

*Midrash Rabbah* on this week's *Parashah* comments on the verse (*Yirmiyahu* 2:31), "O generation, contemplate the word of *Hashem*! Have I been a wilderness to *Yisrael*?" Says the *Midrash*: When a human king travels in the wilderness, does he find food and drink there as he has in his palace? [Until here from the *Midrash*.] R' Pinchas Menachem Elazar Justman z"l (1848-1920; *Chassidic Rebbe* in Pilica, Poland) explains what the *Midrash* is highlighting: If *Hashem* had provided *Bnei Yisrael* with food and drink in the desert through natural means, that would have been miraculous enough. But He did not do that; instead, he provided bread from heaven--the *Mahn*--and water from a rock!

Why did *Hashem* provide food and water in a supernatural way? R' Justman writes: He did this to demonstrate the importance of our holy Torah. In the merit of accepting the Torah, we merited to be sustained with *Mahn*--like the angels.

Why then, continues R' Justman, do our Sages say that the *Mahn* fell in Moshe Rabbeinu's merit? Indeed, after he died, the *Mahn* ceased (see *Yehoshua* 5:12). Likewise, our Sages say that the Clouds of Glory came in Aharon's merit, and the well of water in Miriam's merit. The answer is that every person could have merited these miracles himself, but, since they did not refine themselves adequately, they had to rely on the merit of the *Tzaddikim* Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam. But only after each of those three died did *Hashem* reveal in whose merit each of these miracles occurred--because theoretically, every person could have merited these gifts. (*Sifte Tzaddik*)

## Shabbat

**"*Likrat Shabbat* / To welcome *Shabbat*, come let us go, for she is the source of all blessing; from the beginning, from antiquity she was honored--last in deed, first in thought."**

**(From the Friday night hymn, *Lecha Dodi*)**

In what way is *Shabbat* "the source of all blessing"? R' Zvi Yisrael Thau *shlita* (founder of Yeshivat Har Ha'mor in Yerushalayim) explains:

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes (*Moreh Nevochim* 2:31) that the main purpose of the *Mitzvah* of *Shabbat* is to establish in our hearts belief in Creation--*i.e.*, the knowledge that *Hashem* alone created the entire world, and there was no pre-existing matter or power that partnered with Him. *Rambam* adds that is impossible to entrench belief in a person's heart by words alone; rather, actions are needed to help beliefs take root. For this reason, the Torah gives us the *Mitzvah* of *Shabbat*--to concretize our belief in Creation through actions.

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) takes *Rambam's* words further, writes R' Thau. R' Kook teaches (*Ein Ayah: Shabbat* 4:4) that the knowledge which becomes entrenched in our soul as a result of observing *Shabbat*--*i.e.*, that *Hashem* alone created the world--connects us to the Divine origin of all of existence and clarifies for us that everything in our world has a role to play in bringing the world to its ultimate perfection. This must be so, because a perfect G-d would not create something imperfect or purposeless.

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**“Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying, ‘Bnei Yisrael shall encamp, each man under his banner according to the insignias of their fathers’ household . . .” (2:1-2)**

*Midrash Rabbah* teaches: Each *Nasi* / head of a tribe had a flag whose colors were the same as the colors of his tribe’s gem in the breastplate that Aharon carried on his heart. It is from here that kings and nations learned to make flags, says the *Midrash*. The *Midrash* continues: Reuven’s gem was the *Odem* / ruby, and its flag was red and had a picture of *Duda’im* (the flowers that Reuven brought to his mother--see *Bereishit* 30:14). [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Ovadiah Seforno *z”l* (1470-1550; Italy) writes that Reuven brought his mother *Duda’im* flowers because he saw she was upset at not having more children after the birth of Yehuda. Note that Reuven was all of four or five years old at the time! writes R’ Seforno. Thus, by telling us what Reuven did at such a young age, the Torah is informing us of his wisdom and righteousness.

R’ Uri Weisblum *shlita* (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Nachalat Ha’levi’im in Haifa, Israel) elaborates: Reuven’s trait of sharing the burden of others was passed down to his descendants. For example, says the *Midrash*, just as Reuven saved Yosef’s life (*Bereishit* 37:21), so the first City of Refuge was established in Reuven’s territory (*Devarim* 4:43). It was to remind Reuven’s descendants of this special trait of theirs that *Duda’im* were emblazoned on the tribe’s flag. (*He’arat Ha’derech* p.156)

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As such, continues R’ Thau, we can understand why our sages call *Shabbat* “*Me’ein Olam Ha’ba*” / “a little bit of the World-to-Come.” In the World-to-Come, we will understand the purpose of everything, including the seemingly pointless and negative experiences in our lives. On *Shabbat*, when we acknowledge that a perfect G-d created everything, we strengthen our faith that such a day will come. In this way, *Shabbat* is the “Source of all blessing,” as we say in *Lecha Dodi*--it helps us believe that everything is a blessing. We also understand now the phrase at the end of the stanza: “Last in deed, first in thought.” Not only does *Shabbat* come “last” in the week of Creation, it also alludes to that “last” phase in history.

Indeed, notes R’ Thau, only the first two stanzas of *Lecha Dodi* refer to *Shabbat*. The remainder of the stanzas speak of the ultimate redemption with the coming of *Mashiach*. In light of the foregoing, this is understandable. *Shabbat* is not merely a reminder of a past event; rather, it “reminds” us of a future when Creation will attain its intended perfection. (*Am Mekadeshei Shevi’i* p.19)

**“For Dan, Achiezer ben / son of Ammishaddai.” (1:12)**

R’ Chaim Yehuda Meir Hager *z”l* (the *Vishever Rebbe* in Tel Aviv; died 1968) writes: *Hashem* is our “Father,” but he recognizes us as His “sons” only when we care about our brethren, his other “sons.” The tribe of Dan traveled last, picking up all the objects that their brethren had lost and supporting any stragglers. Says our verse: For Dan, *Achi-ezer* / my brother is a helper, *ben* (from *Binah*) who reflects on my needs; therefore, *Ami* / my nation and *Shakkai* / G-d are united. (*Zecher Chaim*)



**“Bnei Yisrael shall encamp, each man under his banner according to the insignias of their fathers’ household . . .” (2:2)**

*Midrash Rabbah* comments on this verse: Thus it is written (*Tehilim* 20:6), “May we sing in joy at Your salvation, and raise our banner in the Name of our *Elokim* . . .” [Until here from the *Midrash*]

What is the connection between our verse and the quoted verse in *Tehilim* (other than the coincidence of the word “banner”), and what is the *Midrash* teaching? R’ Eliezer David Gruenwald *z”l* (1867-1928; Hungarian rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva*; his *Yahrzeit* is 2 *Sivan*) answers:

The *Midrash Shocher Tov* says, as if speaking to *Hashem*, “When the Temple stood, You used to answer our prayers. Now that there is only a mountain, You also should answer, as it is written (*Tehilim* 3:5), ‘He answers me from His holy mountain.’” This may be understood, R’ Gruenwald explains, based on another *Midrash*. The Torah says, regarding the location of *Akeidat Yitzchak* (*Bereishit* 22:4), “He [Avraham] saw the place from afar.” The verse does not say that Avraham saw the mountain from afar. In fact, the *Midrash* says, the future site of *Akeidat Yitzchak* and the *Bet Ha’mikdash* was not yet a mountain; the location was in a valley until Avraham prayed that it become a mountain as befits *Hashem*’s glory. R’ Gruenwald observes: Since the mountain was formed specifically to hold the Temple, we may interpret the fact that it still is a mountain long after the Temple was destroyed as a sign to us and to the world that the *Shechinah* still rests there. [If *Hashem* had wanted, He easily could have arranged for the Romans to “bulldoze” the entire mountain, as they did in other places.] In light of this, R’ Gruenwald writes, we can understand the *Midrash Shocher Tov* quoted above: “When the Temple stood, You used to answer our prayers. Now that there is only a mountain”--since there is still a mountain, which tells us that You are still with us--“You also should answer.”

Now, R’ Gruenwald concludes, we can understand the *Midrash* on our verse: “May we sing in joy at Your salvation”--referring to the fact that *Hashem* makes His presence felt at the former location of the *Bet Hamikdash*, which brings honor to Him and is, so-to-speak, His salvation. “Raise our banner in the Name of our *Elokim*”--it is as if He is waving a banner to indicate His presence. So, too, the *Midrash* is teaching, the banners that marked the encampment of the tribes in the desert brought glory to *Hashem*. (*Keren L’David*)