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Naming Opportunities

Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig

Water is quite important for life, but is naming one's water source critical to partaking of that sustenance? Why does our parshah include a detailed catalogue of the names of wells?

Classic commentators, like contemporary readers, question the significance of this description, as well as other apparently unnecessary lists and records. Indeed, this problem leads Ramban to formulate one of the most noted approaches to biblical history, explaining that all of the life events of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs are symbolic of the course that history will follow for their descendants. As such, the Torah could be viewed as a guidebook to Jewish history. Ramban's idea is difficult to apply on a practical level, though; how do I know if an event later in Jewish history truly corresponds with the lives of our ancestor? And how might I act on that information?

In his 19th century biblical commentary, *HaK'tav V'HaKabbalah*, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg takes a different approach. Instead of viewing these events as symbolic of the future, his words allow us to extrapolate lessons meant to enrich our lives. In explaining this passage, he asks two fundamental questions:

1. Why did Avraham bother with names at all?
2. Why did Yitzchak put so much emphasis on returning these names to use after they had been lost?

Rabbi Mecklenburg suggests that naming wells is akin to naming locations where a miracle has

occurred. We find this practice throughout the Torah, and it is often a means of creating a reminder for the miracle. A miracle didn't necessarily occur at each well, but the common theme of drawing attention to the wonders that G-d performs is clearly applicable every time water is drawn.

Teaching people about the truth of G-d and the falsehood of idols was one of Avraham's defining roles. Needless to say, communicating this idea was no small task, as it required swimming against the stream of society in which he lived. In order to ingrain the knowledge of G-d in the hearts and minds of the society in which he lived, Avraham would have to develop an artful strategy. The wells were the perfect opportunity to do just that. He took a seemingly mundane location, that was a fixture of daily life, and superimposed on it a name that directed one's attention to G-d. Instead of being a potential outlet for idolatry, everyone would state, "I am going down to draw water from the *Hashem, G-d of the World Well*." In essence, Avraham formulated a trigger in the minds of people. Now, when people thought of the life-giving waters that they needed for their very survival, they would be triggered to think of G-d.

Rabbi Mecklenburg also invokes the concept of a trigger regarding the mitzvah of mezuzah. When we mount a mezuzah on a doorpost we say a berachah ending with "likbo'a mezuzah". One might translate this as "affixing a parchment". However, Rabbi Mecklenburg is puzzled as to why this should be the wording of the berachah, given that, strictly speaking, the word

"mezuzah" does not truly refer to the parchment mounted on our doorways, but rather to the doorpost itself – which is not being affixed!

To answer this question, Rabbi Mecklenburg reframes the word "mezuzah". Don't take it to mean "doorpost", but rather to mean "movement", as in *lazuz*, "to move". Rabbi Mecklenburg contends that mounting a mezuzah is meant to affix and stabilize all of our movement, all of our actions, within the context of knowledge of G-d. At its core, a mezuzah is a trigger akin to those that Avraham and Yitzchak developed when naming wells.

Like many of the most worthwhile pursuits in life, building and maintaining an awareness of G-d in our everyday lives is quite challenging. One might think that approaching this task head-on would be the most obvious path to take. However, Rabbi Mecklenburg's explanation of Avraham and Yitzchak's decision to name their wells, and the similar concept regarding the mitzvah of mezuzah, suggest an alternative approach. It may be worth asking ourselves, "Do we take full advantage of the naming opportunities in our lives that mirror Avraham's well-naming tactic?"

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Magen Avot

**Rabbi Menachem Ben Shlomo HaMeiri
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About the Author

Rabbi Menachem ben Shlomo HaMeiri (a.k.a. "Meiri") lived in thirteenth century Provence, in the southern provinces of France. He was a great scholar, a halachic authority and a rabbinical leader. While his works are peripherally mentioned by a number of his contemporaries (Riv'van, Or Zarua, Rid, Ra'ah, Shitah Mekubetzet, Nimukei Yosef), he was mostly unknown until manuscripts of his works were discovered in modern times. His magnum opus, *Beit HaBechirah*, is a commentary on Mishnah and Talmud, taking into consideration the opinions of many early authorities as well as Meiri's own halachic opinions. He wrote many more works, including a commentary on Mishnah Avot, *Kiryat Sefer* on laws of writing Torah scrolls and mezuzot, and *Magen Avot*.

The History of Magen Avot

In the late thirteen and early fourteenth century there was tremendous anti-Semitism in the Spanish provinces, leading to many Jews taking refuge elsewhere. The flight included many of the Torah leaders at that time,

including many students of the recently deceased Ramban (Nachmanides). These students, led largely by Rashba (Rabbi Shlomo ibn Aderet), arrived in Provence, where they encountered many practices that differed from their own. They attributed this to a local misunderstanding of Jewish law, and they worked to change the practices and traditions of the community in Provence, to match their own.

Meiri, as a rabbinic leader in Provence, took great offense at what he perceived as interference in community matters. *Magen Avot* is Meiri's response to the challenges posed by the Rashba and his followers. In it, he explains that within the halachic system, as taught and experienced by our sages from the times of the Talmud through (his) present day, two proper halachic authorities may, through similar, grounded reasoning, arrive at divergent opinions. Neither of those opinions is necessarily deficient. He explained that the community in Provence had a tradition of rabbinic authority through which they had arrived at their local customs – a tradition which required no interference. Meiri took it upon himself to defend the opinions of the halachic "fathers" of the community in Provence.

The book

Magen Avot is composed of a lengthy introduction, and 24 articles in which Meiri delves into some of the challenges to the traditions of his community. He analyzes both sides of the various disagreements and, when he feels it necessary and/or appropriate, he pursues a compromise between local tradition and the tradition of the new arrivals.

Topics covered include the blessings said under the wedding canopy, the way in which a shofar is blown on Rosh HaShanah, the timing of the Fast of Esther when Purim falls on Shabbat, the time one must wait between eating chicken and cheese, how maariv is prayed in a community where the days are long, and whether or not we should observe the laws of shemitah nowadays.

Why should I read this book?

Magen Avot offers a unique glimpse into a period of our collective history, aside from exploring the depth and breadth of Meiri's Torah knowledge. The halachic discourses in the book become more than a traditional Torah lesson regarding living a Torah life; they provide a powerful portrayal of the importance of each community, and the traditions that we carry forward.

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613 Mitzvot: #410, 413, 520: Cities of Refuge

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

As the Jews are about to enter Israel, they are taught the details of the *ir miklat* [City of Refuge]. When the Jewish nation resides in their land, the nation as a whole is instructed to designate six cities as refuges for accidental murderers. (Mitzvah 520) Then, the courts are commanded to send accidental murderers to live in these cities, and the murderers themselves are required to remain there. (Mitzvah 410) There is a particular prohibition against accepting a bribe from the murderer, to permit him to live outside of the *ir miklat*. (Mitzvah 413)

Ir miklat is a remarkably plastic mitzvah, serving a range of purposes. *Sefer haChinuch* (410) suggests three purposes:

- Punishment: "Because the guilt of murder is very severe, involving destruction of the world, to the point where the sages said: One who kills intentionally will never be saved from justice, even if he performs every mitzvah... Therefore, it is appropriate that one who kills, even accidentally... should be pained by exile, which is almost as painful as death, as one is separated from his friends and the land of his birth, and he lives out his life among strangers."
- Protection: "This mitzvah also improves the world, as the text clarifies, for [the murderer] will thus be saved from the redeemer of the blood [of the victim], lest he kill him..."
- Sensitivity: "There is another benefit, in that the relatives of the victim will not need to see the murderer before their eyes perpetually, in the place where the evil was done. All of the ways of the Torah are pleasant."

Three of the cities are located on the eastern side of the Jordan River, and were designated by Moshe. These are, going south to north, Betzer, Ramot and Golan. (Devarim 4) Three more are located on the western side of the Jordan River; those are, south to north, Kadesh, Chevron and Shechem. (Yehoshua 20) The cities are supposed to have the same distance between the northern border and the northernmost *ir miklat*, between each *ir miklat* and the next, and between the southernmost *ir miklat* and the southern border. (Devarim 19:3) Through this design, we maximize the opportunity for the accidental murderer to reach an *ir miklat*. Our sages have understood that the measurements involved were precise, so that some have used the known locations of some of these ancient cities to calculate the northern and southern borders of Israel. (See Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Rotzeiach 8:7 and *Kovetz Beit Aharon v'Yisrael* 10:2 (56) pg. 105)

As we noted in discussing the lives of the Levites (Mitzvah 342 and Mitzvah 408), each *ir miklat* is also one of the cities designated for the residence of the Levites. *Sefer haChinuch* (408) suggests that the goal of placing the murderers within the cities of the Levites is that "perhaps the sacred land of the Levites will atone for them." Additionally, it will protect the murderers: "Because the Levites are thoughtful people, versed in the levels of character and honoured wisdom, it is known that they will not reject this murderer who will take refuge there, and they will not harm him."

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Biography
Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac
Chaver
Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Born in 5549 (1789) in Hurodna, Belarus, Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver merited to learn from Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Shklov, a prominent student of the Vilna Gaon ("Gra"), for five years.

Rabbi Yizchak soon became a known scholar, teaching and spreading the teachings of the Gaon. He was so highly identified with the Gaon's teachings, that he became to be called "another mouth" of the Gra. His scholarship extended from halachah to homiletics to kabbalah. He told one of his students, Rabbi Yitzchak Cahana, that he had spent more than thirty years studying the words of the Ari z"l and the Gra. In addition to these two great masters, Rabbi Chaver had an interest in the teachings of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, one of his books was an attempt to combine the ideas of all three. However, Rabbi Chaver always saw the Gra as his main teacher, and many of his writings are, in fact, commentaries on the Gra's teachings.

Rabbi Chaver was engaged in the Jewish world of his time, and defended vigorously the authenticity of the Zoahar and other Jewish mystical writings. One of his books, *Magen VeTzina* [protection and shield], is devoted to this effort.

Rabbi Chaver was a prolific writer in all areas of the Torah, producing more than 14 books. Some of his comments on the Talmud were printed in the Vilna edition of the Talmud, a testimony to the appreciation Rabbi Chaver enjoyed.

Apart from his writing, Rabbi Chaver also served as Rabbi in different cities, including the big Jewish community of Tiktin. He passed away at the age of 64, in the year 5613 (1853). In his will, he asked – "not to mention in the eulogy the descriptive 'genius' or 'great'. I know in myself that I did not reach this measure, not even some of it... only mention mussar [ethical instruction], as this is the end of all man..."

Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver's yahrzeit is this Shabbat, 29 Cheshvan.

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Torah and Translation
The Soul of Yaakov, the Body of Esav
Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver
Leket Peirushei Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik Chaver, Toldot
Translated by Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

"הקל קול יעקב והידיים ידי עשו". זה שנתברך יעקב בקול ועשו בידים — שכלל הבריאה היה בב' דברים, בדיבור ובמעשה.

והכוונה בזה שבכל נברא יש גוף ונפש, והגוף נברא במעשה כמו שכתוב "ויעש אלקים את חית הארץ למינה ואת הבהמה למינה ואת כל רמש האדמה למינהו", שבזה נבראו כל הגופים וכל הכלים שלהם, ובדיבור פיו יתברך נתן בהם נשמה וחיות שיוכלו לפעול פעולתם.

ולכן נתברך יעקב בקול ואמר "הקול קול יעקב", וכפל בדבריו ורמז בזה שהבריאה השייכה לבחינת קול ודיבור, זה נתן ליעקב שהוא הנשמה שבכולם. אבל בחינת הידים נתנו לעשו שאין לו אחיזה רק בגוף לבד ולכן מצד עצמו אין לו חיים.

רק בעוונותינו הרבים כשישראל משליכים דברי תורה לארץ אז ניתן כח הדיבור לעשו והוא הנחש, שבלשונו נושך האדם וממיתו וגורם פגם בכל הנבראים. והוא העומד ומקטר, וגם מפתה אותו... והוא הלשון הרע של הנחש שהוא בהיפוכא דתורה, שכמו שזכות התורה גדול מכל המצות כמו כן להפך עון לשון הרע שקול וגדול יותר מכל העוונות.

וזהו ענין פרישת כפים בעת התפילה... שצריך לכלול הגוף עם הנפש בעת התפילה ולחבר הנשמה עם הגוף, כמו שנאמר "נשא לבנו אל כפים" שהם הדיבור והמעשה ביחד... ולכן כשעשה משה רבינו עליו השלום מלחמה בעמלק כתיב "ויהי ידיו אמונה" וכו', והיה כאשר ירים משה ידו וכו'.

"The voice is Yaakov's voice and the hands are Esav's hands." (Bereishit 27:22) Yaakov was blessed with the voice and Esav with the hands, for the collective Creation consisted of two elements, speech and deed.

The meaning here is that every creature has both body and soul. The body was created by deed, as [Bereishit 1:25] states, "And G-d made the beasts of the earth according to their kind and the cattle according to their kind, and all the creeping things of the ground according to their kind." Through this all of the bodies and their physical means were created. And with His speech, may He be blessed, He gave them soul and life so that they would be able to perform their actions.

And that is why Yaakov was blessed with the voice, and [Yitzchak] said, "The voice is Yaakov's voice," and he doubled [the word "voice"] and hinted that he was giving the creation aspect of voice and speech to Yaakov, who is the soul of them all. But the aspect of hands was given to Esav, who has no grip other than in the body alone, and that is why from his side he has no life.

Only, in our great sins, when Israel throws Torah teachings to the ground, then the power of speech is given to Esav, and he is the snake, who with his tongue bites man and kills him, and damages all of the creatures. And he stands and accuses, and also tempts him... And that is the evil speech of the snake, which stands opposite the Torah, for as the merit of the Torah is above all commandments, so, too, on the opposite extreme, the sin of evil speech is equal to and even greater than all other sins.

And this is the meaning of raising hands during prayer... for one must join body with soul in a time of prayer, and join soul with body, as [Eichah 3:41] states, "Let us lift up our hearts to our hands", for these are speech and deed together... And that is why when Moshe Rabbeinu, may peace be upon him, went to war against Amalek, [Shemot 17:11] states, "His hands were faithful... And it was, when Moshe raised his hand, etc."

This Week in Israeli History: 3 Kislev, 1947
Kadima is Caught, but Aliya succeeds

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

3 Kislev is Tuesday

In the years between 1934 and 1948, Jews escaped Europe and made *aliyah* to then-Palestine in two groups. *Aliyah Aleph* refers to the Jews who arrived within the British quotas. *Aliyah Bet* refers to the Jews who tried to avoid the British authorities and their harsh limits on immigration. In the period after World War II ended, *Aliyah Bet* was aided, sometimes passively and sometimes actively, by American, French and Italian officials, and even by UN personnel running the Displaced Persons camps.

More than 100,000 refugees attempted *Aliyah Bet*; the British caught and imprisoned the majority of them in detention camps in then-Palestine, Cyprus and Mauritius. For remarkable details on these camps, see Professor Ulvi Keser's *Jewish Survivors and Detention Camps in Cyprus After the Second World War*, *Journal of Modern Turkish History Studies* (Spring 2013), at <http://bit.ly/1zweJTY>.

On November 5, 1947, the ship *Kadima* left the Italian island of Palestrina, carrying nearly 800 Jewish refugees.

The passengers were largely from Poland and Hungary. There were more than 100 children on board, as well as 70 refugees from the *Exodus*, which the British had infamously sent back to Germany in July. On the same day, the ship *Aliya* left France, with 182 Jewish refugees on board. The two groups planned to meet at sea and transfer all of the passengers to the *Kadima*, but radio problems prevented this; the two ships sailed to then-Palestine independently.

The British intercepted *Kadima* and brought it to Haifa on November 16, the 3rd of Kislev. There was no resistance, due to the ship's poor condition and due to the number of children on board. The passengers were imprisoned on Cyprus. However, the *Aliya* was successful in evading the British; the ship landed off the coast of Nahariya, and the passengers successfully dispersed into the nearby communities.

When the British Mandate ended, *Kadima* joined the Israeli Merchant Marine.

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Weekly Highlights: November 21 – 28 / 28 Cheshvan – 6 Kislev

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
Friday Nov. 21				
4:15 PM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Parshah and Kugel	BAYT	
Shabbat Nov. 22				
10:15 AM	Yisroel Meir Rosenzweig	Meshech Chochmah	Clanton Park	not this week
After hashkamah	R' David Ely Grundland	Torah Temimah	Shaarei Shomayim	
Before minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Daf Yomi	BAYT	
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah: <i>Broken Idols</i>	BAYT	
6:30 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Parent-Child Learning	Shaarei Shomayim	
Sun. Nov. 23 Rosh Chodesh Kislev				
8:45 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah: <i>The Kosher Switch</i>	BAYT	
9:15 AM	R' Shalom Krell	Kuzari	Zichron Yisroel	With light breakfast
8:30 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Gemara: Mind, Body, Soul	Shaarei Shomayim	In the beit midrash
Tues. Nov. 25				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Book of Iyov (Job)	Shaarei Shomayim	
Wed. Nov. 26				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Jew at War, Week 6 <i>War and Rabbi Kook</i>	Beth Emeth	
8:45 PM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Fighting a Jewish War, Week 5 <i>Collateral Damage</i>	BAYT	
Thu. Nov. 27				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	The Book of Yehoshua: Ai Destroyed	49 Michael Ct. Thornhill	For women
Fri. Nov. 28				
10:30 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Advanced Shemithah: Opening Up the Fields	Yeshivat Or Chaim	

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