

THE LAMP OF DARKNESS

The Go Further Addition

Forward

The Age of Prophecy series is the brainchild of Dave Mason, and since an early stage I have served as its creative midwife. From the outset, our goal in writing these books has been introducing the reader to the world of the prophets, and through them to the depth of passionate and fulfilling life that we have each found in Torah. Originally the narrative was a vehicle for our favourite thoughts in Torah, and thus a complete failure. The transformation into a successful novel happened in two stages. The first came when an editor pointed out that our educational goal would never be served if we failed to write a compelling story. The Torah, which we saw as the ends, was overwhelming the narrative which we had approached only as a means. So we took it all out, stripping the book down to a fun adventure story which I doubt many people would ever have read. The second stage emerged through our creative work together. At some point of grappling with how to make the story real while also allowing to serve our educational goals we realized that when it comes to the Torah, to say that the medium is the message is a vast understatement. We are a people who is a product of the story we have been telling since long before we remember. Suddenly, the characters became our teachers as they struggled through the world which we created together.

It is with tremendous gratitude, excitement and not a little trepidation that I present you with the 'Go further' edition of the Lamp of Darkness. This edition aims to peel back the cover of our narrative and expose the topography of Torah beneath. Whether you are an educator, a student or simply a seeker of meaning it is my hope that it will help you access the depth of our work, and the Divine story which it seeks to tell. For each chapter you will find the texts that are directly referenced, as well as those which serve as the underlying conceptual framework, often quoted in their full format for ease of use. In addition, I have provided questions to deepen your personal and textual reflection.

A few thanks are in order. First to the Werthan family, for their generous support of this project. Also to Jackie Frankel Yaakov and the entire Pardes management team for their belief in and support of my work. To my wife Karen, without whose love, belief and support I would never accomplish anything. To Dave Mason, whose partnership has transformed the meaning of chavruta and taken me to places I never dreamed to go. Finally, to the Holy One who is love, support and belief itself – and much, much more.

Mike Feuer

Prologue

We state that the prologue occurs 579 years after the Exodus. We reached this conclusion from the following collection of sources. Kings I 6:1 says it was 480 years from the Exodus from Egypt until Solomon laid the foundation of the Temple, which occurred in the fourth year of his reign. Solomon ruled for forty years (*ibid.* 11:42), which brings us to 516 years after the Exodus. Yeravaum ruled for twenty-two years (*ibid.* 14:20), his son Nadav ruled for two years (*ibid.* 15:25). Ba'asa reigned for twenty-four years (*ibid.* 15:33) and his son Elah became king for two years (*ibid.* 16:8). Zimri ruled for seven days (*ibid.* 16:15) in the twenty-seventh year of King Asa of Judah. Omri then won a civil war and ruled the kingdom of Israel until his death in the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah (*ibid.* 16:29), which means there were eleven years from the rule of Zimri to the rule of Ahav son of Omri. Thus, Ahav became King of Israel 577 years after the Exodus from Egypt, and the prologue segment occurs two years into his reign.

For a rabbinic analysis of these biblical dates, see *Seder Olam Rabbah* ch. 16-17. In order to really grasp the background of the book, it is worth reading the whole first Book of Kings, but the immediate foundational chapters in the Hebrew bible on which the Lamp of Darkness is based are I Kings 16 and 17.

Chapter 1 - A Shepherd's Inheritance

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

Lev lives life within a very limited horizon, longing for something larger. He watches the road to see travelers, values his friendship with Seguv even though he sees him only passing through, and lives on daydreams of what might be. Nevertheless, when Uriel offers him the opportunity to actually enter a larger world he is frightened and upset. Why? What do you dream about and what can that teach you about yourself? How would you react if life actually offered you your dreams?

Textual

What can the various names of the prophets teach us about the role which they played in their society?

The Torah conceives of three primary vessels for the relationship between God and Israel – the commandments, the land and the historical experience of the people. Looking at the sources offered from this chapter on the rains and inheritance, what is the nature of the relationship which each offers? What other sources and types of relationship can you think of?

Sources

This is the first batch of afarsimon oil ever produced in the kingdom

Anointing with oil has both a legal function and powerful symbolism in Jewish tradition. Moshe was commanded to create the original anointing oil in the wilderness (see Exodus 30:22-33) and once the children of Israel entered the land only the High Priest and the King were anointed. The very word messiah derives from the Hebrew moshiah (משיח) which means anointed. Once the unified kingdom split, the Kings of Israel were anointed with afarsimon oil, while kings of the House of David who ruled over Judah were anointed with the special anointing oil.

Babylonian Talmud Horayot 11b Kings of the house of David are anointed; kings of Israel are not anointed. From where do we derive this? Rava said that the verse states: “Arise, anoint him, for this is he” (I Samuel 16:12): This king, David, requires anointing, but another king does not require anointing. The Master said: Even Jehu, son of Nimshi, king of Israel, was anointed only due to the challenge of Joram. And due to the challenge of Joram, son of Ahav, shall we misuse consecrated anointing oil and anoint a king of Israel, who does not require anointing? It is like that which Rav Pappa said: They anointed him with pure balsam oil, not with anointing oil. So too, with regard to Jehu, they anointed him with pure afarsimon oil, not with anointing oil.

Rambam Mishne Torah Kings and Wars 1:10 The kings of Israel are not anointed with the (special) Anointing Oil, but with afarsimon oil only. They may never be appointed in Jerusalem – only may the descendants of David. Only descendants of David are anointed (with the special Anointing Oil).

It's the waters in Yericho

On the deadly waters of Yericho see II Kings 2:19-22

The men of the town said to Elisha, “Look, the town is a pleasant place to live in, as my lord can see; but the water is bad and the land causes bereavement.” He responded, “Bring me a new dish and put salt in it.” They brought it to him; he went to the spring and threw salt into it. And he said, “Thus said the LORD: I heal this water; no longer shall death and bereavement come from it!” The water has remained wholesome to this day, in accordance with the word spoken by Elisha.

The Radak on this verse offers an explanation of the evil of the waters which is reflective of the sins of the people as the actual cause of their deaths.

“Look, the town is a pleasant place to live...” Up to this point we have no indication that the waters of Jericho were bad, or that they caused bereavement. If it had been so, the people would not have loved it nor would they have transgressed the ban against rebuilding it. Furthermore, if the waters had been bad all along how is it that

Questions and Sources

Eliyahu did not heal them? Finally, if they had caused bereavement for the many years they had been settled there the people would have given up and left. Therefore it appears that the evil had come to the waters recently due to the wickedness of the city's residents, and it was the bad waters which caused the ground to be a source of bereavement - killing many who drank from them. From an interpretive perspective, the verse is saying that Jericho was cursed and a source of bereavement because Joshua had cursed it. Then Eliyahu added his own curse in the when Hiel's two sons died and Eliyahu and King Ahav came to comfort him, as described above in I Kings 16:34 and the midrash. The Sages taught "Look, the town is a pleasant place to live in...but the water is bad and the land causes bereavement." What could be good about it?! R' Yochanan said: the inhabitants always see the grace of a place. (Sotah 47a)

As the story progress it will become clear that the rebuilding of Yericho by Hiel, the death of his sons and the interplay between curses and sin serves as a frame for the entire narrative. For more of the background of Hiel's story see the following sources.

I Kings 16:34 During his reign, Hiel the Bethelite fortified Yericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of Aviram his first-born, and set its gates in place at the cost of Seguv his youngest, in accordance with the words that the LORD had spoken through Joshua son of Nun.

Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 113a "Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; with Aviram, his firstborn, he laid its foundation, and with his young son Seguv set up its gates" (I Kings 16:34). It is taught in a baraita: From the death of Aviram, his firstborn, the wicked, it was not incumbent upon him to learn not to build Jericho, as Aviram's death could be attributed to chance. But with the death of Seguv his young son, it was incumbent upon him to learn that it was due to Joshua's curse that they died. What did Aviram and Seguv do that they are characterized as wicked, and what is the baraita saying? This is what the baraita is saying: From the death of Aviram, his firstborn, that wicked man Hiel should have learned about the cause of the death of Seguv his young son. By inference from that which is stated: "With Aviram, his firstborn," do I not know that Seguv was his young son? Rather, what is the meaning when the verse states: "His young son Seguv"? It teaches that he

THE LAMP OF DARKNESS

gradually buried all his sons from Aviram through Seguv, and he should have suspected that Joshua's curse caused the deaths.

may the Holy One protect you

There are many names of God used in the Hebrew bible, and a vast traditional and critical literature which attempts to explain why and what these names mean. We choose to use only the term 'Holy One' in the book for a few reasons. One was simply to avoid confusion through any attempt to add another layer of meaning to the dialogue of the prophets. Another was as part of a larger effort to avoid gendered language in reference to God, which though consonant with Israelite culture, can lead to many misunderstandings within our own. Finally, we operate on the belief that the various names of God express different aspects of the relationship between Creator and creation. The Holy One communicates both the sacred and the unified which we felt were critical elements that must be present in our story.

His head sank between his bent knees

The source for the prophetic position of sitting on the ground with the head between the knees is [I Kings 18:42](#) "Elijah meanwhile climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, crouched on the ground, and put his face between his knees."

For a connection between prayer and prophecy via this position see [gemara Berachot 34b](#).

Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa, who went to study Torah before Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, and Rabbi Yoḥanan's son fell ill. He said to him: Hanina, my son, pray for mercy on behalf of my son so that he will live. Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa placed his head between his knees and prayed for mercy upon his behalf, and Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai's son lived.

For an interesting explanation of why having the head between the knees is significant see [Vayikra Rabbah 31:4](#)

Another interpretation of "Command the Children of Israel" ([Leviticus 24:2](#)): Bar Kapparah opened [his discourse]: "It is You who light my

Questions and Sources

lamp" (Psalms 18:29) - the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Adam, "Your light is in My hands and My light is in your hands." Your light is in My hands, as it is stated (Proverbs 20:27), "The lamp of the Lord is the soul of man"; and My light is in your hands, as it is stated (Leviticus 24:2), "to light a continual lamp." Rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, said, "If you light My lamp, I will certainly light your lamp." This is [the understanding of] "Command the Children of Israel" (Leviticus 24:2). This is [the understanding of] that which is written (Song of Songs 7:6), "Your head (*roshekha*) upon you is like crimson wool (*karmel*), the locks of your head are like purple" - the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel, "The poor (*rashim*) among you are as beloved to Me as Eliyahu, when he went up to [Mount] Carmel." This is [the understanding of] "and Elijah climbed to the top of Mount Carmel, crouched on the ground, and put his face between his knees." And why did he put his face between his knees? He said, "Master of the world, if we do not have any merit, look to the covenant of circumcision."

It rolled behind the wine barrel

We typically think of prophets through the lens of the works of the later prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, looking at them as an institute on par with the kingship. The source which shows that the prophets also served the common need as finders of lost objects is I Samuel 9:5-9

When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, "Let us turn back, or my father will stop worrying about the asses and begin to worry about us." But he replied, "There is a man of God in that town, and the man is highly esteemed; everything that he says comes true. Let us go there; perhaps he will tell us about the errand on which we set out." "But if we go," Saul said to his servant, "what can we bring the man? For the food in our bags is all gone, and there is nothing we can bring to the man of God as a present. What have we got?" The servant answered Saul again, "I happen to have a quarter-shekel of silver. I can give that to the man of God and he will tell us about our errand." — Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he would say, "Come, let us go to the seer," for the prophet of today was formerly called a seer. —

Now I know you are truly a Seer

Seer is one of the many names by which the prophets are known.

Avot d'Rabbi Natan 34:8 The prophet is called by ten names. An envoy, as it says "I have received tidings from the LORD, And an envoy is sent out among the nations..." (Jer. 49:14) Trusted, as it says "...he is trusted throughout My household." (Bamidbar 12:7) Servant, as it says "Not so with My servant Moses..." (ibid.) Representative, as it says 'And an envoy is sent out among the nations (?)' (see Jer. 49:14 and Shemot 4:13) Seer, as it says "...the word of the LORD had come to the prophet Gad, David's seer." (Shmuel II 24:11) Watchman, as it says "O mortal, I appoint you watchman for the House of Israel..." (Ezk. 3:17) Seer, as it says "...for the prophet of today was formerly called a seer." (Shmuel I 9:9) Dreamer, as it says "...do not heed the words of that prophet or that dream-diviner." (Dev. 13:4) Prophet, as it says "...since he is a prophet..." (Bereshit 20:7) Man of God, as it says "There is a man of God in that town..." (Shmuel I 9:6)

Farmers had cursed the late malkosh rains that soaked the barley crop

The relationship between the barley harvest and the wheat harvest are embodied in the Torah and rabbinic literature through the relationship between the *Omer* barley offering which marked the beginning of the harvest immediately following Passover and the two loaves of wheat bread offered on the Shavuot festival seven weeks later. See for example Leviticus 23:10-17

Say to the children of Israel, When you have come to the land which I will give you, and have harvested the grain from its fields, take some of the first-fruits of the grain to the priest; And let the grain be waved before the Lord, so that you may be pleasing to him; on the day after the Sabbath let it be waved by the priest. And on the day of the waving of the grain, you are to give a male lamb of the first year, without any mark, for a burned offering to the Lord. And let the meal offering with it be two tenth parts of an ephah of the best meal mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the Lord for a sweet smell; and the drink offering with it is to be of wine, the fourth part of a hin. And you may take no bread or dry grain or new grain for food till the very day on which you have given the offering for your God: this is a rule for ever through all your generations wherever

Questions and Sources

you are living. And you shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, the day when you give the grain for the wave offering; Let fifty days be numbered, to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you are to give a new meal offering to the Lord. Take from your houses two cakes of bread, made of a fifth part of an ephah of the best meal, cooked with leaven, to be waved for first-fruits to the Lord.

Together they represent an evolution from the animal to the human, as in this comment from R' A.Y. Hakohen Kook [Orot, Orot Yisrael 8:1](#)

Therefore, Pesach is linked to Shavuot through the counting of the Omer in the Temple, that links together the barley sacrifice, animal feed, the instinct, to the wheat offering, human food, the spiritual intellect, “the tree of knowledge was wheat”. (Berachot 40a) These two basic forces reveal their full strength and action, in the depths of the soul and in the breadth of life, when each is expressed in its own full and independent way, with no restrictions, and when they fuse together to a higher unified system.

The first rains (*yoreh*) and the last rains (*malkosh*) are essential aspects of the agricultural cycle in the land of Israel. The bible sees their regular function as a sign of God’s covenant with Israel, as in [Deuteronomy 11:13-17](#)

If, then, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day, loving the LORD your God and serving Him with all your heart and soul, I will grant the rain for your land in season, the early rain (*yoreh*) and the late (*malkosh*). You shall gather in your new grain and wine and oil— I will also provide grass in the fields for your cattle—and thus you shall eat your fill. Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. For the LORD’s anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land that the LORD is assigning to you.

For a rabbinic exploration of the terms which combines meaning and meteorology, see [Babylonian Talmud Ta’anit 6a](#)

The Sages taught in a baraita: The first rain [*yoreh*] is called by this name due to the fact that it instructs [moreh] people to plaster their roofs and to bring in their produce from the fields and to attend to all their needs. Alternatively, that it moistens [*marve*] the earth and

waters it to the depths, as it is stated: “Watering [ravvei] its ridges abundantly, settling down its furrows, You make it soft with showers, You bless its growth” ([Psalms 65:11](#)). Alternatively, yoreh means that it falls gently and it does not fall vehemently. Or perhaps that is not the case; rather, yoreh means that the rain causes the fruit to drop from the trees, washes the seeds away, and washes the trees away in a destructive manner. Therefore the verse states: “Last rain [malkosh]” ([Deuteronomy 11:14](#)); just as malkosh refers specifically to rains that are for a blessing, so too, yoreh is for a blessing. Or perhaps that is not the case; rather, malkosh means that the rain falls so hard [kashe] that it knocks down the houses, shatters the trees and brings up the locusts? Therefore, the verse states: “Yoreh,” just as yoreh is for a blessing, so too, malkosh is for a blessing. And with regard to yoreh itself, from where do we derive that it is referring to rain that falls for a blessing? As it is written: “You children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God, for He has given you the first rain [moreh] in His kindness, and He caused to come down for you the rain, the first rain [moreh] and the last rain [malkosh], in the first month” ([Joel 2:23](#)). The Sages taught: The first rain falls in Marḥeshvan and the last rain in Nisan. Do you say that the first rain is in Marḥeshvan and the last rain in Nisan, or perhaps it is only that the first rain falls in Tishrei and the last rain in Iyyar? Therefore, the verse states: “I shall give the rain of your land in its due time” ([Deuteronomy 11:14](#)). The last rain [malkosh]. Rav Nehilai bar Idi said that Shmuel said: It is a matter that circumcises [mal] the stubbornness [kashyuteihen] of the Jewish people, i.e., it penetrates to the hearts of the Jewish people, as when rain does not fall in its time, they turn to God in repentance. The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught: it is a matter that fills out [memalle] produce in its stalks [bekasheha]. It was taught in a baraita: Malkosh is a matter that comes down on the ears [melilot] and on the stalks [kashin].

And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year

The verse they are reciting is [Leviticus 25:10](#). The question of whether Israel successfully kept the *shemitta/yovel* (sabbatical/Jubilee) cycle during the 1st Temple period is not a simple one, and the connection which it draws

Questions and Sources

between moral rectitude, financial security and national safety is a theme which will unfold through the series. The following sources seem to make it clear that the cycle broke down:

Jeremiah 34:13–17 Thus said the LORD, the God of Israel: I made a covenant with your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, the house of bondage, saying: “In the seventh year each of you must let go any fellow Hebrew who may be sold to you; when he has served you six years, you must set him free.” But your fathers would not obey Me or give ear. Lately you turned about and did what is proper in My sight, and each of you proclaimed a release to his countrymen; and you made a covenant accordingly before Me in the House which bears My name. But now you have turned back and have profaned My name; each of you has brought back the men and women whom you had given their freedom, and forced them to be your slaves again. Assuredly, thus said the LORD: You would not obey Me and proclaim a release, each to his kinsman and countryman. Lo! I proclaim your release—declares the LORD—to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine; and I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

2 Chronicles 36:19–21 They burned the House of God and tore down the wall of Jerusalem, burned down all its mansions, and consigned all its precious objects to destruction. Those who survived the sword he exiled to Babylon, and they became his and his sons’ servants till the rise of the Persian kingdom, in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, until the land paid back its sabbaths; as long as it lay desolate it kept sabbath, till seventy years were completed.

For the connection between how a failure to keep the sabbatical year was connected to exile already in the Torah (before the people entered the land), see Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 33a

Due to the sin of prohibited sexual relations, and idol worship, and failure to let the land lie fallow during the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years, exile comes to the world and they exile the Jewish people from their land, and others come and settle in their place.

Silence is a fence for wisdom: Pirkei Avot 3:17

It's a shepherd's inheritance

The concept of inheritance is essential to the way in which the Torah articulates the relationship between the people of Israel and the land of Israel. It appears in countless places, perhaps the most fundamental is found in [Numbers 26:52-56](#)

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Among these shall the land be apportioned as shares, according to the listed names: with larger groups increase the share, with smaller groups reduce the share. Each is to be assigned its share according to its enrollment. The land, moreover, is to be apportioned by lot; and the allotment shall be made according to the listings of their ancestral tribes. Each portion shall be assigned by lot, whether for larger or smaller groups."

The source for the tribal inheritance which has been alienated from its original owner through sale returning in the Jubilee year is [Leviticus 25:10](#) (quoted on page 8)

"and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family."

The link between the Sabbatical and Jubilee cycles and all of the tribes of Israel being settled on their inheritance, with messianic implications, is made explicit by the [Babylonian Talmud Arakhin 32b](#)

From the time that the tribe of Reuben and the tribe of Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh were exiled, the counting of Jubilee Years was nullified, as it is stated: "And you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a Jubilee for you" ([Leviticus 25:10](#)), indicating that the laws of the Jubilee Year apply only when all its inhabitants are in the land of Israel, and not when some of them have been exiled. The baraita continues: One might have thought that if all the Jews were living in the land of Israel, but they are intermingled, e.g., the tribe of Benjamin is living in the portion of the tribe of Judah, and the tribe of Judah in the portion of the tribe of Benjamin, that the Jubilee Year should be in effect. Therefore, the verse states: "To all

Questions and Sources

its inhabitants,” which teaches that the Jubilee Year applies only when its inhabitants are living according to their proper arrangement, and not when they are intermingled.

More than the lamb wants to suck, the ewe wants to give milk

The source for this is in Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 112a. There it refers to a teacher’s desire to teach being even greater than a student’s desire to learn

Chapter 2 - The Three Keys

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

Uriel says that the prophets inhabit a world of devotion (*avodah*, עבודה) which is defined by the ability to make our own choices. What is the difference between a life of choice and one of obedience? How can Uriel say this if the Torah is filled with commandments? What significant choices have you made and how did they shape your life? What role has obedience played in your choices?

Have you ever been in an emotional state that left you unable to achieve what you wanted? Perhaps because you were too angry to engage or too depressed to motivate yourself? The prophets often used music to change their states. What tools do you use to change yours?

Textual

Why would joy be a necessary precondition for prophecy? How do you define joy?

Despite the fact that fertility plays a central role in the biblical blessings, Sarah (Genesis 16:1), Rivkah (Genesis 25:21), Rachel (Genesis 29:31) and Hannah (I Samuel 1:5) were all barren. Why do you think this might have been? Note the role that prayer and Divine relationship play in these four stories – what is the connection? In this light, how do you understand the words of the Babylonian Talmud Chullin 60b “the Holy One, Blessed be He, desires the prayers of the righteous”?

Sources

Our Way is a path of choice

Most of our actions in life are constrained by necessity - be it situational, societal, biological or otherwise. Many people see the Torah, with its emphasis on commandment, as a further constrain on their freedom. Nevertheless, there is a rich literature on the critical role which choice plays

Questions and Sources

in cultivating the Divine relationship. The Rambam discusses the link between choice and devotion in Mishneh Torah Laws of Repentance 5:1 - 5:4

5:1 Every man was endowed with a free will; if he desires to bend himself toward the good path and to be just it is within the power of his hand to reach out for it, and if he desires to bend himself to a bad path and to be wicked it is within the power of his hand to reach out for it. This is known from what it is written in the Torah, saying: "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil" (Gen. 3.22), that is as if saying: "Behold, this species, man, stands alone in the world, and there is no other kind like him, as regards this subject of being able of his own accord, by his reason and thought, to know the good and the evil, and to do whatever his inclination dictates him with none to stay his hand from either doing good or evil; and, being that he is so, 'Lest he put forth his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever'" (Ibid.)

5:2 Permit not your thought to dwell upon that which ridiculous fools of other peoples and a majority of asinine individuals among the children of Israel say, that the Holy One, blessed is He! decrees at the very embryonic state of every man whether he should be just or wicked. The matter is not so. Every man is capable of being as just as Moses our Master or as wicked as Yeravaum, wise or incony, merciful or human, miser or philanthropist, and so in all other tendencies. There is none to either force things upon him or to decree things against him; either to pull him one way or draw him another way, but he alone, of his own free will, with the consent of his mind, bends to any path he may desire to follow. It is concerning this that Jeremiah said: "Out of the mouth of the Most High proceedeth not the evil and the good" (Lam. 3. 38), which is as if saying, the Creator decrees not that man should be either good or bad. Now, this being so, the consequence hereof is that the sinner alone brought harm upon himself. It is, therefore, meet that he should lament and shed tears because he sinned, and because of what he did to his soul and rewarded it with evil. Even this is the meaning of the succeeding Verse: "Wherefore doth a living man complain, or a strong man? Because of his sins" (Ibid.) Again, he continues, in the succeeding Verse seeing that it all is in our power, and we did all the evil of our own free will and accord, it is, indeed meet for us to turn in repentance and abandon our wickedness, for our free will is in our hands now as well as at the time we committed the sins saying: "Let us search and try our ways, and return to the Lord" (Ibid.-40).

5:3 And, this matter is a great and component part, the very pillar of the Torah and its precepts, even as it is said: “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil” (Deut. 30.15), and it is, moreover, written: “Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and curse” (Ibid. 11.26). This is as if saying, the power is in your hand, and whatever human activity man may be inclined to carry on he has a free will to elect either good or evil. And, because of this very subject it is said: “Oh, who would grant that they had such a heart as this, to fear Me, and to keep all my commandments at all times” (Ibid. 5.26). This is as if saying, that the Creator forces not the sons of man, and makes no decrees against them that they should do good or evil, but that it all is in their own keeping.

5:4 Had the decree of God prompted man to be either just or wicked, or had there been a fundamentally inborn something to draw man to either of the paths, or to any one branch of knowledge, or to a given tendency of the tendencies, or to particular act of all actions as the astrologists maintain by their foolish inventions, how did He charge us by the prophets, to do thus and not to do such, improve your ways, and do not follow your wickedness, whereas man from his embryonic state already had a decree of his conduct issued, or his inborn nature draws him toward a given path of conduct from which he can not deviate? Moreover, what need would there be, under such circumstances, for the Torah altogether? And by what law, and under what system of justice could the wicked be punished, or the just rewarded? Shall the judge of the whole earth not exercise justice? Now, do not wonder and ask: “How is it possible for man to do what his heart desires, and have his entire course of action lodged within himself seeing that he can not do aught in the world without the permission of his Master and without His Will, even as the Verse says: “Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that hath He done, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps” (Ps. 135.6)? Know all that man does is in accordance with His Will, although our actions are really in our own keeping. For example? Even as it is the Creator’s Will that fire and air shall ascend upward, and that water and earth shall descend downward, or that the sphere shall revolve in a circle, and that other creatures of the universe should likewise follow their respective natural laws, as it was His Will for them to be, so was it His Will that man shall have the free choice of conduct in his own hand, and that all his actions should be lodged within him, and that

Questions and Sources

he should be neither forced or drawn, but he, of his own free will and accord, as God endowed him with, he exercises in all that is possible for man to do. He is, therefore, judged according to actions; if he did good, his is rewarded with good; and if he did wrong, he is punished. This is in harmony with what the prophet said: "This hath been of your own doing" ([Mal. 1.9](#)); and: "According as they have chosen their own ways" ([Is. 66.3](#)); and of this very subject Solomon said: "Rejoice O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" ([Ecc. 11. 9](#)); as if saying: "True, it is within the power of thine hand to do so, but thou art to render an accounting on the day of judgment".

hadn't my uncle always said the bashful never learn

This is a paraphrase of a section from the Mishnah in [Pirkei Avot 2:5](#)

He used to say: A brute is not sin-fearing, nor is an ignorant person pious; nor can a timid person learn, nor can an impatient person teach; nor will someone who engages too much in business become wise. In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.

prophecy is not at my command

The idea that prophecy is not an ability which the prophet can exercise anytime they desire has many implications for the Divine relationship. See [Rambam Mishneh Torah Foundations of the Torah 7:4](#)

All the prophets do not prophesy every time they may desire, but they must prepare their minds, rest in a state of exultation and hearty contentment, and in undisturbed solitude; for, prophecy does not rest upon any prophet either when he is in a state of melancholy or in a state of indolence, but when he is in a state of delightfulness. Therefore, the disciples of the prophets had before them the harp, the timbrel, the flute and the violin when they were seeking the spirit of prophecy, whereof it is said: "And they strove to prophecy" ([1Sam. 10.5](#)), meaning, they followed the path of prophecy until they did prophesy, as one says: "Yonder is one aspiring to become great."

Your music is pure and beautiful

For more on the idea that the Divine Presence only comes to rest on one who is in a state of joy, particularly that induced by music, see the Rambam cited in the comment on page 21 and [Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 30b](#)

The praise of joy mentioned here is to teach you that the Divine Presence rests upon an individual neither from an atmosphere of sadness, nor from an atmosphere of laziness, nor from an atmosphere of laughter, nor from an atmosphere of frivolity, nor from an atmosphere of idle conversation, nor from an atmosphere of idle chatter, but rather from an atmosphere imbued with the joy of a mitzva. As it was stated with regard to Elisha that after he became angry at the king of Israel, his prophetic spirit left him until he requested: "But now bring me a minstrel; and it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him" ([II Kings 3:15](#)).

The story of Yosef's sale into slavery is found in [Genesis chapters 37-46](#)

Here she is with her belly between her teeth.

This phrase comes directly from the [Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 2:8](#).

There are three keys that the Holy One does not surrender to any servant

The idea of three keys which are never given into the hand of man comes from the [Babylonian Talmud Taanit 2a-b](#)

Rabbi Yohanan said: There are three keys in the hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, which were not transmitted to an intermediary. And they are: The key of rain, the key of birthing, and the key of the resurrection of the dead. The key of rain, as it is stated: "The Lord will open for you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its due time" ([Deuteronomy 28:12](#)). From where is it derived that the key of birthing is maintained by God? As it is written: "And God remembered Rachel and listened to her, and He opened her womb" ([Genesis 30:22](#)). From where is it derived that the key of the resurrection of the dead is maintained by God? As it is written: "And you shall know that I am the Lord when I

Questions and Sources

have opened your graves” ([Ezekiel 37:13](#)). In the West, they say: The key of livelihood is also in God’s hand, as it is written: “You open Your hand and satisfy every living thing with favor” ([Psalms 145:16](#)). And what is the reason that Rabbi Yoḥanan did not consider this in his list? Rabbi Yoḥanan would have said to you: Rain is the same as livelihood in this regard...

Am I in the place of the Holy One who has withheld the fruit of your womb?

This is a quote from [Genesis 30:2](#). Look at chapter 30 there for the larger story of Rachel’s struggle to give birth.

for growth in this world

The intent of the word growth here parallels the Hebrew word *tikkun* (תיקון). Its biblical meaning is to straighten something which has become bent, as in [Ecclesiastes 1:15](#)

“A twisted thing that cannot be made straight, A lack that cannot be made good.”

It can also mean to establish something on right foundations and in its intended place, as in this usage from [Midrash Genesis Rabbah 4:6](#)

“And God made the firmament” (Genesis 1:7) ...Why doesn’t it say “it was good” on the second day of creation? R’ Yochanan taught in the name of R’ Yosi bar Chalafta, because gehennom was created on the second day, as it says “The topheth has been ready for him since yesterday...” (Isaiah 30:33), a day that has a yesterday but not two days ago. Another reason that it does not say “it was good” on the second day, R’ Chanina says it is because division was created on the second day, as it says: “and it (the heavens) should separate between the two bodies of water” (Genesis 1:7). R’ Tavyomi said: if division whose purpose is to fix and settle the world (לתקוננו של עולם ולישובו) does not merit ‘it was good,’ all the more so division whose purpose is to mix up the world.

The Sages of the Mishnah saw *tikkun olam* (fixing the world) as the responsibility to manage the legal system in order to prevent legal but non-desirable outcomes, as in [Mishna Gittin 4:6](#)

If a man sells his slave to a Gentile or [to someone living] outside the land [of Israel] the slave goes free. Captives should not be redeemed for more than their value, because of tikkun olam. Captives should not be helped to escape, because of tikkun olam. Rabbahn Shimon ben Gamaliel says [that the reason is] to prevent the ill-treatment of fellow captives. Torah scrolls of the law, tefillin and mezuzoth are not bought from Gentiles at more than their value, because of tikkun olam.

In the hands of the early modern kabbalists, particularly the Arizal of Tzefat, the idea of tikkun took on a much more expansive meaning. In their cosmogony the world in which we live is made up of the shattered remnants of the original world which God intended to create. Mixed in with these shards are sparks of the original light of creation and the purpose of human existence is to find and set free these sparks. This is done through acts of tikkun. Every religious act requires contemplative concentration on the various dimensions of divinity and the various combinations of the divine name in order to “raise up the fallen sparks.” Once all the sparks are lifted up and the vessels are prepared, the world undergoes a renewal known as tikkun olam – the restoration/repair of the world.

1st Prophecy Conversation

The stars are a bridge between this world and the one beyond

R' Moshe Chaim Luzatto (the Ramchal) says in his work Derech Hashem II ch. 7 sec. 1-2 that the stars are the bridge between the spiritual world of the Divine will and the physical world of manifestation.

1. Behold, I have already explained in section one that all physical items have their root in transcendent powers. In truth all these items are rooted there in every necessary fashion, and only afterwards are drawn down and translated into physicality in the manner required of them. The heavenly spheres with all their stars were prepared for this purpose. Through their rotation all that is rooted and prepared above in the spiritual world is drawn down and translated into our physical world here below, set in its proper place. The number of the stars, their various levels and divisions, are set according to the highest wisdom

Questions and Sources

in order to achieve this translation. The power of existence flows from the stars to every physical item below, they are the means to transform everything from its transcendent form above to its manifest form below.

2. There is another matter which the Holy One engraved into the stars. All the events of the physical world are prepared above and only then drawn down by the stars in the way in which they are meant to occur. For example - matters of life, wealth, wisdom, children and the like are all prepared above in the roots and made manifest below through the stars in their proper manner. Each of these happen through well-known divisions, particular groupings and known orbits assigned to them. Among all these are divided everything which occurs in the physical world. All physical matters are under their control, functioning according to the influences of their orders and connections to each and every individual.

The idea that the star gazers see some but not all of the Divine intention is rooted in the Sage's understanding of [Isaiah 47:13](#) as expressed in [Bereshit Rabbahh 85:2](#)

You are helpless, despite all your art. Let them stand up and help you now, The scanners of heaven, the star-gazers, Who announce, month by month, Whatever will come upon you.

What is written above the matter? "And the Midianites sold him to Egypt" [and then it interrupts with the story of Yehuda and Tamar:] "And it was at that time." And the reading (narrative) only required it to [immediately] say "And Yosef was taken down to Egypt" ([Genesis 39:1](#)) And because of what was this section made proximate to that? Rabbi Elazar and Rabbi Yochanan [answered this]: Rabbi Elazar said, "In order to make one descent proximate to the other descent." Rabbi Yochanan said, "In order to make [one use of the word,] "recognize," proximate to [another use of the word,] "recognize." Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said, "In order to make the story of Tamar proximate to the story of Potiphar's wife; [to tell you that] just as that one (the incident of Tamar) was for the sake of Heaven, so too this one (the incident of Potiphar's wife) was meant for the sake of Heaven." [As Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "She saw through her astrology that she was destined to raise a child from him \(Yosef\), but she did not know if \[it would be\]](#)

from her or from her daughter.” This is [the meaning of] what is written (Isaiah 47:13), “let the diviners of months inform you from that which will come to you” - Rabbi Eibo said, “From that’ and not ‘all that.”

See also Rambam Mishneh Torah Foundations of the Torah 10:3

Are not the necromancers and astrologists foretelling what is to come to pass, what, then, is the difference between a prophet and such as they? Forsooth, necromancers, astrologists and their like, some of their words are established and some of their words are not established, as the subject is spoken of: “Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from some of the things that shall come upon thee” (Is. 47.13); — of some of the things are spoken, but not of all of the things, because they are not capable to foretell all of the things...

But the Holy One raised Avraham above the stars

The story of Avraham being lifted up ‘above the stars’ is rooted in Genesis 15:5

“He took him outside and said, “Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He added, “So shall your offspring be.””

Rashi on this verse quotes the midrash from Bereshit Rabbahh 44:12 saying ‘He took him out of the terrestrial sphere and lifted him above the stars.’

But when we choose a higher path

The idea that Israel is not subject to the influence of the stars (אין מזל לישראל) is the subject of argument among the Sages. Here is the simple disagreement, for the extended discussion see Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 156a

It was stated that Rabbi Ḥanina says: A constellation makes one wise and a constellation makes one wealthy, and there is a constellation for the Jewish people that influences them. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: There is no constellation for the Jewish people that influences them.

Chapter 3 Honoring the Calf

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

When Lev has an unexpected moment of freedom he decides to do an act of devotion. What does this teach you about his character?

What does it take for something to be an act of devotion? Think of something which you have done which you would characterize as an act of devotion. How did it come about?

Textual

The Golden Calf seems to be gone as a source of idolatry after its original appearance at the foot of Mount Sinai, but it reappears hundreds of years later in the hands of the Kings of Israel. What can this “come back” add to our understanding of the assertion in the midrash that Israel carried the idolatry of the calf with them out of Egypt? (see the sources for pages 39-40.)

Sources

It is not good for a man to be alone

This is a paraphrase of Genesis 2:18

on the ninth day of the fifth month

The ninth day of the fifth month is the 9th of Av in the current Hebrew calendar, the day on which both Temples were destroyed and which is marked by many other tragedies throughout Jewish history. There is no known date for the wedding, so we chose this day for its power in communicating the scale of tragedy which occurred when the King of Israel entered into a marriage with the Queen of an idolatrous people.

No, I'm still counted among the b'nei nevi'im

There are sources for groups of prophets from elsewhere in the Tanach, but the sources for the students of the prophets being known as the children of the prophets (bnei nevi'im) center on the personalities of Elisha and Eliyahu - see [II Kings 2:3](#), [II Kings 4:1 and 38](#), [II Kings 6:1](#)

The Rambam makes clear that the bnei nevi'im are those who are seeking prophecy in [Mishneh Torah Foundations of the Torah 7:5](#)

They that seek the spirit of prophecy are called disciples of the prophets, and, although they train their minds well, it is uncertain whether the Shekinah will rest upon them or whether it will not.

Uncle Menachem told the story of one of the seven shepherds of Israel

The origin of the idea of the seven shepherds is [Micha 5:4](#)

And that shall afford safety. Should Assyria invade our land
And tread upon our fortresses, We will set up over it seven shepherds,
Eight princes of men,

The [Babylonian Talmud in Sukkah 52b](#) says

“Who are these seven shepherds? David is in the middle; Adam, Seth, and Methuselah are to his right; Abraham, Jacob, and Moses are to his left.”

The [Zohar Emor 103b-104a](#) identifies 7 guests (*ushpizin*) who visit the Sukkah, one on each night of the festival – Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aaron, Yosef and David. Later kabbalistic and Chassidic sources associate these guests with the Seven Shepherds, and this is how they are known today.

built an altar a thousand years before

The connection between Yaakov and Bet El centers on his famous dream vision of a ladder connecting heaven and earth in [Genesis 28:11-19](#)

Questions and Sources

He came upon a certain place and stopped there for the night, for the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. And the LORD was standing beside him and He said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac: the ground on which you are lying I will assign to you and to your offspring. Your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and your descendants. Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is present in this place, and I did not know it!" Shaken, he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven." Early in the morning, Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He named that site Bethel; but previously the name of the city had been Luz.

The royal ox of the House of King Omri

The text of the Hebrew bible gives no indication of Omri's tribal affiliation. The academic and traditional literature also come to diverse conclusions. Our decision to make him part of the House of Menashe is largely based on Omri's decision to move his capital to the new city of Shomron, in the heart of Menashe's tribal lands. We assumed that after years of civil war, the king would choose to place his new capital in the most secure area, where he had the strongest tribal support.

Revealing a crack in the stone hidden beneath

The story of the crack in the altar at Bet El appears in I Kings 13:1-5

A man of God arrived at Bethel from Judah at the command of the LORD. While Yeravaum was standing on the altar to present the offering, the man of God, at the command of the LORD, cried out against the altar: "O altar, altar! Thus said the LORD: A son shall be born to the House

of David, Josiah by name; and he shall slaughter upon you the priests of the shrines who bring offerings upon you. And human bones shall be burned upon you.” He gave a portent on that day, saying, “Here is the portent that the LORD has decreed: This altar shall break apart, and the ashes on it shall be spilled.” When the king heard what the man of God had proclaimed against the altar in Bethel, Yeravaum stretched out his arm above the altar and cried, “Seize him!” But the arm that he stretched out against him became rigid, and he could not draw it back. The altar broke apart and its ashes were spilled—the very portent that the man of God had announced at the LORD’s command.

a roof of woven reeds shading the sacred object: the Golden Calf

King Yeravaum built a golden Calf at Bet El and Dan. For the simple event see [I Kings 12:26-33](#)

Yeravaum said to himself, “Now the kingdom may well return to the House of David. If these people still go up to offer sacrifices at the House of the LORD in Jerusalem, the heart of these people will turn back to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and go back to King Rehoboam of Judah.” So the king took counsel and made two golden calves. He said to the people, “You have been going up to Jerusalem long enough. This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!” He set up one in Bethel and placed the other in Dan. That proved to be a cause of guilt, for the people went to worship [the calf at Bethel and] the one at Dan. He also made cult places and appointed priests from the ranks of the people who were not of Levite descent. He stationed at Bethel the priests of the shrines that he had appointed to sacrifice to the calves that he had made. And Yeravaum established a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month; in imitation of the festival in Judah, he established one at Bethel, and he ascended the altar [there]. On the fifteenth day of the eighth month—the month in which he had contrived of his own mind to establish a festival for the Israelites—Yeravaum ascended the altar that he had made in Bethel.

The Golden Calf as a primary idolatrous expression originates in the plain text at Sinai (see Exodus 32) and [Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 101b](#) argues that Yeravaum’s decision to create the calves as a focus of worship was

Questions and Sources

directly related to his fear that the people would question his legitimacy as king. His logic was that only kings of the house of David are permitted to sit in the Temple Courts. When the people saw Solomon's son Rehovam sitting and he Yeravaum standing they would know that Rehovam was the true king. Therefore, he made two calves of gold

In the eyes of the Sages the worship of the Calf is associated with the story of someone known as Micah

According to Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 101b, Micah was one of many children whom the Egyptians crushed between the stones of their buildings to use as mortar. Rashi on that gemara describes a dialogue between God and Moshe which occurs when Moshe wants to save the children from their suffering – “Crushed in the building - of the Egyptians, who put him into the building in the place of a brick as is explained in the aggadah. Moshe said to the Holy One ‘You have done evil to this people! Now if they don't have bricks they place the children of Israel into the building!’ The Holy One replied to him, ‘They are wiping out the thorns, because it is revealed before Me that if these children lived they would be completely wicked. If you want, make a test and remove one.’ Moshe went and removed Micah.”

Right before the Exodus, Moshe went to remove the bones of Joseph from the Nile where they had been hidden (see Exodus 13:19). In order to retrieve them, the midrash says that Moshe wrote the words ‘ascend ox, ascend ox’ (the ox was Joseph's symbol) on a chip of metal and threw it into the Nile. When he took the bones, Micah retrieved the chip of metal. At Sinai, when Aaron threw the people's gold into the fire (see Exodus 32:24), Micah threw the chip of metal in after and the Golden Calf emerged.

Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 103b “And He shall pass through the sea with affliction and shall strike the waves in the sea” (Zechariah 10:11), Rabbi Yoḥanan says: This affliction is a reference to the idol of Micah, as Micah passed through the sea during the exodus from Egypt. It is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Natan says: The distance from Gerav, where Micah resided, to Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was at that time, was three mil, and the smoke from the arrangement of wood on the altar in Shiloh and the smoke from the worship of the idol of Micah would intermingle with each other.

Micah “reappears” in the story of the idol of Micah found in the Judges ch.17-18. At the end of that story his idol is taken by the children of Dan to the newly founded village of Dan.

As a final piece in the thread, the Babylonian Talmud in Sanhedrin 101b referenced above, when explaining Micah’s name, says “It is taught in a baraita: He is called Nebat, he is called Micah, and he is called Sheba, son of Bichri. Nebat, who looked [nibat] but did not see, Micah, who was crushed [nitmakhmekh] in the building of the storage cities of Pithom and Raamses. And what is his actual name? His name is Sheba, son of Bichri.” Nevat is the father of Yeravaum, who rebelled against the House of David and replaced the Temple worship with that of the Golden Calf, one of which is placed at the village of Dan.

There is an interpretive tradition which understands the Golden Calf at Sinai not as an idol meant to replace God but rather as symbolic substitute for Moshe’s leadership, without which the people felt lost, as it says in Exodus 32:1

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.”

The chief exponent of this perspective is perhaps R’ Yehudah haLevi, who combines it with an understanding of human religious consciousness in the ancient world in Kuzari 1:97

97. The Rabbi: All nations were given to idolatry at that time. Even had they been philosophers, discoursing on the unity and government of God, they would have been unable to dispense with images, and would have taught the masses that a divine influence hovered over this image, which was distinguished by some miraculous feature...Now when the people had heard the proclamation of the Ten Commandments, and Moses had ascended the mount in order to receive the inscribed tables which he was to bring down to them, and then make an ark which was to be the point towards which they should direct their gaze during their devotions, they waited for his return clad in the same apparel in which they had witnessed the drama on Sinai, without removing their jewels or changing their clothes, remaining just as he left them, expecting every

Questions and Sources

moment to see him return. He, however, tarried forty days, although he had not provided himself with food, having only left them with the intention of returning the same day. An evil spirit overpowered a portion of the people, and they began to divide into parties and factions. Many views and opinions were expressed, till at last some decided to do like the other nations, and seek an object in which they could have faith, without, however, prejudicing the supremacy of Him who had brought them out of Egypt...Their sin consisted in the manufacture of an image of a forbidden thing, and in attributing divine power to a creation of their own, something chosen by themselves without the guidance of God... They resembled the fool of whom we spoke, who entered the surgery of a physician and dealt out death instead of healing to those who came there. At the same time the people did not intend to give up their allegiance to God. On the contrary, they were, in theory, more zealous in their devotion. They therefore approached Aaron, and he, desiring to make their plan public, assisted them in their undertaking. For this reason he is to be blamed for changing their theoretical disobedience into a reality. The whole affair is repulsive to us, because in this age the majority of nations have abandoned the worship of images. It appeared less objectionable at that time, because all nations were then idolators. Had their sin consisted in constructing a house of worship of their own, and making a place of prayer, offering and veneration, the matter would not have been so grave, because nowadays we also build our houses of worship, hold them in great respect, and seek blessing through their means. We even say that God dwells in them, and that they are surrounded by angels. If this were not essential for the gathering of our community, it would be as unknown as it was at the time of the kings, when the people were forbidden to erect places of worship, called heights. The pious kings destroyed them, lest they be venerated beside the house chosen by God in which He was to be worshipped according to His own ordinances. There was nothing strange in the form of the cherubim made by His command. In spite of these things, those who worshipped the calf were punished on the same day, and three thousand out of six hundred thousand were slain. The Manna, however, did not cease falling for their maintenance, nor the cloud to give them shade, nor the pillar of fire to guide them. Prophecy continued spreading and increasing among them, and nothing that had been granted was taken from them, except the two tables, which Moses broke. But then he pleaded for their restoration; they were restored, and the sin was forgiven.

Chapter 4 The Knife

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

Throughout the book Lev entertains various dreams of the possibility for a different life. What “alternative futures” have you dreamt about, and what can they teach you about yourself? When you consider any lessons you might learn about yourself from your dreams, how does this help you understand the notion that dreams are one sixtieth of prophecy?

Textual

Consider the sources on *dveikut*. What might *dveikut* look like today?

Why do the Sages see so many prerequisites for prophecy? How do they influence the form in which prophecy is expressed in the world? How does this help you understand the role which the prophets play in the Biblical narrative?

Sources

A Israelite indentured servant spooned out food for the disciples

The Israelite indentured servant (*eved ivri*) is a social institution which first appears in [Exodus ch.21](#). Their standard servitude lasts 6 years, and thus are differentiated from foreign slaves who are considered property by the Torah (compare [Leviticus 25:44-46](#)). According to the Torah, an Israelite can be sold as a slave in two situations. The first case is that of one who stole something but is now unable to restore the stolen object or its value. The second case is when a person is forced to sell themselves as a slave because of their poverty. At least in regard to Israelite slaves, the Sages put so many restrictions on their servitude one could say that they strove to push the institution out of existence. As it says in [Babylonian Talmud Kiddushin 22a](#) “Anyone who acquires a Hebrew slave is considered like one who acquires a master for himself...”

Questions and Sources

Together, we seek a true bond

The phrase 'true bond' is our translation of the Hebrew term *dveikut* (דבקות). In the Torah, *dveikut* begins as the model for intimacy of human relationship as in Genesis 2:24

Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings (*v'davak*) to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

and develops into a model for human/Divine relationship, as in Deuteronomy 11:22

If, then, you faithfully keep all this Instruction that I command you, loving the LORD your God, walking in all His ways, and holding fast to Him,

In the context of the prophets and their disciples it is worth seeing the Rambam's understanding of the Torah commandment for *dveikut* in Mishne Torah Laws of Human Dispositions 6:2

It is a mandatory commandment to cleave to the wise and their disciples, in order to learn of their deeds, even as it is said on the subject: "And to Him shalt thou cleave" (Deut. 10.20). Is it possible to cleave to the Shekinah? But even thus the wise men commented upon in interpreting this commandment, saying: "Cleave to the wise men and their disciples" (Ketubot, 111b). Man shall, therefore, find the necessary means to take to wife the daughter of a disciple of the wise, and to give his daughter in marriage to a disciple of the wise; to eat and drink with the disciples of the wise, to do business for and with the disciples of the wise, and to associate with them in every form of companionship, even as it is said, "And to cleave to him" (Deut. 11.22). Even so have the wise men commanded, saying: "Sit amidst the dust of their feet, and drink their words with thirst" (Pirkei Avot 1:4).

The Ramchal, R' Moshe Chaim Luzatto, saw *dveikut* as characteristic of prophecy, not only because of the Divine intimacy involved but also because it began as a human effort and ended as a Divine gift, as expressed in Mesilat Yesharim 26:2-4

The exertion is that when a man completely detaches and removes himself from the physical, and clings always, at all periods and times

to his G-d. In this manner, the prophets were called “angels”, as said of Aharon: “For a priest’s lips shall guard knowledge, and Torah shall be sought from his mouth; for he is an angel of the L-ord of Hosts” (Malachi 2:7), and it is said: “but they mocked the angels (prophets) of G-d” (Divrei Hayamim II 36:16). Even when he is engaged in physical actions required for his bodily side, his soul will not budge from its clinging on high. This is as written: “my soul clings after You; Your right hand supports me” (Tehilim 63:9). However, it is impossible for a man to place himself in such a state. For it is beyond his ability. He is after all a physical creature, of flesh and blood. Thus I said that the end of Holiness is a gift. For that which is in man’s ability to do is the initial exertion, pursuing true knowledge and continual thought on the sanctification of deed. But the end is that the Holy One, blessed be He, will guide him on this path he desires to follow and imbue His holiness upon him, and sanctify him. Then this matter will succeed and he will be able to achieve this clinging with the blessed G-d constantly.

See also 26:7 where the Ramchal says that a state of dvekut allows one to sanctify even the most mundane of acts, like eating

Dvekut received a novel development in thought and practice by the various schools of Chassidic thought.

The essential innovation of the founder of Chassidut, the Baal Shem Tov, was that dvekut could be the starting point of Divine service available to all people, rather than the end point achieved by the rare few

The Baal Shem Tov took the idea that ‘no place can be void of the Shekhinah’ to mean that an awareness of the omnipresence and immanence of God is itself dvekut. He also saw the falling out of the state of dvekut as an idolatrous denial of God’s oneness and all-pervading presence.

our time is short

Pirkei Avot 2:15 Rabbi Tarfon said: the day is short, and the work is plentiful, and the laborers are indolent, and the reward is great, and the master of the house is insistent.

Questions and Sources

dreams are one sixtieth prophecy

Babylonian Talmud Brachot 57B.

There are five matters in our world which are one-sixtieth of their most extreme manifestations. They are: Fire, honey, Shabbat, sleep, and a dream. The Gemara elaborates: Our fire is one-sixtieth of the fire of Gehenna; honey is one-sixtieth of manna; Shabbat is one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come; sleep is one-sixtieth of death; and a dream is one-sixtieth of prophecy.

Only princes sleep until the third hour of the day

This idea comes from Mishnah Berachot 1:2

From what time may one recite the Shema in the morning? From the time that one can distinguish between blue and white. Rabbi Eliezer says: between blue and green. And he must finish it by sunrise. Rabbi Joshua says: until the third hour of the day, for such is the custom of the children of kings, to rise at the third hour. If one recites the Shema later he loses nothing, like one who reads in the Torah.

Wisdom is good with an inheritance

This is a direct quote from Ecclesiastes 7:11 and finds a broader expression in Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 38a

Rabbi Yoḥanan said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, rests His Divine Presence only upon one who is mighty, and wealthy, and wise, and humble.

Music helps us quiet the mind and calm the pool

The connection between music and prophecy is a broad topic which appears in many classical sources and bears on several themes of the book. See for example

I Chronicles 25:1 “David and the officers of the army set apart for service the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who prophesied to the accompaniment of lyres, harps, and cymbals.”

Radak I Chronicles 25:1: *who prophesied to the accompaniment of lyres*
– The sons of Asaph would play the instruments and the holy spirit would come to rest upon Asaph. Then he would sing along with the voice of the lyres. So too Heman and Jeduthun were all prophets with instruments because the Book of Psalms was said with the holy spirit and there are in it prophecies, predictions, exile and redemption...

II Kings 3:15 “As the musician played, the hand of the LORD came upon him...”

This verse is understood by the Sages as an example of how music can be used to clear away negative emotions which block the prophetic spirit (see also comments on p.21-22.)

Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 30b “...the Divine Presence rests upon an individual neither in sadness, nor in laziness, nor laughter, nor in frivolity, nor idle conversation, nor idle chatter, but rather from the joy of a mitzva. As it was stated: “But now bring me a minstrel; and it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him...”

Radak on II Kings 3:15 – It is said that from the day on which Eliyahu, Elisha’s teacher, was removed from the world the spirit of prophecy had not returned to Elisha because of he was in mourning and the holy spirit only comes to rest in joy. And there are those who say that because of his anger toward the king of Israel he was upset...

The connection between prophecy and clarity of mind is rooted in an understanding of the Mishna Berachot 5:1

“The pious ones of old used to wait an hour before praying in order that they might direct their thoughts to God.”

The Rambam’s commentary on that Mishna explains this ‘waiting’ (*shohin* in Hebrew: שוהין) in the following manner: The meaning of

Questions and Sources

shohin is waiting. That is to say that they would wait for an hour before praying in order to settle their minds and silence their thoughts – then they would begin to pray.

See also Rambam Mishneh Torah Foundations of the Torah 7:4

All the prophets do not prophesy every time they may desire, but they must prepare their minds, rest in a state of exultation and hearty contentment, and in undisturbed solitude; for, prophecy does not rest upon any prophet either when he is in a state of melancholy or in a state of indolence, but when he is in a state of delightfulness. Therefore, the disciples of the prophets had before them the harp, the timbrel, the flute and the violin when they were seeking the spirit of prophecy, whereof it is said: “And they strove to prophecy” (I Sam. 10.5), meaning, they followed the path of prophecy until they did prophesy, as one says: “Yonder is one aspiring to become great.”

Chapter 5 The Song of the World

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

Many people in this chapter want something for or from Lev, but it is Yonatan who becomes his friend. What is the difference between how Yonatan related to Lev and how Zim or Daniel do? How do you form friendships, are there particular types of experiences that help?

Textual

Shabbat is marked by an act of sanctification at the beginning (*kiddush*) and division at the end (*Havdalah*). How are these two acts the same and how do they differ? How do they combine to make Shabbat a unique day?

How do you relate to the list of distinctions which Uriel states? What benefits and problems does drawing distinctions bring to the world? Why is the distinction between Israel and the nations included in this list? What does it say to you? How is this connected to the Sages' idea that prophecy is the unique inheritance of Israel?

Sources

Uriel stood in the middle of the clearing holding a goblet of wine

The Torah commands us to mark the entrance of Shabbat in Exodus 20:8 "Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy."

The Sages learn that this should be done over a glass of wine in Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 106a

"Our Rabbis taught: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy (Shemot 20:8): remember it over wine"

The Rambam clarifies the Torah level obligation in Mishneh Torah Laws of Shabbat 29:1 and 29:6

Questions and Sources

“It is a positive commandment from the Torah to sanctify the Shabbat verbally, as it is written in Exodus 20 ‘remember the Sabbath day to make it holy...’ that is to say remember it with a recollection of praise and sanctity.”

The Holy One tested our fathers with manna in the wilderness

The manna is intimately bound up with Shabbat. In fact, the first explicit reference to Shabbat, even before the commandment in Exodus 20:8, is in connection with the absence of the daily manna on the seventh day. The custom to bless two loaves of bread is also connected to the manna. See [Exodus 16:22-26](#)

On the sixth day they gathered double the amount of food, two omers for each; and when all the chieftains of the community came and told Moses, he said to them, “This is what the LORD meant: Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy sabbath of the LORD. Bake what you would bake and boil what you would boil; and all that is left put aside to be kept until morning.” So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered; and it did not turn foul, and there were no maggots in it. Then Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath of the LORD; you will not find it today on the plain. Six days you shall gather it; on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.”

The idea that the manna was a test is explicit in [Deuteronomy 8:16](#)

“who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers had never known, in order to test you by hardships only to benefit you in the end—”

According to the Sages the blessing and holiness given by God to Shabbat in [Genesis 2:3](#) found their expression in the manna, as stated in the midrash in [Genesis Rabbah 11:2](#)

“And Elokim blessed the seventh day and sanctified it” - Rabbi Yishmael says: “He blessed it” with manna “and sanctified it” with manna, He blessed it with manna-for all the days of the week one omer [portion] fell [per person], on Friday two omer [portions] fell [per person]. He sanctified it with manna [on Shabbat] it didn’t fall at all.

If we return in love

The essential importance of serving God out of love is embodied in the verse Deuteronomy 6:5

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

The difference between the Divine relationship which emerges from serving God out of love and the one which grows out of fear can be found in Rashi's comment on that verse, which itself is based in the Sifrei Deuteronomy 32:1

(Deuteronomy 6:5) "And you shall love the L-rd your G-d": Act (i.e., serve) out of love. There is a difference between acting out of love and acting out of fear. If one acts out of love, his reward is doubled. It is written (*Ibid.* 6:13) "The L-rd your G-d shall you fear, and Him shall you serve." One may fear his friend, but if he belabors him, he may leave him. But *you*, act out of (absolute) love. And there is no (absolute) love in the place of (i.e., co-existing with [absolute]) fear, and no (absolute) fear in the place of (absolute) love except vis-à-vis the Holy One Blessed be He. (So that if one loves Him absolutely, it follows that he fears him absolutely, and his reward is doubled.)

The idea that repentance which is motivated by love can transform one's transgressions into merits is a complex notion, and Uriel gives a classic explanation of why this might be so. The textual source for the idea is found in Babylonian Talmud Yoma 86b

Reish Lakish said: Great is repentance, as the penitent's intentional sins are counted for him as unwitting transgressions, as it is stated: "Return, Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity" (Hosea 14:2). Doesn't "iniquity" mean an intentional sin? Yet the prophet calls it stumbling, implying that one who repents is considered as though he only stumbled accidentally in his transgression. Is that so? Didn't Reish Lakish himself say: Great is repentance, as one's intentional sins are counted for him as merits, as it is stated: "And when the wicked turns from his wickedness, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby" (Ezekiel 33:19), and all his

Questions and Sources

deeds, even his transgressions, will become praiseworthy? This is not a difficulty: Here, when one repents out of love, his sins become like merits; there, when one repents out of fear, his sins are counted as unwitting transgressions.

Blessed is the One who divides between the sacred and the mundane

The ceremony marking the end of Shabbat is known as *Havdalah*, which means dividing. We chose to have Uriel recite a version of the text which is used in the present day because it is based on listing the distinctions which the Torah itself presents as foundational to creation.

For the Torah level obligation to verbally mark the leaving of Shabbat just as one does with the entrance, see [Rambam Mishneh Torah Laws of Shabbat 29:1](#) in notes on page 60 above.

The blessing on fire is recited at the end of Shabbat due to the tradition that fire was discovered at the end of the first Shabbat, as noted in [Babylonian Talmud Pesachim 54b](#)

“At the conclusion of Shabbat, the Holy One, Blessed be He, granted Adam knowledge similar to divine knowledge, and he brought two rocks and rubbed them against each other, and the first fire emerged from them.”

To hear the song of the world you need to hear everything

The source for the idea of the Song of the World is a book entitled *Perek Shirah*, the chapter of song. In its current version *Perek Shirah* is a list of songs and praises sung to God by the various creatures and elements of creation. It consists primarily of Biblical verses, but includes rabbinic sayings as well. Many scholars believe that the unique names given to certain birds in the work indicate that it is Tanaitic in origin (1st century BCE through 2nd century CE) though heavily modified over time. There are hints of references to *Perek Shirah* in the Talmud, but the first clear reference is found in the geonic era, 10th century CE.

I heard a story many years ago from my master

The story of the frog and King David comes from Yalkut Shimoni on Tanach 889

They said of King David that when he finished the Book of Psalms he was filled with pride. He said before God: Master of the World! There is nothing in the world which sings songs of praise like me! He happened upon a frog which said to him: don't be so arrogant, because I sing far more praises than you. And for every song of praise I say, I compose upon it three thousand proverbs, as it says "He composed three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered one thousand and five." (I Kings 5:12)

Here is a beautiful thought from R' Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) in the spirit of the Song of the World, and Lev's life, from Likutei Moharan part II, Torah 63:1

For know! each and every shepherd has his own special melody, according to the grasses and specific location where he is grazing. This is because each and every animal has a specific grass which it needs to eat. He also does not always pasture in the same place. Thus, his melody is dictated by the grasses and place he pastures. For each and every grass has a song which it sings. This is the concept of Perek Shirah. And from the grass's song, the shepherd's melody is created.

Chapter 6 The Rogue Vision

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

Uriel is given a prophetic message which he does not understand, and which actually increases his uncertainty, so that in the end he must trust his heart to guide his actions. What does it mean to trust your heart? How do you deal with uncertainty? What is one time you let events take their course even though you knew there was a risk involved?

Textual

The parable at the end of the chapter is from Babylonian Talmud Berachot 61b. Look at the continuation of the story there and see how it ends for R' Akiva. Does the conclusion change your understanding of the parable? If so, how?

Sources

I saw the king's servant

Ovadhiah is named by the Bible as the chief steward of Ahav, king of Israel (I Kings 18:3). He is also labeled as one who greatly feared the Lord (*ibid.* 4) and his name in Hebrew means servant of God. See I Kings 18:3-16 for the role in which he plays in the war which breaks out between the prophets of Israel and the priests of the ba'al. Due to the role he plays in our story, we were forced to take more liberty in developing Ovadhiah's character than in any other personality taken from the Hebrew bible.

Ovadhiah was identified by the rabbis in a couple of places both as a convert from the nation of Edom and as the author of the prophetic book of Ovadhiah which prophesies the downfall of the kingdom of Edom. See this source from Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 39b

It is written: "And Ahav called Ovadhiah, who was over the household; now Ovadhiah feared the Lord greatly" (I Kings 18:3). What is the verse saying? Rabbi Yitzhak says that Ahav said to Ovadhiah: It is written with regard to Jacob: "And Laban said to him: If now I have found favor in your eyes, I have observed the signs, and the Lord has blessed me for

your sake" ([Genesis 30:27](#)). It is written with regard to Joseph: "The Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake" ([Genesis 39:5](#)). The house of that man, i.e., my house, was not blessed. Perhaps you do not fear God? Immediately, a Divine Voice emerged and said: "Now Ovadiah feared the Lord greatly," but the house of Ahav is not fit for blessing. Rabbi Abba says: The praise that is stated with regard to Ovadiah is greater than that which is stated with regard to Abraham. As with regard to Abraham the verse states: "For now I know that you fear God" ([Genesis 22:12](#)), and the term "greatly" is not written, and about Ovadiah the term "greatly" is written. Rabbi Yitzhak says: For what reason did Ovadiah merit prophecy? It is because he concealed one hundred prophets in a cave, as it is stated: "It was so, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the Lord, that Ovadiah took one hundred prophets, and hid them, fifty men in a cave, and fed them with bread and water" (1 Kings 18:4). What is different to conceal fifty men in each of two caves and not conceal them all together in one cave? Rabbi Elazar says: He learned from the behavior of Jacob to do so, as it is stated: "And he said: If Esau comes to the one camp and smites it, then the camp that is left shall escape" ([Genesis 32:9](#)). Rabbi Abbahu says: It is because there is no cave big enough to contain more than fifty people. The verse states: "The vision of Ovadiah. So says the Lord God concerning Edom: We have heard a message from the Lord, and an ambassador is sent among the nations: Arise, and let us rise up against her in battle" ([Ovadiah 1:1](#)). What is the reason, that specifically Ovadiah prophesied concerning Edom? Rabbi Yitzhak says: The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Let Ovadiah come, who dwells among two wicked ones, Ahav and Jezebel, but did not learn from their actions; and he will prophesy concerning Esau the wicked, the progenitor of Edom, who dwelled among two righteous ones, Isaac and Rebekkah, but did not learn from their actions. Efrayim Miksha'a, a student of Rabbi Meir, said in the name of Rabbi Meir: Ovadiah was an Edomite convert. Consequently, he prophesied with regard to Edom. And this is as people say: From and within the forest comes the ax to it, as the handle for the ax that chops the tree is from the forest itself.

He has the right to anything in the land that he desires

The authority of the kings of Israel was not absolute, as is shown by the Torah's commandment to set up judges, its empowerment of the priests and the institution of the prophets which served as a critique of royal power

Questions and Sources

throughout the Bible. Nevertheless, they have extensive rights when it comes to property. The book of I Samuel (see in particular 8:11-17) details the king's ability to overrule private possession of property. There is an argument from the Tanaitic age down through the Biblical commentators of the late Middle Ages over whether these verses are describing the rights granted to the king or simply the situation of oppression which a king brings in his wake.

This is the opinion of the Rambam in Mishne Torah Kings and Wars 4:3

“He can enlist artisans, any he so needs, to do his work. But, he must pay them their wages. He can draft all the animals and slaves and maid-servants he needs for his service, but he must pay their wages or pay their worth, as it says, “and to plough his ploughings, and to harvest his harvests, and to make the implements of war and the tools for his chariots...and the best of your slaves and maid-servants and youth and your asses...he shall take; and they shall do his work” (I Samuel 8:12-16).

I am a slave until the Yovel

The process of transformation from Hebrew slave of a temporary (6 year) period into a perpetual servant is found in Deuteronomy 15:16-17

But should he say to you, “I do not want to leave you” — for he loves you and your household and is happy with you — you shall take an awl and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall become your slave in perpetuity. Do the same with your female slave.

In the eyes of the rabbis, perpetuity here means until the coming of the Yovel year, as in Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael 21:6

“and he shall serve him forever”: until the Jubilee year (Yovel). For it would follow otherwise, viz.: If money, whose “power” is formidable, and which acquires everything, acquires only for six years, then boring, which acquires only bondsmen, how much more so should it acquire (a bondsman) for only six years! It is, therefore, written “and he shall serve him forever” — until the Yovel. But perhaps the meaning is that he acquires him forever — literally! It is, therefore, (to negate this) written (Leviticus 25:10) “And (in the Yovel) you shall return a man

(including a bored bondsman) to his holding.” Rebbi says: Come and see that “forever” is fifty years, it being written “and he shall serve him forever” — until the Yovel. How so? With the arrival of the Yovel, he goes free. With the death of the master he goes free.

Nevi'im often lose their nevu'a toward the end of their lives

The source for the idea that prophets lose prophecy before their death is the Rambam in [Guide for the Perplexed 2:45](#)

“...for ordinary prophets must cease to prophesy a shorter or longer period before their death. Comp. “And the word of the Lord ceased from Jeremiah” ([Ezra 1:1](#)); “And these are the last words of David” ([2 Sam. 23:1](#)). From these instances it can be inferred that the same is the case with all prophets.”

A fox once walked along the banks of a river

The parable of the fox and the fish is found in [Babylonian Talmud Berachot 61b](#)

The Sages taught: One time the evil empire of Rome decreed that Israel may not engage in Torah. Pappos ben Yehuda came and found Rabbi Akiva, who was convening assemblies in public and engaging in Torah study. Pappos said to him: Akiva, are you not afraid of the empire? Rabbi Akiva answered him: I will relate a parable. To what can this be compared? It is like a fox walking along a riverbank when he sees fish gathering and fleeing from place to place. The fox said to them: From what are you fleeing? They said to him: We are fleeing from the nets that people cast upon us. He said to them: Do you wish to come up onto dry land, and we will reside together just as my ancestors resided with your ancestors? The fish said to him: You are the one of whom they say, he is the cleverest of animals? You are not clever; you are a fool. If we are afraid in our natural habitat which gives us life, then in a habitat that causes our death, all the more so. So too, we Jews, now that we sit and engage in Torah, about which it is written: “For that is your life, and the length of your days” ([Deuteronomy 30:20](#)), we fear the empire to this extent; if we proceed to sit idle from its study, all the more so.

Chapter 7 Taming the Bear

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

Lev enters a whole new horizon of life when he arrives in Shomron. Think of sometime in your life when you have ‘stepped into a larger world’ – what does such an experience offer? What are the challenges it poses? What are the strategies and abilities one needs to succeed in a new environment?

Textual

Ovadia says ‘a fool may be blinded by the jewels, but a wise man sees the claws.’ Compare this statement to these two classic rabbinic definitions of wisdom. “Who is wise? The one who learns from everyone.” (Ethics of our Fathers 4:1) and “Who is wise? The one who sees the consequences of his behavior.” (Tamid 32a) What is your definition of wisdom?

Sources

I always imagined Shomron as the largest city in the kingdom

Shomron was a new capital of the northern kingdom, built by King Omri shortly after his ascension to the throne, as recorded in [I Kings 16:24](#)

Then he bought the hill of Shomron from Shemer for two talents of silver; he built [a town] on the hill and named the town which he built Shomron, after Shemer, the owner of the hill.

It is interesting to note that expanding the borders of Israelite sovereignty was so important in the eyes of the Sages that they had the following to say in [Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 102b](#)

Rabbi Yohanan says: For what virtue was Omri privileged to ascend to the monarchy? Due to the fact that he added one city in the land of Israel, as it is stated: “And he bought the hill of Shomron from Shemer for two talents of silver, and built on the hill, and called the name of the city that he built after Shemer, the owner of the hill, Shomron” (I Kings 16:24).

On the pedestal stood a bronze statue

The bible explicitly associates the marriage between Ahav and Izevel with the introduction of new forms of idol worship into the land. IKings 16:29-33

Ahav son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah, and Ahav son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria for twenty-two years. Ahav son of Omri did what was displeasing to the LORD, more than all who preceded him. Not content to follow the sins of Yeravaum son of Nebat, he took as wife Jezebel daughter of King Ethbaal of the Phoenicians, and he went and served Baal and worshiped him. He erected an altar to Baal in the temple of Baal which he built in Samaria. Ahav also made a sacred post. Ahav did more to vex the LORD, the God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel who preceded him.

It is interesting to note that the Sages contrast the military strength of Israel under Ahav (something which supported by extra biblical texts as well) with the low spiritual state of the people. While standard Biblical theology sees military security as dependent on spiritual purity, Ahav seems to be the exception. The solution offered by the midrash is the social unity which Israel maintained under his rule. See Vayikra Rabbah 26:2

Even though the generation of Ahav were all idolaters, because there were no informers among them then were victorious in war...

Chapter 8 The Alliance

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

The royal wedding is more than the joining of two people, it is the union of two cultures. This is why two very different stories are told by the High Priest and Yambalya, each of which represents a separate national identity. What stories do you tell which express your personal, familial and national identities?

Textual

Why would the Torah present the model of relationship as a process which begins in separation and ends with union? And why does verse Genesis 2:24 present the end goal of Adam and Eve's relationship as becoming one flesh if that is how they began?

Sources

whose tent opened to all sides

The source for Avraham's tent being open in all directions is Midrash Tehillim 110:1

"Of David. A psalm. The LORD said to my lord, "Sit at My right hand..." This is what the verse says "Who awakened one from the east whom righteousness met wherever he set his foot?" (Isaiah 41:2) The nations of the world we as if asleep, failing to take shelter beneath the wings of the Divine presence. Who awakened them to come and take shelter? Avraham, as it says: Who awakened one from the east. And not only the nations, but even righteousness itself was sleeping until Avraham awakened it. How did Avraham do this? He made an inn and opened doors in every direction in order to receive all those passing by, as it says "He planted a tamarisk (*eshel*) at Beer-sheba..." (Genesis 21:33) R' Azaria said: what is this *eshel* (אשל)? It is an acronym for eating (אכילה), drinking (שתייה) and escorting one's guests (לוייה). This is "righteousness met wherever he set his foot..."

as she walked the traditional seven circles

The origin of the tradition among Jews (today primarily those of Ashkenazi descent) that the bride circles the groom before the wedding ceremony is obscure. Some trace it to [Jeremiah 31:21](#)

“For the Lord has created something new on the earth, a woman shall circle [after] a man.”

Perhaps the bride is also circling her groom seven times in hopes of bringing down any walls between them, just as Joshua and the people circled Jericho seven times before its walls fell ([Joshua 6:12-21](#)). In general, the Torah and Jewish tradition use the number seven to represent wholeness.

The first woman was separated from Adam and then returned

The source of woman being separated from man and then rejoined through a different type of union is [Genesis 2:21-24](#).

“And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, and he slept, and He took one of his sides, and He closed the flesh in its place. And the Lord God built the side that He had taken from man into a woman, and He brought her to man. And man said, “This time, it is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called ishah (woman) because this one was taken from ish (man).” Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

The idea that this is true for God and Israel, as well as every man and woman in marriage can be found in the [Zohar 3:7b](#)

The following was taught in the section of “Hear oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4) What is one? This is Knesset Israel which is unified with the Holy One, blessed be He. As R’ Shimon says: the union of male and female is called one. The place where the female dwells, this is called one. What is the reason for this? Because male without female is called half a body, and half is not one. When two halves of the body are connected, they become one body and then they are called one.

Questions and Sources

He drew the weapon from his scabbard

The source for the priests of the ba'al cutting themselves is I Kings 18:28

“So they shouted louder, and gashed themselves with knives and spears, according to their practice, until the blood streamed over them.

Chapter 9 The Dispersal

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

The farmers panic when the rain begins to fall, but at first Lev is ready to see it as beneficial to his life as a shepherd. Have you ever benefited from a situation which brought damage to others? What do you think is the proper response to such a situation in thought, feeling and action?

Textual

Deuteronomy 11:13-21 is the second paragraph in the recitation of the Shema prayer, and it is known as the 'acceptance of the yoke of the commandments.' It presents a Divine promise that if Israel keeps the commandments, God will cause the rain to fall and the crops to grow. In the ancient world, what type of relationship emerges from this promise? How about now in the post-industrial societies of the 21st century?

Sources

Still mid-summer, the early yoreh rains were not due for another two months

For sources on *yoreh* and *malkosh*, the early and late rains, see above the notes on page 8.

For a good example of the threat which rain in harvest time represented in the ancient world see [I Samuel 12:16-19](#)

"Now stand by and see the marvelous thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. It is the season of the wheat harvest. I will pray to the LORD and He will send thunder and rain; then you will take thought and realize what a wicked thing you did in the sight of the LORD when you asked for a king." Samuel prayed to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day, and the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel. The people all said to Samuel, "Intercede for your servants with the LORD your God that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins the wickedness of asking for a king."

Questions and Sources

The lamp of darkness is burning brightly once again

The concept of a lamp of darkness which emits a shadow that dims the light of the Infinite appears in Zohar 1:15a. The phrase **בוצינא דקרדינותא** is translated by many as 'a lamp which emits darkness'

With the beginning of the manifestation of the King's will, that is, when the King desired to emanate and create the world, a **דקרדינותא בוצינא** (lamp of darkness) made an engraving upon the supernal light. This lamp of darkness, which emanated from the most concealed of all concealed things from the secret of the Endlessness Light took a shapeless form. The lamp was then inserted into the center of a circle that was neither white nor black nor red nor green, nor any color at all. When it began its measurements, it created colors that shone into the empty space and the engraving. From within the lamp - This lamp of darkness - a fountain spouted, from which the shades down below received their colors. From the most concealed of all concealed things, from the secret of the Endlessness Light, emanated two faces: One cleaved and the other did not cleave. Its atmosphere was unknown until forceful blows split Atik, and a concealed supernal point shone. Beyond this point, nothing is knowable and, because of this, it is called by the name Beginning, which means the first of the sayings.

The is no greater blessing than peace

Uriel is quoting Bereshit Rabbah 38:6

Rebbe said: so great is peace that even if Israel is worshipping idols, so long as there is peace between them it is as if God says 'I cannot rule over them (i.e. punish them), since there is peace between them, as it says "Ephraim is addicted to images— Let him be." (Hoshea 4:17) However, when they are divided what does He say? "Now that his boughs are broken up, He feels his guilt; He himself pulls apart his altars, Smashes his pillars." From this you learn that great is peace and division is hateful.

The Holy One forbids us to resign ourselves to death

While the sources for the value of life are too numerous to list, perhaps the most fundamental is Deuteronomy 30:15-20

See, I set before you this day life and prosperity, death and adversity. For I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His laws, and His rules, that you may thrive and increase, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land that you are about to enter and possess. But if your heart turns away and you give no heed, and are lured into the worship and service of other gods, I declare to you this day that you shall certainly perish; you shall not long endure on the soil that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live— by loving the LORD your God, heeding His commands, and holding fast to Him. For thereby you shall have life and shall long endure upon the soil that the LORD swore to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.

The Sages also taught that one who was righteous and actualized their full self through Torah is called alive even in death, as in Babylonian Talmud Berachot 18a-b

“For the living know that they will die, and the dead know nothing and have no more reward, for their memory has been forgotten” (Ecclesiastes 9:5): For the living know that they will die, these are the righteous, who even in their death are called living. As it is stated: “And Benayahu, son of Yehoyada, son of a valiant man of Kabze’el, who had done mighty deeds, he smote the two altar-hearths of Moab; he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow” (II Samuel 23:20). He was referred to in the verse as son of a living man. Is that to say, that all others are children of the dead? Rather, The son of a living man who lives forever, who even in death is referred to as living. Man of Kabze’el who had done mighty deeds, as he accumulated and gathered many workers for the sake of the Torah. Who killed the two lion-hearted men [Ariel] of Moab, as after his death he left no one his equal, in either the First Temple or the Second Temple periods, as the Temple is called Ariel (see Isaiah 29:1), and the two Ariel refers to the two Temples.



Prophecy Conversation

I thought prophecy was simply a gift from the Holy One

For sources on how prophecy begins as a training but ends as a Divine gift, see [Rambam Guide for the Perplexed, II 32:3](#)

The third view is that which is taught in Scripture, and which forms one of the principles of our religion. It coincides with the opinion of the philosophers in all points except one. For we believe that, even if one has the capacity for prophecy, and has duly prepared himself, it may yet happen that he does not actually prophesy. It is in that case the will of God [that withholds from him the use of the faculty]. According to my opinion, this fact is as exceptional as any other miracle, and acts in the same way.

It is interesting to note that R' Moshe Chaim Luzatto (the Ramchal) sees holiness in the same light in [Mesilat Yesharim ch. 26, section 1](#)

The matter of holiness is dual. Its beginning is service [of G-d] while its end is reward; its beginning is exertion while its end is a [divine] gift. That is, its beginning is that which a man sanctifies himself, while its end is his being sanctified. This is what our sages, of blessed memory, said: "if a man sanctifies himself a little, he becomes much sanctified. If he sanctifies himself below, he becomes sanctified from above" (Yomah 39a).

Balaam, who called himself the man with the open eye

The story of Balaam can be found in its entirety in [Numbers chapters 22-24](#)

The source for Balaam's "necessity" is [Midrash Tanchuma Balak 1:1](#)

Every dignity Israel received, you find that the nations of the world [also] received. In like manner He raised up Moses for Israel, who spoke with him any time that he wanted, [and] he raised up Balaam for the nations of the world, in order that he might speak with Him any time that he wanted. Look at what a difference there is between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the nations of the world!

The prophets of Israel warn the nations about transgressions, and so it says (in [Jer. 1:5](#)), "I have given you as a prophet to the nations." The prophets who He raised from the nations, however, established a breach to cut off mortals from the world to come. And not only that, but all the prophets had a merciful attitude towards both Israel and the nations of the world; for so did Isaiah say (in [Is. 16:11](#)), "Therefore my inner parts throb like a harp for Moab..." And similarly has Ezekiel said (in [Ezek. 27:2](#)), "Son of man, 'Raise up a dirge over Tyre.'" But this cruel man rose up to uproot a whole nation without cause, for nothing. Therefore the parashah about Balaam was written to make known why the Holy One, blessed be He, removed the holy spirit from the nations of the world. [It was] because He raised this man out of the nations of the world, and look at what he did!

The source for Balaam's base character is [Midrash Tanchuma Balak 6:1](#)

"Then they came unto Balaam and said to him, 'Thus has Balak ben Zippor said, "[Please do not refrain from coming unto me.] For I will surely honor you greatly.'" [Even] more than what you [wanted] formerly I will give you. Moreover, everything that you desire and whatever you ordain I will do. ([Numb. 22:18](#)): "But Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, '[Even] if Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, [I could not transgress the command of the Lord my God to do less or more]." From here you learn that he had three things. And they are an evil eye, a haughty spirit and a greedy soul:²³ An evil eye, as it is written (in [Numb. 24:2](#)), "Then Balaam raised his eyes and saw Israel." A haughty spirit, as it is written (according to [Numb. 22:13](#)), "for the Lord refused to let me go with you." A greedy soul, as it is written (according to [Numb. 22:18](#)), "[Even] if Balak should give me [his house full of silver and gold]."

Music is a particularly good tool for achieving that

For sources on the role of music in quieting the mind for prophecy see notes on page 52 above

Chapter 10 Eliav's Choice

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

Lev says that Uncle Menachem bowed to the ba'al because he doesn't like to be different. When have you done something with which you did not agree in order to avoid looking different? When have you chosen to be different despite the discomfort? What caused you to make different choices in these situations?

Textual

The Babylonian Talmud in Shabbat 56b says that 'anyone who says that Solomon sinned is mistaken,' despite the simple meaning of the verses in I Kings 11:1-9. Try and look at this contradiction from both perspectives – if the verses are correct, then what are the Sages trying to teach? If the Sages are correct, then why would the plain meaning of the verses read as it does?

Sources

Have I ever told you why the Kingdom was split?

In the biblical narrative, the twelve tribes of Israel initially lived as a loose confederation which only united to fight wars, as described in the books of Joshua and Judges. In the face of the rising threat of Philistine invasion in the mid-11th century BCE, the tribes were united under the rule of King Saul. Saul was succeeded by David, who together with his son Solomon ruled over what is known as the United Monarchy. Due to King Solomon's failures (see I Kings 11:4-13) God tore apart Solomon's kingdom, leaving the tribes of Judah and Benjamin under his son's rule as the Kingdom of Judah in the south and creating a new Kingdom of Israel out of the ten remaining tribes in the north. The story of the splitting of the unified kingdom into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah can be found in I Kings 12

Yeravaum son of Nevat had a complex relationship with Solomon, first servant, then rebel and finally rival king appointed by the prophets, see I Kings 11:26-32:

THE LAMP OF DARKNESS

“Yeravaum son of Nevat, an Ephraimite of Zeredah, the son of a widow whose name was Zeruah, was in Solomon’s service; he raised his hand against the king. The circumstances under which he raised his hand against the king were as follows: Solomon built the Millo and repaired the breach of the city of his father, David. This Yeravaum was an able man, and when Solomon saw that the young man was a capable worker, he appointed him over all the forced labor of the House of Joseph. During that time Yeravaum went out of Jerusalem and the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh met him on the way. He had put on a new robe; and when the two were alone in the open country, Ahijah took hold of the new robe he was wearing and tore it into twelve pieces. “Take ten pieces,” he said to Yeravaum. “For thus said the LORD, the God of Israel: I am about to tear the kingdom out of Solomon’s hands, and I will give you ten tribes. But one tribe shall remain his—for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city that I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel.”

In the beginning, Solomon even tried to kill Yeravaum as a dangerous rival “Solomon sought to put Yeravaum to death, but Yeravaum promptly fled to King Shishak of Egypt; and he remained in Egypt till the death of Solomon.” (I Kings 11:40)

See also this source from [Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 101b](#)

Rabbi Yoḥanan says: For what virtue was Yeravaum privileged to ascend to monarchy? It is due to the fact that he rebuked Solomon for his sins. And for what misdeed was he punished and lost everything? It is due to the fact that he rebuked Solomon and humiliated him in public, as it is stated: “And this was the cause that he lifted his hand against the king: Solomon built the Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father” (I Kings 11:27). Yeravaum said to Solomon: David, your father, created breaches in the wall so that the Jewish people could ascend for the pilgrimage Festival, and you sealed them in order to marshal forced labor [angarya] for the daughter of Pharaoh, your wife.

Solomon’s weakness for foreign women as the cause for his loss of the kingdom is explicit in [I Kings 11:1-9](#)

“King Solomon loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh’s daughter—Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Phoenician, and Hittite

Questions and Sources

women, from the nations of which the LORD had said to the Israelites, “None of you shall join them and none of them shall join you, lest they turn your heart away to follow their gods.” Such Solomon clung to and loved. He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned his heart away. In his old age, his wives turned away Solomon’s heart after other gods, and he was not as wholeheartedly devoted to the LORD his God as his father David had been. Solomon followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Phoenicians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was displeasing to the LORD and did not remain loyal to the LORD like his father David. At that time, Solomon built a shrine for Chemosh the abomination of Moab on the hill near Jerusalem, and one for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites. And he did the same for all his foreign wives who offered and sacrificed to their gods. The LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.”

The Babylonian Talmud in Shabbat 56b has a prolonged discussion about whether Solomon did or did not go astray after foreign gods. Here is an excerpt -

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nahmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: Anyone who says that King Solomon sinned is nothing other than mistaken, as it is stated: “And his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David, his father” (I Kings 11:4). By inference: Solomon’s heart was not equal to the heart of David, his father; however, he also did not sin. However, how then do I establish the meaning of the verse: “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods” (I Kings 11:4)? That verse is in accordance with the statement of Rabbi Natan; as Rabbi Natan raised a contradiction between the two parts of the verse. On the one hand, it is written: “For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods.” On the other hand, isn’t it written: “And his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father,” indicating that Solomon’s heart was not equal to the heart of David his father; however, he also did not sin? Rather, the verse says as follows: For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart, in an attempt to spur him to go after other gods; however, he did not go after them. ...The Gemara raises another question. Isn’t it written: “And Solomon did evil in the sight of

the Lord" ([IKings 11:6](#)), clearly indicating that Solomon sinned? Rather, since he should have protested against the conduct of his wives, i.e., their involvement in idolatry, but he did not protest, the verse ascribes to him liability as if he had sinned. Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: It would have been preferable for that righteous man, Solomon, to be a servant tasked with drawing water and hewing wood for another matter, i.e., idolatry, and not have the verse write about him: "And he did evil in the sight of the Lord," even though he did not. Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: When Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, she brought to him a thousand musical instruments and said to him: This is the way we do it for this idolatry, and this is the way we do it for that idolatry, and he did not protest that talk. Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: When Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter, the angel Gabriel descended from heaven and implanted a reed into the sea, and a sandbar grew around it, growing larger each year, and upon it the great city of Rome was built, which became God's instrument to punish Israel.

Yeravaum was afraid so he frightened the people?

The source for Yeravaum's fear that the people's attachment to the Temple in Jerusalem would lead them back to their allegiance to the kings of the House of David is [I Kings 12:26-28](#)

"Yeravaum said to himself, "Now the kingdom may well return to the House of David. If these people still go up to offer sacrifices at the House of the LORD in Jerusalem, the heart of these people will turn back to their master, King Rehoboam of Judah; they will kill me and go back to King Rehoboam of Judah." So the king took counsel and made two golden calves. He said to the people, "You have been going up to Jerusalem long enough. This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!"

The [Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 101b](#) fills in Yeravaum's thinking -

Yeravaum calculated and said: It is learned as a tradition that sitting in the Temple courtyard is permitted only for kings of the house of Judah alone. Once they see Rehoboam, who is sitting, and they see me standing, they will think: This, Rehoboam, is king, and that, Yeravaum, is the

Questions and Sources

servant. And if I sit there, I will be considered a traitor against the throne, and they will kill me and follow him. Immediately, the following took place: “And the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said to them: It is too much for you to ascend to Jerusalem; behold your gods, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. And he placed the one in Bethel and the other he placed in Dan” (I Kings 12:28–29).

Then he created a new pilgrimage festival one month after Sukkot

I Kings 12:33 describes how Yeravaum created a new festival holiday -

“On the fifteenth day of the eighth month—the month in which he had contrived of his own mind to establish a festival for the Israelites—Yeravaum ascended the altar that he had made in Bethel.” (I Kings 12:33)

Do not bow before their gods

The verse quoted is Exodus 23:24

Chapter 11 The Vineyard of Shiloh

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

After repeated crises, Lev's heart becomes unblocked through his tears and he finally feels free to choose his own path. What are the barriers in your own heart and what might you be able to do if you removed them?

Textual

When the Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 31a-31b explains why the fifteenth of Av was a day of joy it gives a number of reasons - that this is the day on which the tribe of Benjamin was once again allowed to marry members of other Israelite tribes, that this was the day on which the prohibition against tribal intermarriage was lifted, the day on which the generation which died in the wilderness finally ceased to die, and the day on which the guards whom King Yeravaum had placed on the roads to prevent the people of his kingdom from ascending to Jerusalem were removed. What value or idea do you see uniting these things? Why would this be the source of an annual festival 'to the Lord' at Shiloh?

Sources

He likes to come and make sure everything happens in 'the right way'

For the biblical reference to the festival at Shilo, see Judges 21:19-21

"They said, "The annual feast of the LORD is now being held at Shiloh." (It lies north of Bethel, east of the highway that runs from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah.) So they instructed the Benjaminites as follows: "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards. As soon as you see the girls of Shiloh coming out to join in the dances, come out from the vineyards; let each of you seize a wife from among the girls of Shiloh, and be off for the land of Benjamin."

The Mishna Ta'anit 4:8 describes the following scene which would take place at Shiloh -

Questions and Sources

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamaliel said: There were no days of joy in Israel greater than the fifteenth of Av and Yom Kippur. On these days the daughters of Jerusalem would go out in borrowed white garments in order not to shame any one who had none. All these garments required immersion. The daughters of Jerusalem come out and dance in the vineyards. What would they say? Young man, lift up your eyes and see what you choose for yourself. Do not set your eyes on beauty but set your eyes on the family. "Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Proverbs 31:30).

Nobody wants to get married this way

Zim's description is a paraphrase of the Babylonian Talmud Taanit 31a

The Sages taught: ...all the Jewish people borrow from each other. so as not to embarrass one who did not have her own white garments. All the garments that the women borrowed require immersion, as those who previously wore them before might have been ritually impure. Rabbi Elazar says: Even if the garments were folded and placed in a box [kufsa], The daughters of the Jewish people would go out and dance in the vineyards. A tanna taught: One who did not have a wife would turn to there to find one. Those women of distinguished lineage among them would say: Young man, please lift up your eyes and see what you choose for a wife. The Sages taught: What would the beautiful women among them say? Set your eyes toward beauty, as a wife is only for her beauty. What would those of distinguished lineage among them say? Set your eyes toward family, as a wife is only for children. What would the ugly ones among them say? Acquire your purchase for the sake of Heaven...

Chapter 12 The Rains

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

In chapter 10 Uncle Menachem told Lev a story about King Yeravaum, who dealt with his fear by making other people afraid. In this chapter Uriel tells Lev that ‘pitting fear against fear’ will not achieve the goals of the prophets. Do you think this is true? What is an alternative to making people afraid in order to get them to obey? Why do so many people in power choose to use fear?

Textual

Uriel says that the same hand fashioned light and darkness, echoing Isaiah 45:7 “Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates evil; I am the Lord, Who makes all these.” If the idea that both good and evil come from God is a theological foundation of Judaism, then why does the liturgy change the verse in Isaiah into the blessing ‘Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates everything...’?

Sources

The same hand that fashioned the light also made the darkness

The notion that both light and darkness, good and evil, come from God is a foundational frame for Torah consciousness. It is also too large to give a full treatment here. Nevertheless, consider the following. The essential biblical verse in the discussion is [Isaiah 45:7](#)

Who forms light and creates darkness, Who makes peace and creates evil; I am the Lord, Who makes all these.

Here is a rabbinic perspective on what the origins of evil might be and how it too came from God. [Bereshit Rabbah 9:7](#)

Rabbi Nahman said in Rabbi Samuel’s name: ‘Behold, it was good’ (Genesis 1:4) refers to the Good Desire; ‘And behold, it was very good’

Questions and Sources

(Genesis 1:31) refers to the Evil Desire. Can then the Evil Desire be very good? That would be extraordinary! But without the Evil Desire, however, no man would build a house, take a wife and beget children; and thus said Solomon: 'Again, I considered all labour and all excelling in work, that it is a man's rivalry with his neighbour.' (Ecclesiastes 4:4).

This is a philosophical perspective on the question from the Rambam, Guide for the Perplexed 3:10:1-3

Just as we say of him who puts out the light at night that he has produced darkness, so we say of him who destroyed the sight of any being that he produced blindness, although darkness and blindness are negative properties, and require no agent. In accordance with this view we explain the following passage of Isaiah: "I form the light and create (bore) darkness: I make peace, and create (bore) evil" (Isa. 45:7), for darkness and evil are non-existing things. Consider that the prophet does not say, I make ('oseh) darkness, I make ('oseh) evil, because darkness and evil are not things in positive existence to which the verb "to make" would apply; the verb bara "he created" is used, because in Hebrew this verb is applied to non-existing things e.g., "In the beginning God created" (bara), etc.; here the creation took place from nothing. Only in this sense can non-existence be said to be produced by a certain action of an agent...After these propositions, it must be admitted as a fact that it cannot be said of God that He directly creates evil, or He has the direct intention to produce evil: this is impossible. His works are all perfectly good. He only produces existence, and all existence is good: whilst evils are of a negative character, and cannot be acted upon. Evil can only be attributed to Him in the way we have mentioned. He creates evil only in so far as He produces the corporeal element such as it actually is: it is always connected with negatives, and is on that account the source of all destruction and all evil. Those beings that do not possess this corporeal element are not subject to destruction or evil: consequently the true work of God is all good, since it is existence. The book which enlightened the darkness of the world says therefore, "And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Even the existence of this corporeal element, low as it in reality is, because it is the source of death and all evils, is likewise good for the permanence of the Universe and the continuation of the order of things, so that one thing departs and the other succeeds. Rabbi

Meir therefore explains the words “and behold it was very good” (tob me’od); that even death was good in accordance with what we have observed in this chapter. Remember what I said in this chapter, consider it, and you will understand all that the prophets and our Sages remarked about the perfect goodness of all the direct works of God. In Bereshit Rabbah (chap. i.) the same idea is expressed thus: “No evil comes down from above.”

Without darkness there is no choice

The nexus between good, evil and choice is well expressed in the sources from Rambam Mishne Torah Laws of Repentance 5:1-5:4 cited in the notes on p. 19.

R’ Moshe Chaim Luzatto (the Ramchal) adds the following perspective on the purpose of this interaction between good, evil and choice in his work Derech Hashem 1:3:1

As we have discussed, humanity is the creature created for the purpose of drawing close to God. They are placed between perfection and deficiency, and it is in their hands to earn perfection. Humanity must earn this perfection, however, through their own desire and choice because if they were forced to choose perfection then they would not actually be its master, and God’s purpose would not be fulfilled. It is therefore necessary to create humanity with free will. One’s inclinations are therefore balanced between good and evil and they are not compelled toward either. They have the power of choice, able to choose either side knowingly and willingly, as well as to possess whichever one they wish. Humanity was therefore created with both a good urge and an evil urge. They have the power to incline in whichever direction they choose.

Sparks do not shine in the bright light of day

This is an adaption of a line from Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 63a

The idea that darkness itself gives power and meaning to the light finds powerful expression in Ecclesiastes 2:13 and the comments on this verse in Zohar 3:47b:10

Questions and Sources

“...As light is superior to darkness.” (Ecclesiastes 2:13) The benefit of light only comes from darkness. What is the fixing (tikkun) of white? Black. If it were not for black one would never know white, because blackness causes whiteness to disappear become more precious. R’ Yitzchak says, this is like the bitter and the sweet - one does not know what is sweet until they have tasted bitterness. What therefore makes something sweet, wouldn’t we say the bitter? This is what is written “...The one no less than the other was God’s doing...” (Ecclesiastes 7:14)

Prophecy conversation

It is simply part of our way

The relationship between wealth and prophecy, as well as a number of other attributes, is based in a rabbinic discussion of Moshe’s personal character found in Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 38a “Rabbi Yoḥanan said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, rests His Divine Presence only upon one who is mighty, and wealthy, and wise, and humble. And all of these qualities are derived from Moses... Rabbi Yoḥanan said: All the prophets were wealthy.”

The rabbinic perspective on some of these attributes is best communicated by Pirkei Avot 4:1

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? He who learns from every man, as it is said: “From all who taught me have I gained understanding” (Psalms 119:99). Who is mighty? He who subdues his [evil] inclination, as it is said: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city” (Proverbs 16:3). Who is rich? He who rejoices in his lot, as it is said: “You shall enjoy the fruit of your labors, you shall be happy and you shall prosper” (Psalms 128:2) “You shall be happy” in this world, “and you shall prosper” in the world to come. Who is he that is honored? He who honors his fellow human beings as it is said: “For I honor those that honor Me, but those who spurn Me shall be dishonored” (I Samuel 2:30).

The humble man knows that all is one

See Maharal of Prague *Netivot Olam, Netivo Hanava* for an advanced understanding of this idea.

It is also important to know that the Torah concept of humility (ענוה) is not the same as lowliness (שפל רוח), each have a separate importance in spiritual character. Humility is knowing exactly who and what one is and never being one ounce more or one ounce less. Thus Moshe could be labelled 'the humblest of men,' (Numbers 12:3) and yet still struggle with Pharaoh, chastise the people and intercede before God.

Chapter 13 Yericho

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

The suspension of mourning on Shabbat and the Festivals can be one of the hardest aspects of Jewish law to understand. Do you think that it is possible to choose your emotions? Why would the Torah command us to be joyful even when the situation is a sad one? Is it possible to hold both sadness and joy? What does that look like?

Textual

The interaction between Eliyahu and King Ahav is a classic power struggle between king and prophet. It is made more complex by comparing Yehoshua's words to Moshe's. Look back at Yehoshua 6:26, did God command this curse or was it Yehoshua's idea? Look also at Deuteronomy 11:16–17. Is this really a curse from Moshe? If not, what is it? If it is a Divine threat, then why in the midrash (and our story) does it take Eliyahu's oath to make it happen?

Sources

Rain on Sukkot is a curse

According to rabbinic understanding Sukkot is a time of judgment on the rain which will fall in the coming year (see sources on page 183). Nevertheless, we do not add supplication for rain to our prayers until the last day of the festival. Moving out into a temporary, and non-weatherproof, dwelling is both an act of faith and a seeking of Divine intimacy which are precursors to that request. Thus image shared in Mishna Sukkah 2:9

All seven days of Sukkot, a person renders his sukka his permanent residence and his house his temporary residence. If rain fell, from when is it permitted to vacate the sukka? It is permitted from the point that it is raining so hard that the congealed dish will spoil. The Sages told a parable: To what is this matter comparable? It is comparable to a servant who comes to pour wine for his master, and he pours a jug [kiton] of water in his face to show him that his presence is not desired.

There is no sorrow on Sukkot

The commandment to rejoice in Sukkot (which is ultimately extended to the other festival holidays) is rooted in the verses Deuteronomy 16:14-15

You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female servant, the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. You shall hold a festival for the LORD your God seven days, in the place that the LORD will choose; for the LORD your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy.

One of the classic statements about the power of joy in Divine service is found in the Rambam's Mishne Torah Laws of Shofar, Sukkah and Lulav 8:15

The joy which a person derives from doing good deeds and from loving God, who has commanded us to practice them, is a supreme form of divine worship. Anyone who refrains from experiencing this joy deserves punishment, as it is written: "Because you have not served the Lord your God with joy and with a glad heart" (Deuteronomy 28:47). Anyone who is arrogant and insists on self-glory on such occasions is both a sinner and a fool. King Solomon had this in mind when he said: "Do not glorify yourself in the presence of the King" (Proverbs 25:6). On the other hand, anyone who humbles himself on such occasions is indeed great and honored, for he serves the Lord out of love. David, King of Israel, expressed this thought when he said: "I will make myself even more contemptible than this, humbling myself in my own eyes" (II Samuel 6:22). True greatness and honor are attained only by rejoicing before the Lord, as it is written: "King David was leaping and dancing before the Lord" (II Samuel 6:16).

For sources on the connection between joy and receiving God's presence, see the sources cited on pages 21-22 above.

There are many traditions that the Divine Presence comes to rest in the Sukkah. One of the earliest is Zohar Emor 103b:8

"Come and see, when one sits in this place beneath the shade of faith (the Sukkah), the Divine Presence spreads out her wings over them from above..."

Questions and Sources

Uriel declared that the prophets had prayed for rain at the end of Sukkot ever since

The prayer for rain which is said at the end of Sukkot likely has its origins in the reality of the climate of the land of Israel which exhibits clear wet season/dry season dichotomy. Significant rains rarely begin before the Sukkot festival. In rabbinic tradition Sukkot therefore is a time of judgment on the rain which will fall in the coming year, as it says in Mishna Rosh Hashana 1:2

At four set times the world is judged: On Pesah in respect to the produce. On Shavuot in respect to the fruit of the tree. On Rosh Hashanah all the people of the world pass before Him like a division of soldier [a numerus], as it says, "He who fashions the hearts of them all, who discerns all their doings" (Psalms 33:15). And on Sukkot they are judged in respect of rain.

The waving of the 'four species' on Sukkot is also connected to the prayer for rain, as it says in the Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 2b in response to the question of why we begin praying for rain on Sukkot.

Rabbi Eliezer said: It is since these four species, come only to offer appeasement for water, as they symbolize the rainfall of the coming year. And this symbolism is as follows: Just as these four species cannot exist without water, as they need water to grow, so too, the world cannot exist without water.

The prayer for rain presented here is modeled on the version which is still recited by many Jews around the world at the beginning of the additional service recited on the last day of the Sukkot festival. It was composed by Eleazar Kallir, the 7th century liturgical poet from the land of Israel.

Not on Sukkot

See above the comments on page 181 for the sources on the obligation to be joyful on Sukkot.

Four men sat opposite them, but no one spoke

The tradition of sitting in silence before the mourner until they speak has its textual roots in the book of Job 2:11-13

When Job's three friends heard about all these calamities that had befallen him, each came from his home...When they saw him from a distance, they could not recognize him, and they broke into loud weeping; each one tore his robe and threw dust into the air onto his head. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights. None spoke a word to him for they saw how very great was his suffering.

Without warning, the nobleman with the fiery eyes rose to his feet

The scene between Ahav and Eliyahu in Hiel's house is taken directly from the Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 113a

Rav H̄isda says: The reference is to Jericho, as it is written: "And the city shall be devoted, it and all that is in it, to the Lord...And Joshua charged them at that time by oath, saying: Cursed be the man before the Lord, that rises up to build this city Jericho; he shall lay its foundation with his firstborn, and with his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it" (Joshua 6:17, 26). It is taught in a baraita that this includes a prohibition not to build Jericho even after changing its name to the name of another city, and not to build another city after giving it the name of Jericho, as it is written: "Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; with Aviram, his firstborn, he laid its foundation, and with his young son Seguv set up its gates" (I Kings 16:34). It is taught in a baraita: From the death of Aviram, his firstborn, the wicked, it was not incumbent upon him to learn not to build Jericho, as Aviram's death could be attributed to chance. But with the death of Seguv his young son, it was incumbent upon him to learn that it was due to Joshua's curse that they died. The Gemara asks: What did Aviram and Seguv do that they are characterized as wicked, and what is the baraita saying? The Gemara answers that this is what the baraita is saying: From the death of Aviram, his firstborn, that wicked man Hiel should have learned about the cause of the death of Seguv his young son. By inference from that which is stated: "With Aviram, his firstborn," do I not know that

Questions and Sources

Seguv was his young son? Rather, what is the meaning when the verse states: “His young son Seguv”? It teaches that he gradually buried all his sons from Aviram through Seguv, and he should have suspected that Joshua’s curse caused the deaths. Ahav was Hiel’s close friend and groomsman. He and Elijah came to inquire about Hiel’s welfare in the house of mourning. Hiel sat and said: Perhaps when Joshua cursed, this is what he cursed: Not to build Jericho even after changing its name to the name of another city, and not to build another city after giving it the name of Jericho. Elijah said to him: Yes, that is the curse. Ahav said to Elijah: Now the curse of Moses is not fulfilled, as it is written: “And you go astray and worship other gods,” and it is written: “Then the Lord’s anger will flare against you, and He will close the heavens, and there will be no rain” ([Deuteronomy 11:16–17](#)). And that man, referring to himself, established an object of idol worship on each and every furrow in the kingdom of Israel, and the rain is so plentiful that it does not allow him to go and worship it; will the curse of his student, Joshua, be fulfilled? The verse relates Elijah’s reaction: Immediately: “And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said to Ahav: As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew or rain these years, but according to my word” (I Kings 17:1). Elijah prayed for mercy and they gave him the key to rainfall enabling him to dictate when it would rain, and he arose and went.

May the Holy One comfort you among the mourners of Israel

There is a powerful exploration to be done around this phrase. The concept of comforting a mourner has many biblical roots on both the individual and national level, see the above quote from [Job 2:11-13](#) for the former and [Isaiah 40:1-2](#) for a classic example of the latter. The word comfort here is a translation of the Hebrew נחם which is also used to convey regret (see for example Genesis 6:6 and I Samuel 15:11.) These seemingly contradictory meanings open up the depth of the concept, because in truth נחם means to change one’s perspective after the fact. Combined with the name of God most associated with the comforting of a mourner, the definition of נחם can teach us much about how to do this important task. We had Lev offer this comfort in the name of the Holy One, but the traditional phrase used today is ‘May the Makom (lit. the place) comfort you among the mourners of Israel.’

Makom is a unique name of God which appears in early rabbinic literature, like the Mishna Berachot 5:1

One should not stand up to pray except in a reverent state of mind. The pious men of old used to wait an hour before praying in order that they might direct their thoughts to God (lit. *כדי שיכונו לבם למקום* align their hearts with the Place.)

Here is an explanation of its importance from R' Daniel Kohn: "The word 'place' in this mishnah has a double meaning, or so it seems at first. On the one hand, it means simply the place where one stands. On the other hand, the Rabbis teach that G-d Himself is 'the Place', because He is the ultimate Place for the world and so it refers to Him (see Bereshit Rabbah 68:9) ... To appreciate how these two 'places' coalesce, and to appreciate the sense in which G-d is the place for the world, you need to contemplate a bit about what 'place' is. Say you're sitting on a chair now. That's your place. But that chair is in a room, so in broader sense your place is the room. But that room is in your house, and that house in your town, and that town in your country, on your continent, in your world, in outer 'space'. But that space too is in a place which holds it, enabling it to be. The irony is, though, that that place, the ultimate space, is no place at all. It is the space in which all things 'are' but it itself is not them. The truth is no 'thing' is truly space: anything which can be defined with dimensions and is distinguishable from some other thing is not the space holding it, but rather occupies a background, an essence, which enables all things to be. This contemplation to a most ironic conclusion: that which is 'no thing' is what holds all things and enables them to be. The truth is that this can only really be known as an experience, and the challenge for most people is that this experience only comes by letting go of 'knowing' anything and simply becoming 'present' to this awareness. This is because in order to 'arrive' at 'place' you need to let go of holding on to things and be alertly aware of... nothing! The truth is, the less you move, think or talk, the more you 'stand still', the more you are 'there' in the 'space of all places'. If you allow this to happen, slowly and calmly following the contemplation above, you might notice that, inside of you, a certain quiet is developing. That quiet comes as thought is let go of and is actually the inner equivalent to 'place', the silence present when no words or thoughts, no mind objects, are there; when there is 'only' inner space. This silent presence of shehiyya is not only the way to align with place, it is the experience of it and its inner manifestation. Here you meet

Questions and Sources

the unchanging, unconditional, essential Place which is 'yours', within you, an ever-present truth of essence. There you experientially meet He Who is, as the Rambam says, the only truth, the place of the world, from which 'all that is manifest' comes." From Prayer Essay Three - Shehiyya: The Stillness Which Is Place, Rav Daniel Kohn

When we "comfort a mourner" in the name of HaMakom, the Place, we are offering them the perspective that there is something outside of their grief. We affirm God as the place of existence in order to remind the mourner that when they are ready to move from the pain of loss into the process of acceptance and integration of that loss into a new phase of life, that perspective is waiting for them. We sit silently in a house of mourning because this is not something which can be given to another person, only held deeply as an inner belief; but we offer the hope for it as our parting words.

Chapter 14: The Key of Rain

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

When describing the lamp of darkness, Uriel offers one of the classic explanations for *hester panim*, the hiding of God's face which can be experienced as evil, or simply as the absence of God's intervention in one's life or history. In what type of situations do you think that a good (parent, friend, God) should actively intervene to help those they care about and in which do you think they should stand back? What type of relationship results in both cases?

Textual

In light of the sources brought in this and the previous chapter, how do you understand the Sage's assertion that there are three keys never given into the hands of man, together with their teaching that Eliyahu received the key of rain?

Sources

Guard yourselves

The verses quoted by Lev are [Deuteronomy 11:16-17](#). These verses are part of the larger passage (verses 13-21) which make up the second paragraph in the declaration of God's unity, the acceptance of the yoke of Divine kingship and the acceptance of the yoke of Divine commandments which combined are known as קריאת שמע - the recitation of the *shema*.

Eliyahu has taken one of the forbidden keys

See the [Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 113a](#) brought in the notes on pages 188-190 for the source of Eliyahu taking the key of rain. There is another version of the story found in the midrash [Tanna debei Eliyahu Zuta 8](#)

...And so Israel angered and blasphemed against their Creator, engaging in idolatry for three hundred and ninety years in the age of the First Temple. From where do we learn this? You can know it was so because

Questions and Sources

Israel was settled in the land for four hundred and ten years while the First Temple stood. Subtract from these the twenty years that the kings of Judah and Israel did not worship idols and you are left with three hundred and ninety in which they did. Every prophet who spoke to Israel would rebuke them, urging that they repent but they did not want the goodness which the prophets offered. The people replied 'we do not want nor do we desire your prophecy.' From where do we know this is true? You can know it was so because King Have asked Elijah the prophet, saying 'is it not written in your Torah "Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them. For the LORD's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce..." (Deuteronomy 11:16-17)?!' But we worship idols and no drought has come! On the contrary, come and see how much good has come to me, as it says "Ahav son of Omri became king over Israel...Ahav son of Omri did what was displeasing to the LORD, more than all who preceded him...He erected an altar to Baal... During his reign, Hiel the Bethelite fortified Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of Aviram his first-born, and set its gates in place at the cost of Seguv his youngest, in accordance with the words that the LORD had spoken through Joshua son of Nun." (I Kings 16:29-34) At once Elijah was filled with great wrath upon Ahav and said to him 'empty one! You have despised the One who created the whole world for his glory, the One who gave the Torah for his glory. Upon your life, I will bring judgement upon you only through your own words, as it says "Elijah the Tishbite, an inhabitant of Gilead, said to Ahav, "As the LORD lives, the God of Israel whom I serve, there will be no dew or rain except at my bidding." (ibid 17:1) At once Elijah took the key of rain and departed. Then a great famine came upon the land...

I saw Eliyahu's soul rise to the highest realms, to the Throne of Glory

The Throne of Glory (כסא הכבוד) is a keystone concept in Torah. Conceptually, a throne is where the Presence of the king comes to rest and holds the king's presence even when the king is not there. The following two points will help you connect this idea to the world of the prophets.

The Throne of Glory is one of the things which preceded the creation of the world.

THE LAMP OF DARKNESS

Bereshit Rabbah parshat Bereshit 1 "In the beginning God created..." Six things preceded the creation of the world, some of which were created and some of which 'rose up in thought' to be created. The Torah and the Throne of Glory were created. The Torah, as it is written "The Lord acquired me at the beginning of His way..." (Mishle 8:22) The Throne of Glory, as it is written "Your throne is established of old..." (Tehillim 93:2) The forefathers 'rose up in thought' to be created, as it is written "Your fathers seemed to Me Like the first fig to ripen on a fig tree." (Hoshea 9:10) Israel 'rose up in thought,' as it is written "Remember Your congregation, which You acquired from time immemorial..." (Tehillim 74:2) The Holy Temple 'rose up in thought,' as it is written "As a Throne of Glory, exalted from the beginning, so is the place of our Sanctuary." (Jeremiah 17:12) The name of the Messiah 'rose up in thought,' as it is written "...before the sun, his name will be magnified..." (Tehillim 72:17) R' Ahavah son of R' Zeira said: also teshuvah, this is what is written "Before the mountains were born..." (Tehillim 90:2)

The idea that Yaakov's face is engraved on the Divine throne is a widespread motif in rabbinic writings. Here is one example from the 'Heikhalot literature,' (lit. the Throne room literature) which are some of the earliest Jewish mystical texts preserved. They deal primarily with the means and experience of ascent to God's throne.

Heikhalot Rabbati, § 164 Bear witness to them of what testimony you see of me, of what I do to the features of the face of Jacob their father, which is engraved for me on the throne of my glory. For at the time that you say before me "holy," I bend over it, embrace, kiss and fondle to it, and my hands are upon its arms, three times, when you speak before me "holy." As it is said: holy, holy, holy.

Another example is the Targum Yonatan on Genesis 28:12

"He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it." Targum: And he dreamed, and, behold, a ladder was fixed in the earth, and the summit of it reached to the height of heaven. And, behold, the angels who had accompanied him from the house of his father, ascended to make known to the angels on high, saying, Come, see Jacob the pious, whose likeness is in the throne of glory, and whom you have been

Questions and Sources

desirous to see! And, behold, the holy angels from before the Lord ascended and descended, and looked upon him.

What the righteous decree the Holy One carries out

The origins of this idea in the Biblical text can be traced to [Job 22:28](#)

You will decree and it will be fulfilled, And light will shine upon your affairs.

The rabbis address it in [Sifrei Bamidbar 135](#)

“Do not speak to Me again about this thing” (Deuteronomy 3:26) He said to him: “Do not ask this thing of Me, but decree a different thing upon me, and I will do it.” To what might this be compared? To a king who issues a difficult decree upon his son. When the son asks him to rescind it, the king replies: Do not ask this thing of me, but decree a different thing upon me and I will do it, as it is written ([Iyyov 22:28](#)) “You will decree and it will be fulfilled for you.” So Moses said: If not, (i.e., If I cannot enter Eretz Yisrael), let me see it. The Lord said: This I will do. “Go up to the summit of Pisgah, etc.” (Deuteronomy 3:23)

The [Talmud Yerushalmi Ta’anit 16b \(3:8\)](#) places this doctrine in the mouth of the 1st century BCE Sage Shimon ben Shetach, who says “The Holy One, blessed be he, nullifies his decree when it conflicts with the decree of a righteous person...” See the whole context there, as it also deals with bringing rain to the world.

So the Holy One made the lamp of darkness as well

The concept of a lamp of darkness which emits a shadow that dims the light of the Infinite appears in [Zohar 1:15a](#). The phrase [בוצינא דקרדינותא](#) is translated by many as ‘a lamp which emits darkness.’ See the source on page 126.

This page also contains a simplified description of the concept of *tzimtzum*, the Divine contraction which created the space for creation. A foundational version of this idea is found in the book [Etz Chaim 1:2:2](#)

THE LAMP OF DARKNESS

Know that before the emanations were emanated and creations were created, there was a simple, supernal light which filled all of existence; there was no place empty [of the light]. Rather, all was filled with the Light Without End (Ohr Ein Sof). There was no beginning nor end, rather all was a simple, undifferentiated light -- the Light Without End. And when His Will rose to create the worlds and to emanate the emanations, to reveal, in full, His deeds, name, and attributes (this was the reason for the creation of worlds, as explained [elsewhere]) The Infinite Light contracted itself into a central dot, literally in the middle of the Light. And the Light contracted and spread to the sides surrounding the central dot, thus leaving an empty vacuum...

Chapter 15 The Battle

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

This whole chapter is marked by things that could be seen as miracles or as coincidence. Have you ever had the experience of the world ‘going your way’ when you most needed it? What brought this about? How did you understand it at the time? How about afterwards?

Textual

Look at the midrash which explains the scene in which Uriel and the boys escape the cave. What types of situation, personal or national, cause nature to return to its conditionality? Looking at the stories to which it refers, does human will have a role in this return, or only Divine will?

Sources

You split the rock for Shimshon at Lehi

The story of Shimshon at Lehi is found in Judges ch. 15, the specific reference is to verses 18-19

He was very thirsty and he called to the LORD, “You Yourself have granted this great victory through Your servant; and must I now die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?” So God split open the hollow which is at Lehi, and the water gushed out of it; he drank, regained his strength, and revived. That is why it is called to this day “En-hakkore of Lehi.”

You opened the mouth of the well for Yisrael

The well which sustained Israel in the wilderness after the Exodus has many appearances in Biblical and rabbinic literature. Uriel is referring to the splitting of the rock in Exodus 17:6-7

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pass before the people; take with you some of the elders of Israel, and take along the rod with which you struck the Nile, and set out. I will be standing there before you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock and water will issue from it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.

I say this is the moment for which you were formed

The idea of miracles where God overturns the laws of nature in order to meet some immediate need of the prophet or the people one of the more theologically challenging notions the Bible presents, at least to the philosophical mind. It has troubled philosophers from Philo to Rambam to Spinoza. One of the ways in which the Sages harmonized the idea of there being 'laws of nature' and their belief in the absolute freedom of Divine will to micro-manage when desirable was by asserting that the conditionality of the laws of nature was built-in to creation, as in Genesis Rabbahh 5:5

The Holy One set preconditions (before creation) with the sea that it split before Israel, as it is written "...at daybreak the sea returned to its normal state (eitano)..." (Exodus 14:27) Meaning that it returned to the conditions (tano) that had been set for it. R' Yermiah ben Elazar said: not with the sea alone did the Holy One set such conditions, but rather with everything created during the six days of creation, as it is written "It was I who made the earth And created man upon it; My own hands stretched out the heavens, And I commanded all their host." (Isaiah 45:12) I commanded the sea that it split before Israel, I commanded the heavens and earth to fall silent before Moshe, as it says "Give ear, O heavens, let me speak; Let the earth hear the words I utter!" (Deuteronomy 32:1) I commanded the sun and moon to stand still before Yehoshua, as it says "Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon, O moon, in the Valley of Ayalon!" (Joshua 10:12) I commanded the ravens to sustain Eliyahu, as it says "The ravens brought him bread and meat every morning and every evening..." (I Kings 17:6) I commanded that the fire not harm Hananya, Mishael and Azarya and I commanded the lions not hurt Daniel. I commanded the heavens to open at the voice of Yechezkiel, as it says "...the heavens opened and I saw visions of God." (Ezekiel 1:1) I commanded the fish to vomit out Jonah, as it says "The LORD spoke to the fish, and it spewed Jonah out upon dry land." (Jonah 2:11)

Chapter 16 Yochanan's secret

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

What does being a priest mean to you? Is it a duty? A privilege? Something else? Why do you think that God characterizes Israel as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," (Exodus 19:6) right before the giving of the Torah at Sinai? What would such a nation look like?

Textual

Look at the at the sources which deal with the priestly gifts and the fact that the kohanim receive no inheritance in the land. What reason do you imagine might lie behind these commandments? How are they connected? What opportunities become available to the kohanim through a lack of inheritance?

Sources

One can receive the Presence in many ways

The story of Shimshon and the battle of Lehi can be found in Judges 15:9-19

The story of King Saul referred to can be found in I Samuel ch. 11

The idea that the gift of power in response to a desire to fight injustice is the first rung on the ladder of prophecy is found in Rambam's The Guide for the Perplex II 45:1

The first degree of prophecy consists in the divine assistance which is given to a person, and induces and encourages him to do something good and grand, e.g., to deliver a congregation of good men from the hands of evildoers; to save one noble person, or to bring happiness to a large number of people; he finds in himself the cause that moves and urges him to this deed. This degree of divine influence is called "the spirit of the Lord"; and of the person who is under that influence we say that the spirit of the Lord came upon him, clothed him, or rested upon him, or the Lord was with him, and the like. All the judges of Israel possessed

this degree... This faculty was always possessed by Moses from the time he had attained the age of manhood: it moved him to slay the Egyptian, and to prevent evil from the two men that quarreled; it was so strong that, after he had fled from Egypt out of fear, and arrived in Midian, a trembling stranger, he could not restrain himself from interfering when he saw wrong being done; he could not bear it... This faculty did not cause any of the above-named persons to speak on a certain subject, for it only aims at encouraging the person who possesses it to action; it does not encourage him to do everything, but only to help either a distinguished man or a whole congregation when oppressed, or to do something that leads to that end. Just as not all who have a true dream are prophets, so it cannot be said of every one who is assisted in a certain undertaking, as in the acquisition of property, or of some other personal advantage, that the spirit of the Lord came upon him, or that the Lord was with him, or that he performed his actions by the holy spirit. We only apply such phrases to those who have accomplished something very good and grand, or something that leads to that end; e.g., the success of Joseph in the house of the Egyptian, which was the first cause leading evidently to great events that occurred subsequently.

You were born a priest of the Holy One

The revelation that Lev is a kohen not only draws together many aspects of the story, it also lays the groundwork for understanding some of its fundamental themes. In order to reflect on this, we have to clarify the meaning of kohen. It is generally translated as priest, and while this is certainly correct, the English word lacks a specific connotation which is critical to understanding the role of the kohanim within Israel. Rashi on Exodus 28:3 explains:

“Next you shall instruct all who are skillful, whom I have endowed with the gift of skill, to make Aaron’s vestments, for consecrating him to serve Me as priest.”

Rashi: *to sanctify him, to appoint him as priest to me* — to sanctify him, i.e. to install him into the priesthood by means of the garments here specified, so that he may become priest unto Me. The expression of kehuna כהונה denotes service.

Questions and Sources

The element of service which the word kohen contains makes the translation 'minister' more accurate, as in its usage in II Samuel 20:26 and I Kings 4:5. In essence, a kohen serves the people vis a vis God and God vis a vis the people. This definition has profound implications for the relationship between Israel and the world. Immediately preceding the giving of the Torah at Sinai, God labels Israel "a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6) This means that as a people Israel is meant to serve the world vis a vis God and God vis a vis the world.

The idea that the kohanim have no inheritance in the land appears in Numbers 18:20

And the LORD said to Aaron: You shall, however, have no territorial share among them or own any portion in their midst; I am your portion and your share among the Israelites.

The command to separate the first portion of bread is one of the twenty-four priestly gifts which the Torah grants the kohanim listed in Tosefta Challah 2:8

Twenty-four priestly gifts were given to Aharon and his sons, in particular, in general and with an everlasting covenant. These are they: ten in the Temple, four in Jerusalem and ten in the surrounding environs. Ten in the Temple: sin offering, guilt offering, communal peace offerings, bird sin offerings, conditional guilt offerings, the oil of the leper's offering, the two loaves of Shavuot, the weekly showbread, the remains of the flour offerings and the Omer offering. Four in Jerusalem: first born animals, first fruits, the elevated portions of the thanksgiving and Nazirite offerings, and the skins of the sacred offerings. Ten in the surrounding environs: the terumah portion of produce, the terumah taken from the Levitical tithe, the first bread (challah), the first fleece, the shoulder, cheek and stomach portion, redemption of the first born male child, redemption of the first born donkey, devoted offerings, a devoted ancestral field which was not redeemed, returned property stolen from a convert who is dead. All of these were given to Aharon and his sons in general, in particular, and with an everlasting covenant in order to create an obligation on the whole and on each particular, to grant a reward on the whole and on each particular. One who transgresses and withholds them is as if they transgressed both on the whole and the particular.

THE LAMP OF DARKNESS

The specific command to separate the first portion of bread (Challah) appears in [Numbers 15:17-21](#)

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land to which I am taking you and you eat of the bread of the land, you shall set some aside as a gift to the LORD: as the first yield of your baking, you shall set aside a loaf as a gift; you shall set it aside as a gift like the gift from the threshing floor. You shall make a gift to the LORD from the first yield of your baking, throughout the ages.

The connection between the giving of priestly gifts to the kohanim and their landless status is made explicit in [Numbers 18:19-20](#)

All the sacred gifts that the Israelites set aside for the LORD I give to you, to your sons, and to the daughters that are with you, as a due for all time. It shall be an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for you and for your offspring as well. And the LORD said to Aaron: You shall, however, have no territorial share among them or own any portion in their midst; I am your portion and your share among the Israelites.

Aside from the practical need to support the kohanim, the priestly gifts, and in particular the bread offering, were seen as a source of blessing for all Israel who gave them. As in [Ezekiel 44:30](#)

All the choice first fruits of every kind, and all the gifts of every kind—of all your contributions—shall go to the priests. You shall further give the first of the yield of your baking to the priest, that a blessing may rest upon your home.

The prohibition against a kohen becoming impure due to the dead is found in [Leviticus 19:1-4](#)

The LORD said to Moses: Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: None shall defile himself for any [dead] person among his kin, except for the relatives that are closest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother; also for a virgin sister, close to him because she has not married, for her he may defile himself. But he shall not defile himself as a kinsman by marriage, and so profane himself.

Questions and Sources

The Sages understood this prohibition in a very broad fashion which is analyzed in the tractate of the Mishna call Ohalot (tents.) A general rule of thumb is that a kohen cannot make direct contact with or be under any roofed space with a dead body.

The kohanim are a separate family unit within the tribe of Levi. The refusal of the Levites to participate in the sin of the Golden Calf appears in Exodus 32:26

“Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said: Who is for God, let him come to me; and all the children of Levi gathered to him”

There is one interpretive tradition which even sees the refusal of the Levites to join in the sin of the Golden Calf as the source of their elevation to the position of servants of God, and became an archetype for their steadfast faith in God and Moshe’s leadership. See Deuteronomy 10:8

At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the Ark of the LORD’s Covenant, to stand in attendance upon the LORD, and to bless in His name, as is still the case.

And Rashi Deuteronomy 10:8

AT THAT TIME accordingly means: In the first year of the Exodus from Egypt, when ye sinned by worshipping the golden calf, but the sons of Levi did not thus sin. — at that time God separated them from you. It places this verse in juxtaposition with the retreat to Bene Jaakon to tell you that in this matter also, the sons of Levi did not sin, but stood steadfast in their faith.

Chapter 17 – The Steward’s Wife

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

On their journey to Shomron, it is their insignificance in the eyes of the soldiers which keeps Lev and Yonatan safe. Has it ever helped you to be unnoticed? How did it feel?

Textual

There is a common expression that ‘cleanliness is next to godliness.’ How do you understand the Torah’s emphasis on immersion in water in order to remove impurity? Is it simply a negative spiritualization of dirt, or something more? And if so, what might it be?

Sources

The impurity of the dead still clings to the rest of us

The Torah has numerous commands to wash with water in order to remove some form of impurity, though the verb used (יָחַר) can be understood in many ways. The Sages understood it to mean immersion in flowing water or such waters properly gathered into a bath (*mikve*), as in the midrash halacha Sifra Emor 4:7

“until he bathes his flesh” (Leviticus 22:6): I might think that he could bathe each limb individually; it is, therefore, written (Leviticus 22:7) “And when the sun sets he shall be clean” — Just as the sun sets as a whole, so the bathing in water must be as a whole (and not limb by limb).

As Uriel notes, the impurity of the dead is only removed through the ritual sprinkling of water mixed with ashes of the red heifer, as described in Numbers chapter 19. We included this scene simply to emphasize Lev’s newly discovered status.

Questions and Sources

Living waters will suffice

The phrase 'living waters' is used in many places to mean water which flows naturally from the ground rather than that which is gathered, as in Genesis 26:19

But when Isaac's servants, digging in the wadi, found there a well of spring water,

It is connected specifically to rituals of purification in verses like Leviticus 15:13

When one with a discharge becomes clean of his discharge, he shall count off seven days for his cleansing, wash his clothes, and bathe his body in fresh water; then he shall be clean.

A beautiful explanation of the role that living water plays in purification can be found in the Sefer HaChinuch 173:2

(2) And about the reason that water purifies everything impure, I would think from the perspective of the simple understanding it is in order that a one see themselves upon immersion as if they are created at that time, [just] like the whole world was water before man was upon it - as it is written (Genesis 1:2), "and the spirit of God floated upon the face of the waters." Through this comparison, the one who immerses can take to heart that just as they are renewed his body, so too they also renew their actions for the good, fixing their actions and becoming exacting in the way of God, blessed be He. Therefore the Sages said that the purification is not fit with water that is in a vessel, but rather only with living water - or collected [water], which is on the ground and, in any case, not in a vessel - in order to place in the heart the idea world in the moment of immersion was entirely water, and [that] one is renewed upon emerging from it, as we said. But if the water was in a vessel - or even if it passed through a vessel - this matter that we said would not be set in the thought of the one immersing as everything within a vessel has limits which are the creation of the hands of man. Therefore, when one immerses in a vessel, they will not think of the whole world as water like at the beginning of Creation, and that they are renewed at that time. 'And the one who accepts, will accept; and the one who refrains will refrain.'

With their feet pointed toward Jerusalem

There is no binding requirement for the direction in which one is buried. However, the belief that upon the resurrection of the dead the newly-living will immediately head to Jerusalem has led many communities over time to develop customs on the matter. Some bury the dead with their feet toward the cemetery exit, some toward the Land of Israel and some toward Jerusalem.

It must be one of Gidon's caves

The source for Gideon's caves is Judges 6:1-2

Then the Israelites did what was offensive to the LORD, and the LORD delivered them into the hands of the Midianites for seven years. The hand of the Midianites prevailed over Israel; and because of Midian, the Israelites provided themselves with refuges in the caves and strongholds of the mountains.

Hidden in a cave outside the city

The source for Ovadia hiding the prophets from Queen Izevel is I Kings 18:13

My lord has surely been told what I did when Jezebel was killing the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred of the prophets of the LORD, fifty men to a cave, and provided them with food and drink.

Prophecy Conversation

The righteous eat to satisfy the soul

Mishle 13:25 "The righteous man eats to his heart's content, But the belly of the wicked is empty."

Chapter 18 Shimon's Tale

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

Most people think of a just world as one in which everyone gets what they deserve. Uriel insists that such a world could not stand and sees the story of his own life as proof. How do you understand the relationship between justice and mercy? How could they work together to build the world? Would the world be better off with strict justice? What would we gain and what would we lose?

Textual

See the source on the obligation to judge another favorably. What do you see as the benefits and risks of such an obligation? How would you define its limits?

Sources

The faithful judge the prophets with favor

There is a general position in rabbinic thought that one has an obligation to judge others with a favorable eye. The Torah verse in which this is rooted is the end of Leviticus 19:15

You shall not render an unfair decision: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kinsman fairly.

The Babylonian Talmud in Shevuot 30a understands the verse as applying both to legal requirements for fairness and to the personal obligation to judge others favorably. It also narrows the application of the obligation

“But in righteousness shall you judge your colleague,” meaning that you should judge another favorably, and seek to find justification for his actions, even if when interpreted differently his actions could be judged unfavorably. Rav Yosef teaches that from the verse: “But in righteousness shall you judge your colleague [amitekha],” it is derived: With regard

to one who is with you [im she'itekha] in observance of Torah and in fulfillment of mitzvot, try to judge him favorably...

The Holy One always creates the remedy before bringing the malady

This is a concept which appears in Babylonian Talmud Megillah 13b

As Reish Lakish said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, does not strike at the Jewish people unless He has already created a remedy for them beforehand, as it is stated: "When I would have healed Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim was uncovered" (Hosea 7:1). But this is not so with regard to the nations of the world. With them, God first strikes them and only afterward does He create a remedy, as it is stated: "And the Lord shall smite Egypt, smiting and healing" (Isaiah 19:22).

it could not stand

The idea that world cannot stand on strict judgement appears in one of Rashi's comments on Genesis 1:1

In the beginning of God's creation of the heavens and the earth.

Rashi: *God's creation of the heavens and the earth*: But it does not say "of the Lord's creation of" (i.e., it should say "of the Lord God's creation of" as below 2:4 "on the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven") for in the beginning it was His intention to create it with the Divine Standard of Justice, but he perceived that the world would not endure; so He preceded it with the Divine Standard of Mercy, allying it with the Divine Standard of Justice, and that is the reason it is written: "on the day the Lord God made earth and heaven."

Chapter 19 The final journey

Questions for Learning and Reflection

Reflective

See the sources on the situations in which the Sages determined that observance of the law was more important than life. Are there people, ideas, laws which you see as more important than living?

Textual

The principle of *marit ayin* is based on the idea that people judge the world by what they see, even if they are not judging it correctly. The command to place the blue thread on the corners of one's garment is also based on the connection between one's eyes and the world, that one should see it and recall all the commandments. What do the two have in common and how do they differ?

Sources

Some things are more precious than life

The Torah's injunction to choose life is one of its strongest principles, as expressed in [Deuteronomy 30:19](#)

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life—if you and your offspring would live—

Nevertheless, the Sages understood there to be three prohibitions which themselves uphold the boundaries that give life its meaning. Therefore, if one is forced to choose between death and violation of these principles, the choice is death. The limitation to three actions is true in normal times, but in a time of persecution when enemies are seeking to uproot the Torah from Israel, every precept becomes a matter of choosing death over violation. See [Tosefta Shabbat 16:1](#)

The precepts were given to Israel for no reason other than for Israel to stay alive, for it is said of the precept, "Which if a man do, he shall

live by them" ([Lev. 18:5](#)) - live by them and not die by them. Therefore, when there is danger to life, no precept is to be insisted on except those prohibiting idolatry, unchastity, and murder. When does the rule apply? Not in a time of religious persecution. But during a time of religious persecution, a man must be willing to give up his life even for the least demanding of precepts, as it is said, "You shall not profane My Holy Name - I am to be hallowed among the children of Israel" ([Lev. 22:32](#)).

Don't bow. Just pick up and go.

The situation described here is built upon the rabbinic notion that even if an act is permissible in and of itself, it may be prohibited because it looks like an act forbidden by the Torah (*marit ayin*, lit. within eyesight). The legal source for this scene is in [Babylonian Talmud Avodah Zarah 12a](#)

If a thorn became imbedded in one's foot while he was standing before an object of idol worship, he may not bend down and remove the thorn, because he appears to be bowing down to the object of idol worship; but if he is not seen, it is permitted. If one's coins were scattered while he is before an object of idol worship, he may not bend down and pick them up, because he appears to be bowing down to the object of idol worship; but if he is not seen, it is permitted. Likewise, if there is a spring that runs before an object of idol worship, one may not bend down and drink from it, because he appears to be bowing down to the object of idol worship; but if he is not seen, it is permitted.

It also has a narrative parallel in the [Babylonian Talmud Gittin 57b](#)

"As For Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are reckoned as sheep for the slaughter" ([Psalms 44:23](#)). And Rav Yehuda said: This verse applies to the woman and her seven sons who died as martyrs for the sake of the sanctification of God's name. The incident occurred as follows: They brought in the first of the woman's sons before the emperor and said to him: Worship the idol. He said to them: I cannot do so, as it is written in the Torah: "I am the Lord your God" ([Exodus 20:2](#)). They immediately took him out and killed him. And they then brought in another son before the emperor, and said to him: Worship the idol. He said to them: I cannot do so, as it

Questions and Sources

is written in the Torah: “You shall have no other gods beside Me” (Exodus 20:3). And so they took him out and killed him. They then brought in yet another son before the emperor, and said to him: Worship the idol. He said to them: I cannot do so, as it is written in the Torah: “He that sacrifices to any god, save to the Lord only, he shall be utterly destroyed” (Exodus 22:19). And so they took him out and killed him. They then brought in another son, and said to him: Worship the idol. He said to them: I cannot do so, as it is written in the Torah: “You shall not bow down to any other god” (Exodus 34:14). And so they took him out and killed him. They then brought in yet another son, and said to him: Worship the idol. He said to them: I cannot do so, as it is written in the Torah: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One” (Deuteronomy 6:4). And so they took him out and killed him. They then brought in another son, and said to him: Worship the idol. He said to them: I cannot do so, as it is written in the Torah: “Know therefore this today, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord, He is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is no other” (Deuteronomy 4:39). And so they took him out and killed him. They then brought in yet another son, and said to him: Worship the idol. He said to them: I cannot do so, as it is written in the Torah: “You have avouched the Lord this day to be your God...and the Lord has avouched you this day to be a people for His own possession” (Deuteronomy 26:17–18). We already took an oath to the Holy One, Blessed be He, that we will not exchange Him for a different god, and He too has taken an oath to us that He will not exchange us for another nation. It was the youngest brother who had said this, and the emperor pitied him. Seeking a way to spare the boy’s life, the emperor said to him: I will throw down my seal before you; bend over and pick it up, so that people will say that he has accepted the king’s authority [harmana]. The boy said to him: Woe [haval] to you, Caesar, woe to you, Caesar. If you think that for the sake of your honor I should fulfill your command and do this, then for the sake of the honor of the Holy One, Blessed be He, all the more so should I fulfill His command. As they were taking him out to be killed, his mother said to them: Give him to me so that I may give him a small kiss. She said to him: My son, go and say to your father Abraham, You bound one son to the altar, but I bound seven altars. She too in the end went up to the roof, fell, and died. A Divine Voice emerged and said: “A joyful mother of children” (Psalms 113:9)

The color of the Throne of Glory

The color of the Throne of Glory is stated in Ezekiel 1:26

Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and on top, upon this semblance of a throne, there was the semblance of a human form

The significance of the color is expressed in the Babylonian Talmud Menachot 43b

It is taught in a baraita that Rabbi Meir would say: What is different about tekhelet from all other types of colors such that it was chosen for the mitzva of ritual fringes? It is because tekhelet is similar in its color to the sea, and the sea is similar to the sky, and the sky is similar to the Throne of Glory, as it is stated: “And they saw the God of Israel; and there was under His feet the like of a paved work of sapphire stone, and the like of the very heaven for clearness” (Exodus 24:10), indicating that the sky is like a sapphire brickwork. And it is written: “The likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone” (Ezekiel 1:26).

Glossary of authors and works referenced

Mishna

An authoritative collection of the oral tradition of Jewish Law, redacted by R' Yehudah HaNasi in the early 3rd century CE.

Midrash Aggadah

Midrash Haggadah is made up of the interpretation, illustration, or expansion, in a moralizing or edifying manner, of the non-legal portions of the Bible. Many of the works cited above (such as Genesis Rabbah, Tanchuma, Eliyahu Zuta) belong to this category.

Midrash Halacha

Midrash Halacha is the exploration of the traditionally received law through identification of its sources in the Bible and through interpretation of these Scriptural passages as proofs of its authenticity. The term applies also to the derivation of new laws and enactments from the Bible, either by means of interpretation of the meaning of the verses themselves or through the application of certain hermeneutic rules. A few of the works cited above, like the Sifre and the Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael belong to this category.

Seder Olam Rabbah

A 2nd-century CE Hebrew language chronology attributed to the Tanna R' Yose bar Chalifta. It details the dates of biblical events from Creation to Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia.

Babylonian Talmud

A comprehensive work of rabbinic literature comprised of both legal and narrative elements (halacha and Aggadah), built upon the Mishna. The Babylonian Talmud (as opposed to the Jerusalem version) reflects discussions and editing over a period from approximately 250 CE to 600 CE.

Targum Yonatan

A translation of the Torah into the dialect of Aramaic spoken in the land of Israel. Its origins likely are in late antiquity and it includes much narrative material collected from various rabbinic sources.

Heichalot literature

A collection of esoteric and revelatory texts produced some time between late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, they represent some of the earliest Jewish mystical texts.

Eleazar Kallir

The greatest and most prolific of the early paytanim, the liturgical poets, whose works are still recited today. He apparently lived in the city of Tiberias in the land of Israel in the Byzantine era, though the biographical facts of his life, including his name, are all shrouded in mystery.

Zohar

A commentary on the Torah, written in both Aramaic and Hebrew. It presents a complete mystical theosophy, dealing with the nature of God, the cosmogony and cosmology of the universe, the soul, sin, redemption, good, evil, etc. It first came to light thirteenth century Spain at the hands of R' Moshe ben Shem Tov de Leon. Its authorship is traditionally attributed to the second century Tanna R' Shimon bar Yochai.

Rashi (1040 - 1105 CE)

Shlomo ben Yitzhak, best known by the acronym "Rashi", was an early and influential medieval Torah and Talmud commentator. He was born in Troyes, France, and as a young man he studied in the yeshivot of Worms and Mainz. His commentary on the Bible and Talmud is considered an indispensable tool for Torah study.

R' Yehudah HaLevi (1075 - 1141 CE)

R' Yehuda Halevi was a Spanish poet and philosopher. He is considered to this day to be one of the greatest Hebrew poets of all time, and his liturgical poetry appears in several prayer rites. His philosophical work, the Kuzari, is one of the great masterpieces of Jewish philosophy.

Rambam (1137 - 1204 CE)

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam) was perhaps the greatest intellectual and spiritual figure of post-Talmudic Judaism. He wrote indispensable works of philosophy, law, commentary, and responsa. He was the first to produce a comprehensive commentary on the entire Mishnah. His code of law, Mishneh Torah, is the first and unsurpassed comprehensive code of Jewish law and practice.

Questions and Sources

Radak (1160 - 1235 CE)

Rabbi David Kimchi (the Radak) was a Provençal rabbi, biblical commentator, grammarian and philosopher, born to a family of grammarians and commentators. His commentaries on the Hebrew bible display his grammatical mastery, and are amongst the most basic and commonly referenced.

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (1707 - 1746 CE)

R' Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (Ramchal) was an Italian rabbi, kabbalist and philosopher who also wrote dramatic works and literary criticism.

R' Nachman of Breslov (1772 - 1810 CE)

R' Nachman of Breslov was one of the most creative chassidic masters, whose thought and teachings continue to resonate within wide circles far beyond his immediate followers. He was a great-grandson of the founder of Chassidut, R. Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov.

Rav A.Y. Hakohen Kook (1865 - 1935 CE)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook was one of the major Torah personalities of the early 20th century and influential leader in both Lithuania and the Land of Israel. A master of many facets of Jewish literature, he wrote philosophical and mystical tracts as well as responsa and commentaries.

Rav Daniel Kohn

Rav Daniel was a central teacher and guide to spiritual growth at the Sulam Yaakov yeshiva where Dave and Mike met and learned together. Though little of his Torah is quoted directly here, its spirit permeates the book.