

על דשע

**Alei Deshe - Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on
the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur**

Raising Our Hands

Our parshah concludes with Bnei Yisrael's war with Amalek. וְהָיָה כִּאֲשֶׁר יִרְיֶה מֹשֶׁה יָדוֹ וְגִבֹּר יִשְׂרָאֵל - *It happened that when Moshe raised his hand, Yisrael was stronger* (Shemos 17:11). In Rosh Hashanah 29a, the Mishnah explains: "Could Moshe's hands make or break a war? Rather, this teaches that when Yisrael looked upwards and subjugated their hearts to their Father in heaven, they were victorious." But if so, why does the Torah use the expression יָדוֹ - *his hand*, which implies battle might?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 68a) relates that R. Akiva eulogized R. Eliezer, saying, "His two arms were two Sifrei Torah." The Gemara (Sotah 7b) explains the pasuk (Devarim 33:7) לֹא יָרִיב לּוֹ - *may his hands fight for him*, as a reference to conversation of Torah.¹ Clearly, the hands play an integral role in the study of Torah. Moshe's hands symbolized that toil in Torah study is the way to subjugate one's heart to Hashem and vanquish Amalek.

The pasuk (17:12) states: וַיִּדִי מֹשֶׁה כְּבִדִים - *Moshe's hands grew heavy*. Rashi cites Chazal: Moshe's hands grew heavy because he was derelict regarding the mitzvah, appointing someone in his place. We don't have a shred of comprehension of Moshe Rabbeinu, but that's what it says. Similarly, Chazal state² that the war with Amalek was a result of Bnei Yisrael's "weakening their hands" from Torah. One

must not be lax in Torah learning; one must labor in his study, infusing diligence with energy and joy.

We may take another approach to the Mishnah. The Gemara (Berachos 17a) relates that when the *Chachamim* took leave of the *beis midrash*, they would bless each other, enumerating *berachos* for many body parts: their hearts, mouths, tongues, eyes, faces, lips, kidneys and feet. The Maharsha notes that there is no blessing given for their hands. He explains that whereas the other body parts have a function in Torah study, hands are meant specifically for action – fulfilling mitzvos – not study.³ About one who learns Torah but does not fulfill mitzvos, it is written (Mishlei 17:16): לָמָּה זֶה מְחִיר כֶּסֶף, - *Why is there money in the hand of a fool to purchase wisdom, though he has no [understanding] heart?*⁴

Moshe's raised hands signified to *Klal Yisrael* that they must not satisfy themselves with Torah study; they must

learn Torah with the intention to fulfill all its mitzvos with joy, including guarding their eyes and thoughts. In fact, one who will not keep the mitzvos is better off not learning Torah at all. When one puts Torah study into practice by fulfilling the mitzvos and guarding his senses, he has

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1 *Toras Chaim* writes that this is because one gestures with his hands and arms when teaching Torah.

2 *Tanchuma* 25; *Mechilta*, Parshas Amalek 1

3 It seems the Maharsha does not agree with the above statement of *Toras Chaim*.

4 See Yoma 72b

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‘learned Torah with his hands’; he has brought Torah into the practical realm. This is the ultimate form of subjugating oneself to Hashem.

Chazal relate (Berachos 30b) that the early *chassidim* would spend an hour before each *tefillah* directing their hearts toward their Father in heaven. Simply, this means they developed concentration to achieve focus on their *tefillah*. But Rabbeinu Yonah dismisses this explanation, because then why does it say “focusing their hearts toward their Father in heaven,” and not simply “focusing their hearts on their prayer”? Rather, their attention was on eliminating from their hearts all enjoyment of this world and purifying it of this world’s nonsense. With their focus solely on the greatness of Hashem, their *tefillos* would be accepted. Only once the heart is cleansed of foreign desires can it be focused on our Heavenly Father, assuring that one’s *tefillos* will be accepted.

Based on this, my father⁵ explained the Mishnah’s statement that Bnei Yisrael “subjugated their hearts to their Father in heaven.” They surrendered their hearts’ capacity of desire to Hashem; from now on, their hearts would yearn and long for closeness to Hashem.

The pasuk (16:22) says about the *mann*, וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁשִׁי לְקִטּוֹ לֶחֶם מַשְׁנֶה - *It happened on the sixth day that they gathered a double portion of food.* Chazal⁶ read מַשְׁנֶה as מְשֻׁנָּה, different; on Shabbos, the *mann* tasted different than it did during the week. The Sfas Emes⁷ asks on this: since the *mann* tasted however the eater desired,⁸ if one would ‘season’ his *mann* with the

Shabbos taste once the first Shabbos had passed, the taste would no longer be unique to Shabbos.

Explains the Sfas Emes:⁹ The *mann* was food of *malachim*; what taste could possibly be assigned to it? It was the ‘taste’ of closeness to Hashem that the generation of the *midbar* – the *dor de’ah* – sought to imbue in their *mann*. The variety of this ‘taste’ reflected the intensity of each person’s desire for it and his depth of spiritual understanding. Just as Hashem is infinite, so are the levels of connection one can have with Him. The *mann* had a unique taste on Shabbos because Bnei Yisrael’s desire for closeness with Hashem reached unique levels on Shabbos, which could never be achieved during the week.

We must make the most of our time on Shabbos, arousing our truest desire, the desire for purity, for ridding ourselves of every negativity and for subjugating our hearts and desires to our Heavenly Father. The *yetzer hara* constantly presents us with new *nisyonos*; the only way we can triumph is by completely surrendering our hearts to Hashem, so that our only desire is for closeness to Him.

(בשלה תשכ"ב – ס"ג מאמר ג)

5 Pnei Menachem, Parshas Zachor 5756 pp. 173, 178

6 Mechilta

7 Likutim מ"ה מכילתא ד"ה

8 See Shemos Rabbah 25:3

9 Before this approach, the Sfas Emes answers that the *mann* tasted progressively better each Shabbos. We may explain that this was because every Shabbos maintains a *kedushah* all its own, independent of all other *Shabbosos*; see *Ibra D'dasha*, vol. 1 p. 36. This would explain why when Rosh Chodesh falls on Shabbos, Shabbos is not considered more frequent (*tadir*) than Rosh Chodesh; the *kedushah* of each Shabbos is unrelated to that of other *Shabbosos*. See *Ibra D'dasha*, vol. 2 p. 27.

The Sap Within a Yid

The Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 1:1) teaches that the fifteenth of Shevat is ראש השנה לאילן, Rosh Hashanah of the tree. The *mefarshim* and *sefarim* wonder why לאילן is written in the singular, since Tu B'Shevat is Rosh Hashanah for *all* trees.¹⁰

In the next Mishnah we learn, בארבעה פרקים, העולם נידון וכו' בעצרת על פירות האילן - *At four*

10 In fact, the same Mishnah lists the dates of Rosh Hashanah – למלכים ולרגלים of *kings and of holidays* and – לירקות of *vegetables*, all in the plural form.

junctions the world is judged... on Shavuos [there is judgement] on fruits of the tree. Once again, אילן is written in the singular. What is this ‘tree’ that is judged on Shavuos?

On the pasuk (Shir Hashirim 2:3) כְּתַפּוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הַיַּעַר כֵּן דוֹדִי בֵּין הַבְּנִים - *Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest so is my beloved between the sons,* the Gemara (Shabbos 88a) comments:

“Why is Yisrael compared to the *tapuach*?¹¹ To

11 תפוח is commonly translated as ‘apple,’ but Rabbeinu Tam maintains that it is the Esrog.

teach that just as the fruit of the *tapuach* begins to grow before its leaves, so did Yisrael say *na'aseh* before *nishma*.” Fruit trees generally produce leaves before fruit; people generally consider carefully before taking action. Just as the *tapuach* goes against the normal trend, so did Bnei Yisrael go against normal conduct by accepting the mitzvos before carefully analyzing their choice. Besides the judgment on all trees that occurs on Shavuos, there is a specific judgment rendered on האילן, the tree – the תפוח בעצי, the tree – the

הַיָּעַר. On the day of *kabbalas haTorah*, the Yidden who preceded *na'aseh* to *nishma* are carefully examined.

Tu B'Shevat is in the middle of the winter; the trees are not bearing any fruit. So why is it the Rosh Hashanah of fruit? Rashi¹² explains that a fruit's growth depends on the sap that the tree produces before it begins to bud. This occurs on Tu B'Shevat, after the majority of winter has passed. At that time, the tree contains the core energy which will eventually produce fruit.

The Yidden – the תַּפּוּחַ בְּעֵצֵי הַיָּעַר - also contain a core energy which brings forth fruit. Their innermost and essential desire to come close to Hashem transcends all reckoning and led Bnei Yisrael to declare *na'aseh* before *nishma*. This will, even before it is expressed with action, carries more value than the action itself, since it is the energy that enables all positive activity; with this will, the act is seen as already done.

Tu B'Shevat always falls out close to Parshas Beshalach – Shabbos Shirah. This is no coincidence; every parshah holds relevance to the time of year when it is read. *Shiras HaYam* begins with (Shemos 15:1) אָז יָשַׁר מֹשֶׁה - *Then Moshe sang*. Rashi comments, "His heart decided to sing a song." The *mefarshim* discuss this at length; certainly Moshe must have decided to sing before he sang, but why is that to be stressed? Isn't the actual singing the main point?

Chazal¹³ say that it is forbidden to praise Hashem excessively; since it is impossible to state all of His praises, one must limit himself to the praises prescribed by the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah*. Explaining the phrase הַבּוֹחֵר בְּשִׁירֵי זְמֵרָה - *He*

Who chooses the songs that are melodious, R. Bunim of Peshischa read בְּשִׁירֵי as בְּשִׁירֵי, the remnants. When one's heart is full of songs to Hashem but he is limited in his ability to express them fully, it is the remnant of these melodies that Hashem chooses.¹⁴ As *sefarim* say, a song that can be sung is limited; it is like a drop from

was more valuable than the song itself, since the innermost will is what brings one to express his feelings in song, while not allowing those feelings to ever be fully expressed. It is the letter *yud* of יָשַׁר that led Rashi to explain it in this manner; this element of desire and will is the essential

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the ocean. The desire to sing is always greater than what can be expressed in song.

Even one who sings to the extent of his desire will find his desire increase; the concept of מִי שִׁישׁ לוֹ מִנֵּה רֹצֵה מֵאֲתֵימ - *one who has one hundred desires two hundred* – is not limited to material concerns. Spiritual will, too, constantly increases. One's *ratzon* is his *nefesh*, a G-dly, limitless force that can never be quenched. It is a gift from Hashem and it connects man with Him; as the Sfas Emes writes,¹⁵ the *nefesh* has an astonishing desire and longing for its Creator. This desire is like the sap within a fruit tree, the energy that produces the fruit.

אָז יָשַׁר מֹשֶׁה means that Moshe's heart desired to sing to Hashem and he did so. This desire

strength of a 'Yid.' It is what brought Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim, and it was their preparation for declaring *na'aseh v'nishma* at *kabbalas haTorah*.

It is so with every Yid as well; his innermost desire, his fruit-producing sap, is what fuels his growth.

This, then, is the meaning of Tu B'Shevat as ראש השנה לאילן. Just as it is Rosh Hashanah for trees when their sap stands ready to produce fruit, although the fruit is not yet visible; so it is with the tree of הַיָּעַר בְּעֵצֵי הַיָּעַר. When a Yid is brimming with his most fundamental desire, it is Rosh Hashanah for him; he can then achieve all that he aspires to.

(פרשת בשלח – ט"ו בשבט תשפ"א)

12 Rosh Hashanah 12b s.v. *mina*, 14a s.v. *af* and s.v. *ho'il*

13 See Berachos 33b

14 See Sfas Emes, Sukkos 5634, Shemini Atzeres

15 Tehillim 19, from Terumah 5662

Waters Of Redemption

The Gemara (Sotah 11a) relates that Bnei Yisrael were redeemed from Mitzrayim in the merit of righteous women: when they would go to draw water, Hashem would fill their buckets halfway with water and halfway with small fish. They would return home, cook one pot of water and one pot of fish, and bring them to their husbands working in the fields. With the passage of time, they would give birth to children in the fields. When Hashem revealed Himself at the *Yam Suf*, the women recognized Him first, as the pasuk (Shemos 15:2) states: וְזָה קוֹלִי וְאֶנְיָוָהוּ - *This is my G-d and I will build Him a sanctuary.*

Iyun Yaakov comments: “Although a woman is not obligated to [draw water] for her husband, as it is a man’s duty – as the pasuk (Yehoshua 9:21) states about the *Givonim*: וַיְהִי חֹטְבֵי עֵצִים וְשֹׁאֲבֵי מַיִם - *They became woodchoppers and water drawers*; nevertheless, the [men and women] reversed their roles because of the harsh labor, as the Gemara states earlier.”

Iyun Yaakov’s entire statement is difficult to understand, as we will enumerate.

1. *Although a woman is not obligated to [draw water] for her husband.* Indeed, *Beis Yosef*¹⁶ writes that a woman is not obligated to give her husband’s animals to drink, since this is normally done at a river or spring, and women typically stay at home in keeping with (Tehillim 45:14) כָּל כְּבוֹדָה בַּת מְלָךְ פְּנִימָה - *every honorable princess dwelling within.* Nonetheless, it is clear that it was the way of women to draw water. As the pasuk (Bereishis 24:11, 13) states, אֶל בְּאֵר הַמַּיִם לָעֵת עֶרֶב לָעֵת צֹאת, הַשְּׂאֵבֹת - *towards a well of water at evening time, the time when women come out to draw*; וּבָנוֹת אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר יֵצְאוּ לְשָׂאֵב מַיִם - *and the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw.* Although these were non-Jewish women, it is evident from the Gemara (Yevamos 77a) that the concept of women remaining at home applies to non-Jews as well. Another pasuk (Shmuel I 9:11) describes Jewish women drawing water: הַמָּה עֹלִים הַמַּעֲלָה הָעִיר וְהַמָּה מְצָאוּ נְעוּרוֹת יֵצְאוּ לְשָׂאֵב מַיִם - *As they were climbing the ascent to the city, they encountered some maidens going out to draw water.*¹⁷ This is also described by the Gemara (Shabbos 148a): “Women who fill their pails with water.”

The Mishnah (Kesubos 71b) states that if a husband obligates his wife by vow to fill pails of water and spill them out, he must divorce her. The

Gemara (72a) explains that this is when the husband compels his wife to do so with ten pails of water; he must divorce his wife because he makes her look like a fool. One might infer from this Gemara that in general, it is a woman’s job to draw water for her husband. However, this would not be proof, since it is discussing an obligation by oath, irrespective of the woman’s regular obligations. Nevertheless, as above, it was certainly the way of women to draw water.

2. Even if we assume that drawing water is not the duty of a woman, the fact that women drew water in Mitzrayim can be easily understood. Although it was not their role, they went beyond the letter of the law (as is clear from the Gemara) to help their husbands, who were toiling at hard labor. In any case, a woman’s obligations to her husband are only *mid’Rabbanan*, and were not yet decreed at that time;¹⁸ clearly, the women were acting out of devotion to their husbands.

3. *As the pasuk states about the Givonim.* Does *Iyun Yaakov* mean to deduce that since the Givonim drew water, it was obviously not the obligation of the Jewish women? This would not seem conclusive. The Mishnah (Kesubos 59b) states that a woman is exempted of her household duties if there are household servants; since the Givonim were given the duty of drawing water, the women would have become exempt then even if it had been their obligation. And if *Iyun Yaakov*’s intention is to prove from the pasuk’s use of *lashon zachar* that it was the job of the male Givonim, so it must be a male obligation — this too is no proof, since the Torah uses masculine terms when referring to both men and women.

4. *Nevertheless, the [men and women] reversed their roles because of the harsh labor, as the Gemara states earlier.* *Iyun Yaakov* refers to an earlier statement of the Gemara that the men’s and women’s work were reversed. But this means that their work for the *Mitzrim* was reversed. When the women brought food to their husbands in the fields, the men were working in harsh labor; clearly, this was not during the time when they were assigned women’s work. In fact, even when the men’s and women’s duties were reversed, it was only relevant to their labor for the *Mitzrim*, as above, not their domestic responsibilities.

(בבאות דשא – בשלה תשפ"א)

16 Y.D. end of 234 [cited by *Biur HaGra*], *Kesef Mishnah, Nedarim* 12:11

17 כָּל כְּבוֹדָה בַּת מְלָךְ פְּנִימָה certainly applies to unmarried women as well.

18 Although there are sources that women would observe these obligations even before they were decreed.