

Israel: The Land of Perspective

Yom Haatzmaut 5769

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Transcribed by Robert Shur

Who is a wise person to keep all these things? The one that is mitbonen in Hashem's kindness.

Tehillim 107:43

מי חכם וישמר אלה ויתבוננו חסדי ה':
תהלים קז: מג

Dovid Hamelech describes the wise person as one who can keep the special gifts given to him by Hashem through the perspective of having hitbonenut. Hitbonenut is commonly translated as to view, but actually there are three other words in lashon hakodesh that have a similar meaning – lir'ot (לראות), l'habit (להabit) and l'histacel (להסתכל). What is the difference between these similar terms?

From Tanach we find that lir'ot actually refers specifically to seeing something for the first time, and l'habit means to continue to watch.

See, Hashem, and consider, to whom You have done this! Shall the women eat their fruit, the children that are dandled in the hands? Shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?

Eicha 2:20

ראה ה' והביטה למי עולפת כה אם ת' אכלנה
נשים פרים ע' ללי טפחים אם יתרג במקודש
אדני כהן (נבייא):

איכה ב:כ

L'histacel, on the other hand, refers to looking at the details of something, as we find in Chazal.

Look at three things and you will not fall to sin: know where you came from, where you are going and who you eventually will answer to.

Avot 3:1

עקביא בן מהלאל אומר הסתכל בשולשה דברים וαι
אתה בא לידי עבירה דע מאין אתה ולאן אתה הויל
ולפני מי אתה עתיד ליתן דין וחשבון
אבות ג: א

Hitbonenut is a combination of the two, to look at the details of something while keeping the entire picture in perspective. Dovid Hamelech is saying in Tehillim that the wise one that knows

how to focus on the details without losing perspective of the big picture will be the one that will be able to keep the gifts from Hashem.

The day of the week that lends itself the most to having this perspective is Shabbat. During the rest of the week we need to be focused on the details, to accomplish the tasks that need to get done, as the Torah commands to do melacha during the first six days of the week. However, on Shabbat, we rest, we look back at the rest of the week with a bigger perspective and see the world in a way we can't during the rest of the week.

For this reason, every gift that Hashem gave us was given on either Shabbat or on a day which the Torah refers to as Shabbat, since only with the perspective of Shabbat can we hope to keep those gifts.

For instance, the Gemara Shabbat 88a says that Yitziat Mitzrayim took place on a Thursday, but the Torah refers to it as a Shabbat.

And count for yourselves the day after Shabbat from the day you bring the Omer which is waived, seven complete weeks.

Vayikra 23:15

וְסִפְרַתְמָ לְכֶם מֵאַחֲרַת שַׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הַבִּיאָכֶם אַתָּה עַמְּךָ תִּתְנַפֵּה שֶׁבַע שְׁבָתוֹת תִּמְלִים תִּתְהִיאֵנָה:
וַיְקִרְאָה כָּגֵט

Additionally, the Torah was given on Shabbat.

Everyone agrees the Torah was given to the Jewish people on Shabbat.

Shabbat 86b

ודכווי עולם - בשבת ניתנה תורה לישראל
שבת פו:

The first place that the Jews captured in Israel after crossing the Yarden with Yehoshua was Yericho, and this too happened on Shabbat.

Since Yericho was captured on Shabbat, everything in it was consecrated to Hashem.

Bamidbar Rabba 14

ולפי שהיה יום שבת אותו יום שכבשו את יריחו לכך
החרים את יריחו קדש לה'
במדבר רבה פרשה יד

In our times as well, the first day of the founding of the State of Israel, May 15, 1948 (Iyyar 5), was on a Shabbat. When Hashem gives us a gift, He wants us to have the knowledge and skills to keep it, so when it is given on Shabbat, we are able to have the perspective of Shabbat, of hitbonenut of the big picture, to know what to do with it and treat it properly.

When Hashem created the world, we find that almost every day was finished with a statement of "ki tov" – it is good. However, on the last day of creation, we find a different statement.

And G-d saw everything he had created and behold it was exceedingly good.

Breishit 1:31

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֲתֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאַד
בראשית א:לא

What is the difference between “tov” and “tov me’od”? At first glance, it would seem that while tov is good, tov me’od is very good, similar to the difference between getting an A and a B on a test grade. However, in lashon hakodesh, the two are very different, and the difference is quite deep and significant.

Tov refers to everything that was created during the six days of creation that exists within the natural order of the world that we see and are accustomed to. This order of the world is fixed and cannot change, as Shlomo Hamelech says:

What was will be, what was created will be, for there is nothing new under the sun.

Kohelet 1:9

מה שָׁהִиּוֹה הוּא שָׁהִיּוֹה וְמַה שָׁנֶעֱשָׂה הוּא
שָׁנֶעֱשָׂה וְאֵין כֵּל חֲקָשׁ תַּחַת הַשְׁמָשׁ:
קהלת א:ט

However, me’od is something beyond, something greater. Me’od refers to what is beyond the natural order of the world, that we can’t see with our own eyes. Only Man can be referred to as tov me’od, for only Man has the ability to go beyond this world and reach something greater. The very name of Man, Adam, is about going beyond the natural bounds of this world, because in lashon hakodesh the letters of Adam are the same letters as Me’od.

How does Man get to the point of me’od, of going beyond this world? The passuk itself, when describing man as tov me’od, gives the answer.

And G-d saw everything he had created and behold it was exceedingly good, and was evening and day, the sixth day.

Breishit 1:31

וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֲתָה כֵּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהַגָּה טוֹב
מִאָדָן וְיִהִי עָכֹב וְיִהִי בְּקָר יוֹם הַשְׁשִׁי:
בראשית א:לָא

The sixth day [refers to] everything is in limbo until the sixth day with is the sixth of Sivan, which was prepared for the giving of the Torah.

Rashi ibid.

יום הששי כולל תלויים ועומדים עד יום הששי, והוא
שי בסיוון המוכן למתן תורה:
רש"י שם

Through the acceptance and keeping of the Torah, Man can achieve this status of Tov Me’od.

We find the word me’od in another place in the Torah, when Yehoshua and Kaleb describe the land of Israel to the Jewish people after the negative remarks of the other leaders of Israel.

And they said to the entire Jewish people, the Land that we transversed to see it is exceedingly exceedingly good.

Bamidbar 14:7

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל כָּל עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָמֵן רַהֲרֵץ אֲשֶׁר
עָבְרָנוּ בָּה לְתוֹרָא תֹּהֶה טוֹבָה הַאֲرֵץ מִאָדָן
בָּמִדְבָּר יְהֻזָּה

What Yehoshua and Kaleb were saying is not simply that the Land of Israel is a really great place, but rather that it a place that goes beyond the natural order of this world. It goes beyond the physical order of the world, in that it can hold the entire Jewish people from around the world

within its small borders, and its deserts can bloom in a way that nowhere else on earth can. It also goes beyond the spiritual order of the world, and our connection to Hashem there is like nowhere else on earth.

This year's Yom Haatzmaut celebration of 60 years of the State of Israel, which takes place on a Shabbat of a Shemitta year, carries with it an extra mission and challenge.

When we read the pesukim in the Torah about Maaseh Breishit, the creation of the world, we don't find the letter "samech" used at all. The letter samech is the one letter in lashon hakodesh which is completely closed on all sides.⁶ When Hashem created the world, He created it in a way in which nothing is ever completely closed, and we can always start again and renew ourselves.

There is one other place in the Torah where we don't find the letter samech, and that is the Parshat Bikkurim, the pesukim said when bringing the first fruits to the Beit Hamikdash. Bikurim teaches us the same lesson, that we can always start again from the beginning and we are never stuck to the circumstances that we have chosen for ourselves. Bikurim are supposed to be 1/60 of the fruits in the field, to teach us that we can always break the closed bounds of samech. Even the basket that the bikurim are brought in, which the Torah refers to as a נזב, teaches us this lesson, as the Baal HaTurim explains that נזב has the numerical value of 60, to show that by bringing the bikurim we can break the bounds of the samech.

After 60 years of the State of Israel, we still see great miracles on a daily basis in the growth of Torah in Israel, as well as the success of business and technology in Israel. On the other hand, we know the situation in Israel remains as complicated as ever, and we never really know what will be. Nonetheless, the assessment of Yehoshua and Kalev that the land is Tov Meod still holds true today, that we always have the opportunity to break the natural order of the world in Israel and live a life that is beyond this world, with the ability to constantly renew ourselves and choose our own destiny. To do this, we need to understand the challenge of transitioning from tov to tov me'od, through the Torah. In this year's Yom Haatzmaut, we will hopefully have the skills of hitbonenut to combine the details with the big picture, and to see everything in the proper perspective. B'ezer Hashem, we hope that with this we will be zoche to the Geula Shleima Od B'zo Hashana.

Chag Haatzmaut Sameach.

⁶ Even though the mem sofit is also completely closed, it is simply an extension of the regular mem which is open on one side.