

## Echoes of the Ages

In a village near the town of Pranzev, Poland, lived the G-d fearing Jew R' Raphael Duvshinsky. His livelihood came from his pub, which he rented from the local landowner, and his only trouble was a lack of children.

One Erev Pesach, R' Raphael was unable to find a non-Jew to buy his Chametz. Having no other option, he declared "Let anyone come and take what they want!" removing the Chametz from his responsibility, and went home to prepare for Pesach.

R' Raphael decided not to tell his wife of the happenings until after Pesach because he did not want her to worry. That Pesach was particularly joyous for he realised that he had been tested by Hashem, and passed.

After Pesach, R' Raphael returned to his business, expecting to find nothing but empty kegs and bottles. However, he was greeted not by bare shelves, but by two big black dogs, which sniffed him and then ran off. The tavern was exactly as it had been left.

Amazed at this miracle R' Raphael consulted a Rabbi as to what must be done with the alcohol. He was told that clearly G-d had intervened, and he could keep the Chametz. However, he decided that he would not use Chametz with any doubt involved, and so would get rid of it all. And so he let it run out on to the ground.

Distraught, his wife agreed with her husband's decision, but still wept when she heard the news. She ran to the Rabbi, crying how, not only did they have no children, but now no means to support themselves either.

"Don't cry," soothed the Rabbi. "Return to your home and remove the worry from your heart. In the merit of the mitzvah you and your husband have fulfilled, you will embrace a son who will light up the world with his righteousness."

The next year, the couple had a son. He grew up to be the great tzadik R' Avrema'le of Chekhenov, about whom the Kotzke Rebbe said "Who can compare to this man, whose every limb is pure and holiness?"

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מס' ש"ב

The first Rashi in the whole Torah comments that the Torah should have started halfway through this week's Sedrah at the pasuk - "This month is for you - Hachodesh Hazeh Lachem". So why did it not?

Rashi explains why the Torah started with Maaseh Bereishis but we are left to ponder, "Why the starting point of Chumash should have otherwise been all the way here in Sefer Shemos?" This first commandment signals the beginning of the redemption; the birth of a nation. How so? A slave, by definition, has nothing. His time is not his own. At this moment the Jewish People are empowered to take back control of their time and participate in creating a calendar. Controlling one's own schedule is the first great step of freedom.

One of the 6 questions we are asked after 120 years is, "Did you fix times for Torah?" (Gemara Shabbos) The Maharal explains that since the intellect is the supreme function of human this question tests not whether or not we learned as much as whether or not we had fixed appointments to learn. The ability to create goals, set aside times, and climb deliberately through the gauntlet of daily needs and urges testifies that one's spirit had succeeded to rule over his earthy tendencies. Sefer Cheshbon HaNefesh writes, "The animal spirit has a short attention span. It observes the world with material eyes, seeing only that which is close, obvious, and immediate...The intellectual human spirit is in constant danger of itself being swallowed up by the desires of the animal spirit." Rabbi Yisrael Salanter zt'l made the following observation about this aspect of the human condition that "a man is a drop of intellect in a sea of instinct". Who can forget the images and accounts of people clutching to trees for their lives as all is swept away below in a swirling storm? Fixing times for Torah is no less "a tree of life to those who grasp it!" (Mishlei) *By Yoel Lax*

The Talmud (Rosh Hashana) demonstrates anecdotally that the word for "fixed"-*"keva"* as in "Fixing times for Torah" also means "to steal". How are the concepts of "fixing" and "stealing" compatible?

In order to fix times for Torah one has to steal from other competing interests. While waiting for the bus or an important phone call there are thousands of hours that at risk of falling by the wayside waiting to be retrieved or stolen back and fixed as times for Torah learning. The Mishnah in Avos reminds us, "Don't say when I'll be free I'll learn. Maybe you'll never be free." Some present need will always be there to push away our learning if it is not locked away in set pockets of time or sacred appointments. There is a problem we all have with time. It runs through our hands like water. We cannot hold it. Eventually it is spent. We take photographs and stash away money but time slips like sands through the hour-glass and we are helpless to stop the clock. Time spent busy with Torah is time stolen from the world of temporality and deposited, effectively fixed forever.

The Alter from Kelm ztl instituted a mandatory five minute learning session to teach the value of small amounts of time. The accumulative accomplishments of those well used moments became measurable monuments to the potency of this lesson. He also regimented the students to rise at 3:30 am and eat breakfast and learn from 4am to 7am. The purpose of this daily exercise was to teach zeal and to train them to fix times for Torah even under unusual circumstances. Making such good use of time is symptomatic of a genuinely free person. When doing so, we gain mastery over something illusory and impossible for a man to grasp. We can then truly say- "We have time!"

### Times for Shabbos - זמני שבת

In: 4:31

Out: 5:38

## The Light

לא ראו איש את אחיו ולא קמו איש מתחתיו שלשת ימים ולכל בני ישראל היה אור כמושבתם (י"ב:ג)

They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings (10:23)

Kindling lights has always occupied a prominent position in Jewish ritual, whether they be those of the Menorah in the Sanctuary or the Shabbos candles in the home. Perhaps the reason is that light is something which cannot be contained or restricted. If one lights a candle for oneself, the room becomes brighter for everyone else, and if one illuminates the room for another person, one benefits from the light oneself. Creating light for another person symbolizes that when we do anything for others, actually we are doing for ourselves as well.

This concept did not always prevail. The Midrash tells us that while in captivity in Egypt many Israelites were idolaters. Idolatry is essentially a system whereby a person creates his own gods and erects his own ethical-moral system to conform to his desires. Whereas the Israelites of the Exodus had been drawn together by their common suffering and took an oath to be kind to each other (tan D'bei Eli'ahu) there were some who had become so self-centred as a consequence of the pagan influence of their environment, that they were totally indifferent to their brethren. The selfish person deludes himself that he is enhancing his personal wealth by refusing to share with others as the Torah teaches us the opposite "that which a person gives to the priest that is his" (Numbers 5:10) in other words to give of oneself is to receive.

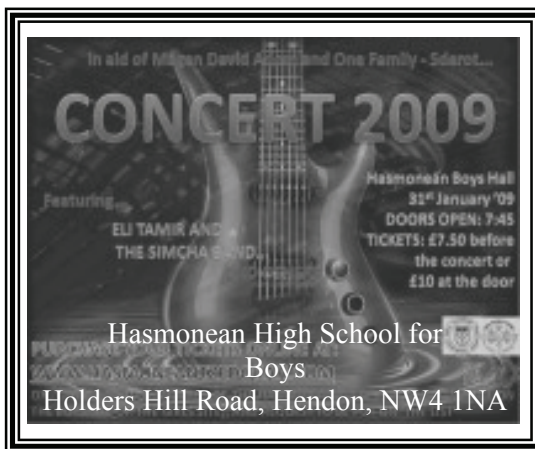
The Torah describes the darkness of Egypt, which represented a lack of concern for one another. This means they did not see one another nor did they rise from there place. If one only sees oneself and does not see his brother's plight and empathize with him then one does not rise oneself. This thought is consistent with the Midrash that states that some of the Israelites perished during the three days

of the darkness and did not participate in the Exodus.

The Midrash further interprets the term *v'omesh* as referring to a "palpable darkness" (10:21), to mean that this darkness was not simply a passive absence of light, but rather an active darkness; i.e. a thick fog which eclipsed any source of light. This refers to the capacity of the attitude of selfishness to extinguish positive character traits which a person may have.

Torah and mitzvos are the antithesis of this type of darkness. "for a mitzvah is a lamp and Torah is light" (proverbs 6:23). The Talmud (Sotah 14a) states that Torah begins and ends with acts of chessed which indicates that the essence of Torah and mitzvos is consideration for others. This was also emphasised by Rabbi Akiva, who taught that "love your neighbour as yourself" is the foundation of the Torah.

By Shlomo Katz



## The Ends of the Exile

...שלושים שנה וארבע מאות שנה. ויהי מקץ שלושים שנה וארבע מאות שנה... (י"ב:מ"ג-מ"א)

...for four hundred and thirty years. And it was at the end of four hundred and thirty years... (12:40-41)

Hashem told Avraham at the Bris Bein Habsarim that "your offspring shall be aliens in a land not their own - and they will serve them and they will oppress them for 400 years". Now the actual time the Bnei Yisrael were in Mitzrayim was far less than 400 years, as the Rashi to Shemos 6:18-20 spells out. To solve this problem the Chachamim explain that the Bris Bein Habesarim does not mention Mitzrayim as the particular location of exile, but "a land not their own", which included the land of Canaan at the time. Hence the 400 years can be counted from earlier on, from the time of Yitzchak's birth, and hence 400 years is reached by the date of Yezias Mitzrayim.

However, the Pesukim quoted above from Shemos 12:40-41 state that the exile was 430 years, not 400. The explanation provided by Rashi and the Ramban for this is that the extra thirty years account for the thirty years between the Bris Bein Habesarim and Yitzchak's birth, but this does not seem to explain why the exile has two durations both presented in the Pesukim, namely 400 years and 430 years, nor the reason for this change. This problem is made even stronger by Rashi's comment on the words Vayehi... Haze: "This tells [us] that when the end [of the exile] arrived, Hashem did not deter for a blink of an eye. On the fifteenth of Nissan the angels of praise came to Avraham to inform him [that Yitzchak would be born], on the fifteenth of Nissan [the next year] Yitzchak was born and on the fifteenth of Nissan [thirty years earlier] the decree [of the Bris] Bein Habesarim had been decreed." Rashi seems to be explaining that it was important for both the 430 years since the Bris Bein Habesarim and the 400 year since Yitzchak's birth to be completed on the same day, implying that

not only was the exile counted from both these dates, but that both time spans needed to finish at the same time!

The Brisker Rav answers these questions by explaining that there were actually two separate prophecies that were proclaimed at the Bris Bein Habesarim concerning the time for the end of the exile. The first was that Avraham's descendants would be "aliens" - wanderers - "in a land not their own", lasting for 400 years. The second was that these 400 years needed to be completed by a certain date, providing an end point to the exile, which was 430 years from the Bris Bein Habesarim. It is now clear why both dates are needed, as well as why the 400 years were from Yitzchak's birth - they required Avraham's descendants to be wanderers, hence requiring Yitzchak to be born - and why the 430 years were from the Bris Bein Habesarim - when the end point of this exile was fixed. This also clarifies why Rashi detailed how both time periods ended on the same day, as well as starting on the same day.

Other examples of how an exile can have two time periods are Galus Bavel, the Babylonian exile, and the final exile Galus Edom, the Edomite exile. Galus Bavel had the first component mentioned above, a definite time span for exile of seventy years, but no fixed end point. Galus Edom, on the other hand, has no fixed time span, but a definite end, as the Gemora Sanhedrin 98a states "if they merit it, [the redemption] will come sooner; if not it will come 'at its set time'". May we merit it now.

By Yehoshua Lefkowitz

### Riddle of the Week

For which sin can a person be punished by *Beis Din* without first being warned?

(Answer in next week's Living Torah)

### Answer to Last Week's Riddle

Which holiday addition to the 'grace after meals' is it that most people do not say and hope they never have to?

Answer: The addition in grace for eating on Yom Kippur.

Prizes have been sponsored by various local Jewish shops to be raffled off to those who successfully answer the weekly general knowledge question!!! Everyone is welcome to submit an answer by emailing us at [LIVINGTORAH@HASMONEAN.CO.UK](mailto:LIVINGTORAH@HASMONEAN.CO.UK)