

IN THE NICK OF TIME

by Shlomo Katz

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Miketz
"In the nick of time"
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Today's Learning:
Nach: Melachim II 17-18
Taharot 2:2-3
O.C. 378:3-5
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Batra 120
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Horiot 8

The Midrash Tanchuma on this week's parashah opens with a question: When one sees rain at a time when the populace needs it, what berachah does one recite? The midrash answers: On rain, one recites the berachah, "Ha'tov v'hameitiv." [See Shulchan Aruch, O.C. ch.221 for the circumstances under which this berachah is recited.] The midrash continues: Everything that comes from Hashem has a fixed measure. He fixed limits for the sun, the Heavens, and the earth. He fixed a time for the Exodus. He fixed a limit for darkness. [The midrash cites a verse to support each of these statements.] Likewise, when Yosef was imprisoned, Hashem fixed a limit on his imprisonment, as it is written, "It happened miketz / at the end of two years . . ."

What is this midrash teaching? R' Avraham Meir Rosen z"l (Warsaw; 19th century) explains: How do

we know that the berachah for rain is "Ha'tov v'hameitiv"? Another midrash derives this halachah from the verse (Mishlei 25:25), "Like cold water on a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land." Just as the berachah for good news is "Ha'tov v'hameitiv," so too that is the berachah for cold water on a weary soul, i.e., rain after a drought. However, one recites this berachah only if the rain falls when it is wanted. Rain that falls at the wrong time is not a blessing, but is rather a curse. Indeed, the same is true of every phenomenon; good things that happen at the wrong time or in the wrong amount are not blessings, but curses.

The word "miketz" from which our parashah takes its name is usually used in connection with events that happen at a fixed time, e.g., the shemittah (see Devarim 15:1). Why, then, is that word used in connection with Yosef's release from prison? Because, just as He does with rainfall, G-d chose the moment very precisely, so that it would be a blessing. Specifically, it coincided with Pharaoh's dream and led to Yosef's appointment as viceroy. (Be'ur Amarim)

"It happened at the end of two years . . ." (41:1)

We read (Tehilim 40:5), "Praiseworthy is the man who placed his trust in Hashem, and did not turn to the arrogant." The Midrash Rabbah comments: "Praiseworthy is the man who placed his trust in Hashem"--this refers to Yosef; "and did not turn to the arrogant"--because Yosef said to Pharaoh's chief butler (at the end of last week's parashah, 40:14), "If only you would think of me . . . and mention me," Yosef had to remain in prison an additional two years.

Many commentaries point out the seeming contradiction in this midrash. On the one hand, Yosef is praised as a person who placed his trust in Hashem, but, on the other hand, he is criticized for asking Pharaoh's chief butler for assistance!

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) explains: The degree to which a person is expected to rely on Hashem rather than on his own efforts depends on the strength of his bitachon / trust in Hashem. The midrash refers to Yosef as someone who placed (in the past tense) his trust in Hashem, i.e., he was already accustomed to relying on Hashem. [Ed. note: The Midrash Rabbah on verse 39:2, alluded to by Rashi z"l there, describes how Yosef would pray before beginning each task for his master.] The midrash is teaching that, for such a person, it was wrong to seek the assistance of the Chief Butler. (Tiferet Zion)

R' Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz z"l (the Chazon Ish; 1878-1953) writes: Yosef knew that his salvation was not dependent on any exertion on his part, and that everything comes from Hashem. However, since human beings are obligated to act, and not depend on miracles. Yosef obligated himself to make use of the opportunity and enlist the help of the chief butler. But, bitachon places limitations on the efforts that one is allowed to make to accomplish his goals. A person must carefully consider any act before he does it, making sure that it is in keeping with the trait of bitachon. In this case,

Yosef erred by enlisting the help of an arrogant person (in the words of the midrash), i.e., a person who was not likely to remember Yosef and come to his aid. A desperate person does anything he can--he even takes futile actions--but someone who trusts in Hashem does not do this; indeed, the obligation to act before relying on a miracle does not include an obligation to engage in a futile action.

The Chazon Ish writes further: Lack of trust in Hashem is a fault in any thinking person, and a person who lacks bitachon comes close to having no part in the basic tenets of Judaism. What are the attributes of a person who does have bitachon? He is naturally modest, and one will not hear from him that he belongs to the camp of those who trust in Hashem. To the contrary, he bewails his lack of perfection in this trait. His trust and his feeling of strength based on his belief in Hashem manifest themselves only in action. For example, he will not be afraid when his friend opens a store [in competition with him]; rather, he will make efforts to help him, give him good advice, assist him, and in general be concerned for his welfare. When a person does acts of kindness for someone who intends to compete with him, the world is enriched by this additional holiness. Because of this action, he causes others to honor and praise G-d's faithful; fortunate are such a person and his generation. (Chazon Ish: Emunah U'vitachon 2:4-6)

"Let Pharaoh proceed and let him appoint overseers on the land, and he shall prepare the land of Egypt during the seven years of abundance." (41:33-34)

Why did Yosef think it was his place to offer advice when all Pharaoh had asked Yosef to do was to interpret his dreams? R' Yosef ben Moshe Trani z"l (Maharit; 1568-1639) explains:

Yosef's advice was part of his interpretation of the dreams. Yosef was explaining why Pharaoh had dreamt about the seven years of plenty that would precede the seven years of famine. It was a message to Pharaoh that he should use those seven years to prepare.

Even so, maybe the preparation intended by the dream was for each Egyptian to store wheat in his own home. Why did Yosef think that it was his place to suggest that Pharaoh centralize the process?

This, too, was alluded to in the dream itself, Maharit explains. When Pharaoh saw the seven good ears of grain, they emerged from one stalk, while the seven withered ears emerged from seven separate stalks. Thus, Yosef understood that the seven years of famine would be felt differently in different places; in Pharaoh's palace, near the central stores of food, they would not be as difficult as in the countryside, where no food was stored.

Yosef was explaining this to Pharaoh when he said (41:26-27), "The seven good cows are seven years, and the good ears are seven years; it is a single dream. The seven emaciated and bad cows that emerged after them- -they are seven years; as are the seven emaciated ears scorched by the east wind. There shall be seven years of famine." Regarding the famine, Yosef did not say, "It is a

single dream." The seven years of plenty would be uniformly good; the seven healthy cows and the seven healthy ears alluded to the same thing. However, when it came to the famine, the cows and the ears represented two different things. The cows represented the fact that nothing would grow, which would be true uniformly throughout Egypt. In contrast, the ears represented the resulting hunger, which would not be uniform. The emaciated cows and the withered ears were not one dream. (Tzofnat Paneach)

"Then Yehuda said to Yisrael his father, 'Send the lad [Binyamin] with me, and let us arise and go, so we will live and not die, we as well as you as well as our children.'" (43:8)

R' Yaakov Kaminetsky z"l (rabbi in Lithuania, Seattle and Toronto; rosh yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn; died 1986) notes that Yehuda's words are consistent with the halachic order of precedence for saving lives: first one must save himself, then his parents, and then his children.

Furthermore, R' Kaminetsky observes, we learn from this verse that even an am ha'aretz / ignoramus should save his own life before he saves a Torah scholar's life [since Yaakov's sons were of a lower stature compared to Yaakov, yet they still had to feed themselves first.] (Emet L'Yaakov)

Shabbat & Chanukah

Many answers have been offered for the famous question: Why is Chanukah eight days long, when the miracle of the oil lasted only seven days? (There was enough oil to last one day, and it lasted seven additional days.)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes about this question as follows:

The usual complete cycle of time is seven days, which is one week. [This is based on Creation.] However, this cycle is incomplete in one respect, since the ultimate purpose of all that is holy will not be revealed until the future. On the other hand, even now, a discerning person can see that the world is progressing in the general direction of its ultimate destiny. There is no other way, for example, to explain why the Jewish People have roamed from one end of the world to the other [and back to Eretz Yisrael] unless it is part of a plan that is being played out.

Shabbat is at the same time part of the seven-day cycle with which we are familiar, but it also foreshadows the World-to-Come, which is beyond our time. In the holiness of Shabbat we can taste the holiness that we will experience in that as-yet unseen world.

The Greeks and those Jews who fell under their influence rejected our concept of a future World filled with holiness. We see this from the Mishnah (Berachot 54a) which relates that the Sages of that

era instituted to say in the Temple, "Baruch attah Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael, min ha'olam v'ad ha'olam / from [this] world until [the other] world."

If there were no need to emphasize the existence of a future world, Chanukah would have been seven days, which is a complete unit of time in this world. However, there is such a need, so our Chanukah of eight days reminds us of something beyond the world as we know it, i.e., the World- to- Come. (Ein Ayah: Shabbat Ch.2, No.9)

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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