

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by **Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman** of the **New West End United Synagogue** in conjunction with **Shapell's/Darché Noam***

PARSHAT BEHAR

DVAR TORAH: FROM MATZAH TO MANNA

The author of the Chatam Sofer, Harav Moshe Sofer זצ"ל of Pressburg (1762–1839), was puzzled by reports of the celebrations that took place on Lag Baomer in the Land of Israel, and in a responsum (Teshuvot Chatam Sofer, Yoreh Deiah 233) he voices his concern. In his responsum he notes that according to a Midrash the thirty-third day of the Omer plays an important role in the timeline of the Exodus.

The Jews left Egypt with hastily baked matzot. Those matzot, says a midrash, sustained them for their first thirty days in the desert. At the end of thirty days their matzot ran out, and the Children of Israel were hungry for three days. They called out to G-d, and He provided them with miraculous bread that fell from Heaven. The מן, manna, began to fall on Lag Baomer, thirty-three days after the first day of the Exodus (he notes that this date is not unanimous in Chazal). This, says the Chatam Sofer, might be a cause for celebration.

However, most connect Lag Baomer's special celebrations with the Tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands now flock to his ציון, his grave in Meron on Lag Baomer. And whether, as some say, Lag Baomer is the day Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai passed away, or, as others say, it is the day he began to learn Torah from Rabbi Akiva, he is certainly the individual most directly associated with Lag Baomer. Perhaps, though, it is no accident that the day the manna began to fall is also closely associated with Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

Israel's transition from matzah to manna in the desert reflected their elevation to a new level of dependence on G d. The Jews trusted in G-d and followed Moshe into the desert, without even waiting for their bread to rise. After several weeks, though, their supplies began to run out. The People faced two possible reactions: dread that they would all die in the desert; or expectation that G-d will follow His awesome salvation in Egypt and at the Sea with awesome Divine Providence in the desert. On the thirtieth day Israel did not even see where tomorrow's food would come from – then they actually went through three days of famine.

On the thirty-third day they were blessed with awesome miracles, sweet water and manna as sweet as honey. But they only received one day's worth. This continued for forty years, when they never saw tomorrow's food, but trusted that G-d would provide for them every single day.

“The Torah was only given over to אוכלי המן, those who eat of the manna,” said Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Mechilta Beshalach Vayasa 2). Extreme trust of G d was a necessary pre-requisite for Israel receiving the Torah. To access G-d's Torah Israel needed to be intensely connected to Him, to totally rely on Him. We needed to trust that He provides exactly what we need for our bodies and souls. We were primed by Heavenly manna for His Heavenly Torah. Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught us that the Torah was given to those who eat of the manna; and he reflected this teaching in his own life. During his twelve years in the cave, hiding away from the Romans who wanted to kill him, he ate of the miraculous carob tree and drank of the miraculous spring. He was later able to teach the Torah he and his son learned in the cave to the People of Israel. The thirty-third day of the Omer not only celebrates the falling of the manna, but the great flow of Torah that came to all of Israel through one of the אוכלי המן, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

SOURCE GUIDE: YEARS OF GOOD FORTUNE

This source guide is built on an aggadic passage that tells of a family who in one moment was blessed with years of good fortune. It describes how it came and how they reacted. We will follow the story, step-by-step, and note a theme that emerges from two significant details.

A. The Episode of the Pious Man, His Righteous Wife, and the Mysterious Nomad

<p>1. Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 607</p> <p>This is an anecdote about a certain pious person who encountered financial difficulties and his wife, who was a proper and decent woman. One time he was plowing in the field and he met Eliahu, of blessed memory, in the guise of an Arab nomad. Eliahu said to the pious man, "You have six good years coming. When do you want them – now or at the end of your days?"</p>	<p>ילקוט שמעוני רות תרז</p> <p>מעשה בחסיד אחד שיבד מנכסיו והיתה אשתו קשרה לסוף נעשה שכיר, פעם אחד היה חורש בשדה פגע בו אליהו זכרוננו לברכה בדמות ערבי אחד, אמר לו יש לך שש שנים טובות אימתי אתה מבקש אותם עכשו או בסוף ימיה?"</p>
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How would you answer that question yourself? What are the pros and cons of each of the two options?

Let us see what the pious man himself answered:

<p>2. Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 607</p> <p>He said to him (to Eliahu in the guise of an Arab). "You are a sorcerer; I have nothing to give you. Just, please, leave me in peace." But he returned back three times. On the third time, the pious man said, "I will go and consult my wife." He went to his wife and said to her, "A certain man came and troubled me three times and told me, 'You have six good years coming. When do you want them – now or at the end of your days?' And what do you say?"</p>	<p>ילקוט שמעוני רות תרז</p> <p>אמר לו, "קוסם אתה אין מה ליטן לך! אלא, הפטר מעלי בשלום." וחזר אצלו עד שלש פעמים. בפעם שלישית אמר לו "אלה ואמלך באשתי." הלה אצל אשתו ואמר לה, "בא אלי אתך והטריח אותי עד שלש פעמים ואמר לי, 'יש לך שש שנים טובות אימתי אתה מבקש אותם עכשו או בסוף ימיה?'" אמר לה, "וימה את אומרת?"</p>
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What did his wife say?

<p>3. Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 607</p> <p>She said to her husband, "Tell him to bring them now." The man said to Eliahu, "Bring them now."</p> <p>Eliahu said to him, "Go home and even before you reach the gate of the courtyard, you will see the blessing spread over your household."</p> <p>His sons were sitting, searching in the dirt with their hands, and they found enough money to sustain them for six years. They called their mother. The husband did not even reach the gateway, and the woman had already gone out to greet him and tell him the good tidings.</p>	<p>ילקוט שמעוני רות תרז</p> <p>אמרה לו, "לך אמור לו הבא אותם עכשו." אמר לו, "לך הבא אותם עכשיו."</p> <p>אמר לו, "לך לביתה ואין אתה מגיע לשער חצרה עד שתראה ברכה פרוסה בבית."</p> <p>והיו יושבים בניו לחפש בידם בעפר ומצאו ממון שיזונו בו שש שנים וקראו לאמן, ולא הגיע לשער עד שיצאת אשתו לקראתו ובשרה אותו.</p>
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Note, now, how he and how she each react:

<p>4. Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 607</p> <p>Immediately he thanked the Holy One, blessed be He, and felt content.</p> <p>What did his decent wife do? She said: "At any rate, the Holy One, blessed be He, has stretched out a 'string of lovingkindness to us and given us money that can sustain us for six years. Let us involve ourselves in acts of kindness for these years. Perhaps the Holy One, blessed be, will add more of His own."</p> <p>Thus she did. Whatever she did every day she told her young son. "Write down what we give," and thus he did.</p>	<p>ילקוט שמעוני רות תרז</p> <p>מיד הודה לקדוש ברוך הוא ונחה דעתו עליו,</p> <p>מה עשתה אשתו הקשרה? אמרה לו, "מכל מקום כבר משה עלינו הקדוש ברוך הוא חוט של חסד ונתן לנו ממון מזון שש שנים. נעסוק בגמילות חסדים שנים הללו שפא הקדוש ברוך הוא מוסיף לנו משלו."</p> <p>וכן עשתה. כל מה שעשתה בכל יום ויום אמרה לבנה קטן, "כתוב כל מה שאנו נותנין." וכן עשה.</p>
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Six years pass by:

<p>5. Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 607 At the end of six years, Eliahu, of blessed memory, came and said to the man, “The time has come to take back what I have given you.”</p>	<p>ילקוט שמעוני רות תרז סוף שש שנים בא אליהו זכרונו לברכה. אמר לו, "כבר הגיע עונה ליטול מה שנתתי לך."</p>
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How would you react if you were in the pious man’s place? Here is what he actually did:

<p>6. Yalkut Shimoni Ruth 607 He said (to Eliahu), “When I took the money, it was only with my wife’s consent. Similarly, when I return it, I only want to return it with my wife’s consent.” He went to his wife and said to her, “The elderly man is back to take back what is his.” She said, “Go tell him. ‘If you find people more trustworthy than us, give them your deposit.’” God saw their words, and the acts of kindness they had done, and added to them good upon good. This fulfills the verse, “The acts of tzedakah, charity, are peace” (Yishayah 32:17).</p>	<p>ילקוט שמעוני רות תרז אמר לו, "כשנטלתי לא נטלתי אלא מדעת אשתי. אף כשאני מחזיר לא אחזיר אלא מדעת אשתי." הלך אצלה אמר לה כבר בא הזמן ליטול את שלך, אמרה לו, לך אמור לו אם מצאת בני אדם נאמנים ממנו מן להם פקדונך, וראה הקדוש ברוך הוא דבריהם, וגמילות חסדים שעשו, והוסיף להם טובה על טובה, לקיים מה שנאמר, "והיה מעשה הצדקה שלום" (ישעיה לב:יז).</p>
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B. What is the significance of the following two details?

- a. **“Six years”** – Why is that the chosen number of years of good fortune?
- b. **“Your deposit”** – Why does she refer to the money that way?

“Six years” – Six years is a transparent reference to the Shemittah cycle: “Six years you may sow your field ... but in the seventh year, the land shall have a complete rest, a Shabbat to G-d; you shall not sow your field, nor shall you prune your vineyard” (Vayikra 25:3-4). The Torah sums up the message of Shemittah:

<p>7. Vayikra 25:23 ... For the land belongs to Me, for you are strangers and [temporary] residents with Me.</p>	<p>ויקרא כה:כג ... כי לי הארץ כי גרים ותושבים אתם עמדי.</p>
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Hashem owns the land; He owns the world. “G-d’s is the earth and all that fills it, the world and all those who inhabit it” (Tehillim 24:1). Avraham refers to G-d as “קונה שמים וארץ” – “the One Who possesses the Heaven and the earth” (Bereishit 14:19).

This is why the wife in the story refers to the miraculous six years of plenty as **“Your deposit.”** She viewed the treasure as God’s money that He deposited with them. She approached those six years as a financial advisor would, trying to invest God’s money in the way that would best serve the interests of her “client.”

“G-d saw their words” – means two things:

- a. He saw her choice of words, referring to the money not as theirs, but as His.
- b. He saw that her argument was sensible. It makes sense to invest more money with her (and it is worth assuring the family’s own financial security), because she has a good track record of high returns on His investment. She transforms money into tzedakah, gemilut chasadim (acts of kindness), and mitzvot.

HONOUR OTHERS, HONOUR MYSELF BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

During Sefirat Haomer we remember the tragedy of Rabbi Akiva's students who "did not act towards each other with כבוד, honor" (Yevamot 62b). This time period is a special opportunity to work on improving that character trait. How do I go about actually doing it? How do I learn to honor others?

On answer is given by the Mishnah. Chazal tell us, "איזהו מכובד? המכבד את הבריות" – "Who is an honored person? It is a person who gives other people honor" (Avot 4:1). The Baalei Hamussar say that if I give other people honor it is a סימן, an indication, that I have a deep sense of who I really am. Let us elaborate.

If I want to be able to give honor to other people, the first thing I have to do is to be able to relate to myself with proper honor. I must be able to relate to myself as a צלם אלוקים, made in the image of G d. Each person has a source of significance, of חשיבות, and of meaning in the world which is absolute. It is part of who I am; nobody can take it away from me. When I sense that within myself, I will have what to give to others. Then I can share that sense of the fullness of what I have and that spills over to other people. I can then relate to other people with kavod, with honor.

If I feel myself lacking, that I am really not so important; then I am not in touch with my essential נשמה, my soul, and צלם אלוקים, the image of G-d. If I relate to honor and self-worth superficially, it will be very hard for me to give other people honor; for I will feel that by honoring others I am somehow giving up something, losing honor to others. But truly honoring others comes from an internal sense of worth, an internal sense of kavod, that I know all of G-d's creatures have. The path to honoring others is to honor myself.

Honoring my self does not mean putting on airs; it doesn't mean being a "stuffed shirt." Honoring my self is also not a contradiction to the ענוה of מדה, humility. Humility means that I know that all of my significance as a human being, all of my worth, comes from a Source which is above me, which created me. It is not something that I have. It is a blessing that has come from Above.

I was created to be a mere fraction of a whole picture. Of course, I have worth. Of course, I have my own kavod. But I have to understand that just as I have that kavod, so Hakadosh baruch Hu, the Holy One, blessed be He, created millions and billions of other people, and they have their kavod. And my kavod can only really be expressed, and only really comes to its fruition when I connect it with that of other people. I realize that I'm a fraction and he's a fraction; and we can all come together and create a whole. A person has to think – I'm so חשוב, so important, that I couldn't possibly be responsible for my own חשיבות, my own importance. It must come from a Source beyond me.

שבת שלום ומבורך

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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