

TRUE WEALTH

by Shlomo Katz

Parshios Matos & Masei

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Today's Learning:
Ohalot 8:3-4
O.C. 320:15-17
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Metzia 84
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shevuot 3

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (4:7), "The beginning of wisdom is to acquire chochmah / wisdom; from your every acquisition acquire binah / understanding." Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; 14th century) writes: King Shlomo is teaching that one should acquire the wisdom of the Torah before acquiring other forms of wisdom. And, after a person has acquired chochmah, he must acquire binah, which is the ability to "understand one thing from another" (i.e., to draw inferences from one's knowledge). In truth, without binah, the acquisition of chochmah is incomplete. Therefore, "from your every acquisition acquire binah." Even if it costs you all of your belongings, acquire binah, for that is true wealth.

R' Bachya continues: It was important for King Shlomo to teach us to acquire the wisdom of the Torah before acquiring other forms of wisdom because one who studies other subjects before

studying Torah acquires false beliefs or values. In contrast, if one has a solid grounding in Torah study, he has a foundation upon which he can build using other wisdoms, and they will not harm him. R' Bachya notes that the word "teva" / "nature" is also the root of the verb "to drown." The reason is that one who exposes himself to nature (science) before he has a solid grounding in Torah is doomed to drown in false beliefs. In particular, one must be aware that G-d controls the physical world and performs super-natural miracles as He sees fit.

It is to teach this lesson that the (second) parashah we read this week opens with a list of the places where Bnei Yisrael camped, writes R' Bachya (citing the Rambam z"l). Lest one think that the Exodus was a natural event and that Bnei Yisrael camped at oases in the desert, the Torah informs us of the places where they stayed so that (if we knew where they were) we could see that they are desolate places where no one could survive for 40 years except through Divine intervention.

"If a man takes a vow to Hashem . . ." (30:3)

R' Avraham Saba z"l (1440-1508) asks: Why do the laws of vows, with which our parashah opens, follow the laws of the yom tov sacrifices, with which last week's parashah ended? He explains:

The festivals, especially Sukkot, the last yom tov listed, are times of joy. As is well known, the feasting and drinking that accompany joyous times often lead a person to err and sin. The antidote to this is to take vows to abstain from excessive pleasures.

In this light, R' Saba explains two customs: First, for this reason our Sages would break expensive dishes at festive banquets, i.e., in order to temper the joy so that it will not lead to frivolity. [See below.]

Also, this is the reason that our Sages ordained that a special blessing ("Ha'tov v'ha'meitiv") should be recited when a new bottle of wine is brought to the table. Because the new wine may heighten the light-heartedness of the participants, it is necessary to remind them of the imperative to remain holy by reciting a berachah. (Tzror Ha'mor)

The Gemara (Berachot 30b-31a) teaches: "Wherever there is joy, there should be trembling." The Gemara continues and relates that the Sage Mar the son of Ravina made a wedding for his son, and he saw that the yeshiva students were extremely joyous. He took a cup made from fine glass valued at 400 zuz and he smashed it in front of the guests.

Why was Mar the son of Ravina disturbed by the students' great joy? Rashi z"l explains that one who is exceedingly joyous appears to have thrown off the yoke of Heaven [for a person's joy should always be tempered by his trembling before G-d's awesomeness].

The Tosafot comment that the above Gemara is the origin of the custom to break a glass at a wedding.

R' Moshe Isserless z"l (Poland; 1525-1572) gives another [better known] reason for breaking a glass at a wedding, i.e., as a sign of mourning to recall the destruction of Yerushalayim.

"The commanders of the thousands in the legions, the officers of the thousands and the officers of the hundreds, approached Moshe. They said to Moshe, 'Your servants took a census of the men of war under our command, and not a man of us is missing'." (31:48-49)

In his classic work on ethics and philosophy, Chovot Ha'levavot / Duties of the Hearts, Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pakudah z"l (Saragossa, Spain; early 11th century) relates the story of a tzaddik who met victorious warriors returning from battle. He said to them, "It is premature to rejoice, for you have won the battle and collected booty only in the small war. The greatest battle, though, still lies ahead."

The soldiers asked him, "What battle is that?"

He answered, "The fight against the yetzer hara and its agents." [Until here from Chovot Ha'levavot, Sha'ar Yichud Ha'maaseh Ch.5]

R' Moshe Gruenwald z"l (rabbi and rosh yeshiva in Khust, Hungary; died 1911) explains the above teaching of the Chovot Ha'levavot in light of another story in that work. There it is recorded that a pious man said to his disciples, "If I believed that you were free of all sin, I would fear for your sake from something that is worse than sin, namely, that you might believe yourselves to be tzaddikim." Similarly, why must a victorious warrior prepare for battle against the yetzer hara? Because the haughtiness he feels makes him particularly susceptible.

R' Gruenwald continues: When the armies of Bnei Yisrael returned from the battle against Midian, as related in our verses, they knew that they had to prepare for the next battle, the one against the yetzer hara. And, they knew that this meant they had to subdue any feelings of haughtiness. But they did feel haughty. They "took a census" and felt as if "not a man was missing (i.e., lacking)." Therefore, the next verse (31:50) relates, "So we have brought an offering for Hashem - what any man found of gold vessels, anklet and bracelet, ring, earring, and clasp, to atone for our souls before Hashem." (Arugat Ha'bosem)

R' Shlomo Halberstam z"l (1907-2000; the Bobover Rebbe) finds the above teaching of the Chovot Ha'levavot alluded to in another verse, i.e., in Moshe's words to the tribes of Reuven and Gad later in our parashah (32:22), "And the Land shall be conquered before Hashem, and then you shall return -- then you shall be 'clean' before Hashem and Yisrael." After you successfully conquer the Land, then you also need to ensure that you are clean of any sin before Hashem and Yisrael. (Kerem Shlomo, Vol. III)

"The cities that you shall give to the Levi'im -- the six cities of refuge that you shall provide for a murderer to flee there, and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities." (35:6)

R' Nosson of Breslov z"l writes in the name of R' Nachman of Breslov z"l (1772-1810): There are 48 words in the first section of Kriat Shema, which contains the foundation of our belief - six in the first sentence and 42 in the paragraph beginning "Ve'ahavta." Paralleling this, there are 48 cities of Levi'im - six cities of refuge and 42 other cities. In fact, our Sages teach that all 48 cities can provide refuge to an accidental killer. Similarly, Kriat Shema provides refuge to one whose emunah - the essence of life - is at risk.

R' Nachman continues the analogy: From the fact that the Torah sends the accidental killer to the cities of the Levi'im to be rehabilitated we can learn that one whose emunah needs rehabilitating should travel to a tzaddik. (Likkutei Halachot: Hilchot Techumin 5:37)

This Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

26 Tammuz: On this date in 5519 (1759), R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov z"l, founder of the chassidic movement, and R' Chaim Hakohen Rappaport z"l, rabbi of Lvov, defeated the leaders of the Frankist movement in a debate (Luach Davar B'ito p.1178). The Frankists were followers of Yaakov Frank, who claimed to be the successor or gilgul / reincarnation of the (false) mashiach Shabbtai Zvi. Two months after this debate, Frank converted to Christianity.

Shabbat Mevarchim: Some have the custom not to recite "Birkat Ha'chodesh" prior to the month of Av. Among those who do recite it, some have the custom to chant the last section (the paragraph beginning "Yechadshehu") to the tune of the kinah / lament "Eli Tziyon." Customs vary about whether Av Ha'rachamim is recited today.

27 Tammuz: Some say that today is the birthday and yahrzeit of Yosef Ha'tzaddik, son of Yaakov and Rachel. Others say that he was born and died on Rosh Chodesh Tammuz.

Erev Rosh Chodesh Av: Some have the custom to remove the crowns from the Sifrei Torah until after Tisha B'Av. (Luach Davar B'ito p.1184)

1 Av: Yahrzeit of Aharon Ha'kohen, brother of Moshe Rabbeinu. The date of Aharon's passing is mentioned in our parashah. (The first day of Av sometimes coincides with Shabbat Parashat Matot-Masei, making this the only event whose date is recorded in the Torah that is ever read about on the date it occurred, not including yom tov readings.)

On this date, the waters of the Flood had receded enough for the peaks of the mountains to become visible. (See Rosh Hashanah 11b).

On this date, near the beginning of the Second Temple period, Ezra Ha'sofer and several thousand Jews returning from Bavel (Babylon) and Persia arrived in Yerushalayim (Ezra 7:9). Unfortunately,

only a minority of the Jewish People returned to Eretz Yisrael before or during the Second Temple era, as they were comfortable in their new homes in the Diaspora. Our Sages say that Hashem "wished" to perform miracles for the returning exiles similar to those that He had performed for the generation of the Exodus, but the Jewish People were not worthy.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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