

# THINGS WE DON'T KNOW

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Shemini

### Things We Don't Know

#### Volume 26, No. 25

*Sponsored by the Katz family on the 50th birthday of the sponsor of the first issue of Hamaayan, which appeared 25 years ago this Shabbat.*

The editors of Hamaayan on the second yahrzeit of Moreinu Ha'Rav Gedaliah ben Zev Hakohen Anemer z"l, whose support and encouragement of our continued efforts never waned.

In this week's parashah, we read about the dedication of the Mishkan. Rabbeinu Nissim z"l (the "Ran"; Spain; 1290-1380) writes that the Mishkan and its implements are part of G-d's "system" for causing His beneficence to flow to this world. This is not a natural process, the Ran writes, but a process that is understood only by Him. We can understand that the greater the distance between the natures of two things, the more "tools" there must be so that one can relate to the other. Since our existence is so different from Hashem's Existence that there are virtually no words to compare the two, we can appreciate the need for something (here, the Mishkan) to assist in the interaction, even if we don't understand how or why it works.

For a similar reason, the Ran writes, a tzibbur / congregation can interact with Hashem better than an individual can. As unlike as the tzibbur is from Hashem, its members collectively have more attributes in common with Him than any one individual does. This is why our Sages say that one who intentionally refrains from having children causes the Shechinah to depart from the Jewish People. That person is preventing the proliferation of the tzibbur.

In this light, the Ran continues, it is understandable why earlier generations worshiped the stars and planets, which they saw as intermediaries between themselves and the distant G-d, Whom they recognized, but could not relate to. Their actions were understandable, but against G-d's wishes. The above explains also why the first two Commandments, "Anochi / I am Hashem" and "Lo yihiyeh / You shall not have other gods," were spoken directly by Hashem to Bnei Yisrael. Had Bnei Yisrael

not heard these commands from G-d Himself, they would have been too difficult to accept.  
(Derashot Ha'Ran No.9)

\*\*\*\*\*

"For I am Hashem Who elevates you from the land of Mitzrayim / Egypt to be an Elokim to you; you shall be holy, for I am holy." (11:45)

Rashi z"l writes: "In all other places it is written, 'I took you out,' and here it says, 'Who elevates you.' Regarding this, the school of R' Yishmael taught: 'If I had brought Yisrael up from Egypt only to bring about this one thing, i.e., that they would not defile themselves by eating reptiles [the subject of the preceding verses], that should be sufficient for them and should be regarded by them as an elevation."

R' Eliyahu Meir Bloch z"l (1894-1955; co-founder and rosh yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio) comments: One also could say that the phrase, "Who elevates you from the land of Mitzrayim [from the root meaning "constrained" or "narrow"] refers to the special blessing Hashem has given us that enables us to lift ourselves above the constraints of time and mortality. This is hinted at in the verse (Shmot 19:4), "You have seen what I did to Mitzrayim, and that I have lifted you on the wings of eagles . . ." (Peninei Da'at)

\*\*\*\*\*

"To distinguish between the contaminated and the pure, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten." (11:47)

Rashi comments: "Is it necessary to say that one should distinguish between a donkey and a cow? Have they not already been closely defined as to their distinguishing characteristics? Rather, this means that you should thoroughly understand to distinguish between what is unclean to you [not kosher] and what is clean to you [kosher], i.e., between the case of an animal only half of whose windpipe has been cut through by the knife [not kosher], and the case when the greater part has been cut through [kosher]."

R' Baruch Sorotzkin z"l (1971-1979; rosh yeshiva of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio) writes: The importance of a mashehu (loosely translated, hair's-breadth) is inestimable and should not be underestimated. If one eats a kezayit / olive-volume of matzah on Pesach, he fulfills his obligation, while one who eats a mashehu less than a kezayit does not fulfill the mitzvah. Similarly, one who eats a kezayit of certain prohibited foods incurs the penalty of karet, while one who eats a mashehu less than a kezayit does not incur that penalty.

R' Sorotzkin continues: The above Rashi teaches us something even more profound--that a mashehu can create a state of existence. The hair's-breadth between half the windpipe and the majority of the windpipe determines whether the animal is tahor and kosher or tamei and non-

kosher.

R' Sorotzkin adds: There is another lesson, too. Who causes the animal to be tahor and kosher or tamei and non-kosher? The shochet. This demonstrates the potentially drastic consequences of giving up in the middle of an effort versus expending one more mashehu of effort. That mashehu very well could be the difference between kedushah / holiness or its opposite. (Ha'binah V'ha'brachah)

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Pirkei Avot**

Antignos Ish Socho used to say, "Do not be like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving reward; instead be like servants who serve their master not for the sake of receiving reward." (1:3)

Rashi z"l writes: "Do not say, 'I will observe the mitzvot so that He will supply my needs.' Rather, serve Him out of love."

R' Shmuel d'Ouzida z"l (Venice, Italy; late 1500's) writes: Some commentaries explain that Antignos is only discouraging us from serving Hashem with the intention of receiving reward in this world. However, if one's intention is to receive reward in Olam Ha'ba, that is permitted. R' Shmuel writes that this may be the intention of Rashi's words quoted above, as well.

Why should there be such a distinction? R' Shmuel explains that serving Hashem with the intention of receiving a reward in this world is potentially destructive because maybe Hashem will not reward the person in this world. Maybe Hashem will test a person with poverty and that person, not realizing that he is being tested, might conclude that there is no justice and will regret his good deeds. This cannot happen if a person is not expecting reward in this world.

R' Shmuel himself disagrees with the commentaries cited above and explains that a person should not serve Hashem with the intention of receiving any reward. Why then does the Torah frequently promise us rewards for our good deeds? R' Shmuel explains that, from G-d's perspective, the right thing to do is to promise us rewards. From our perspective, however, the right thing is to serve Him without intention of reward. (Midrash Shmuel)

R' Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (the Shelah Ha'kadosh; died 1635) writes: In light of the commentaries cited by Midrash Shmuel (above), we can understand a perplexing Gemara (Beitzah 16a), which states: "All week long, if the sage Shammai would see a good quality piece of meat for sale, he would buy it in honor of Shabbat. Not so the sage Hillel, whose every deed was for the sake of Heaven." What is this Gemara suggesting? asks the Shelah. Surely, Shammai also acted for the sake of Heaven!

The Shelah answers: Hillel and Shammai disagree whether one is permitted to serve Hashem with the intention of receiving reward in Olam Ha'ba. All week long, when Shammai served Hashem, he did so with the intention of receiving reward in Olam Ha'ba, which our Sages call, "the world which is all Shabbat." Hillel, on the other hand, served Hashem with no intention of receiving reward; his service was entirely for the sake of Heaven. (Shnei Luchot Ha'brit)

\*\*\*\*\*

## Letters from our Sages

This letter was written by R' Zvi Pesach Frank z"l (1872-1960), who later would become Chief Rabbi of Yerushalayim, to his cousin R' Isser Zalman Meltzer z"l (1870-1953; rabbi and rosh yeshiva in Slutsk, Russia). The letter is dated "Tammuz 5680 [1920]." The context for the first paragraph is the relatively recent end of World War I, during which many Jewish communities fled from the battlefield. The letter is published in Shevivei Ohr, p.186.

To my great joy, I received greetings from your honor via a traveler from there to here. I was extremely happy to hear that your honor has returned home in peace, and that the merit of your Torah--particularly, the public teaching of Torah--protected you and saved you from the decree of exile which has come upon the world. Thanks to G-d, Who is Good and does good, that He has kept us alive and brought us to this day when we can exchange letters with each other. May we hope to soon see our complete salvation, and may we give thanks before Him for the redemption of our souls.

Among the many things that must be said at this time, I would like to suggest to his honor that he reflect deeply--perhaps he will see fit to come up to the holy mountain [i.e., to move to Eretz Yisrael], together with his holy yeshiva. Why should we not be awakened by the good people in the secular camp who are distant from the Torah--many of them have never seen its light--but who give their lives and souls to renovate our treasured land to the best of their understanding. Why should those who wave the banner of our holy Torah stand at a distance at this time when we see clearly an awakening from above to show mercy to His nation and His land? Behold, "It is time to favor her, for the appointed time has come; for Your servants have cherished her stones and favored her dust" (Tehilim 102:14-15).

[Epilogue: R' Isser Zalman Meltzer made aliyah in 1923 together with some of his students, and served as rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Etz Chaim in Yerushalayim.]

---

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](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

*Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. The low cost of sponsorship is \$36. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.*