

Fascinating INSIGHTS

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COMING SOON Bez"H

Fascinating Insights—The Sefer (in English)

Test Time

The summer brings along with it tests, such as in שמירת עינים among other things. This is shown to us in the Parshiyos at this time of year as they speak of the sins of the Jewish people: מתאוננים, complaining about the מן, the Lashon Hara of Miriam, Meraglim, Korach, sinning with the daughters of Moav and so on. It therefore is no surprise that it is in the summer time when the Beis Hamikdash (both) was destroyed.

This time of year is that of the שטן, as is shown by the Meraglim:

1) It says **ימנ בכורן ענבים**, the days were the season of the first ripe grapes.¹ Adding up the end letters—מ, י, ג— we come to a total of 100. This is the numerical value of סם,² another name for the שטן.

2) R' Shimshon Miestripolia³ tells us the word בכורי means first, preceding as in a Bechor, firstborn. So בכורי ענבם can be interpreted as the letters that precede ענבם. That is, ס before ע, נ before מ, א before ב and ל before מ. This spells סמאל,⁵ the שטן,⁶ as this is his time of the year.⁷ Consequently, we see that this time of year is conducive to stumbling and sinning.

¹ Bamidbar 13:20.

² See סמאל, Bamidbar, 13:20. סם is a reference to the evil part of him (see footnote below). Additionally, סם is related to סומא, to blind, since he blinds a person from the truth.

³ Sefer Karnayim, 21b

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ע | נ | ב | ס |
| ל | מ | א | ל |

⁵ As with everything in creation, סמאל has a mixture of Kedusha and Tuma. The first two letters are the impure part—סם—whereas אל (Hashem's name) is the holy part. It is the אל of his name that gives him vitality and as in **יהיה האדם פי ה'** יורה האדם פי ה' (Devarim 8:3). With this we can explain the Gemara (Succa 52a) that says in the future Hashem will slaughter the Yetzer Hara. That means to say, slaughtering סם from אל.

⁶ Although this hint is done without the י of ענבים, this is not problematic, since י is one of the weak letters in Dikduk (the others are ה, ג, ו). Alternatively, the letter before י is ט (Gematria of 9), which refers to the 9th of Av, the day the Satan is at his highest.

⁷ Incidentally, the first letters of **אתה סתר לי מצר**... you are a shelter for me, from distress you preserve me (Tehillim 32:7) spell סמאל, since without Hashem's help we can't overcome him as the Gemara (Succa 52b) says **אלמלא הקב"ה שעוור לו אינו יכול לו** if not for Hashem who aids him, he would be unable to withstand him.

3) If we add up the word עמלק with its hidden letters (known as מלוי)—קוף, למד, ממ, עין, מם—we come to a sum of 470. This is identical to that of ענבים. ימי בכורי עמלק lacks Kedusha as it says עמלק יושב בארץ הנגב,⁸ dry and devoid of Kedusha.

It is because of this that prior to the summer, we have Shavuot (Torah) since בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין I have created the evil inclination and the Torah as its antidote.⁹ In a similar vein, this time of year we are accustomed to learn Pirkei Avos, to protect us from sin.

A Gravelly Prayer

The Gemara¹⁰ relates that Reish Lakish would mark the boundaries of where the Rabbis were buried. The simple meaning, Rashi explains, is so that Kohanim would not inadvertently walk over them, thereby contracting Tumah.¹¹ R' Yaakov Emden explains that Reish Lakish identified those graves so that people who wanted to daven by the graves of Tzadikim would know where to find them.

We find this idea in connection with Kalev. To be saved from being persuaded by the עצת מרגלים, designs of the Meraglim, Kalev davened over the קברי אבות, graves of the patriarchs.¹²

The Gemara¹³ says that one reason for going to a cemetery¹⁴ is כדי שיבקשו עלינו מתיים רחמים, so that the deceased who are buried there should beg for mercy on our behalf. This can't mean that we are allowed to daven to the dead to ask them to help us as that is forbidden because of **לא יהיה לך...** you shall not recognize the gods of others in My presence¹⁵ and maybe also because of **ודרש אל המתים**, one who consults the dead.¹⁶ So what does it mean? Some¹⁷ hold it means that it is permitted to speak directly to the dead to ask them to daven to Hashem on our behalf. This is similar to the Tefillos we find that are addressed to Malachim, as they are merely Hashem's messengers and they don't possess the ability to do anything on their own accord. So it is permitted to address the dead directly and ask them to intercede on our behalf. Others¹⁸ disagree and say that addressing a dead person is a violation of **ודרש אל המתים**. "Asking the dead to pray for mercy on our behalf" means that we daven directly to Hashem that in the merit of the dead, He should have mercy on us. We visit the graves only to remind Hashem of the merits of the Tzadikim who are buried there. Most of the classical Poskim, including the Be'er Heitev, Chayei Adam, Mateh Efraim and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, rule in accordance with the second view. The Mishna Brura¹⁹ writes that we visit graves because a cemetery where Tzadikim are

⁸ Bamidbar 13:29. The simple meaning is Amalek dwells in the area of the south.

⁹ Kidushin 30b.

¹⁰ Baba Metzia 85b.

¹¹ In this way, Rashi explains, the righteous wouldn't be a cause of harm to others (s.v. מציינ). This seems difficult to grasp since for Kohanim any grave would be a problem, not just that of Tzadikim. R' Yaakov Emden therefore offers his explanation.

¹² Bamidbar 13:22, Rashi, Sota 34b. See Zohar, Acharei Mos 70b-71b.

¹³ Taanis 16a.

¹⁴ In that Gemara, it is speaking of going on certain fast days which was customary back then.

¹⁵ Shemos 20:3. See Geshet Hachaim 2:26.

¹⁶ Devarim 18:11. See Eliyahu Rabbah 581:4.

¹⁷ See the Shela quoted by Elef Hamagen 581:113, Pri Megadim, Orach Chaim 581:16 and Maharam Shick, Orach Chaim 293.

¹⁸ See the Bach and Shach, Yoreh Deah 179:15. See also Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 5:43-6.

¹⁹ 581:27. Also Be'er Heitev, Orach Chaim 581:17.

interred is a place where Tefillos are more readily answered. However, one shouldn't put his trust in the dead rather he should just ask Hashem to have mercy on him in the merit of the Tzadikim who are buried there. Other Poskim rule that it is permitted to talk to the dead [or to Malachim] to intercede on our behalf. The Minchas Elazar²⁰ proves from a host of sources throughout the Gemara and Zohar that not only is this permitted but it is a Mitzva to do so. So, the most that is permitted [according to the lenient views] is to ask them to act as our emissaries to Hashem so that Hashem will look favorably and mercifully upon us.

Think Right!

One of the struggles many face is improper thoughts. We need to do what we can to protect ourselves. Much damaged would be alleviated if we would protect our eyes as this is a cause for improper thoughts and as it says ולא תתורו...עיניכם.²¹

A student of the Kotzker Rebbe²² (1787-1859) who saw a woman coming towards him veered off to a nearby wall to avoid looking at her. After the woman passed, the Kotzker Rebbe told him it is better to look at the woman and think of the wall than to look at the wall and think of the woman!

The story is told of someone who complained to the Kotzker Rebbe about his מחשבות זרות, foreign, impure thoughts. The Rebbe retorted זרות?! It is from you (meaning you caused it by not guarding your eyes against the improper)!

The following is some advice given on how to protect ourselves in this area:

1) Reciting the words of ונתנה תקף along with its solemn melody may help with protecting our eyes and distancing our minds from improper thoughts²³ as it contains the words, "You remember all that was forgotten...You open the book of records...and the signature of the hand of every person is in it..."

2) We should ask ourselves are these thoughts empowering us. If it is not then we should keep our focus and attention on something else since we want to live the most powerful existence we can. Since we can't think two thoughts at once, if our minds are occupied with a different thought, we are free from improper thoughts.²⁴

3) Hashem gets so much pleasure when we overcome such thoughts as is indicated by Yosef who exemplifies this as he overcame the test with the wife of Potifar. It says there וימאן, he refused to be with her.²⁵ וימאן forms an acronym of מִן הַיָּמִין נִמְנָה, how beautiful and pleasant are you.²⁶ When we

²⁰ 1:68. See also the Gesher Hachaim 2:26 and Minchas Yitzchak 8:53.

²¹ Bamidbar 15:39.

²² When the Kotzker Rebbe was 13 years old, he had mastered the entire Talmud. After his marriage at age 14, his father introduced him to Chassidus (as he was born to a non-Chassidish family). He became a student of the Chozeh of Lublin and R' Simcha Bunim of Peshischa. For the last 20 years of his life, he lived in seclusion. He is considered to be the spiritual founder upon which the Gur dynasty is based, through the teachings of its founder, the Chidushai Harim. Although he never published any works, he wrote many manuscripts. However, he had them all burned before his death. His thoughts and comments were published in אמת ואמונה as well as אהל תורה. His students include the Chidushai Harim as well as R' Chanoch of Alexander. His son-in-law was the great Avnei Nazer.

²³ This can be done daily or whenever one feels a struggle in this area.

²⁴ Just as if one approached us while davening we would ignore him since he is disturbing, we should do the same if an improper thought comes to us. We need to bear in mind that when one wrestles with a filthy person, he gets dirty (Tanya 28).

²⁵ Breishis 39:8.

²⁶ Shir Hashirim 7:7.

realize the pleasure Hashem receives from us overcoming such tests, it can help us in this area.²⁷

Conquering a City

The Gemara²⁸ says that through *pilpul* (Talmudic analysis), Asniel Ben Kenaz was able to restore the Torah that had been forgotten²⁹ during the mourning period for Moshe as it says וילכדה עתניאל... Asniel Ben Kenaz conquered Kiryas Sefer...³⁰ Kiryas Sefer refers to the Citadel (the meaning of Kiryas) of the Book (referred to by the word Sefer), meaning collection of Halachos. Asniel prevailed over these forgotten laws (That is, he restored them.) through his Talmudic analysis.³¹

The Arvei Nachal³² teaches that when Hashem created the world, He looked at the Torah as a blueprint and then created it.³³ This means that every physical area has a section of the Torah that corresponds to it.³⁴ At the root of the Jewish people's conquest over the land of Canaan was their observance of the corresponding parts of the Torah and their mastery over them.³⁵ The spiritual advantage translated into a military advantage that brought about the Canaanite downfalls without much difficulty. The city of Kirayas Sefer corresponded to the Torah that had been forgotten during the mourning period of Moshe's death. Asniel Ben Kenaz was victorious in the spiritual battle for Kiryas Sefer and as a result the Jewish people were victorious in the physical battle.

Each tribe received a different portion in Eretz Yisrael. The word פקד has several meanings. Dovid calls the Mitzvos פקודי ה',³⁶ Hashem's commands. Eretz Yisrael was apportioned to each tribal head according to פקודיו, his tribe's census.³⁷ This similar wording intimates that each tribe received its portion in Eretz Yisrael according to פקודיו, its Mitzvos, the Mitzvos in which its members' souls were rooted. Another word of the same root is תפקיד, purpose or mission. Each person's lot in Eretz Yisrael also corresponds to the unique life mission for which Hashem created him.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander Tz"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

²⁷ The Tanya (27) writes even if one is busy all his days in this battle, he shouldn't feel depressed or too troubled because perhaps this is why he was created.

²⁸ Temura 16a.

²⁹ These included Kal Vachomers and Gezeira Shavos. In a letter to the Mahartz Chayes, the Chassam Sofer (Orach Chaim, 208, s.v. מ"ש) writes that at times Ruach Hakodesh will rest upon a Talmud scholar as a result of his efforts. This inspiration causes the scholar to grasp material (logically) that would have otherwise been beyond his intellectual reach. This is what is meant here that Asniel restored Torah through his efforts in analyzing Torah law.

³⁰ Yehoshua 15:17 and Shoftim 1:13.

³¹ Rashi, s.v. וילכדה.

³² Parshas Shemos, s.v. ואמר כי העניין אך העניין and Parshas Shelach, s.v. העניין.

³³ Breishis Rabba 1:1.

³⁴ So, for example, each stone may have a letter etched into it, each block a Pasuk, each neighborhood a section of Torah and each city an entire Parsha.

³⁵ It is said that whenever R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld walked from one place to another in Eretz Yisrael, he sought a new, untried path to reach his destination. When he was asked why he didn't use the shortest route, he explained that walking about in Eretz Yisrael provides a Jew with a strong connection to each specific parcel of land that he traverses. Since every spot in Eretz Yisrael corresponds to a different part of the Torah, a Jew walking on unfamiliar streets or roads in Eretz Yisrael is constantly being connected to parts of the Torah with which he is not yet familiar. R' Sonnenfeld wanted to connect to them all.

³⁶ Tehillim 19:9.

³⁷ Bamidbar 26:54.