

למודי משה

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Insights into Halachah

Astrology and *mazul* in Halachah

In this week's *sedra* and last week's *sedra* we find that Pharaoh constantly sought advice from his astrologers and magicians. It's clear from here as well as in various other places that there is a power of astrology. Do we reckon with this power in halachah?

Gemara in Shabbos (156a)

There is a fascinating Gemara at the end of Shabbos (156a). The Gemara starts off by mentioning that the day of week one is born determines his nature. For example, if a person is born on Monday he will be an argumentative type of a person who doesn't get on with people. The reason being, that on the second day of creation Hashem split between the upper and the lower waters, and they had a fight with each other over it. Since on the second day of creation, *machlokes* came into the world, one who is born on Monday will be an argumentative type of a person. Similarly, if a person is born on Wednesday he will be wise and beautiful as on Wednesday the celestial bodies were created (*meorois*). The day one is born effects what his nature will be.

The Gemara continues, that the constellation (*mazul*) under which one is born also affects him. The Gemara says, if one is born under the influence of the planet Madim [Mars] then he will be a person who likes blood. The Gemara says, he can choose an either become a surgeon, bandit, butcher or a *mohel*, he can choose if he wants a job which is good or bad, but he will end up with a job that has some connection to blood.

The Gemara continues and brings the opinion of R' Chanina who says: מזל מחכים מזל מעשיר ויש מזל לישראל – "the constellation under which a person is born in determines if he will be wise or wealthy, and there is *mazel* for a Yisroel".

R' Yochanon argues and says אין מזל לישראל – "there is no *mazul* for a Yisroel". Meaning that Klal Yisroel have a direct connection with the Ribbono Shel Olam and even if a person is born under a bad *mazul* his future can be changed.

We could easily dismiss the above Gemara and say אין מזל לישראל, and the fact that someone is born under a certain *mazul* doesn't make a difference. However, from Rashi it's clear that that's not *pshat* in the Gemara. Rashi explains that יש מזל לישראל, means, if one is born under a certain *mazul*, even if he davens and gives lots of *tzedokah*, it won't help to change his *mazul*. Which would imply that the opinion which holds אין מזל לישראל, holds that if a person davens and gives *tzedokah* he can change his *mazul*, however, if a person doesn't do anything his *mazul* will stay as it is and it will affect him. Even the opinion which holds אין מזל לישראל, only maintains this if the person davens and increases in *tzedokah* in order to change his *mazul*.

What comes out is, both opinions agree that there is a *koach* [power] of astrology in the world, and depending under which constellation a person is born, his future can be determined. R' Chanina holds, יש מזל לישראל and there is nothing one can do to change his *mazul*. R' Yochanon argues and maintains אין מזל לישראל, and if one davens and gives *tzedokah* he can change his *mazul*.

The Gemara continues that Rav also holds אין מזל לישראל. By Avrohom Avinu the *pasuk* says: ויוצא אותו החוצה – "He took him outside". The Gemara explains, Avrohom looked into his astrological forecast and saw that he was unable to have a son. Hashem promised Avrohom that he would have a son, Avrohom however was very bothered as his astrological forecast showed that he was unable to have a son. Hashem told Avrohom, צא מאיצטגנינות שלך – "leave your astrological forecast", don't worry about what the stars say, as אין מזל לישראל.

The Gemara continues with some stories which show how אין מזל לישראל. The Gemara relates that R' Akiva had a daughter and some stargazers came and told him, that the day she gets married she is going to be bitten by a snake and die. On the day of her *chasunah* she removed some type of silver ornament from her hair and stuck it into a hole in the wall and without noticing she entered it directly into the eyes of a snake. The next day when she took her ornament to put on, she realized that there was a dead snake on the end of it. R' Akiva asked his daughter what special act she had done to deserve such a miracle. She answered, last night at the *chasunah* a poor hungry man knocked at the door but everyone was involved in their food and they never noticed him, however, I noticed him, and I took my portion of food and gave it to him. After hearing this R' Akiva said: וצדקה תציל ממות – "Giving *tzedokah* can save one from death", means not only one will be saved from an unusual death, it means one will be saved even from death itself." We see that the stargazers prediction was correct.

Another story the Gemara relates that demonstrates **אין מזל לישראל** is, that some astrologers told R' Nachman bar Yitzchok's mother, that her son will be a thief. R' Nachman's mother made sure that he never uncovered his head. She said to her son: "Cover your head so that *yiras* Shomayim will be upon you, and daven for mercy". He never knew why she said this to him. One day he was sitting and learning underneath a palm tree (that didn't belong to him) and a his head covering fell off his head. He lifted his eyes and saw the palm tree. He was overcome by impulse and he climbed up and detached a bunch of dates with his teeth. We see that he was born under the *mazul* which gave him the tendency to steal, but since **אין מזל לישראל**, he was able to overcome it with good *chinuch* and lots of davening.

We see from the above Gemara that astrology and stargazing has meaning behind it and one needs to daven and give *tzedokah* to be saved from it.

Tosfos asks, that the Gemara in *Moed Kotan* (28a) says, בני חיי ומזוני – "children, life, and sustenance" aren't dependent on one's *zechusim* [merits], rather they are dependent on one's *mazul*, which sounds like one's *mazul* can't be changed, and in our Gemara we said one can change his *mazul*? *Tosfos* answers: בני חיי ומזוני, are dependent on one's *mazul*, however, if a person davens really hard, his *mazul* can be changed, like it says in our Gemara.

From the above Gemara it would seem quite clearly that there is a *koach* [power] behind astrology and not only does it affect the *goyim*, but it can even effect Jews as well.

Surely we have *bechira* [free will]?

From the above Gemara it seems that if a person for example is born under the *mazul* of Mars, he will be a person who likes blood, and is very likely to end up being a bandit and kill people. How does this fit in with the idea that a person has *bechira*, and has free will to choose what he wants to do in life?

The *Meiri* deals with the above difficulty. He writes: **איש ואיש** מיסודות האמונה להאמין שהבחירה ביד האדם בכל פעולותיו לעשות כרצון איש ואיש – "One of the foundations of *emunah* is to believe, that a person has free will in all his actions that he does, and each and every person has the ability to do as he wishes. Even if a person is born under a certain *mazul* and his *teva* [nature] is to spill blood and the like, he still has free will and he can put an end to his *mazul*."

In other words, if a person is born under a certain *mazul* he is more likely to do a certain act, however, it can be changed. If one is born on under the *mazul* of Madim (Mars) he is likely to become a bandit, but it's possible for him to change and use his passion for blood and become a *mohel*.

The *Meiri* continues and says something even more startling, he explains that when the Gemara says **יש מזל לישראל**, it doesn't really mean that a person is born with a certain *mazul* and it can't be changed, rather, the Gemara was bothered with the question of **לוי רשע וטוב לו**, צדיק ורע לו רשע וטוב לו, how it could be that *tzadikim* have such difficult lives, and *rashoim* have it so easy. In frustration to the above, the Gemara said **יש מזל לישראל**, meaning a Jew is born with a certain *mazul* and there is nothing he can do to change it, in reality however, we don't hold like this and really **אין מזל לישראל**.

The *Teshuvos HaGeonim* goes even further and concludes that even *goyim* have *bechirah*. Although the Gemara only mentions that *yidden* can change their *mazul*, the same thing must be by *goyim* as well, as if not how can a *goy* ever be held accountable for his actions. It may be more difficult for a *goy* to change his *mazul*, but it's possible.

What comes out so far is, there is a concept of *mazul* and depending under which *mazul* a person is born, will determine the way a person is more inclined to turn out. It also comes out that astrology means something. However, a person can work on himself, daven, give *tzedokah* and do *maasim tovim* [good deeds] and change his *mazul*.

Contradiction between two *sugyos*

The Gemara in *Pesochim* (113b) says: **מנין שאין שואלין בכלדיים שנאמר תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך** – "How do we know, that it's forbidden to ask stargazers for advice? Because it says in the *pasuk* 'you shall be completely faithful with Hashem your G-d'". From the Gemara in *Pesochim* it's clear that one isn't allowed to believe in stargazers prediction, how can we reconcile this with the Gemara in Shabbos which seems to say that R' Akiva, R' Nachman's mother and even Avrohom Avinu did believe in it?

Similarly the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (65b) discusses the *issur* of **לא תעוננו** and brings a three way *machlokes* as to what exactly the *issur* is. The third opinion the Gemara brings is R' Akiva, he learns that the *issur* of **לא תעוננו** is: **זה המחשב עתים ושעות ואומר היום** – "one who predicts things based on time, and says, today is good to go out, and tomorrow is good to buy, etc." The Gemara is saying that there is an *issur* to do things according to astronomical predictions. The Rambam (*Hilchos Avodah Zorah* 11:8) *paskens* like R' Akiva and says it's forbidden to do things based on astronomical predictions. (The Rambam also *paskens* like the other two *pshotim* in the Gemara. The *Bartenura* speaks out that all three *p'shotim* agree with each other and therefore there it's not contradictory to *pasken* like all three *pshotim*.)

What comes out is, there seems to be a big contradiction. From the Gemara in Shabbos it would seem that one is allowed to listen to astronomical prediction's and do things accordingly, however, from the Gemara in *Pesochim* and *Sanhedrin* it would seem that it's *ossur*, how can we reconcile these contradictory Gemara's?

Big *machlokes* between Rambam and Ramban

To answer the above contraction there is two very different approaches, the approach of the Rambam and the approach of the Ramban. The Rambam in *Sefer HaMitzvos (lo saseh 32)* writes, that there is an *issur de'O'raisa* to follow astronomical predictions and to say, on such a day is good to do X, and on such day it's terrible to do Y. If one transgresses on the above he has transgressed on an *issur de'O'raisa* and receives *malkus* [lashes]. According to the Rambam, listening to an astrologer is just as much of an *issur* as eating *chazor*. Similarly the Rambam *maskens* in *Hilchos Avodah Zorah (11:8-9)* that it's forbidden to follow astronomical predictions, and if one does he receives *malkus*.

At the end of *Perek 11* the Rambam writes, astrology is *sheker vechosav* [a bunch of lies] and Klal Yisroel which are a wise nation shouldn't believe in such rubbish, and it shouldn't even cross one's mind that such things are true. The Rambam continues, that one who believes in such things and says astronomical predictions are true but what can I do, the Torah forbade it, is being foolish and is acting like a child who doesn't have proper *daas* [knowledge] (when it comes to lobsters, it's ok to say lobsters are delicious but what can I do the Torah forbids it, by astrology one shouldn't say this). Anyone who has a bit of sense, will see clearly that astrology is a load of rubbish.

What's with the Gemara in Shabbos and how come Avrohom Avinu listened to astrological predictions?

The Rambam in *Sefer HaMitzvos* and in *Yad HaChazokah* doesn't say anything, however, in a letter he wrote to the *Chachmay Tzorfas* he deals with the above. The *Chachmay Tzorfas* asked him about listening to astrology and he replied that they should look at what he writes in *Yad Chazokah*. Then he says, what about the Gemara in Shabbos and Avrohom Avinu? He says, either the Gemara is just a *moshul* and we shouldn't take it literally or we don't *masken* like the Gemara in Shabbos.

The Ramban in *Teshuvos (Teshuvos HaRashbah Meyucheses 283)* says the exact opposite to the Rambam. He writes, the *koach* [power] of *mazolois* is very great and one who just ignores it is relying on miracles. It's clear from the Gemara in Shabbos that *mazolois* have a *koach*, as Avrohom Avinu, R' Akiva and the mother of R' Nachman were all worried about it. However, many times Hashem performs hidden miracles and protects us and changes one's *mazul*.

The Ramban then discusses if one is allowed to consult with astrologers, and he says one shouldn't as one is supposed to be תמים עם ה' אלקיך, trusting in Hashem. Therefore, there is no contradiction, as true there is a *koach*, however, one is supposed to be תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך and not consult astrologers.

Although one isn't supposed to consult astrologers, the Ramban speaks out, that if one does find out astronomical predictions he should be worried about them and he should increase in *tzedokah* and *maasim tovim*. If so, how did R' Akiva and the mother of R' Nachman find out about astronomical predictions? We have to say, they didn't try and find out, rather they were told, and once they were told, they had to be careful and worry about them.

What comes out is, one shouldn't consult with astrologers, if however one does find out, he should be worried about the prediction and should increase in *tzedokah* and *maasim tovim* to help change them, and if a person finds out that such and such a day isn't good for him to do business, he should refrain from doing business on that day as one isn't allowed to rely on open miracles.

So we have a major *machlokes* between the Rambam and the Ramban, the Rambam holds that astrology is a load of rubbish and one who believes in it has no *seichal* [knowledge], and the Ramban holds astrology is something and if one finds out something he has to be worried about it. It's important to note, that even according to the Ramban it could be that astrology today is nothing like it used to be and perhaps today even the Ramban will agree that it's has no validity.

How do we *masken*?

The *Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 179:1)* *maskens*, that one shouldn't consult with astrologers and the *Rema* adds, that the reason is because of תמים תהיה עם ה' אלקיך. In 179:2, the *Shulchan Aruch* says, if one happens to know that a certain time has bad *mazul* he should be worried for it, one shouldn't ask, but if he finds out, he should be worried for it, like the Ramban. The Gaon says that the *mekor* [source] for what to do about astronomical predictions is the aforementioned Gemara at the end of Shabbos.

Starting *zman* on Rosh Chodesh

Based on the fact that we *masken* like the Ramban, the *Rema* says, the *minhag* is that *yeshivos* start *zman* on Rosh Chodesh. Since there is a *koach* behind *mazolois* and we know that Rosh Chodesh has a good *mazul* we try and start *zman* then. Therefore, those *bochurim* who come to *zman* a day or two late, not only are they missing out on the *shlaimus* of a full *zman*, they are missing out on the good *mazul* that comes with starting on Rosh Chodesh!

Making kiddush between the sixth and seventh hour

After we have seen that we *pasken* like the Ramban that *mazoilas* do have *koach* we can understand the *minhag* of not making kiddush between the sixth and seventh hour of the day. The *Magen Avrohom* (271:1) brings from the *Tikunei Shabbos* that one should try and make kiddush on Friday night before it gets dark, because the beginning of Shabbos is *mazul madim* and at the end of Friday (just before Shabbos) it's the *mazul* of *tzedek* and so one should try and make kiddush during the *mazul* of *tzedek*.

The *Likutei Maharich* points out, even though one should be particular about the above, if one has hungry visitors he shouldn't wait to make kiddush, and the mitzvah of *hachnosas orchim* will overturn the *midas hadin* to *midas horachamim*.

The *Aruch HaShulchan* says, one shouldn't be worried about the above and *chas ve'sholam* one should say we are under the power of *mazolois*. (The *Aruch HaShulchan* seems to go like the Rambam)

A novel reason for not having to interrupt learning in order to go to a levayah

Two weeks ago we discussed the issue of why people don't interrupt learning in order to go to *levayos*. We brought various reasons to answer up why people aren't so worried about going. Someone showed me a *Kuntros* written by R' Dovid Moore Shlit'a (printed in the *sefer Mesach Aharon*) in which he goes through the various different suggestions given by the *poskim*, and various different question he has on their approaches. In the end he brings a novel *svora* of his own, which he says is a good reason to rely on, and applies for all people, whether one is busy learning, one is busy working, and whether one knows about the *levayah* or not, and even if one can see it.

Gemara in Bava Metsia

The Gemara in *Bava Metsia* (27a) asks: אם סימנים דאורייתא או דרבנן – “if the concept of *simonim* [identifying a lost item using various distinguishing marks] is *de'O'raisa* or *de'rabonon*”. On 27b Rava says: את"ל סימנין לאו דאורייתא היכי מהדרינן אבידתא בסימנין – “if *simonim* isn't *de'O'raisa*, how can we return a lost item to the presumed owner, perhaps it will end up being returned to the wrong owner? Rava answer's: דניחא ליה למוצא אבידה דנהדר בסימנין כי היכי דכי אבדה ליה לדידיה נמי נהדרו ליה בסימנין – “We return the lost item, as it is satisfactory to the finder of a lost item to return it on the basis of *simonim*, rather than exercise his right by Torah law to retain it, so that when an item is lost from him in the future, the finder will return it to him on the basis of *simonim* as well.”

Rav Safra then asks: אמר ליה רב ספרא לרבא וכי אדם עושה טובה לעצמו בממון שאינו שלו – “But can a person perform an act that results in benefit for himself with property that is not his?”. The Gemara answers: ידע דעדים לית ליה ומימר אמר כולי עלמא לא ידעי סימנין מובהקים דידיה ואנא יהיבנא סימנין מובהקים דידיה ושקלנא לה – “Rather, we return the lost item, as it is satisfactory to the owner of the lost item to be able to provide a description using *simonim* and on that basis take possession of the item. He knows that he has no witnesses to testify to his ownership, and he says: No one else knows the clear-cut *simonim* that are on the item. I will provide a description using *simonim*, and based on that information I will take possession of the item.”

We see from the above, that Rava holds that we take on that the finder is happy to return the lost object to anyone who can bring *simonim*, even though he loses out and can no longer keep it, even though *min haTorah* he should be able to keep it until someone brings witnesses. If one would need witnesses, it would belong to the finder as finding witnesses is virtually impossible and the owner will be *mayayesh* [give up hope], and it will automatically belong to the finder. Now that *simonim* help, the owner won't give up so fast and the finder will have to return it. Even though now he might lose, but we take on that the finder is happy with the institution of *simonim*, because if he ever loses something he will gain and will be able to get it back.

Even Rav Safra agrees to the above, it's just he holds that the finder being happy isn't enough, and we need the original owner to be happy as well (see *Ritva*).

In regards to the owner of the object we also take on that he is happy with the idea of *simonim*, even though a trickster could come along and lie, but it's not likely, therefore, he prefers to use *simonim* over witnesses.

The Gemara doesn't conclude if *simonim* is *de'O'raisa* or not, and the *poskim* argue halachah *lemaseh* what to do, but we can definitely use the above logic.

Based on the above, R' Dovid Moore suggests that *mesim* in big cities are *moichel* on their *kovad* and the *kovad* of their Torah (which is the reason to go to a *levayah*) in order not to bother everyone to go to their *levayah*. Since they don't want to have to attend every *levayah*, they are happy to be *moichel* on people coming to theirs.

It's even more straightforward than the case of *Bava Metsia*. In *Bava Metsia* we take on that one is *moichel* based on the small chance that he one day he will lose something, and it will be easier for him to get it back by using *simonim*. In regards to a *levayah* one is being *mochel* once (his *levayah*), in order to gain from having to go to numerous *levayos* every single day. Even if one doesn't speak it out clearly, it's obvious that he would prefer to forgo having everyone at his *levayah* and be saved from 70 years or more of having to go to every single *levayah* and be able to learn or even work without constantly having to stop to go to a *levayah*.

Gemara in Kesubos

R' Dovid Moore adds that the above is really a Gemara in *Kesubos* (71b). The Gemara says, if one doesn't let his wife go to a *beis oval* (*shivah* house) or *beis mishteh* (*chasunah*) she can leave and receive a *kesubah* as he is restricting her. The Gemara asks, by a *chasunah* it makes sense, but what restriction is there by not letting her go to a *beis oval*? The Gemara answers, perhaps tomorrow she will die and no one will come to bury her. The Gemara then brings a *beraisa*, that one who buries will have people to bury him, one who goes to *levayos* will have people at his *levayah* etc.

We see, if one doesn't go to *levayos* then when he dies no one will come to his. Even though according to halachah there is no *heter* of not going to his *levayah* because he never went to others, but that's the way of people (from a *Mefaresh* in *Nedorim* 83b it seems that *min haShomayim* Hashem will cause it, but from other *rishonim* it seems it's just, that that's the way people are).

Someone who isn't accustomed to go to every *levayah*, is *mochel* that people don't need to go to his, as he knows that that's the way people are. The fact that he doesn't go to every *levayah* proves that he doesn't mind if not everyone comes to his.

The above logic of *mechilah* helps both for *bitul* Torah and *bitul melachah* [one who is working], and for whether one knows about a *levayah* or not and even if one actually sees the *levayah* (provided he accompanies the *levayah* for four *amos*).

Small cities

Based on the above we can also understand why in small cities the *minhag* is that people do interrupt learning. In a small city people are much closer and they want everyone at their *levayah*, therefore, there is no logic of *mechilah*.

Adam gadol

Based on the above, what is the *heter* to be *mevatel* Torah for an *adam gadol*, *rosh yeshiva* etc.? Surely the above *heter* applies to them as well? *Pshat* is, for an *adam gadol*, one is *mechuyav* to respect him even if he is *mochel*.

Shemittah

Interesting shemittah shailah

I recently saw an interesting *shemittah shailah* (in R' Naftoli Kopshitz's *Madanay Kohan*). There was a family who was *noheg* that *yevul nochri* [produce grown by a *goy* during *shemittah*, about which there is a big *machlokes* if it has *kedushas sheviis* or not] has *kedushas sheviis*. The mother went to the shop to buy some vegetables to make a soup thinking that what she brought was *yevul Chutz La'aretz* [produce grown in *Chutz La'aretz*, which everyone agrees doesn't have *kedushas sheviis*]. When she got home she realised that what she had actually bought was *yevul nochri* and so she went back to the shop and swapped what she brought for *yevul Chutz La'aretz* and then cooked a big delicious soup.

The *din* is, if someone buys something using *shemittah* produce as payment, the item one buys also becomes *kodosh* with *kedushas sheviis*. Since the way the woman was able to buy the *yevul Chutz La'aretz* vegetables was by giving back her *yevul nochri* vegetables, perhaps it's considered that she brought *yevul Chutz La'aretz* using *shemittah* produce, which would mean that her new *yevul Chutz La'aretz* vegetables should also have *kedushas sheviis* on them, which in turn would mean that her soup is also *kodosh* with *kedushas sheviis*, what in fact is the status of her soup?

Chillul

An *eitsah* that perhaps she could do is be *mechalel* [redeem] the soup which has *kedushas sheviis* on to some other food item that she is about to eat, based on the Rambam (*Hilchos Shemittah Ve'Yoval*, *Perek* 6) which says that one can redeem *demai sheviis*, *bein derech mekech*, *bein derech chillul*.

However, it's not so simple as the *Derech Emunah* (6:59) brings a *machlokes* between the *Rash Sirliyo* and the *Chazon Ish* if one can *lechatchilah* redeem *shemittah* produce on a *shoveh perutah* [small amount].

Mekech to'us

Perhaps another thing we can say is, is that the sale was a *mekech to'us* [mistaken sale] as the woman never intended to buy vegetables with *kedushas sheviis* on, therefore, when she swapped her *yevul nochri* vegetables for *yevul Chutz La'aretz* vegetables it wasn't considered swapping, rather she was returning her *yevul nochri* vegetables and brought *yevul Chutz La'aretz* starting from scratch.

However, to say the above is not so simple, as she never stipulated with the shop keeper that she doesn't want to buy *yevul nochri*, and in fact many people do buy *yevul nochri*. Since many people buy *yevul nochri* it is very difficult to say that there is an *umdanah de'muchach* [obvious unspoken statement] that one doesn't want to buy *yevul nochri*. Being that there is no *umdanah de'muchach* it's difficult to say that it's called a *mekech to'us*, therefore, when she gave her *yevul nochri* vegetables back it's considered a swap and not a new transaction.

Shlichus

Another thing perhaps we can suggest is, is that when a woman goes shopping she is a *shliach* [messenger] of her husband, and when it comes to *shlichus* there is a *svora* [logic] that if the *shliach* does something bad, the sender can say: לתקוני שדרתיך ולא לענותי – “I sent you to do good for me not bad” and the *shlichus* is *botul* [void]. Since the husband doesn’t allow *yevul nochri* in his house, perhaps the *shlichus* is *botul* and it turns out that she never brought the *yevul nochri* produce.

However, it’s difficult to say the above as presumably when a woman goes to the shop she isn’t considered a *shliach* every time, rather the husband gives her money every so often so that she can buy things for both of them, and she buys for both of them but not as a *shliach*.

(Please let me know what you think about the above *shailah*)

Divrei Torah for the Shabbos Table

Often the motivation behind a name can be more important than the name itself

This week’s *sedra* begins with Hashem instructing Moshe to tell the Jewish people that He will take them out and redeem them from their suffering in Mitzrayim. The Medrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 13:19) teaches that one of the merits in which the Jewish people were saved was that they did not change their names, and instead of adopting Egyptian names, they preserved their uniquely Jewish names. However, Rav Yisroel Reisman points out that when we examine the names of the Jews who emerged from Mitzrayim, none of them are named after their illustrious ancestors. We don’t find anybody in that generation named Avrohom, Yitzchok, or Yaakov, or Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehudah, or Yissochar. Since we are accustomed to defining Jewish names as those that are given to commemorate our righteous forbearers, how can *Chazal* say that they did not change their Jewish names when we do not find a single person in that generation named after any of the *Avos*?

Josephus records that when Alexander the Great came to Eretz Yisroel in the times of the second *Beis HaMikdash*, he met Shimon HaTzaddik and was greatly impressed by him. However, when Alexander requested that a statue of him be erected in the *Beis HaMikdash*, Shimon HaTzaddik demurred on religious grounds, explaining that there are no statues in Jewish holy places. Instead, Shimon suggested that to show their devotion to him, all male babies born to Kohanim in that year would be named Alexander in his honour, and this is how the non-Jewish name Alexander became a Jewish name. However, if the selection of a name is so significant and influential, how could Shimon HaTzaddik agree to give a non-Jewish name to so many Jewish children, especially to those who would grow up to serve in the *Beis HaMikdash*?

Rav Reisman recounts that at the end of his life, Rav Avrohom Yaakov Pam remarked that people often approached him for advice about choosing a name for their new-born baby. Unfortunately, the discussions often revolved around the friction that was generated when grandparents had expectations that the baby be named for a dear relative, while the baby’s parents didn’t care for the name or the person after whom they were being asked to name. Rav Pam said that in his experience, any time a name was given to promote *sholam bayis* [peace in the family], the parents always had *nachas* from the child, as the key is not the actual name that is given, but rather the motivation behind it. Similarly, a man was hesitant to name his child after his father because he died at a relatively young age, so he asked Rav Elyashiv for guidance. Rav Elyashiv responded that honouring one’s parents brings long life, and he should have no qualms about naming his child after his father.

For the same reason, although the name Alexander was originally a non-Jewish name, because it was given to protect the *Beis HaMikdash* and to fulfil the instructions of Shimon HaTzaddik, it became a Jewish name, as the rationale behind the name is far more important than the name itself. Similarly, the Jewish people in Mitzrayim did not have the custom to name their children after the *Avos*, but the names they selected were chosen for Jewish reasons. For example, the father of the leader of the tribe of Gad was named Deuel (*Bamidbar* 1:14). Although this may not sound like a Jewish name, the Ramban writes (*Bamidbar* 2:14) that it is a contraction of two words that connote the hope that he would be יודע קל – “a knower of Hashem”, which is certainly a Jewish value. Just as Leah chose the name Reuven to express that Hashem had seen her affliction (*Bereishis* 29:32), so too the Jewish people in Mitzrayim also chose names that expressed *Yiddishe* ideals. When the Medrash praises them for not changing their names in Mitzrayim, it is not referring to the names themselves, but to the underlying motivations behind them, because that is what is truly important. (R’ Ozer Alport)

The power of saying Tehillim

השם קשה וידבר משה כן אל בני ישראל ולא שמעו אל משה מקצר רוח ומעבדה קשה – “And Moshe spoke to Bnei Yisroel, however, they did not listen to him because of shortness of spirit and hard work” (*Shemos* 6:9)

This week’s *sedra* begins with Hashem instructing Moshe to inform the Jewish people that they will be freed from slavery and brought to Eretz Yisroel. However, when Moshe attempted to convey this message to them, they were unable to accept it due to their shortness of spirit and hard work. Curiously, in *Parshas Shemos*, when Moshe and Aharon originally approached the Jewish people and told them that they would be liberated, they did believe that Hashem would save them. What changed in the interim?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky answers based on a Medrash (*Shemos Rabbah* 5:18) which teaches that when the Jewish people were initially enslaved in Mitzrayim, they were not required to work on Shabbos. What did they do on these days off? They read *megillah* scrolls that discussed inspiring themes of *geulah* [redemption]. What were the precise contents of these scrolls?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky suggests that the *megillos* included chapters of *Tehillim* that were authored by Moshe (*Rashi* to *Bava Basra* 14b), among them *מזמור שיר ליום השבת* (*Tehillim* 92). What is the connection between Shabbos and this chapter of *Tehillim*, which does not appear to discuss Shabbos in any way? The Jewish slaves in Mitzrayim used to read it on Shabbos, which was their day of rest, so they could be encouraged by its focus on *אמונתך בלילות* – “faith in dark times” and its assurances that ultimately, *אויביך יאבדו* – “Your enemies will perish” – and *להגיד כי ישׁר ד’... שתולים בבית ד’* – “The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, planted in the house of Hashem, to declare that Hashem is upright, my Rock in Whom there is no injustice”. These scrolls strengthened the Jewish slaves with their promises of freedom and better times ahead.

At the end of *Parshas Shemos*, when Moshe approached Pharaoh and requested a three-day respite to travel and offer *korbonos* to Hashem in the wilderness, Pharaoh responded (5:9) by instructing the Egyptian taskmasters to increase the slaves’ workloads *שקרו בדברי שקר* – “and let them not spend their time with false words”. To which false words was Pharaoh referring? To those contained in their *megillos*. Pharaoh recognized that these scrolls gave *chizuk* [encouragement] to the Jewish slaves and caused them to yearn for a salvation they believed was imminent. To put a stop to this, he decreed that they would no longer enjoy Shabbos as a day of rest so that *אל ישׁעו בדברי שקר* – they wouldn’t have any free time to contemplate the uplifting words in their *megillos* that were responsible for their optimism.

Pharaoh’s plan succeeded, as evidenced by the fact that when Moshe approached the Jewish people in the beginning of *Parshas Vo’eira*, they were no longer open to his promises of impending liberation. Without the *chizuk* provided by their weekly *Tehillim* sessions, they lost their confidence in the *geulah* and were no longer able to accept Moshe’s soothing words.

Although *boruch* Hashem we are not subject to the backbreaking slavery that our ancestors endured, Rav Yaakov’s insight about the power of *Tehillim* to strengthen the *emunah* of those in pain is still relevant to all of us. Instead of limited *megillos*, we are fortunate to possess the entire *Sefer Tehillim* containing 150 chapters replete with inspiring messages of better times ahead, just waiting for us to tap into their latent power to provide us with tremendous *chizuk* as we confront our own challenges and struggles. So let’s make sure to take advantage of being able to freely pick up a *Tehillim* and say as much of it as we want.

What was the *kal v’chomer*

Last week’s *sedra* ends with Moshe’s complaint to Hashem: *ומאז באתי אל פרעה לדבר בשמך הרע לעם הזה והצל לא הצלת את עמך* - “Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he made matters worse for Your nation, and You have not saved Your people.” (*Shemos* 5:23). In the *pasukim* at the beginning of this week’s *sedra*, Hashem appears to Moshe and tells him to again speak to the Klal Yisroel and tell them that they are on the verge of redemption. However, when Moshe does speak to Bnei Yisroel: *ולא שמעו אל משה מקצר רוח ומעבדה קשה* - “they do not listen to him because of shortness of spirit and hard work” (*Shemos* 6:9).

At that point, Hashem tells Moshe to go back and speak to Pharaoh once more. Moshe responds with a *kal v’chomer* argument: *הן בני ישראל לא שמעו אלי ואיך ישמעני פרעה ואני ערל שפתים* - “Behold Bnei Yisroel did not listen to me (even though this would be “good news” for them); how can I expect Pharaoh to listen to me (when this will be “bad news” for him) and I am of uncircumcised lips.” (*Shemos* 6:12). Rashi notes that this is one of ten places where we find a *kal v’chomer* argument in the Torah.

Many *meforshim* point out that this *kal v’chomer* seems flawed: The *pasuk* explicitly states why Klal Yisroel did not listen to Moshe Rabbeinu. They did not listen because of *קצר רוח ומעבדה קשה* – “because of their depression and oppression”. Pharaoh was a free man sitting in his palace. He might well be in a state of mind to pay attention to what Moshe was going to tell him!

This is a famous question that everyone asks. The *sefer Ohr HaYoshar* answers very logically that the *kal v’chomer* is a legitimate *kal v’chomer*. Why? The truth of the matter is that in *Parshas Shemos*, when Moshe Rabbeinu came to Klal Yisroel, they did believe him (*Shemos* 4:31). The *Ohr HaYoshar* interprets the *kal v’chomer* Moshe argued as follows: “If the people who at one time believed me and were willing to hear my message – but now after my promises did not materialize and their situation has deteriorated, they no longer believe me, then certainly Pharaoh who never believed me in the first place, and on the contrary, was responsible for why it got worse – he certainly is not going to believe me now!

I saw a second interpretation in the *sefer Darash Mordechai* from Rav Mordechai Druk: He rejects the *pircha* [the question posed to destroy the logical argument]. The *pircha* was – the Jews didn’t believe Moshe because they were oppressed slaves,

but Pharaoh was a free man – he might believe Moshe. Rav Druk observes that Pharaoh was not a free man. He was almost as oppressed as the people were. Why is that? Pharaoh was oppressed because he was forced to live up to the image that he created about himself that he was a deity!

Chazal say that Pharaoh had a major problem in trying to portray himself as a god. Gods do not need to go to the bathroom and that is one problem Pharaoh could not solve. What did he do? Once a day, in the early morning, before anyone else got up, he went down to the Nile and took care of his bodily needs. Imagine that – he could only go once a day and he had to ensure that nobody else saw him! Pharaoh was as oppressed as Klal Yisroel. This is not being facetious. He was so obsessed with his self-image and the image that he needed to maintain – that he literally drove himself to self-torture. He had to watch his every move! Pharaoh too was a slave. He was a slave to his own visions of grandeur. So, if Bnei Yisroel could not listen to Moshe because of their status as slaves – all the more so Pharaoh, who suffered a more intense force of slavery, would not be able to listen to Moshe!

The power of tefillah

After Pharaoh begged Moshe to remove the plague of Frogs from Mitzrayim: ויצעק משה אל ה' על דבר הצפרדעים אשר שם (Shemos 8:8). The Torah does not use this expression of ויצעק by the other plagues. The Torah says that Moshe prayed (ויעתר) when requesting the cessation of the other *makkos*, but not this expression of “crying out” (צעקה).

The *Zohar* explains that צעקה is a more dramatic or more panicked form of *tefillah*. ויצעק shows an urgency. What was Moshe Rabbeinu’s urgency in stopping the plague of Frogs? Why not let Pharaoh suffer a little longer?

In our minds, Hitler *y'mach shmo* is the personification of evil to Klal Yisroel. That is because the Nazi’s atrocities are relatively fresh in our memories. Pharaoh was as big a *rosha* as Hitler, if not worse. He bathed in Jewish blood. He took Jewish babies and squashed them into the walls of the pyramids. It was no less horrible than the Holocaust. So – Pharaoh is feeling the pressure of the *Tzefardim* – what is the problem? Why didn’t Moshe take his time with a long leisurely *shemoneh esrei* when he prayed for cessation of the plague?

The Rebbe, Reb Bunim of Pische, asks this question. He answers that Moshe Rabbeinu was trying to prove another point. The whole purpose of the plagues was to demonstrate that there is a Ribbono Shel Olam that rules the world, and that He is the Master of the universe. He controls the world.

However, Moshe wanted to demonstrate here that there is another power in the world as well, and that is the power of prayer (*koach hatefillah*). Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to show that despite the fact that Hashem wanted Pharaoh to suffer, there is something that – as it were – could stop the Will of the Ribbono Shel Olam. This is as much a fundamental of our faith as the fact that there is a Ribbono Shel Olam and that He runs the world and cares about what happens in the world. Another fundamental belief of our faith is the idea that *tefillah* helps.

By employing the most intense form of *tefillah*–ויצעק, Moshe wanted to show the amazing power of *tefillah*. I can stop a steaming locomotive in its tracks. Let the plague of Frogs end immediately! (R' Yissocher Frand)

DEDICATED IN HONOUR OF THE SHABBOS SHEVA BROCHOS OF YITZCHOK ARYEH & GITTEL BROCHA WACKS (STEINHART)

MAZEL TOV WISHES FROM YOUR UNCLE, AUNT & COUSINS ROYDE IN KIRYAT SEFER

THIS THIS WEEK'S SHEET IS DEDICATED IN HONOUR OF AHARON HARRIS, ON THE OCCASION OF HIS BAR MITZVAH. MAY HE CONTINUE TO BE A SOURCE OF NACHAS TO ALL HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS AND MAY HE GROW UP TO BE A BIG TALMID CHOCHAM, AND MAY HASHEM GRANT HIM WITH LOTS OF KOCHAS AND ALL HE NEEDS TO BUSY HIMSELF WITH TORAH AND MITZVOS UNTIL 120.

DEDICATED BY FAMILY SMITH LICHVOD THE BIRTH OF THEIR DAUGHTER

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