

Spoiling the firstborn

Also lift the head of the children of Gershon... (Num. 4:22). Rabbi Efraim Lunshitz in *Kli Yakar* asks: why did Hashem not charge the descendants of Gershon with the more important task of carrying the Ark, if Gershon was Levi's firstborn and should therefore be given the most important position? He answers that this was done so as not to cause the family of Gershon to become haughty. This is a fundamental idea in children's education, that even though the firstborn deserves more by right of him being older, one should still take care to make sure that those extras that the firstborn gets do not "go to his head" and cause him to become overly proud.

Gershon the Philosopher

Also lift the head of the children of Gershon... this is the service of the Gershonite families to serve and to carry, and they shall carry the curtains of the Tabernacle... and the tachash covering which is on top of it... (Num. 4:22–25). The Ostrovtzer Gaon, in his approbation to the work *Minchas Yitzchok* on Mishnayos, offers a lengthy exposition contrasting Moshe's two sons Gershom and Eliezer. He then connects this motif concerning Moshe's son Gershom to the Levitical tribe of Gershon and uses that to explain why of all the families of Levi the Gershonites were responsible for carrying the *tachash* covering.

The Ostrovtzer Gaon begins by explaining that there are two ways to for a person to come to realize and accept Hashem's sovereignty in the world. One way is to philosophize and research God until he has proved to himself that veracity of what the Torah reveals to us about Hashem's role in the world. The other way is to simply accept the tradition that he received from his forefathers about the Torah and about Hashem, without doing any sort of scientific investigation into their veracity. Both of these approaches have their merits and drawbacks, and both are equally enshrined in the beginning of the *Shemonah Esrei* prayer where we refer to Hashem as *Elokeinu veElokei Avosaynu*—"our God" if we personally investigated His existence and have scientific proof of Him, "and the God of our forefathers" is we are simply accepting the tradition passed down to us from generation to generation.

The Ostrovtzer Gaon explains that these two approaches are typified by Moshe's two sons. The scientist/philosopher's approach begins by asking difficult questions and

even calling Hashem's existence into question. In doing so, the scientist/philosopher is conceptually akin to an idolater in that he considers not worshipping Hashem. In the end, the scientist/philosopher correctly concludes that Hashem and His Torah are indeed true, thus he becomes like a convert (*ger*) who was once an idolater and then became a God-fearing person. To this effect, we find in the Midrash (*Mechilta* to Ex. 18:3) that when Moshe married Yisro's daughter, the latter made him swear that his firstborn son will be consecrated to idolatry. Yisro's intention was that Moshe's firstborn son be first introduced to the concept of idol worship, and only later come to realization of the truth of Hashem and His Torah. In this way, Gershom was to be like the scientist/philosopher who needed scientific/philosophic proof of Hashem in order to believe. Gershom's very name alludes to his initial estrangement, as the Torah reports that Moshe gave him that name "because I was a stranger in a foreign land" (Ex. 18:3).

Moshe's son Eliezer, by contrast, represents the immaculate believer. He is not sullied by the need for scientific/philosophic proof of Hashem, rather he simply believes with all his heart in the tradition that he received from his predecessors—without conducting his own investigation into the matter. When naming Eliezer, Moshe said "...because the God of my father is in my aid" (Ex. 18:4), mentioning his father's God as though he is only following a greater tradition.

The Ostrovtzer Gaon points out that when we say the prayer *Ein K'Elokeinu* the order of sentences in that prayer seems counterintuitive. First we say, "There is none like our God, there is none like our Master..." and then we say, "Who is like our God? Who is like our master?..." Logically, one would have assumed that we should first ask "Who is like our God? Who is like our master?..." and then answer "There is none like our God, there is none like our Master...". Why do we say it backwards, giving the answer before the question?

The Ostrovtzer Gaon answers that this prayer teaches us an important lesson: If somebody wants to start asking questions about Hashem, then he must first preface that by making sure that the existence of Hashem as passed down through tradition is thoroughly engrained in his psyche. In other words, the only way to justify the scientist/philosopher's of seeking out proof of Hashem, is to first adopt the traditionalist approach of wholly accepting Hashem as part of a tradition, and only

then can he start asking questions. This is because if one begins his investigation without grounding himself in the immutable belief in Hashem, then before he completes his investigation and comes to the correct conclusion, he will be akin to an idolater. Therefore, first one must decisively declare “There is none like our God, there is none like our Master...” and only then can he explore the questions of “Who is like our God? Who is like our master?...”¹

With this in mind, the Ostrovtzer Gaon now explains why the sons of Gershon (son of Levi) were charged with carrying the *tachash* covering that was placed atop the Tabernacle. The Talmud (*Shabbos* 28b) says that because the *tachash* had a single horn on its forehead, it was a Kosher animal. The Ostrovtzer Gaon explains that this alludes to the traditionalist who only has one thing in his head, the unwavering belief in Hashem, and he was never tainted by the need for scientific proof, so he is kosher. One who practices that modality can rest assured that nothing can ever cause his belief in Hashem to falter, so it is the safest path. The path of scientist/philosopher, on the other hand, has its dangers that it opens up unacceptable possibilities.

Accordingly, the Ostrovtzer Gaon explains that the family of Gershon was charged with carrying the *tachash* coverings in order to stress that if one wants to take up the approach of Gershon son of Moshe of investigating Hashem and finding scientific/philosophic proof of Him, one must first carry the *tachash* which solidifies the basis of his belief in Hashem on traditional grounds before undertaking such an endeavor.

Confession Time

And they will confess their sin that they sinned, and he will return his guilt on his head, and its fifth he will add on to it, and he will give to whom he had incurred the guilt (Num. 5:7). Rabbi Azaria Figo (author of *Binah Littim*) explains the verse (Jeremiah 2:35), “I have been judged over you saying ‘I did not sin’” as

¹ Rabbi Naftali of Ropshitz explains in the name of Rabbi Baruch of Mezibuzh (*Daas Zekanim*, ch. 6, 2, cited in *Butzina deNehora*, Jerusalem 2007, vol. 1, *Likkutim* 5) why we recite *Ein K’Elokeinu* specifically at the end of the prayers. He explains that according to Lurianic Kabbalah, the morning prayers are a mystical journey through the four worlds of *Assiya*, *Briyah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Atzilus*. At the end of that journey, we will have traversed all of those world and seen that there is no other like Hashem. Once we have seen that, it is now appropriate at the conclusion of the prayers to say “There is none like our God, there is none like our Master...”

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referring to Hashem being “judged”, so to speak, by a sinner claiming to not sin but still receiving Divine punishment. Such a sinner makes Hashem look guilty because the sinner claims he did not sin, yet Hashem is still giving him a punishment. For this reason, Hashem is said to “have been judged” over such a sinner’s denial. Based on this, *Yalkut HaGersbuni* cites *Divrei Shaul* of Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathansohn who explains that this is the idea behind the requirement to confess one’s sins. When one confesses his sins, he “takes away” the guilt from upon Hashem, because he admits that he deserved whatever Divine punishments befell him and Hashem is free of suspicion of any wrongdoing because the sinner now admits that he got exactly what he deserves. By doing this, the sinner “turns back” any guilt he had incurred by causing others to suspect Hashem of wrongdoing.

[How many limbs does a woman have?](#)

And in the hand of the Kohen will be the bitter cursed waters (Num. 5:18).

Rabbeinu Yoel writes in *Rimzei Rabbeinu Yoel* (Parshas Nasso, p. 100) that the word “cursed” (המאררים = 496) in *gematria* equals the twice the number 248. This is because each person has 248 limbs, and is an allusion to the 248 limbs of the adulterer and the 248 limbs of the adulteress which these waters are supposed to affect. The same idea is quoted in Rabbeinu Efrayim al haTorah (p. 63). The problem with this explanation is that the Gemara (*Bechoros* 45a) says that although men have 248 limbs, women have 252 limbs, not 248 limbs. However, there is a *Tosafos* (to *Sukkah* 27b) which also repeats the idea that woman have 248 limbs, even though it is at odds with the Gemara (see the commentaries there). The work *Alei Tamar* to the Jerusalem Talmud (*Sotah* 5:1) argues that there are two distinct ways of counting a woman’s limbs and in one way of counting the total is 248 and in another way of counting it comes out to 252.

Following the Gemara’s assumption that women have 252 limbs, Rabbi Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai, also known as Chida, writes in *Dvash LeFi* (*Maareches Aleph*, 9) that when you join the 248 limbs of a man with the 252 limbs of a woman, you get the number 500, which is the *gematria* of the phrase used to denote the commandment of procreation (פרו ורבו = 500), which can only be done by the union of a man and woman, and is fulfilled by producing a son and daughter, male and female. Chida also writes in *Nachal Kedumim* (*Parshas Bereishis* 24) that the *gematria* of bride (כלה) and

groom (חתן) together equals 513 (חתן + כלה = 513) which is the sum of the 248 limbs of the man, 252 limbs of the woman, and the word “one” (אחד = 13).²

Even though the Gemara assumes that women have a different amount of limbs than men do, according to some authorities the *Mi SheBeirach* prayer said when praying for the recovery of an ill woman should still mention 248 limbs, just like it does when recited for a man. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger in *HaElef Lecha Shlomo (Orach Chaim 120)* explains that this is because the blessing of healing comes to the woman through her husband, and he can only bestow unto her from what he himself has which is only 248 limbs. (The prevailing custom, however, is not to mention 248 limbs when praying for a woman’s recovery). Moreover, the prayer of *Kriyas Shema* has exactly 245 words, and according to many sources, the reason why the Chazzan repeats the last three words of *Kriyas Shema* is so that we can get to the number 248. When somebody prays *Kriyas Shema* as an individual and there is no *chazzan* he should preface the *Shema* with the words *El Melech Neeman* so that he can get to the number 248. The Munkatcher Rebbe in *Minchas Elazar* (vol. 2, 28) writes that even though women do not have 248 limbs, they should also do this in order to reach 248 words (see also a *Rivevos Efrayim* vol. 1, 56 by Rabbi Efraim Greenblatt).

The Sotah’s Falling Thigh

When Hashem gives your thigh to be falling and your stomach to burst (Num. 5:21). In this passage, the Torah mentions the punishments which ought to befall the adulteress and says that her “thigh” will fall. But why does the Torah write the word “thigh” in singular form, doesn’t she have two thighs? The Chizkuni (here) explains that the word “thigh” is actually a euphemistic term for the adulteress’ private parts. He compares this to the phrase “under my thigh” used by Avraham (Gen. 24:2) which refers to the place of his circumcision and to “who exited the thigh of Jacob” (Ex. 1:5) which refers to Yaakov’s progeny. In both of those cases, the word “thigh” is a nice way of saying his male organ. Indeed, when the Talmud talks about women’s tendency to become jealous over the possibility of their man being unfaithful to them with another woman, the Talmud says: “A woman only becomes jealous with the

² Perhaps this can allude to Hashem, the One and Only, who is the 3rd partner in a marriage. As our sages teach, ish and isha, shechina beneihem. (After all, this is what sets apart marriage from a civil union - the inclusion of Hashem in the union.)

‘thigh’ of her colleague” (*Megillah* 13a). In this case too, notes Chizkuni, the word “thigh” means something more intimate. Accordingly, if “thigh” doesn’t mean “thigh” then it makes a lot of sense why it is in the singular and not in the plural. Others cite Josephus in *Antiquities* (Book III, Ch. 12) who writes that if a suspected adulteress was actually guilty, then her *right thigh* will become distended and her stomach will explode and she will die like this. According to Josephus, it seems that the word “thigh” was in singular form because the punishment of the *Sotah* only affected her *right* thigh, but not her *left* one. See also Rabbi Mordechai of Tzfas’ work *Sifsei Kohen* who explains that the word “thigh” is in singular form because it will be separated from her and leave her with only half her body.

The Sotah’s Self-Incrimination

And the woman says ‘Amen, Amen’ (Num. 5:22). Abarbanel writes that if the woman refuses to say “Amen, Amen” then this is tantamount to admitting that she had committed adultery, and Hashem’s name is not erased in the Sotah waters, but she is killed by strangulation in *Beis Din* because her refusal to say “Amen, Amen” is like testimony that she had sinned. Abarbanel further writes that if she openly admits that she sinned she loses her *kesubah* and must be divorced, and according to “others” she is killed. There are two issues with this passage of Abarbanel. First of all, we do not find the opinion of these “others” anywhere in the Talmud. Secondly, as Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson asks in *Shoel U’Meishiv* (2nd edition, vol. 4, 5), how can *Beis Din* give her capital punishment if there are no witness that testified about her crime, and self-incrimination or admission is not Halachically admissible in *Beis Din*? *Yalkut HaGershuni* (*Klalim, Kuntres Ohel Yosef* 23) cites Rabbi Nathanson’s questions and offers his own resolution. He explains that the “others” to whom Abarbanel referred refers to none other than the Tannaic sage Rabbi Meir who is sometimes anonymized in the Talmud as “others say...” He finds a passage in which Rabbi Meir seemingly endorses this view because in *Kiddushin* (62a) Rabbi Meir expounds on the word “she shall be cleansed” (הנקי) as though it said “she shall be strangulated” (חנקי), due to the interchangeability of the letter אחה”ע. In that passage Rabbi Meir says that this suggests if she did indeed stray from her husband, then she should be strangulated. Nonetheless, none of the commentators to that Talmudic passage explain that Rabbi Meir is referring to a case where the woman admits her guilt or refuses to say “Amen, Amen.” Rather, they explain that Rabbi Meir refers to a regular case of a suspected adulteress drinking the Sotah waters about which Rabbi Meir says that if she is guilty,

the waters themselves will miraculously choke her, not *Beis Din*. See also *HaDrash VeHalayun* and *Tzur Yaakov* (end of 14) who further discuss the Abarbanel and the problems with his stance.

The Blessing of the Sotah Waters

And she will be clean, and she will sow seed (Num. 5:25). Rashi explains that if she is truly innocent, then she will be cleared from the punishments brought by the Sotah waters, and not only that, if previously she only gave birth with a lot of pain, then from then on she will give birth with comfort, if previously should only gave birth to darker children, from then on she will give birth to more pale children.

The Talmud (*Brachos* 31b) says that when Chana prayed to Hashem to have a child, she said to Him that if He doesn't grant her a child, then she will seclude herself with another man and have her husband Elkana suspect her of adultery and make her drink the *Sotah* waters, and since she will be innocent, she will be blessed with "sowing seed" and give birth, because Hashem would not abrogate the promises of the Torah that an innocent woman who drinks the Sotah waters will be blessed with children. However, the Talmud then says that this understanding only follows the opinion of Rabbi Yishamel who understood that the promise to innocent women is that if they were previously barren, they would now bear children, but according to Rabbi Akiva this was not Chana's intention. Rabbi Akiva disagreed with Rabbi Yishmael because Rabbi Akiva argued that if the Torah promised barren women children for drinking the Sotah waters when innocent, then every barren woman would purposely cause herself to be accused of adultery and drink the Sotah waters in order to be blessed with children. So instead Rabbi Akiva explains that the Torah's promise was that if previously she only gave birth with a lot of pain, then from then on she will give birth with comfort, if previously should only gave birth to short children, then from then on she will give birth to taller children, if previously should only gave birth to darker children, then from then on she will give birth to more pale children.

Nonetheless, *Tosafos* ask the obvious question: Rabbi Akiva's explanation has not really dealt with Rabbi Akiva's own objection to Rabbi Yishamel. Just as Rabbi Akiva rejected Rabbi Yishmael's opinion because it would lead to every barren woman would purposely cause herself to be accused of adultery and drink the Sotah waters in

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order to be blessed with children, so does Rabbi Akiva's position lead to every woman who gives birth with a lot of pain, or short children, or dark children purposely causing herself to be accused of adultery and drinking the Sotah waters in order to be blessed with painless birth, taller children, or whiter children. So what's the difference between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael?

Tosafos HaRosh and the Maharsha both answer that a barren woman would be willing to sacrifice her reputation in order to have children, but a woman who already has children would not be willing to jeopardize her good name in order to have a more comfortable birth or to have taller or whiter children.

Alternatively, Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz of Frankfurt (in *Panim Yafos, Parshas Nasso* and in *Sefer Haflaah* to *Kesubos, Kuntres Acharon* 115) explains (as does the *Yad HaMelech* to *Hilchos Sotah* 5:1 by the grandson of the *Noda B'Yehuda*) the matter differently, and absolutely brilliantly. The Halacha regarding a Sotah is that if one witness can testify that she indeed cheated on her husband, then she does not drink the Sotah waters, rather we accept that witness's testimony and assume that she indeed betrayed her husband. The Talmud (*Sotah* 2b) explains that even though normally we do not accept the testimony of a single witness, in the case of a Sotah has previously been warned to seclude herself with this specific man and she nonetheless did so, there is strong circumstantial evidence that she indeed betrayed her husband, so that strong circumstantial evidence coupled with the single witness allows us to treat as if we know that she for sure sinned. The problem that bothered Rabbi Akiva was that if women would begin secluding themselves in order to have children (per Rabbi Yishmael), then a woman being secluded with a man whom she was warned against is no longer strong circumstantial evidence that she indeed betrayed her husband because maybe she secluded herself with him in order to have children. Accordingly, Rabbi Akiva argued that if Rabbi Yishmael is right, then we no longer the basis of the Halacha that the testimony of a single witness is enough to adjudicate cases of a suspected adulteress!

This problem is only true of Rabbi Yishmael's opinion that a barren woman can have children by being suspected of adultery and drinking the Sotah. But there is another difference between a barren woman and a woman who has children but not in the most optimal way. In the case of a barren woman who had already been married for

ten years and not given birth, her husband is technically obligated to divorce and marry somebody else. She has nothing to lose by secluding herself with another man to cast aspersion upon herself, because even if her husband refuses to allow her a chance to clear her name and drink the Sotah waters, she is anyways destined to be divorced. For her, it's worth it to be suspected of adultery in order to drink the waters. So when it comes to the barren woman, Rabbi Yishmael's explanation offers justification for her secluding herself with another man in order to have children, which is why Rabbi Akiva rejects his position because then it would erase the Halacha of a single witness being believed.

On the other hand, when it comes to a woman who had already given birth, just her births were painful or her children were short or dark, if she did nothing, she would be allowed to remain married to her husband. So now she is peacefully married to him. If she were to bring about suspicions on herself that she had committed adultery in order to drink the Sotah waters and get its blessings, she is taking a big risk because her husband could choose to either divorce her forthwith or make her drink the Sotah waters. Because of this, a woman who had already given birth will not take the risk of allowing herself to be accused of adultery, because she might simply end up getting divorced. Accordingly, even though Rabbi Akiva admits that theoretically a woman *could* use the Sotah waters to have less painful births or taller/whiter children, she wouldn't want to do so because it involves a risk that she will lose everything she has. Accordingly, Rabbi Akiva's view that the Sotah waters help an innocent woman have less painful births or taller/whiter children remains mostly theoretically and not practical. Accordingly, if a married woman would end up being secluded with another man, this would be considered enough circumstantial evidence to allow us to believe one witness, and we would not have to take into account the possibility that she only did this in order to have less painful births or taller/whiter children because a woman would not risk everything she has in marriage for those, less important, gains.

The Nadir Miracle of the Nazir

A man, when he does something wondrous... (Num. 6:2). Ibn Ezra explains that the pledge of the Nazir is considered something "wondrous" because most people in the world are driven after their desires, yet the Nazir willingly abstains. According to R. Meir Arik, in Tal Torah to Nedarim ch. 1, this position was expressed by Shimon Hatzadik to a very special Nazir.

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Rabbi Shalom Moskowitz of London, the Shatzer Rav, explained (as cited by Rabbi Avraham Schorr in *HaLekach VaHaLibuv, Maamarei Leil Shabbos Kodesh V'Yom Tov* vol. 2, pg. 114) that the word “miracle” is an acronym for Sotah and leprosy (נס = נגע וסוטה). Those are the only two *mitzvos* in the Torah which require miraculous Divine intervention in order for them to be applicable.

We can add that both of these miracles come about as the results of sinning. This is because when a person does what he is supposed to be doing and does not sin, then he does not need any miracles because he already knows Hashem. But when a person sins, then he needs a reminder from Above that Hashem does exist and does have the powers over nature. We might also add that the word “miracle” (נס) is related to the word “fleeing” or “running away” (נָס). This is because miracles are only necessary for people who have already “run away” from Hashem and need a reminder to come back. For those who are already “with Hashem” miracles are like preaching to the choir. Alternatively, “miracle” (נס) is related to “flagpole” (נֵס), because just as the flag symbolizes the vigor and spirit of a nation, screaming “Our country is still there”, so does a “miracle” symbolize Hashem’s power in the world and tell those who behold the miracle, “Hashem is still here!”

R. Yehonasan Eyebchutz explains this very idea, in explaining the Midrash which teaches that "Esther is compared to the morning star, just as the morning star signals the end of the night, so does Esther signal the end of open miracles." Until the time of Esther, miracles were more common, now God not longer acts that way with us. The question is that one would assume that night time would have been a time of darkness, a time without miracles, and daytime would be the time with miracles. But it's just the opposite, the times of open miracles was compared to night, and the end of the night was the entrance into non-miracle paradigm. R. Eyebchutz explains that one who needs a miracle, like one who needs a flashlight, must be in the dark. It is evident that God exists and runs the world on a intellectual level. Those who need miracles to understand that are actually profoundly blind. Those who live without miracles are living in the day - in a time of clarity that requires no miracle at all!

In light of the abovementioned Ibn Ezra, we can also suggest that the word “miracle” is an acronym for Sotah and Nazir (נס = נזיר סוטה). This is because the punishment which befalls the Sotah who committed adultery is supernatural (as Ramban notes)

and the fact that a human being would willingly become ascetic and reject his normal desires also takes a miracle (as Ibn Ezra says, it is a “wonder”). One is a miracle preformed by God, and the other is a "miracle" performed by a man.

What’s wrong with wine?

...**Nazir to be abstinent for Hashem (Num 6:2)**. Rashi explains that the passage of the Nazir are juxtaposed to that of the Sotah in order to teach that somebody who saw a Sotah in her downtrodden situation ought to accept upon himself to abstain from wine, because wine brings about adultery. The Talmud (*Brachos* 62a) only says that if somebody sees a Sotah in her downtrodden situation, he ought to accept upon himself to abstain from wine. The Talmud does not say, like Rashi does, that drinking wine leads to adultery. In light of that, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger (*Chochmas Shlomo, Parshas Mishpatim* p. 342) sees suggest a creative alternative interpretation to the Gemara. He explains that seeing the Sotah’s situation inspires one to abstain from wine for a different reason. The problem with wine is not that it leads to adultery, but that it creates the unfortunate situation by which a woman would have to drink the Sotah waters. This is because if her husband drinks wine, then we will become hot-headed enough to warn his wife not to be secluded with a specific man. Without that warning, the whole case of Sotah does not apply.

Guarding us from the Evil Eye

...**and He shall guard you... (Num. 6:25)**. The Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 12:4) says that “and He shall guard you” specifically refers to Hashem guarding us from the Evil Eye (*Ayin HaRa*). The *Bris Shalom* (R. Pinchas ben Filta p. 561) asks: why does the Midrash specifically expound this verse as referring to protection from the Evil Eye? He answers by first posing a contradiction in sources. The Talmud (*Sotah* 38a) says that when the Kohanim bless the nation, they must do so in a loud voice. However, on the other hand, we find that the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar* 766) says in the name of Rabbi Tanchuma that when righteous people bless the Jews, they do not raise their voice; whereas when Bilaam uttered his blessing, he did raise his voice. The Midrash asserts that whoever blesses another in a loud voice is actually cursing them. Accordingly, Bilaam originally wanted to curse the Jewish People, but instead Hashem put blessings in his mouth. He still wanted to mitigate the effects of those blessings, so he uttered them out loud so that people from other nations will hear them and become jealous of the Jewish People, thus imposing upon them an

Evil Eye. From this Midrash, we see that giving a blessing in a loud voice is tantamount to a curse, because it also brings about an Evil Eye, so why did the Kohanim have to bless the nation in a loud voice? The answer is that the Kohanic Blessings themselves include special protection against the Evil Eye. Once that is already included in the blessings, then it was not a problem for the Kohanim do offer their special blessings in a loud voice. Thus, when the Midrash specifically expound the verse in question as referring to protection from the Evil Eye, it meant to resolve this contradiction by explaining that the Kohanim are different from other righteous people who bless the Jews, because the Kohanim's blessings include Hashem offering special protection from the Evil Eye.

Heavenly Favoritism

Hashem shall favor you... (Num. 6:26). The Talmud (*Brachos* 20b) explains why Hashem favors the Jewish People: The Torah requires that when one eats and is satisfied, then he is obligated to bless Hashem, however the Jewish people go beyond the letter of the law, and set extra parameters and said that even if one is not satisfied, as long as he has eaten a certain amount of food as little as an egg's measurement or an olive's measurement, they are already required to recited the Grace after Meals. If the Jewish People are so committed to Hashem that they are more stringent than the law demands, then He will likewise show them favor.

Rabbi Eliyahu Gutmacher (a student of Rabbi Akiva Eiger), in his glosses to the Talmud, further explains this in light of a Midrash Tanchuma (*Parshas Nasso*) that says that if a Jew only has an olive's worth of food, not only does he not complain to Hashem about his meager lot, but he even blesses and thanks Hashem for what he had. For this show of dedication, the Jews deserve His favor.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer in *Teshuvos Chasam Sofer* (*Orach Chaim* 49) explains this passage in the opposite direction: He explains that at times of Divine blessing, a Jew could eat a lot less than an olive's worth of food and be miraculously satisfied with that small morsel. However, even in such times, when a Jew would be satisfied with a small amount of food, he goes the extra mile and makes sure to eat a substantial amount at least an olive's size or an egg's size so that he will be able to make the required blessings after the food without worrying that maybe he is not obligated in said blessing and its recitation would be a violation of the prohibition against taking

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Hashem's name in vain. Because the Jews are so careful about not taking His name in vain, Hashem too is careful in dealing with them and shows them favoritism. Indeed, *Maase Rav* (74) which records many of the Vilna Gaon's personal rulings says that one should optimally not eat something that is only a third the size of an egg and then be in limbo about whether he is obligated to recite an after-blessing, rather he is obligated to eat a full egg's worth so he can make the blessing without any qualms.

Intimacy on Shabbos

On the seventh day, the prince of Children of Efraim... (Num. 7:48). The commentators (see *Ran* to the first chapter of *Taanis*) explain that during the years of famine, when Yosef was in Egypt, he did not engage in intimacy with his wife, in order to show his comradery with his family in the Land of Canaan who were suffering from the famine. For this reason, when the Torah reports on the birth of Yosef's two sons, they were said to be born "before the famine had come". However, his older brother Levi did engage in intimacy with his wife during those years, and for this reason when Yaakov and his family came down to Egypt in middle of the years of famine, Levi's wife gave birth to a daughter—Yocheved—at the border to Egypt. Levi did not refrain from intimacy with his wife because he did not think that Yosef was suffering from the famine because presumed Yosef to be dead or an apostate (see also *Beis Yosef* to *Orach Chaim* 574). Rabbi Moshe Sofer, in *Chasam Sofer al HaTorah* (in Parshas Miketz, p. 209) adds to this that even during the seven years of surplus before the famine, Yosef still refrained from relations with his wife in order to commiserate with suffering of his father who thought that Yosef was dead and spent those years mourning his loss. However, explains Rabbi Sofer, during the years of surplus Yosef did engage in relations with his wife on Shabbos. He finds an allusion to this in the passage which describes the birth of Yosef's two sons as "before the famine had come", for the first letter of those words spells out the word "The Shabbos" (בטרם תבא שנת הרעב = השבת). Because Yosef celebrated Shabbos and engaged in intimacy with his wife on that day, he was able to have two sons during the seven years of plenty. Based on this, Rabbi Sofer offers a new understanding of an indecipherable Midrash. The Midrash says that in the merit of Yosef keeping Shabbos, the tribe of his son Ephraim brought their inaugural sacrifices on Shabbos. Rabbi Sofer explains that what this Midrash means is that in the merit of observing Shabbos and recognize it as a special time of intimacy, Yosef

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PARSHAS NASO

was rewarded with the birth of his son Efraim, whose tribe later brought sacrifices on the seventh day of the inauguration (on Shabbos).

*Much of the material presented in **Oneg!** has been translated by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein from Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's weekly Hebrew 'Aalefcha Chochma' parsha sheet. To sign up to the **Oneg!** weekly email list, or to sponsor a week of **Oneg!** send an email to BKLAshul@gmail.com*