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Shabbat ends in London at 5.07 pm

Artscroll p.366 • Hertz p.265 • Soncino p.407

SAYINGS & SAYERS
of the SIDRAH

Onkelos

by Rabbi Samuel Landau, Kingston, Surbiton & District United Synagogue

Chumash: "And the Lord went before them... in a pillar of fire to give them light." (Shemot 13:21)

This week we depart slightly from our ordinary format to paint a portrait of Onkelos. Onkelos was no less than the nephew of Emperor Hadrian and was a Roman nobleman in his own right. He was highly educated and during his studies came across Jewish learning. He was drawn to it like a moth to a flame. He decided to consult with his 'uncle' on business matters, asking for imperial advice. Hadrian suggested that Onkelos should find a product that is generally undervalued, advertise its true value and then reap the rewards on re-sale.

Soon after this conversation, Onkelos departed to Jerusalem. There he converted and immersed himself in Torah study. He became one of its greatest scholars and translated the Torah into Aramaic in a style that gave added explanation to the text. This text (*Targum Onkelos*) is so important that it is printed in many Chumashim, such as the Artscroll Stone edition used in some of our communities, alongside the Hebrew.

Understandably, his uncle was rather irked when he heard that his nephew had joined the Hebrews.

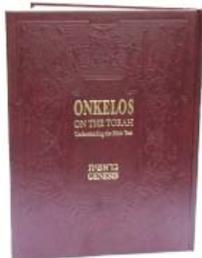
The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 11a) reports that: 'The Caesar sent a legion of troops after Onkelos but he dissuaded them from arresting him them by [citing] scriptural verses and they became

converted to Judaism. Thereupon, Hadrian sent another Roman cohort after him, bidding them not to say anything to him. As they were about to take him away with them, he said to them: 'Let me tell you just an ordinary thing; you know very well what goes on in the Roman Court. The common soldier carries the torch for the officer; the officer carries it for the captain; the captain for the general and the general for the emperor. Tell me, for whom does the emperor carry the torch?'

"The emperor is not obliged to serve anyone," they answered him. "He is the highest authority in the country!"

Onkelos replied: 'In contrast, G-d carries the light before Israel, as the Torah says: "And the Lord went before them... in a pillar of fire to give them light" [the verse from our sidrah quoted above]. Then they converted too!'

Pragmatically, his uncle decided to seek rapprochement. Onkelos travelled to Rome and stood before Caesar who asked why he had chosen this small and persecuted people. Onkelos responded that he was simply following the Emperor's good advice; "You advised me to buy a material for which there are few customers. I travelled throughout the world and I could not find anything that has fewer customers than the Jewish religion. I bought it and I found that I had got a bargain. One day, all nations will appreciate its value."



Paradoxical Thinking

by Rabbi Shalom Kupperman

Etz Chaim Synagogue, Leeds

On the eve of D-Day, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, General Dwight Eisenhower, wrote two letters. One was made public. It read:

"Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force! ...The free men of the world are marching together to victory! I have full confidence in your courage and devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full victory! Good luck! And let us beseech the blessing of Almighty G-d upon this great and noble undertaking."

The second letter was kept in his pocket, just in case. It read:

"Our landings have failed and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based on the best information available. The troops, the air and the Navy did all that bravery could do... any blame or fault... is mine alone."



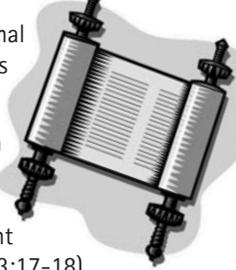
Not only military leaders, but everyone who wants to live their life to its full potential has to know how to maintain an extreme optimism while being prepared to face the worst possible failures. Back in the 18th century, the Chassidic master Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa was already promoting such paradoxical thinking:

"Everyone should have two pockets, each containing a note. One note should read; 'I am but dust and ashes' [Bereshit 18:27] and the other 'the world was created for my sake' [Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5]. From time to time, we must reach into one pocket, or the other. The secret of living comes from knowing when to reach into each."

Keeping unwavering hope for a better future on the one hand and constant readiness to face trouble on the other hand, has always been the trademark of the world's number one experts in survival – the Jews.

A fine example of this national characteristic is found in this week's sidrah:

"It came to pass when Pharaoh let the people go... the children of Israel were armed when they went up out of Egypt". (Shemot 13:17-18)



Rashi (d.1105) comments that "this verse was written to explain where they got weapons for their [future] wars with Amalek, Sichon, Og and Midian". The Children of Israel, leaving Egypt, did not rely on miracles. They prepared themselves for trouble, taking with them a stock of weaponry, which indeed they eventually had to use.

Later, at the Sea of Reeds, we find that the Women of Israel had prepared themselves very differently for the journey in the wilderness:

"Miriam... took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women came out after her with timbrels and with dances" (Shemot 15:20). Rashi comments that "the righteous women were certain that The Almighty would perform miracles for them; therefore, they took timbrels out of Egypt [to help them celebrate those miracles]."

How contradictory are these two attitudes! One is pragmatic, anticipating trouble, whilst the other one confidently and cheerfully anticipates miracles. Yet it was essential for the Israelites to maintain both approaches. How could they survive without the weapons and how could they celebrate without the timbrels?

Not only in the Biblical wilderness, but in all of their wanderings, the Jewish people have survived and thrived because they had both pockets – the one with the optimistic note and the one with the pragmatic note, and they knew when to reach into each pocket.

Shepherds Bush

by Rabbi David Katanka, St. Annes Hebrew Congregation

Exactly 100 years ago, a meeting was held at the home of Mr I. Fineberg to form a new shul and Talmud Torah at Shepherds Bush, at the cost of 6 pence per week per member.

Things progressed steadily, as the original team attracted a worthy following. Step by step, the fledgling kehilla moved up from 61 The Lawn to Park Hall, Providence Place. 11 years on, in February 1924, Stuart Samuel laid the foundation stone. Three months later, the building was opened by Lord Swaythling and was consecrated by Dayan Asher Feldman of London Beth Din.

This new congregation was already affiliated to the Federation of Synagogues, and so arrangements were made for burial rights within that organisation.

Despite the threat of war in the late 1930s, the Executive, together with the newly appointed Minister Rev (later Rabbi) Raphael Feldman, went about tackling the major task of reconstruction. The £2000 raised, added to the £3000 loan of the Federation, ensured the success of the project. The result was a most beautiful shul, a jewel in the crown of London Jewry and a credit to all who worked for its fruition.

The building was consecrated by Dayan H.M.Lazarus, who stepped in for Chief Rabbi Dr J.H.Hertz who was unwell. The new communal hall was called the Hyman Fisher Hall, in recognition of a life dedicated to the shul by Mr Fisher who served on the shul's Executive.

Another member of the Executive, Emanuel Dee, never let the shul down throughout its history. Whenever financial problems arose, he was there to prop things up. The community as a whole was known for its generosity in responding to charitable appeals.

The shul was enriched by the influx of new immigrants arriving during this period, who added virility and colour to the kehilla. The story is told of one of the Chazanim who a few times had come to Shacharit slightly late. One of the regular minyan participants came to the Chazan and asked him if he had an alarm clock. Next morning, a brand new clock was on the Chazan's seat!

Shepherds Bush was certainly a training ground for new ministers. Men of great talent started their careers in this distinguished west London congregation. Amongst them were Chief Rabbi of Johannesburg Louis Rabinowitz, Chief Rabbi of Cape Town I. Abrahams, Rabbi (later Dayan) Moshe Swift and his brother Rabbi I.L. Swift, as well as Rabbi I.L. Abrams. Rabbi Feldman stayed on after handing over the reins, often saying that he

enjoyed being in a smaller community, as numbers sadly dwindled over the years.

My late father Rev M. Katanka served as Chazzan from 1950-55, before moving on to Princes Road Synagogue, Liverpool.

One of the shul's best known traditions was that before *Neilah* on Yom Kippur, and on the last days of Yom Tov, an address was given in Yiddish.

It had been the hope to expand further, as the shul and hall were full to the brim on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and at other times. Circumstances decreed otherwise; after its 50th anniversary, community members started moving away to fresh pastures. A central *bimah* was installed in memory of Rabbi Feldman who had passed on in his prime. The seating area that this took away was not missed. During Pesach 1989, when the congregation could not muster a minyan, it was decided to call it a day.



Shepherds Bush, London

Peace between Jordan and Israel

by Rabbi Steven Dansky, Community Director, Mill Hill United Synagogue

On 10 January 1996, King Hussein of Jordan made his first public appearance in Tel Aviv, and was given a warm welcome. He arrived in Israel to honour the negotiators who had set up the peace talks between Israel and Jordan two years earlier. This peace treaty ended an enmity of 46 years between the two countries. Shimon Peres, then the Prime Minister of Israel, stated at this historic event: "We still face all kinds of challenges. The greatest of them is not to let the galloping prospect of peace pass us by."

The concept of 'peace' (*shalom*) is paramount in Jewish thought. In Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers 1:18, see green siddur p.528) we are told that without peace, the world would cease to exist. Peace, together with truth and judgement, create an environment where the world can sustain itself. Take these away, and a chaotic and unsafe existence ensues.

The concept of peace is not only a physical status. It is a state of mind, and carries with it a deeper ethos. One of the names of G-d is '*Shalom*'. At the end of Kaddish, we say 'G-d (who) makes peace in heaven, may He grant us peace as well'. This is fascinating, as it assumes that G-d needs to make peace even in heaven, where surely no fighting exists!

The Chassidic masters explain that in heaven, there are angels, each with different remits. For example, the angel Gavriel represents the strength and judgement of G-d, and Michael represents His mercy. Their very essence is therefore contradictory to one another and (in theory) they should destroy each other. Yet G-d accepts them both and encourages them to work together to provide judgement to mankind, but to temper that judgement with mercy. On a similar level, the earth itself is created out of contradictory pieces of matter – earth and wind, fire and water. Each essence undermines the other – wind blows away the dust, water douses the fire. Yet G-d creates the world in such a way that each has its place, and every element can exist in harmony.



Shimon Peres

This is a very powerful idea – peace is not about negating one's nature in order to ensure that there is no conflict. Actually, it is a clear understanding that we may not all think in the same way, but that we are willing to accept each other **for our** differences, not despite them. We strive to recognise the value in those who differ from us and recognise that harmony in life, just like music, can only be created with more than one voice.

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