



Ephraim Fruchter Jerusalem Chapter Madrich

Optical Illusions

In the cool Spanish spring of 1452, Joseph ibn Shem-Tov, mentor of Don Isaac Abravanel and author of the earliest Jewish treatise on preaching (Ein ha-Qore), delivered a rousing sermon to the reeling Jewish community of Segovia. Through analyzing Rebbe Akiva's shopkeeper metaphor in Pirkei Avot (3:20), ibn Shem-Tov responds to the tendency of comparing the nature of human and divine justice by developing a distinction between them. According to ibn Shem-Tov, divine justice is true since it accounts for all factors and nuances, governing in a fashion unattainable by beings of flesh and blood.

This tendency to conflate what are really two distinct notions is endemic to the human condition, expressing itself in the communal, material, and spiritual realms. *Parshat Beha'alotcha* presents instances of these three spheres of comparison. Firstly, as Rashi (Bemidbar 8:2) notes, the task of lighting the menorah was given to Aharon after he had contrasted his more static role in the dedication of the Mishkan with the dynamic participation of the *nesi'im*. And *masechet Pesachim* (96a) scrutinizes where the obligations of *Pesach Rishon* and *Sheni* converge and diverge. Within the

second category, the Jewish people persist in promoting collective nostalgia for the fleshpots of Egypt, with disastrous results. Finally, even the best are not immune from making incorrect equivalencies. Aharon and Miriam misassess Moshe's spiritual requirements, thinking his were the same as theirs, eventually paying a price.

As much as we try, it's inevitable that we will incorrectly match and equate the infinitely diverse people, ideas, and experiences of the world. But neither was the world created for nor the Torah given to the ministering angels. We will make mistakes, but preserving a perspective which "loves the maybe" (Derech Eretz Zuta 1:11) will ensure a modicum of humility as we attempt to organize our world. Ultimately, what matters is faithfulness to Rava's words, constantly examining ourselves to see whether "fear of the Lord is our treasure" (Shabbat 31a).



Ometz Shmidman Alon Shvut, 9th Grade

Just Give Me a Second

Can't make it to Jerusalem for Pesach? Are you *tamei met* (impure due to contact with a dead body)? What do you do now? Are you destined to be excluded from the rest of Am Yisrael? The carriers of Yosef's bones (Rashi) were faced with this very

problem. They went to Moshe and started complaining that they were excluded from the mitzvah of korban pesach, asking “Why should we be excluded from the rest?” You can almost hear their screaming for justice and political correctness. Why should impurity be a reason for exclusion? This is such a big question that Moshe brings the question to G-d, whose response is immediately in the very next pasuk! Unbelievably fast!

G-d doesn't go back on what He said that whoever is *tamei* can't perform the korban pesach. That would disrespect Him. Instead, He sets another date, a “second pesach” on the 14th of Iyar, whereas if you are *tamei* on the first pesach you can do the korban pesach during this “second pesach.” Granted, you are still being excluded from the main event. But imagine there is a test, and everyone takes it except you. Wouldn't you feel excluded from the group? On the other hand, once you do it, you can get back into the group, so not the worst.

Pesach Sheni is very similar to the case of splitting the Land of Israel according to the fathers, where another group was being excluded from the rest of the shevet. Normally, if a father dies his sons inherit him. Tzofchad, who sinned severely when he gathered wood on Shabbat, died and had only girls but no sons. The girls went to Moshe and asked- Why should our father's legacy die just because he doesn't have sons? He has daughters, that should be enough to deserve land in Eretz Yisrael! Once again, Moshe brought the question to G-d. They got their land and it started a whole other set of questions.

Seeing how important it is to be inclusive, when you are with friends playing something in school, and you see someone just

there on the side, encourage them to come and join, to be a part of the group, of the class. We learn that when someone is excluded, it's such a difficult case that Moshe brought the case to G-d himself! ■

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