

למודי משה

על הפרשה ועניני הזמן

נערך ונכתב על ידי ר' משה הריס

HALACHAH, DIVREI TORAH AND RIDDLES,
RELATED TO THE PARSHA OR THE TIME OF YEAR

This Week's Halachic Topic Is:

Palm Reading and *Chochmas HaPartzuf* [Physiognomy]

בראשית

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Insights Into Halachah

Palm Reading and *Chochmas HaPartzuf* [Physiognomy]

Introduction

As we begin the Torah anew, I would like to explore the fascinating subjects of palm reading and *chochmas hapartzuf*. While this may initially seem like an unusual topic with which to begin our new cycle with, we will soon discover that the Ramban derives a source for these disciplines from two *pesukim* in this week's *parashah*.

In the pages that follow, we will examine what palm reading and *chochmas hapartzuf* actually are, and we will trace some of the earliest sources that discuss them. We will also seek to determine their *halachic* status: Is it permissible to make use of such disciplines? Is it acceptable *lechatchilah*, only *bedieved*, or perhaps entirely prohibited?

Is it true that certain practitioners refrain from examining patients during the *Yamim Noraim* period, recognising that sincere *tefillah* has the power to alter a person's destiny? What did Rav Vosner tell those who became fearful after hearing ominous predictions regarding their future?

The Gemara in *Berachos* (58a) teaches that upon seeing six hundred thousand Jews one recites the *berachah* of “*Baruch Chacham HaRazim*.” Under what circumstances can this *berachah* be recited upon seeing a single individual? Why do some have the custom to look at their fingernails during *Havdalah*? And if a *bochur* suspects that his *rosh yeshivah* or *maggid shiur* is proficient in *chochmas hapartzuf*, would covering his forehead do him any good?

These questions, and many others, will be explored below.

Palm Reading

Palm reading, or by its professional name, chiromancy, is a discipline that claims to reveal and describe a person's nature, traits, personality, past, and future through the study of the lines and features of the hand.

It bases its analysis on reading the lines of the palm (such as the life line, wealth line, head line, fate line, heart line, health line, and others), together with an examination of the hand's characteristics (including its shape, structure, length, thickness, flexibility, softness or firmness, skin ridges, elevations, and distinctive markings).

Practitioners in this field claim to be able to discern not only a person's character, but also future events that may befall that individual. The palm is divided into various regions, each corresponding to different aspects of a person's personality and life. The more pronounced and prominent particular lines appear, the stronger the qualities or influences they are believed to represent.

The reading is generally performed on the dominant hand, while the non-dominant hand is said to reflect the subconscious mind or the latent potential within the individual. Numerous methods of palm reading exist, and some of them even contradict one another.

***Chochmas HaPartzuf* [Physiognomy]**

According to the discipline of physiognomy, the face serves as a mirror through which the soul, with all its layers and dimensions, is reflected. By studying the face, one is believed to gain insight into a person's character and personality.

The analysis focuses on all parts of the head, from the forehead to the chin, including the skin, hair, facial structure, forehead, eyes, eyebrows, nose, cheeks, ears, mouth, lips, teeth, and chin.

Since these physical features generally do not undergo significant change throughout a person's lifetime, they are regarded as fundamental characteristics or inherited genetic traits.

Torah Sources

Moshe and Yisro

Numerous early sources discuss the disciplines of palmistry (palm reading) and *chochmas hapartzuf*. Among the earliest is the *Zohar HaKadosh* (Raza DeRazin, *Parshas Yisro* 70a; *Zohar Chadash* ad loc.; *Tikkunei Zohar*, Tikkun 70).

Commenting on Yisro's advice to Moshe Rabbeinu to appoint leaders over the people, the *Zohar* explains the words, “*Ve’atah sechezeh*” – “And you shall discern” (*Shemos* 18:21). How was Moshe to identify those worthy of leadership? The *Zohar* explains that he did so by examining their facial features and the markings of their hands. Specifically, six primary areas were scrutinised: the hair, eyes, nose, lips, face, and the lines and markings of the hands. In addition, the wrinkles and formations of the forehead, eyes, and face were carefully observed. Through these signs, Moshe was able to discern those best suited to assume positions of communal leadership.

The *Ramak*, in his *Ohr Yakar*, as cited by *Ohr HaChamah*, explains this passage similarly.

Rabbi Chaim Vital, however, writes in his glosses there that this was the wisdom of physiognomy possessed by the Arizal. He adds: “As for us, we possess virtually no knowledge of it.”

A well-known tradition relates that the Arizal declined to teach this wisdom in its entirety even to Rabbi Chaim Vital, despite having instructed him in every other branch of wisdom that he wished to learn. (This account is recorded by the *Chida* in his *sefer Midbar Kedemos*.)

Eliezer and Rivkah

Rabbi Yehudah Modran *zt"l*, in his *Pri HaEitz* (*Parshas Chayei Sarah*), writes that Eliezer, the servant of Avraham, recognised from Rivkah's facial features and markings that she was a righteous woman, worthy of becoming Yitzchak's wife, and that the proposed match stemmed from a source of holiness.

According to this approach, Eliezer's test at the well did not constitute an act of prohibited divination. Rather, it served merely to confuse and mislead the forces of impurity. This, he explains, is the deeper meaning of the expression, “Through her I shall know” - that is, through the form and markings reflected in her countenance.

Hidden Mysteries of Torah

It is well known that the Ramban, in this week's *parsha* (Bereishis 5:1), cites Rav Sherira Gaon, who writes that the Sages transmitted from generation to generation the wisdom of facial recognition and the interpretation of bodily markings.

Certain aspects of this wisdom are alluded to in the *pasuk*, “*Zeh sefer toldos ha'adam*” – “This is the book of the generations of Adam” (Bereishis 5:1), while other elements are hinted to in the following *pasuk*: “*Zachar u'nekeivah bera'am*” – “Male and female He created them” (Bereishis 5:2).

The Ramban writes that these esoteric teachings and mystical traditions were entrusted only to individuals who exhibited signs of being worthy recipients of such profound wisdom.

He further observes that these traditions had already been lost in his own generation, concluding: “We have not merited to possess them.”

The teaching of Rav Sherira Gaon is discussed at greater length in *Teshuvos HaGeonim* (*simanim* 99 and 122), where he elaborates upon the qualifications required of those deemed worthy to receive these hidden secrets of the Torah.

There he cites the Gemara (*Chagigah* 13a-14a), which teaches that the hidden secrets of Torah, such as *Maaseh Merkavah*, *Sefer Yetzirah*, and *Maaseh Bereishis*, should be taught only to one who possesses five qualifications: 1) *Sar Chamishim* - a leader of fifty. 2) *Nesui Panim* - one who is respected and held in esteem. 3) *Yo'etz* - a counsellor. 4) *Chacham Charashim* - one possessing profound wisdom. 5) *Navon Lachash* - one capable of understanding and transmitting subtle matters.

Those qualified for such wisdom would gather in secluded places where no one would pass by. There they would *daven* for Heavenly mercy, asking that whoever was truly worthy in the eyes of Heaven should have his eyes enlightened and be granted understanding of these hidden mysteries.

Better to Remain Simple and Trust in Hashem (Part 1)

The *Rema* (Orach Chaim 664:1), discussing the custom of examining one's shadow in the moonlight on the night of *Hoshanah Rabbah*, writes that one should not be excessively meticulous in matters of this nature, lest doing so adversely affect his *mazal*. Moreover, since most people do not properly understand these subjects, the *Rema* concludes: “*Tov liheyos tamim v'lo lachkor asidos*” – “It is preferable to remain innocent and wholehearted, and not to investigate the future.”

Similarly, the *Aruch HaShulchan* (Orach Chaim 664:11) writes that it is not fitting for the Jewish people to occupy themselves with such matters. A person can perform *teshuvah* in a single moment, and through sincere *teshuvah* his situation can be transformed from bad to good. Therefore, one's attention should be directed solely toward our Father in Heaven.

The *Kaf HaChaim* cites the *Recanati*, who relates a remarkable incident. A certain individual examined his shadow in the moonlight on the night of Hoshanah Rabbah and noticed that no shadow appeared above his head, a sign that was traditionally regarded as ominous. Deeply shaken, he spent the entire night weeping, praying, and engaging in heartfelt *teshuvah*. Later, when he looked again, he saw that the shadow had reappeared above his head. From this story we see the tremendous power of *teshuvah*, which has the ability to overturn even the harshest decrees.

I likewise heard in the name of Rav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner *zt"l* concerning a famous expert who would periodically come to Bnei Brak and predict future events. Many people trembled in fear of what he might say about them. Rav Vosner commented that a single heartfelt *tefillah* has the power to change everything.

A striking observation is recorded in *Maaseh Tuviah*, authored by the renowned physician Rabbi Tuviah Katz. In the section entitled *Olam Katan*, he writes that when a person's nature and character traits undergo a genuine transformation, the lines and markings of both his palms and his face change as well. According to this understanding, these signs are not fixed and immutable. Rather, they reflect the person's current spiritual and emotional state, a reality that can itself be altered through growth, *teshuvah*, and self-improvement.

Better to Remain Simple and Trust in Hashem (Part 2)

It is said that some of the foremost practitioners of physiognomy and palmistry refuse to receive visitors during the opening days of the year, particularly throughout the *Yamim Nora'im*. During this period, when the gates of *tefillah* and *teshuvah* are especially open, a person's spiritual standing is in a state of constant flux. As a result, they maintain that the signs and markings by which they assess an individual are likewise subject to change, for better or for worse.

Indeed, some claim that if a person were to photograph the palms of his hands before Yom Kippur and then photograph them again afterwards, he would be able to detect visible changes in the lines and markings of his palms.

Ultimately, however, the Jewish people are not bound by the dictates of fate.

This idea is reflected in the Torah's description of Avraham Avinu:

“And He took him outside” (*Bereishis* 15:5).

Rashi, citing the Medrash, explains that Hashem told Avraham:

“Leave your astrology behind. You have seen in the constellations that you are destined not to have a child. I will give you a different name, and your *mazal* will be changed.”

Even if there exists a wisdom capable of discerning a person's tendencies, character traits, or even certain Heavenly indications, a Jew is never imprisoned by them. Through *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, *ma'asim tovim*, and the boundless mercy of Hashem, a person's destiny can be transformed.

Rather than becoming preoccupied with signs, predictions, and forecasts, it is far preferable to place one's trust in Hashem with simplicity, sincerity, and wholehearted faith. For He alone directs all events, overturns every decree, and holds the future entirely in His hands.

Rabbi Yishmael's Mastery of This Wisdom

The Ramban, in his *Derashos* (*Derush Torah Temimah*, pg. 161), writes that the study of palm markings and facial recognition continued even in later generations. According to the Ramban, these disciplines were not mere folklore or superstition, but were founded upon authentic and ancient traditions transmitted through the generations.

He explains that the bearers of Torah inherited these esoteric teachings from Rabbi Yishmael, who was renowned for his expertise in this field and was therefore known as "*Rabbi Yishmael d'Heichalos v'Hakaras Panim*" - Rabbi Yishmael of the Heavenly Chambers and the Wisdom of Facial Recognition.

The Ramban further notes that even the scholars of the nations of the world possessed fragments of this wisdom. Their understanding, however, was limited to its more superficial and natural dimensions. The deeper and more profound aspects remained the province of the Torah sages. As those great sages passed from the world and the chain of transmission weakened, much of this wisdom was lost as well, leaving behind only fragmented and often distorted remnants in the hands of a select few.

The *Berachah* of "*Chacham HaRazim*"

The Ramban¹ offers a profound explanation of the Gemara (*Berachos* 58a), which teaches that upon seeing a gathering of six hundred thousand Jews, one recites the *berachah*:

"Baruch Chacham HaRazim" – "Blessed is the Knower of Secrets."

The Gemara explains that no two people possess identical minds, just as no two people possess identical faces.

According to the Ramban, this relationship is not coincidental. A person's inner essence is reflected in his outward appearance. Every face expresses a unique combination of character, personality, and thought. Hashem alone knows the

¹ The Ramban briefly alludes to this concept in *Milchamos Hashem* at the conclusion of *Maseches Berachos*.

innermost feelings, thoughts, and motivations of each individual amongst the countless members of Klal Yisrael.

The Ramban further explains that there occasionally exists an extraordinary individual whose wisdom encompasses every branch of knowledge and whose intellect, in a sense, contains all varieties of human understanding. Such a person may be regarded as possessing the significance of an entire multitude.

Upon seeing such an individual, one may recite the *berachah* of “*Baruch Chacham HaRazim.*”

The Ramban relates an incident involving a sage who, through his mastery of facial recognition, perceived that a colleague had attained this exceptional level of wisdom. Upon seeing him, he immediately recited “*Baruch Chacham HaRazim.*”

His colleagues were troubled by this act, for they realized that they themselves lacked such mastery of Rabbi Yishmael's wisdom of facial recognition. They cast an envious eye upon him, and shortly thereafter he passed away.

Looking at the Fingernails During *Havdalah*

The *Tur*, citing Rav Hai Gaon (*Teshuvos HaGeonim*, *siman* 49), records a tradition received from earlier sages that the markings of a person's hand contain signs associated with blessing and prosperity.

The *Taz* (s.k. 2) and the *Mishnah Berurah* (298:9) explain that this tradition forms one of the reasons behind the widespread custom, cited by the *Rema*, of looking at the fingernails of the right-hand during *Havdalah* on *Motzaei Shabbos*.

According to this explanation, one should not focus solely upon the fingernails themselves, but should also glance at the palm and the markings of the hand. Doing so is regarded as a *siman berachah* and a source of blessing.

Aristotle and His Colleagues

The study of physiognomy and palmistry was known amongst the Jewish people for many centuries, although relatively little written material on the subject has survived.

Likewise, amongst the nations of the world, several of antiquity's most prominent philosophers and scholars occupied themselves with these disciplines. Among those associated with the study of physiognomy and the hand were Democritus, Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Pythagoras, who investigated these subjects from a very early period.

Various Works on the Subject

Approximately five hundred years ago, Rabbi Moshe ben Eliyahu Galino of Crete authored a work entitled *Toldos HaAdam*, dealing with the wisdom of physiognomy and palmistry. The *sefer* was first published in Constantinople in the year 1514 and was later reprinted numerous times, sometimes under different titles, including *Chochmas HaYad* and *Divrei Chachamim*.

Another notable work is *Shoshanas Yaakov*, authored by Rabbi Yaakov ben Mordechai of Fulda and published in Amsterdam in 1706. Approximately one hundred and fifty years later, an abridged version appeared in Yerushalayim under the title *Chochmas HaYad VeHaPartzuf*.

In more recent times, a popular volume on this subject has circulated under the title *Sod Chochmas HaPartzuf*, *Chochmas Kaf HaYad* ("The Secret of Physiognomy and Palmistry"). See picture on the right.



The Opinion of Those Who Forbid

Rabbi Nosson Gestetner zt"l, in *Shu"t Lehoros Nosson* (vol. 6, *siman* 79), discusses a question raised by Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel *shlita*: Does one who seeks predictions about the future through facial recognition or the markings of the hand violate the Torah obligation of “*Tamim Tihyeh Im Hashem Elokecha*” (“You shall be wholehearted with Hashem your G-d”)?

Rabbi Gestetner rules unequivocally that any attempt to investigate the future through palmistry, physiognomy, or similar means is prohibited on a Torah level because it conflicts with the positive commandment of *Tamim Tihyeh*. The very pursuit of foreknowledge, he argues, runs counter to the wholehearted trust and reliance upon Hashem that the Torah demands.

The only sanctioned method of inquiring about the future was through the *Urim VeTumim*.

This follows the approach of the Ramban (*Sefer HaMitzvos*, Mitzvah 8), who explains that the essence of *Tamim Tihyeh* is to direct one's heart exclusively toward Hashem, to believe that He alone controls all events and knows all future occurrences, and to seek knowledge of the future only through Divine channels such as prophecy or the *Urim VeTumim*, rather than through astrologers or other predictors.

This is also the implication of Rashi who explains the *pasuk* “*Tamim Tihyeh Im Hashem Elokecha*” to mean: “Walk with Him in simplicity and wholeheartedness. Place your hope in Him. Do not investigate the future. Whatever comes upon you, accept with innocence and trust. Then you will be with Him and belong to His portion.”

Rabbi Gestetner emphasizes that this prohibition remains in force even if physiognomy and palmistry contain genuine elements of truth. After all, according to the Ramban, even astrology may possess some validity, yet the Torah still forbids relying upon it.

Indeed, he argues, these traditions were never intended as tools for predicting the future. As indicated by the *Zohar*, their original purpose was to identify individuals suitable for leadership and positions of communal responsibility.

Similarly, the *Ramak*, cited in *Ohr HaChamah* (on the *Zohar*, at the beginning of *Parshas Yisro*) suggests that the sages who possessed this knowledge also knew the precise boundaries governing its permitted use. For example, it could be employed to determine whether someone was fit to lead the community, whether a *talmid* was worthy of receiving certain wisdom, or whether one should enter into a business relationship with him.

A Form of *Me'onen* [Divination]

The *Kerem Shlomah* of Rabbi Shlomah Gross (Yoreh Deah 179) cites the *Lechem Mishneh* (*Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 11:9), who discusses a person who declares: "I will examine your palm and tell you what future events await you."

According to the *Lechem Mishneh*, such conduct falls under the prohibition of *me'onen* [divination]. This position is likewise cited by the *Zivchei Tzedek*.

Furthermore, the *Lechem Mishneh* maintains that one who engages in such activity may even be liable for lashes, since a concrete action has been performed.

The *Kerem Shlomah* concludes:

"The precise parameters of this issue still require further analysis."

Elsewhere (*s.k.* 7, *ois* 2), he writes:

"Likewise, one should not attempt to determine future events through the wisdom of the hand or the face."

He also discusses there the opinion of Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *zt"l* regarding this matter.

The Opinion of Those Who Are More Lenient

On the other hand, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch *shlita* writes in *Teshuvos VeHanhagos* (vol. 1, *siman* 454) that one may inquire through palmistry regarding present circumstances or future developments.

In his view, the prohibition of *Tamim Tihyeh* applies only when a person actually places his trust in such predictions. However, if one's purpose is merely: "To know

his *mazal* so that he may strengthen himself in *teshuvah* and good deeds, then there is no outright prohibition.”

Nevertheless, Rabbi Sternbuch stresses that engaging in such matters is still inappropriate and should be avoided.

He supports this position from the wording of the *Rema* (*Orach Chaim* 664), who states that it is "*not proper*" to investigate the future. This language implies that, while such conduct is discouraged, it may not constitute an outright prohibition.

Similarly, the *Sefer Chasidim* (605) appears to indicate that although the practice is not absolutely forbidden, a person who is concerned for his spiritual welfare (*shomer nafsho*) will refrain from it.

Rabbi Sternbuch adds that even according to the more lenient view, one must remember that for the Jewish people everything ultimately depends upon *tefillah*, *teshuvah*, and *ma'asim tovim*.

Moreover, those who claim expertise in palmistry are rarely capable of distinguishing truth from error with complete certainty. Genuine insight is often intermixed with conjecture, mistake, and misunderstanding.

For this reason, he concludes that it is preferable not to consult such methods regarding future events at all. Rather, one should place his trust in the Creator of the World. Through abundant *tefillah*, *tzedakah*, *teshuvah*, and good deeds, may Hashem bless us with children, life, and sustenance in this world, and grant us a share in eternal life in the World to Come.

Rabbi Kleinman likewise discusses this issue in his *sefer Halachah U'Refuah* (vol. 5, pg. 257).

See also the concluding section of the *kuntros Al Tifnu* who elaborates at length that one should not make practical decisions based upon physiognomy, particularly because errors and distortions are so common in this field.

The *Zohar* itself indicates that even Moshe Rabbeinu found these matters difficult and required Heavenly instruction in order to understand them correctly. How much more so in our generation, where individuals with far less stature, and even non-Jews, claim mastery of these disciplines.

A Question Requiring Further Analysis

Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel *shlita*, in his monumental work *VaYashev HaYam* (vol. I, siman 13, §24; *Tamim Tihyeh*, pg. 76), raises a fundamental question regarding the entire discussion.

Since the wisdom of physiognomy and palmistry is cited by *Chazal* themselves, perhaps employing it to gain insight into future events does not violate the commandment of “*Tamim Tihyeh Im Hashem Elokecha*.”

After all, the *Zohar* appears to indicate that through this wisdom one may discern not only a person's character and spiritual disposition, but even future material developments, such as financial success or failure. The issue is therefore far from straightforward and requires careful analysis.

Rabbi Hillel further notes that the *Zohar* and other early authorities classify this discipline among the hidden secrets of Torah. He laments the fact that today these matters are discussed openly, to the extent that even children have become familiar with the lines of the palm and their purported meanings.

Some authorities regard this wisdom as a branch of practical Kabbalah. The great Torah sages of every generation repeatedly warned against involvement in practical Kabbalah except under the most exceptional circumstances. Matters of this nature demand extraordinary caution and should be approached only by those who are genuinely qualified and authorised.

The Power of Torah

An extraordinary story was related with great emotion by the author of *Shevet HaLevi*, Rabbi Shmuel HaLevi Vosner *zt"l* (cited in ‘*Dirshu*’ *Likras Shabbos Malkasah*, 3rd of Nissan 5777, pg. 1). Before recounting the incident, he prefaced his remarks by saying that it was not his practice to tell such stories, certainly not in public. Nevertheless, he decided that this account must be shared, so that later generations would recognize and appreciate the immense power of Torah.

HaGaon Rabbi Michael Papa *zt"l*, the father of the renowned *dayan* Rabbi Moshe Yosef Hoffman *zt"l*, was a remarkably holy and awe-inspiring individual. He served as a Rosh Yeshivah, and Rav Vosner's grandfather was among his distinguished *talmidim*.

It was said that Rabbi Michael could discern, merely by looking at the faces of the *bochurim*, the conduct and behaviour of each individual. The *bochurim* were so intimidated by this extraordinary ability that they would arrive each morning for *davening* with their caps pulled low over their foreheads, hoping to conceal any signs that might reveal their actions.

They failed to appreciate that for one endowed with *ruach hakodesh*, a lowered cap provides no barrier to spiritual perception.

One morning, Rabbi Michael approached a particular *bochur* and said to him:

“It will not help you to cover your forehead. Yesterday you played a game with your friends.”

He then proceeded to describe the game precisely. It was a game resembling Monopoly, in which players acquire properties and buildings. Rav Vosner even mentioned the original Hungarian name of the game and the manner in which it was played.

Rabbi Michael then told the *bochur*:

“Know that yesterday you played away your *mazal*. During your lifetime you were destined to acquire several buildings in actuality. Instead, yesterday you gained them only in imitation.”

The implication was that the *bochur* had, in some mysterious spiritual sense, exhausted or diminished a measure of the material success that had been prepared for him.

The story was related not merely as a remarkable incident, but as a demonstration of the extraordinary spiritual perception possessed by great Torah sages, and as evidence of the profound depths of Torah wisdom that are beyond ordinary human comprehension.

Summary of *Dinim* that Come Out:

The disciplines of palmistry (*chochmas hayad*) and physiognomy (*chochmas hapartzuf*) have ancient roots in Torah literature. They are discussed by early sources and were studied by *Tannaim*, *Amoraim*, *Rishonim*, and *Acharonim*. Even in contemporary times, there are individuals who claim expertise in these areas.

The early authorities explicitly classify this wisdom among the hidden secrets of Torah. They state that it should be transmitted only to individuals possessing the five qualifications enumerated by *Chazal*: 1) *Sar Chamishim* - a leader of fifty. 2) *Nesui Panim* - one who is respected and held in esteem. 3) *Yo'etz* - a counsellor. 4) *Chacham Charashim* - one possessing profound wisdom. 5) *Navon Lachash* - one capable of understanding and transmitting subtle matters.

There is significant debate among the *poskim* regarding the permissibility of using palmistry and physiognomy to discover future events.

Some authorities prohibit the practice outright, maintaining that attempting to investigate the future through such means conflicts with the Torah's command of "*Tamim Tihyeh Im Hashem Elokecha*" - to place one's complete trust in Hashem.

Others adopt a more lenient approach and permit consulting these disciplines, provided that the individual does not accept the predictions as absolute or place his reliance upon them. Even according to this view, however, involvement in such matters is generally discouraged and considered inappropriate.

The proper path for a Jew is to place his trust in Hashem and to remember that *teshuvah*, *tefillah*, *tzedakah*, and *ma'asim tovim* have the power to alter any decree and change a person's destiny for the better.

(This write-up is based primarily on Oimek HaPeshat #125 and most of the sources come from VaYashev HaYam (siman 13) by Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hillel shlita and Dor HaMelaktim by Rabbi Stillerman shlita.)

Divrei Torah to Enhance Your Shabbos Table

Shabbos Kodesh

(Adapted from a ma'amer written by R' Yisrael Rot shlita)

The Torah tells us at the beginning of *Parshas Bereishis* (2:1-3):

ויכולו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם, ויכל אלוקים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה וישבות ביום השביעי
מכל מלאכתו אשר עשה, ויברך אלוקים את יום השביעי ויקדש אותו כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר
ברא אלוקים לעשות.

"The heavens and the earth and all their hosts were completed. G-d completed on the seventh day His work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He rested from all His work which G-d created and made."

On Friday night we mention in *Shemonah Esrei*:

אתה קדשת את יום השביעי לשמך, תכלית מעשה שמים וארץ, וברכתו מכל הימים, "וקדשתו מכל הזמנים", וכן כתוב בתורתך: ויכולו השמים והארץ וכל צבאם: ויכל אלקים ביום השביעי מלאכתו אשר עשה וישבת ביום השביעי מכל מלאכתו אשר עשה ויברך אלקים את יום השביעי ויקדש אותו כי בו שבת מכל מלאכתו אשר ברא אלקים לעשות.

"For Your Name's sake You sanctified the seventh day, the culmination of the creation of heaven and earth; You blessed it above all the days and sanctified it above all times."

We then continue:

"And so it is written in Your Torah: 'The heavens and the earth were completed... and G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.'"

A question immediately arises. The *pasuk* certainly teaches us that Shabbos possesses sanctity, but where do we find in these words that Shabbos is holier than all other sacred times? How does the *pasuk* prove our declaration that Hashem "sanctified it above all times"?

Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch Finkel *zt"l* brings down a beautiful explanation in the name of Rabbi Meshulam Dovid Soloveitchik *zt"l*:

The unique greatness of Shabbos lies in the source of its holiness. The sanctity of the Yomim Tovim depends upon Klal Yisrael. Through *Beis Din's* establishment of the calendar, the Yomim Tovim become holy. Shabbos, however, is fundamentally different. Its holiness is not dependent upon man. Hashem Himself sanctified Shabbos during the six days of Creation.

This is reflected in the wording of our *tefillos*. On Yom Tov we conclude the *berachah*, "*Mekadesh Yisrael V'Hazemanim*" - "Who sanctifies Yisrael and the *zemanim*," because the holiness of the Yomim Tovim comes through the sanctification of Yisrael. On Shabbos, however, we simply say, "*Mekadesh HaShabbos*" - "Who sanctifies the Shabbos," because Hashem alone established its holiness.

Accordingly, the wording of the Friday night *Shemonah Esrei* becomes clear. When we cite the *pasuk*, “And G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it,” we are demonstrating precisely why Shabbos is “sanctified above all times.” Since Hashem Himself sanctified it, its holiness surpasses that of every other sacred occasion.

The Greatness of *Tosefes Shabbos*

This insight teaches us a profound lesson regarding the greatness of *Tosefes Shabbos*, the mitzvah of accepting Shabbos before its official beginning.

By accepting Shabbos early, a person is not merely adding another moment of holiness. He is extending the holiness that Hashem Himself invested into the seventh day from the very beginning of Creation. If so, it is impossible to overstate the greatness of this mitzvah.

To illustrate this idea, R' Yisrael Rot *shlita* relates a powerful parable:

A man in Europe committed a serious offence against the law and was brought before the courts. The judges imposed an unusually harsh sentence: he was ordered to make substantial monthly payments to the government treasury for the remainder of his life.

The man feared that in his old age he might be unable to meet these obligations. Therefore, he calculated the estimated total sum he would owe over the next fifty years. He liquidated his savings, borrowed enormous amounts of money, and entrusted the entire sum to his attorney with instructions that the required payment be transferred each month to the government treasury.

When the Minister of Finance learned of the man's extraordinary dedication to fulfilling the court's decree, he was deeply impressed. “If this individual is willing to go to such lengths,” he declared, “there can be no doubt that he has abandoned his former ways.” Concluding that the punishment had already accomplished its purpose, the authorities completely cancelled the sentence and exempted him from all future payments.

The lesson is clear.

If such a mode of conduct has such a powerful impact down here in this world, how much more so will have an impact in Heaven. One who serves Hashem beyond the minimum obligation demonstrates exceptional loyalty and devotion. Such a person

is regarded as a faithful servant. When someone accepts Shabbos before the required time, he proclaims that he wishes to place himself under the Kingship of Heaven even earlier than necessary. His actions reveal his love and dedication.

This explains the statement of the *Pri Megadim* (*siman* 256) who writes that one who adds from the weekday onto the holy is granted added life.

Similarly, the *sefer Rimzei Shabbos* writes: "One who expands the borders of Shabbos and shortens the domain of the weekday will find that his troubles are diminished and his blessings increased."

The Ben Ish Chai, in his commentary *Ben Yehoyada*, explains that the Gemara's promise, "Whoever delights in Shabbos is granted an inheritance without boundaries," applies specifically to those who enhance Shabbos through *Tosefes* Shabbos.

The *Seforim HaKadoshim* further teach that harmful spiritual forces were created during the twilight period of *erev* Shabbos. Through the sanctity of *Tosefes* Shabbos, their influence is weakened and nullified.

An extraordinary story was related by Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky *zt"l* concerning his grandfather, the renowned *Ridvaz zt"l*. While serving as Rav of the great city of Slutsk, the *Ridvaz* became critically ill and lay upon his deathbed.

One day he fell asleep and experienced a remarkable vision. He saw the Heavenly Court assembled, deliberating his fate. The judgement appeared to be that his time in this world had come to an end.

The *Ridvaz* pleaded before the Heavenly Court. He argued that he was in the midst of composing his monumental commentary on the *Yerushalmi*. If he were taken from this world now, the work would never be completed and would be lost to future generations.

The Heavenly Court answered that another *Talmud Chacham* would arise and complete the work.

The *Ridvaz* then pleaded further. He explained that he supported many widows and orphans and attended faithfully to their needs. Who would care for them once he was gone?

Again, Heaven replied that others would take his place and continue these acts of kindness.

At that point the *Ridvaz* offered one final argument.

“Already from Thursday night,” he said, “the tablecloth upon my table is spread in honour of Shabbos Kodesh. Long before Shabbos arrives, my household and I prepare for it and accept it with the proper measure of *Tosefes Shabbos*.”

When the judges of the Heavenly Court heard these words, the verdict changed. They ruled that in the merit of his extraordinary honor for Shabbos he should remain in this world for many additional years.

Indeed, he recovered. He completed his commentary on the *Yerushalmi*, merited to settle in Eretz Yisrael, and eventually served as the Rav of Tzefas. Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky himself later adopted this practice, following the example of his illustrious grandfather.

My dear friends, let us elevate the honour of Shabbos. Let us welcome Shabbos early and add to its holiness. In that merit, may Hashem shower us with abundant salvations, blessings, and success. Yet our motivation should be even higher than the rewards promised.

We should bring in Shabbos early simply because we love Shabbos.

Because when a Jew eagerly hastens to welcome the Queen, extending her holiness and longing for her arrival, that itself is the greatest testimony to the preciousness of Shabbos Kodesh.

The Garments of Adam and Chava Were Made from the Skin of the *Nachash*

The *pasuk* says that when the *nachash* (snake) seduced Adam and Chava into eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as*, they realized they were naked, and “G-d made for them garments of skin and dressed them.” (*Bereishis* 3:21) The Medrash says that these garments of skin came from the *nachash*. The Ribbono Shel Olam skinned the *nachash* (which was a huge animal), took his hide and made it into clothing for Adam and Chava. What is this Medrash trying to teach us?

These are metaphors. *Chazal* say that jealousy prompted the *nachash* to try to entice Adam and Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and change the world. Rashi

quotes the Medrash that the *nachash* observed them engaging in marital relations and he lusted for Chava. He was jealous of Adam and hatched this plot to bring them down. Jealousy was the root cause that prompted the *nachash* to change the world.

What caused the *nachash's* jealousy? He saw them engaging in private activity that is supposed to remain private between a man and a woman. He looked where he was not supposed to look, and he wanted what he was not supposed to want. The root of *Midas HaKinah* (the Attribute of Jealousy) is that someone looks where he is not supposed to look, and as a result, wants that which is really off limits to him. If someone restricts his eyes and his thoughts to his own four *amos*, there is no jealousy. That is the way it is.

I see my friend or my neighbor driving a better car. I want that car. I see that my friend remodelled his kitchen. I need to remodel my kitchen. He has granite counter tops. I also want granite counter tops. Why are you going around looking at his kitchen? His kitchen is his kitchen! Your kitchen is your kitchen. Maybe you can't help seeing a car. But *kinah* stems from me looking into the private affairs of someone else where I have no business looking.

This is perhaps why a famous Gemara in *Maseches Taanis* (8a) equates the *Ba'al Lashon HaRah* to the *nachash*. The Gemara asks what pleasure does either get from their destructive actions? *Lashon HaRah* is also an *aveirah* of revealing information which should be hidden. What is *Lashon HaRah*? I know something about someone that others do not know. I spread it. Again, I am looking at that which should remain hidden. I see it and I share it with others. It is the same *aveira* as the *nachash*—looking where you should not look, wanting what you should not want, and going where you do not belong.

The Tolner Rebbe explains the reason why the Ribbono Shel Olam punished the *nachash* by taking its skin and making garments of hide for Adam and Chava. What is skin? Skin is the most basic covering of a being. It keeps hidden that which should be hidden. The *nachash* failed to understand that. There are things that should remain closed, should remain behind the screen, behind the skin. They should be hidden. Do not look where you are not supposed to look.

By taking the skin of the *nachash*, the Ribbono Shel Olam was teaching us that this *nachash* did not respect the privacy of a human being and looked where he should

not look. As a result, the Ribbono Shel Olam took off his skin—uncovered him—and used that skin to cover the human beings. (R' Frand)

Pninin U'Peliyos on the Weekly Parsha – Answers

(For the questions see the back page of the booklet)

1) Although Kayin's murder of Hevel is the first death explicitly recorded in the Torah, the *Ichud B'Chidud* (5777) points out that Hevel was not actually the first creature to die.

Rashi writes that after Hashem created the Leviathan and its mate, He slew the female Leviathan so that the pair would not reproduce and overwhelm the world. According to this, the female Leviathan was the first of Hashem's creations to die.

2) The Rit Elgazi reportedly remarked that had he been present at the time of man's creation, he would have suggested two modifications.

First, he would have advised that human beings be created with detachable limbs. If a person's leg became injured, for example, he could simply remove it and allow it to rest, rather than having to confine his entire body to bed.

Second, he suggested that a person should have been created with a small opening leading directly to the stomach. When it came time to eat, one could simply place the necessary nourishment inside and close the opening again. In this way, countless hours spent eating could be saved and devoted instead to Torah study. (Cited in *Otzer Pela'os HaTorah* pg. 44)

3) The *Ba'al HaTurim* comments on the *pasuk*, “*Ha'ishah asher nasatah imadi hi nasnah li min ha'eitz va'ochel*” (“The woman whom You placed with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate” [*Bereishis* 3:12]), that Chavah struck Adam HaRishon with a branch from the Tree until he consented to eat from it.

The Ben Ish Chai, in *Od Yosef Chai* (*Parshas Ki Seitzei*), strongly rejects this interpretation, describing it as *leitzanus* and insisting that such a comment could never have originated from the *Ba'al HaTurim*.

It is noteworthy, however, that both the *Moshav Zekeinim* (*Bereishis* 3:12) and the *Chofetz Chaim* (*Shem Olam, Kuntres Nefutzos Yisrael*, ch. 5) cite this explanation. Certainly, if the *Chofetz Chaim* records it, it cannot be dismissed lightly.

Nevertheless, a fundamental question remains. If Adam ate only under duress, why was he punished? Surely an act performed under coercion should not incur liability.

Dayan Pozen *zt"l* of London (cited in *Daf Al HaDaf*, *Chullin* 139b) suggests a fascinating answer. Although Adam was coerced into eating, he nevertheless derived pleasure and enjoyment from the act. Rather than experiencing anguish or regret, he took satisfaction in the fruit. It was for that enjoyment, rather than merely for the act itself, that he was held accountable.

This insight sheds light on a famous Gemara in *Chullin* (139b). The Gemara asks: "Where is Haman alluded to in the Torah?"

It answers: "*Ha-min ha'eitz*" – "From the tree..."

The *meforshim* explain the connection as follows.

Chazal teach (*Megillah* 12a) that Haman's decree against the Jewish people came because they were "*nehenu*" – "derived enjoyment" - from the feast of Achashverosh.

Why did *Chazal* emphasise that they *enjoyed* the feast? Why not simply say that they attended or ate at the feast?

The answer is that the Jews might have justified their participation by claiming that they were compelled to attend because of the king's authority. Their failing was not merely their attendance, but the fact that they derived pleasure from it and felt no inner discomfort regarding their involvement.

This is the connection between Haman and "*Ha-min ha'eitz*." Just as Adam's punishment stemmed not merely from eating the fruit but from the enjoyment he derived from it, so too the Jews in the days of Achashverosh were judged because they enjoyed the royal feast.

4) Although most people assume that Adam's exile from the Gan Eden was a punishment for eating from the forbidden fruit, the *Ichud B'Chidud* (5777) points out that the Torah gives a different reason. Hashem expressed a concern (3:22-23) that Adam might eat from the Tree of Life, which would enable him to live forever, so He removed Adam from the Garden to prevent this from happening.

5) The *Medrash Rabbah* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 22:12) relates that after Kayin murdered Hevel, he became terrified that either avengers or wild animals would kill him in retribution for his crime.

Although Kayin deserved punishment, Hashem did not wish to punish him immediately. Instead, He provided Kayin with a dog to accompany and protect him.

According to this Medrash, Kayin was the first person mentioned in the Torah to own a dog.

6) The fourth *berachah* in the weekday *Shemoneh Esrei* contains the names of Adam and his grandson Enosh (5:6), stating: "*Atah chonen l'Adam da'as u'melamed l'Enosh binah*" - "You graciously endow man with wisdom and teach mortals understanding." (Torah Teasers)

Pninim U'Peliyos on the Weekly Parsha – Questions

(For the answers see above)

- 1) Which creation was the first to die?
- 2) If you were around at the time man was first created, and you were able to change two things, what would you have changed?
- 3) Why was Adam punished for eating from the *Eitz HaDa'as* if he was forced by Chavah to do so?
- 4) Why did Hashem banish Adam from Gan Eden?
- 5) Who was the first person in the Torah to have a pet dog?
- 6) Which grandfather and grandson mentioned in *Parshas Bereishis* appear in the weekday *Shemoneh Esrei*?

Appreciating the Small Things in Life

Couches - These are just so comfortable! We can sit or lie down on them, as a great way to unwind after a long day. They can even be used for sleeping, if there are no beds available.

This booklet was compiled with *siyata dishmayah* by Rabbi Moshe Harris. For final rulings please consult your Rov. For any comments, dedications, or to subscribe to receive the weekly booklet email: limudaymoshe@gmail.com, visit www.limudaymoshe.com, or call 0583249052.