

למודי משה

שמות - גליון צ"ו

Insights into Halachah

Not learning on *nitel nacht* (night of December 25th) and sending presents to *goyim* on their holidays

(A large amount of the following I heard in a *shiur* from R' Yissocher Frand, and he said that most of the *shiur* he got from an article he saw in the *Moriah*, I think it can be found in the Tishrei 5746 edition but I haven't checked it up.)

There is a widespread *minhag*, particularly amongst *chassidim*, not to learn on the night before December the 25th. What is the *mekor* for such a *minhag*? Why is the night before December the 25th known as *nitel nacht*? Does this *minhag* still apply today?

A *mekor* for such a *minhag* isn't found in the Bavli, Yerushalmi, *Rishonim*, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Kisvei Arizal* etc. and Sephardim don't have the *minhag* at all, only Jews from Eastern Europe and particularly of *chassidish* descent seem to have such a *minhag*, and they treat the *minhag* very seriously, so where is the *mekor* for such a *minhag*?

Sending presents to *goyim* on their holidays (first reference to *nitel nacht*)

The first reference to *nitel nacht* can be found in a *Teshuva* from the *Terumas HaDeshen* in *Siman* 195. In most prints the *Teshuva* is missing, however, it can be found in the new editions. The Jewish printers most probably took it out in order not to offend the *goyim*.

The *Terumas HaDeshen* is dealing with the *inyan* of sending gifts to non-Jews during the holiday season. The *Terumas HaDeshen* writes: "In many cities it was customary to send presents to the priest or government officials on the eighth day from *nitel*." The eighth day from *nitel* is January the 1st, when the *goyim* celebrate their new year. The *Terumas HaDeshen* wants to know if there is anything wrong with doing the above. He says, that one should be careful not to do it on the exact day, and he should either send it before or after.

The Mishnah in *Avodah Zorah* (1:1) writes, that for three days prior to their holidays, it is forbidden to do business, loan money, repay loans and other specific activities, with idol-worshippers. The Gemara explains the reason for this prohibition: that since the *ovdei avodah zorah* [idol worshippers] profited through these activities, this will cause him to give thanks to his *avodah zorah* on his holiday. It is forbidden for a Jew to bring this about, as it is written (*Shemos* 23:13), "The names of other gods you will not mention; they shall not be heard on your mouth." Rashi explains that one cannot cause the non-Jew to mention the name of an *avodah zorah*. When are these holidays? The Mishnah (1:3) lists various different days, one of them is "*kalander*", which falls eight days after *tekufas Teves*, which we will see soon is December the 25th, which means that "*kalander*" falls on January the 1st. The *Tiferes Yisrael* says, "*kalander*" is called what it is, as it has to do with being the beginning of the calendar. Based on the above Mishnah the *Terumas HaDeshen* says that it should be forbidden to send gifts to a *goy*, if however, one sends it a few days before the holiday or a few days after, then one gets out of the problem.

The *Terumas HaDeshen* adds, that just like we *lehavdil* have *simonim* [omens] on Rosh Hashanah, and dip the apple in the honey, and eat the head of a fish, *goyim* also have *simonim* and getting a gift on new year is a good *simon* for them. Therefore, it's better to send the *goy* a present after the 1st of January than before, because if he receives it a day before the 1st of January it accomplishes the same thing.

The *Terumas HaDeshen* then asks, what happens if the 31st falls on Shabbos and so one can't send the gift a day before and he is unable to send it the day after, is it ok to give it on the actual day of the holiday?

He answers, firstly, today *goyim* aren't so into *avodah zorah* and they won't run off to their *avodah zorah's* just because they received a gift. Secondly, the whole *inyan* of giving gifts isn't to do with *avodah zorah* and it's simply a *simon be'alma* [unrelated significance].

The *Rema* (*Yoreh Deah* 149:12) brings the above *Terumas HaDeshen*: שְׂקוּרֵין שִׁי שִׁמְיֵי שֶׁאֲחֵר נִיטִיל שְׂקוּרֵין – "Similarly if one sends a *goy* a gift nowadays, on the eighth day after *nittel* which is known as new year, which if a *goy* receives a gift on such a day it's a good sign for him. If it's possible one should send it the day before, if not, it's ok to send it on the holiday itself." (Many editions of the *Shulchan Aruch* have the above censored out, so don't be shocked if you look it up and can't find it.)

This *Terumas HaDeshen* is the first time we find mentioned the idea of *nitel*. The *Terumas HaDeshen* spells the word "*nitel*", *nun, yud, tof, lamed* which is a similar word to "*toleh*", which means to hang. In the *Moriah* in an article to do with *nitel* he suggests, that the reason *nitel nacht* is called so, is because it refers to the one who was hung (*toleh*).

The *issur of lo sachoneim* (לא תחנם)

There are two issues with sending presents to a *goy*, one is that if one sends a *goy* a present, he might run off and start praising his *avodah zarah*, to which we said above is not such a problem nowadays as *goyim* aren't so religious anymore. A second issue is the *issur of lo sachoneim*. The Gemara in *Avodah Zarah* learns out from the *pasuk of lo sachoneim*, that one isn't allowed to sell land in Eretz Yisroel to a *goy*, that one isn't allowed to praise a *goy*, and that one isn't allowed to give a *goy* a *matnas chinom* [free gift].

The reason for the above (the last two *dinim*) is because if one praises a *goy* and gives a *goy* presents, the *goy* will start being friendly and will start intermingling and it may result in intermarriage.

Does *lo sachoneim* apply to all *goyim*

Does the *issur of giving gifts to a goy* learnt out from the *pasuk of lo sachoneim* apply to all *goyim* or does it perhaps only apply to the *sheva umos* [the seven nations that occupied Eretz Yisroel at the time when the *Yidden* first arrived]?

The *pasuk of lo sachoneim* in *Parshas Vo'eschanon* is referring to the *sheva umos*, there is a *machlokes rishonim* and *poskim* if it applies only to the *sheva umos* or if it applies to all *goyim*, however, most *rishonim* and *poskim* take on that it applies to all *goyim*. *Tosfos* in *Avodah Zarah* (20a), Rambam (*Hilchos Avodas Kochovim*, *perek* 10) and the *Smag* (mitzvah 38) all learn that it applies to all *goyim*.

Does *lo sachoneim* apply to all *goyim* or only one who serves *avodah zarah*?

From the *loshon* of the *Tur* and the Rambam who both say: **אסור ליתן מתנת חנם לעובד ע"ז** – "It's forbidden to give a free gift to a ***goy who serves avodah zarah***" it would seem that the *issur of lo sachoneim* only applies to a *goy* who serves *avodah zarah*, however, the *Beis Yosef* (*Choshen Mishpot* 249) speaks out that the *Tur* who writes **אסור ליתן מתנת חנם לעובד ע"ז**, isn't coming to exclude *Yishmoalim* (Muslims) which don't serve *avodah zarah* as they also believe in one G-d, rather it's coming to exclude a *goy* who keeps the seven *mitzvos*. Similarly the *Shach* (*Yoreh Deah*) *paskens* that the *issur* of giving free gifts to *goyim* applies to all *goyim*, even if they aren't from the *sheva umos* and even if they don't serve *avodah zarah*.

So what is the *heter* to give a *goy* a gift before his holiday?

Tosfos in *Avodah Zarah* asks, how can the Mishnah in *Gittin* say that one is allowed to give *tzedakah* to a *goy* at the same time that he gives *tzedakah* to a Jew, surely there is an *issur of lo sachoneim*? *Tosfos* answers, that if one is doing it because of *darchei sholam*, to make peace between the Jews and the *goyim* then it's allowed.

We see from *Tosfos* that if one gives a gift to a *goy* for an ulterior motive, i.e. so that his car mechanic does a speedy job on fixing his car, then there is no *issur*. Based on this, we can understand why the *Terumas HaDeshen* isn't bothered with the *issur of lo sachoneim* when giving a priest or government official a gift before his holiday. Since he is doing it to make peace between the *goyim* and the *Yidden* there is no *issur* involved.

We see from the above *Terumas HaDeshen* two things, 1) The usage of the word *nitel* and 2) That nowadays one is allowed to send a free gift a non-Jew before his holiday.

[In *Maaseh Ish* (Volume 3, page. 168), a story is brought down about the Chazon Ish. The ChaZon Ish would never read or touch newspapers. One time he had to read something in the paper which was written by the Winston Churchill, the wartime prime minister of England. They brought him the newspaper and he didn't want to touch it all. He told them to put the paper down on the table, the Chazon Ish then took off his glasses and started reading. After he finished they removed the paper without the Chazon Ish touching it. After reading the article the Chazon Ish said how Churchill was a very successful *goy*.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 10:4) *paskens*: **וכן אסור לספר בשבחן ואפילו לומר כמה נאה עובד כוכבים זה בצורתו קל וחומר שיספר** – "...similarly it's forbidden to say praises about a *goy*, even saying something such as how beautiful the appearance of a *goy* is, is forbidden. All the more so, to praise the actions of a *goy*...".

It's clear from the above Rambam that it's forbidden to praise a *goy*, how come the Chazon Ish praised Churchill?

We can't answer that the Chazon Ish learns like the *rishonim* who say the *issur of lo sachoneim* only applies to the *sheva umos*, as the Chazon Ish himself, in *Sheviis* (*siman* 24) brings *rayas* that the *issur of lo sachoneim* applies to all *goyim*.

However, perhaps we can answer based on a Gemara in *Avodah Zarah*. The Gemara says, it's forbidden to praise a *goy*. The Gemara then asks: If praising a *goy* is forbidden, how could Reb Shimon ben Gamliel make a *berachah* on a beautiful looking *goy*, מה רבו ה' מעשיך – "How great are Your creations Hashem"? The Gemara answers: **להודות לדי' יתברך שרי** – "To give thanks to Hashem is allowed".

Perhaps we can say the same thing by us, and say that the Chazon Ish wasn't praising Churchill, he was simply praising Hashem for the fact that he created someone so clever, however, he wasn't praising Churchill.]

Additional reasons for why *nitel* is called so

We mentioned above that one of the reasons why *nitel* is called so, is because it refers to the one who was hung.

Various *seforim* that mention the word *nitel* spell the word in different ways. Some spell it *nun, yud, tof, lamed*. This spelling is apropos to the previous explanation that refers to someone who was hanged, as the word “*toluy*” is also spelled with a *tof*. Others replace the *tof* with a *tes*, which brings us to the next explanation.

Some maintain that the word *nitel* is from the Hebrew expression *netilah*, as in *netilas lulav* – taking the *lulav*. In this context it refers to Yeishu who was taken from the world.

There are those who suggest that the word *nitel* hints to the fact that one should not learn, for if we jumble its letters, they form the abbreviation of: Yidden, *torn nisht lernen* – Jews! We are not all allowed to learn (*Nitei Gavriel*, Chanukah p. 392).

Some explain that *nitel* comes from the Latin word *natal* – birthday, referring to the fact that Yeishu was born that day (*Nitei Gavriel*).

Why should one not be allowed to learn until midnight on the 25th of December?

One reason is brought down in the *sefer Darkei Chaim VeSholam* which is a *sefer* which brings down the *minhogim* of the *Minchas Elozar* (the Munkatcher Rov). He writes, that he didn't learn on *nitel nacht*, didn't take *kvitlach* from his *chasidim* and refrained from various other things as well. However, he writes that the above applies on the night of January the 6th and not December the 25th.

What's January the 6th? The *Minchas Elozar* had things more precise than the *goyim*. January the 6th is nothing to do with *choga*, rather it's to do with *tefukas Teves*. There are four *tekufos* in the year, one of them is *tekufas Teves* and in *kabbolah* is referred to as a “*koach azoh l'klippas*”. There is a certain *koach hatumah* [power of impurity] in the world known as *klippas* and on the night of *tekufas Teves* they are very strong, as a result the *Minchas Elozar* didn't learn, didn't take *kvitlach* and refrained from various other things aswell.

Why January the 6th, *tekufas Teves* is on December the 25th ?

Really *tefukas Teves* is on December the 25th except in the year 1582 when Pope Gregory changed the calendar after realizing that there was a discrepancy in the solar calendar which until then was counted as 365 and $\frac{1}{4}$ days when in truth it was 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes and 46 seconds. Over a few thousand years the discrepancy added up and in 1582 they decreed that on October the 5th they would add 15 days onto the calendar, the result being that in the times of the *Minchas Elozar* instead of *tekufas Teves* being on December the 25th it was on January the 6th.

After the above incident there was a *machlokes* amongst the *goyim* as to when *choga* should be kept, the Roman Catholics who followed Pope Gregory kept *choga* on December the 25th, however, the Greek Orthodox and the Russian Orthodox celebrated and continues until today to celebrate *choga* on January the 6th.

According to the *Minchas Elozar* not learning on *nitel* isn't so much to do with *choga*, rather, it's to do with the *kochas hatumah* that are present on the night of *tekufas Teves* which is January the 6th.

Why should the strong *kochas hatumah* be a reason not to learn, on the contrary one should learn more?

The *Be'ar HeTeiv* (*Orach Chaim* 571) writes: שחוזר עד בקליפות כח מוסיף כח בעו"ה רשע בעודו שלומד בתורה וטורה שלומד בעודו רשע בעו"ה מוסיף כח בקליפות עד שחוזר – “One should know, that any act that a person does, and any Torah that one learns whilst he is a *rosha*, adds *kochas* [strength] to the *klippas hatumah* in the world, until one does *teshuva* which removes the *kochas* from the *klippas*.”

Since we aren't *tzadikim* and even if one learns he doesn't learn entirely *lishma* and even if one does *mitzvos* he doesn't do them properly, consequently, the *kochas hatumah* feed of the little bit of *kedusha* that comes from our learning and our *mitzvos*. Throughout the year we aren't worried about this so much, as Hashem in his kindness accepts our Torah and *mitzvos*, but on the night of *tekufas Teves* when the *kochas hatumah* are very strong, if we learn and do *mitzvos* without the correct intentions the *klippas* will feed off it, therefore, there is a *minhag* not to learn that night.

According to all the above, not learning is nothing to do with *choga*, rather it's to do with *tekufas Teves* and *tumah*. Some say, the only reason Yoshki was able to be born this time of year, is because the *kochas hatumah* are so strong that they facilitated his birth.

A second reason for not learning on *nitel nacht*

Another reason brought down for the *minhag* not to learn on *nitel nacht* is brought down from the Chasam Sofer in his *Igros Sofrim*. The Chasam Sofer brings from his Rebbe that the reason we don't learn on the night of *nitel* is because ה' ישרים משמחי לב, the Torah makes one very happy and on the night of December the 25th something terrible happened for the Yidden, the birth of Yoshki, which caused lots of *tzoras* for the Yidden, since something terrible happened Klal Yisroel are in a state of mourning and therefore we don't learn, just like an *oval* doesn't learn.

The Chasam Sofer then asks, if the above is the reason, why don't we learn *devorim hamutorim* [things that an *oval* is allowed to learn], why is the *minhag* that we don't learn at all? Moreover, if the reason is because of mourning, why should there be a difference between before *chatzos* and after? On Tisha B'Av learning is forbidden the entire day?

The Chasam Sofer adds that there was an additional reason for not learning. On the night of December the 25th, the *goyim* used to have the *minhag* to go to church at midnight, what would the Ribbono Shel Olam think about Klal Yisroel if all the *goyim* are up late at night busy praying to their *avodah zorah's* and the *Yidden* are all fast asleep in their beds? They would be a terrible *kitrug* on Klal Yisroel, to avoid this *kitrug* the *minhag* was established that one isn't allowed to learn until midnight on the night leading up to December the 25th. If a good Jew isn't allowed to learn until midnight, what does he do? He goes to bed early, and makes sure to wake up at midnight and start learning to make up for the lost learning. This is how the *minhag* became to not learn anything at all on *nitel nacht*, by not learning anything at all, it indirectly caused people to get up a midnight and learn, the same time that the *goyim* are going to church, which would help save the *kitrug* on Klal Yisroel.

A third reason

An even more practical for not learning on *nitel nacht* is brought down in the *Moriah* from R' Yosef Liberman. He says that the *mekor* is based on a *Rema* brought down in the *Shulchan Aruch*. The *Rema* writes, if a Jew walks into a non-Jewish city on the day or the night of one of their *Yomim Tovim* and they are all having a good time, and if the Jew doesn't participate he will cause hatred between the Jews and the *goyim*, he is allowed to rejoice with them.

In Europe people didn't learn at home, they would work in the day and at night they would go to the *Beis HaMedrash* to learn. How would it look in the eyes of the *goyim* if the Jews were busy learning in *shul* and not participating in their *Yom Tov*, they would have a great hatred towards the Jews, as a result the *minhag* became not fill up the *Beis HaMedrash* on the night of the 25th.

Moreover, what happens after a *goy* has a few drinks and sees a *Yid* learning in the *Beis HaMedrash*, he starts to think who caused *Yoshki* to be killed etc. and he will probably start attacking the *Yidden*, therefore, the *minhag* became not to learn on *nitel nacht*.

Differences between the different reasons

According to the Chasam Sofer, there is nothing wrong with learning *devorim hamutorim* and one is allowed to learn, he just needs to make sure to learn after midnight as well. Moreover, according to the Chasam Sofer, the *inyan* of not learning is specifically on the night where the *goyim* fill their churches, and so if they fill their churches on the 25th one needs to learn after midnight on the 25th. If however, one lives in a Slovakian country, where they celebrate January the 6th, then one has to make sure to learn after midnight on January the 6th.

According to the *Minchas Elozar*, the *inyan* of not learning isn't to do with *choga*, rather it's to do with *tekufas Teves*, which is on January the 6th, therefore one shouldn't learn until midnight after midnight however, if he wants he can learn if he doesn't want to he doesn't need to, whereas according to the Chasam Sofer, one needs to learn specifically at midnight.

Eretz Yisroel

In Eretz Yisroel the *minhag* not to learn on *nitel nacht* doesn't exist, or at least until the European *Rabbonim* came to Eretz Yisroel. According to the reason of the Chasam Sofer and R' Liberman it makes sense, as in Eretz Yisroel there was never a large group of *goyim* therefore, there would be no *kitrug* and the *goyim* wouldn't hate the *Yidden* if the *shul's* and *Botei Midroshim* are full.

Can a school give winter holidays between December the 25th and January the 1st?

R' Moshe Feinstein has a *Teshuvah* in which he discusses if it permissible for a school to give a winter holiday between December the 25th and January the 1st. He says, it's obvious that one shouldn't have it at this time of year, and even though the parents aren't intending to rejoice with the *goyim*, and it's simply an ideal time to have a holiday as the parents are off work, it's not a good thing to have a holiday at a time where the *goyim* are busy celebrating with their *avodah zora's*, therefore, *chas vesholam* for a school to take off during such a time.

How to occupy the time?

If one has the *minhag* of not learning on *nitel nacht*, what should he do?

We find several practices among the *gedolei* Yisroel: 1) As we mentioned earlier in the name of the Chasam Sofer, one should go to sleep until *chatzos* and then wake up and learn the rest of the night; 2) Some had the *minhag* of playing chess, as this was an intellectually oriented pastime; 3) There were those who occupied themselves with financial calculations; 4) and some dealt with community issues (*Sefer Nitei Gavriel*, pg. 403-408).

There was also a custom to play cards on *nitel nacht*. Although many *gedolim* justified this practice, many spoke out very strongly against it. The *Ksav Sofer* (*Droshos* vol. I, pg. 75) bemoaned the situation that on such a terrible day of calamity for Klal Yisroel, people would sit and play games. Others write that even if people wish to rely on the actions of certain great people who did play cards, who

is to say that they did not have some higher intent that common people have no concept of? According to some, card playing was only permitted for those who did not know how to learn and if they did not play, they would commit more serious transgressions, however, *bnei Torah* may not play under any circumstances (*Shu"t Chavos Yoiv* 126; *Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Kovetz Teshuvos*, 31-32; Moriah article; *Sefer Moadim LeSimcha*, pp. 418-420).

According to Rav Shalom of Belz, until *chatzos* one should occupy himself with thinking about the greatness of Hashem and attempt to cling to Him as much as possible. In this way he can counteract the negative spiritual forces. Based on this some suggest learning *mussar* or reading stories of *tzadikim* as this is a method of improving one's ways and coming closer to Hashem (Moriah article).

The *Kedushas HaLevi* writes very strongly against it. He says: Due to our many sins, a terrible breach has been made among Acheinu Beis Yisroel to play with cards. It's a light thing in their eyes, but it's known that in each card there is definitely a big *klipa*... There are many downfalls from this: 1) You lose fear of Hashem; 2) In my eyes you are definitely a thief; 3) You make yourself *tomei* with *klippas* that shouldn't even be mentioned. (*Kedushas HaLevi, Chanukah – "Yadua"*)

The *Chidushei HaRim* of Ger said over the following story one Chanukah night by candle lighting: One Chanukah, someone gave the *Chozeh* of Lublin a *kvitel* with the name of a friend on it. The *Chozeh* looked at it and spit. A while later he handed the *kvitel* to the *Chozeh* again. This time the *Chozeh* looked at the name and said: "this person is illuminating the world". He then added: "before, when you handed me the *kvitel*, your friend was playing cards; now he's lighting the Chanukah *menorah*."

Some interesting stories

1) It is reported that the *Maharsha* didn't learn on the night of *nitel nacht* and he involved himself with calculating his *ma'aser* money accounts. It is related that someone informed the government that the *Maharsha* hated the Christians, and claimed that the proof to this was that he did not learn on *nitel nacht* because the air was impure. That evening the *Maharsha* was in his study examining his accounts and a *sefer* fell off the shelf. He replaced it, but it fell again. This occurred three times and he realized that there was something unusual going on. He opened the *sefer* in order to examine it, and at that moment the police and the informer burst into the room. They saw the *Maharsha* learning and they took the informer away (*Moadim LeSimcha*, pg. 416).

2) The author of *Orchos Rabbeinu* relates the following (vol. I, pg. 193): when he came to learn his regular session with the Steipler and informed him that it was *nitel nacht*, the Steipler told him that, if so, they would "talk in learning" and not learn from a *sefer*. This was because the Steipler was concerned not to make a *chilul* Hashem, as it once occurred that someone who came to the Steipler on *nitel nacht* was surprised to see him learning. When that happened, the Steipler apologetically said that he had not been aware that it was *nitel nacht*. The author reports however, if the Steipler was learning in a place where no one would see him, he learned from a *sefer*. Additionally, the Steipler instructed him that in the future he was not to tell him that it was *nitel nacht*. The Steipler also reported that the Chazon Ish held it was forbidden to abandon one's learning on *nitel nacht*.

3) The *Chidushei HaRim* once related that a priest asked Rav Yonason Eibeshutz the following question: The Jews maintain that the whole world exists because of their Torah learning. If so, if no one is learning on *nitel nacht*, how does the world continue to function? Rav Eibshitz responded, *minhag Yisroel Torah hi* – keeping the Jewish customs is itself Torah! The custom of not learning is the Torah that keeps the world going.

4) There is another story related that a *talmid chocham* once found a great man learning on *nitel nacht*. In response to his visitor's question as to why he was learning on that night, the great man answered, "I wanted to see what the *gehenom* of those who learn on *nitel* is like." The *talmid chocham* retorted, "I am sure that there is no *gehenom* for learning on *nitel nacht*, but for belittling a *minhag* Yisroel there certainly is *gehenom*." The great man accepted the rebuke and closed his *sefer*.

Whether one has the *minhag* to keep *nitel nacht* or not, one has to remember not to get carried away and do things which are *ossur* according to halachah. If one doesn't have the *minhag* then he should make sure to learn properly and make sure to make up for the lack of learning in the world and should bare in mind that if one learns at a time when others don't he is **ניטל שכר כנגד כולם**.

(After spending a decent amount of time on writing out the above in honour of the fact that this year *nitel nacht* falls out on Friday night, someone was *me'orer* to me that some say that Shabbos overrides the issue. He never gave me a good reason but I looked around and I found that some say Shabbos overrides the issue, since as the *Zohar* recited by some on Friday night says, וכל דינין מנה מתעברין מנה – "all harsh judgments go away in the face of Shabbos". Others, however, keep this custom even on Friday night, though they will sing *zemiros*, tell stories of *tzadikim*, or the like, instead of the regular *divrei Torah*.)

Divrei Torah for the Shabbos Table

We are all unique

In his first comment on *Parshas Shemos*, Rashi writes that although Hashem had already counted the Jews who descended to Egypt by name during their lifetimes, He did so again after they died to make known how much He loves the Jewish people, who are compared to stars that are also brought in and out by name and number. While this comparison is intended to be complimentary, Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman questions what in fact is so praiseworthy about being likened to stars. If Rashi had written that we are as

numerous as the stars, that would indeed be admirable, but what is so special and praiseworthy about being compared to stars? Further, what is the significance of individual stars having names, and how is this relevant to us?

Rav Aharon Leib explains that the purpose of names is to differentiate between objects. Therefore, we do not give names to items unless they are unique; when things are identical, we do not use names to distinguish between them. For example, if a person has 20 cans of Coke in front of him, they all have the same name, as there is no difference between one can of Coke and the can next to it. However, if a person has 20 different flavors of soda in front of him, then he will call one Coke, one Sprite, one diet, etc., because names are used to differentiate between items.

With this insight, we now understand that if Hashem gives names to the stars, it must be because no two stars are identical, and each star has its own unique purpose. Rav Yisroel Reisman notes that the *Gemara (Berachos 59a)* teaches that when Hashem wanted to bring the flood to punish Noach's generation, He did so by removing two stars from the tail of the *mazul* called Kimah, and the absence of those two stars somehow set the flood and its destruction in motion. Although all stars look identical to us and we are incapable of discerning the differences between them, the fact that each has its own name teaches us that each has its own unique purpose.

Similarly, when one looks around at other Jews, especially if he lives in a sizeable community, it is easy to think that we are all the same. Although we recognize that people have their own likes and dislikes and idiosyncrasies, as far as our underlying role in the world, it sometimes feels like we all have the same job and are all doing the same thing. Rashi teaches us that this perspective is mistaken. Just like the stars, we each have our own names, because we each have our own unique mission in this world, and we should not compare ourselves to anybody else. Rav Tzaddok beautifully writes that just as there is a mitzvah to have *emunah* (faith) in Hashem, so too a person must also have *emunah* in himself and believe that he has a unique function and inimitable relationship with Hashem.

In *Parshas Vayechi*, when Yaakov blessed his grandsons Ephraim and Menashe, he crossed his hands in order to place his stronger right hand on the younger Ephraim and his weaker left hand on the older Menashe (*Bereishis 48:14*). Many *meforshim* question why Yaakov didn't simply switch their positions so that he could extend his hands straight across from him. Rav Reisman suggests that Yaakov was hinting to us that rather than trying to change a child to fit our needs, we must instead adapt ourselves to deal with the child as he is. Every child has his own name and mission, with his own unique talents and weaknesses, and the job of a responsible parent (or in this case, grandparent) is to adjust his hands and approach according to the child and his individual needs.

Although we often find ourselves feeling lost in the crowd, it is important to remember that Hashem does not see a crowd, but rather a collection of many individuals, each with their own unique name and purpose. To illustrate this concept, Rav Reisman notes that when a parent goes to graduation and there are 100 or more graduates on stage, the parent only focuses on his beloved child, almost as if the other children are not even there. A few years ago, a new *succah* poster came out, displaying a panoramic image of MetLife stadium during the 2012 *siyum hashas*. The person selling the poster made an unusual offer: Anybody who could locate himself in the picture could have it for free, a task which was nearly impossible for a human, but comes easily to Hashem, Who lovingly focuses on every single one of us, with our own unique name and life mission, as if we were His only child. (R' Ozer Alport)

The deeper meaning of אשר לא ידע את יוסף - "Who did not know Yosef"

Towards the beginning of this week's *sedra* the *pasuk* says: ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים אשר לא ידע את יוסף - "And a new king arose in Egypt who did not know Yosef" (*Shemos 1:8*). The simple meaning of "who did not know Yosef" is he either **acted like** he did not know Yosef or he **purposely forgot** about him. However there is perhaps a deeper meaning in the words as well.

We learn in these next several *parshiyos* what a terrible person Pharaoh was. Besides throwing all male children into the Nile, *Chazal* go so far as to say that Pharaoh became a leper and (based on conventional medical wisdom of those days) would bathe in the blood of children as a supposed cure for the disease. He would slaughter Jewish children and bathe in their blood. Words are insufficient to describe the wickedness of this murderous tyrant.

Yet, the first indictment the Torah levels at Pharaoh was that "he did not know Yosef." He forgot what this great and righteous individual did for his country and denied that Egypt owed Yosef or his descendants any gratitude. Any person with a shred of decency would say "How could I do this to the Jewish people? If not for them, we would all have starved to death." Pharaoh's decline into the terrible things he later did began with the fact that he was not a *makir tova*. He did not recognize the kindness he owed the Jewish people. He didn't remember the favor that Yosef did for him.

This is the simple meaning of "who did not know Yosef". But there is a deeper intent as well. In *Parshas Vayeishev*, when Yosef was being seduced by Potiphar's wife, the *pasuk* says he left his garment in her hands. The Ramban there asks: Yosef was obviously stronger than Potiphar's wife. The garment that he left in her hands provided the incriminating evidence against him. Why did he not simply grab the shirt from her so that she would not have any evidence that he tried to "attack" her. He could have saved himself from all those years in jail!

The Ramban says an incredible thing: Out of respect to his master's wife, he refused to grab his garment back from her. He felt it would be ungrateful on his part to rudely and violently grab something out of the hands of a woman whose husband took him into their home and provided him with food and shelter.

We thus have a study in contrast: Yosef *HaTzadik* is willing to risk his entire future because he feels a sense of *hakaras hatov* and gratitude to Potiphar and his wife. He is willing to end up in jail rather than be rude to his master's wife. This is one end of the spectrum. Pharaoh is at the other end of the spectrum. He is willing to kill the Jewish people, the family of Yosef, and ignore the great debt of gratitude he should have had for this nation.

This gives us a deeper understanding of what the Torah means when it says about the Egyptian king "who did not know Yosef." He did not have an understanding of what it means to be a Yosef. Yosef was someone to whom Pharaoh could simply not relate on a spiritual level!

You can never know what the future descendants might turn out to be

After Moshe sees an Egyptian beating a Jew, the *pasuk* says: בחול ויטמנהו ויך את המצרי ויטמנהו בחול - "and he looked this way and that, and he saw that there was no man, and he smote the Egyptian and he buried him in the sand." (Shemos 2:12). Moshe Rabbeinu killed the Egyptian who was beating the Jew. Rashi elaborates on the words "and he looked this way and that, and saw that there was no man": Moshe (prophetically) peered into the future and determined that no righteous person was destined to descend from this Egyptian.

The Brisker Rav asks the following question: What difference does it make if a righteous person was destined to descend from this Egyptian? If the Egyptian was deserving of the death penalty for striking a Jew, then who cares if he will have righteous descendants? A Jewish court does not pardon the sins of ancestors based on the merits of future offspring. And if he was not deserving of the death penalty for his actions, we certainly would not execute him merely because he was not going to have a righteous descendant!

The Brisker Rav answers by citing the Rashi on *pasuk* 14: When Moshe Rabbeinu killed this Egyptian he executed him by using the *shem HaMeforash* [the Ineffable Name of the Almighty]. A person is normally prohibited from pronouncing this Name, but if he has those powers, he can literally kill someone by invoking the *Shem HaMeforash* against him. Why did Moshe utilize this method of execution?

The Brisker Rav explains by quoting a Rambam: "An idolater who smites a Yisroel, even though he is deserving of death, is not executed" (*Hilchos Melochim* 10:6). This is based on a Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (58b): "Rav Chanina says, an idolater who strikes a Yisroel is deserving of death, as it is written, 'and he turned this way and that and saw that there was no man and he smote the Egyptian.'" However, the Rambam *paskens* that although he is deserving of death, we do not execute him. The *Kesef Mishnah* there explains that the Rambam means that the idolater receives the death penalty "at the Hand of Heaven." We do not prosecute him, but Hashem will take care of him.

Based on this *Kesef Mishnah*, the Brisker Rav says that is why Moshe killed the Egyptian with the *Shem haMeforash*. Utilizing the Name of G-d to kill the Egyptian was a form of "execution by the Hand of Heaven."

The Brisker Rav explains that now we understand what Rashi means when he says that Moshe looked and saw that a righteous person would not descend from this person. In earthly courts, we certainly do not take into account who the future descendants of a person are when determining whether or not to punish him for a given crime. In "death at the Hand of Heaven," however, these are exactly the type of calculations that Hashem takes into account when determining if and when to carry out the punishment of "death at the Hand of Heaven."

In connection with this insight of the Brisker Rav, I would like to relate an interesting incident which I heard from R' Yissocher Frand:

There was once an outstanding *bochur* who got married in Lakewood. The Roshei Yeshiva and many of the distinguished students of the *yeshiva* came to his *sheva berochos*. The *chosson* said a nice *dvar Torah* during the meal. It was now the end of the *sheva berochos* meal, and the grandfather of the *chosson* asked for permission to speak.

The grandfather of the *chosson* was an *am ha'aretz* (opposite of a *talmid chochom*). He knew nothing. The *chosson* began squirming in his chair. "What is my grandfather going to say? The Rosh Yeshivas are all here. I am going to be so embarrassed!" But after all, he was the *zeida*. It is not possible to tell a *zeida* that he cannot speak at his grandson's *sheva berochos*.

The *zeida* (who was from Europe) got up and spoke to the gathering:

I would like to relate an incident that happened in Europe. There was a young boy in Europe who attended *cheder*. He was a *chevremán* [a mischief maker]. One Monday morning, before anyone was in *shul*, this boy took a goat and put it into the *aron kodesh*. When it came time for *krias haTorah*, the *gabbah* opened the *aron kodesh* to take out a *sefer Torah*. Lo and behold, a goat jumped out! The people in *shul* were outraged. They traced the criminal act back to this mischievous boy.

The principal of the *cheder* came to the boy's parents and said, "This is the last straw! This time your son has gone too far. We are throwing him out of the school." The boy then went to the town *Rov* and told him, "I want to take the principal to a *din Torah* and demand that he accepts me back into school." The principal came to the *din Torah*. The *Rov* turned to the boy and asked, "What is your claim?" The boy responded, "There is only one *cheder* in this town. If I get thrown out of this *cheder*, what will become of me? Either I will go to some non-Jewish school and lose all connection to *yiddishkeit*, or I will wander the streets and lose all connection to *yiddishkeit*, and then my children will not have any connection to *yiddishkeit*. My grandchildren will not have any

connection to *yiddishkeit*! True, maybe I deserve to be thrown out of school. However, can you say that you have “looked this way and that way and saw that in the future no person will descend from me”? What is going to be with my descendants? What is going to be with my children and my grandchildren? This principal is sentencing them that they should all be irreligious Jews. That is not right! How can you sentence my children and grandchildren to a life without Torah?”

The principal said, “You are right,” and he accepted the boy back into school.

The *zeida* concluded, “Ani Yosef! I am that boy! I am that mischievous boy who put the goat in the *aron kodesh*. Now, look at my *ainekel* [grandson]. Look at this *illui* [brilliant prodigy]! See what happens! You never know who might come out from someone.”

Moshe Rabbeinu had *ruach hakodesh*. He could say, “and he saw that there was no man (destined to emerge from him).” But the average person can never know. A person never knows with his children, one never knows with his *talmidim* one never knows with his classmates and peers. That is why it is essential to always proceed with caution in all matters of discipline, and certainly in “life and death matters” such as expulsion.

Important lesson to learn from Pharaoh’s daughter

In this week *sedra* we have the story of Pharaoh’s daughter going down to the river and finding Moshe there in a box: ותרא את התבא זה בתוך הסוף ותשלח את אמתה ותקחה ותפתח ותראהו את הילד והנה נער בכה ותחמל עליו ותאמר מילדי העברים זה – “And she saw a box in the reeds and she stretched out her hand, and she took it and opened it up, and she saw a child. The child was crying, and she had pity on him, and she said “he is a Jewish child” (*Shemos* 2:5-6).

Rav Nissan Alpert in a *hesped* he gave for his beloved teacher R’ Moshe Feinstein he observed that many people complained that Rav Moshe was so overly generous in writing *haskomas* [letters of approbation] for newly-published *seforim* that they proved nothing and were essentially worthless. Rav Nissan suggested that Rav Moshe constantly acted based on his desire to do kindness and help another Jew rather than conducting himself according to the strict letter of the law. He therefore preferred to write *haskomas* whenever possible without extensively analyzing the text to confirm its merit and value.

Rav Alpert likened this philosophy to that which was exemplified by Pharaoh’s daughter. Upon descending to the river, she heard a crying infant and immediately went to assist him and remove him from the river. Only after acting with mercy and helping a baby in need did she pause to look at and identify the child as a Jewish infant.

When approached for a charitable contribution or to assist with our time, how many times do we first look over the beggar or analyse the worthiness of the organization and turn them away empty-handed due to a lack of perceived merits? Let us learn from the ways of Pharaoh’s daughter and Rav Moshe Feinstein that we should act first and foremost with kindness without extensive analysis of the recipient’s merit. This should arouse Hashem to reciprocate by similarly treating us with compassion without an in-depth examination of our merits. (R’ Ozer Alport)

Making sure not to use *bitul* Torah as an excuse

הוא אחר באו משה ואהרן ויאמרו אל פרעה – “Afterward, Moshe and Aharon came to Pharaoh and said...” (*Shemos* 5:1). As Rashi observes, the Torah indicates that only Moshe and Aharon approached Pharaoh, and not the *zekeinim* – the nation’s elders, whom Hashem had commanded Moshe to assemble and bring with him to Pharaoh. Rashi explains that one by one, the elders left Moshe and Aharon, and by the time Moshe and Aharon arrived at the palace, there were no *zekeinim* left. The *zekeinim* were punished for abandoning Moshe, Rashi adds, at the time of Matan Torah, when only Moshe was permitted to approach Hashem and the *zekeinim* were sent back: ונגש משה לבדו אל ה' והם לא יגשו – “Moshe alone shall approach Hashem; they [the elders] shall not approach” (*Shemos* 24:2).

The Tolner Rebbe relates that he once heard the *Beis Yisroel* pose the question of why, in fact, the *zekeinim* chose not to join Moshe and Aharon on their mission which was assigned to them by Hashem. He also asked why they were punished specifically by being turned away at the time of Matan Torah.

The *Beis Yisroel* answered that the *zekeinim* said to themselves, “We are Roshei Yeshiva, not *askonim* [lay leaders].” Going to speak to Pharaoh, they figured, would constitute *bitul* Torah, which they would not allow themselves. They therefore left, one by one, each to his *yeshiva* to deliver a *shiur* to his *talmidim*. They were punished specifically at the time of Matan Torah, by being sent away and not being invited together with Moshe. The message being conveyed is that if one fails to come to his fellow Jew’s aid in his time of distress with the excuse of *bitul* Torah, because he refuses to take time away from his learning, then his Torah is not truly Torah, and he regresses and falls to a lower spiritual stature.

This week sheet is dedicated in honour of Aharon Harris’s bar mitzvah. May he continue to me a source of *nachas* to all his family and friends. May he grow up to be a big *talmid chocham*, and may Hashem grant him with lots of *kochas* and all he needs to be able to busy himself with Torah and *mitzvos* until 120.

This week’s sheet wasn’t sponsored by anyone and so has been printed at a reduce scale, to ensure I can continue printing on a large scale please donate towards costs, thank you.