sold in order to highlight the challenging circumstances that he faced. Nevertheless, Yosef recognized that Hashem put him in the right place at the right time in order to save his family. Yosef found the good in his times of being in Mitzrayim, even though he did not wish to be there in the first place.

Much like the stories of Shimshon, Yaakov, and Yosef, one is capable of finding the goodness out of a complicated moment in their life. Although it is difficult at times to detect the good and sometimes it may not always be visible immediately, in the end, Hashem truly does have a plan for all of us. This past year has been very challenging in many different ways, but “וְנֵעַם אֶצְלֵךְ” – something sweet can always be found from the bitter experiences. So before you do anything else – take a moment, close your eyes, and think of all the things you have managed to do during this pandemic you were not ever able to do before. Hopefully, we will all be able to emerge stronger and appreciate that often times of hardship can provide us with opportunities of personal growth.

MOSHE'S GROWTH AS A LEADER IN PARSHAT SHEMOT

What does it take to be a leader? Do they have to be fearless, assertive, or charming? What sets apart a bad leader from a good leader? A leader is not someone chosen at random. They have to be considerate, fair, and most importantly, willing to make decisions for the greater good.

At the beginning of Parshat Shemot, Pharaoh takes over and enslaves Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim. Then, Moshe's childhood story is told, from his adoption into Pharaoh's family to his rise to being the leader of Bnei Yisrael. Along the way, we see how Moshe encounters Hashem at the burning bush, and finally, his return to Mitzrayim to lead Bnei Yisrael to freedom. Throughout the Parsha, one can see how the theme of Moshe's path to leadership appears numerous times. There are many rabbinic interpretations of where this theme is seen in Parshat Shemot. One can fully understand Moshe's growth as a leader by looking at Ibn Ezra, Rashi and the Peshat of the Pesukim.

One could question why Moshe was chosen to be the leader of Bnei Yisrael, as it seems he does not have any previous leadership skills or qualifications. To explain, Ibn Ezra notes how Moshe was raised in Pharaoh's household. In Perek Bet Pasuk Gimmeil, the Pasuk explains, **וַתִּקַּח לוֹ תֵבַת גֹּמָא וַתִּתְחַמְרָהּ, וַבַּחֲמֹר וּבַזָּפֶת**. Ibn Ezra comments on the word **“וַתִּתְחַמְרָהּ”** – “and daubed it” – the paste used to hold Moshe's basket together.¹ Ibn Ezra explains how Hashem planned for the basket to be glued together in a very intentional way, and further expands his explanation to the idea that Hashem planned out everything ahead of time. Ibn Ezra suggests that Moshe learned necessary leadership skills through his experiences in Pharaoh's house. By living in close proximity to the king of Egypt, Moshe was able to gain the skills he would ultimately use to take Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim. Furthermore, Ibn Ezra also explains how it was important that Moshe be raised separately from the rest of Bnei Yisrael, so when the time came for him to lead, Bnei Yisrael would see him as special and not someone they had known their entire lives. This shows how a leader must be someone respected, which Moshe grows up to be.

Another important aspect of Moshe's leadership was his empathy. Rashi explains how as a leader, Moshe felt for his people and truly cared for their wellbeing. In Perek Bet Pasuk Yud Aleph, the Pasuk states, **“וַיִּגְדֵּל מִנְּשָׂה וַיַּצֵּא אֶל אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלֵתָם”**, that Moshe grew up and saw the suffering of Bnei Yisrael. What does “seeing” the suffering of Bnei Yisrael mean? Rashi comments on the specific words **“וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלֵתָם”**.² Moshe did not just see their suffering, he understood how they felt and shared in

their pain. This is how a true leader should act. Moshe had compassion and empathy for Bnei Yisrael and this story certainly showcases his leadership skills.

Furthermore, Moshe did not just remain on the sidelines, but followed up with action. When Moshe saw a Jew being beaten up by a Mitzri, he took action and defended his fellow. In Perek Bet Pasuk Yud Bet, the Pasuk describes, “וַיִּפֹּן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיִּרְא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּךְ אֶת־הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַחֹל”³. Moshe does the right thing by saving his fellow Jew and kills the Mitzri who was beating him up. Moshe took a huge risk that could get him into a lot of trouble with Pharaoh, which is what happens in the end. By taking action, Moshe protected his people even though he would have to face dangerous consequences as a result. A good leader has to be an effective speaker, but words are meaningless if no action is being taken through them. When Moshe kills the Mitzri, he took action as a leader and this is what truly sets him apart from others.

Parshat Shemot illuminates the growth of Moshe as a leader throughout his journey in Mitzrayim. One can thoroughly comprehend Moshe’s development as a leader by looking at Ibn Ezra, Rashi and the Peshat of the Pasukim. Ibn Ezra explains how Moshe was raised in Pharaoh’s household in order to prepare him for leadership and set him up with skills he would later need, as well as separate him from Bnei Yisrael so they would look up to him when he became their leader. Rashi describes the empathy Moshe had when he saw Bnei Yisrael suffering, and how a leader must show true compassion for their people. The Pshat of Pasuk Yud Bet describes the action Moshe took when he saw a Jew in trouble and the skills this showcased.

By taking a look at the Parsha as a whole, many lessons can be learnt from it all. Being a leader is not easy. It takes a truly faithful person to be as great a leader as Moshe, and one should aspire to be as humble and brave as he was. However, a lot of effort was put into making Moshe “leader material”. Becoming a leader is a process. It doesn’t just happen in one day or week. Throughout his journey, Moshe became a respected person, had empathy for his people, and took action when it was needed. This took courage and bravery, which Moshe was able to get from his faith in Hashem. One can learn from this many things. Most importantly, we must have undisputed Emunah in Hashem because he has a plan for everyone to reach their fullest potential.

THE PATH TO BECOMING A GREAT LEADER

Colin Powell once said, “there is no secret to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure.” Moshe Rabbeinu was a strong leader for Bnei Yisrael for many years. Throughout his years as a leader, he grew immensely, and the way in which he supported Bnei Yisrael also changed. As a result over time, Moshe became a better leader. His journey began when he was chosen as a leader by Hashem and was told to go and take Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim. After he succeeded in this mission he had to keep Bnei Yisrael satisfied, and out of trouble. Ultimately, he led the Jewish people to the most spiritual and important moment for the entire nation for eternity, Matan Torah. Even at this point in time, when Bnei Yisrael sinned, Moshe was there through it all to guide the nation through their mistakes. Throughout his journey, Moshe questioned himself and asked Hashem for guidance, and grew in his ability to lead the people.

The story of the start of Moshe’s leadership begins in Mitzraim when Hashem sends Moshe to go to free Bnei Yisrael from slavery. This story was the beginning of Moshe’s leadership. At that point, he was humble, scared, and hesitant about taking on such a big role. When Hashem appeared to Moshe at the Sneh in Sefer Shemot, Perek Gimmel, Pasuk Yud and commanded him to free Bnei Yisrael from Mitzrayim, Moshe is startled and responds in Pasuk Yud Aleph, מִי אֲנִי כִּי אֵלֶיךָ אֶל פְּרַעֲהַ וְכִי אֲוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם – who am I to do this task? This is the first time that we see that Moshe is being asked to do such a big job by Hashem. Not only is he being asked to go to Pharaoh, but to take an entire nation out of slavery. This is a huge responsibility to take upon oneself and difficult to do without any hesitation. Moshe has a lot of doubt in his mind about his potential and he can’t see himself fulfilling this mission. Even after Hashem declared that he will be with him the whole time and that there is nothing to fear, and even after Hashem proves to Moshe that he will be with him on his mission by showing Moshe miracles, he was *still* very hesitant. Hashem persisted in his request, but Moshe kept resisting. Eventually, Hashem decided to send Moshe with his brother, Aharon, to support him. Once Hashem gave him this compromise, Moshe agreed.

When Moshe and Aharon arrive in Mitzrayim, Moshe’s leadership takes a big step forward. Instead of being hesitant about the directions given by Hashem, Moshe does as he is told. Hashem begins by telling Moshe and Aharon to go to Pharaoh and show him Hashem’s power through a miracle. In Sefer Shemot, Perek Zain, Pasuk Yud, one can see that Moshe and Aharon follow Hashem’s directions, וַיִּבֹּא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל פְּרַעֲהַ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כִּן כְּכָל אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' Each time Moshe was commanded to go to Pharaoh he did so. We also see that Moshe had a role in the delivery of some of the Makkot in Mitzrayim. This, I believe, was a sign of Hashem’s great faith in Moshe that he could be entrusted with Yetziat Mitzrayim. Being a part of this important event also showed growth in Moshe’s development as a

leader. He became more comfortable with doing as Hashem asked without any questions, as opposed to earlier in his leadership.

Once Bnei Yisrael left Mitzrayim, they had become physically free from slavery; however, they were stuck in the slave mentality from their years of hard labour. Moshe, as their leader, had a great responsibility to deal with their complaints and to ready them to ultimately receive the Torah at Har Sinai. Moshe had come a long way from the beginning of his leadership journey, but one can see that he still had moments where he doubted himself and cried out to Hashem for help. When Bnei Yisrael cried for water Moshe immediately turned to Hashem and cried out to him in Sefer Shemot, Perek Tet Vav, Pasuk Kaf Hey, 'ה לָךְ קָרָאִי. As a result of Moshe's cries, Hashem gave him a stick to throw into the water and sweeten it for drinking. One can see from this story that Moshe still needed help from Hashem at this point in his leadership.

A pivotal event in Moshe's journey as a leader was at Matan Torah and Chet HaEgel. After Matan Torah, Moshe spoke alone with Hashem at the top of Har Sinai. Hashem then told Moshe that Bnei Yisrael were doing something horrible by creating the Golden Calf. Hashem even threatened to destroy the nation. Moshe, however, pleaded with Hashem and said that he should not destroy this nation. After defending Bnei Yisrael, Moshe returned from the mountain to a horrific sight. The people who he had led and supported had turned against Hashem and worshipped a Golden Calf. With this, Moshe became so enraged that he threw the Luchot from his hands. Despite this, like a true leader Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael how to correct what they had done. And so, Moshe went back up Har Sinai and ultimately received another set of commandments.

This scene truly shows Moshe's humanity and leadership skills. Moshe began by preparing his nation for an indescribable, incredible experience. Following this, he ascended the mountain and received the Torah from Hashem himself. When Moshe heard of the wrongdoing of his nation, he stands up for Bnei Yisrael when Hashem mentions destroying them. Moshe does not even question what it is that Bnei Yisrael had done, rather he begins to defend them right away. Following this, once Moshe sees what his nation has done, he is in total shock and loses control of himself. This is a quality that all humans have, they eventually reach a breaking point, just like Moshe had done in this case. He shows his humanitarian side when he makes a big mistake. He breaks the luchot, a mistake that should not have happened, but a human mistake. When Moshe comforts Bnei Yisrael the first thing that he does is tell them what they had done wrong. Immediately following this he goes on to try and help Bnei Yisrael recover from their terrible mistake. He is willing to try and help them recover, and have Hashem give them another chance.

Throughout his life, Moshe transforms from a man without any significant leadership responsibilities to a man who led an entire nation. Through his life, we can all learn from Moshe in many different ways. One major thing that we can learn is that even when in a difficult situation, persistence can lead to great things. Moshe began by being worried about his role, but with the help of Hashem was able to complete his mission. Throughout his journey, Moshe showed some human qualities by getting angry, making mistakes and having doubts at times, but he turned to Hashem during difficult times. As Jewish people, we should all be able to know that we have Hashem by our sides to help us to get to each of our goals in life, and to never give up, just like Moshe.

CHET HAEGEL AND THE ROOT OF FALSE WORSHIP

Many people are worshipers of something. For some, it might be their phones, social media, celebrities, drugs, alcohol, or food. For others, it could be sports, beauty, television, etc. The question is then, why do so many people worship such simple things and not the creator of the entire universe? This false worship is not a modern-made experience: rather it dates all the way back to the times of Torah, most notably with the sin of the Golden Calf. Through reading Parshat Ki Tisa, one can examine the root cause of false worship.

After Matan Torah, Moshe went up on Har Sinai for 40 days to receive the Torah from Hashem. Bnei Yisrael became restless, thinking that Moshe wasn't going to come down from the mountain. Bnei Yisrael demanded that Aharon make them a new god since they felt abandoned by Moshe. Aharon told everyone to take the gold rings off the ears of their wives, sons, and daughters and to give them to him. Aharon then took the gold and made it into the Golden Calf. He had then told Bnei Yisrael that this was now their god who took them out of Egypt. Consequently, they began bringing offerings and sacrifices to the calf, their new god.

How could Bnei Yisrael move on so quickly to a new god with Moshe being up on the mountain for only 40 days? Hashem had done so much for them up to this point, and it was obvious that a newly made Golden Calf couldn't do anything for them. Why would Bnei Yisrael want to worship a calf and not the creator of the universe? Are humans really that illogical and ungrateful?

Bnei Yisrael moved on so fast because by nature, people are restless. When things are hard, it is human nature to look for outside sources to help. Previously, Bnei Yisrael depended on Moshe to show them the way they had to go. According to Rashi on Perek Lamed Bet Pasuk Aleph, now that Bnei Yisrael believed Moshe to be dead, they needed a god that would go ahead of them. This proves that Bnei Yisrael were already looking for another god although Moshe hasn't been on the mountain for long. They had lost faith that Moshe would ever come back. It was Bnei Yisrael's instinct to find a new physical god to worship when things were taking too long with Moshe.

Similarly, Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra wrote that when Bnei Yisrael demanded of Aharon to “קוּם עִשֵׂה לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ” – Come, make us a god who shall go before us,” *elohim* in this case meant that Aaron should make them “something visible and corporeal on which the glory would rest”. This proves that people are drawn to worshipping something tangible, as opposed to something more esoteric. The Golden Calf exemplifies a tangible object to worship, versus Hashem, whose worship is more invisible and mystical.

Nowadays, when Hashem is hidden and does not show us revealed miracles, we often turn our faith to “fake Gods” in pursuit of tangible connections. This leads us to turn to other mediums which

we can physically see, feel, and hear. They offer us quick and easy connections, albeit their being counterfeit imitations of the true connection with Hashem. For example, the number of social media users has increased by an average of 1.4 million each day and for the past 12 months. This equals to 16.5 new users every single second! People also turn to alcohol and drugs as a way to “feel” something meaningful. In the United States, alcohol sales revenue was \$252 billion in 2019. This number has been rising by 4.3% each year. Just as Bnei Yisrael had no faith Moshe would come down from the mountain, people have no faith Hashem is here (even though His presence isn’t revealed to us).

Moshe was up on Har Sinai getting a life-altering gift from Hashem for all generations to come, and yet Bnei Yisrael refused to wait and instead turned to another god. This is just like nowadays, where Hashem is doing so much for us, and yet we worship counterfeit gods. Humans are always on the prowl, looking for the shortcut to happiness. We cannot judge Bnei Yisrael for Chet Haegel, since we could not predict how we would react in this situation. Although turning to Hashem could be much harder than turning on your phone, it is doable (and highly recommended!). Davening first thing in the morning instead of “surfing” social media, or reciting Tehillim (instead of watching TV) help create a meaningful relationship with Hashem. We have the power to go from false worship, to worshipping the creator of the world.

ANTI-VAX VS. PRO-VAX: WHICH SIDE IS THE TORAH ON?

Vaccinations is a topic that courts controversy. Although it seems obvious to some, the CDC put out an actual statement saying that vaccines do not cause autism, an opinion held by a significant number of people. Others believe that there are microchips in vaccines for the government to control you. These people are known as anti-vaxxers and have links to other conspiracy theorists out there. I'm going to bring in the Torah's opinion as to whether vaccines are good or bad. Is the Torah anti-vax or pro-vax? What about in regards to the COVID vaccine? What are the Torah's guidelines? According to Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, when it comes to vaccines (or any other experimental treatment) the Torah's approach is that if there's a good reason for the treatment, and there's strong reason to believe it works and without significant risk, the Torah permits and even encourages the use of vaccines.

The Torah's first guideline is to undertake medical treatment like a vaccine only if there is a good reason. It can't just be for fun. Rabbi Mayer Twersky says that,

It is true and correct that one may distinguish between a temporary threat and a threat which has taken root and created a new reality ("new normal"). Where the threat is temporary, perhaps one is required to wait and hide 'until the wrath passes.' But where the threat has become embedded in the fabric of life (along the lines of the dangers of childbirth, for example), it is not possible to wait for it to pass.

According to this source, a good reason means that there must be a threat that will not just blow over. In the case of the COVID vaccine there is definitely a good reason to get the vaccine. The world is in a pandemic state. People are dying and others have been severely affected in the long term. The past year has proven that it will not blow over and we have all had to adapt to this new life. In the case of other vaccines, like the flu vaccine, there is still a good reason. Even though the flu isn't as bad as COVID, it still causes problems every single year. So, to summarize, both regular vaccines and the COVID vaccine meet the first guideline.

The Torah's next guideline is to get the vaccine if there is strong reason to believe it works. One cannot just inject a homemade vaccine you read about online. As long as a licensed medical doctor says it will work, it is allowed. Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulai believes that "today, when no one may treat without license from their scholars, all who are involved in treating are called 'experts.'" In the case of the COVID vaccine, there is a reason to believe it works according to experts. The official CDC website says,

All COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States have been shown to be safe and effective at preventing COVID-19. All COVID-19 vaccines that are in development are being carefully evaluated in clinical trials and will be authorized or approved only if they make it substantially less likely you will get COVID-19” (Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine).

Even though the COVID-19 vaccines did not go through the same amount of extensive trials as other vaccines, they still have proven it does work. In the case of regular vaccines there is certainly a reason to believe it works because of the extensive trials they must go through. To summarize, again both the COVID vaccine and regular vaccines meet the second guideline with flying colors.

The Torah’s last guideline is based on the risk level of the vaccine. This is where it gets complicated. If there is no risk, not only is the vaccine just allowed, it is actually mandatory. If there is a small risk, however, the vaccine is allowed but not mandatory. If there is a great risk, the vaccine is not allowed at all. Rabbi Asher Weiss argues that, “still, it appears that this is so even in our case, that as long as it benefits the community, it is appropriate for a group of people whose heart moves them to volunteer for roles involving some danger”. The COVID vaccine will certainly benefit the community because it will help rid the world of COVID.

This means even if there is some danger the vaccine is still allowed. The CDC warns that, “you may have some side effects, which are normal signs that your body is building protection. These side effects may affect your ability to do daily activities, but they should go away in a few days. Some people have no side effects” (*Possible Side Effects After Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine*). This shows that the COVID-19 vaccine does not pose a great risk. On the other hand, regular vaccines go through extreme testing and have very little risk, so they are definitely allowed.

Both COVID vaccines and regular vaccines meet the Torah’s guidelines for experimental treatment so they are allowed. They both have a need to get them, they both have gone through trials to prove they are effective and lastly they go through trials to make sure there is no great risk. If there was an extreme risk, they would not be approved. Now that you know the Torah’s opinion, as soon as the vaccine becomes available, go out and get it, the Torah isn’t stopping you.

MAKING TEA ON SHABBAT

A few Shabbosim ago, I woke up from a nap craving a cup of delicious, hot tea. As I made my way to the kitchen, I was shocked to notice I had never made a cup of tea on Shabbos before. I was baffled when I realized this, and it raised an abundance of questions. First of all, how does one make tea on Shabbos? Is making tea on Shabbos even permissible? I learnt that there were two main issues when it comes to making tea on Shabbos; the first being the Melacha of Bishul, the act or resemblance of cooking, and the second being the Melacha of Borer, the act of separating. The following Dvar Torah will recognize all the problems with making tea on Shabbos, and how to address them to make a nice, steamy cup of tea to distress on a wonderful Shabbos day.

Regarding the Melachah of Bishul, there are several terms to be aware of, such as the Kli Rishon and Kli Sheni. The Kli Rishon is the first vessel by which food or water is cooked or boiled. In the case of making tea, the urn is a Kli Rishon because it is where the water is boiled. A Kli Sheni is the second vessel that the food or water is transferred into. In the case of making tea, the Kli Sheni is the cup or mug. In general, Kli Shenis are unable to cook or boil substances unless it is being added to food. The simplest solution that one may think of would be to add the tea bag last in the order it cannot be cooked. However, this raises the problem that one is not able to do any actions that resemble cooking. Therefore one cannot add the tea bag last as it resembles the act of cooking.

The Poskim were able to find another way to make tea on Shabbos that avoids doing Melachah of Bishul. The proper way to make tea on Shabbat according to the poskim is to pour the water into another cup before adding it to the teabag. Using a Kli Shlishi, a third vessel, can solve all of the problems listed above and allow us to drink tea on Shabbos without doing any forbidden actions.

While it may seem like the Poskim's solution solves all problems regarding making tea on Shabbos, the second issue regarding making tea on Shabbos is Borer. The Melachah of Borer is separating, which is forbidden on Shabbos. When removing the tea bag from the cup, one will be separating it from the tea. The solution to avoid breaking this Melachah is to remove the teabag with a spoon while scooping up some tea as well. This resolves the problem as one will not be separating the tea bag from the beverage, as both the tea bag and the tea will be removed from the cup.

Making a tea on Shabbat can be difficult and confusing to understand at first, however, it isn't as hard as it seems. By using a Kli Sheni and Kli Shlishi one will not be doing the Melacha of Bishul. As well, by removing the teabag with a spoon, one will avoid the Melacha of Borer. Everyone must follow these simple rules and steps to not break Shabbat! Good luck making tea on Shabbos.

THE USE OF ELEVATORS ON SHABBAT

Imagine going to shul on a beautiful, hot summer Shabbos, feeling parched and wanting to sit down. You finally arrive at your elegant synagogue and begin to make your way to your minyan until you see a notice sign that reads “The main minyan moved to floor 5”. You just walked half an hour to get there and cannot even comprehend walking up five flights of stairs. Luckily, your synagogue has a Shabbos elevator... problem solved! Or is it?

Firstly, what is the issue with using an elevator on Shabbat? There are 39 general categories of laws that forbid Jews from performing on Shabbat. Jews are not allowed to press buttons on Shabbat. Pressing buttons is under the category of creating sparks or fire in the 39 melachot. If the button in the elevator completes an electrical circuit, it creates a spark which is perceived as being the same as “kindling a fire.” Kindling fire is forbidden. The fact that pressing the button initiates assorted changes in the electronic systems, causing the elevator to stop at specific levels, is also an issue.

Melachah translates as “work”, and work is forbidden to do on Shabbat. Some may wonder, how is pressing an elevator button considered work? Some say the answer is that it is not exhausting work that is forbidden on Shabbat, but rather creative work. During the week, billions of people are working. People are using their creativity and intelligence to build and create a better world. On the seventh day, Shabbat, these people take a break from changing the world and appreciate its beauty at the moment from God. Instead of altering our surroundings, like pressing a button on the elevator, we enjoy them.

So, if you are unable to press buttons on an elevator on Shabbat, what do you do? Luckily, there is something called a Shabbat elevator. A Shabbat elevator is an elevator that operates automatically, the control buttons are completely disconnected. There is a pre-set program that makes the elevator stop at every single floor, there is no need to press any buttons. This solves the issue of pressing buttons on Shabbat, but is using a Shabbat elevator 100% permissible according to Halacha?

There are some very strict and lenient views on whether riding a Shabbat elevator is allowed or not. One strict view from Dayan Yitzchak Weisz on riding elevators on Shabbat is that a person’s extra weight makes the elevator work harder. The increased weight in the elevator cabin prompts the motor to draw more current, an action not permitted on Shabbat.

Another strict view is from Rav Yaakov Breisch. Rav Yaakov Breisch connects elevators to riding a train or trolley on Shabbat. Using a train or trolley on Shabbat as transportation is not allowed, it is written in Beitzah 25b, “...And one may not go out on a chair borne on poles by other people, neither a man nor a woman. All of these are considered weekday activities, the performance of which would display disrespect for the Festival.” This passage describes the rabbinic ban of being carried in a chair

supported by other people because it is not within the nature of Shabbat. The ruling of an elevator can be seen as a connection to this rule. Rav Breisch doesn't see a distinction between riding horizontally and riding vertically. Nevertheless, this comparison does not have much support from other Halachic authorities.

There are a number of lenient views regarding riding in a Shabbat elevator. Without pushing buttons, all you are doing is stepping into an elevator and continuing to ride. Halachah (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 252:5) observes the verdict of Beit Hillel (Shabbat 17-18) that before Shabbat begins, one can plan for his appliances to perform Melachah during Shabbat: "It is permitted to open water to the garden and the water will continue and flow all of Shabbat...". If the rider does not push any buttons (performs no Melachah), some permit the use of a Shabbat elevator since the elevator was arranged before Shabbat to automatically go up and down.

Is there a difference between ascending and descending the elevator? Yes! Ascending an automatic elevator is completely permissible. Although everyone who enters the elevator generates an increase in current, it is widely believed that this does not pose a halachic issue. It does not involve igniting, there is no new electric element that enters the circuit, and there is no increase in the "fire" because of the increase of current.

However, there are issues with descending an elevator on Shabbat. There is a Mishna that if someone is merely seated in a wagon not moving at all and his weight is the reason the animals begin to push and plow, he holds halachic accountability for the outcome. This can connect to elevators too. A rider in an elevator ordinarily does not move around much. It is only the rider's weight that causes the elevator to descend. Since the person is responsible for the actions of his weight, descending an elevator on Shabbat is not permitted according to this perspective.

Nevertheless, there is a lenient view on descending elevators. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach believed that the elevator rider acts as an "aide" to the elevator ("*mesaye'ah ein bo mamash*"). He reasons that the rider is just assisting the elevator since the elevator is completely capable of performing the task of going up and down alone. As a result, the rider is not liable for the impact his weight has on the motor's operation. The elevator would descend and ascend no matter who rides it. The elevator would have descended anyways, so the person's weight is not significant.

In short, are you able to ascend and descend a Shabbat elevator? It is important to remember not to press any buttons on Shabbat. This might not seem like "work" but it is a reminder that we should not change our surroundings, but appreciate and enjoy them on Shabbat. Even more so, the decision made by Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited in n.140 of *Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah* ch. 23) that "one should not rebuke those who are lenient and ride on a descending automatic elevator" is suitable to follow. Thus, we should try to avoid utilizing an automatic elevator that descends, but we can rely on lenient opinions when absolutely necessary.

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