

This coming Monday is *Tu B'Shevat*, the *Rosh Hashanah* / New Year's Day for trees. (This designation has *Halachic* consequences for tree owners and buyers of fruit.) R' Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l (1891-1982; *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav in Yerushalayim) writes about trees: The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 88a) states, "Hashem created the world conditionally. If *Bnei Yisrael* will accept the Torah, Creation will endure. If not, Hashem will return the world to *Tohu Va'vohu* / astonishing emptiness." [Until here from the *Gemara*.] Thus, by studying and observing Torah, one becomes Hashem's partner in the Creation of nature. For this reason, man, especially the righteous person, is likened to a tree (*Devarim* 20:19; *Tehilim* 92:13).

R' Kook continues: We learn in *Pirkei Avot* (Ch.3), "One who walks on the road while reviewing a Torah lesson, but interrupts his review and exclaims, 'How beautiful is this tree! How beautiful is this plowed field!'--Scripture considers it as if he has forfeited his soul." [Until here from the *Mishnah*.] The *Mishnah* is not teaching us to ignore nature's beauty, R' Kook writes. Indeed, there is a *Berachah* to be said on a flowering tree. The *Mishnah* is speaking of someone who "interrupts" his learning, *i.e.*, he detaches the beauty of nature from the Torah, seeing nature as a separate entity. The sage who taught the just-quoted *Mishnah*, Rabbi Yaakov, teaches later in *Pirkei Avot* (ch.4), "This world is but a corridor leading to the main hall," *i.e.*, the World-to-Come. He is teaching: Do not see this world and nature as separate from *Olam Ha'ba* and Torah. They are but a continuum, and the light of *Olam Ha'ba* and Torah can reflect back upon, and illuminate this world and nature so that we see Hashem in it. (*Le'netivot Yisrael* II 50)

Shabbat

"It happened on the sixth day that they gathered *Lechem Mishneh*/ a double portion of food . . ." (From our *Parashah--Shmot* 16:22)

R' Yosef Karo z"l (1488-1575; Greece and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: On *Shabbat*, one recites *Hamotzi* over two loaves of bread. He holds both loaves in his hands, and then slices the lower one.

R' Moshe Isserles z"l ("*Rema*"; 1530-1572; rabbi of Cracow, Poland) adds in a gloss: That is on Friday night, but on *Shabbat* day and on *Yom Tov* night, one cuts the upper loaf. (*Shulchan Aruch: O.C.* 274:1)

Why two loaves? R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the *Chafetz Chaim*; died 1933) writes: As a remembrance of the *Mahn*, as it is written, "They gathered *Lechem Mishneh*." (*Mishnah Berurah* 274:1)

R' Chaim Hakohen z"l (1585-1655; Aleppo, Syria) writes: The *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Shabbat* 15:3) states, "*Shabbat* was given to the Jewish People solely so that they may engage in Torah study." Therefore, R' Chaim writes, it is obligatory to devote more time to Torah study on *Shabbat* than one devotes on a weekday. The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 31a) teaches that a person will be asked in Heaven whether he had fixed times for Torah study. That, however, refers to a weekday, when a person is obligated to work for his living, R' Chaim writes. On *Shabbat*, however, when there is no work, a person must devote himself to Torah study--for if not now, when!)

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“Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him . . .” (13:19)

**“Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea . . . and the water split.”
(14:21)**

We read in *Tehilim* (114:3--recited as part of *Hallel*), “The sea saw, and fled.” The *Midrash* on that verses asks, “What did the sea see?” and it answers, “It saw Yosef’s coffin.”

What is the connection between Yosef’s coffin and the splitting of the sea?

R’ Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z”l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: Our Patriarchs--Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov--knew that the nation they were establishing is the foundation for the revelation of *Hashem* in this world. And, they passed on that knowledge to Yaakov’s children. However, those children--Yosef, on the one hand, and his brothers, on the other hand--disagreed about how this would come about. Would *Hashem*’s revelation be through the Torah--given uniformly to all individuals and all generations, and transmitted through central leadership (Yosef’s view)--or would *Hashem*’s revelation be through prophecy--experienced by each individual on his own level and each generation on its own level (the brothers’ view)? Since, according to tradition, the Torah could only be given after *Bnei Yisrael*’s population reached 600,000, Yaakov’s family was not yet “Jewish,” Yosef held. His brothers, in contrast, held that the key test of “Jewishness” was whether *Bnei Yisrael* were fit for prophecy, and they were. [R’ Kook bases this on the famous *Derashah* of R’ Yehuda Roseannes z”l (1657-1727; Turkey; author of *Mishneh Le’melech* on *Rambam’s Mishneh Torah*), explaining in detail the dispute between Yosef and his brothers. A full explanation is beyond the scope of this space.]

R’ Kook continues: Our Sages teach that *Bnei Yisrael* who left Egypt were idolators. Indeed, the guardian angel of Egypt challenged *Hashem*’s plan to split the sea, claiming that *Bnei Yisrael* were no better than their pursuers. Had the view of Yosef’s brothers--that each generation stands alone--prevailed, *Hashem* could not, in fairness, have split the sea. However, the sea “saw” Yosef’s coffin, and it “remembered” that the Torah was yet to be given. Seeing that, the sea fled.

(*Me’orot Ha’Rayah: Chanukah* p.79)

R’ Yitzchak Arieli z”l (1896-1974; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav; author of *Enayim La’mishpat*) offers another explanation for the connection between Yosef’s coffin and the splitting of the sea. He writes:

By withstanding the seductions of Potiphar’s wife, Yosef demonstrated that one can rise above nature. So, too, said the sea, I can defy my nature and split.

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha’geulah* p.16)

**“Bnei Yisrael were ‘Chamushim’ when they went up from Egypt.”
(13:18)**

Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z”l (Spain; 1255-1340) writes: The *P’shat*/simple meaning is that *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt armed, like an army going to war. Though the Jewish People are not like other nations, which need to arm themselves against their enemies, the Torah commands us to act somewhat in a natural fashion. After we do our part, then *Hashem* will perform His miracles.

(*Commentary on the Torah*)

R’ Moshe Yitzchak Ashkenazi z”l (1821-1898; Trieste, Italy) elaborates: One should never rely on a miracle or on extraordinary *Hashgachah* / Divine Providence approaching the level of a miracle. Rather, along with his *Bitachon* / Trust in *Hashem*, one must take steps to help himself. *Bitachon*, writes R’ Ashkenazi, is like salt--without it, food may be bland, but too much salt is counterproductive and damaging. Similarly, one should trust in *Hashem*, lest he be shown that all of his own wisdom and efforts are worthless. At the same time, one should not rely exclusively on *Bitachon* such that he refrains from lifting a finger on his own behalf.

R’ Ashkenazi continues: When *Bnei Yisrael* left Egypt after witnessing unprecedented miracles, one might have expected them to rely on *Hashem* to care for them. But, they did not do that exclusively; they also armed themselves. And, when Amalek attacked them (at the end of our *Parashah*), they did not sit back and wait for *Hashem* to vanquish their attackers; they fought back. Just as it would have been wrong to congratulate themselves on their military prowess, so it would have been wrong to do nothing for their own defense, R’ Ashkenazi concludes. (*Simchat Ha’regel: Drush* 3)

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This, continues R’ Chaim, explains why we take two loaves of bread. Of course, the simple reason also is correct--i.e., to honor *Shabbat*. But, at the same time, the two loaves of bread hint that one must study twice as much Torah on *Shabbat* as he does on a weekday, for we find that a “loaf of bread” alludes to Torah study (see *Mishlei* 9:5).

Regarding the custom to cut the lower loaf on Friday night and the upper loaf on *Shabbat* day, R’ Chaim writes: During the workweek, *Hashem* is hidden in our world, since everything appears to operate according to nature, based on our efforts. On *Shabbat*, when we refrain from work, *Hashem* becomes revealed. On Friday night, when *Shabbat* is just beginning, nature must take the initiative from “below” to unify with *Hashem*; therefore, we cut the lower loaf. On *Shabbat* day, *Hashem* reveals Himself from “above”; therefore, we cut the upper loaf.

(*Mekor Chaim: Tur Pitdah* 274:1)