

Parshat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

Productive Planting

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

Among the *mitzvot* in these *parshiot* is the *mitzvah* of *orlah*. The verses state: "When you come to the land and you shall plant any fruit tree ... for three years [the fruit] shall be forbidden to you ... In the fourth year all its fruit shall be sanctified to laud Hashem, And in the fifth year you may eat the fruit so that it will increase its crop for you – I am Hashem your God."

Rabbi S. R. Hirsch explains that the observance of this *mitzvah* is an affirmation of our devotion and commitment to Hashem. Only after we acknowledge and praise Hashem for His involvement in our labor are we permitted to enjoy the fruit ourselves, and the gratitude we acknowledge in the fourth year must carry over to the fifth and all subsequent years as we enjoy the crops He continues to bless us with.

Our responsibility to praise Hashem does not end with bringing the fruit of the fourth year to Yerushalayim; we must continually praise Him with every blessing we say before eating the fruit, says Rabbi Y. P. Bodner.

Yalkut Lekach Tov explains a connection between planting trees and the verse referring to Torah as, "A living tree for those who hold onto it." Planting trees in *Eretz Yisroel* is not a matter of choice but an obligation, just as learning *Torah* is an obligation. And, just as planting trees requires work and support, so

must we support *Torah* scholars and institutions when we come to the land.

Rabbi Y. Salant sees in this connection an affirmation of the relationship between the financial support Zevulun is enjoined to give Issachar who toils in *Torah*, the tree of life. Like the tithes, *orlah* or the proceeds from its sale must be brought to and eaten in *Yerushalayim*. Here the families bringing the gift would be immersed in an environment of *kedushah*, they would observe the *Sanhedrin* and see the *kohanim* involved in the *Beit Hamikdash* service. They would sometimes leave their sons in *Yerushalayim* to study, with the money from the tithe or *orlah* to support them and to share their bounty with *Kohanim* and *Leviim*. In this way, the families would be immersed in *Torah* study and in support of *Torah* institutions in the land.

The *Torah* compares Man to a tree. Rabbi Munk quoting the Ohr Hachaim explains that until the age of three, a child's mind is fairly closed to spiritual development. In the fourth year, he begins his spiritual awakening with learning the aleph bet and beginning praises and *brachot* to Hashem. In the fifth year, as *Pirkei Avot* teaches us, a child starts learning *Torah*.

The Sichot Hitchazkut explains the custom of upsherin with the verse, "The first shearings you should bring to Me." *Bnei Yisroel* is called *tzon kodshecha*, Your holy sheep, and so we bring to God the first shearings of His sheep,

our children at the age of three, as they begin their spiritual awakening.

Asufat Maarachot notes that when Hashem first brought Adam into *Gan Eden*, he started with *chessed*. Adam was created without the necessity of working for his needs. The trees would provide all his food. Only after the sin was man forced to work for his bread. Altruistic *chessed* had to precede *gevurah* and is the first basis of the world, but after the sin we were taught that we need to practice restraint. Therefore, when we enter the land Hashem has promised us, we begin with the same action Hashem started in creation of the world; we plant trees. Only after planting are we commanded to conquer the land, to bring *gevurah*, power, into play. In the same way, we should begin every new stage of our lives with *chessed*.

The *Maor Vashemesh* further explains the idea of *orlah* as grounded in *chessed*. It is as if Hashem is telling *Bnei Yisroel* not to get so caught up in the physical trappings of the new land that they forget about their brothers. Hashem commanded *Bnei Yisroel* not to use the fruit for the first three years to remind them that the fruit and the land belong to Hashem, that they must practice restraint, and that when they have permission to eat of the fruit, they must bring it to *Yerushalayim* and share it with the *Kohanim* and *Leviim*, and then continue sharing their bounty with others.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The literal meaning of a Bar or Bat Mitzva is the son or daughter of a *mitzva*. This connotes that there comes a point in a person's life when he sees himself as being born for the *mitzvot* he does. There's a premise in Judaism that in a certain sense we give birth to ourselves through our deeds. When a child is born, he's a creature of instinct. A baby doesn't make moral or spiritual choices. He acts on what his body tells him. But when a child reaches the age of three, he is called *hegia ledei chinuch*, a child who is educable. This age is tied to intelligible

speech where a child can talk about yesterday and tomorrow and what he wants and needs. He's acquired some level of abstraction and humanization. Parents are then obligated to teach him *Torah*, the roadmap of life, to differentiate between good and bad, and to raise him according to his way.

Time passes and the child reaches Bar or Bat Mitzva. The Gra explains that when a child is born the animal self is much stronger than the spiritual self. It takes 12 and 13 years until they become more or less equal. At this point they

can understand cause and effect and the consequence of their actions. Bar/Bat Mitzva is the gate towards maturity and becoming a full member of the Jewish people.

In non-Jewish society coming of age parties celebrate freedom. A Bar/Bat Mitzva celebration implies responsibilities. *Mitzva* means commandment which means that there's a commander and that one has to listen to the commands. *Mitzva* also comes from the root word *zavta*, joining together. An immature child is not spiritually aroused yet. All he knows is

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what's tangible. Through doing *mitzvot*, he develops an awareness and a relationship with Hashem.

For a boy, the core *mitzva* at Bar Mitzva is donning *tefillin*. Until this point, he was exempt and not considered mature enough. *Tefillin* requires awareness and consciousness. By custom, the boy practices wearing *tefillin* thirty days beforehand. On the day of his Bar Mitzva, there's a party celebrating the fact that he can now make choices and give birth to himself by using his conscious and spiritual abilities.

In the traditional community, there are often three parties. Party one is for the boy's class. The kids are expected to make little speeches and bless the Bar Mizva boy. Usually the teacher will accompany them to add to the momentous aura of the occasion. Party two is the main celebration which usually takes place in a hall. The highlight is the boy's speech which his parents or Rabbi will help him prepare. If the boy has stage fright, the boys might interrupt with singing which is a great kindness. The third party is usually just a family dinner, a warm welcome to the boy to

the great world of adulthood. Now that he's reached maturity, he's held accountable for his deeds.

Many boys go through a huge transformation after their Bar Mitzva as the feeling of responsibility is very maturing. It's also a time when the boy begins wearing more traditional or *Chassidic* garb depending on his background. Much like a new recruit to the army, a boy at Bar Mitzva develops a new image of himself that will help him grow into his role as a worthy member of the Jewish people.

Shir Shel Yom: Yom Chamishi Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

"Hashem put it as a testimony for Yehosef when he went forth over the land of *Mitzrayim*, a language that I did not know, I will hear. I removed the yoke from his shoulders and stopped his hands from working for others. You called upon me at a time of anguish and I responded. I answered you even when I was hidden and I tested you with the story of *Meriva*."

On a simple level, Chazal explain that Yosef was released from prison on *Rosh Hashana* and was appointed viceroy over Egypt. Pharaoh's advisors weren't happy. They reminded Pharaoh of the law that a leader must be fluent in seventy languages. A miracle happened and an angel came and taught Yosef all the languages. The burden of slavery was taken off him and his hands no longer had to serve others.

On a deeper level, Yosef is another name for the Jewish nation, as it says in the previous chapter, "*Noheg k'tzon Yosef*." Hashem stopped the slavery of the Jews a year before they left Egypt. Rav Hirsh explains that we speak about *Rosh Hashana* as a time of potential. Yosef was imprisoned for years and then when it was destined for him to leave, he became second to the king in no time. So too,

although the Jews may feel entrapped in difficult straits, they must know that there is a way to change this reality via what *Rosh Hashana* signifies.

Rav Hirsh points out that although Yosef was in Egypt surrounded by impurity, he remained the same righteous, worthy, son of Yaakov. He was able to maintain who he was under all circumstances and this is hinted at in the extra heh added to his name. Hashem testified that he remained the same Yosef as before. Although the Jewish people were still in Egypt, Hashem promised to take them out. But the purpose was not to become a free people. There was a testimony that there was something more awaiting them. Before redeeming them, Hashem gave them the first *mitzva* of *kiddush hachodesh*, establishing the Jewish calendar. This indicates that they are different than other nations in that they control nature rather than nature controlling them. *Rosh Chodesh* was not established when the moon was seen but when the *beit din* said *mekudash*. If the witnesses came close to sunset but the *beit din* said *mekudash* after sunset, *Rosh Chodesh* was the next day. Hashem told the Jewish people even before he created them, that He demand more from them than other nations. We are not part of

physical reality. Although we function within it, it's not our essence. Our mission is to connect to Hashem and this gives us capabilities far above other nations. It's a call for us to renew ourselves, to develop and come out of the darkness into the light. At *Har Sinai*, when Hashem said, "*Onochi...*" we knew not just that there is one Hashem but that there's nothing worthwhile besides a relationship with Him. The exile of Egypt is described as a time when the power of speech was in exile. We were in the 49 gates of impurity, steeped in idol worship. The power of prayer and *Torah* was in exile. This is indicated in that Moshe could not speak clearly. He was the leader of the Jews and reflected the times.

We see this pattern later in Jewish history when we were at a level of "Not knowing the language." Hashem waits for us to come to a point of "*Eshma...* I am willing to hear, I recognize I am not where I am supposed to be, my speech is in exile. My clarity of knowing Hashem and internalizing it is not the way it should be." The *shofar* has the power to awaken us. On *Rosh Hashana* we come back to Hashem and say, "I am willing to listen. I regret what I did wrong." In this way we open ourselves up to Hashem's salvation.