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## Preface

*Paysach Burke*

*Baruch Hashem*, it gives me great pleasure to present this, the 1<sup>st</sup> issue of the South African Torah Journal (SATJ). What you find here is the result of much planning, consulting, prayer and perseverance. I admit it can still be improved and value any feedback from the community of readers in order to offer a pristine publication.

I sincerely hope you find this issue enjoyable, inspiring and intellectually stimulating. While you'll find a diversity of *Torah* articles on offer, originality or novelty, in Hebrew, '*chidush*', is the Journal's focus. If you found any ideas here particularly daring, well that's what I was going for, allowing a place for novel *Torah* ideas that sometimes are wonderfully refreshing and sometimes turn our world upside down.

Besides the lengthy quality assurance process of preparing articles for publication, I encourage letters to the Editor as an additional safeguard for the perfection and truth of *Torah* and look forward to hearing from those for whom *oraisa hu dkah mart'cha leih*, 'those who are fired-up by Torah'.<sup>1</sup>

If you have a *chidush* (an original or novel *Torah* idea) to share, then this is a place for you. Many are unaware of the amazing *Torah* talent that we are blessed with in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> I hope that these words serve as a goad for more wonderful *Torah* to be unearthed as you start work on your next *chidush*.<sup>3</sup>

There is no end to thanking Divinity, 'for everything is from You, and from Your Own we have given You'.<sup>4</sup> Having been allowed to get this far, I hope my efforts prove worthy of the holy task before me.

Thank you to those who gave valuable advice. Thank you, too, to the article contributors and reviewers, without whom this Journal would not exist.

With joyous blessings for a *Chanuka sameach*

Yours

Paysach Burke

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<sup>1</sup> Ta'anis 4a

<sup>2</sup> Y.D. 241.21 end of Ramo; Nedarim 62a

<sup>3</sup> Chagiga 3a

<sup>4</sup> I Divrei HaYamim 29:14

### How does the multiplier effect work?

*Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein*

One of the great unheralded heroes of the Holocaust was Rabbi Avraham Grodzinsky, the spiritual leader of the Kovno Ghetto. Until the outbreak of the war, he had been the *Rosh Yeshiva* of the famed Slabodka Yeshiva and was one of the leading sages of his generation. He had entered the *yeshiva* at the age of 17, and, under the tutelage of the legendary Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel, the 'Alter of Slabodka', he devoted himself to both intense *Torah* learning, and equally intense character refinement.

Later, amid the horrors of the Kovno Ghetto, people would attest to the open, friendly countenance Rabbi Grodzinsky carried at all times, perfecting the trait of 'receiving every person with a friendly face',<sup>5</sup> which was a source of hope and great comfort to all those who encountered him. In the years of the ghetto, when the situation was most dire, he formed a group of 10 of his former students from the Slabodka Yeshiva, who would meet every *Shabbos* to discuss what spiritual and physical actions they could do to improve the plight of those around them. This eternal optimism in the face of hopeless odds – this faith in the power of the few – is an idea that goes right to the heart of *Chanukah*.

Actually, Rabbi Grodzinsky took his initial inspiration from an earlier source than the Maccabees. In the *Torah* portion of *Vayeira*, we read of Abraham's tireless negotiation with G-d to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. After a few rounds of negotiation, G-d eventually agrees to save the cities if 10 righteous people can be found within them. From here, the *Gemara* learns the foundational spiritual principle that 10 righteous people can have a decisive impact on an otherwise hopeless situation. The *Gemara* goes even further, stating that a person who doesn't believe in the power of 10 righteous people to save the world is guilty of heresy. In other words, the belief in the power of even a small group of people to change the world and overturn the natural order of things is no less than a fundamental principle of Jewish faith.<sup>6</sup>

We see a powerful illustration of this principle in the story of *Chanukah*. The mighty Greek empire that had conquered most of the known world at the time had invaded the land of Israel and was pursuing a relentless campaign to remove all vestiges of *Torah* living from society. The situation seemed hopeless. There were many Jews at the time who were abandoning their faith due to both the existential threat and the enticements of Greek society. It was at this point that a small group of people banded together – Matisyahu and his sons – to try and do something about the situation. What began simply as an act of defiance became a miraculous military defeat of the mighty Greek army, allowing the Jewish People to reclaim the land, reclaim the *Torah* and reclaim the Holy Temple.

More than 2 000 years later, in the depths of the Holocaust, Rabbi Grodzinsky drew on the Maccabees' example, recruiting 10 righteous men of his own to bring hope and strength to the inhabitants of the ghetto and spread light in a time of unimaginable darkness.

The prayer we read describing the great miracles of *Chanukah* tells how G-d delivered 'the many into the hands of the few'. And, indeed, the smallness of the Jewish People and our outsized impact on

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<sup>5</sup> Pirkei Avot, 1:15

<sup>6</sup> Sanhedrin 99b

the world is the story of Jewish history. As the *Torah* says, 'Not because you are the most numerous of the nations did G-d want you and chose you – for you are the fewest among the nations.'<sup>7</sup>

Why is that? Why is it that the Jewish People, so small in number, are able to have this seismic effect on the world? Part of the reason is that we, the Jewish People, are a living testimony to a fundamental truth about the nature of reality – that the physical world is just a smokescreen for a deeper spiritual reality. Overcoming the odds, subverting the natural order of things, testifies to the primacy of the world of spirituality over the world of materialism, to the fact that G-d – who is the Creator of all matter and the source of everything – is the One in control. So, what we see in the story of *Chanukah*, and in many other instances in which the Jewish People have defied their small numbers, is how the impact of the few is multiplied through G-d's intervention, defying all rational predictions and overturning empirical reality as we know it.

This idea is symbolised by the defining miracle of *Chanukah* – the small jar of *halachically* pure oil the Maccabees found when they recaptured the Temple, which burned for eight days when it should have burned for one. This is why we celebrate *Chanukah* by lighting candles for eight days.

Why is this miracle so central to the festival? Surely the great military victory of the Maccabees over the mighty Greek empire was even more remarkable? The reason is that the miracle of the oil burning for longer than it was supposed to encapsulates all of the other miracles. It symbolises this multiplier effect that we've been discussing – that through G-d's direction, through the mysterious workings of a deeper, essential, spiritual realm, outcomes in the physical world can be amplified beyond their input. A small jar of oil that was meant to burn for a day can burn for eight.

Rabbi Aharon Kotler, the great *Rosh Yeshiva* of Lakewood, points to the fact that it was the oil's spiritual purity that imbued it with the miraculous power to burn for eight days, to transcend its physical limitations. Similarly, it was the righteousness and uprightness of the Maccabees that enabled them to defeat the great army of the Greeks. Both are small in physical quantity, but potent in spiritual quality.

And this is the great lesson of *Chanukah* for the Jewish People – that, irrespective of our numbers, if we remain upright and loyal to our Divine heritage, then we will always survive and thrive. Rabbi Kotler's personal life story bears this out, being one of those fortunate to escape Europe before the Holocaust swept everything away. He came to America and established a small *yeshiva* in Lakewood, New Jersey. In the 1940s and 1950s, few people held much hope for the prospects of a classic *Torah* institution in the heart of the new world, yet, starting with a handful of students, and in defiance of all rational predictions, the *yeshiva* grew to become the largest centre of Jewish learning in the Diaspora, with more than 6 500 students. He started small, battling the odds, but his vision had the power of purity behind it.

This message of the few over the many, of G-d's multiplying effect on our actions, is the story of Jewish history. Israel is such a small country, and yet its impact is so great, and wherever Jewish communities have found themselves, their impact on wider society has been out of all proportion to their small size.

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<sup>7</sup> Devarim 7:7

But, the real secret ingredient to transcending physical inputs is spiritual purity. Purity is the yeast that makes our efforts rise up. It's all about the purity of the oil, of the energy and intentionality we put into our work in this world. Purity is about sincerity, about kindness, compassion and decency, about spirituality and faith in G-d, and dedication to His Will, His *Torah*. With this, we can truly achieve great things, supernatural things. We can go beyond the numbers.

This seminal message of *Chanukah*, this Heavenly multiplier effect, applies no less to our personal lives. A person may feel he will not be able to earn a living if he closes his business on *Shabbos*, but *Chanukah* teaches us that G-d can multiply all of the week's work to more than make up for it. A person may feel that dedicating himself to absolutely scrupulous business ethics may cost him money, but ultimately, G-d has the power to bless all of our efforts and to multiply them. The same goes for *tzedakah* – charity – for which the *Torah* itself promises multiplied returns.

On *Chanukah*, a small group of righteous people made a big difference, overcoming a mighty force. If good people with pure hearts and sincere intentions band together, even in small numbers, they can bring light and blessing into the world. G-d's blessings can multiply the effect of the limited physical world like that small jar of oil that burned for so much longer, thereby spreading so much light in the world. This is the message of hope and optimism of *Chanukah*.

[Ed: This republished essay, by past Chief Rabbi Dr Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, is a part copy of the preface to his compilation of sermons "Out of the Depths"<sup>8</sup>.]

### **Preface; The Art of the Sermon; The Jewish Sermon**

*Chief Rabbi Louis Isaac Rabinowitz z'l*

#### **Preface**

Grateful though I am to a number of congregants and friends who have not only urged me to commit to permanent form a selection of the sermons which I delivered in South Africa during the first five years of my ministry there, but have in addition relieved me completely of the burden of publishing them, it is with some diffidence and hesitation that I thus commit them to cold print.

Before giving the reasons for that hesitation, let me briefly give the background against which these sermons have been delivered. I arrived in Johannesburg in February, 1945, to take up my appointment as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregation (subsequently, in addition, Chief Rabbi of the Federation of Synagogues of the Transvaal<sup>9</sup>) in succession to the late Chief Rabbi, Professor J. L. Landau, and preached my first sermon on the Friday evening of Parshat Terumah. At that time Rabbi A. H. Lapin was acting as assistant Rabbi to the Great Synagogue, and the arrangement was that we should both preach alternately on Friday evening and Sabbath morning. Rabbi Lapin remained at the Great Synagogue just long enough for the sermon at each service to become a regular feature of the Synagogue, and on his subsequent appointment to the Yeoville Synagogue, I took upon myself the onerous task of continuing the custom. As a result, for five years I have done what I believe to be the custom in the Church, but for which I know no parallel among Jewish preachers – preached twice on each Sabbath and on each day of the Festivals. It is not an example which I would recommend to anyone who appreciates, as I do, the importance of careful preparation of a sermon, to follow. The sermons included in this volume are a selection from the considerable number which I have preached during that period.

[...]

The diffidence and hesitation about publishing these sermons stem, however, from a source unconnected with the subject matter of the sermons, but from the very decided views which I have formed, after two decades of preaching, on the sermon as a genre of literature, if indeed it can so be regarded at all (from the question whether the Rabbinic injunction on the Oral Law, "Thou hast not the right to give oral utterances in writing,"<sup>10</sup> does not apply to the sermon). It is to this subject that I devote a separate section of this Preface.

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<sup>8</sup> RABINOWITZ, L. I. 1951. *Out of the depths: sermons for all sabbaths and festivals*. Johannesburg: Eagle Press.

<sup>9</sup> Since 1994 Transvaal Province was split into the provinces of Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga & (part of) North West; Rabbi Bernard Casper z'l was the 1<sup>st</sup> Chief Rabbi of the entire South Africa.

<sup>10</sup> Temura 14b

### The Art of the Sermon

Lord Elton prefaces his volume of broadcast talks published under the title, "It Occurs to Me,"<sup>11</sup> with a thoughtful Introduction which he calls "Apologia." It deals with the "fundamental problem of all wireless<sup>12</sup> talks," the problem of the manner in which this comparatively new form of public speaking differs from all other forms of expression. He points out with justice that "the art of broadcasting is not in the least like the art of delivering a lecture, preaching a sermon, or making a political speech," and makes it abundantly clear that each has its own special technique. All of those, however, are forms of the expression of the *spoken* word, and as he points out, "if it differs, or should differ, radically from all other forms of public speaking it differs, or should differ even more unmistakably from any conceivable form of writing," for as he rightly emphasises later, "the spoken word differs *in toto* from the written, as every successful platform speaker knows."

That is the only, but the very real, reason for my diffidence and hesitation. It is in committing to the entirely different medium of print what is essentially the spoken word with its different use of words, phrases and rhythms. The form of the sermon, as distinct from its message, is essentially a transient and impermanent thing, and what Lord Elton says of the broadcast talk applies with equal force to the sermon. "If the microphone is likely to kill the most brilliant literary essay, it is equally true that the printed page is likely to kill the most successful broadcast talk."

I have on many occasions been commissioned to write sermons for publication in Jewish newspapers. Never have I thought of submitting a sermon which I have delivered from the pulpit. I have recognised to the full the essential difference between the sermon which is heard and the sermon which is to be read, between the spoken and the printed sermon. The latter has been the nearest approach to a homiletical essay, whereas the former consists of a homiletical address. The difference is so marked that when a faithful listener of mine once maintained to me that he had learnt to the full the technique of my sermons, its form, its nuances, and its peculiarities, I took an early opportunity of bringing to his notice some of my published sermons (not delivered sermons which had been published, but sermons specially written for publication) and not for a moment did he suspect that I was the author!

That is as far as the art of the sermon in relation to other forms of literary expression is concerned, but one has also to discuss the art of the sermon in relation to itself. Again, I take my thesis from a discussion of another form of literary art, this time – with some trepidation at the fear of being misunderstood – the novel.

Some fifteen years ago I read in the London Evening Standard, in an article by J. B. Priestly, a comparison between the two novelists, George Moore and H. G. Wells. The views expressed there coincided so completely with my own views of the nature of the Sermon that I went to the trouble of copying it out. The following is the relevant passage: -

"While Mr. Moore has been living quietly in Ebury Street, going over and over his manuscript, smoothing out a phrase here, meditating over a comma there, Mr. Wells has been rushing up and down the world writing huge surveys, articles, stories, wireless talks... Mr. Wells represents, perhaps better than any other living man, *literature as an impure art*, the imagination roughly seizing hold of any lump of life that happens to be about. And Mr. Moore represents, better than any other man writing in English, *literature as one of the pure arts*, like music and painting.

<sup>11</sup> ELTON, G. 1939. *It occurs to me: broadcast talks by Lord Elton*. London: Collins.

<sup>12</sup> radio

“You can say of anything that Mr. Wells has written... that they could have been vastly improved if he had taken more trouble. But... he would not have been H. G. Wells, the man of gusto and creative fertility...

“On the other hand, you can say of Mr. Moore that he seems to be imprisoned in that small charmed circle of art he has made for himself. There are times when you long to open a door and a few windows. Life is roaring by, mankind is embarking on the most astounding adventures, and there, you feel, is Mr. Moore still murmuring of Manet, Monet, Balzac, etc.

“You must make your choice. You cannot fall in behind both these writers, for they are marching in different directions. I believe prose fiction to be an impure art, with one side of it wide open to the hurly-burly of life and to opinions, ideas, philosophies. If you close that side, you may draw nearer to perfection of form, but very soon the air within becomes stuffy, vitiated.

“... I believe this to be a time when literature must be an impure art, a rough compromise between perfect statements, fine forms and the hasty improvisation of the man who is charging into the middle of life.”

Priestly’s view of the prose novel of today as a form of impure art coincides completely with my own view of the art of the sermon. It is not pure, but applied art. It is the application of an artistic medium to a purpose, the purpose being the interpretation of the word of G-d to act as a guide of conduct, and the interpretation of current events in the light of the revealed word. It is far removed from the polished essay with its smooth, rounded phrases, its perfection of form, its slaving towards the attainment of certain literary standards. It is not so much the product of the study as of the life outside. “Life is roaring by; mankind is embarking on the most astounding adventures,” and the tumult tends to drown the still, small voice of G-d.<sup>13</sup> It is of the essence of the sermon that it should consist of “the imagination roughly seizing hold of any lump of life that happens to be about,” and subject it to the scrutiny of the light which is the Torah. I will be the first to agree, and the readers of these sermons will no doubt regretfully agree with me, “that they would have been vastly improved if he had taken more trouble,” and that they represent “a rough compromise between perfect statements, fine forms and the hasty improvisation of the man who is charging into the middle of life.” I maintain, however, that the improvement would have been only in the direction of literary polish, and that the message would not thereby necessarily be improved, and to me the message is all-important. Perfection of form must often be sacrificed to the necessity for employing every available means to drive a message forcefully home, and that has been done.

I am therefore an eclectic in preaching. Everything is subordinated to the primary and paramount need of bringing home the point which it is desired to make in the most effective manner possible. Sometimes that effect is created by the power of words, at others by striking analogy. Sometimes a pure exegetical exercise suffices, at others a Talmudic disquisition; the purist will even note to his distress that from time to time I have not disdained to employ the powerful weapon of a well-placed witticism to fight indifference and apathy.

I would not, however, have these words interpreted as meaning that a sermon does not need careful preparation. On the contrary. I always speak without a note, because unless I can see my congregation and feel a mental, almost telepathic, contact with it, I cannot preach. But every single sermon I deliver has been the fruit of careful preparation and mental effort. It has been worked out, thought out, and written out. It is a reflection of my realisation of the importance of the sermon. Never have I felt the need to do so, and never have I done so, with other speeches, however

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<sup>13</sup> | Kings 19:12

important the occasion may be, however difficult or thorny or delicate the subject. At the most I note down a few salient points, and beyond that rely upon the inspiration of the moment.

As I prepare my sermons, however, the predominant thought in my mind is not the literary perfection, but the most effective method whereby the particular message I wish to convey can be emphasized and reinforced; to that thought all other considerations take but secondary place.

It is claimed that the principles enunciated above have passed the crucial test of experience. My arrival in Johannesburg was attended by an upsurge of enthusiasm which, in addition to causing me acute embarrassment, had the effect of filling the Synagogue. After some two months a number of gloomy prophets, conscious of that fitful and spasmodic enthusiasm which characterizes the Jewish people as a whole and which is supposed to be though I have not found it – especially characteristic of Johannesburg Jewry, foretold, independently of one another, that when the novelty had worn off the attendance would drop to the previous low level. Five years have now passed, and the attendance week by week has been maintained at a level which has surpassed all expectations.

In conclusion of this section I would revert to the “Apologia” of Lord Elton with which it opens. He states of his published talks that “None stands now exactly as it was spoken, for... I have had to eliminate a few of the crudest characteristics of the non-literary form – repetition, interjection or colloquialism.” I, on the contrary, give the sermons exactly as they were spoken, retaining “the crudest characteristics of the non-literary form – repetition, interjection or colloquialism,” for they are not literary essays based on sermons, but sermons actually delivered.

### **The Jewish Sermon**

The sermons here published are Jewish not only in content, but in form. For the Jewish sermon has a form all of its own. That form is determined by two important facts. The one is the age-old tradition that choice of the text for the sermon is limited to the Sidra of the week and the Haftarah. When a plain lesson emerges from the plain reading of the text the peculiar characteristic to which I refer is not necessarily apparent. It is when a certain event has occurred upon which the preacher feels the necessity of preaching, and this traditional “conceit” enjoins upon him the need to find a suitable text within the four or five chapters of the Bible whose literal meaning has not the remotest apparent connection with the point at issue, that this characteristic emerges, the characteristic of homiletical ingenuity, Midrashic exposition of a text, its use as a peg upon which to hang a thought which has come from without. From this the corollary of the form of “Mashal VeNimshal” of exposition and application. The text is interpreted in the desired direction, and when the exposition is complete, it is applied to the purpose for which that exposition was undertaken.

The second characteristic of the Jewish sermon is its return to the Midrash, the realisation that there is a continuous tradition of well-nigh two thousand years of Jewish preaching which provides the preacher with an inexhaustible storehouse of homiletical material. The Midrash is, by and large, a collection of excerpts of the sermons of the Aggadic Rabbis which fulfil all the requirements of the modern Jewish preacher. The most striking change which has come over Jewish preaching in English in the last fifty years has been the gradual return from the Victorian sermon based on Christian models to the modern sermon taking as its rough material the homiletical expositions of the Rabbis of old. It is claimed that many of the sermons here given, even when they do not quote a Midrash, are Midrashic in form and follow in the well-defined path of traditional Jewish preaching.

In one important point, however, they differ from these historical models. They are short. Rarely have I preached for more than twenty minutes, for one of the formative influences in my preaching has been a statement I read somewhere that “It is much better for a speaker to conclude with the audience saying ‘If only he had gone on longer for five minutes!’ than that they should say ‘If only he had been five minutes shorter,’” and the statement of Lloyd George that if a man cannot say what he has to say in half-an-hour, ‘twere better he did not say it at all!

It is my earnest prayer that by giving these sermons to a wider public than has been able to hear them when they were delivered, there may result a greater appreciation of the greatness of our faith and a stronger sense of communion between our people and their Father in Heaven.

## Judah and Gratitude

David Fachler

*In memory of my dear Opa, Refoel ben Eliezer (Phillip Posen) and in honour of my nephew Yehuda Yehzekel ben Yehiel (Judah Ezekiel Fachler)*

In *Berachot 7b* the *Talmud* states:

From the day that the Holy One Blessed Be He created His world there was no person who thanked Him until Leah came and thanked Him, as it says, 'This time I will thank G-d.'<sup>14</sup>

While it is surely commendable to offer thanks to G-d, the commentaries ask why Leah waited until her fourth son was born to express her gratitude, why did she not do so earlier? *Rashi*, basing himself on *Genesis Rabbah*, explains that Leah foresaw prophetically that Jacob would have twelve tribes. She calculated then that each of his four wives would have three children. When she was blessed with a fourth child the realization that she had received more than her fair share prompted her to offer thanks to the Almighty.<sup>15</sup>

The above explanation raises more problems than it solves. When the *Torah* recounts an episode of history it does not merely tell us a story but requires us to learn from the actions of its protagonists. If Leah only thanked G-d when she received more than she deserved, are we similarly only obligated to show gratitude when we perceive that we are receiving more than is due to us? Are we not meant to appreciate everything that comes our way? And even if we are permitted to take certain things for granted, how is our prophet-less generation meant to know what is deserved, and what is not?

Rabbi Jonah Munk<sup>16</sup> offers a different interpretation to *Rashi*: Leah's marriage to Jacob was beset by more than the usual problems that accompany matrimony. The *Torah* records that Jacob, who was cheated by his father-in-law into marrying the elder sister of the woman he truly loved, hated his first wife. Seeing that Leah was placed in such a terrible predicament, G-d 'opened her womb'<sup>17</sup>. However, even though she had hoped that Jacob would love her after she provided him with a firstborn son, as she declares at Reuben's birth, 'G-d has seen my affliction and now my husband will love me'<sup>18</sup>, this was not to be. Indeed, even after her second son, Simeon, was born, she records that 'G-d had heard' that she 'was hated'<sup>19</sup>. It was only when her third son, Levi, was born that she felt that her husband would be her true companion, 'This time my husband will accompany me'<sup>20</sup>. Our commentaries teach us that Jacob acquiesced to Leah's wishes for a closer relationship and that is why it was he who named his third child, with all the connotations of companionship that this name, Levi, conjures up. When her fourth son arrived, and when she realized that his birth was not merely a means to attract her spouse's attention, she thanked G-d for the special gift of a son.

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 29:35, recording the birth of Leah's fourth son, Judah.

<sup>15</sup> *Rashi*, *ibid.* 29:34-35; *Rashi*, *Berachot 7b*

<sup>16</sup> Hagey Yonah pp.53-54

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 29:31

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* 29:32

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* 29:33

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* 29:34

While this is an interesting explanation it still does not offer a complete answer to our questions. Why should it matter what motives are assigned to the birth of a son? Is it not enough that one is blessed with the miracle of childbearing? Should we not thank G-d regardless? I would humbly suggest that the answer lies more in psychology than in theology.

In Hebrew the terms for 'offering thanks' (הודיה), and 'acknowledgement' or 'admission' (הודאה), are very closely related. The reason for this is that we are only able to appreciate someone else and express gratitude when we acknowledge that other people's deeds and actions affect our lives. If we are caught up in ourselves and in our predicaments, however justified, we are unable to see those around us and to appreciate what they are doing. A despised and, most probably, depressed wife whose love for her husband is unreciprocated cannot possibly dream of anything else but a happy marriage. Only after she is assured that her husband is a true partner can she appreciate what she has. Prior to Levi's birth Jacob's actions led Leah to believe that he was not her true companion. However, after he verbally affirmed that this was not the case, she was free to meditate on what was happening beyond the confines of her marriage. She could finally appreciate the unfettered joy of childbirth. She could now ecstatically thank G-d on his beneficence in blessing her with a fourth beautiful son.<sup>21</sup>

The penultimate blessing in the *shmone esrei* (a central Jewish prayer) consists of a prayer of thanks to G-d for what He has bestowed upon us, and it is quite possible that this was inspired by Leah's open expression of gratitude.<sup>22</sup> The *Talmud* cautions against offering prayers in 'a state of depression'.<sup>23</sup> This *Talmudic* dictum found its way to all the classic *halachic* (Jewish law) literature and has become part of *halacha*. If this is so, it is very possible that from a purely *halachic* perspective Leah's depression barred her from thanking G-d. Only once she gained confidence in herself could there be any meaning in her submission to G-d and in her acknowledgement that everything was directed by His hand.

The *Tiv Gittin*<sup>24</sup> suggests that Leah's statement is in fact a confession rather than an expression of thanks. Prior to Judah's birth Leah did not understand the travails that she experienced. Why was she the unloved older sister? Why did Jacob detest her? Why even after Reuben and Simeon were born was there no difference to her marital relationship? Only after her fourth son is born, effectively making her the matriarch of a plurality of the tribes of Jacob, does she finally realize the purpose of her suffering. Only now can she say, 'I admit to you G-d' that my suffering had a purpose, that in order to become the female progenitor of the Israelites I had to undergo what You had in store for me.

Through Judah's birth Leah bequeathed to us, her descendants, the gift of acknowledging that G-d has great plans in store for us, even if it does not always appear that way. Contemporary thinkers have suggested homiletically that the reason we are called Jews is because we are ready to admit the truth.<sup>25</sup> We need to live up to this legacy. We need to heed Leah and Judah's message and realize the truth that G-d is constantly looking after us. Once we internalize this, we will become happier, humbler and more grateful servants of Hashem.

<sup>21</sup> See also Samson Raphael Hirsch, commentary to Genesis 29:35.

<sup>22</sup> See *Meshech Chochma* [ibid.] where he refers to Leah's statement as a blessing.

<sup>23</sup> Berachot 31a

<sup>24</sup> FRIEDMAN, A. Z. *Wellsprings of Torah*. [Hebrew edition]. V.1:134.

<sup>25</sup> In Hebrew Jews are יהודים, and therefore we contain in our name הודאה – acknowledgement or admission

### Light from dark

Rabbi Avigdor Blumenau

During the consecration of the *Beis HaMikdash* in the times of the *Maccabim*, the small amount of pure oil which was found burned for eight days.<sup>26</sup> To commemorate this miracle, *Chazal* instituted the *mitzvah* of candle lighting on *Chanukah*. What is the deeper meaning of this *mitzvah*? How can we appreciate its relevance to us?

The *Chumash* tells us that on Yaakov's return from Aram to *Eretz Yisrael*, Devorah, Rivkah's wet-nurse, passed away.<sup>27</sup> The family buried her under the *alon* [Ed: plateau or oak] and mourned for her. As a result, the place was named Alon Bachut. *Rashi*, citing *Chazal*, explains that at the same time Yaakov received news that Rivkah herself had passed away and her family mourned for her. This is reflected in the *pasuk* since the word *alon* in Greek means 'another', implying that there was an additional cause to mourn. The family kept the passing of Rivkah quiet in order to avoid people cursing her, upon her death, as the one who had borne Eisav. Therefore, the *Chumash* itself only conveys her passing by way of a subtle hint.<sup>28</sup>

Looking more deeply into the words of *Chazal*, several questions arise. Firstly, who were the people who hated Eisav so much, that upon Rivkah's passing, would be prompted to comment that she had been the one who had brought Eisav into the world? Granted, Eisav had been unliked or even hated for his actions, but is there a deeper meaning to this? Secondly, is it logical and fair to attribute Eisav's negative behaviour to Rivkah? She certainly did not approve of his ways and even ensured that he would be spiritually disinherited? Thirdly, besides for the fact that the word *alon* most conveniently means 'another' in Greek, is there a deeper reason for the Torah choosing to inform us of Rivkah's death specifically in the Greek language?

The enemy of Eisav is Greece. It was Rome, the embodiment of Eisav, who conquered the Greek Empire. This was not by coincidence. The battle between Greece and Rome for world dominion was a manifestation of something deeper. The Greeks, the descendants of *Yavan*, represent achievement in cultural and intellectual pursuits. Eisav represents brute physical force. The very soul of Greece, even prior to becoming a formal nation or power, detests what Eisav stands for. This was the standpoint of the people *Chazal* refer to as those who would find opportunity in Rivkah's passing to express their hatred of Eisav.

Ancient Greece was the cradle of science, which is founded upon careful observation of the natural world. However, all too often, immersion in the observation of natural processes can lead to conclusions which are technically accurate, but which fail to take into account the full picture. Technically speaking, it is true that Rivkah gave birth to Eisav. The fact that she had abhorred what he stood for and that she had brought about his eternal disempowerment would have been meaningless to *Yavan*.

The absolute truth, the *Torah*, is possessed by the Jewish People. The nations of the world possess limited variations of the truth, which manifest in their specific languages. This explains why a *Torah* scroll needs to be written in Hebrew. The Greek language also represents a distortion of the absolute truth of *Torah*. However, the Greek distortion is unique. It takes the form of adopting only a

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<sup>26</sup> Shabbos 21b

<sup>27</sup> Bereishis 35:8

<sup>28</sup> Rashi citing Bereishis Rabbah 81:5

thin, external layer of *Torah* and discarding the true meaning and depth. But that layer, the scientific observational layer, remains pristine, unadulterated. It makes sense, then, that the *Torah* may be written in Greek.<sup>29</sup> It is a beautiful language in the sense that it is superficially accurate. It accurately represents the external aspects of the truth.

When an individual passes away people are prompted to survey the deceased's life achievements. Therefore, the mere mention of Rivkah's death incorporates the fact that she bore Eisav. Mentioning her death in Hebrew would suggest a deep connection between her and Eisav. The *Torah* avoids this by hinting to her death in Greek, implying that the connection between her and Eisav is as superficial as the layer of *Torah* truth which the Greek language is able to express.

HaGaon HaRav Yitzchak Hutner *zt'l* explains that much like the Jewish People can never be destroyed, because spiritual entities endure, the force of Greek civilization can never be destroyed.<sup>30</sup> Greek culture was adopted by the Romans and lives on in the modern world. This means that today we are actually contending not only with the force of Eisav, but with the joint forces of *Yavan* and Eisav. Eisav provides the physical temptation, but *Yavan* infuses it with cultural and intellectual meaning. *Yavan* turns the physical into an impure form of spiritual, he uplifts and beautifies it.

Our response is to imbue our physical activities such as eating and family life with true spiritual meaning, providing life experiences just as appealing as those which the modern world has to offer. Additionally, we do not settle for the technical performance of *mitzvot* by complying with the basic requirements, rather we enhance them by beautifying the *mitzvah* experience, *hiddur mitzvah*.<sup>31</sup>

When it comes to the *mitzvah* of lighting *Chanukah* candles, we ensure the totality of the *mitzvah* experience. We opt for *mehadrin min hamehadrin*, the most ideal way possible to perform the *mitzvah*. Each male member of the family lights his own *Chanukiyah*, the number of candles corresponding to the night of *Chanukah* on which he is lighting. Perhaps this is linked to the fact that *Chanukah* corresponds to the spiritual defeat of the Greeks at the hands of the Jewish People. We could only have defeated them through accessing our own true spiritual beauty, embracing *mitzvot* in totality.<sup>7</sup>

The power of our enemy forces us to bring our potential to the fore. *Chanukah* represents not only light *in* the darkness, but light *through* the darkness. It inspires us to keep *mitzvot* in the most meaningful manner. The *Chanukah* candles provide enough light to last all year round, making it possible for us to thrive during the long exile of Eisav, despite the fact that it is coupled with the darkness of *Yavan*.

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<sup>29</sup> Megilla 9b

<sup>30</sup> Pachad Yitzchak, Ma'amar 6

<sup>31</sup> Bava Kamma 9b

<sup>7</sup> There is a distinction between the concepts of *hiddur mitzvah* and *mehadrin acharei mitzvot*, however, in this context they may be viewed as comparable.

## The Halachik Lamdan- a Halachik Imperative

### Chapter 1 – The Lamdan

*Rosh Yeshiva Chaim Finkelstein*

More important than gaining knowledge is the ability to put that knowledge to use. Especially in a day and age that rightfully calls itself the Information Generation, where, at the click of a button, vast tomes of information can present themselves. In the 1980's IBM made that clear when they were litigated against, and as a tactic presented the courts with thousands of pages of information pertaining to the case. As the courts were unable to process such volumes of information the case was duly dismissed.<sup>32</sup> In order for information to become useful a system of sorting and analysing must be adopted, to sift out the relevant parts, to make sense of the material under scrutiny and mostly, to deconstruct the plane information in a way that one can generate new information from the old.

This system was called by the *Talmud*, *lehavin davar mitoch davar*, 'to extrapolate one concept from another',<sup>33</sup> or, as is commonly referred to, as *pilpul*, 'the dialectic of give and take'.<sup>34</sup> Understandably, with many *Tanaic*<sup>35</sup> and pre-*Tanaic* texts in circulation at the time of the *Amoraim* (c 200-500 CE) a system was needed to collate and contextualise these texts, and this system of *pilpul*, which is as old as the written *Torah* itself, was employed.<sup>36</sup> By contrasting these texts, identifying the implications of a phrase, and distinguishing their content from what was orally transmitted, the sages of the *Talmud* could indeed contextualise and even extrapolate deeper meanings than what was apparent.<sup>37</sup> This system, like all disciplines, had to be learnt by observation and mentorship from a practitioner, and the platform for the transmission of this system was called the *Beis Medrash*, the *Kalla*,<sup>38</sup> or *shimush*, 'apprenticing with a sage'. The student would eventually learn the information, as well as acquire the tools to deal with new information and the innovation of new concepts. The subject of in-depth *Talmud* study could occupy an entire library, but for the purposes of this essay the above introduction will suffice.

The *Rishonim*<sup>39</sup> and *Achronim*<sup>40</sup> continued with this system of analysis, and the style of their works bear a strong resemblance to the style of the *Talmud* itself, often using the same language and hermeneutical terminology as the *Talmud*.<sup>41</sup> The result is the same as the *Talmud*, that information has been processed and analysed and new ideas have taken form.

This system of analysis continues until today, with each *Rosh Yeshiva* approaching a subject with their unique style of thinking. Each may concentrate on aspects of the *Talmud*, the *Rishonim* and the *Achronim*, that previous *Torah* scholars may not have dealt with, or revise the explanations of previous scholars, providing a fresher and deeper perspective than what was apparent. The young *yeshiva* student, just like the students of yore, come not only to learn the content of the *Talmud* in

<sup>32</sup> BENNIS, W. G. 1976. *The unconscious conspiracy: why leaders can't lead*. New York: AMACOM.

<sup>33</sup> Shabbos 31a

<sup>34</sup> Temura 16a

<sup>35</sup> [Ed. c 10-200 CE]

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Uncovering the pearl beneath the rock.

<sup>38</sup> Brochos 6b; [Ed. a biannual Babylonian Torah gathering].

<sup>39</sup> [Ed. c 1000-1500 CE]

<sup>40</sup> [Ed. c 1500-2000 CE]

<sup>41</sup> הכי נמי. כל שכן. מר אמר חדא ומר אמר חדא ולא פליגי etc.

their *yeshiva*, but also the methodology of *pilpul* from their *Rosh Yeshiva* and his lectures, to be able to contrast texts, to identify intimations of a phrase and most importantly to contextualise and innovate new ideas from the old. A student who has managed to acquire this skill set from his mentors and can utilise them in providing insight is called a *lamdan*, a scholar who is familiar with the inner workings of the *Torah* and is capable of crafting a *sevara*, 'a logical deduction', which is robust and impervious to refutation. For a *sevara* to stand steadfast, the originator must do his homework, including researching the available information on the subject, and then testing his deductions by rigorous questioning. The successful *lamdan* will make sense of the wealth of information before him and can hold the maelstrom of opinions and ideas together with his deductions, even gleaned new principles along the way. The case for learning in this manner has been strengthened by the *yeshiva* organisations when it comes to learning *Gemara* and its commentaries, and a young student showing acumen in this style of analysis is hailed among his peers and seniors as a *Talmid chochom*, worthy of the title. It is probably due to intellectual prowess that such honour is heaped upon the sharp and masterful scholar, for as the Maharal writes, that the Jewish People distinguish themselves by their ability to recognise intellectual superiority.<sup>42</sup> So within the walls of the *yeshiva* a *lamdan* can emerge, a *Torah* scholar whose patterns of thought will resemble his predecessors all the way back to the *Talmud* (and maybe even further), insofar as his ability to decode and explain texts in circulation, providing insight and exposing a deeper mechanism, thus contributing to the subject at hand.

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<sup>42</sup> Maharal, Chidushei Agados, Yevomos 79a

*Tsuf D'vash*<sup>43</sup>  
*Mishlei Chapter 10 Verse 1*  
*Paysach Burke*

*“Mishlei Shlomo Ben Chacham Ysamach Av  
Uven Csil Tugat Imo”*

*“Proverbs of Solomon, a wise son is a father’s joy  
while a foolish son is a mother’s sorrow”*

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*Proverbs of Solomon Solomon’s discipline  
Doubled statements in form and meaning  
Simple and hidden ripe for reaping*<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Honeycomb; Title taken from Mishlei 16:24

<sup>44</sup> Gra

*The just good and industrious praised<sup>45</sup>  
The crooked bad and lazy disgraced<sup>46</sup>  
Where till now Torah was lauded and spake<sup>47</sup>  
From here is book two where we menschen  
make<sup>48</sup>*

*Of the first lesson be wise and no fool  
The wise son gladdens the father who sees  
Him with the wise<sup>49</sup> in study hall and shul  
Gladly he hears his constant novelties<sup>50</sup>  
A sign he taught him many a good rule<sup>51</sup>*

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<sup>45</sup> Ralbag

<sup>46</sup> Ralbag

<sup>47</sup> M"D

<sup>48</sup> M"D; Gra

<sup>49</sup> M"D; Gra

<sup>50</sup> Gra

<sup>51</sup> Malbim

*While a mother's ache is a foolish lad  
She sees his daily nothing and nonsense<sup>52</sup>  
She worries<sup>53</sup> for him and hopes it's a fad  
And is pained by his lack of constance*

*Gd's<sup>54</sup> happy with who His Torah heeds  
And a fool of a leader's our chagrin<sup>55</sup>  
A wise son rejoices in good deeds  
While a fool neglects prohibition<sup>56</sup>*

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<sup>52</sup> M"D; Rashi; Gra

<sup>53</sup> E"E

<sup>54</sup> Rashi

<sup>55</sup> Rashi

<sup>56</sup> Gra

### Glossary

*Achronim* – Literally ‘Latter ones’, the Rabbis of c1500-2000 CE.

*Beis HaMikdash* – Jewish Temple

*Beis Medrash* – House of study

*Chanuka* – A Jewish festival of 8 days that commemorates miracles through lighting candles.

*Chanukiya* – Candelabra for lighting candles on *Chanuka*.

*Chazal* – An acronym for *Chachameinu Zichronam Livracha*, ‘Our Sages of Blessed Memory’.

*Chumash* – The 5 Books of Moses, being the essential part of the Written Torah.

*Eretz Yisroel* – The Land of Israel

*HaGaon* – The Genius. Used as an honorific.

*Halacha* – Jewish law

*Kalla* – A biannual *Torah* gathering that occurred in Babylon before Pesach and Rosh Hashana.

*Maccabim* – Maccabees

*Mitzvah* – commandment

*Pasuk* - verse

*Rosh Yeshiva* – Head instructor of a Talmudic Academy.

*Rishonim* – Literally ‘Earlier ones’, the Rabbis of c1000-1500 CE.

*Shmone Esrei* – literally ‘18 Blessings’. This is a central Jewish prayer.

*Talmud* – A large multi-volume work that is a written version of that part of *Torah* that was orally transmitted for centuries as an explanation of the Written Torah.

*Tanaic* – pertaining to the period of the *Tanaim*, the Rabbis of c10-200 CE.

*Torah* – ‘Instruction/Teaching’. It encompasses the Divine wisdom that G-d gave to the Jewish People.

*Yeshiva* – Academy for the advanced study of *Talmud*.

*Z'l* – Acronym for *zichrono livracha*, ‘may his memory be for a blessing’.

*Zt'l* – Acronym for *Zecher tsadik livracha*, ‘may the memory of the righteous be for a blessing’.