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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

VOICE RECOGNITION

“...that it is my (Yosef’s) mouth that is speaking to you” (45:12)

Learning Hebrew was a slow painful process for me. But when I finally managed to hold what might be called a “conversation”, it struck me that the way I was expressing myself in Hebrew was quite different from my English self.

Not just that my limited vocabulary and my painful syntax made communication more cumbersome and imprecise, but that I adopted a different persona — somewhat more confrontational and *heimishe*.

My intuition is that the identity and the culture expressed in that language have an influence on the way we express ourselves when we speak that language.

I found something similar in this week’s Torah portion.

“...that it is my mouth that is speaking to you.”

Yosef is here reassuring the brothers that the Egyptian Viceroy facing them is in point of fact their long-lost brother. Rashi explains that he did this by speaking in Hebrew, a language unknown in Egypt. The Ramban questions this interpretation

because it was likely that most of the ruling class in Egypt probably knew Hebrew.

So what, then, according to Rashi, was the sign that signified that Yosef was indeed their brother?

Yosef’s physical appearance had completely changed after twenty-two years, but there is one thing that doesn’t change — the sound of someone’s voice. Voice recognition is such a strong indication of identity that it can be used as a factor in deciding the halacha in matters of *issur v’heter* (see Chulin 96a).

But that’s only if the person you are identifying is speaking in a language that you have heard him speak. When Yosef stopped speaking to the brothers in Egyptian and started to speak in Hebrew, the unmistakable sound of their brother’s voice reassured them that he was Yosef.

• Sources: *Ahavat Yehonatan in Mayana Shel Torah*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the discovery of the goblet in Binyamin’s sack, the brothers are confused. Yehuda alone steps forward and eloquently but firmly petitions Yosef for Binyamin’s release, offering himself instead. As a result of this act of total selflessness, Yosef finally has irrefutable proof that his brothers are different people from the ones who cast him into the pit, and so he now reveals to them that he is none other than their brother. The brothers shrink from him in shame, but Yosef consoles them, telling them that everything has been part of G-d’s plan. He sends them back to their father Yaakov with a message to come and reside in the land of Goshen. At first, Yaakov cannot accept the news, but when he recognizes hidden signs in the message which positively identify the sender as his son Yosef, his spirit is revived. Yaakov together with all his family and possessions sets out for Goshen. G-d communicates with Yaakov in a vision at night. He tells him not to fear going down to Egypt and its negative

spiritual consequences, because it is there that G-d will establish the Children of Israel as a great nation even though they will be dwelling in a land steeped in immorality and corruption. The Torah lists Yaakov’s offspring and hints to the birth of Yocheved, who will be the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. Seventy souls in total descend into Egypt, where Yosef is reunited with his father after 22 years of separation. He embraces his father and weeps, overflowing with joy. Yosef secures the settlement of his family in Goshen. Yosef takes his father Yaakov and five of the least threatening of his brothers to be presented to Pharaoh, and Yaakov blesses Pharaoh. Yosef instructs that, in return for grain, all the people of Egypt must give everything to Pharaoh, including themselves as his slaves. Yosef then redistributes the population, except for the Egyptian priests who are directly supported by a stipend from Pharaoh. The Children of Israel become settled, and their numbers multiply greatly.

BAVA METZIA 103 - 109

“Rabbi Yochanan maintains that there is a special reward for walking a farther distance to a Beit Kneset (Synagogue).”

Rabbi Yochanan and Rav have differing views regarding the intent of the blessing in the Torah: “Blessed are you in the city...” (Devarim 28:3)

Whereas Rav states that this refers to having a Beit Kneset nearby in the city (the Maharsha points that in the time of the *gemara* it was the general practice that the Beit Kneset be outside of the city), Rabbi Yochanan does not consider this a blessing. Having a Beit Kneset inside the city is not necessarily better, according to him, since walking to a Beit Kneset that is further away from home awards the walker with special reward called “*sachar pesiot*” — “reward for steps”. Rashi writes that we find in Masechet Sota (22a) that Rabbi Yochanan was taught this concept by a widow who said to him rhetorically: “Don’t I receive more reward if there is a Beit Kneset in my neighborhood, but I nevertheless walk to your Beit Midrash to pray?”

Two points to ponder: It appears that Rav does not adhere to this concept, although the *gemara* does not explicitly state that there is a dispute in this matter. In addition, it would appear to be helpful to understand if the concept of “*sachar pesiot*” is connected in any way to the *mishna* in Avot (5:21): “*L’fum tza’ara agra*” — “According to the amount of difficulty is the reward.” It would seem that the *mishna* in Avot applies to any mitzvah activity, whereas it appears that special reward of “extra steps” is taught only in relationship to walking to a house of prayer.

• Bava Metzia 107a

Rabbi Chanina said, “Everything is in the hand of Heaven, except for cold and hot.”

The source for this teaching is cited by Rabbi Chanina as a verse in Proverbs (22:5): “Cold and heat is in the troubled path, and one who guards his health will keep distance from them.” From this he sees that it is within a person’s ability to avoid cold and heat, and sicknesses that may result from exposure to extreme temperatures in winter and summer.

This teaching by Rabbi Chanina is quoted on our *daf* to explain why Rabbi Chanina interpreted *another* verse as referring to sicknesses caused by cold and heat: “And G-d will remove all illness from you, and all of the evil diseases of Egypt that you knew; He will not put them on you, but He will lay them upon all of your enemies.” (Devarim 7:15)

In this chapter Moshe Rabbeinu relates to the entire Jewish People the numerous ways in which they will be immensely blessed by G-d if they observe the way of the Torah when they enter the Land of Israel very soon. A number of interpretations are offered in the *gemara* to explain the meaning of “removing all illnesses”. For example, Rav’s interpretation is that the verse refers to Divine removal of the *ayin hara* (“evil eye”), in accordance with his personal experience (see Rashi) and statement that: “Nine-nine people die from *ayin hara*, while one dies from the way of the world.” (See Tosefot who asks about the descendants of Yosef, about whom it is taught elsewhere that they are beyond the reach of the *ayin hara*, and should therefore have had longer life spans, but did not.)

Rabbi Chanina, on the other hand, teaches that the illnesses in the verse refers to G-d’s blessing the nation by removing the maladies caused by exposure to extreme temperatures that normally promote illnesses in a natural manner.

Tosefot quotes another well-known teaching of our Sages: “Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except the fear (awe) of Heaven.” It would seem that this statement does not agree with the teaching of Rabbi Chanina. Tosefot clarifies, however, that Rabbi Chanina is speaking about *things that might happen to people*, and occur to those who are not careful to dress warmly when the temperature drops, or are not prudent about staying in the shade with plenty of water during a heat-wave. The other statement that everything is controlled and determined by G-d except for “the fear of Heaven” deals with *human character traits*, and not specific events or circumstances. Regarding “*yirat Shamayim*” — the fear and awe of G-d — a person has free-will to choose whether to do what is good or what is bad, what is right or what is wrong. A person’s decision to act correctly and “choose life” is free choice, and is not Heavenly predetermined.

• Bava Metzia 107b

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. What threatening words did Yehuda say to Yosef?
2. Why did Yehuda say his missing brother died?
3. Why was Yehuda the one to plead for Binyamin?
4. What do we learn from Yosef telling his brothers, "Go up to my father"?
5. What two things did the brothers see that helped prove that he was really Yosef?
6. Why did Binyamin weep on Yosef's neck?
7. Why did Yosef send old wine to Yaakov?
8. What did Yosef mean when he said, "Don't dispute on the way"?
9. What happened to Yaakov when he realized Yosef was alive?
10. Why did G-d tell Yaakov, "Don't fear going down to Egypt"?
11. "I will bring you up" from Egypt. To what did this allude?
12. What happened to the property that Yaakov acquired in Padan Aram?
13. Who was the mother of Shaul ben HaCanaanit?
14. When listing Yaakov's children, the verse refers to Rachel as "Rachel, wife of Yaakov." Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah are not referred to as Yaakov's wives. Why?
15. Yosef harnessed his own chariot instead of letting a servant do it. Why?
16. Why were shepherds abhorrent to the Egyptians?
17. Why did Yosef pick the weakest brothers to stand before Pharaoh?
18. What blessing did Yaakov give Pharaoh when he left his presence?
19. Yosef resettled the land of Egypt, moving the people from city to city. What were his two motives for this?
20. Whose fields were not bought by Yosef?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 44:18 - He threatened that Yosef would be stricken with leprosy, like Pharaoh when he took Sarah from Avraham. Alternatively, Yehuda threatened to kill Yosef and Pharaoh.
2. 44:20 - Yehuda feared that if he said his missing brother was alive, Yosef would demand to see him.
3. 44:32 - He was the one who took "soul" responsibility for him.
4. 45:9 - We learn that *Eretz Yisrael* is higher than all other lands.
5. 45:12 - He was circumcised like they were, and he spoke *lashon hakodesh*.
6. 45:14 - Binyamin wept for the destruction of *Mishkan Shilo* built in Yosef's territory.
7. 45:23 - Elderly people appreciate old wine.
8. 45:24 - He warned that if they engage in halachic disputes, they might not be alert to possible travel dangers.
9. 45:27 - His *ruach hakodesh* (prophetic spirit) returned.
10. 46:3 - Because Yaakov was grieved to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 46:4 - That Yaakov would be buried in Eretz Canaan.
12. 46:6 - He traded it for Esav's portion in the Cave of Machpelah.
13. 46:10 - Dina *bat* Yaakov.
14. 46:19 - Rachel was regarded as the mainstay of the family.
15. 46:29 - Yosef wanted to hasten to honor his father.
16. 46:34 - Because the Egyptians worshipped sheep.
17. 47:2 - So Pharaoh wouldn't see their strength and draft them.
18. 47:10 - That the waters of the Nile should rise to greet Pharaoh.
19. 47:21 - In order to remind them that they no longer owned the land, and to help his family by removing the stigma of being strangers.
20. 47:22 - The Egyptian priests.

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YOSEF AND THE DIVINE PLAN OF LEADERSHIP

Vayigash
When Yosef reveals his identity to his brothers he makes it clear that they should not be upset at having sold him into slavery. Additionally, neither G-d nor Yaakov nor Yosef reproves them for their actions, since Yosef's exalted position in Egypt will result in their survival. Essentially, although they intended to harm their brother, the outcome was positive. Abarbanel asks the obvious question. Even though the sale of Yosef had a positive result, the *transgression* of the sale itself remains. An individual should not be exonerated just because his purposeful and evil behavior ends up having a positive outcome, especially an outcome that could not have been even remotely anticipated by the brothers at the time of the sale. Rather, what they intended was to doom Yosef to a miserable existence for what promised to be a dramatically shortened life.

Abarbanel explains that a famous verse from Proverbs (21:1) is the basis for understanding this conundrum: "Like streams of water, so is the heart of a king in the hand of G-d; wherever He wishes, so He directs it." Abarbanel is telling us that the entire unfolding of these events was directed by G-d. Kings, rulers and statesmen who can, with a single word or action, alter the course of history, can become G-d's agents to bring about specific important events. Just as farmers collect the winter's rainfall and direct the "streams of water" by means of dams, canals and ditches to the areas where it is most needed, so too

can G-d direct a myriad of seemingly unrelated coincidences to produce His intended result. This is the metaphor of the "king's heart", for the heart is the ultimate motivator of human behavior.

In this case the brothers' hatred of Yosef, a product of their own free will, gave G-d the "opening", as it were, to direct the brothers to sell Yosef into slavery in Egypt. When Yosef realizes that they are afraid of retribution he tells them, according to most translations, "And now, don't be distressed or reproach yourselves for having sold me here, for it was to be a provider that G-d sent me ahead of you." According to this translation it sounds like Yosef is telling them that *despite* having sold him they shouldn't be upset because, in the end, good would result. Abarbanel, however, understands the verse as follows: "It is *because* you sold me that you shouldn't be upset or reproach yourselves..." — your hearts were in G-d's hands, and you were doing His will.

Because the ensuing Egyptian exile, the subsequent miracles of the Exodus and the 40-year experience in the Wilderness were the seminal events in the creation of G-d's Chosen People, the principal actors in that drama had the status of great rulers who throughout history G-d has used to bring about dramatic shifts in the course of the human experience.

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

"Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon."

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CONVERTS' SOUL-MATE

From: Ruth

Dear Rabbi,

I am a recent convert to Judaism and I was wondering about my prospects for finding my zivug soul-mate. I'm not asking from a social point of view, but rather based on the teaching that G-d decrees matching souls at conception. According to this teaching, the soul of a non-Jew who later converts would not have been decreed for a Jew since at that time the soul of the convert was not Jewish. Does this mean that from a spiritual point of view converts may only marry fellow-converts?

Dear Ruth,

This is a fascinating question.

You are correct. The Sages taught (Sota 2b): Forty days before the formation of the fetus (i.e., at conception) a voice from Heaven proclaims, "The daughter of so-and-so is destined for so-and-so". And it makes sense that for Jews, this proclamation is relevant only for other Jews whom they're permitted to marry. This would seem to exclude those born as non-Jews who later convert.

However, even if converts do often marry each other, that's not always the case. Converts also marry people born Jewish. Indeed, your namesake, the righteous convert Ruth, united with Boaz, the leader of Israel at that time, who thus became the ancestor of none other than King David.

But how does this fit into the Divine decree of who's for whom?

One possible explanation is based on the idea of reincarnation where, for certain reasons, a Jewish soul may be reincarnated into a non-Jewish body. While the soul is Jewish, from a halachic point of view the person is not. It is the inner yearning of the Jewish soul which compels this non-Jew to convert. Perhaps G-d decrees a Jewish soul-mate for this displaced

Jewish soul which is "destined" to convert.

Another possibility is that while every person has free-will, G-d knows in advance that a particular non-Jew will eventually convert. G-d may thus decree from the outset a Jewish soul-mate for this initially non-Jewish soul which will eventually become Jewish and fitting for its mate.

A third possibility is based on the idea that although one has a primary soul-mate, for several reasons (such as wrong decisions, death, etc.) one may miss his or her predestined soul-mate. In such cases, in His infinite wisdom, G-d compensates for these misses, and unites unpaired, compatible souls whose union also has great potential. Converts may also be a part of this reshuffling and re-pairing of available soul-mates.

This would seem to be the dynamic at work behind a particularly interesting story related to your question:

There was a young man who was an accomplished Torah scholar, of goodly appearance and from an upstanding, well-to-do family. Yet for many years he could not find his soul-mate. In despair, he finally consulted one of the greatest rabbis of recent times, "the Steipler", who told him that his soul-mate had not been born yet, but refused to provide further explanation. Initially expecting to wait another twenty years for his lagging soul-mate, he actually found her within a year!

How so?

He married a convert, about whom the Sages taught (Yevamot 62a), "A non-Jew who converts is like a newborn child". Since a convert receives a new soul at the time of conversion, it is as if he is born anew as a Jew at that time. Thus, when the young man consulted the rabbi, this woman had not yet converted, and had thus not yet been "born". Only after several months when she converted was she "born" as a Jew, and proclaimed by a Heavenly voice to be the soul-mate of this available, exceptional young man!

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

AVNIT — THE TEN SONS OF THE SIYUM

When a tractate of the Talmud is completed, the names of the ten sons of the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Papa are mentioned in the passages recited in the Siyum ceremony.



Avnit, about a kilometer north of Zefat, is reputed to be the burial place of these Torah scholars, and according to some traditions it is the final resting place of their great father as well.

PRAYING WITH A MINYAN

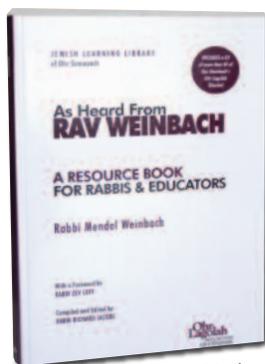
One should make an effort to pray in shul together with the congregation. If, however, due to circumstances beyond his control, one is unable to pray with the congregation, he should at least pray at the same time that they pray. If it is not possible for him to pray at the same time as them, and he is praying alone, then it is better to pray in shul. *Rema*: The same rule applies to people who live in a place without a *minyan*; therefore, they should pray Shacharit and Ma'ariv when the congregation prays. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 90:9*)

Though the prayers of an individual are not guaranteed to be accepted, the prayers of the congregation are never rejected, and one should therefore pray with the congregation even if there are sinners among them. It is better to pray with a *minyan* in shul than to pray with a *minyan* at home. If one has a choice to pray between two shuls, he should go to the one with more people. This is because there is greater honor accorded to G-d when there are more people present. However, if the shul with more people is more distracting, and it is hard to hear the prayers or the Torah read-

ing, it is better to pray where it is less distracting, even if it means praying with a *minyan* at home. (*Mishneh Berurah*)

The *Mishneh Berurah* explains what is considered grounds for not being able to pray with the congregation as follows: 1) One who is too weak to go to shul, even though he is not actually sick. 2) If one will suffer an actual monetary loss by going to pray with the congregation, he is allowed to pray by himself at home or in the shul.

However, one should not refrain from praying with the *minyan* if he only stands to lose profit. For one cannot compare losing profit to losing one's own money. The *Mishneh Berurah* writes a story of a great rabbi who passed up a chance to earn a large profit because it would interfere with praying with a *minyan*. Afterwards, when he found out how much profit he actually lost, he was happy that he did not let money interfere with his prayers. The *Eliyah Rabba* writes in the name of *Teshuvot Beit Yosef* that a fine should be imposed on those who do not go and pray with a *minyan* because they are learning or doing business instead.



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A WORD FOR A THOUGHT

There seem to be three synonymous words in Hebrew which all mean “thought”: *hirhur* (*hirhurim* in plural), *machshava* (*machshavot* in plural), and *raayon* (*raayonot* in plural). In the following paragraphs we will explore the nuances between the meanings of these three different words and how they reflect different stages of man’s thought process.

The Vilna Gaon (in his commentary to *Sefer Yetzirah*) and others explain that the word *machshava* refers to a pure, abstract thought, while *hirhur* means a thought that has already been transferred or formulated into possible words. Indeed, Rabbi Pinchas ha-Levi Horowitz (1731-1805) writes that the word *hirhur* is related to the Hebrew word *hirayon* (pregnancy), because a *hirhur* refers to the conception of a thought that will eventually germinate into verbalization.

Alternatively, the Vilna Gaon writes that a *machshava* transpires in the brain (the seat of the intellect), while a *hirhur* takes place in the heart (the seat of emotion).

What does the word *raayon* mean? There is ample reason to argue that *raayon* refers to one’s intellectual will. That is, when translating/converting Hebrew words into Aramaic, the letter *tzadi* in Hebrew commonly becomes an *ayin* in Aramaic. Thus, the Hebrew word *ratzon* (will) becomes *raavon* in Aramaic. This would seem to suggest a correlation between the word *raayon* and *raavon* (which are spelled almost exactly the same).

However, Rashi (to Berachot 55b) explicitly rejects this etymology by forcefully stating that the word *raayon* is not related to the Hebrew word *ratzon*, but rather means the same as *machshava*. Nachmanides (to Numbers 2:14) also writes that *raayon* is synonymous with *machshava*. Either way, it seems fairly clear that *raayon* is another word for “thought”. What, then, can be the difference between the

words *raayon* and *machshava*?

(Interestingly, Rashi, in his commentary to Daniel 2:29-30, defines *raayon* as *hirhur*, as opposed to *machshava*. This seems to contradict Rashi’s above-cited explanation that *raayon* means *machshava*.)

Rabbi Meir ha-Levi Abulafia (1170-1244) writes in his commentary *Yad Ramah* (to *Sanhedrin* 38b) that the word *raayon* is an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew word *machshava*. This suggests that the words *raayon* and *machshava* are indeed synonymous — but the former is Aramaic, while the latter is Hebrew.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) takes a different approach. He writes that a *raayon* is the beginnings of a thought. It is the type of idea that simply materializes in one’s head as he clears his mind to rest. A *raayon* is a spontaneous, sometimes fleeting, idea that upon further consideration and deliberation can potentially be developed into a well-formulated concept. A *machshava*, on the other hand, is the result of deliberate and focused thinking. The word *machshava* is related to the word *cheshbon* (calculation), as it denotes intended and purposeful pondering.

In short, the three words for “thought” in Hebrew are not exactly synonymous, but can be traced to three different points on one’s track of thought. In the beginning, a spark of a prototype of an idea surfaces in one’s mind. This is called a *raayon*. If one follows the thought, contemplates it, and develops it to its logical conclusion (known as *hoge’h/higgayon*), the resulting thought becomes a clearer, more mature idea — a *machshava*. As one completes his train of thought and prepares to verbally express what he is thinking, the theoretical and conceptual brainwaves are converted into words. Those unspoken words are known as *hirhurim*.

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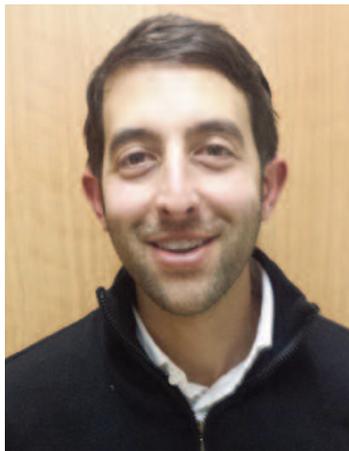
According to some estimates over 40 million Americans play fantasy sports, the favorite being “Fantasy Football”. For those who are unfamiliar with the name, Fantasy Football is a game of skill in which the participants serve as the general managers of virtual professional American football teams. The competitors choose their team rosters by participating in a draft of real football players. Points are based on the actual performances of the players in their games. The most popular version is within the National Football League. The object is to have your team win and score the most points. There are organized Fantasy Football leagues in which one can randomly play, but one can also set up a league with one’s friends. As a grandfather of young American teens, I have seen firsthand the passion that goes into this Fantasy world.

Since we live in the Olam Hasheker and the Olam Hadimyon — a world where falsehoods and fantasies are commonplace — it’s not surprising that Fantasy sports have a great appeal to young people. While in years past every boy dreamed that he’d be the next Babe Ruth, Mickey Mantle, Willie Mays or Johnny Unitas, today’s youth dream of being the general manager of their favorite football team. Very few, however, actually do something to achieve that goal. Yehuda Chaim Troy was the exception.

As most Americans know, Texas is a state with some of the most fanatical football fans in America. Growing up in San Antonio, Yehuda Chaim was infected with the football bug and his dream was to become a general manager of a football team. Of course, a nice Jewish boy needs a profession as a backup, and Yehuda Chaim graduated from the University of Texas with a degree in Finance, but he never took his eye off the ball. In his best-selling book, *Moneyball*, Michael Harris describes a new type of general manager of a sports team. He’s not the red-faced, hollering ex-pro who gets along well with the owner and recruits players based on reports from scouts who are part of an “old boy’s network”, but rather a data-savvy “quant” who makes his picks based on a myriad of metrics and statistical analysis. This is what experts (such as my 14 year-old granddaughter) who play Fantasy Football do, and this is what Yehuda Chaim wanted to do in the “real world” of football. While still in college Yehuda Chaim

interned with the New Orleans Saints and, following a short post-college stint as a Financial Advisor for Morgan Stanley in Dallas, returned to work for the Saints fulltime in their Youth Programs Department for the team’s first season in Louisiana post-Hurricane Katrina. Just a year and a half later he moved to New York City joining the NFL’s corporate office, taking a role in Player Development to help current players prepare for life after the game through career, financial, and mental health skill building. Soon thereafter Yehuda Chaim joined the Labor Operations group at the NFL, supporting Collective Bargaining negotiations and analyzing data related to player contracts. Simultaneously he also succeeded in acquiring a Masters in Business Administration from Fordham University.

In 2013 he moved out west to join the NFL’s operation in Los Angeles, widening the impact of a big data business intelligence system he had helped develop. On paper, Yehuda Chaim was doing the kind of work he dreamed of years before, but a funny thing happened – a casual reading of *Start-up Nation*, a book about the phenomenal success of Israel’s “hi-tech” scene, triggered a realization that he needed to tap into something deeper than the path he’d been blazing. While in Los Angeles he had a slight connection to the Jewish community, mostly through volunteerism with the Jewish Federation and attendance to a few events sponsored by Aish HaTorah. However, a Birthright trip in 2005 and a cultural pull towards Israel; the Jewish People’s homeland beckoned. He soon thereafter resigned from his job and made aliyah to Tel Aviv. Once in Israel he began spending weekends and holidays with religious cousins in Ma’aleh Michmash and Rechasim. The beauty of Shabbat and their spiritually elevated way of life made a big impact – a few months later he decided to take one week of introductory classes at Aish HaTorah Jerusalem in order to better comprehend the implications of 3,500 years of Jewish history and the practicality of integrating more observance of Judaism into his life. After 9 months of learning at Aish, Yehuda Chaim came to Ohr Somayach to continue elevating spiritually and deepening his connection to the wisdom of the Torah. He’s currently learning in our Center Program alongside Rabbi Peretz Segal and is well on his way to the “Big Leagues.”



ASARAH B'TEVET, EZRA AND THE TRANSLATION OF THE TORAH

The Shulchan Aruch states: On the eighth of Tevet during the days of King Ptolemy, the Torah was translated into Greek and three days of darkness came to the world, on the ninth of Tevet it is unknown what took place, and on the tenth, the king of Bavel besieged the city of Yerushalayim to destroy it (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 580:1, see end of Masechet Ta'anit). The commentaries ask an obvious question: It is clear from the *Selichot* that we say on *Asarah B'Tevet* that Ezra HaSofer passed away on the ninth of Tevet. If so, then why does it say that it is unknown what happened on the ninth? (Taz on Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 580:1, Chatam Sofer, *Derashot*, *drush l'chet Tevet* and Parshat Vayigash)

Before proposing an answer to this question, let us analyze another question. Why is it that the translation of the Torah is such a negative event? On the surface it can be argued that the translation of the Torah can be very productive since it can enable many who do not know Hebrew to learn the Torah. If so, why is it looked at in such negative terms? It says in Masechet Sofrim: It once happened that five elders translated the Torah into Greek for King Ptolemy, and that day was as catastrophic as the day that the golden calf was made because the Torah "could not be fully translated" (Masechet Sofrim 1:7). This statement of Chazal is teaching us something fundamental about the Torah. The Torah contains layers and layers of depth to such an extent that one verse can include many different explanations. The different explanations are derived through methods of derivation (given to us along with the Torah at Mount Sinai) that draw on similarity in words used in different verses, words that either contain extra letters or are incomplete with omitted letters, dots on top of letters or words, and even the shapes of the letters and the words — all intended to bring out the deeper meaning behind the literal text. This is why the translation of the Torah was such a tragedy, as when it was translated according to only the simple meaning of the text all of the depth behind the Torah was left out. This is what Chazal mean when they say that it could not be fully translated.

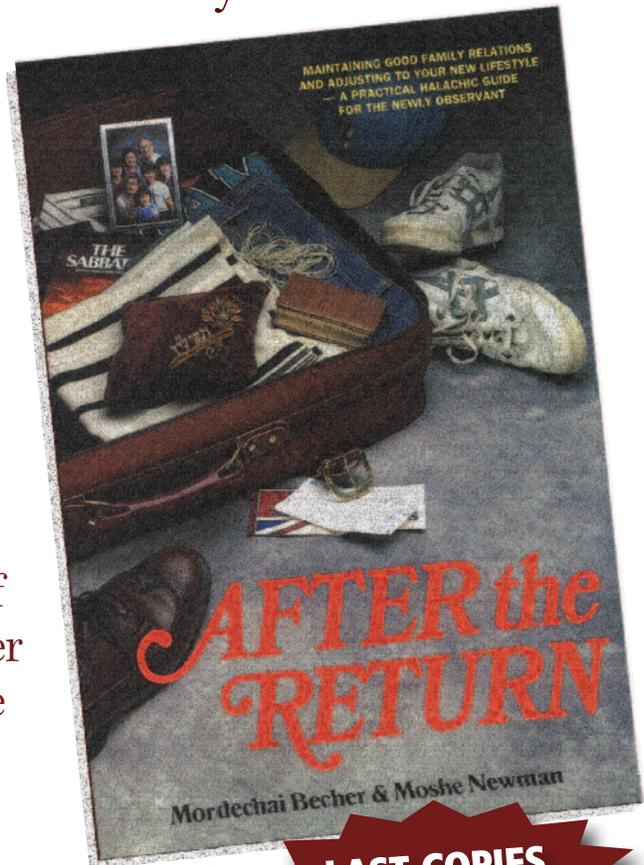
The Gemara says in the name of Rabbi Yosi: It was fitting for the Torah to be given through Ezra if not for the fact that Moshe preceded him... nevertheless even though the Torah wasn't given through him, the script was changed through him (Sanhedrin 21b). What is the meaning of this Gemara? The commentaries explain that the Torah was given in Ashurit script. This script was very holy, and each nuance of the shape

of the letters in this script, and the crowns above them, was full of depth. In fact, the Gemara says that Rabbi Akiva was able to derive *halachot* just from the crowns above the letters (Menachot 29b). However, being that this script was so refined and holy it was only used for the Torah that was in the *Aron Hakodesh* (Holy Ark). As a result, only the learned rabbis and prophets knew the script, while the common people were totally unfamiliar with it. However, as the generations went by, anti-Semitism and tragedies increased, and there was a worry that perhaps the Torah that was learned from the shapes of the letters would be forgotten altogether. Therefore, just like Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi wrote down the Oral Law as "The Mishna" (even though it was not meant to be written) to preserve it, so too Ezra Hasofer decided to institute the teaching of this script to the common people to preserve it for the generations to come. This is what the Gemara means when it says that even though the Torah wasn't given through Ezra, the script was changed through him. By comparing the giving of the Torah to the changing of the script Chazal are telling us that in its own right the changing of the script was also a form of giving over the Torah.

Now we may address the question of why it says that it is not known what happened on the ninth of Tevet, when we know very well that it was the day that Ezra Hasofer passed away. The Chatam Sofer says that when Ezra passed away everyone recognized the big loss that came with it. After all, it was Ezra Hasofer who taught them the Ashurit script and all the Torah that could be learned from it. Therefore they held the eighth of Tevet as a fast day. However, a few years later after the Torah was translated to Greek and the people became used to the literal translation of the Torah, they no longer valued the contribution of Ezra in reinstating the Ashurit script. This is because according to their crooked understanding that there is no depth behind the Torah, there was no difference in the language or script in which the Torah is presented. That is why they started to question the reason to fast on the day when Ezra passed away. When Megillat Ta'anit wrote that it is unknown what happened on the ninth, it was essentially writing the greatest tragedy of all: The people lost the value for the Torah's depth to such an extent that they no longer saw the passing of Ezra as a tragedy. This itself is the greatest calamity.

An old friend's wedding, an uncle's funeral, Passover at the family homestead — these are but a few of the challenging real-life events that are fraught with conflict and anxiety for the newly observant.

After returning to the faith of their ancestors, many re-enter the secular world without the tools to respond to the inevitable challenges to their newly adopted set of beliefs.



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