

## Children of Light and Darkness

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### ***Interdisciplinary Parashat HaShavua.***

I remember *Nechama* Leibowitz<sup>1</sup> once telling the class that I attended thirty years ago, that when she first came to Israel in 1935, there weren't enough university positions for the many highly educated Jews relocating from Europe. She noted that this resulted in many of the Israeli high school teachers at the time having truly distinguished educational pedigrees. *Nechama* recalled that on Fridays, during lunch, various staff members in the high school where she taught, would give a *Parashat HaShavua Shiur*, and that she was very impressed by the world-class physicist talking about the physics involved in the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea. She of course was too modest to mention her own credentials in comparative literature which she always "brought to the table," so to speak, when teaching in high school, at teachers' seminars and in the university over the course of her long and distinguished career.

*Bar Ilan* University has continued the tradition of enlisting a wide variety of thoughtful individuals to discuss aspects of *Parashat HaShavua*, and the university has published for many years, a weekly *Parashat haShavua* essay—they are available on line<sup>2</sup>—authored by various faculty members, each exploring an idea relevant to the individual's special interests and training.

### ***An evocative topic of a Parashat HaShavua essay.***

I was brought up short the other day when I noticed that one of these essays published in 1999 by Rabbi Dr. Pinchas Hayman, who was educated at Yeshiva University, held various faculty and administrative posts at *Bar Ilan*, and has for the last several years developed and advocated the *Revadim* program,<sup>3</sup> an educational package for the teaching of *Tora SheB'Al Peh*, was entitled "The Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness".<sup>4</sup> I was familiar with such terminology from what is known as the "War Scroll"<sup>5</sup> of the Dead Sea Scrolls, in which is described a war between the Sons of Light, comprised of the Jewish tribes, and the Sons of Darkness, who were identified as *Edom, Moav, Ammon*, the Amalekites, the Philistines and their allies from *Ashur*, the vast majority of whom play various roles in the accounts in *BaMidbar!* In his essay, Dr. Hayman begins by mentioning how *NeTzIV*, the acronym for R. *Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin*, the great 19<sup>th</sup> century *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Volozhin*, discusses in his introduction to *Sefer BaMidbar*, the evocative idea of "the children of Light and the children of Darkness." Could *NeTzIV* have been aware of some ancient tradition to this effect? But, as I continued to read, I found that *NeTzIV*, and for that matter, Dr. Hayman, paraphrasing the immortal words of Monty Python,<sup>6</sup> were discussing "something completely different."

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<sup>1</sup> **Nechama Leibowitz** (Hebrew: נחמה ליבוביץ; September 3, 1905 – 12 April 1997) was a noted Israeli Bible scholar and commentator who rekindled interest in Bible study... [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nechama\\_Leibowitz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nechama_Leibowitz)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.lookstein.org/articles/revadim.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.biu.ac.il/JH/Parasha/eng/shelach/hay.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/war>

<sup>6</sup> Monty Python (sometimes known as The Pythons) were a British surreal comedy group who created the sketch comedy show *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, that first aired on the BBC on 5 October 1969. Forty-five episodes were made over four series. The Python phenomenon developed from the television series into something larger in scope and impact, spawning touring stage shows, films, numerous albums, several books, and a stage musical. The

### **A Midrashic dichotomy between “Sons of Light” and “Sons of Darkness.”**

In his introduction to *BaMidbar*, NeTzIV references a passage in *Midrash Rabba* whereby the five books of the *Tora* are thought to be alluded to in the description of the Creation of light in *Beraishit*:

*Beraishit Rabba* 3:5

Said R. Simon: The word for “light” (various forms of the term “*Ohr*”) is written five times, corresponding to the five books of the *Tora*:

(*Beraishit* 1:3) “And God Said: ‘Let there be light...’—This corresponds to the book of *Beraishit*, because the Holy One, Blessed Be He, Describes in it how He Created His World.

(Ibid.) “...And there was light.”—This corresponds to the book of *Shemot*, in which is recorded how the Jewish people when from darkness to light.

(Ibid. 4) “And God Saw the light, that it was good...” This corresponds to the book of *VaYikra*, that is filled with multiple *Halachot*.

**(Ibid.) “...and God Divided the light from the darkness.”—This corresponds to the book of *BaMidbar*, which distinguishes between those who left Egypt and those who came to the land of Israel.**

(Ibid. 5) “And God Called the light Day...”—This corresponds to *Mishneh Tora* (*Devarim*) that is filled with multiple *Halachot*.

The reference to *BaMidbar* draws attention to “the turning point” where one generation is replaced by the other, a process that begins in last week’s *Parasha*, *BeHa’alotcha*,<sup>7</sup> and continues throughout the journeys in the desert.

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group's influence on comedy has been compared to The Beatles' influence on music...

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monty\\_Python](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monty_Python)

<sup>7</sup> The previous sections of the *Tora* are separated by the subsequent ones by two verses that are surrounded by “backwards ‘*Nun*’s”:

*Shabbat* 115b-116a

Our Rabbis taught: (*BaMidbar* 10:35-6) “And it came to pass when the ark set forward that *Moshe* said, [etc.]”: for this section the Holy One, Blessed Be He, Provided signs (backwards “*Nun*”s) above and below, to teach that this is not its place.

*BaMidbar* 10-11

**33** And they set forward from the mount of the Lord three days' journey; and the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord went before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting-place for them.

**34** And the Cloud of the Lord was over them by day, when they set forward from the camp.

**35** And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said: 'Rise up, O LORD, and let Thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee.' **36** And when it

rested, he said: 'Return, O LORD, unto the ten thousands of the families of Israel.' **37**

### **But which generation is which?**

The essential question is which term—"Children of Light"; "Children of Darkness"—applies to which of the two generations being compared. Traditional commentators like *MaHarZ"O*<sup>8</sup> and *Yefeh Toar*<sup>9</sup> consider the fact that since the generation of the Exodus dies in the desert, whereas the subsequent generation lives to enter the land of Israel. Since "light" is generally considered something positive, while "dark" is associated with a negative entity or experience, the former are the Children of Darkness and the latter, the Children of Light. But such an interpretation would appear inconsistent with the verse as interpreted by the Midrash:

"God divided the Light (chronologically earlier, therefore the generation of the Exodus) from the Darkness (chronologically later, therefore the generation that entered Israel)."

This is the way *NeTzIV* understands the respective references in the *Midrash*, i.e., that the generation of the Exodus are the children of Light because of the plethora of overt miracles that they witnessed, e.g., the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Sea, while the generation that ultimately enters the land of Israel, who of course heard of those earlier events, but did not experience them directly, are designated

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**1** And the people were as murmurers, speaking evil in the Ears of the Lord; and when the Lord Heard it, His Anger was Kindled; and the Fire of the Lord Burnt among them, and Devoured in the uttermost part of the camp. **2** And the people cried unto Moshe; and Moshe prayed unto the Lord, and the Fire Abated. **3** And the name of that place was called *Taveira*, because the Fire of the Lord Burnt among them.

*Rebbe* said: It is not on that account, but because it ranks as a separate Book (i.e., there are seven books of the *Tora*, with *BaMidbar* being split into three,—the section before the one encircled by "Nun's", the section itself, and the section that follows the section encircled by "Nun's"). With whom does the following dictum of R. *Shmuel b. Nachmani* in R. *Yonatan's* name agree: "(*Mishlei* 9:1) 'She (Wisdom) hath hewn out her seven pillars': this refers to the seven Books of the *Tora*"? With whom? With *Rebbe*. Who is the *Tanna* that disagrees with *Rebbe*? It is R. *Shimon b. Gamaliel*. For it was taught: "**R. Shimon b. Gamaliel said: 'This section is destined to be removed from here and written in its (right place—*BaMidbar* 2). And why is it written here? In order to provide a break between the first (account of) punishment and the second (account of) punishment.** What is the second (account of) punishment? — (Ibid. 11:1 ff.) 'And the people were as murmurers, (etc.). The first (account of) punishment? — (Ibid. 10:33) 'And they moved away from the mount of the Lord,' which R. *Chama* b. R. *Chanina* expounded (as meaning) that they turned away from following the Lord"...



ויראציות שונות לנו"ן הפוכה בכתב סת"ם, הכתב המשמש לכתיבת ספרי תורה.

Although the Talmud contends that the malfeasance of the people who left Egypt which ultimately led to their being relegated to dying in the desert already began towards the end of *BaMidbar* 10, the true sins that were met with fierce Divine Punishment begin with *BaMidbar* 11. Consequently it could be said that, just as *HaShem* Decided to choose the tribe of *Levi* in place of the first-born to serve as His Priests as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf (*Shemot* 13:2; *BaMidbar* 3: 41, 45), so too *HaShem* Chose the next generation to replace the generation of the Exodus as those who would merit actually coming into the land of Israel.

<sup>8</sup> Commentary on *Midrash Rabba* by Rabbi *Zev Wolf* Einhorn of *Horodna*, Poland (d. 1862), printed in the standard editions of the *Midrash* with commentaries.

<sup>9</sup> JAFFE, SAMUEL BEN ISAAC ASHKENAZI (d. late 16<sup>th</sup> century), commentator on the *Midrash*. Jaffe was rabbi of the *Ashkenazi* community of Constantinople. He studied under Joseph *Leib*. When Samuel reached an advanced age, his son Joseph was appointed to succeed him. Jaffe's fame rests upon his comprehensive commentary to the whole of *Midrash Rabba*, which reveals an extensive knowledge of the relevant literature...

[http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0011\\_0\\_09955.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0011_0_09955.html)

the children of Darkness. *NeTzIV* suggests that specifically because they had so much first-hand experience with God's Intervention on their behalves, the generation of the Exodus found themselves profoundly incapable of being able to rely upon themselves to work within the bounds of natural law. Dr. Hayman employs a wonderful turn of phrase that encapsulates the complex challenges of these two generations:

There was darkness among the sons of Light... And there was light among the sons of Darkness.

He suggests that the intensity of "the Divine light of miracles" effectively blinded the sons of Light in terms of being able to trust in their own ability and sense of self-reliance in order to conquer and settle the land without relying exclusively upon Divine Assistance. For this reason, they resisted at every turn to continue on to the land of Israel, until the opportunity was finally Taken away from them following the sin of the spies. The sons of Darkness, on the other hand, so called because they specifically were not overwhelmed by the direct experience of the miracles associated with the Exodus, were able to see and be guided by the inner light<sup>10</sup> cast by the ethical messages of the *Tora*,<sup>11</sup> which made them more well-suited than their immediate predecessors for the tasks of nation-building and community development that lay ahead.

***Approaching the world by looking through the prism of Tora rather than supernatural phenomena.***

*NeTzIV's* formulation, along with Hayman's interpretation, significantly parallels what R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik has written concerning what he refers to as "*Halachic Man*":<sup>12 13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The numerous references to "light" and "sight" call to mind Woody Allen's film, *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (a 1989 existential drama written, directed by and co-starring Woody Allen, alongside Martin Landau, Mia Farrow, Anjelica Huston, Jerry Orbach, Alan Alda, Sam Waterston and Joanna Gleason... [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimes\\_and\\_Misdemeanors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimes_and_Misdemeanors) ).

<sup>11</sup> True to his advocacy of the *Mishna* and *Gemora* as crucial sources for a Jew's education, Dr. Hayman in turn likens the statements in *Chumash* to sharply delineated black and white dictums that are as clear as day, whereas the *Tora SheBAI Peh* focuses upon "the mist and haze of the human world," and can be compared to the murkiness and ill-defined qualities of night and darkness, which will hopefully be enlightened by the macro-ideas that originate in the *Tora SheB'Ktav*.

<sup>12</sup> In contrast to who the *Rav* refers to as "*Homo Religiosis*," a personality strikingly similar to *NeTzIV's* "children of Light."

...*Homo Religiosis* is intrigued by the mystery of existence—the *mysterium tremendum*—and wants to emphasize that mystery. He gazes at that which is obscure without the intent of explaining it and inquires into that which is concealed without the intent of receiving the reward of clear understanding... Cognition, according to the world view of the man of God, consists in the discovery of the wondrous and miraculous quality of the very laws of nature themselves. The mystery of the world is to be encountered precisely in the understanding of the functional relationship in effect between the phenomena of this world. Every clarification of a phenomenon brings in its wake new enigmas. *Homo Religiosis* sees the entire ordered world, the entire creation which is delimited and bound by the law as a cryptic text whose content cannot be deciphered, as a conundrum that the most resourceful of men cannot solve. The riddle of riddles is the very nature of the law itself. In a word, the cognitive act of *Homo Religiosis* is one of concealment and hiding. (pp. 7-8)

<sup>13</sup> *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan, JPS, Philadelphia, 5743.

When *Halachic* man approaches reality, he comes with his *Tora*, given to him from *Sinai*, in hand. He orients himself to the world by means of fixed statutes and firm principles. An entire corpus of precepts and laws guides him along the path leading to existence... (p. 19)

There is no real phenomenon to which *Halachic* man does not possess a fixed relationship from the outset, and a clear, definitive, a priori orientation. He is interested in sociological creations: the state, society, and the relationship of individuals within a communal context. The *Halacha* encompasses laws of business, torts, neighbors, plaintiff and defendant, creditor and debtor, partners, agents, workers, artisans, bailees, etc. Family life—marriage, divorce, *Chalitzta*, *Sota*, conjugal refusal (*Mi'un*), the respective rights, obligations and duties of a husband and a wife—is clarified and elucidated by it. War, the high court, courts and the penalties they impose—all are just a few of the multitude of Halachic subjects. The *Halachist* is involved in psychological problems—for example, sanity and insanity, the possibility or impossibility of a happy advantageous plea is available), and assumptions as to the intention behind a specific act (*Umdena*), the presumption that a particular individual is a liar or a sinner, the discretion of the judges, etc. etc. “The measure thereof is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.” (*Iyov* 11:9) (pp. 22-3.)

Just as *NeTzIV*'s “children of Light” look to approach the world and humanity in a constructive and proactive manner in accordance with the *Tora*'s themes, so Halachic man uses the *Tora* system of *Halacha* as a frame of reference and lens for understanding and improving the environment in which he finds himself.

***An additional aspect of being guided by the Tora/Halacha in order to sanctify the world and live a Godly life.***

At the end of one of his essays on *Parashat Shelach*,<sup>14</sup> R. *Shalom Noach Berezovski*,<sup>15</sup> known as the “*Slonimer Rav*” comments upon how *Mitzvot* such as *Tzitzit* potentially can mitigate against the undo influences of one's “heart” and “eyes”, as suggested in *Bamidbar* 15:39 “And it shall be unto you for fringe *Tzitzit*, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the Commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye go not about after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go astray.”<sup>16</sup> He asserts a dichotomy between “*Ohr Meikif*” (light that surrounds) and “*Ohr Penimi*” (inner light). Verses like *Tehillim* 40:9 “I delight to do Thy Will, O my God; yea, Thy Law is in my inmost parts,” and a statement in *Avot D'Rabbi Natan*, Chapt. 24, “the Words of *Tora* are absorbed into his blood”,

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<sup>14</sup> *Netivot Olam*, vol. 4, *Yeshivat Beit Avraham Slonim, Yerushalayim*, p. 86.

<sup>15</sup> Rabbi *Shalom Noach Berezovsky* (Hebrew: שלום נח ברזובסקי; August 8, 1911 – August 8, 2000) served as *Slonimer Rebbe* from 1981 until his death. He is widely known for his teachings which he published as a series of books entitled *Netivot Sholom*. Rabbi Berezovsky was a prolific writer. Through his writings he was among the most influential of contemporary *Chasidic rebbes*, among *Chasidim* and non-*Chasidim* alike. A leading non-*Chasidic Rosh Yeshiva* has referred to the *Nesivos Sholom* as the “*Mesillat Yesharim* of our times”...

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sholom\\_Noach\\_Berezovsky](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sholom_Noach_Berezovsky)

<sup>16</sup> See my essay regarding this topic “Hearts and Minds...and Eyes” at <https://rayanotyaakov.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/shelach-5775-the-heart-and-the-eyes.pdf>

suggest, in his opinion, the ideal that a person should become the literal embodiment of Tora.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, he writes in *Netivot Olam*, that the blessing that is made on the *Tallit*, “*LeHitatef BaTzitzit*” (to enwrap oneself in *Tzitzit*) as opposed to simply “*LeHitlabesh BaTzitzit*” (to clothe oneself with *Tzitzit*) is in order to assert that the individual should strive to completely envelop himself in *Tora* and *Mitzvot* within, rather than allowing them to remain external to his true essence.

The *Tora* itself and particularly the portion of it that we have incorporated into our standard liturgy in accordance with the *Tora* mandate to recite the *Shema* prayer morning and evening, set the same aim of true internalization:

*Devarim* 4: 29

But from thence ye will seek the Lord thy God; and thou shalt find Him, if thou search after Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.

Ibid. 39

Know this day, and lay it to thy heart, that the Lord, He Is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else.

Ibid. 6:6

And these words, which I Command thee this day, shall be upon thy heart.

Consequently, to actually be guided by the light of *Tora* in order for us to make our way through the “darkness,” it is incumbent upon us not only to study its dictates and approaches for how to live our lives, but also to internalize these ideals to the point where the light of *Tora* is not simply being directed at us, but so that we can redirect its light to ennoble and sanctify ourselves as well as all that we encounter.

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<sup>17</sup> *Makkot* 22b..

*Raba* observed: How dull-witted are those other people who stand up (in deference) to the Scroll of the *Tora* but do not stand up [in deference] to a great personage...