

Welcome Letter

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A tremendous thank you goes out to the many dedicated volunteers who poured their time and energy into making these newsletters a reality. We also want to extend our deepest gratitude to everyone who assists behind the scenes with all of Eshel's ongoing projects—your hard work makes this all possible.

We are also excited to announce the launch of our new app! You can already find and download it on the Apple App Store, and it will be available soon on Android.

As we continue to grow, we would love to hear from you. We warmly welcome any suggestions, ideas, comments, or offers to help. Please feel free to reach out to us at office@eshelpublications.com.

Wishing everyone a wonderful Shavuos,
The Eshel Publications Team

SHAVUOS

NEXUS BETWEEN MAN AND G-D,
Time Pieces pg.479



The Jewish holidays have many facets of meaning that run parallel to each other. Historically, Pesach celebrates the formation

of the Jewish people, Shavuos celebrates the giving of the Torah, and Sukkos celebrates the journey of the Jewish people through the desert on the way to the Land of Israel.

The Torah also allocates a specific point in the agricultural cycle to each holiday. Pesach is the sprouting of the grain, Shavuos is the cutting of the crop, and Sukkos is the gathering in of the crop. There are also names of various mitzvos associated with each holiday.

Pesach is the festival of matzos, Sukkos is the festival of dwelling in the sukkah huts, and Shavuos is the festival of bringing an offering of our bikkurim, first fruits, to G-d.

The various parallels of Pesach and Sukkos are not difficult to match up.

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MERON: THE MIND vs. THE HEART

AS PUBLISHED IN MISHPACHA MAGAZINE, 5786

The impending arrival of Lag b'Omer inflamed holy passions across Eretz Yisrael this year, and these passions divided Klal Yisrael into two camps, each claiming spiritual authenticity. The ongoing Iran and Lebanon wars and their accompanying dangers led the government to curtail the massive yearly hilula at the kever of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. The burning question among those whose hearts tugged them toward Meron was,

**"Should we listen?
Or should we go anyway?"**

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SHAVUOS

NEXUS BETWEEN MAN AND G-D, *Time Pieces* pg.479, continued from pg...1

Pesach is the nascency of the Jewish people, and as such it is the blossoming of the crop. Sukkos is the destiny of the Jewish nation marching toward the Land of Israel, their final destination. As such, it parallels the final ingathering of the grain to its "home," the silo.

But the parallels of Shavuot don't seem to match up. How does the agricultural midpoint of "cutting the grain" correspond to the giving of the Torah? Where's the parallel?

And what unique quality exists in the act of cutting the grain that makes it a suitable metaphor for Shavuot?

To understand the unique quality of this moment in the agricultural cycle, we must touch on the theological issue of G-d's omnipotence and man's free will.

Judaism demands from us both a very strong sense of personal accountability and at the same time an acknowledgment of G-d's omnipotence. We are enjoined to do good as if it all depended on us, yet we pray to G-d with a sense of utter human frailty. We must push ourselves to the utmost, but never lose sight of the omnipotent G-d.

If man were to live with only a sense of G-d's omnipotence, he would shirk his duties, adopting a fatalistic attitude of "What's the point of it all?" and accomplish naught. If, on the other hand, he were to only see his own endowed capabilities, he could become arrogant and selfish. What usually happens is that we end up tilting emotionally toward one perspective or the other, depending on the particular circumstances.

This paradox is one of the great theological issues, namely free will vs. Divine omniscience. Whichever way we choose to answer this intellectually, on the practical level we live with both understandings as being true, each utilized in its proper application.

This division of duties — of assuming the mantle of responsibility while simultaneously believing everything is from G-d — expresses itself most blatantly during the agricultural growth cycle. From when the seed is first planted until it is cut, it is G-d who is solely involved in its development. The act of cutting the grain, then, begins man's role in processing it: threshing, winnowing, sifting, grinding, etc. He is the one whose action converts it into edible food.

At that critical junction of putting the scythe to the stalk, the grain moves from the domain of G-d's providence into the realm of human responsibility and capability.

A similar bridge between two domains expresses itself at the moment of the giving of the Torah. Before the Torah was brought down from the heavens, the world was the mirror of G-d, who was the sole Creator and Master. It has been pointed out that the number of generations from the beginning of the world until the giving of the Torah is twenty-six, which is the numerical value of G-d's ineffable Name, connoting that all those generations lived only as an expression of G-d's benevolence.

They did not have a clear mission that would define them as self-deserving of existence.

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However, once the Torah was given to the Jewish people, man was charged with a mission. He became responsible for keeping the Torah and enacting its moral code. It was now up to him to build or destroy the world.

Even during Creation there is a hint of man's role to come. The description of the sixth day of Creation in the Torah is written in a way that hints at the sixth day of Sivan, when the Torah would be given.

The Rabbis teach us that G-d's creation of the world was conditional on man's future acceptance of the Torah. It may have all been G-d's doing, but it depended on man as its *raison d'être*.

This intertwining of G-d and man is true with regard to all moral accomplishments, but most strongly brought home by Torah study itself. Nothing is closer to a person's sense of self than his faculties of reason and comprehension. Yet when we study Torah, we need to be fully aware of the two truths simultaneously. We cannot be said to be studying G-d's word unless we are firmly convinced and believe that the ideas we struggle to understand are G-d's Divine wisdom. Yet, if we do not fully comprehend them with our own mind and understand it with our own words, we have also not fulfilled our obligation of Torah study. If G-d's words have not genuinely become our own words, we have yet to receive the Torah.

This, then, is the magnificent holiday of Shavuos. It is the day when G-d passes the Torah to man, so to speak, and man becomes the bearer of responsibility for the world. The world rises or falls on the weight of man's accomplishments instead of the sheer benevolence of the Almighty. This is why the cutting of the crop is chosen as the precise moment to mark Shavuos. We are holding in one hand the stalk of G-d's bounty, and in the other hand the scythe of human endeavor.

Furthermore, G-d has given us the opportunity to be a part of His wisdom so that the same idea belongs to both G-d and man, at one and the same time.

How appropriate that this is the holiday when we brought the first fruits to G-d when we had the Temple. While the fruit is still growing, it is obvious to all that it is in G-d's hands at this point; there is no need to demonstrate our awareness that our bounty is a gift from the Almighty. If we were to wait much longer after the harvest, we would likely have gotten used to the notion that it is "ours," and thanking G-d would be belated and perfunctory.

It is at the precise moment of laying a scythe to the crop — at the "cutting of the grain" — that we stand at the nexus of these two forces and are able to correctly convey our gratitude. We recognize man's responsibility and G-d's benevolence at one and the same time and genuinely acknowledge that even that which is the fruit of man's labor is ultimately G-d's.

Let us then celebrate the night of study on Shavuos in the spirit that the Torah was given. We will study Torah with the imperative that only we have the ability to know right from wrong, and if we will not set the world right no one else can. And let us study the words of the Torah with the appropriate humility that all our intellectual struggles are there to understand but a sliver of G-d's infinite wisdom. ■

COUNTING AND THEN SOME

PARSHAS BEHAR 5786 - AS PUBLISHED ON TORAHWEB.COM

Parshas Behar starts off with the mitzvah of counting the years until *Shmitah*. Seven years are counted, and the seventh year is actually the *Shmitah* year. We then count again seven cycles of *shmitah* years, and the fiftieth year is the year of *yovel*. There seems to be a difference between these two countings. The first counting is seven years that are counted and then the seventh year that we count is itself the sanctified year of *Shmitah*. The *Yovel* year on the other hand comes after we've finished counting the seven cycles, and after that the fiftieth year is *Yovel*,

which we need to establish by proclaiming it. It seems as if our counting did not quite accomplish the *Yovel* year. This is eerily reminiscent of the *sefira* counting, where we count seven weeks of seven days each, and with that our counting is finished. The fiftieth day is then *Shavuos*. It seems as if there are two systems in place regarding 'counting', which we need to better understand.

One more event reminiscent of this is the *Yom Tov* of *Sukkos*. There are seven days of *Yom Tov*, followed by an eighth day which is somewhat connected and yet somewhat disconnected. It seems as if the *Yom Tov* proper is seven days and then there is another day of *Yom Tov* following our count of seven.

Let us understand the purpose of counting as a mitzvah. Counting can be simply a mechanical act of trying to find an aggregate sum. For instance, certain types of halachic counting like *ziva* require seven days of waiting before one can purify oneself. That counting is simply a mechanical noting of how many days and how much time has passed. There is no real act of counting that one is obligated to do; as long as the appropriate time period has elapsed that's good enough.

However, both *Sefiras Ha'omer* and the counting towards the *Yovel* require an active counting. When we have a group of pieces, which will together form a greater entity, we have the act of counting as a meaningful establishing of the role of each piece in the greater whole. Thus, when a person is assembling a machine of some sort, and he has individual parts, each part is allocated a description of where it fits into the bigger picture. Thus, every single piece has both its own identity and its role as part of the greater structure. Counting *Israel's* population is similar. *Klal Yisroel* consists of twelve distinct tribes, different families in each tribe, and unique individuals in each family. When we count them, we make note of each individual, each family, and their specific tribe, as well as the total of *Klal Yisroel*. This means that each and every one has a unique place, and together they integrate to form *Klal Yisroel*. This counting is the way in which we impose the overarching structure so that all the pieces and elements add up to the whole that they're supposed to create.

But then there is a unique phenomenon, where the whole supersedes the sum of its parts. The *Gemara* (*Yoma 39a*) says that when it comes to the attribute of *kedusha*, translated loosely as sanctity, a person's actions can never achieve the totality of *kedusha*. Instead, it says a person does actions that build *kedusha* in this world, and *Hashem* endows him with more *kedusha* from above. The attribute of *kedusha* required effort on our part, and on top of that an endowment from above.

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That is how kedusha works. Because kedusha is a quality that really goes beyond our world, it can never be obtained and achieved from within ourselves alone, rather it requires a partnership of our efforts combined with Divine benevolence.

In the Torah, the number seven refers to the totality of our world and existence. The world was created within seven days and therefore the unit of seven days is a description of the totality of human effort and achievement. Whenever the Torah commands us using the number seven, it is there for us to dedicate the totality of our efforts. But then there is another achievement and that is the 'eighth' day. It is a day not inherent in our world, but rather endowed from above. It expresses the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Thus, if we count seven full cycles, then on the fiftieth year we are granted *Yovel* from above. *Yovel* possesses a sanctity that transcends our world; it takes the process that we've been engaged in, the commerce of buying and selling houses and slaves, and undoes it. It restores the world to its natural order as ordained by the Divine. *Shmitah*, on the other hand, is still within our world. It is a respite and rest from activity but it's not a reversal of the natural economic order.

The same is true of Shavous. Torah is a set of behaviors, that first of all is meant to bring out the best of our accomplishments in this world. A person is supposed to achieve and attain the best character possible to be developed within this world. And thus, we count forty-nine days so that we bring out the best of our middos. But Torah is a lot more than that. It brings in an otherworldliness. It presents not only the laws that make us more moral people within the context of our world, rather it also opens up to us another world of spirituality far beyond the human world. Thus, Torah was given on the fiftieth day rather than the forty-ninth day.

It is an idea that is worthy of bearing in mind as we interact with the world around us. There is an awful lot of noise about how the Torah is meant to make us the most moral people possible. That is certainly true. But those people who trumpet the Torah's position on every aspect of current events need to remember that Torah is far more than that. Much of the Torah cannot be explained - and should not be explained - in terms of this-worldliness. It is an aberration, truncating the higher part of Torah.

Torah is given on the fiftieth day. It requires forty-nine days of genuine preparation making ourselves better people with our efforts and in the context of this world. But then there is a fiftieth day. It is a gateway to a world beyond. ■

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MITZVAS TALMUD TORAH

Q&A SESSION WITH RAV AHRON LOPIANSKY SHLITA

Q: Is there a *derech* where a “regular person” could go about learning *kol haTorah kula*?

A: The *Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Hilchos Talmud Torah)* explains what this would include.

Torah Shebichsav begins with *Bereishis* and finishes with *Divrei HaYamim*. A person in his life should go through it once, at least. This doesn't necessarily mean knowing it well, but at least just going through the words.

Torah Shebal Peh includes the *ikar limudim* of each *halacha*. It is hard for us to parse this. But it probably includes going through *Shas* once in your lifetime. Additionally, there are certain things that you must do.

1. Learning some *halacha* every day is critical. So that you can keep *mitzvos*.
2. Learning some *mussar*, of any kind, that keeps you focused on *Avodas Hashem*. Whatever moves you and motivates you.
3. Learning a part of *Torah Shebal Peh* at a level that engages you to learn in depth. Some people like *bekius* and *chazering* a lot and knowing information. And some people enjoy *iyun*. But the important thing is to stay engaged with engaged and deep learning. ■



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THE CENTRALITY OF תורה

An Elucidated Translation of selections from Yesodei HaTorah, pg. 693 with the recorded explanations of Rav Lopiansky



The עקידת יצחק (שער סז) poses a striking, fundamental question: we celebrate the Yom Tov of שבועות with תפילה and מנהגים that reflect the giving of the תורה. Yet, the תורה itself makes no mention that מתן תורה occurred on שבועות.

The תורה refers to this day as a יום בכורים. Why doesn't the תורה explicitly label this יו"ט as the celebration of תורה? He offers two answers.

First, to understand this anomaly, we must recognize the nature of a command. The עקידה writes: a commandment presupposes the existence of a Commander and the prior acceptance of His authority. To command מתן תורה's commemoration would be conceptually circular. This parallels what רמב"ן says regarding אמונה. Telling someone who lacks אמונה that it is a מצוה to believe is inherently contradictory, as the command itself relies on the very belief they are struggling to attain. Just as אמונה cannot be commanded, celebrating the תורה cannot be commanded. It must arise organically.

Moreover, by skipping over an explicit mention of מתן תורה on שבועות, it changes the Yom Tov to an expression of our own רצון to connect to ה'. Demonstrating that our desire to be close to ה' does not need to be commanded.

Second, the עקידה writes, had the תורה tethered מתן תורה to a specific date, it would inadvertently suggest that our relationship to תורה is limited to that time. Our yearly cycle of Yomim Tovim correlate with the unique opportunities available at that time of year. In the fall, we have סוכות a time of זמן שמחתינו. In the spring, we have פסח a time of זמן חירותינו. However, the celebration of the תורה cannot be confined to a section of time! The Torah is the דעת עליון – the highest, governing wisdom, that pulses through a Yid at all times.

As stated in ספר יהושע (1:8): "לא ימוש ספר תורה הזה מפֿיך והגית בו יומם ולילה" – Make sure not to let Torah ever cease from your mouth and discuss it day and night.

Consider the following משל. A person's character is comprised of many מדות. We range from חסד to גבורה, and זריזות to סבלנות, each necessitating a specific time and use. However, there is one מדה that is always active. That is דעת. The governing מדה which helps us choose which of the other מדות to use at any given time. The תורה is called "דעת עליון" – the ultimate דעת. The centrality of דעת in our מדות, is a small reflection of the ultimate focal point of our lives – תורה.

תורה is not an event to be celebrated. It is our core identity. This is why the פסוקים make no mention of מתן תורה occurring on שבועות. Celebrating the תורה cannot be confined to a single calendarical date. תורה is meant to pulsate through everything we do and through every decision we make. Each day, we should find ourselves renewed with an ever-deepening love for תורה. May we all merit to internalize this message from the עקידה and live with תורה at the center of our lives. ■

MERON: THE MIND vs. THE HEART

AS PUBLISHED IN MISHPACHA MAGAZINE, 5786, *continued from pg...1*

Thousands upon thousands of people risked the trip to Meron, arguing that this was what their bitachon demanded of them. To some, it was simply unthinkable that Rabbi Shimon's kever would be desolate on Lag b'Omer. Others based their decision on their certainty that "Hashem is there watching over all of us," or that "The merit of Rebbi Shimon will protect us all."

Those who had experienced the extraordinary moments of inspiration that are unique to Lag b'Omer in Meron were certain that if the authorities had any idea of what this otherworldly

experience was like, they would realize that it was far more powerful than any political or logistical concern. Furthermore, they had no fear, because "Those who keep mitzvos know of no harm."

But there was another, equally powerful voice on the other side of the issue. The Chief Rabbi HaGaon HaRav Yosef, and many other leading rabbanim stated in no uncertain terms, "It is absolutely forbidden to go... There is real pikuach nefesh involved, and it is a terrible sin to go.... On Yom Kippur we do not fast if there is any chance of a person becoming seriously ill, and on Shabbos we drive a car to take someone who is ill to the hospital.... It is a law of the Torah that endangerment to life pushes aside almost every mitzvah. And indeed, what mitzvah is there in going to Meron?"

These are some of the sounds that echoed throughout Eretz Yisrael in the lead-up to Lag b'Omer. In the end, many people went—far more people than the authorities permitted. Also, a great many, stayed home and celebrated Rabbi Shimon's hilula at local gatherings, graced by eminent rebbes and rabbanim.

The point of this article is not to attempt to determine right or wrong regarding this issue. However, much can be gained by reflecting on these two different currents flowing through Klal Yisrael, carrying some sincere avdei Hashem in one direction and some in the other. What are the forces at work?

A human being's essence operates with two essential components. One is intellect and understanding, and the other is feeling and emotion. The purpose of the intellectual component is to enable us to learn Torah. The emotional aspect reveals itself in yiras Hashem and ahavas Hashem, the work of our hearts.

The Torah exemplifies these two components through Moshe and Aharon. Moshe embodies the Torah of the intellect and Aharon represents the emotional essence of avodah, expressed in the pasuk, "And Aharon will see you and rejoice in his **heart**" (Shemos 4:14).

An extraordinary amount of ink has been poured into describing the crucial importance of each of these components. Chassidus and the Mussar movement sprang up to correct what was seen as a lack of religious emotion in their generation. Each, in its own way, stressed the need to fan the flames of ahavah and yirah. Other great Torah figures, such as R' Chaim Volozhin and others, pushed back out of concern that an overemphasis on emotion could steer people away from pursuing the depths of Torah and building an intellectual recognition of Hashem.

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They would settle for “feeling good” through Chassidus or “being good” through Mussar and give up the intellectual effort of coming to know Hashem through His wisdom.

Like all disagreements between great people, the two sides of this debate were far closer to each other than it seems at first glance. They were simply focused on the area that they felt needed strengthening. They charted different routes to the same destination.

Let us now take a closer look at the two attributes of intellect and emotion, and why they are both necessary and complimentary.

For our avodas Hashem to be alive and vital, it needs to be fueled with warmth. In fact, the life force is always indicated by warmth and heat. Death is cold and rigid, while living is warm and dynamic. In a spiritual sense, a person whose Torah observance is devoid of emotion is performing a lifeless avodah. He may be doing everything according to the letter of the law. He may have all the laws figured out to perfection. However, he is simply a robot going through motions. Without the warmth of ahavah and the fire of yirah, his life-force is disengaged from Hashem and His mitzvos.

This might seem to indicate that we should focus almost exclusively on flaming the fires of emotion, ahavah and yirah. The intellect seems to be relegated to the task of instructing us regarding what laws to perform. However, that is not the case; Talmud Torah is k'neged kulam—the quintessential mitzvah. The mind plays the central role of providing us with the correct framework for discerning right from wrong. Our emotions are meant to breathe life into those determinations. Emotions can never determine right and wrong.

An apt analogy is a car. If it has responsive brakes and a precise steering wheel, but no engine, it will not be going anywhere. It will remain where it is for eternity. However, a car that has very powerful engine, but poor brakes and a broken steering wheel, will drive off a cliff at full speed. This is far worse than going nowhere; it is self-destruction. Likewise, the mind must use the Torah to steer our course of action every inch of the way and warn us to apply the brakes when our spiritual safety depends on it. The heart is supposed to infuse life into the course of action our intellect chooses.

The Kuzari (2:50; 3:11) provides a fascinating insight into the role of the heart—in this case, joy and simchah—in avodas Hashem. He observes that the simchah we are commanded to feel on Yom Tov is supposed to emanate from our understanding of the Yom Tov. When this is the case, our simchah is true avodas Hashem. He stipulates that this is only the case when our emotions arise from our understanding. When a person understands with his mind what Yom Tov is all about, and then his emotions well up and pour forth, and he even breaks out singing and dancing, then the song and the dance are avodas hashem. We see in this description a case in which emotion is the mitzvah, but the emotion is defined by the intellect; it is a product of the mind.

Let us now return to the Meron conundrum. Some people present orthodoxy as a matter of doing what we the Torah tells us to do—no more or less than that. In this view, “compliance” and “observance” are the keywords. Heart and soul are optional; it's the actions that matter. However, anyone who has seen or experienced this approach feels its extraordinary sterility. It cannot endure for long.

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MERON: THE MIND vs. THE HEART

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Many different paths in avodas Hashem have arisen to inject a particular brand of fire and emotion in Yiddishkeit, and this is an essential and critical endeavor. But when emotions and passion are set in motion without guardrails, when they are not carefully monitored and directed by the intellect, they are as destructive as the car whose engine overrules the brakes and the steering wheel. Such passions have given us false messiahs, strange practices, and misdirected zealotry.

The Gerrer Rebbe, the Imrei Emes, expressed this succinctly (Rosh Golas Ariel, p. 220): When he became Rebbe, he moved the time of Shabbos Shacharis from 10:00 am to 7:30 am so as not to miss the z'man Krias Shema. The Chassidim were upset. They approached the Rebbe and insisted that if the Rebbe only knew how warm and heartfelt their prayers were when they had time to prepare, he would surely have them daven later.

He responded with a quotation from the beraisa: "Bar Kappara stated, Had they mixed in a drop of honey into the incense, its odor would have been overwhelming. So why indeed did they not do so?" The Rebbe paused, to let the question sink in. He then continued, "For the Torah has prohibited it, 'You shall not offer sourdough nor honey onto the altar.'" In other words, no religious experience, profound as it may seem, overrides the halachah.

The correct attitude is perhaps best expressed by the Chazon Ish in a poignant letter (Igros Chazon Ish 3, Letter 64):

A group of zealots had asked him to participate in some sort of protest. He replied that his emotions resonated with the true and just outrage felt by them. "However, toiling in Torah under excruciatingly difficult circumstances [as I have], endows one with unique characteristics. They are not free to act on the beck and call of emotions, holy as those emotions may be. Rather they are forced to prefer the logic of Torah over emotions of rage and anger, even if [those emotions are] emanating from a sacred spot."

The emotional yearning for the intense kedushah of Lag b'Omer in Meron is indeed a symptom of a passionate Yiddishkeit filled with fire of G-dliness. But how does a person act on those emotions? He gathers the information, presents it to a posek, and as the daas of halachah determines, so does the person act.

Only if our engine is fully revved up, and the steering wheel directing it, with brakes capable of stopping on a dime, will we arrive at our destination safely! ■



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RUS: THE BOOK OF SUFFERING AND REDEMPTION

SEEDS OF REDEMPTION, ADAPTED FROM שבועות טעם קריאת מגילת רות בחג רות IN THE NACHLAS YOSEF

“...And why indeed is Rus read on Shavuos, the very day that the Torah was given? In order to teach us that Torah is acquired only through suffering and deprivation.”
(Yalkut Shímoní Rus 596)

Rus is a book about suffering (Baba Basra 14b), as is the book of Iyov. In each of these books, a prominent family of Israel suffers total devastation. They were wealthy and aristocratic families of great aristocracy and wealth. Both Naomi and Iyov lose almost their entire family and every scrap of their possessions and wealth. Both Naomi and Iyov become paradigms of unthinkable suffering whose downfall spurred people to wag their heads in disbelief at the fate of such wealthy and prominent households.

But the resemblance ends there. The book of Iyov leaves us with a feeling of mourning and of unredeemed despair. But while the book of *Rus* also talks of death and poverty, the suffering is redeemed in an ending full of hope.

R' Yochanon said, “Why was she called Rus? For her progeny, Dovid, would one day suffuse Hashem with song and praise.” (Baba Basra 14b)

Furthermore, the two books make remarkably different points. *Iyov's* purpose is to depict suffering at its worst. *Rus* depicts suffering as a vehicle for redemption.

Nevertheless, a cursory reading of *Iyov* makes one think that he too is redeemed at the very end. Is this not implied by the verse, “And G-d blessed Iyov with greater wealth than before” (Iyov14:12)?

Despite those words, redemption is not the message. The endings of the two stories are very different at their core. *Iyov's* good fortune is not perceived as having emanated from his suffering. He suffered for a reason unknown, and his suffering ceased for a reason unknown. His later fortune was yet another unexplained act of G-d, and this fortune bore no relation to his suffering. His fortune was like a bright sun that was temporarily obscured by a dark cloud; when the cloud passed on, the sun continued shining as before. The cloud contributed nothing to the sunshine that radiated afterwards. It is comparable to a person who suffers from illness and is subsequently healed. The relief is not a benefit of the suffering. The pattern for *Rus* is radically different. It could be compared to a dark cloud that covered a bright sun, and then burst into rain, giving rise to a verdant crop. It was the rain in the cloud itself that brought forth the bounty in the field. A woman had a difficult childbirth and had a beautiful child. The suffering itself produced the child. In this light, let us take a second look at the words of the Gemara:

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RUS: THE BOOK OF SUFFERING AND REDEMPTION

SEEDS OF REDEMPTION, ADAPTED FROM בחג רות מגילת קריאת טעם השבועות IN THE NACHLAS YOSEF

It is a book of suffering that bore redemption, as R' Yochanon said, "Why was she called Rus? For her progeny, Dovid, would one day suffuse Hashem with song and praise." (Baba Basra 14b)

What did the Gemara find in the words of R' Yochanon that is not found in the book of *Rus* itself? Doesn't the Megillah itself make it clear that Rus is the great-grandmother of Dovid?

The answer is that R' Yochanon's statement highlights the idea that *Rus* did not just **happen to be** a grandmother of Dovid. Rather, it was in her **very essence** that the seed of Dovid was to be found. She was called *Rus* because she would produce Dovid. Her journey of suffering was the "rain" that caused Dovid to sprout from that seed.

Rus merited being the progenitor of Dovid because of her suffering. She was part of Naomi's family for ten years, and had no thought of becoming Jewish. She must have seen beautiful things living and comfort among the aristocracy; yet nothing moved her until the suffering began. Her *neshamah* became purified through the suffering and allowed her to move forward.

That seed of redemption had actually been planted a long time prior to the events in the *Megillah*. Seven hundred years earlier, Lot had been told to save himself and his two daughters who were "to be found with him (*hanimtza'os*)" (Bereishis 19:15). These daughters indeed included in their progeny the rarest of "finds," *Rus* and Naamah (the wife of Shlomo), who were their descendants some seven hundred years later (Bereishis Rabbah 50:10). *Rus* was not a stranger appearing on the scene for the first time. The seeds were there, but the pathway to the sprouting of those two seeds was strewn with travails and suffering. This included *Rus* struggling to join the Jewish people, and Naomi struggling to make amends for leaving her people, to bring back *Rus*, and to be accepted among them upon her return.

However, suffering alone does not suffice. Rain does not produce blossoms if no seeds are buried in the ground. Likewise, if there is no "seed" of greatness ensconced in a person's soul, there will be no spiritual blossoms, despite the suffering the person may endure. Thus, Machlon and Kilyon suffered and passed away, but never grew from their travails.

In contrast, Naomi and *Rus* had seeds of virtue and greatness deeply ensconced within them. As they suffered and struggled, those seeds blossomed into the house of royalty.

The same is true of *Klal Yisrael's* journey in Mitzrayim. Eighty percent of them never made it out. They had planted no seeds, and their suffering ruined them. The other twenty percent gained tremendously from their suffering. The seeds of greatness had been planted, and the suffering "watered" them.

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The same pattern proved true throughout the difficult history of *Klal Yisrael*. Many were torn away from their faith, while others grew tremendously. Difficulties bring out greatness, but there must be a seed.

This story of suffering and redemption is appropriate for *Shavuos*, the day of the giving of the Torah, for Torah came to us at a tremendous cost of suffering. For "hatred (*sinah*) for the Jewish people descended at Sinai" (*Shabbos 89a*). This meant that our long history would be marked by an almost never-ending stream of troubles for us. We have never stopped suffering since the day that we became a nation. Nevertheless, once the seed of Torah was planted within us, the suffering became the rain that is causing that seed to sprout.

Torah is a tremendous gift, but it also makes our lives extremely difficult. The *Derashos haRan* and others explain that Torah causes hatred because it compels us stand out. Naturally, this results in a lot of ill will among the gentile populace of our surroundings.

We tend to perceive the hatred generated by the Torah as an unfortunate by-product, but in truth, it is the suffering that enables us to grow. Suffering makes us ask whether all the hard work is worthwhile. By contemplating this, our resolve to hold tight to the Torah is reinforced.

Indeed, the book of "suffering that becomes redemption" is the book that is most fit to teach us about the redemption that is sprouting from our collective suffering! ■



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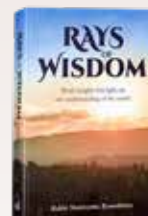
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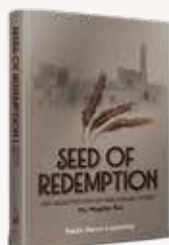
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