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TOURO TORAH

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ט"ו בחשוון, תשע"ז

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Thanksgiving the 'Avraham 'Avinu Way

By Reena Evans

Following *Sara's* death, *'Avraham* is left with the difficult task of finding a suitable burial site. He approaches the sons of *Ches*, who offer him several locations. Succeeding the initial presentation of sites, a short and curious verse interrupts the narrative of their negotiations: "ויקם אברהם וישתחו לעם הארץ," "*'Avraham* got up and bowed to the people of the land" (*Bereishis* 23:7). The *midrash* learns from here "שמודים על בשורה טובה", that one must give thanks for good tidings (*Bereishis Rabbah* 58:7). The *'Eitz Yosef* explains that *'Avraham* was bowing to express gratitude to God in front of the people of the land, not to the people themselves, as the *passuk* might be interpreted. The *'Eitz Yosef*, a commentary on the *midrash*, writes, "הוא מקום קדוש, זה שכיין שזכה למערת המכפלה, שהוא מקום קדוש, זה 'ודאי נחשב לו כל כך לבשורה טובה והשתחוה והודה לה'". *Avraham* regarded the acquisition of the holy *Me'aras ha-Machpelah* as indeed a good tiding, and, therefore, he prostrated himself and gave thanks to God.

Upon further reflection, the burial of *Sara* seems to be a very strange place to teach the concept of thanksgiving. *'Avraham* had just gone through the trauma of the death of his wife, his life partner, the one who made possible his role as forefather of the Jewish people. In reference to this tragic Biblical episode, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik states, "When *Sara* dies, *'Avraham* lost not only his wife, but he realized that he completed his covenantal role" (*The Speeches of the Rav*, 120-121). In fact, *Sara* had been so vital to *'Avraham's* activities that, after her death, the mantle of Jewish leadership passed to *Yitzchak*, and therefore, as Rabbi Beinisch Ginsburg relates, there is barely any mention of *Avraham's* doings for his last thirty-eight years as a widower. In *Pirkei 'Avos* (9:7), Rabbeinu Yonah lists the burial of *Sara* as one of the ten trials in which *'Avraham* was tested. In addition to losing his *'eishes chayil*, *'Avraham* had to deal with the unsavory locals who extorted from him an exorbitant sum of money for a burial plot. It seems unbecoming that, in the midst of all this stress and emotional grief, *'Avraham* gave thanks.

One of the fundamental concepts of Judaism lies in seeing God's Hand even in the midst of the most tragic and trying times. Applying this principle to the Biblical trauma discussed: specifically during this time of *Sara's* death comes the vital need for *hakaras hatov*, which can literally be defined as "recognizing the good" in every situation. This positive approach demonstrates our faith in God's guiding Hand. It states that we believe that He cares for us and that one day, perhaps not even in this world, we will see that even that which was bitter was, in the long run, sweet.

In her *shiurim* on the principle of *bitachon* (trust in God), Mrs. Dina Schoonmaker draws this concept from the story of the sale of *Yosef*, where the Torah writes, "ארחת ישמעלים...וגמליהם נשאים נכאת וצרי" (*Bereishis* 37:25). On this verse, *Rashi* explains that Ishmaelite caravans generally carried foul smelling tar, but God

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arranged that the caravan approaching the place where the brothers decided to sell *Yosef* was carrying aromatic spices so that *Yosef* should not have to suffer from unpleasant odors on his journey down to Egypt. At first glance, this Divine "coincidence" seems insignificant, when looking at the general picture of the sons of *Ya'akov* selling their own brother as a slave to such an immoral, impure place as Egypt.

This irony underscores the fact that God always has a plan. Nothing is arbitrary. Indeed, *Yosef* was destined to go down to Egypt, but God measures out every iota of suffering, only giving the exact amount that is necessary for the fruition of the Divine plan. Here we see a clear example of the proverbial "silver lining" of every storm cloud, even if this lining is tarnished and crumpled. Some small thing goes right, even if everything else is going horribly wrong.

So, too, regarding the thanksgiving offered for the sale of a piece of land. *Avraham* teaches that, even in the midst of his ¹nal *nissayon* after the tragic death of his beloved wife, he understands that God is taking care of the details. Despite the emotional and financial difficulties of purchasing a plot, *Avraham* expresses *hakaras ha-tov* for the small consolation of securing the holy burial site of *Me'aras ha-Machpelah* for the resting place of *Sara*, his pious life companion.

A few thousand years later, another *Avraham* declared thanks for God's beneficence during a disastrous period. On October 3, 1863, in the thick of the horrible and bloody civil war, *Abraham Lincoln* designated the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving. He writes the following in *Proclamation 106*:

The year that is drawing towards its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict...

Even in times of crisis, *Avraham*, *Yosef*, and *Abraham Lincoln* provide powerful examples of being attentive to the details of God's kindnesses. When a person recognizes that He is in complete control of the circumstances of his life, he gains tremendous *menuchas ha-nefesh*, serenity, and *devekus*, closeness with the Creator. Though we may not necessarily be in real life crises, we still face the emotionally challenging process of having to make important life decisions along with other obligations and responsibilities during our college years. Let us use this powerful tool of *hakaras ha-tov* to see how God gives us the *matok* within the *mar*, forming the bittersweet of life's travails, and come to a greater *simchas ha-chaim* (joy in life) and love of the Ultimate Benefactor.

“ Some small thing goes right, even if every- thing else is going horribly wrong. ”

-Reena Evans

Chizuk For Cheshvan: A Proactive Reflection On Yom Tov

By Este Stollman

In *Parshas Noach* (6:16), God commands *Noach* to create a *tzohar* for the ark. Here, *Rashi* comments that *tzohar* either means a window or a beautiful precious jewel. According to both explanations, the purpose of the *tzohar* was to create a source of light for the contained construct of the vessel that would take *Noach* and his family

through the darkness of the storm. There are many relevant lessons a person can learn from the Torah's telling of the *Mabul* story, as he can apply them to his life specifically during the physically and spiritually dreary month of *Cheshvan*. Before explaining the practical applications of the significance of the *tzohar* in our own lives, I would like to first state two fundamental principles in our *'avodas Hashem*: "*sur me-ra'*," the command to turn away from bad, and "*aseh tov*," the command to do good. In any religious achievement in our lives, we must take note of the importance of fulfilling both dicta. We must separate from the storming impurities of the outside culture to accomplish and be successful in our involvement in holy Torah activities.

“ In the rickety arks we each create for ourselves during this rainy month ... we need a *tzohar* of holy and stable messages to hold onto...”
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We can view through two different lenses the messages the *tzohar* holds for us as a metaphorical source of light during our troubling times of exile. Firstly, we have the need to remove the bad, spiritually disabling elements from our lives, symbolized by the window, Rashi's first definition of the *tzohar*. In his *Shabbos ha-Gadol* speech entitled "The *Korban Pesach* and the Riddle of the Jewish Identity," Rabbi Dr. Moshe Sokol discussed the significance of painting our doorways with blood. Since the door represents the opening into our homes, this command symbolizes the fact that we must sacrifice certain pleasures to make sure that what we allow to enter our homes is only pure and Torah-approved. We must close the proverbial "door" to all the impurities that lie outside our homes. In the episode of David and *Bat-Sheva'*, David views *Bat-Sheva'* through the window and that gesture leads to sin. In this way, the window is represented as a potentially dangerous opening to our homes. The *halachos* regarding obstructing windows, when a house is under construction, also point to how windows can serve as improper openings, through which a *ruach ra'ah*, or impure spirit, can enter one's home.

Following this line of thinking, if we take a deeper look at *Rashi*, he might be telling us to take heed of what we look at and let into our homes, namely that which is encapsulated by the principle of *sur me-ra'*. Once we have fulfilled this command, we can then venture on to doing good deeds, the message of which is embodied by the principle of *'asei tov*. After we have succeeded in removing the impurity from our lives, we are then able to immerse ourselves in the holiness of the Torah, which itself is a treasure of precious jewels. Our Sages write, "*Shiv'im panim la-Torah*," "There are seventy ways to [interpret] the Torah" (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 57:59). I think a very simple, yet beautiful explanation of this statement follows the second explanation of *Rashi*: the Torah is like a diamond that has multiple facets,

radiating light in seventy different directions.

Chevi Garfinkel, a noted lecturer, said that loving every Jew is recognizing the fact that we all come from the same source. We must acknowledge the righteousness of the many paths of Torah that various Jews take, as long as they are in keeping with the Torah's commandments. This piece of wisdom relates to the jewel's representation of *'asei tov* in terms of Torah life. When our Sages say that there are seventy ways to learn the Torah, they are, indeed, pointing to the fact that there are different lifestyles to lead in Judaism, and they are all valid, since they all emanate from the same Source; they are all composed of the same material. All the facets of a jewel are part of one cohesive unit. There are seventy faces of the one luminous diamond that is our Torah, and each shines in its own unique way.

In the rickety arks we each create for ourselves during this rainy month through various coping mechanisms and basic techniques of survival, we need a *tzohar* of holy and stable messages to hold onto to remain dry in the overwhelming and thrashing "mire of the shadowy depths" and "*ma'amakei mayim*"—"the rampant depths" of this period of time (*Psalms* 69:3). The bleak weather of *Cheshvan* not only exposes our vulnerability to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD, for short), but can also cause a spiritual depression. By grasping the messages within *Parshas Noach*, we are promised to remain emotionally and religiously intact through the difficult times that lay ahead of us. The Torah, our multifaceted *tzohar*, can aid us in this task as it is an "*eitz chayim hi la-machazikim bah*"—"a living tree to those who hold onto it." If we grab onto the radiating wisdom of the Torah now, God

promises a life of illumination and joy, enlightening us with only goodness, beauty, and blessings for the coming year.

Torah and Turkey

By Rachel Laury

Regarded as a god by the Aztecs, introduced to Spain after it was discovered by either Columbus or Cortes, nominated as a status symbol for affluent 16th century Europeans, plucked for winter coats by American Indians, desired by Benjamin Franklin to be the national symbol in lieu of the eagle, and able to fly up to 55 miles an hour and run up to 30, the *meleagris gallopavo*, also known as the wild turkey, has a rich and colorful history. It's fast, it's historical, it's comical—but is it kosher?

To paraphrase the eleventh chapter of *Parshas Shemini*: “*Marinate steak, grill salmon, and roast grasshoppers, but don't go near the hyrax, ostrich, or porcupine area of the supermarket.*” The Torah goes into exhaustive detail of what is and isn't kosher, specifying identifiable signs of a kosher animal. A mammal is acceptable as long as it has hooves that are fully split and chews its cud. This, of course, requires the mammal to know what a cud is—I certainly didn't, until I googled it. That's why I'm not kosher.

However, excluded from all of this is an elucidation of the signs by which we can tell that a bird is kosher, as had been done with the mammals and the fish. It just lists the twenty-four different species of non-kosher birds of prey and says that all the rest of the unmentioned birds are kosher. To deduce the division of ranks seems straightforward enough via the process of elimination—for a Talmudic ornithologist, perhaps. But with every two Jews having three opinions, and in the absence of a way to accurately identify each of the listed species nowadays, things aren't quite so clear.

Chazal (*Chullin* 3:6, 59a) help us laypeople by outlining three identifying features of a kosher bird, aside from the rule that it has to be non-predatory: the bird has to have an extraneous toe, a crop, and/or a gizzard that can be peeled by hand. If you know that the dead bird gracing your neighbor's table is a predator, then it is *treif* regardless of whether it has any of the signs or not. You should probably tell him that.

The term “non-predatory,” or *dores*, is also up for debate, however. *Rashi* says that a kosher bird needs to possess all four features, including not being a *dores*. *Rambi* (not the search engine, an eleventh century Rav from Provence) maintains that possessing the three physical characteristics necessarily labels it as non-predatory. The *'Aruch Hashulchan* (*Yoreh Deah* 82:12-13) brings down the *Ramban*, who holds that if a bird has each of the three signs and is not known to be a *dores*, then, rest assured, it is perfectly kosher. However, there is still much confusion on the subject, and thus the *Rama'* (*Yoreh Deah* 82:3), based on a *Rashi* in *Chullin* (62a), rules that one must have a legitimate *mesorah* for a bird to be kosher, but that's all that's needed. Someone way back and wise had to have passed down the tradition that a specific bird species is kosher in order for you to serve it at your Shabbos table. There is no need to check it for the kosher signs.

Now here's the question we've been leading up to, if you've been following the story so far: If a bird needs a *mesorah* to be considered kosher, how could the turkey, a species only introduced to the Jews late in history, have that *mesorah*?

We first need to understand how a *mesorah* works. There are different opinions about how a *mesorah* can be transmitted, but most seem to hold that they require a personal and verbal testimony, and not a written one (*Darkei Teshuvah* 82:34, *'Igros Moshe Yoreh Deah* 1:34). There are also a number of ways to

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“create” a *mesorah*, but they are not so simple.

The *Aruch Hashulchan (Yoreh Deah 82:32)* says that if someone who doesn't have a *mesorah* in his community that a particular bird is kosher travels to another city which has a *menorah* for that bird, he may eat the bird in that city, relying on the *mesorah* there. He adds that, if wanted, all the residents in a particular city that lack a *mesorah* can choose to rely on that of another city which has a *mesorah*.

The 19th century Italian Rabbi Isaac ben Meir *Ha-Kohen* wrote a book entitled *Zivchei Kohen*, in which he included names and diagrams of 74 different birds, each with a valid *mesorah*. Turkeys and chickens were left out of the list.

To clarify, turkeys are *not* such close relatives with chickens. They don't invite each other over for Chanukah parties or wear long gowns to each other's weddings. There is some crossover, but just because chickens, and anything that looks like a chicken, are kosher (*Darkei Teshuvah, Yoreh De'ah 82:24*), this doesn't performe imply that turkeys are kosher as well.

In terms of general acceptance as a dish, the 16th-century European chickens grudgingly realized that the turkeys brought back by the Spanish Conquistadors were taking over their territory. As a matter of fact, turkeys were being served at extravagant state dinners. The chickens absolutely did not know what to do with themselves.

As turkeys gradually became a part of European cookbooks, somewhere along the road Jews began to eat it as well, and the rabbis of the time generally gave them the green light. The signs are all there: the turkey has the crop, the extra toe, and the gizzard that can be peeled. But how could they so blatantly defy the *Rama's* ruling of the absolute need for a *mesorah*?

It is possible that it was accepted as kosher by the Sephardim, who are not under the jurisdiction of the *Rama*, an Ashkenazi *posek*, and it went on to Eastern Europe with a “*mesorah*” attached to it. There is also a suggestion (*Mesorah*, Rabbi Liebes) that the rabbis who permitted it did not hold by the *Rama* and just checked it for the physical signs. One last plausibility is that the *Rama* was born only 46 years after America was discovered, and the people at the time followed the *Rambi*. Today, we follow the *Rama*.

It's likely, but unsubstantiated, that some rejected the *kashrus* of turkeys when it was emerging as a new delicacy. The *Netziv (Meshiv Davar Yoreh Deah:22)* points out that when the turkey entered the scene, its status was questionable. However, because the turkey has been accepted by the sweeping majority of Jews, it cannot be declared non-kosher without truly irrefutable proof. We are told that *HaShem* “would not let all of the Jewish people err and follow an isolated opinion. If a Jewish practice exists it must have a strong basis” (*Halachot Ketanot 1:9*). Likewise, if most of us are eating turkeys, there must be a cogent rationale for it. It is as if there is, indeed, a *mesorah* for turkeys, and no further analysis is necessary (*Tzemach Tzedek Yoreh Deah:60*). The *Shach (Yoreh Deah 82:6)* warns that if the bird is actually found to be a *dores*, we can conclude that the *mesorah* was enacted inaccurately and reject it. We have yet to find someone who can disprove the non-predatory tendencies of the turkey.

In *siman 19* of his *Shut Mei Be'er*, Rabbi Schur contends that the Jews of India, where the turkey may have originated before somehow ending up in America, had a *mesorah* from *Moshe Rabbeinu* that the turkey was kosher, and shows that we can all rely on this tradition. For those who think the turkey actually originated in America, Rabbi Aryeh Lebusch Bolchiver of Russia (*Shem Aryeh, siman 16*) affirms that a bird has been observed for long enough to change its status as a “new” species, i.e. one year, without displaying any characteristics of a *dores*, we can be satisfied that it is not a *dores*.

The acceptance of the turkey as a kosher species is practically global. All

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the major *kashrus* organizations regard it as kosher, and innumerable *gedolim* such as the *Chofetz Chaim*, Rav Moshe Feinstein, and Rabbi Joseph B. Soltovitchik have mentioned its *kashrus* as indisputable.

So...Enjoy your turkey sandwich this Thursday with no qualms!
Happy (Kosher) Thanksgiving!

Based on "Is Turkey Kosher?" by Rabbi Ari Zivotofsky (kashrut.com), "A Short History of the Turkey", by Andrew Gardner (history.org), and "Halachically Speaking: Thanksgiving and Eating Turkey" by Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovitz (theyeshivaworld.com)
We would like to thank Rabbi Chaim Loike, an expert on the *kashrus*, of birds, for reviewing this article prior to publication.

Recognizing our Bonuses

By Penina Abramov

There is a section in the *Talmud* (*Berachos* 7b) that says that no one thanked God since the creation of the world, until Leah thanked God for her fourth son *Yehudah*. This is a very puzzling statement. How could this be true? The *'Avos* and other *'Imahos* were blessed with so many reasons to thank God. What about Adam or *Noach*? One could even ask, why did Leah herself not properly thank God for her first three children? Why were the forefathers and mothers not commended for their appreciation to God? What is it about this thanksgiving instance that sets it apart?

There is an explanation of this idea that Rabbi Zev Leff quotes from the *midrash* (*Bereshis Rabbah* 71:4). He says that *Rav Berachiah* says in the name of *Rav Levi*:

This [concept] can be compared to a Kohen who was given a large amount of terumah by one individual and did not thank him. He was then given a small measure of unconsecrated grain, and he thanked the donor. Said the first individual to the Kohen: "I gave you a large amount, and you did not thank me; he gave you a very small amount and you thanked him. [Why?]" The Kohen replied: "You gave me what rightfully belonged to me, so I saw no reason to thank you. He gave me what belonged to him and upon which I had no claim. Therefore, I thanked him."

The *midrash* is explaining that sometimes we only properly thank someone for something we feel is not naturally ours. It is noted that the *'Imahos* knew that there were going to be 12 tribes of *Yaakov*. Each of the matriarchs thought they would have three sons, so when Leah had a fourth son, she thanked God for the extra gift that was beyond her allotted portion.

In life, we tend to feel grateful to God at times when we get a special bonus that we do not feel we deserve. We only start acknowledging God for the matters that are above and beyond our perceived merits. In Hebrew, we say that someone who is thankful has *hakaras ha-tov*. *Hakarah* means to recognize. An effective way of bringing oneself to a true level of gratitude may be to recognize that everything God gives us is essentially a bonus. In modern-day society, entitlement is a big *yetzer ha-ra'*. Our problem is that we feel that the gifts we have and the circumstances we encounter are naturally ours, and therefore we rarely feel gratitude. On this national holiday of thanksgiving, let us take the time to see the little things that God blessed us with that we may be taking for granted. Once we truly start to realize that nothing in life is a given, then we will be able to truly have the *middah* of *hakaras ha-tov*.

“ *The midrash is explaining that sometimes we only properly thank someone for something we feel is not naturally ours.* ”

-Penina Abramov

~Touro Torah~

Faculty Advisor

Dr. S. Weissman

Staff

Este Stollman

Reena Evans

Contributors

Rachel Laury

Penina Abramov

Want to write for Touro Torah?

Contact

revans@student.touro.edu
or estollma@student.touro.edu.