

IT MUST HAVE BEEN A MIRACLE!

by Shlomo Katz

Parshios Matos & Masei

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King Shlomo writes (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) explains: King Shlomo is teaching that one should acquire the wisdom of the Torah before 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; hence, "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: King Shlomo had to teach us to acquire Torah wisdom before 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" because 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, as Jews once did) we could see that they are desolate places where no one could survive for 40 years except through Divine intervention.

"They approached him and said, 'Pens we will build here for our livestock and cities for our small children'." (32:16)

Midrash Rabbah comments: The tribes of Gad and Reuven were wealthy and had large flocks. They loved their money and settled outside of Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, they were exiled before the other tribes (see Divrei Ha'yamim I 5:25). About them, Mishlei (20:21) states, "If an inheritance is seized hastily in the beginning, its end will not be blessed."

R' Yaakov ben Asher z"l (the "Ba'al Ha'turim"; Germany and Spain; 1269-1343) elaborates: Because of the *eight* times that the tribes of Gad and Reuven asked to receive their inheritance first, they were exiled *eight* years before the other tribes.

R' Asher Anshel Katz shlita (the Viener Rav in Brooklyn, N.Y.) explains: Our Sages teach that if someone shows contempt or disregard for something, that thing will not serve him when he needs it. For example, says the Gemara (Berachot 62b), because the future-King David tore King's Shaul's cloak (Shmuel I 24:5), King David himself could not be warmed by clothes in his old age (Melachim I 1:1).

This principle applies to spiritual matters also, continues R' Katz. For example, says the Gemara (Shabbat 23b), "One who loves Torah scholars will have sons who are Torah scholars. One who honors Torah scholars will have sons-in-law who are Torah scholars. One who has awe of Torah scholars will himself become a Torah scholar." But, says the Gemara (Kiddushin 33b), "A Torah scholar who doesn't stand to honor his teacher will forget his learning."

Similarly, writes R' Katz, if a person davens three times a day with proper concentration, then, when he is in need, Hashem will have mercy and heed his prayer. But, if one doesn't value the daily prayers and merely goes through the motions, then his prayers won't be answered even in his time of need.

The tribes of Gad and Reuven didn't value Eretz Yisrael. They sacrificed the Land over which Hashem watches constantly (see Devarim 11:12) for a land of pasture. Therefore, they were sent into exile before the other tribes.

One might argue, continues R' Katz, that the tribes of Gad and Reuven had some noble reason for wanting to remain on the east side of the Jordan; however, our verse dispels that notion. Specifically, by mentioning their flocks before their children, they proved that their priorities were confused.

R' Katz concludes: We must reflect on this thought during this period of the year, when we mourn over our exile. The prophet (Yeshayah 66:10) says, "Be glad with Yerushalayim and rejoice in her, all who love her; exult with her exultation, all who mourned for her." The Gemara (Ta'anit 30b) teaches: "One who mourns for Yerushalayim will see her joy, while one who doesn't mourn for Yerushalayim will not see her joy." One who is too comfortable in this exile will not merit to share in the rejoicing of the Jewish People even if he is living when mashiach arrives. For this reason our Sages teach, "When the month of Av arrives, we decrease our joy." Those who look for loopholes to allow them to eat meat, listen to music or wear freshly-pressed clothes are missing the point, R' Katz writes. (Shemen Rosh)

"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 also you shall give them forty-two cities." (35:6)

R' Nachman of Breslov z"l (1772-1810) taught: 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. Our Sages teach that all 48 cities can provide refuge to a person who kills accidentally. 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)

Letters from Our Sages

Below is a haskamah / letter of approbation to the printing of Tzon Kodashim by R' Avraham Chaim Shor z"l (Poland; died 1632), a commentary on the Talmudic tractates dealing with kodashim / the sacrificial offerings. The letter was written by R' Yaakov Yitzchak Ish Horowitz z"l (died Tisha B'Av 5575 / 1815), an early chassidic rebbe known as the "Chozeh / Seer of Lublin."

It is not my way to act above my station by giving a haskamah, for I am neither a rabbi nor a maggid / preacher--except when absolutely necessary, for nothing comes before G-d's Will. In this case, however, it seems to me to be a great mitzvah. When I was young, I had a great desire to write a commentary on the tractates of the Order of Kodashim, for it is well-known how great a mitzvah it is to occupy oneself with the laws of kodashim, as our Sages say, "If one studies the laws of the olah sacrifice, it is as if he has offered an olah," etc. The Order of Kodashim is like a closed book, and its text is not as well-edited as it should be, unlike the other tractates which have the glosses of the Maharshal z"l, Maharsha z"l and Maharam z"l [three 16th century Talmud commentators].

Presumably, this is because these tractates were not studied in depth with students as they are not as relevant in our times. Later, however, the demands of the public, the needs of Bnei Yisrael, which are many, were placed upon me--whether giving advice or praying for them. I was afraid to push people away, since G-d gave me the ability to help the Jewish People. I was very preoccupied, so much so that I can't even study for myself, let alone write a commentary. There are commentaries on Kodashim, for example Panim Me'iot and Mayim Kedoshim, but there are inadequate because their authors were so sharp and had such far-ranging knowledge that they did not have questions

about whether the text was precise; they were concerned only with posing questions and answering them. Another work, Birkat Ha'zevach is too concise. For many years, I pined to reprint the work Tzon Kodashim because it is a satisfying commentary and a "big tree" on which one can support himself with regard to alternative texts. I was not able to do this, however, until I met my beloved (paraphrasing Shir Ha'shirim)--my friend, the son of my friend, R' Eliezer Ze'ev son of the late Zvi Hirsch z"l, who used to live in my home--who agreed to print this work. I said that I would write these words so that people like me would accept them, for it is fitting for every learned person to buy a copy of Tzon Kodashim and to study the Order of Kodashim, and money should be no object. As the Sefer Chassidim states: It is a bigger mitzvah to buy a set of Talmud than to write a Sefer Torah, for once permission was given to write down the Talmud, it is something that every learned person needs. In contrast, how many Sifrei Torah are never used at all?! Therefore, I have promised to buy a copy. May we merit to perform the sacrificial service in the rebuilt Temple soon in our days.

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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