

**Kol**

**קול**

**Mevaseret**

**מבשרת**

A Compilation of  
Insights and Analyses  
of Torah Topics

by the students of  
**MICHLELET MEVASERET YERUSHALAYIM**

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

כי נפלתי קמתי כי אשב בחשך ה' אור לי.

For though I fell, I will rise; though I sit in the darkness,  
Hashem is a light unto me. (Michah 7:8)

Stepping off the airplane in the beginning of September, we were prepared for the exciting experiences our year in Israel would have to offer. Little did we know how much would be in store, on a personal, national, and international level. Everyone's plans have been derailed. Even now, as we write this letter together, there are thousands of miles and a vast time difference between us, when only a short time ago we were all sitting in the same room. However, if we have learned one thing from this entire experience, it is that nothing in life is a given; nothing is set in stone; nothing is constant – except for Hashem and His Torah.

This edition of the Kol Mevasseret represents the dedication and resilience of a student body which didn't allow the chaos of a worldwide pandemic to suppress their Torah learning. The publication of this year's journal despite the challenge of COVID-19 demonstrates that nothing can silence the Kol Mevasseret – the voice of our Torah.

We recognize that we are privileged to have been continually provided with opportunities for growth and learning amidst all the upheaval. Despite all the positivity, we acknowledge that there has also been so much pain and tragedy this year – in the world at large as well as for MMY. We thus dedicate this year's Kol Mevasseret to all COVID-19 victims, and specifically to Mr. David Steinmetz z"l, father-in-law of our respected and esteemed Rosh Beit Midrash, Rabbi Lerner.

Unfortunately, the MMY family has experienced more than our fair share of pain this year, with the sudden and untimely loss of Shmuel Berman z"l, son of our beloved Mechanechet, Mrs. Berman. We therefore also dedicate the Kol Mevasseret to a vibrant little boy who brought so much simcha and light to the MMY environment.

It is our hope that the continuous Torah learning of the MMY students, and the valuable contributions that each student continues to offer, should serve as an *aliyat neshamah* for Mr. Steinmetz, for Shmuel, and for all those who have fallen victim to tragic circumstances.

To our fellow students: Look at what we have accomplished in a time during which it would have been so easy to give up, to lose motivation, and no one would have blamed us. In a time where everything around us seems to have fallen, we have in fact risen higher. Times may seem dark, but look at the light we have brought to the world – **כי נר מצוה ותורה אור** – Let our accomplishments inspire us to continue to cling to Torah, no matter where in life we find ourselves. We had a vision of embarking on “our year” – our “Israel year,” but it has been made clear from this entire experience that it is our responsibility to ensure that each and every year is “our year,” no matter where we are.

Sincerely,

The Kol Mevaseret Editors 5780



# INTRODUCTION

הנה ימים באים נאם ה' אלקים והשלחתי רעב בארץ לא רעב ללחם  
ולא צמא למים כי אם לשמוע את דברי ה' (עמוס ח:יא)

When I was growing up, this particular pasuk was popularized through a song composed by Abie Rotenberg (D'VEYKUS 1). It was the theme song for National NCSY and a special English chorus was written for the NCSY teshuvah movement. "To keep the flame alive through obstacles we strive, this is the essence of NCSY." In fact, the "flame" is still the NCSY logo.

I was very moved by that song as I navigated the multiple obstacles in my childhood and adolescent years. What a beautiful idea! The things we should be searching for – like a hungry or thirsty person yearns for food, water and his most basic physical needs – is the holy Torah that is equally necessary for our spiritual existence.

Now that I am older and a bit wiser and trained to look up pesukim, I realize that the pasuk we were singing does not seem to be a positive message! The prophecy of Amos, in its Bayit Rishon context, is that there will be a famine for Torah.... And we will search and search, from sea to sea and from North to East and they will not find (8:12). How terrible! Can I continue to sing this song that is in fact not beautiful?

Although it is not uncommon that composers take words from Tanach out of context and use them for their own uplifting message, perhaps there is a way to understand this *nevuah* within its context so as to salvage the message to be something positive.

Some explain that the famine for Torah is in and of itself a positive prophecy. The negative element appears only in the pasuk that follows, when we are told **וְלֹא יִמְצְאוּ**, and they won't find. The "curse" is only in that particular point in history. The actual search itself, which is the pasuk of the song (8:11) is to be embraced. In order to get have more context, it would be helpful to continue

reading into the middle of the next and final perek of Amos where the nevuah ultimately concludes (9:8-15):

כי לא השמיד אשמיד את בית יעקב נאם ה' ... ביום ההוא אקים את  
סכת דוד הנפלת ... ושבתי את שבות עמי ישראל ... ונטעתים על  
אדמתם ולא ינתשו עוד מעל אדמתם אשר נתתי להם אמר ה' אלוֹקֵיךְ.

Thus, even if the pasuk from the song, in its context, is negative, the end result of that nevuah is positive!

Rav Yitzchak Arama in his Akeidat Yitzchak explains that in the nevuah of Amos there was in fact a famine with regard to Torah, but no one was actually searching for *dvar Hashem*! The minute the Jewish people would actually be thirsty and search out Torah, certainly Hashem would open up his warehouse for us and *geulah* would come.

This comment reminds me of the story told by Rav Soloveitchik. A child is playing hide and seek and no one finds him. The child cries and cries as he is left alone in his hiding place. The child's parent tries to calm down the child and explains that the child won the game as no one found him! The child however replies, "But no one was even looking for me ..." How tragic! Hashem is distraught when we do not search for Him.



MMY 5780 has been a memorable year. The high of Purim was so incredibly palpable and then COVID-19 hit, and it all seemed to come crashing down.

But in retrospect, it is clear that that was far from the truth. With the dedication of the many girls who remained on campus as well as of those who continued their studies remotely, MMY 5780 managed to still have an amazing year of Torah learning. There was a tremendous thirst for Torah learning and the digital platforms provided seemingly endless opportunities that previously had not been tapped. Despite much of the imagery of the eighth perek of Amos repeating itself – כלֹוֹב קִיץ ... וְהִפְכִי חֵגֵיכֶם לְאֵבֶל – a jail-like existence in the summer *zman* and our *chagim* period having so much tragedy – nonetheless ... יִמְצְאוּ. Our talmidot found lots of spiritual growth

opportunities by continuing their regular schedule of Torah learning and connections to the rabbanim and teachers, even if it had to be done from a distance. *Divrei Hashem* are alive and well.

This edition of Kol Mevaseret is therefore extremely precious. It represents the Torah learning that took place within the walls of MMY as well as in “MMY Without Walls”. It represents the dedication of those who continued their learning, and their teaching, despite many of them losing physical access to a beit midrash and the face-to-face (without a mask) guidance of their faculty. We are so inspired by them all and we are honored to share the fruits of their labor with the Torah-searching public.

In the zechut of MMY 5780, הרחמן הוא יקים לנו את סוכת דויד הנופלת,

Rabbi David Katz



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תנ"ך

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## **A Two-Way Street:**

### **A Message of Shir HaShirim**

According to R' Akiva (Mishna Yadayim 3:5), Shir HaShirim is the holiest book in all of Ketuvim. The obvious question is why? It seems strange to include a love story as part of Tanach. There must be a deeper message within the Song that made its canonization necessary.

According to Rashi and the Ibn Ezra (Shir HaShirim 1:1), the Song is to be understood as a metaphor for Bnei Yisrael's relationship with Hashem. This, however, only furthers the question: Why is a romantic connection an appropriate way to illustrate Bnei Yisrael's relationship with Hashem? The answer lies within the very nature of human relationships.

I heard the following idea from my uncle, Rabbi Yitzchak Berger. The intensity of a romantic relationship is often indescribable. Similarly, Am Yisrael's relationship with Hashem is nearly impossible to articulate because it is so deep and complex that it extends into another realm entirely. A simple description will not sufficiently capture the depths of this relationship. That is why Shlomo Hamelech wrote Shir HaShirim.

As a poem, Shir HaShirim uses poetic devices, including parallelism and imagery. The particular usage of these devices are of great significance, and reveal a hidden message from the text.

Parallelism is defined as the use of successive verbal constructions in poetry or prose which correspond in grammatical structure, sound, meter, meaning, etc. In simpler terms, parallelism is when two parts of a poem are structured in a way where similar rhythms can be detected, and often use similar words.

In Tehillim, there are examples of two common types of parallelism. One is synonymous parallelism, where the same thought is repeated twice in different but synonymous words. For example, in

the pasuk (18:5), אפפוני חבלי מות ונחלי בליעל יבעתוני, the same idea of death, fear, and danger is repeated in both sections.

Another common type of parallelism is contrasting parallelism, “where the two lines balance one another or contrast a thought. For example, in the pasuk (18:27) עם נבר תתברר ועם עקש תתפתל (18:27) one section expresses how Hashem deals with the pure, and the other section describes how He deals with the impure.

In Shir HaShirim (1:2), however, we find an altogether unique type of parallelism.<sup>1</sup> ישקני מנשיקות פיהו כי טובים דרך מיין. The two parts are neither the same nor different from each other; rather, the second section offers an explanation for the first. There is a desire to be kissed by the man, and then there is the explanation for that desire – for your affection is better than the taste of wine.

The second significant poetic device is imagery, defined as, “visually descriptive or figurative language, especially in a literary work”. Iyov uses a rare form of imagery called “innovative imagery,” which is imagery that is not straightforward, but rather more creative, with a less obvious message.<sup>2</sup> For example, in the pasuk (Iyov 19:21) לא תשבועו קל ומבשרי כמו קל – “Why do you pursue me like G-d, and from my flesh you are not sated,” the word “sated,” a perfectly ordinary word, is used in an unusual context, producing an image of cannibalism in describing the perverted relationship between the friends and Iyov.

The imagery in Shir HaShirim is even more innovative than the imagery found in Iyov.

קול דודי הנה זה בא מדלג על ההרים מקפץ על הגבעות: דומה דודי  
לצבי או לעפר האילים הנה זה עומד אחר כתלנו משגיה מן החלונות  
מציץ מן החרכים:

Hark! My beloved! There he comes, leaping over mountains, bounding over hills. My beloved is like a gazelle or like a young stag. There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the window, peering through the lattice. (2:8-9)

<sup>1</sup> See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry – The Garden of Metaphor*.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*



In the first pasuk quoted here, the woman describes the man running toward her. In the next pasuk, she compares him to a gazelle or a stag, and then describes a “he” looking through the latticework. The beauty is in the ambiguity.<sup>3</sup> It is easy to picture a stag having come down from the hills, peering in through the lattice; it is just as easy to see the eager human, running towards his beloved. Is the “he” referring to the man or the stag? The man is undoubtedly the one peeking through the latticework, but the language is ambiguous so that the mind is unsure of which one to picture.

As seen above, the complex parallelism and imagery used in Shir HaShirim leads to confusion, and must be examined closely in order to figure out the underlying message. That feeling of confusion, the slight frustration at not immediately knowing what the text means, and the satisfaction of figuring it out, is exactly what Shlomo Hamelech intended for his readers to feel.

It seems that a romantic relationship is confusing, even frustrating, at times, but fulfilling. So too, Bnei Yisrael’s relationship with Hashem is confusing, frustrating, and fulfilling. There are times when there’s no way to understand His choices for us, times when we feel frustrated, and times when the relationship feels comfortable. The depth and extent of these feelings in this context cannot be described using typical poetic devices, so Shlomo Hamelech uses unique versions in order that his audience *feels* the emotions he wants to convey.

Rabbi Berger made another point that is incredibly meaningful. A successful relationship requires effort from both parties. In Shir HaShirim, it is clear that when either the man or the woman does not put in effort, there is distance between them:

אני ישנה ולבי ער קול | דודי דופק פתחי לי אחתי רעיתי יונתי תמתי  
שראשי נמלא טל קצוצתי רסיסי לילה: פשטתי את כתנתי איככה

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<sup>3</sup> ibid

אלבשנה רחצתי את רגלי איככה אטנפם: דודי שלח ידו מן החר ומעי  
המו עליו: קמתי אני לפתח לדודי וידי נטפו מור ואצבעתי מור עבר  
על כפות המנעול: פתחתי אני לדודי ודודי חמק עבר נפשי יצאה  
בדברו בקשתיהו ולא מצאתיהו קראתיו ולא ענני:

I was asleep, but my heart was wakeful. Hark, my beloved knocks! 'Let me in, my own, my darling, my faultless dove! For my head is drenched with dew, my locks with the damp of night.' I had taken off my robe – was I to don it again? I had bathed my feet – was I to soil them again? My beloved took his hand off the latch, and my heart was stirred for him. I rose to let in my beloved; my hands dripped myrrh – my fingers, flowing myrrh – upon the handles of the bolt. I opened the door for my beloved, But my beloved had turned and gone. I was faint because of what he said. I sought, but found him not; I called, but he did not answer. (5:2-6)

In this text the man puts in effort, but the woman does not. This causes him to lose hope and leave, leading to distance and making it much harder for the woman to reconnect to him. Yet, there is something incredibly comforting here about Am Yisrael's relationship with Hashem. Yes, there has to be a constant effort to connect to Him. But Hashem also puts in effort. Whether it is through miracles, big and small, or simply through creating opportunities for His people to connect to Him, Hashem puts in effort.

In his essay "Kol Dodi Dofek", Rav Soloveitchik discusses Hashem's six "knocks," referring to six times that Hashem created opportunities for Bnei Yisrael to connect with Him with the establishment of the State of Israel. It is evident that Hashem genuinely wants a relationship with His people, and if they should choose not to reciprocate that effort, the distance will increase and reconnection will be more difficult.

We see from the complex language in Shir Hashirim that the comparison of the relationship with Hashem to a romantic relationship leads to clarity about the depth of that connection, as well as conveying a message that Hashem does indeed reach out for a connection. It indicates that the relationship with Hashem is

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two-sided, with each one putting in effort to stay connected. Therefore, not only does Shir HaShirim belong in Tanach, but it is arguably the most important canonized book, or as R' Akiva says, the *kodesh kodashim*, the Holy of Holies.



# **Self, Service, and Servitude:**

## **Servant Leadership Throughout Tanach**

Servant leadership, a philosophical phrase coined by Robert K. Greenleaf, describes a leader whose main goal is to serve others and whose main focus is placed on the needs of others, thereby making him a more successful leader. Perhaps Greenleaf may have been the first person to put a fancy label to such an idea, but the fundamental roots of this principle came long before him. The phenomenon of servant leadership has existed almost since the beginning of time, and its many manifestations throughout Tanach, specifically within the lives of Yosef HaTzaddik, Shlomo HaMelech, Gideon and Yiftach HaGiladi, can serve as a blueprint for successful leadership in the modern world as well.

### **Yosef HaTzaddik**

Yosef HaTzaddik stood out from the start. His father knew it. His brothers knew it, resented him for it, and even sold him because of it. Potifar, Eishet Potifar, and Paroh all recognized it. What made Yosef so special? Ultimately, there were a plethora of characteristics that contributed to Yosef's notable character. Perhaps one specific quality was his extraordinary ability to truly hear and cater to the needs of others. It was this skill that allowed Yosef to develop into the leader he became.

Some time after he arrives in Egypt, Yosef finds himself in prison, only to be released years later when Paroh has a bad dream and the cupbearer is suddenly reminded of Yosef's existence. Paroh already asked all the magicians and sages in Egypt to interpret his dream, but their efforts proved to be futile. Yosef, however, immediately succeeds in providing Paroh with a satisfying explanation for his dream. When examining the pesukim, it becomes clear that in addition to his *ruach hakodesh*, Yosef has something which the rest

of Paroh's advisors lack. He has the ability to completely remove himself from the picture so that he can hear the needs of Paroh and fully focus on them, and that is why he succeeds. The pasuk (Bereishit 41:8) states:

וַיְהִי בִבְקָר וּתְפֻעָם רוּחוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּקְרָא אֶת כָּל חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם וְאֵת כַּחֲמֵיהֶם וַיְסַפֵּר פִּרְעֹה לָהֶם אֶת חֲלֹמוֹ וְאֵין פֹּתֵר אוֹתָם לַפִּרְעֹה.

This pasuk has a minor grammatical discrepancy that expresses a major contextual insight. Paroh asks for his dream, singular, to be interpreted. However, when attempting to present him with a solution, his advisors reference *them*, plural, implying that Paroh had experienced more than one dream.

Yosef HaTzaddik comes along, and finally, Paroh's words are validated. Yosef HaTzaddik specifically points out that he has heard what Paroh is expressing. He exclaims (41:25):

חֲלֹם פִּרְעֹה אֶחָד הוּא אֶת אֲשֶׁר הָאֱלֹקִים עָשָׂה הַגִּיד לַפִּרְעֹה.

Yosef acknowledges what the magicians and sages fail to understand, and that is what enables him to ultimately succeed in correctly interpreting the dream. Paroh's advisors hear what they want to hear. They try to help Paroh in the way that makes most sense to them. They hear two very different accounts, one about cows and one about wheat, and they reconcile that by deciding that Paroh has experienced multiple visions, despite the fact that this is not what Paroh is expressing to them. Yosef, on the other hand, takes himself out of the picture and works to solve the dream within the framework in which Paroh portrays it. That is the essence of Yosef HaTzaddik – the ability to step aside and fully devote himself to the needs of others.

Moreover, Yosef understands that it is his job to serve others – specifically, his nation. This is the reason he does not bear a grudge against his brothers for selling him. Upon revealing himself to them he urges (45:5):

וְעַתָּה אֵל תַּעֲצְבוּ וְאֵל יַחַר בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי מִכְרַתְּם אֹתִי הִנֵּה כִּי לְמַחִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֱלֹקִים לִפְנֵיכֶם.

Yosef is able to dismiss the atrocious act that his brothers committed against him because he realizes that it is not all about him. He had to experience the plight of being sold in order to attain an authoritative position in Egypt, which is what enabled him to come to the aid of the Jewish people in a time of crisis. He understands that he is part of a broader plan.

Yaakov, as well, acknowledges this attribute of Yosef. In his bra-chot to the shevatim at the end of his life, he praises Yosef (49:24):

ותשב באיתן קשתו ויפוז זרעי ידיו מידי אביר יעקב משם רעה אבן ישראל.

Yaakov hints to the tremendous suffering Yosef underwent, but emphasizes that Yosef did not let this discourage him. He knew that G-d's hands were at work in orchestrating a master plan, and "from there he sustained the rock of Israel." The trauma that Yosef underwent does not matter because it is what allowed him to serve his nation. Throughout his life, Yosef is able to take a step back and realize that he serves a greater purpose – to serve his people, and this is what renders him such a great leader.

## Shlomo HaMelech

Similarly to Yosef HaTzaddik, Shlomo HaMelech possessed a skill for listening and had an extraordinary level of intuition. Throughout his rulership, he focuses solely on the people whom he is serving, but perhaps his extreme unselfish regard for others contributes to his eventual downfall.

When Shlomo first becomes king, Hashem comes to him in a dream and asks him what he would like. He requests the following (Melachim I 3:9):

ונתת לעבדך לב שמע לשפט את עמך להבין בין טוב לרע כי מי יוכל לשפט את עמך הכבד הזה.

Already in his initial appeal regarding his leadership, Shlomo is solely focused on how he can best and most efficiently serve the nation. Therefore, he requests a *lev shomea*, the ability to truly hear and understand the needs of his people, in order that he can do

what is right for them. Shlomo has the opportunity to request anything to satisfy his own personal desires, be it wealth, fame, or longevity – but he directs his request towards the benefit of the people, a major insight into his character.

The first instance in which Shlomo HaMelech can be seen executing his intuition comes shortly after this exchange with G-d. Two women approach Shlomo with a baby, and each claims to be the mother of the child. One woman explains that in response to the death of her baby, the other woman stole her own baby, as the two women were living in the same house. In a stroke of absolute wisdom, Shlomo HaMelech makes the bold suggestion that the baby be cut in half, which would automatically reveal the identity of the true mother based on her maternal instinct. Similar to Yosef HaTzaddik, his wisdom lay in his *לב שומע* – his ability to truly listen. The pasuk (3:26) describes the women's reactions to Shlomo's solution:

ותאמר האשה אשר בנה החי אל המלך כי נכמרו רחמיה על בנה  
ותאמר בי אדני תנו לה את הילוד החי והמת אל תמיתהו וזאת אמרת  
גם לי גם לך לא יהיה גזרו.

Shlomo is able to deduce who the legitimate mother is by dismissing any personal reasoning and instead placing himself in the emotional mindset of the woman he is trying to help. He recognizes the natural need that a mother has for the security of her child, and he utilizes that understanding to make the right decision in his judgement.

Not only is Shlomo HaMelech capable of truly hearing the needs of his people, but he also places their collective needs before his own. Shlomo HaMelech takes on two significant building projects in his lifetime, one right after the other: The Beit HaMikdash and his own palace. However, in examining the juxtaposition in the pesukim describing these two buildings, it becomes clear that he puts more energy and alacrity into the Beit HaMikdash – the Temple that belongs to the entire nation – than into his own palace.

This can be inferred from the fact that in regards to the Beit Ha-Mikdash, *ויבנהו שבע שנים* (6:38), as opposed to his own home,



regarding which the pasuk states: ואת ביתו בנה שלמה שלש עשרה שנה: (7:1). ויכל את כל ביתו

Both the fact that the building of the Beit HaMikdash precedes that of Shlomo's home, as well as the fact that Shlomo works more quickly to build the Beit HaMikdash, testify to Shlomo's dedication to the needs of his nation, rather than his own personal needs.

Shlomo HaMelech's wisdom and character is so notable that people come from all over the world to witness it. One such visitor is the Queen of Sheba. She recognizes Shlomo's tremendous servant leadership and comments (10:9):

יהי ה' אלקיך ברוך אשר חפץ בך לתתך על כסא ישראל באהבת ה' את ישראל לעלם וישימך למלך לעשות משפט וצדקה.

The Queen of Sheba understands that Shlomo's ascension to the throne was for the purpose of serving his people, the Jewish people. Her choice of words even parallels those of Shlomo's request. G-d appoints him as king for the benefit of the people, request. G-d appoints him as king for the benefit of the people, לעשות משפט וצדקה, and Shlomo successfully actualizes this purpose throughout his kingship.

However, Shlomo's selfless tendencies also prove to be his greatest weakness. As a consequence of his efforts to cater to the needs of every single person, he ends up sacrificing his own principles. Shlomo HaMelech has many wives, each of whom practices a different religion, and worships a different god. Shlomo caters to their religious desires, allowing them to build altars to their gods (11:7-8):

אז יבנה שלמה במה לכמוש שקץ מואב בהר אשר על פני ירושלים ולמלך שקץ בני עמון וכן עשה לכל נשיו הנכריות מקטירות ומזבחות לאלהיהן.

Shlomo devotes himself to pleasing his wives and loses sight of where he should really be directing his selfless energy – Hashem. As a result of his actions (11:19):

ויתאנף ה' בשלמה כי נטה לבבו מעם ה' אלקי ישראל הנראה אליו פעמים.

Shlomo serves as a paradigm of the consequences that ensue when a lack of balance exists within one's life, be it within his

character or his actions. Shlomo possesses every trait necessary to excel in the area of servant leadership, but perhaps takes his selfless qualities too far. In focusing so much on how he can benefit others, Shlomo fails to recognize the overarching purpose of his role in the first place – לשפוט את עמך להבין בין טוב לרע – to follow G-d's will. In his service to others, Shlomo loses himself, and ultimately his connection to G-d as well.

## Gideon vs. Yiftach

Gideon and Yiftach are two shoftim living in different time periods. The benefit in stepping beyond one's self becomes evident when comparing their interactions with the Jewish people.

When Gideon is singled out by the angel to become the next leader, he already displays an immensely unselfish concern for the wellbeing of the Jewish nation. As soon as he is confronted by the *shechina*, he seizes the opportunity to appeal on behalf of his nation who are suffering at the hands of the Midyanim. He pleads (Shoftim 6:13):

בי אדני ויש ה' עמנו ולמה מצאתנו כל זאת ואיה כל נפלאותי אשר  
ספרו לנו אבותינו לאמר הלא ממצרים העלנו ה' ועתה נטשנו ה' ויתנונו  
בכף מדין.

It is interesting to note that he presents his concern using plural, first-person language. Not only is he expressing a concern for the benefit of the entire nation, but he also includes himself, signifying the strong connection he feels to his people. Gideon recognizes something which Yosef understands and that Shlomo comes to forget – that he is part of a bigger picture.

Gideon's thoughtful and considerate personality significantly manifests itself in a later confrontation with the people of Ephraim, who are insulted that they weren't originally recruited to join in the war against Midian. They complain (8:1):

ויאמרו אליו איש אפרים מה הדבר הזה עשית לנו לבלתי קראות לנו  
כי הלכת להלחם במדין ויריבון אתו בחזקה.

Ephraim verbally attacks Gideon. Rather than reacting defensively, he responds to their claim with the utmost grace and calmly tries to appease them (8:2-3):

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם מֶה עָשִׂיתִי עִתָּה כֹּכֶם הֲלוֹא טוֹב עָלְלוֹת אִפְרַיִם מִבְּצִיר  
אֲבִיעֹזֶר בִּידְכֶם נָתַן אֱלֹקִים אֶת שְׂרֵי מִדְיָן אֶת עָרֵב וְאֵת זָאֵב וְמֶה יִכְלֹתִי  
עֲשׂוֹת כֹּכֶם אִם רָפְתָה רוּחַם מֵעָלְיוֹ בְּדַבְּרוֹ הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה.

Gideon could have taken personal offense at Ephraim's accusation. He chooses, however, to disregard his own feelings and focus on the frustration expressed by the people of Ephraim in order to resolve the issue. By listening to their complaint without allowing it to become tainted by his personal involvement, he understands that at the root of their frustration is a longing to feel important. He caters to that desire by praising and glorifying Ephraim's actions and reassuring them that their efforts are necessary for the success of the nation. He even relinquishes any credit in defeating Midian, attributing it largely to Ephraim. Through taking a selfless perspective on the matter at hand, Gideon is able to secure peace amongst his nation as well as to earn his people's trust and loyalty, thus rendering him an accepted leader amongst the Jewish people.

Yiftach, however, does not follow the same wise track as Gideon did, resulting in tremendous repercussions for his leadership and the nation as a whole. In contrast to Gideon, Yiftach's leadership starts out selfishly, with a focus on personal pain and resentment rather than on the nation's needs. Yiftach had an unpleasant childhood, during which he was scorned and rejected by his own brothers. The pasuk describes (11:2):

וְתֹלֵד אִשֶּׁת גִּלְעָד לוֹ בָּנִים וַיַּגְדְּלוּ בְּנֵי הָאִשָּׁה וַיַּגְרִשׁוּ אֶת יִפְתָּח וַיֹּאמְרוּ  
לֹא תִנְחַל בְּבֵית אֲבִינוּ כִּי בֶן אִשָּׁה אַחֲרֵת אָתָּה.

From the start, Yiftach harbors a grudge toward his brothers for the contempt shown to him, as well as the loneliness and distress he suffered when they exiled him. When later approached with a request to lead them in war against Ammon, he fails to prioritize his nation's need for salvation. Instead, he lashes out at them (11:7):

הֲלֹא אַתֶּם שִׁנְאַתֶּם אוֹתִי וְתִגְרֹשׁוּנִי מִבֵּית אָבִי וּמְדוּעַ בָּאתֶם אֵלַי עַתָּה  
כַּאֲשֶׁר צָר לָכֶם.

Yiftach is reluctant to help out his nation, even in a time of dire need, solely because of the pain they caused him. Ultimately, once he is offered an authoritative position, he agrees to help them, but unlike Gideon, there is no selflessness or compassion involved. Yiftach's inability to cater to the needs of his people haunts him later on, when, similarly to Gideon, he is confronted by Bnei Ephraim, who are upset with the fact that they were not included in the war. The following exchange takes place (12:1):

וַיִּצְעַק אִישׁ אֶפְרַיִם וַיַּעֲבֹר צְפוֹנָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לִיִּפְתָּח מִדּוֹעַ עֲבַרְתָּ לְהִלָּחֵם  
בְּבָנֵי עַמּוּן וְלָנוּ לֹא קִרְאָתָ לָלֶכֶת עִמָּךְ בֵּיתְךָ נִשְׂרַף עֲלֶיךָ בָּאֵשׁ.

Ephraim confronts Yiftach, albeit harshly, in anguish at not having been included in the fighting. They use threatening language to express their anger, and Yiftach seemingly takes tremendous personal offense at their words. He counters their complaint in a similarly accusatory tone (12:2-3):

וַיֹּאמֶר יִפְתָּח אֲלֵיהֶם אִישׁ רִיב הָיִיתִי אֲנִי וְעַמִּי וּבְנֵי עַמּוּן מְאֹד וְאִזְעַק  
אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא הוֹשַׁעְתֶּם אוֹתִי מִיָּדָם וְאִרְאֶה כִּי אֵינְךָ מוֹשִׁיעַ וְאִשְׁמָה נַפְשִׁי  
בְּכַפִּי וְאֶעֱבְרָה אֶל בְּנֵי עַמּוּן וַיִּתְּנֶם ה' בְּיָדִי וְלָמָּה עָלִיתֶם אֵלַי הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה  
לְהִלָּחֵם בִּי.

Yiftach does not even attempt to take a step back and understand the roots of his people's frustration. Rather, he hears an attack on his personal choices and actions and he retaliates. He shames Ephraim for being inaccessible, unhelpful, and incompetent and he does not even venture to validate their feelings of frustration. He is too focused on his own honor and now-damaged ego, and acts in his own interest. As a result, conflict erupts between Ephraim and Gilad – a civil war of sorts. The pasuk describes (12:4):

וַיִּקְבֹּץ יִפְתָּח אֶת כָּל אֲנָשֵׁי גִלְעָד וַיִּלָּחֶם אֶת אֶפְרַיִם וַיָּכּוּ אֲנָשֵׁי גִלְעָד  
אֶת אֶפְרַיִם כִּי אָמְרוּ פְּלִישִׁי אֶפְרַיִם אִתָּם גִּלְעָד בְּתוֹךְ אֶפְרַיִם בְּתוֹךְ מְנַשֶּׁה.

Yiftach takes action against Ephraim out of revenge for the belittling of himself and his family. He does so with no constructive purpose for the greater nation. Consequently, the Jewish people suffer a significant loss וַיִּפֹּל בְּעַת הַהִיא מֵאֶפְרַיִם אַרְבַּעִים וּשְׁנַיִם אֲלָף (12:8).

Yiftach makes rash decisions based on his own emotions and interests, and this results in major consequences for the general nation. Yiftach's inability to look beyond himself and disregard personal issues and experiences hinders him from focusing on the needs of the nation. In comparing the stories of Gideon and Yiftach and their different responses to similar challenges, the role that selflessness plays in a leader's ability to properly serve his people becomes clear.

Yosef HaTzaddik, Shlomo HaMelech, Gideon and Yiftach each represent a different point along the spectrum of servant leadership. Yosef's intuitive listening skills allow him to accommodate the needs of the people, because he understands that his mission is greater than himself. Shlomo Hamelech's transition from a dedicated, compassionate king to somewhat of a people-pleaser causes a decline in his relationship with G-d and demonstrates what happens when service becomes pure servitude. A comparison between the events in the time of Gideon and the time of Yiftach perfectly illustrates the consequences that arise when one is in service to himself, as opposed to others. Within all these narratives, the concept of servant leadership reverberates. It serves to remind us, time and time again, that a successful leader is not he whose followers serve him, but rather, he who serves his followers.



## ויראת מאלקיך

In Parshat Kedoshim, many mitzvot are mentioned, including the Shabbat, tzedakah, honesty in business, honoring parents, respecting elders, sacredness of life, and many more. In two places, (19:14 and 19:32), the phrase **ויראת מאלקיך** appears.

What is the significance of this phrase and why is it mentioned specifically here?

To answer this question, we must look at the first time the shresh **ירא** appears in the Torah (Bereshit 3:10) **ואירא כי עירם אנכי**. After eating from the Etz Hada'at, Adam admits that, due to his fear of Hashem (because of his nakedness), he tried to hide. Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman comments that Adam thinks he can conceal his sin from Hashem, blaming his fear on his nakedness, not on his sinful behavior. Obviously, no one is able to hide from G-d or conceal sins, because G-d is all-knowing.

With this understanding, we can look deeper into why the phrase **ויראת מאלקיך** appears twice in the same perek.

The first appearance of the phrase is:

לא תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ויראת מאלקיך אני ה':

What is the relevance of this phrase here? Why is fearing G-d connected to placing a stumbling block in front of a blind person?

Rashi comments that the prohibition refers not just to a person who is physically blind. Rather it includes giving bad advice to an unknowing person, someone who is “blind” regarding the matter at hand. Whether your intentions were good or bad cannot be discerned by the average person. Only G-d knows, and for this reason we have to fear G-d because He looks internally and knows what is in our hearts.

The first appearance of the phrase is:

מפני שיבה תקום והדרת פני זקן ויראת מאלקיך אני ה':

The commandment refers to rising before an elder. Lest a person refrains from standing, pretending that he didn't notice the older person, the Torah warns us that Hashem knows each person's intentions. If someone averts his eyes to pretend that he did not see the elder, Hashem knows the truth. We should fear G-d because He knows our deepest of intentions.

The Netziv comments that if you come to rise for an elder, it will teach you the basis of the level of middot that you need in order to have proper yirat shamayim.

The Torah wishes to emphasize that Hashem is all-knowing and it is impossible to hide from Him. Knowing that we cannot escape His presence, we should try to come as close to having yirat shamayim and ahavat Hashem as possible.

A *marshal* might help explain this concept. Imagine staying at a friend's house that you are somewhat friendly with, but she is not your closest friend. The first night you stay there, you feel less comfortable and less at home, than you do after staying there for a week.

This idea is comparable to a pasuk found in Tehillim (27:4), *אחת שאלתי מאת ה' אותה אבקש*, in which David HaMelech asks for only one thing.

However, we clearly see from the rest of the pasuk that he is asking for two things. First, he is asking to dwell in Hashem's house all the days of his life, *שכתי בבית ה' כל ימי חיי לחיות בנעם ה'*. Second, he asks: *ולבקר בהיכלו*.

These two requests are seemingly contradictory. The first is to dwell in the house of Hashem, and the second is to visit His sanctuary.

In reality, David Hamelech has a single request. He wishes to dwell in the House of Hashem, but he wishes for a duo state



of mind. On the one hand, he would like to feel the excitement of a visitor. On the other hand, he wishes to feel the comfort of a long term resident, feeling close with Hashem. This includes both yirat Hashem and ahavat Hashem.

This concept of being a guest in Hashem's house while also being so close that you are able to feel His presence at all times is clearly expressed through the service of the korban mincha. The korban mincha is known as the simplest korban, consisting of oil, flour, and spices. The pasuk (Vayikra 2:2) states:

והביאה אל בני אהרן הכהנים וקמץ משם מלא קמצו מסלתה ומשמנה  
על כל לבנתה.

To further understand this korban we must look at some explanations of why the korban has such specific halachot. A few pesukim later, it is mentioned that this mixture cannot become chametz and cannot contain honey. Why are these two things problematic?

The Ramban (Vayikra 2:11) quotes the Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:46), that the reason chametz and honey are not allowed on the mizbeach is because that is what the worshippers of *avodah zarah* would do.

אמר שמצא בספריהם שהמנהג היה לעובדי עבודה זרה להקריב כל  
מנחתם חמץ ולערב הדבש בכל קרבניהם, ולכן אסרו לגבוה.

There are other explanations as to why it is forbidden to have chametz and honey on the mizbeach. The Ba'al Haturim (2:11) suggests that chametz represents the yetzer hara because when dough rises, it becomes filled with air, just like our yetzer hara. Similarly, honey is so sweet that it represents our desire for sin. When it comes to our korbanot, there is no room for error. Therefore, we cannot allow even a crumb of chametz or a drop of honey onto the mizbeach.

Continuing on the topic of the *korban mincha*, the infinitive of the root of the word mincha is *lehaniach*, to put down. When

bringing a *korban mincha*, we are completely subjugating ourselves before Hashem.

When we daven *tefillat mincha* in the middle of the day, we “put down” whatever we are in the middle of doing during our busy day. This is evidence of the importance a relationship with Hashem is in our lives. He is the only real stability that we have.

When one feels that a deep connection with Hashem is not so necessary in his or her life, such a time is precisely when one needs to realize how crucial the connection is. The *korban mincha* is not as impressive or inspiring as the *korban olah* or the *korban shelamim*. When you slaughter an animal, it is an awe-filled experience. Sacrificing some flour, oil, and spice mixture does not necessarily have the same effect emotionally as the other *korbanot*. The thought of always keeping Hashem in our lives, even during the mundane times, is exactly what the *korban mincha* is supposed to represent.

Going back to the original question, we must try to understand why the phrase *ויראת מאלקך* is repeated. We see multiple times throughout Tanach how important it is to fear G-d. Why is this command so important? We learn, starting in the beginning with Adam Harishon through the *pesukim* in Vayikra, that there is a common theme when it comes to fear. If we truly believe in G-d, we will be careful with our behavior since we know that someone is above us and watching our every move.

This phrase is strongly emphasized, not to scare us, but rather to empower us. We know that Hashem is always watching us. We cannot escape Him even in our thoughts. In the times of the Beit HaMikdash, we brought *korbanot* to try to come close to Hashem and understand His Torah. Nowadays, we try to achieve this through other forms of *avodat Hashem*, such as *tefillah* and *talmud Torah*.

Coming close to Hakadosh Baruch Hu causes us to realize His ultimate and infinite power which leads us to fear Him more.

When we recognize how all-encompassing and powerful Hashem is, we fear Him. However, we do not just fear: we also have a tremendous amount of ahavat Hashem, because we learn to appreciate how compassionate and full of rachamim He is.



## **Eishet Potifar and Esther HaMalkah**

The well-known story of Yosef and Eishet Potifar is found in Parshat Vayeishev. What was the extent of Yosef's courage and resilience when faced with Eishet Potifar's schemes? Is there more to the story than mentioned in the pshat? A deeper analysis of this passage can be found in the midrash (Sefer Hayashar, Bereishit, Vayeishev 15).

When Yosef was brought to Egypt, he was sold to one of Pharaoh's head officers, Potifar. When Potifar's wife – who the midrash identifies as Zilichah – saw Yosef, she was immediately attracted to him and did everything in her power to seduce him. Yosef constantly remembered Hashem and did not give in to her advances.

In response, Zilichah made a party for all of her friends. When they asked her why she looked so weak and despondent, she responded that she has been unable to fulfill her physical desires, and the anguish was taking a toll on her. Before explaining to them exactly what she was lacking, Zilichah ordered her servants to bring to her friends bread, etrogim, and knives (to cut the etrogim). Then, Zilichah summoned Yosef and presented him to all of her friends. When the women saw Yosef, they became entranced by his beauty and were unable to take their eyes off of him. They were so enthralled that they cut their hands with the knives instead of cutting the etrogim. Due to them being hypnotized by Yosef's beauty, they did not notice the blood dripping onto their laps.

When Zilichah asked her friends what they were doing, they realized that they had become so entranced by Yosef's beauty that they had cut their own hands. Zilichah explained to them that this difficulty was one she struggled with daily. The women suggested that she corner Yosef in private and cry until he finally gave in to her demand. Despite carrying out this new plan, Yosef still did not capitulate to her seduction because he was devoted to Potifar and to his ultimate master, Hashem.

On the day that all Egyptians celebrated the rising of the Nile River, Zilichah claimed that she was sick and remained at home. After everyone left to celebrate, she dressed herself in nice clothing and makeup and sat in the doorway where Yosef passed every evening after work. When Yosef returned from the field, he tried to avoid Zilichah, but she reminded him that he needed to pass through the doorway in order to enter the house.

Before Yosef could respond, Zilichah grabbed onto his clothing, unsheathed a sword, and threatened to kill him. Yosef attempted to run away, but Zilichah grabbed onto his coat and ripped off a piece. Zilichah was afraid that Yosef would tell Potifar how she harassed him, and therefore fabricated a story where Yosef was the subject of the blame. When Potifar's household heard her version of events, they shared the news with Potifar. Potifar unleashed his anger, yelled at Zilichah for letting an "*ish lvr*" into their household, and hit Yosef in an attempt to kill him. Yosef begged Hashem to save him because he was innocent. Hashem answered Yosef's pleas and sent one of Potifar's servants to tell Potifar the true version of events. Upon hearing the real story, Potifar sent Yosef to jail instead of killing him.

Parts of this midrash are reminiscent of the story in Megillat Esther. In viewing the stories side-by-side, it seems that there may be parallel ideas within the stories.

In Vayeishev, Yosef combed his hair and groomed himself. Similarly, in Megillat Esther, many characters were focused on their appearances. This resulted in drastic ramifications for Vashti and led Achashverosh to choosing a new wife – Esther.

The pasuk states (Esther 1:11): להביא את ושתי המלכה לפני המלך. בכתר מלכות להראות העמים והשרים את יפיה כי טובת מראה היא. Achashverosh summoned Vashti to appear before his guests to display her beauty. When she refused to come, Memuchan convinced Achashverosh to kill Vashti because she refused the king's orders. Later (2:2) it states: ויאמרו נערי המלך משרתיו יבקשו למלך נערות בתולות. טובות מראה. After Vashti was punished, Achashverosh's servants suggested that he choose a new wife from among the beautiful maidens of his empire. It is clear from these two pesukim that

beauty and appearance are significant in Megillat Esther, as we saw already in the story of Yosef and Zilichah.

Additionally, both Zilichah and Esther hatched a plan to trap the person they viewed as the antagonist of their lives. However, as opposed to Esther's two-part plan that was indeed successful, Zilichah concocted two plans in her attempts to trap Yosef, and neither of her plots were successful. The first time, following the advice of her friends, she cried and begged him to give in. The second time, she sat in the doorway to tempt Yosef when he returned from work. In contrast, Esther succeeded in wiping out Haman and ultimately saving her nation by creating a thoughtful, detailed plan. Esther carried out her plan slowly and deliberately, making sure to act strategically (such as inviting Achashverosh and Haman to her party). As is seen in Megillat Esther (5:4), ותאמר אסתר, אם על המלך טוב יבוא המלך והמן היום אל המשתה אשר עשיתי לו Esther's plan was carefully calculated, as opposed to Zilichah's impulsive one.

Another difference led to the striking contrast between the turning points in these two stories: while Zilichah acted very similarly to Haman by concocting a plan filled with deceit, trickery, and lies for her own sake, Esther acted completely for the sake of saving her people בדרך ה'.

Another parallel between these stories is their endings. In both cases, the hero was saved with the help of Hashem, but in a hidden way. Towards the end of the story in Bereishit, it appeared to be that Potifar believed the story that Zilichah told him and would therefore kill Yosef, but Hashem sent a messenger to tell Potifar the true story, and Yosef was thus saved. Zilichah thought she would succeed, but was defeated at the last moment. So too, in Megillat Esther, the entire nation was saved through the hidden miracles performed by Hashem. Haman made elaborate plans, but in the end those plans were foiled by Hashem.

Noticing and embracing the parallels between the stories of Eishet Potifar and Megillat Esther highlights the greatness of our ancestors and clearly demonstrates Hashem's mighty hand in overturning the plans of the wicked.





## **Haftarat Mikeitz – Mishpat Shlomo**

The haftara assigned for Parshat Miketz (Melachim I 3:15-4:1) is not often read. Most years, Mikeitz coincides with Shabbat Chanukah, and is replaced with the specific Chanukah haftara. Nevertheless, reviewing its haftara allows us to explore the unique role of a Jewish monarch.

The haftara tells the story of two women who appear before Shlomo Hamelech due to a dispute about which one is the true mother of a baby.

The haftara can be divided into a number of sections:

- 3:15 Shlomo wakes up from a dream, stands before the aron, and brings offerings to Hashem in thanks.
- 3:16 Two prostitutes approach Shlomo for judgement.
- 3:14-21 The accusing woman delivers her testimony: She lives with another woman who gives birth three days after she does, and there is no one else living with them. The second woman's child dies during the night, and she takes the first woman's child while she sleeps, replacing him with her dead child. The first woman wakes up in the morning to nurse her child, realizes he is dead, and upon closer inspection discovers that he is not her baby.
- 3:22 The accused woman denies the claims, saying her child is alive and the accuser's child is dead.
- 3:23-25 Shlomo assesses the statements and orders for a sword to cut the baby in half.
- 3:26 The real mother cries out to stop the baby from being slaughtered, preferring to give up the child, while the other woman expresses indifference.

3:27 Shlomo awards the baby to the real mother.

3:28-4:1 All of Yisrael heard of the judgement Shlomo gave and were in awe of his wisdom. Shlomo ruled over all of Yisrael.

This incident unfolds in the early years of Shlomo's reign. According to Rashi (Melachim I 3:7), he is only twelve years of age at the time. The Beit Hamikdash is not yet built, and the mizbeach hanechoshet is situated in Givon. In the pesukim preceding the haftara, it states: 'וַיֵּאָהֵב שְׁלֹמֹה אֶת ה', and that he travels to Givon in order to give offerings of thanks to Hashem for His kingship. It is that night that Hashem visits Shlomo in a dream and approvingly, grants his request for a **לֵב שׁוֹמֵעַ לִשְׁפוֹט אֶת עַמּוֹ**.

The haftara begins with Shlomo waking up from his dream in Givon, realizing that his dream is true. Indeed, the Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:1) mentions that he could understand the chirping of the birds and the bark of the dog. The incident described in our haftara is the very first example of Shlomo's wisdom, displayed quite frankly throughout the story.

It is interesting to note the contrast between the two kings: Shlomo HaMelech (in the haftara of Miketz) and Pharaoh (in Parshat Miketz). Shlomo and Pharaoh both experience dreams. The apparently straightforward dream of Shlomo, starkly contrasts with Pharaoh's, which is cryptic and needs deciphering.

The latter dreams of seven thin, unhealthy cows rising from the Nile and eating seven fat cows; and afterwards seven skinny ears of grain eating seven fat sheaves (Bereishit 41). Pharaoh, in response to his strange dreams, wakes up perturbed and shaken, requesting that the wise men of Egypt interpret them. In contrast, Shlomo wakes up in happiness, begins to rejoice, and celebrates with a feast of appreciation of Hashem, as he realizes that his dream was indeed true (Rashi 3:15).

Rav Shimon Schwab (R' Shimon Schwab on Chumash, p. 166) delves into the episode of Pharaoh's dream, and uses it to analyze the nature of the Mitzriim. Being a world superpower at the time, their entire philosophy is built around the dominance of physical strength.

All conflicts are settled by might, with the strong overpowering the weak. This explains why Pharaoh's spirit is "agitated" by his dreams. They are uncharacteristic of Egyptian ideology.

Pharaoh is extremely unnerved to see the seven strong and healthy "beings," which ideally should be in the upper hand, completely consumed by the seven thin and meager "beings," which should logically be vanquished. Surprisingly, it is not the mighty that win. Furthermore, agriculture and nature are a recurring feature of Egyptian culture, and the thought of their corruption is unfathomable to the advisors of Pharaoh. They are simply unable to find a solution to Pharaoh's dreams, as they do not let themselves believe in the subversion of nature. Everything is strictly controlled by them, and in their eyes there could be no change.

On the other hand, the nature of Shlomo's dream displays an entirely different element of leadership. Although the contents of the dreams differ greatly, in comparison, we are able to find a more meaningful dimension to Shlomo. Whereas Pharaoh values physical strength, we see that Shlomo appreciates the more intangible value of wisdom. The validity of his decision to ask for wisdom is justified by Hashem's willingness to also grant him seemingly desired physical attributes, such as wealth and the death of his enemies, even though all he asks for is **הבין לשמוע משפט** (Melachim I 3:11).

Whereas for Pharaoh, the virtue of his country is in her agriculture and physical nature, Shlomo yearns to lead his country in truth and justice, which are less tangible and more lofty values. Shlomo does not glorify physical power or strength, yet he still manages to be a successful leader, as is evident in the story depicted in our haftara. Indeed, a comparison of the dreams reveals the constricted and megalomaniacal nature of Pharaoh's leadership, and the more nuanced and impassioned nature of Shlomo, who loves Hashem.

Upon a closer inspection of the haftara, an interesting finding arises. It seems that based on the women's testimonies, it is obvious from the start who the real mother is. There are various proofs offered to support this.

Firstly, R' Rivlin (*Iyunei HaTorah* p. 105) points out a principle that comes into play in this incident: **המוציא מחברו עליו הראיה** – "one

who accuses his fellow must bring evidence". Indeed here, the "מוציאה" admits herself that she does not have evidence against the real mother since she claims she slept throughout the entire incident of the switching of the babies (Melachim I 3:20). Automatically, Shlomo should discount her claims as she does not bring any evidence to support herself.

Additionally, according to the מוציאה, she has to gaze at her child in the morning before realizing it is not her own, and only then realizes that לא היה בני אשר ילדתי. R' Rivlin points out that a real mother would instinctively realize if it was not her true child lying in her arms. This furthermore strengthens the idea that she herself caused the baby to die during the night, and purely fabricated the story, either out of guilt or fear.

Moreover, the Malbim notes a fascinating nuance in the women's statements. While both arguments should apparently be the same (as they argue the same point), the accusing woman states that בני החי ובנך המת while the accused mother states that המת ובני החי, switching the order of their statements. The Malbim suggests that a person: "יקדים תמיד מה שהוא העיקר ויאחר את הטפל" – "one will always mention first what is more important to him, and afterwards what is less important" (3:22).

In the case of the accuser, it is more important to mention the status of the dead child, whereas in the case of the accused, the real mother, the live child is more important. Based on the priorities of each of the women, Shlomo immediately knew who the real mother was.

Taking all these reasons into account, it is indeed bewildering to contemplate why Shlomo's suggestion to cut the baby in half is necessary, since it is already obvious who is the real mother. Metzudat David writes that already after the delivery of the arguments, Shlomo is aware of the verdict of the case (3:25). What does the sword add to the case?

R' Rivlin (p. 106) suggests that this episode showcases Shlomo's character as a dayan. One of the challenges encountered by dayananim is that the losing party feels as if their argument is neglected and underrated. A truly proficient judge knows how to show everyone the

validity of the winning party's position, so that even the losing party agrees with his verdict. Although it is possible to argue with the analysis of the arguments suggested by the Malbim, nobody can argue with the verdict after the incident of the sword.

Shlomo's capabilities לעשות משפט, to enact true and unwavering justice, and not just לשפוט, to simply judge, are displayed here to the rest of Bnei Yisrael. Everyone is in awe of his ability to ensure that the judgement is wholeheartedly accepted as the truth. Its effect on the rest of the nation is far reaching. Radak explains (3:28) that after this incident, Bnei Yisrael are afraid to do evil, even in secret, as they witnessed how Shlomo's wisdom brings justice into the light for all to see.

R' Yaakovson (Chazon HaMikra, Parshat Miketz) furthermore examines Shlomo's character as a judge by comparing it to his role as a king. He argues that there is a clear difference between the roles of a regular judge and a king who judges. The Malbim (Shmuel II 12:5) writes that השופטים לא ישפטו רק כפי התורה ... אבל המלך ישפוט לפי השעה ולפי הפועל that "shoftim judge purely according to (the strict parameters of the) Torah, but kings can judge according to context and action as well". A shofet's role is to give judgement strictly based on the Torah law. However, a melech is given more leeway, and is allowed to pass judgements taking into account other aspects of the incident.

A practical application of this, for example, is dictated by Rambam (Hilchot Rotzeiach 2:4), who discusses situations where a murderer, for technical reasons, does not strictly deserve the death penalty. Yet, if a king sees fit to sentence him to death, הרשות בידו, the permission is in his hands.

In more general terms, R' Dr. Shimon Federbush (*Mishpat Ha-Melucha B'Yisrael*, p. 70) writes that the Torah grants permission to kings to expand the laws of punishment or to make new laws, as long as it is for the sake and good of the people. This means that (within limits) he can rule as he sees fit, provided it is for the greater good of the nation.

A prime example of the manifestation of a king's authority is after the incident with Batsheva, when David HaMelech is approached

by Natan HaNavi. He is presented with a story of a poor man's sheep being stolen and killed by a wealthy man, and is asked to give a psak in regards to his punishment. The due punishment, according to the Torah, is that he would have to pay **אַרְבַּע צֵאן תַּחַת הַשֶּׁה** pay four times the amount stolen in compensation for the loss of the sheep. However, David, in his rage over this horrible incident, adds another punishment: that the wealthy robber deserves to be put to death (Shmuel II 12:5). One can clearly see how David is looking beyond the strict laws applied to this case, and taking into account the wealthy man himself, and the cruelty of his actions.

An example of the king exacting a more lenient approach (as opposed to a stricter approach), occurs with David and the woman from Tekoah. She approaches David with a heart-wrenching story, telling him how one of her two sons kills the other, and the rest of her family wishes for her to hand him over to be killed (Shmuel II 14:7). Ideally, her remaining son, according to the Torah, should be sentenced to death. However, David assures her that he will deal with her menacing family members, so that **לֹא יוֹסִיף עוֹד לַגֵּעַת בֶּךָ**, they will never hurt her (14:10). He chooses to judge based on her pitiful existence and opts to comfort her. This is a very telling insight into the liberty that a king has, to judge based on external factors as he sees fit.

It is interesting to ponder whether the case in our haftara showcases Shlomo's judgement as an example of a regular judge or a melech. The theme of the importance of mishpat throughout the story is obvious, as discussed above, but what about the more emotional, flexible style of a melech? Does this present itself at any point throughout the haftara?

At first glance, Shlomo appears to handle the testimonies of both women very diplomatically, and we infer that he adheres strictly to the "rules" and principles dictated from the Torah (e.g. **הַמּוֹצִיא מִחֵבֶרֶת** and **אָדָם יָקָרִים מִהוּא הָעֵיִקָר**). One is able to see how he acts like a true shofet. He repeats both women's statements, which according to Radak (3:23) is correct protocol for a judge, in order to ensure both parties that their claims have been understood. However, one cannot deny the episode with the sword to be a striking one, and to reveal a

powerful, dramatic aspect of Shlomo which is something seemingly uncharacteristic of a court judge.

This may perhaps refer back to the original question of whether the threat of using the sword is superfluous. It is already evident that the sword is not needed to determine who is the real mother; it is not relevant to the strict “shofet” aspect of the case. One may suggest that it is a reflection of Shlomo’s character as a king, and that throughout the entire case he embodies attributes of both a shofet and a melech.

The case presented before Shlomo is an extraordinary one. The evil of the lying mother is such that her main intention is to ruin the happiness of the real mother. She herself has no interest in nursing someone else’s baby (Metzudat David 3:26). In a situation where identity and law are mixed up, it is not enough to simply issue a verdict. It is necessary to expose the cruel logic of the lying mother and impress it upon the nation.

There is an element of emotion involved too. Behind the rigidity of the “shofet” aspect of Shlomo is a more sensitive and attuned “melech” dimension. R’ Mendel Hirsch (*R’ Hirsch on Haftaros*, Parshat Miketz) points out that Shlomo refers to the child more delicately and endearingly as *yalud* (newborn) (3:27) rather than *yeled* (child). This is a close echo to the rachamim mentioned in the previous pasuk, indicating how Shlomo is touched by the true mother’s plea.

This is the blessing of Shlomo’s wisdom. He is given the ability to emulate both the shofet and the melech. It is clear, as shown through the haftara, that the wisdom granted to Shlomo is the reason for his peaceful and stable reign over Bnei Yisrael. He sees what is correct for Bnei Yisrael as a leader, and is able to attend to their needs on multiple levels and dimensions.





## עין תחת עין

Regarding the pasuk (Shemot 21:24): עין תחת עין שן תחת שן יד תחת יד – “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot,” Rashi, comments that this pasuk should not be understood literally. He writes:

סמא עין חברו נותן לו דמי עינו כמה שפחתו דמיו למכר בשוק, וכן כלם; ולא נטילת אבר ממש, כמו שדרשו רבותינו בפרק החובל

The Gemara (Bava Kama 84a) states that the pasuk is referring to monetary compensation; the perpetrator must pay the victim for the decrease in his value due to the missing body part. In that sugya, Chazal bring five proofs that the correct interpretation is not the literal one, but rather refers to monetary compensation.

Ibn Ezra brings one proof in his explanation of the pasuk.

אמר רב סעדיה לא נוכל לפרש זה הפסוק כמשמעו. כי אם אדם הכה עין חבירו וסרה שלישיית אור עיניו איך יתכן שיוכה מכה כזאת בלי תוספת ומגרעת. אולי יחשיך אור עינו כולו ויותר קשה הכויה והפצע והחבורה כי אם היו במקום מסוכן אולי ימות ואין הדעת סובלת

He writes that it must be referring to monetary compensation since it is impossible to apply this principle accurately in its literal fashion. How is it possible that the harm could be returned at the exact level it was performed, and not more or less?

While this is all true, one is still left with a glaring question: Why did the Torah present this law in such a misleading manner that could lead to it being understood literally? Why didn't the Torah just write it in terms of financial compensation?

One possibility is based on our understanding of the relationship between pshat and drash. The Torah is a two-tiered system. On the pshat level, the Torah is our moral and spiritual guide. On the drash level, it teaches us the actual practical halacha.

Many mefarshim reflect this view in their commentaries on the Torah. The Sforno writes:

עין תחת עין כך היה ראוי כפי הדין הגמור שהיא מדה כנגד מדה,  
ובאה הקבלה שישלם ממון (קמא פרק החובל) מפני חסרון השערתנו, נסכל  
ונוסיף על המדה לאשמה בה:

The Torah writes this law in a literal matter because that is the severity that the punishment should warrant. However, since it cannot be carried out practically, Chazal explain that it is referring to financial compensation.

Rav Soloveitchik explains this pasuk that "On a strictly moral plane, then, the offender indeed deserves retribution in kind for imparting such incalculable pain and suffering. On a practical level, however, no court is allowed to exact such a penalty" (Chumash Mesoras HaRav).

The Rambam (Chovel u'Mazik 1:3) also follows this approach:

זה שנאמר בתורה (ויקרא כד כ) "כאשר יתן מום באדם כן ינתן בו"  
אינו לחבל בזה כמו שחבל בחברו אלא שהוא ראוי לחסרו איבר או  
לחבל בו כאשר עשה ולפיכך משלם נזק.

True justice would be to perform the exact physical blemish done to the victim on the perpetrator. However, since this is not possible, it must be referring to monetary compensation.

Rav Yehuda Cooperman (HaMaayan 11) learns from this that the function of pshat is not to teach us practical law. In the case of עין תחת עין, the Torah wrote the punishment according to the principle of *middah ke'neged middah* to teach us the severity of this harm. The level of seriousness of what the offender did to the victim would be missing if the pshat of the Torah had written the practical law.

Secondly, Rav Herschel Schachter, in Eretz HaTzvi, cites that he heard from Rav Soloveitchik that we learn in the Mishnah (Chagigah 1:8) that Torah SheBichtav was given from *middat hadin*, and Torah SheBeal Peh was given from *middat harachamim*. Therefore, Torah SheBichtav is stricter, while Torah SheBeal Peh is more lenient.

Also on this pasuk, the Shelah (Torah Ohr 6) writes:

כמו שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל (בר"ר יב, טו) בתחלה עלה במחשבה לברוא העולם במדת הדין, ראה וכו' שיתף מדת הרחמים עם מדת הדין... וכמו (שם כד) עין תחת עין שפירשו רבותינו ז"ל שרצה לומר דמי עינו, וכתבו התורה בלשון עין תחת עין להורות שהיה ראוי ליתן עין ממשי, אלא שמצד מדת הרחמים בא הקבלה ליפטר בדמי עין:

The midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 12:15) says the world was originally destined to be created with only *middat hadin*. However, Hashem realized that such a world could not be sustained, so He added *middat harachamim*. Since Torah SheBichtav reflects a stricter, *middat hadin* judgement, the punishment for עין תחת עין is so severe. However, since Hashem knew we couldn't handle such a harsh legal system, the Torah SheBeal Peh reflects a more lenient, *middat harachamim* punishment.

In his introduction to his K'tzot Hachoshen, Rav Aryeh Leib Heller quotes the following midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 8:5):

אמר רבי סימון, בשעה שבא הקדוש ברוך הוא לבראת את אדם הראשון, נעשו מלאכי השרת כתיים כתיים, וחבורות חבורות, מהם אומרים אל יברא, ומהם אומרים יברא, הדא הוא דכתיב (תהלים פה, יא): חסד ואמת נפגשו ... חסד אומר יברא, שהוא גומל חסדים. ואמת אומר אל יברא, שכלו שקרים ... מה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא נטל אמת והשליכו לארץ, הדא הוא דכתיב (דניאל ח, יב): ותשלך אמת ארצה, אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, רבון העולמים מה אתה מבזה תכסיס אלטיכסיה שלך, תעלה אמת מן הארץ.

The midrash discusses how the angels responded when Hashem wanted to create human beings. The malach representing chesed (kindness) wanted to create humans because they would all do chesed. The malach representing emet (truth) did not want to create humans because they would all be full of lies. Hashem responded by throwing Emet to the ground and saying, רצוני שתעלה אמת מן הארץ.

Rav Heller explains that by doing this, Hashem was handing the truth of Torah over to human knowledge, even though human knowledge can never truly understand the Torah. This is why we determine halacha according to the Sages, even though they may be

wrong, since human knowledge is limited. There is a dual theory of truth. There is absolute divine truth which is infinite, and human truth which is finite. Hashem made the decision to hand Torah over to mankind; Halacha chooses human truth over absolute truth. Why did He do this? Shouldn't the Torah reflect absolute truth?

The Midrash Rabbah (19:33) on Parshat Chukat says:

דבר אחר, או ישיר ישראל, זה אחד משלשה דברים שאמר משה לפני  
הקדוש ברוך הוא ואמר לו למדתני...

There are three places that Moshe said something before Hashem, and Hashem replied, "You have taught Me." One such occurrence is regarding Matan Torah. The first of the ten commandments Hashem gives is **ה' אלקיך**. At Matan Torah, Hashem commands Bnei Yisrael to stand far away, **ויעמד העם מרחוק** (Shemot 20:18) and tells Moshe to ascend the mountain, **ה' אל עלה אל**. This might lead Bnei Yisrael to believe that Hashem is saying that He is only Moshe's G-d and not the G-d of the entire Bnei Yisrael. Hashem replies that Moshe is correct and, for the future, He switches His lashon to **ה' אלקיכם** (Bamidbar 15:41).

This midrash teaches us the concept of factoring the human condition into Torah. According to absolute divine truth, Hashem views Bnei Yisrael as one entity, and therefore, He is **ה' אלקיך** in singular. However, Moshe refers to human psychology and insecurity and that according to human truth, He is **ה' אלקיכם** in plural. Hashem handed Torah over to human beings, and therefore it must account for the human condition.

The gemara (Bava Metzia 59a-59b) relates the Halachic ruling about a **תנור של עכנאי**, an oven of many different parts assembled into one. There is a machloket between R' Eliezer and the Chachamim if the oven is impure. R' Eliezer says no, since it is not a complete oven, and the Chachamim say yes, because it is functionally complete. R' Eliezer asks for divine signs to prove that he is correct, and the heavens comply. After these signs, R' Yehoshua stands up and says **לא בשמים היא**, "it is not in the heavens." R' Yirmiya explains that once Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael the Torah

at Har Sinai, halacha is ruled in accordance with the majority opinion, which in this case is that of the Chachamim.

Rav Amital (sicha, Parshat Para, **לא בשמים היא**) offers the following explanation regarding this debate. In order for a utensil to be susceptible to impurity, it must be complete. According to R' Eliezer, since the **תנור של עכנאי** is not one piece, it is not an ideal oven. Therefore in the ideal world of divine truth, it is incomplete and cannot be impure. However, according to the Chachamim, since the **תנור של עכנאי** functions in the human world, according to human truth it is complete and, therefore, susceptible to impurity. Rav Amital explains that the concept of **לא בשמים היא** is an indication that the human condition is a crucial factor in determining halacha. Once Hashem handed Torah over to mankind, it no longer belonged to the world of divine truth. Rather, it exists in the world of human truth, with human interpreters who apply the human condition.

There are two levels of justice in the Torah: true and practical. By writing the punishment of **עין תחת עין** in a "misleading" manner, the Torah emphasizes that these two levels aren't always articulated in the same way. Since Torah SheBichtav reflects true justice and *middat hadin*, Hashem has the ability to decide when justice should be served to such a level of severity. According to absolute truth, the literal punishment would be the correct one. However, Torah SheBeal Peh, which includes mankind's perspective, reflects practical justice. It accounts for the human condition, which teaches us that on a human level, we can never make such a harsh judgement, and we must always act with *middat harachamim*.



## **Parent-Child Favoritism in Sefer Bereishit**

In Sefer Bereishit there are a number of times that we see a pattern of parent-child favoritism. One illustration of parental favoritism can be found in Bereishit 27 – Yitzchak wants to give the brachot to Eisav while Rivka wants Yaakov to have the brachot (and strategizes how to achieve that). Later on in Bereishit 37, we see that Yaakov has a very special relationship with Yosef that causes jealousy and envy amongst the other children. In Bereishit 37, Yaakov gives the *ketonet passim* to Yosef (and does not give his other children a similar gift), exacerbating the problem.

Are these cases of parents doing the wrong thing? The trend of parent-child favoritism is very prevalent in Tanach and can be traced back to Avraham's treatment of his two sons, Yitzchak and Yishmael.

### **Avraham's "Favoritism"**

Avraham reached a very old age before having two sons, Yishmael and then Yitzchak. Avraham originally believes that Yishmael will be his heir, because he is the firstborn (17:18), but Hashem tells Avraham that Sarah will give birth to a child, Yitzchak, who will be his heir. It is this child that Hashem has chosen to carry on Avraham's legacy. However, Hashem blesses Yishmael and promises that he will become a great nation. Avraham does not want to show any favoritism towards one child over the other.

After Yitzchak is born and is weaned, Avraham makes a party to mark the occasion (21:8). At the party, Sarah sees a very disturbing interaction between Yishmael and Yitzchak and demands that Avraham expel Yishmael and Hagar. Avraham does not want to throw them out and is very distressed. Once again, Hashem tells

Avraham that Yitzchak will get his inheritance (the brit). Avraham did not want to show favoritism, yet Hashem tells him that he must in order to create the Jewish people. What are we to make of Avraham's actions? Was he being a good father, or was he trying too hard to be "fair" to his two sons?

In order to answer these questions, it is helpful to understand an explanation of the beginning of Eishet Chayil (31:10-13) found in Midrash Tanchuma (4):

ואברהם זקן. זה שאמר הכתוב: אשת חיל עטרת בעלה (משלי יב:ד), זה שאברהם שהיה מקונן על שרה, מה כתיב למעלה מן הענין, ותמת שרה וגו'. התחיל אברהם לבכות עליה ולומר, אשת חיל מי ימצא. בטח בה לב בעלה, אימתי? בשעה שאמר לה: אמרי נא אחותי את. גמלתהו טוב ולא רע כל ימי חייה. דרשה צמר ופשתים, בין יצחק לישמעאל, שאמרה, גרש האמה הזאת ואת בנה.

These verses of Eishet Chayil allude to Avraham's mourning for Sarah.

Avraham began to weep for her, saying: *A woman of valor who can find? The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.* When did he demonstrate his trust in her? When he said to her: *Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister* (Bereishit 12:13). *She does him good and not evil all the days of her life. She seeketh between wool and flax* [alludes to her decision] to separate Yitzchak and Yishmael when she said to her husband: *Cast out this bondwoman and her son* (Bereishit 21:10).

The Midrash shows that Avraham, upon Sarah's death, realized that she was correct when she said that Yishmael should be banished and that Yitzchak should be the true inheritor.

Avraham wanted to be a father who was fair to his children, yet Hashem (and Sarah) convinced him that only one son could be the recipient of his spiritual legacy.

## Yitzchak's "Favoritism"

In the next generation, we see Yitzchak's favoritism towards Eisav. The commentaries differ in their approaches to Yitzchak's relationship with Eisav. At first glance, it seems that Yitzchak blindly favors



Eisav to the point that he does not really know his son's true character. Rashi (25:28) comments on the pasuk, **וַיֹּאֲהֵב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו**, that Eisav would bring food that he had hunted to Yitzchak. It appears that Yitzchak favors Eisav as a father would favor the son who tends to his needs.

The Malbim explains (25:28):

אם מפני שחשב שהוא הבכור והוא הראוי לירש המתנות האלקות והוא לא שמע שרב יעבד צעיר, ואם מפני כי ציד בפיו, שהיה מדבר תמיד מגבורותיו בציד, וגם שהיה מרמה אותו בפיו ופושט טלפיו כחזיר, או כחז"ל שהיה מביא לו מן הציד וחשב שמקיים מצות כבוד, כן כתב הר"א, ורבקה ידעה שרב יעבד צעיר, והכירה יותר את מעשי הנערים, לכן היתה אוהבת את יעקב.

Yitzchak favors Eisav not only because he is the eldest child, but also because he is worthy of being given the brachot. Yitzchak has no idea of the prophecy that the older brother will serve his younger brother and is unaware of Eisav's true nature.

However, the Sforno (25:28) disagrees: **גַּם אֶת עֵשָׂו אֶע"פ שִׁדְעָה בָּלִי**, Yitzchak loved **also** Eisav, not only Yaakov, even though he was aware that Eisav had a far less perfect personality than Yaakov. Sforno explains that Yitzchak shows favoritism to Eisav because he understands that Eisav needs the extra attention. According to Sforno, Yitzchak did not show any unwarranted favoritism; there was a very valid reason for his actions.

When Yitzchak wants to give Eisav the brachot, he tells him: **וַעֲשֵׂה לִי מִטַּעֲמִים כְּאִשֶּׁר אֲהַבְתִּי וְהִבֵּיָאָה לִּי וְאָכַלְהָ בְּעֵבֶר תִּבְרַכְךָ נַפְשִׁי בָטָרָם** (27:4). The Sforno explains that Yitzchak knew that Eisav was not worthy of the blessing that he wished to confer upon him. For this reason, he instructed Eisav to perform an act of honor towards him in order to give him merit. By contrast, when Yitzchak blessed Yaakov (28:3), he knew that Yaakov needed no additional merit.

Consequently, when it comes to Yitzchak, it is unclear whether the favoritism is blindly given, or if it is just a parent trying to help out the weaker child.

## Yaakov's "Favoritism"

A completely different form of favoritism is seen in Yaakov's relationship with Yosef: *וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אָהַב אֶת יוֹסֵף מִכָּל בְּנָיו כִּי בֶן זָקֵנִים הוּא לוֹ* (37:3). Rashi presents two explanations of the phrase *בֶּן זָקֵנִים*: Yosef was born when Yaakov was already old. Alternatively, Yosef was a very wise child and Yaakov taught him everything he learned from Shem and Ever. These two explanations are quite different. The former describes a father grateful for a child born in his old age, while the latter depicts a father proud of the superior intellect of his child.

According to the Ramban, it was customary for an elderly parent to choose one of his younger children to serve as his personal assistant, attending to all of his parent's needs. This close personal constant interaction often created very strong bonds of endearment.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky in *Emet L'Yaakov* offers a different twist: Yaakov specifically taught Yosef also the Torah of Shem and Ever, unlike what he taught to the rest of the brothers (the Torah of Avraham and Yitzchak). Yaakov taught Yosef how to live in galut. It was well known from the *Brit Bein Habetarim* that the Jewish people were going to be exiled. Yaakov taught Yosef solely the teachings of Shem and Ever, showing that Yosef would be the Jewish leader during galut. This designation made Yosef's brothers very jealous, but Yaakov understood that Yosef had a superior intellect and therefore designated him as leader.

Yaakov's "favoritism", was either the love of an elderly man to his child born late in life, or was part of a specific plan to protect the Jewish people in years to come.

Each of the Avot displayed some form of favoritism to his children. Avraham did not want to show favoritism, but Hashem told him he should favor Yitzchak. The reason for Yitzchak's favoritism of Eisav is not so clear. Some meforshim claim that Yitzchak favored Eisav because he did not know Eisav's true character, while others might claim that Yitzchak was correct in favoring Eisav because he was trying to keep Eisav from going on an evil path.

Yaakov favored Yosef, but the resulting jealousy of the other brothers caused the selling of Yosef, an event that Am Yisrael is still paying the price for today, as we are still in galut. So while it may have been well intentioned, the results have had implications for thousands of years.

It is well known that Sefer Bereishit serves as a blueprint for what will happen in the future. This concept is known as **מעשה אבות** סימן לבנים. The tension between Yitzchak and Yishmael is felt today between Israel and the Arab nation. The tension between Yaakov and Eisav is felt between Bnei Yisrael and Edom (often identified as Christianity). Finally and most sadly the tension between Yosef and the brothers is felt today by Jews amongst themselves. Perhaps, before assigning special treatment to a child, one ought to consider potential repercussions.



## Megillat Esther

Megillat Esther begins with Achashverosh, the new Persian king, reigning over the former Babylonian empire. Persia was a vast and diverse state to live in as seen explicitly in the pasuk וישלה ספרים אל (1:22). The country was so pluralistic and diverse that every province received the king's document in its own language.

In Persia, the king's word was law and violating it was punishable by death. Even Queen Vashti was murdered for her refusal to attend the king's party. This was the society that the Jews chose to live in, despite Koresh's proclamation that the Jews were permitted to return to Eretz Yisrael. Why then were they still living under a king whose reign was exemplified by extravagant parties, materialism, and excessive drinking: כל יסד המלך על כל והשתיה כדת אין אנס כי כן יסד המלך על כל (1:8)?

The alcohol usage that is portrayed laudibly, sharply contrasts with a passages in Mishlei (31:4), composed by Shlomo HaMelech: אל למלכים למואל אל למלכים שתו יין ולרוזנים או [אי] שחר. The pesukim continue by saying that if kings drink, they will forget what they decreed – something Achashverosh seemingly did not care about.

Shlomo was the builder of the Beit HaMikdash and known for his great wisdom. However, Achashverosh is the complete opposite, portrayed as foolish and uncaring towards Hakadosh Baruch Hu. The only reason he sent out the decree to save the Jewish people was because he was married to Queen Esther. This is seen in the wording of Esther's appeal to the king (7:3): ותען אסתר המלכה ותאמר: אם מצאתי חן בעיניך המלך ואם על המלך טוב תנתן לי נפשי בשאלתי ועמי בבקשתי.

Esther referred to herself first with her request, since she knew that Achashverosh would not care about her people. She even went as far as to say that she would not have bothered the king if

the decree was merely for the Jews to be sold rather than murdered: *כי נמכרנו אני ועמי להשמיד להרוג ולאבד ואלו לעבדים ולשפחות נמכרנו החרשתי* (7:4). It was clear to Esther that Achashverosh did not care about her people; he was indifferent to his wife's nation.

The Megillah portrays Esther's story as tragic. She was ripped away from Mordechai, who according to Rashi (2:7) was her father figure, and possibly her husband as well. Esther was forced to become the wife of a gluttonous and hedonistic king. Achashverosh may have cared about Esther, since he offered to give up half of his kingdom to her: *ויאמר המלך לאסתר גם ביום השני במשטה היין מה שאלתך* (7:2). *ואסתר המלכה ותנתן לך ומה בקשתך עד חצי המלכות ותעש*

However, he did not care about the Jewish people. He did not act until he discovered that his beloved queen was part of them. This is explicitly seen in who the king chose to be his main advisor: Haman, who was the embodiment of anti-semitism. Haman even went as far as to attempt to destroy the entire Jewish people, all because of Mordechai's refusal to bow down to him.

Mordechai was a fiercely observant Jew. He noticed that Bnei Yisrael was descending into hedonism and forgetting about Hashem. The Jewish people made a promise by the rivers of Babylon: *אם אשכחך ירושלים תשכח ימיני, תדבק לשוני לחכי אם לא אזכרכי, אם לא אעלה את ירושלים על ראש שמחתי* (Tehillim 137:5-6). However, in the Purim story, the Jews seem to have forgotten their beloved, Yerushalayim, and subsequently Hashem.

In the Megillah, Hashem's name is never found. However, the words *גדולתו* and *כבוד מלכותו* (1:4) are found to describe the king of Persia. These words are typically used to describe Hashem. Mordechai and Esther, the authors of the Megillah, are telling Bnei Yisrael that they must make a decision about which king to serve: Achashverosh or Hashem? The Jews that stayed in Persia had the option to return to Eretz Yisrael but chose to remain in galut.

According to the Midrash, had all the Jews returned to Israel with Koresh's proclamation, the second churban would not have

happened. However, most Jews remained in the Persian Empire with Achashverosh as their king, and Achashverosh saw himself as above G-d.

The Gemara (Megillah 12a) relates that he used the utensils of the Beit Hamikdash and wore the garments of the kohen gadol at his party. Additionally, the beginning of the Megillah depicts Achashverosh's palace using descriptions that are often associated with the Beit HaMikdash.

Megillat Esther is not just a nice tale from Tanach. Rather, it is arguably one of the most important stories for those still living in galut. The Jewish people had the choice to return to Yerushalayim but opted to stay in Shushan. Shushan is described as the *birah*, the capital of Persia. Outside of this, the word *birah* in Tanach is only used to describe Yerushalayim. In the Purim story, Shushan is replacing the real *ir habirah* with materialism and false comfort. We read the Megillah and enjoy the festivities of the day, but one thought leaves a sour taste in our mouths: Why are so many Jews still living in galut?





## Tefillat Yaakov Avinu

Preceding Yaakov's reunion with Eisav, Yaakov prepares for the encounter by davening for his family's safety. During Yaakov's previous interaction with Eisav, Eisav had threatened to murder him. Therefore, after taking the necessary precautions, Yaakov turns to Hashem expressing his fears concerning his family's future. This tefillah is found in Parshat Vayishlach (Bereshit 32:10-13):

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹקֵי אֲבִירָהּ וְאֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק ה' הָאֵל אֲמַר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאַרְצְךָ  
וּלְמוֹלַדְתְּךָ וְאִשְׁבִּיבָה עִמָּךְ: קִטְנִתִּי מִכָּל הַחַסְדִּים וּמִכָּל הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֵת  
עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְּמִקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הֵייתִי לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת: הַצִּילֵנִי נָא  
מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו כִּי יֵרָא אֲנֹכִי אֵתוֹ פֶּן יָבוֹא וְהִכָּנִי אִם עַל בָּנִים: וְאַתָּה  
אָמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אִשְׁבִּיב עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמַתִּי אֶת זִרְעִךָ כְּחוֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִסְפָּר מְרֹב.

Yaakov's tefillah and its structure reflect the theme of the importance of the Jewish nation. Hashem first promises to Avraham, *כי ברך אברכך והרבה ארבה את זרעך ככוכבי השמים וכחול אשר על שפת הים* (22:17), which, according to Rashbam, Yaakov understands would be fulfilled through his own children. Therefore, Yaakov davens, *וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אִשְׁבִּיב עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמַתִּי אֶת זִרְעִךָ כְּחוֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִסְפָּר מְרֹב*, to remind Hashem of the promise and to emphasize the necessity of protecting his children from Eisav.

Similarly, Yaakov begins his prayer with a mention his forefathers, *וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹקֵי אֲבִירָהּ וְאֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק*. His focus is on the creation of Am Yisrael, and he utilizes the merit of the nation's patriarchs in his request. Sforno notes that Yaakov mentions the forefathers with the hope that Hashem would grant his request in their merit.

Yaakov feels that he alone does not have enough merit for Hashem to answer his tefillah. For this very reason, Yaakov continues his tefillah with the phrase "*katonti*." He acknowledges that he may not deserve that which he is requesting, but with the merit of his forefathers in mind, he asks that Hashem grant it regardless.

“Katontl” is also Yaakov’s acknowledgment of what Hashem has done for him thus far. Rashi (32:11) narrates, נַתְּמַעֲטוּ זְכוּיָתִי עַל יָדִי, החסדים והאמת שעשית עמי, לכך אני ירא, שמא משהבטחתני נתלכלכתי בחטא ויגרום לי להמסר ביד עשו. Yaakov is concerned that the kindness he has received has outweighed the reward he has earned. He fears that without his merit as protection, his sins could cause him to be overpowered by Eisav. Therefore, he asks for Hashem’s protection out of pure compassion.

Another aspect of Yaakov’s tefillah is voiced in the phrase מִיד אָחִי מִיד עֶשָׂו. The Beit HaLevi questions why Yaakov Avinu would feel the need to include two descriptions of his presumed assailant. He explains with the following (32:10-13)

וְיֵשׁ לַפֶּרֶשׁ הַכוּוֹנֶה דִּיעֶקֶב בְּהוֹדְעוֹ דְּעֶשָׂו בֹּא לְקִרְאָתוֹ הַבֵּן דְּלֹא יִמְלֹט  
מֵאַחַד מִשְׁנֵי הָאוֹפְנִים, אוֹ דְּעֶשָׂו יִלָּחֵם עִמּוֹ וְיִרְצֶה לְהוֹרִגּוֹ, אוֹ דִּיתְרַצֶּה  
עִמּוֹ וְיִשׁוּב מֵאִפּוֹ וְיִשָּׁב עִמּוֹ בְּשִׁלוּהַּ וְאַחֲזֶה כְּשֵׁנִי אֲחִים. וּמִשְׁנֵי הָאוֹפְנִים  
הַלּוֹ נִתְיָרָא יַעֲקֹב, דָּגֻם טוֹבוֹתוֹ וְאַהֲבָתוֹ שֶׁל עֶשָׂו רָעָה הִיָּתָה אֲצֵל יַעֲקֹב.

Yaakov fears both obvious outcomes of the meeting with Eisav. Either Eisav would attack his family, or Eisav would decide to make peace and live among them. Yaakov’s referral to Eisav by name evokes an image of the wicked character by which he is usually portrayed; however, his initial use of the term “brother” serves as an additional request to be saved from Eisav’s dangerous brotherly affection. Yaakov views the latter as equally dangerous due to the ways through which Eisav’s presence could potentially negatively influence Yaakov’s family, and therefore distinguishes between the two outcomes. His focus continuously remains on the development of his children, and ultimately, the Jewish nation.

Through all of his prayers, Yaakov relies heavily on the merit of the patriarchs. However, the gemara (Shabbat 55a) argues about whether zechut avot could also be exhausted:

מֵאִמְתִּי תִּמָּה זְכוּת אֲבוֹת אֵמֹר רַב מִיָּמוֹת הוֹשַׁע בֶּן בָּאֲרִי ... וְשִׁמְזָאֵל אֵמֹר  
מִיָּמִי חֲזָאֵל ... רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֹוִי אֵמֹר מִיָּמִי אֱלִיהוֹ ... וְרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אֵמֹר  
מִיָּמִי חֲזָקִיהוּ.

Each opinion presents a different belief as to when zechut avot ceased to be accepted. By inference, it is indisputable that according

to every opinion, zechut avot can no longer be used. However, Tosafot (Shabbat 55a) reassures us with the promise in Vayikra 26:42 “**וִזְכַּרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאֶת בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֲזָכֹר וְהָאָרֶץ אֲזָכֹר**”. Hashem reassures Bnei Yisrael that He will remember zechut avot, rendering it applicable and necessary today.

In agreement with Tosafot, Chazal instituted zechut avot into the first bracha of Shemoneh Esrei: **בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ**, אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב. Similar to the structure of Yaakov's tefillah, this bracha of zechut avot is included in the first section of Shemoneh Esrei, which serves as an introduction to the section of bakashot. Chazal structured it in this way to evoke the concept of zechut avot in Am Yisrael's daily supplications.

The concept of zechut avot is closely related to Chazal's phrase, **מַעֲשֵׂה אֲבוֹת סִימָן לְבָנִים**. Similar to Chazal's institution of a daily tefillah that mimics Yaakov's, we can recognize the methods of the avot to be a **סִימָן** and apply them to overcome our own struggles. In his introduction to Parshat Vayishlach, Ramban explains, **נִכְתָּבָה הַפֶּרֶשֶׁה זֶה לְהוֹדִיעַ כִּי הִצִּיל הַקִּבְיָ"ה אֶת עַבְדּוֹ וְגֵאלוֹ מִיַּד חֹזֶק מִמּוֹנוֹ**. This parsha was written to exhibit the fact that Hashem saved Yaakov from the hands of someone stronger than him, Eisav. He continues to explain that this parsha contains a hint for future generations that all that transpired between our forefather Yaakov and Eisav will happen to us with Eisav's children. Therefore, it is fitting for us to follow in the path of Yaakov when we are confronted by our challenges. By studying the life experiences of the avot, we absorb their values into our Jewish consciousness and can learn correct conduct from their behavior.

With this concept in mind, the bracha of the avot in Shemoneh Esrei enables us to utilize our connection with our patriarchs, learn from their example, and seek Hashem's protection in our daily interactions. During one of the most frightening situations in his life, Yaakov maintained a calm state of mind. This enabled him to turn to Hashem with a prayer that would serve as a model for future generations. Hopefully, in addition to imitating his powerful tefillah, we will all be able to mimic Yaakov's tremendous ability to trust in and turn to Hashem.



## Moshe Rabbeinu and Gideon

In Tanach, we are exposed to various personalities throughout history who may serve as either positive or negative role models. We also find some individuals who lie somewhere in the middle of these two extremes. They find themselves struggling to make the right decision, but are not always successful.

An example of such an individual is Gideon, the fifth shofet of Bnei Yisrael. As a shofet, he leads Bnei Yisrael to great spiritual heights by destroying avodah zara, and to a great military victory in his battle against the Midyanim. Unfortunately, towards the end of his life, Bnei Yisrael are led astray, and immediately after Gideon's passing, they return to their old idolatrous ways.

The gemara in Rosh Hashana (25b) writes that Yeruba'al (another name for Gideon) in his generation has the same status as Moshe in his generation. This comparison paints Gideon in a positive light. Additionally, the Ramchal (Mesilat Yeshtarim, ch. 19) mentions Gideon as an example of someone who displays the attribute of piety. This is surely a statement of good character!

On the other hand, the Midrash Tanchuma (Shoftim 4) and Zohar (Zohar Chadash 119) seem to view Gideon as not being particularly pious or qualified. They write that he is only chosen because of his defense of Bnei Yisrael, and in comparison to the rest of his generation. This contradiction is somewhat striking. With three chapters of Shoftim dedicated to Gideon's leadership, we must have the ability to uncover what type of leader he truly is. Is he comparable to Moshe, or is he relatively average?

An effort can be made to resolve this by comparing the narratives of Moshe and Gideon. They are both approached to be saviors as a result of Bnei Yisrael's cries to Hashem. Moshe and Gideon doubt their capabilities to fulfill Hashem's mission, so He gives them each a sign as reassurance and proof. Additionally, the phrase "*panim el panim*" is used regarding both Moshe and Gideon, referring to their

interface with Hashem and malachim respectively. Each one is humble, and both have a connection to Midyan.

Another undeniable connection between these two leaders is the use of gold earrings. In Parshat Ki Tisa and in Sefer Shoftim, the nation donates their *nizmei zahav* to form something larger. The Jews in the desert create a golden calf, and the nation during the time of Gideon forms an *ephod*, a golden apron. [The Gemara (Arachin 16a) states that the *ephod* of the kohen gadol acts as a kapparah for avodah zara, furthering this connection.]

Perhaps we can view Gideon's intentions when making his *ephod* in the same light, as a kapparah for the golden calf. This sin was a result of Bnei Yisrael's assumption that Moshe was dead as well as their efforts in trying to replace their leader and connection to Hashem. The *ephod*, both the one created by Gideon and the one worn by the Kohen Gadol, serve to symbolize and represent that only certain people should be leaders. Only certain people are capable of connecting the masses to Hashem on a higher level.

In Shoftim (8:22-23), after the victory in battle against the Midyanim, Bnei Yisrael ask Gideon to become their king and begin a dynasty from his family. Gideon immediately replies that he and his children will not rule over Bnei Yisrael, but rather that Hashem will always be their Ruler. In the very next pasuk, Gideon tells the nation to gather gold earrings, just as Aharon told Bnei Yisrael, and he fashions the *ephod* as a representation of Hashem's victory, success, and ultimate leadership.

Returning to original our question: How could Gideon be compared to Moshe, yet also be viewed as average in certain respects? I believe the answer lies in the difference between their two narratives. In Shoftim 6:27, the pasuk states ויקח גדעון עשרה אנשים מעבדיו ויעש כאשר דבר אליו ה' ויהי כאשר ירא את בית אביו ואת אנשי העיר מעשות יומם ויעש לילה. After Hashem tells Gideon to destroy the mizbeach of the ba'al and to make a proper mizbeach to bring karbanot to Hashem instead, Gideon proceeds to do so. However, he does it at night because he is afraid that the people of the city will find out, and kill him.

In contrast, when Moshe and Aharon first go to Pharaoh, the pasuk ויעש משה ואהרן כאשר צוה ה' אתם כן עשו (Shemot 7:6), specifically

points out that they do exactly what Hashem commanded them. This includes their willingness to bravely confront Pharaoh. (When it comes to the actual Exodus, the pasuk writes: **וַיְהִי בַעֲצָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הַרְצִיא** **יְהוָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל צְבָתָם** (Shemot 12:51); It takes place in the middle of the day, in order to emphasize the people's complete faith in Hashem and by contrast, their nonexistent fear of Mitzrayim.)

This is the distinction between Moshe and Gideon that the midrash and Zohar highlight. Whereas Gideon does follow instructions, he does not follow them to the extent which Hashem commands him. It is possible that the midrash refers to Gideon's generation as weak in their observance, to explain how Gideon in his generation is like Moshe in his generation. It's all about proportions. Since his generation is in a lesser spiritual state, his generation is not able to completely fulfill Hashem's will. Even though Gideon creates the *ephod l'shem shamayim*, to bring the people closer to Hashem, he is not successful. In the end, the people worship the *ephod*.

Both Gideon and Moshe look out for the needs of Bnei Yisrael, defending them and desiring to do what's best for them. However, only Moshe is able to fully comprehend Hashem's wishes, carrying out His desires. Gideon speaks well, but is somewhat lacking in his actions. In the end, the people are inadvertently led astray, serving the symbol of Hashem's glory, instead of Hashem Himself.

What does the Torah intend to teach us by having the story of Gidon echo that of Moshe Rabbeinu? How often are we capable of reaching the greatest of heights, but due to our surroundings and peers we fail to reach our full potential? How many times have we let our surroundings dictate our service to Hashem? How many times do we know exactly what Hashem wants from us, but we do it 'at night' or not at all because we fear the repercussions that will come from society? How often do we try rectifying sins or mistakes we've made in our past, but fail to do so because we have fallen into habits which are uncondusive to that type of change?

Gideon's story represents some of the challenges we face. It is the contrasting story of Moshe Rabbeinu, who follows G-d's words in broad daylight, that teaches us that serving Hashem fearlessly and outwardly will lead to incredible results.





## **באלו חטאתי באלו תמחול לי**

After a little over a year in the desert, Bnei Yisrael finally approached the outskirts of their destination. In their fear and uncertainty, they decided to send meraglim to scout out Eretz Yisrael. After the negative report broke the morale of the people, Bnei Yisrael were punished by Hashem and were destined to travel throughout the midbar for over another thirty-eight years. After these years passed, they were finally ready to enter Eretz Yisrael, and Yehoshua bin Nun was appointed as their leader and guide in this new venture.

One of the first things Yehoshua did was send meraglim to spy out the city of Yericho. Why did Yehoshua seem to repeat the mistake of thirty-eight years earlier, especially since Yehoshua was one of the original twelve meraglim who were sent? In order to answer the question, we need to understand the reason behind both sets of meraglim.

In Parshat Shelach, Moshe was commanded by Hashem to send twelve men, one man from each shevet, to spy out the land of Eretz Canaan. Included in these dozen representatives were Calev ben Yefuneh (from Shevet Yehuda) and Yehoshua bin Nun (from Shevet Ephraim).

After forty days of spying out the inhabiting nations, taking note of their strength and population, the quality of land, and the types of cities, the meraglim came back and reported to the entire Bnei Yisrael what they saw. All of the spies besides Calev and Yehoshua frightened Bnei Yisrael by reporting that the nations in Eretz Canaan were too mighty to conquer. When Calev and Yehoshua tried to calm down the nation and explain that the other meraglim were wrong, the people wanted to stone them to death.

Thirty-eight years after the original meraglim, after Moshe had died, the Jewish people were ready to cross the Yarden and go into the Land of Canaan. Prior to entering, Yehoshua sent two men to spy out the land. These two men, Calev and Pinchas, entered the land and went to the city of Yericho, where they encountered a woman named Rachav.

Rachav hid the spies from the King of Yericho by hiding them on her roof, saving them from being captured. She admitted to the men that the people of the city were terrified of the Jewish people and in awe of everything that happened to them in the desert. Rachav then instructed them on how to escape the city, requesting that her family be spared when Bnei Yisrael would come and attack the city. The meraglim made it back to Yehoshua and reported, *כי נתן ה' בידנו את כל הארץ וגם נמגו כל ישבי הארץ מפנינו* (Yehoshua 2:24).

The Malbim (Yehoshua 2:1) explains five key differences between the meraglim that had been sent by Moshe and those that Yehoshua sent. The first difference is that it was the nation, not Moshe, that demanded that the meraglim be sent. In Devarim (1:22), during Moshe's parting speech, he says *ותקרבוני אלי כלכם...* Although in Parshat Shlach it seems as though the spies were only the working extension of Hashem and Moshe, here we learn that it was really due to the nation's initial request for spies to check out the land. In Sefer Yehoshua, it was only Yehoshua who thought it necessary to send spies into the land right before crossing the Yarden.

The second difference is the location from which the nation was settled at the time during which meraglim were sent. Moshe sent the Mergalim from Midbar Paran (Bamidbar 13:3), which is far from the border of Eretz Yisrael. However, Yehoshua sent his meraglim "*min hashitim*" (Yehoshua 2:1), which is on the physical border of the land. This is very significant when considering the mindset that the people could have had when the meraglim were going in.

Bnei Yisrael in the Midbar wanted to decide whether they would go in or not based on the spies' report. They were not certain they would be successful, so therefore, they sent the spies. When they heard what the spies had seen, they were deterred from continuing to enter and conquer the land. On the other hand, when Yehoshua sent in the two meraglim, his mindset was not about whether to go in or not because at this point, there was no going back. Rather, he was interested in determining the best way to conquer the land.

The third difference is that Moshe sent twelve men whereas Yehoshua only sent two. When describing what the twelve men would do, the pasuk uses the word **לתור** (Bamidbar 13:17). This word has the negative connotation of determining the quality of the land and strength of its inhabitants. Each shevet sent a person from their individual shevet because they wanted to know specifically if they would be able to conquer the land.

When Yehoshua sent two people, however, the pasuk uses the word **ראו** (Yehoshua 2:1) because they were meant to be true military spies rather than spies looking to distinguish the quality of the land.

The fourth difference mentioned by the Malbim, is that the meraglim in the midbar reported back to **כל העדה** (Bamidbar 13:37), which made it a public event that instilled fear within the entire nation. When Calev and Pinchas returned, they reported back only to Yehoshua.

The fifth difference, explains the Malbim, is that the meraglim that Yehoshua sent were primarily meant to spy out the city of Yericho and its surrounding areas. There was no mention of seeing the people and quality of land, as was the case with the first meraglim.

These five main differences ultimately come to suggest that the spies sent by Yehoshua were not an impulsive fear-driven decision, but rather a calculated leadership initiative whose sole

purpose was to create a military strategy and plan for a successful takeover of the land of Israel.

In addition to the technical and motivational differences, it seems that perhaps, Yehoshua's initiative also had a deeper spiritual purpose. When Rachav assisted the meraglim in their escape, she freed them through her window. Rashi (Yehoshua 2:15) comments that this was the same window and the same rope that other men would use to enter Rachav's house to sin. This encounter with the meraglim is the first time Rachav did not sin with her visitors. The Rambam (Hilchot Teshuvah 2:1) says that teshuva gemurah, complete teshuva, is when the exact same scenario and opportunity occurs and instead of sinning again, one refrains.

Additionally, Rav Soloveitchik in his sefer *Al HaTeshuvah* describes two types of teshuva – *העלת הרע* and *ביעור הרע*. The latter means to lift up the bad, not denying the sin, but rather allowing it to propel you forward.

Rachav does this teshuva when she allows Calev and Pinchas to exit the same window that all of her “visitors” came through to sin with her. She was able to use the thing that led to promiscuity and sin, for a mitzvah by saving the Jewish spies. Rachav turns to Hashem and says: *רבונו של עולם, באלו חטאתי באלו תמחול לי* (Rashi, Yehoshua 2:15)

The Radak (6:25) explains that ultimately Yehoshua married Rachav, which exemplifies her coming full circle.

From the first pasuk in the second chapter of Yehoshua, it is unclear what the exact mission of Calev and Pinchas was. However, when we see what the spies reported back in pasuk 24, we can learn that in addition to a strategic plan, the spies were also sent on a spiritual mission.

Not only did Bnei Yisrael successfully enter the land without becoming influenced by the inhabiting nations, but they even served as the epitome – *or lagoyim* – and created a lasting

influence on those who they encountered. The meraglim that Yehoshua sent were not only an appropriate decision, far from a mistake, but they were ultimately even a *takana* for the meraglim the people had chosen to send decades earlier.



## Tefillat Eliezer – Omen or *Bakasha*?

Tefillah takes on many forms, including *bakasha*, requesting something from Hashem. When Eliezer is sent by his master Avraham, to find a wife for Yitzchak, Eliezer davens, requesting from Hashem that his mission should succeed (Bereishit 24:12-14). However, after analyzing the language of his tefillah, Eliezer may have invoked an omen, putting his *bakasha* up to chance.

At first glance, Eliezer's request appears normal.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹקֵי אֲדֹנָי אַבְרָהָם הִקְרָה נָא לִפְנֵי הַיּוֹם וַעֲשֵׂה חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנָי  
אַבְרָהָם:

He asks Hashem, on behalf of his master Avraham, to do an act of kindness for him, and make his mission successful. Next, he suggests a somewhat unusual sign:

הֲנֵה אֲנֹכִי נֹצֵב עַל עֵין הַמַּיִם וּבְנוֹת אֲנָשֵׁי הָעִיר יֵצְאוּ לְשָׂאב מַיִם: וְהִיא  
הַנִּעְרָה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלַיָּה הִטִּי נָא כְּדֹךְ וְאַשְׁתָּה וְאָמַרְתָּ שְׁתֵּה וְגַם גְּמֹלֶיךָ  
אֲשַׁקֶּה אֹתָהּ הַכַּחַת לַעֲבֹדךָ לִיצְחָק וְבָה אֲדַע כִּי עֲשִׂיתָ חֶסֶד עִם אֲדֹנָי:

He asks for the wife of Yitzchak to be the one who offers him *and* his camels water. Only when that happens, will he know that Hashem did this kindness for Avraham. It is interesting to note that Eliezer put his success in finding a wife for Yitzchak up to the chance that there will be a woman who offers water to him *and* his camels.

Rambam (Hilchot Avodah Zara 11:4) forbids any practice of enchantment as the idolaters do, as learned from the pasuk: “Nor shall you use enchantment” (Vayikra 19:26). Enchantment interprets random occurrences as predictions for the future. For example, if one drops his stick, he cannot view this as a bad omen that his planned actions will be unsuccessful.

According to the Rambam, it seems that Eliezer chooses a wife for Yitzchak based on an arbitrary omen. If this is prohibited, how was it permissible for Eliezer to do so?

The Raavad disagrees with the Rambam. When looking carefully at the language of the tefillah, Eliezer is not attaching importance to some random occurrence. Rather, he wants to test the young woman's level of kindness and see if she is a true **בעלת חסד**.

How does Rivka respond? She is extremely diligent and conscientious, running to the well each time to bring more and more water (Bereisit 24:20).

ותמחר ותער כדה אל השקת ותרץ עוד אל הבאר לשאב ותשאב לכל  
גמליו.

She patiently single-handedly serves all the camels until they finish drinking, even though there are other servants who can assist her. After seeing a sign like this, Eliezer knows that there is no need for any additional signs, neither of her lineage nor of her beliefs, as her kindness is completely compatible with Avraham's house of **חסד**.

The Ohr HaChaim (24:12) agrees with the Raavad. He explains that Eliezer purposefully wants to see if she will offer water to the camels, because he is scared that Avraham's family may deceive him and try to marry off one of their maidservants to him, claiming that she is part of the family. He therefore insists that the suitable wife for Yitzchak should do more than he asks of her by also offering to water his camels. This would be a characteristic of a wife who is related to Avraham's chessed, not of a maidservant.

The Sforno (24:14) agrees, explaining that Eliezer is hoping and relying on sincere tefillah, not on any omen. He prays that this will happen. The gemara (Chulin 95:) says, "Any *nichush* that is not like Eliezer's *nichush*... is not *nichush*." This refers to a person who says things **similar** to Eliezer. However, he does not say it in a manner of one who is praying, but instead views it as a superstitious omen, that if such a thing should happen – I will do such and such. Therefore, because Eliezer davens to Hashem in a manner of supplication, this prohibition did not apply to him since he did not rely on happenstance.

Rashi (24:14) explains: **ובה אדע** – "This is a manner of supplication – inform me through her." He is begging Hashem and



beseeching Him through tefillah. The Siftei Chachamim comments: “Not that through the sign he should know, but instead this is the beginning of a new phrase; he begs Hashem that He will inform him through [the girl] that He bestowed kindness.”

We use this type of *bakasha* in *Shema Koleinu*. We use tefillah as a chance to ask Hashem to “show us a sign” that this is what we should be doing, or that this is the person we should marry. But really, it is not an omen that we are asking for. Rather, we are asking for the confidence and knowledge to continue in what we are doing. We believe that Hashem is involved in our daily lives through the concept of *hashgachah pratit*. Through asking Him for certain “signs,” we are asking for guidance in our Hashgacha.

We hope that through *Shema Koleinu* (which literally means Hashem – hear our voices), He will hear our thoughts and help us to make the right decision. In this way, we develop an emotional relationship with ourselves, because we get to transform ourselves into whatever we want, and tefillah is our vehicle for that.

More importantly, we develop a strong emotional relationship with Hashem. Eliezer was doing the same; he was not making a sign using superstitious omens. He was asking for the correct thought process to make sure that the woman would be the right wife for Yitzchak.



## Thinking Out of the Box

Woven throughout Sefer Bereishit are the stories, lessons, and monumental events that forged the path of the development of the Jewish nation. Each decision the forefathers made and each action they took, created an impact that not only showed immediate effects, but was transmitted into the lives of each Jew, from the biblical era to the present. Certain moments (e.g. akeidat Yitzchak) are lauded in Jewish history, taught from a young age and imprinted in the memory of each student with time. The piety and emunah that characterize the Jewish people, among many other attributes, are evident in these instances.

However, not everything is so clear in the tapestry of the Torah. Threaded alongside the moments of clear avodat Hashem are events that make the reader question the intentions and actions of the avot. One theme in particular worth discussing is the repeated instance of our forefathers, while in a foreign land, telling the local leader that their wives are their sisters, causing their wives to be taken, the leader to be punished, and the truth to be revealed. This happens twice with Avraham and Sarah, and then again with Yitzchak and Rivka.

What exactly is going on in these stories? Why bend the truth? What were the intentions each step of the way, and why do seemingly innocent men get punished? Clearly, there is much to be learned here, and many messages from our ancestors waiting to be internalized.

The first of the three aforementioned instances is when Avraham and Sarah are forced to go to Egypt due to a famine in their land. The pasuk says: **ויהי רעב בארץ וירד אברם מצרימה לגור שם** (Bereishit 12:10). The pasuk only mentions Avraham going down to Egypt, even though Sarah went with him. Why does it not say her name in the pasuk?

The Midrash Rabbah (40:5) answers: *נתנה בתיבה ונעל בפניה*. Avraham locked her inside a box, because he saw that she was extremely beautiful and did not want the Egyptians to take her and violate her. Another instance of a beautiful woman being hidden inside a box is found regarding Dina (32:23), where Rashi quotes a Midrash that Yaakov placed Dina inside a chest so that Esav would not see her and want to marry her. Although Yaakov was evidently punished for this action, it is not clear that Avraham's hiding Sarah in a box had direct negative consequences, as Sarah would have been taken regardless.

Why did Avraham only start fearing the danger of Sarah's beauty now? Rashi (12:11) explains that they were heading towards Egypt, and Egyptians were an unattractive nation, not used to seeing beautiful women. However, Avraham voices the same fear when he calls Sarah his sister again during the instance with Avimelech and the Plishtim, and Yitzchak does this as well with Rivka. There must be a better explanation.

The Ramban, however, questions this response. We see that Avraham and Yitzchak repeat this ploy also in the land of the Plishtim. He, therefore, proposes alternate explanations. The first is that perhaps Avraham only developed the fear of Sarah's beauty once they entered a place where kings dwelled, because the custom was to bring beautiful women to kings and kill their husbands.

The second, preferred answer of the Ramban, is that Avraham actually labeled Sarah as his sister from the moment they left Charan, but the Torah only mentions the reference in places where there is a new matter taking place. Consequently, now, when Avraham and Sarah are entering the new territory of Egypt, he presses her to call herself his sister again, though he must have also done so previously.

The Ohr HaChaim adds a different nuance to Ramban's point. He quotes the *germara* (Pesachim 64b), *אין סומכין על הנס*; while it is true that righteous people have to place their trust in G-d, this rule only applies when one does not deliberately put himself into a dangerous situation. No one has the right to make his survival

depend on a miracle. When Avraham said to Sarah **הנה נא ידעתי כי** **אשה יפת מראה את**, he was telling her that had he recognized how beautiful she actually was, how vile the Egyptians were and how dangerous the situation was, he would not have ventured to put themselves into this predicament.

This is a message that can be taken to heart nowadays as well: While it is the basis of emunah to believe in Hashem and His capabilities to take anyone out of any form of trouble, that does not give anyone the excuse to act recklessly and have blind faith that Hashem will save him. Each individual must act with clarity of mind and the best intentions. One may ask, then, how Avraham could repeat the same strategy with Avimelech just a few perakim later? The Ohr HaChaim explains that the Plishtim were not as unattractive (and therefore not as desperate) as the Egyptians, so Sarah was not in as great a danger. That is why Avraham during the episode did not command Sarah to say she was his sister, but rather said it himself.

What were Avraham's motives for this episode as a whole? He said to her: **אמרי נא אחתי את למען ייטב לי בעבורך וחיתה נפשי בגללך** (12:13). Rashi says that the words **לי בעבורך ייטב לי** refer to the fact that the Egyptians would give Avraham presents for Sarah. But this answer does not suffice: he must have had a more righteous motive.

The Ohr HaChaim defends Avraham's righteous intentions.

דקדק לומר וחיתה נפשי ולא אמר ואחיה וכו' לרמזו אומרו (משלי  
יג:כה) צדיק אוכל לשובע נפשו.

Avraham specifically said **נפשי וחיתה**, that his *soul* would remain alive through Sarah describing him as her brother. He did not have in mind his mere physical survival. If that had been his intention, he would have said **ואחיה**, without mentioning the soul. **נפשי וחיתה** is an allusion to Avraham remaining spiritually pure after what could happen. It is written in Mishlei that **צדיק אוכל לשובע נפשו**: a righteous person eats food not to enjoy it but to satisfy the needs of his soul so that he may carry on his task in life. Avraham here was doing

what he needed to do to ensure that he and his wife survived the period of the famine in Egypt.

Additionally, the Ohr HaChaim explains that the double language in the pasuk: **בגללך** and **בעבורך**, is a reference to the fact that Avraham hoped this decision would not only protect his physical well being by ensuring he would not be killed, but his spiritual entity as well by ensuring worthy offspring:

חשב אברהם כי על ידי סתירת האשה עם האיש והיא נקיה ה' יפקדה  
בבנים בדומין לו והוא אומרו וחיתה נפשי בפקודת הזרע בגללך פירוש  
בדברים המתגלגלים ממך

Avraham figured that through Sarah undergoing an experience similar to that of an *isha sota* and remaining innocent, they would be rewarded with children.

Regarding innocence, it is clear that Avraham's and Sarah's intentions were pure. However, what about Pharaoh? Did he commit a sin? If not, why did he receive such a drastic punishment? According to Rashi (12:17), **במכת ראתן לקה**, **שהתשמיש קשה לו**. Pharaoh was afflicted with the disease of *ra'atan*, which made relations painful for him.

Analyzing the phrase **על דבר שרי** – “on account of Sarai,” will help us figure out the root of the affliction. Rashi explains as follows, **על פי דבורה**; **אומרת למלאך הך**, והוא מכה Sarai; she told an angel to strike Pharaoh, and the angel struck. The Ohr HaChaim writes that this phrase shows that Pharaoh was told that Sarah was Avraham's wife *as* he received the affliction. How could Pharaoh be given a punishment if he did not know before? The Kli Yakar (12:17) offers one explanation.

אע"פ שבפני ההמון עם אמרה שרה אחותו אני, מי"מ לפרעה הגידה  
האמת שהיא אשת אברם בחשבה שמלך יושב על כסא דין לא יעשה עול,  
ופרעה לא השגיח בה כי אמר לדברך הראשונים אני מאמין על כן נגעו  
ה' על דבר שרי בשביל דבורה של שרי ומה היה דבורה. אשת אברם.

Although Sarah told the general population that she was Avraham's sister, she told Pharaoh that she was Avraham's wife. Sarah assumed that a king would not commit any wrongdoings if he knew that a woman belonged to her husband. However, Pharaoh did not

listen to her, and instead decided to listen to her original statement that she was Avraham's sister. Therefore he was afflicted because of the "word of Sarah": her statement that she was Avraham's wife, the statement that Pharaoh ignored.

Once Pharaoh was suffering through his calamities, he cries out to Avraham and asks three questions (12:18-19):

וַיִּקְרָא פַרְעֹה לְאַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר מַה זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לִּי לָמָּה לֹא הִגַּדְתָּ לִּי כִּי  
אֶשְׁתְּךָ הִוא: לָמָּה אָמַרְתָּ אֲחֵתִי הִוא וְאִקַּח אֹתָהּ לִּי לְאִשָּׁה וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה  
אֶשְׁתְּךָ קֵד וְלֹךְ:

Why is Pharaoh so repetitive? Ramban says that once Pharaoh was afflicted, he feared that perhaps Sarah was indeed the wife of Avraham. He asked Avraham doubtfully *לִי מַה זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ* to get the truth from him. If Sarah were his sister, he would have said so here, but since Avraham was silent after Pharaoh said *קֵד וְלֹךְ*, Pharaoh realized that she was his wife and therefore sent Avraham and Sarah away.

The Ohr HaChaim explains that perhaps Pharaoh wanted to vocalize two levels of his astonishment at Avraham's conduct: Firstly, he accused Avraham of entrapping him by withholding the information that Sarah was married, a fact which could cause Pharaoh to commit a sin. Secondly, he could not understand that Avraham had not only withheld relevant information but had deliberately misinformed him when he described Sarah as his sister.

According to the Sforno, Pharaoh asks Avraham why he didn't trust him, even if he distrusted the rest of the nation. Why did he say that Sarah was his sister even after she was brought to the king?

The Ba'al HaTurim offers an interesting comment on the section of the pasuk *קֵד וְלֹךְ אֶשְׁתְּךָ הִנֵּה*. He says that this phrase is written twice in the Torah. The second time is when Lavan and Betuel say to Eliezer (24:51): *הִנֵּה רִבְקָה לִפְנֵיךָ קֵד וְלֹךְ וְהִיא אִשָּׁה לְבֵן אֲדִנִּיךָ*: *כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה'*. In the previous pasuk, Lavan and Betuel proclaim: *לֹא נוֹכַל דַּבֵּר אֵלֶיךָ רָע אוֹ טוֹב* – *"the matter stems from Hashem. We can say to you neither bad nor good."* When Hashem

wants something to happen, it will. What one thinks or says about it does not change the fact that it is the reality. Lavan and Betuel realized this, and so did Pharaoh twelve perakim earlier. One cannot combat the will of Hashem.

There is a second instance in which Avraham refers to Sarah as his sister, and Sarah is taken to the leader of the country. In this case, it is Avimelech the king of Grar. Let us analyze the similarities and contrasts between the two stories.

There it is written (20:2): ויאמר אברהם אל שרה אשתו אחתי הוא. Avraham says about his wife, Sarah, that she is his sister. Rashi comments that in this instance, Avraham did not ask Sarah for her permission before covering up the truth. He did this against her will, because she had already been taken by Pharaoh and he wanted to protect her from what he now knew firsthand could happen. This is different than in Egypt, where Avraham commanded Sarah to tell everyone that she was his sister rather than saying it himself.

One may ask why Avraham would so readily repeat his actions when things did not go so smoothly with Pharaoh. The Ramban explains that this situation was not like that of Egypt, because in Egypt the nation was steeped in immorality and the men saw Sarah and praised her to Pharaoh and his officers. Here, however, the king was pure and straight and his people were good. Avraham simply suspected everyone and therefore told everyone that Sarah was his sister.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps he had reason to fear, for in the very same pasuk, Avimelech sends for Sarah and takes her.

However, this is where the story diverges from the story of Sarah and Pharaoh. That night, Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream. He says to Avimelech (20:3): הנה נתתי לך את שרה אשתך. This pasuk raises questions on Avimelech's innocence, as well as the

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<sup>1</sup> The Ramban restates this general idea in his commentary on Bereishit 20:12, where he writes that Avraham was worried that there was no יראת ה' in Grar because most places in the world do not fear G-d, and therefore from the time that he left his land and began to wander without knowing where he would end up, he planned to say that Sarah was his sister no matter where he was. He did not specifically plan that he would say this in Grar.



threatened punishment. After all, the Ohr HaChaim states: אחר האמת: מהאמור בענין נראה כי לא ידע שהיא בעולת בעל Avimelech did not realize that Sarah was someone's wife. This makes sense, considering the fact that Avraham claimed that she was his sister. Avimelech says in the following pesukim (20:4-5): הגוי גם צדיק תהרג: הלא הוא אמר לי אחתי: הוא והיא גם הוא אמרה אחי הוא בתם לבבי ובנקיון כפי עשיתי זאת:

He clearly tells Hashem that he did nothing wrong, being that he did not physically sin with Sarah and because Avraham and Sarah both held to the claim that they were siblings. The perplexity of the situation increases when Hashem says to Avimelech (20:6):

גם אנכי ידעתי כי בתם לבבך עשית זאת ואחשך גם אנכי אותך מחטו  
לי על כן לא נתתיך לנגע אליה.

Clearly, Avimelech did not intend to sin, and did not physically sin. Yet Rashi teaches (20:9) that Avimelech and his people were stricken with a plague that typically didn't affect any living creatures: all bodily holes were closed. Bereishit Rabbah (52:13) explains the scenario in a way that almost exactly parallels what happened with Pharaoh: כל אותה הלילה היה מלאך עומד ומגלב בידו והיה מתייעץ בשרה, ואם אמרה ליה מתייעץ בשרה, ואם אמרה ליה מחי מחי, ואם אמרה ליה שבוך הוה שבוך שמענו בפרעה שלקה בצרעת ואבימלך שלקה בעצור, ומגין שהכל לקו בזה ובוה, תלמוד לומר: על דבר שרי אשת אברם, גורה שוה. Both afflictions came directly from the word of Sarah.

A different comment in the Midrash Rabbah (52:7) uses a *ma-shal* to prove that Avimelech was not completely innocent:

משל לגבור רוכב על הסוס והסוס רץ וראה תינוק אחד משלך ומשך  
הסוס ולא הויק את התינוק, למי הכל מקלסים לסוס או לרוכב, לא  
לרוכב, כך על כן לא נתתיך לנגע אליה, מחטונך לי, יצרך המחטיאך  
בידי הוא מסור, ואני מנעתך מלחטא, משכתיך מן החטא, והשבת שלי  
הוא ולא שלך.

A man is riding a horse, and notices that there is a baby in his path. He pulls the horse out of the way so that the baby would not be run over. Who is responsible for saving the baby: the horse or the rider? Clearly, the rider is the hero. So too, Hashem saw that

Avimelech was on the path of sinning with Sarah, and therefore pulled him out of the way in order to “save the baby.” If Avimelech was left to his own accord, he very well could have and would have sinned, and that is why he was punished.

Rav Elchanan Wasserman touched on a similar concept in a *sicha* to a Rabbinical Seminary in Germany, a few years before World War II (Ohr Elchanan vol. 2). In his speech, he referred to the pasuk (20:11): וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם כִּי אִמְרַתִּי רַק אֵין יִרְאֵת אֱלֹקִים בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה: וְהִרְגוּנִי עַל דְּבַר אִשְׁתִּי.

He asked the crowd: Why did Avraham say the seemingly extraneous word *רק*? Rav Elchanan answered: when one is found amongst a group of intelligent people, or an entire nation that seems to be extremely well educated and put together, it would appear to be possible to live a quiet and peaceful life. One would feel assured that through their intellect, these groups had established morals and principles and would conduct themselves with proper middot. However, with the word *רק*, Avraham was relaying that even though he was in a place that appeared respectable, he was still suspicious. The decorum of a nation or group of individuals whose mannerisms are determined only by intellect and civility can change in an instant, because they have no intermediary or force to control their *yitzrot*; though they may have poise and dignity, they have no *yirat Hashem* to prevent them from acting on their evil desires.

That is what Avraham meant when he said *רק אין יראת אלקים*: there is truly no force that can defeat sinful or immoral inclinations other than fear of G-d and recognition that He is always watching. As good as he may have been, Avimelech and his nation did not possess this quality.

After the episode concludes, Avimelech, to his credit, did not rush to kick Avraham and Sarah out like Pharaoh did. He gifted cattle, sheep, and servants, in addition to returning Sarah, to Avraham. He offered his land for Avraham to settle in and presented Avraham with one thousand pieces of silver to appease Sarah and vindicate her name.

Rashi (20:16) explains Avimelech’s motive in quite a noble light. His thought process was: “had I returned you empty-handed,

they could say, 'After he violated her, he returned her.' Now that I had to spend money and appease you, they will know that against my will I returned you, and through a miracle." Though his actions were clearly misguided, Avimelech essentially sacrificed his own honor here in order to pronounce Sarah's innocence.

In Parshat Toldot, (chap. 26), the Torah narrates the third episode of a forefather describing his wife as his sister. This time, it is Yitzchak and Rivka who are the protagonists. Interestingly enough, the leader of the land in which the story occurs is again Avimelech of Garar. Just like Avraham who went to Egypt because of a famine in the first passage, Yitzchak and Rivka go to Garar because of a famine.

Rashi comments (26:2) that Yitzchak intended to go to Egypt as well, but Hashem instructed him against it because he was too pure to leave the land of Israel, especially to a place as impure as Egypt. While in Egypt, the men and officers saw Sarah and praised her to Pharaoh, by contrast the men of Garar simply asked Yitzchak about his wife. Yitzchak replied הוא אחתי – she is my sister. The pasuk (26:7) states Yitzchak's reasoning behind this: כי ירא לאמר אשתי. פן יהרגני אנשי המקום על רבקה כי טובת מראה היא. Like his father, Yitzchak was afraid that he would be killed and Rivka would be taken because of her beauty.

However, what differs between now and when Avraham was in Garar was that Yitzchak, according to the Alshich (26:7), was particularly scared of the *men* of Garar, not Avimelech. After Avimelech's response to his experience with Sarah and the brit that he made with Avraham, Yitzchak had no reason to fear that he would take Rivka. This assumption was accurate, for unlike the two instances with Sarah, Rivka was not taken. Instead, something strange occurred: ויהי כי ארכו לו שם הימים וישקף אבימלך מלך פלשתים (26:8). Yitzchak was the one who was intimate with his wife, not a foreign leader. Many mefarshim use the phrase ויהי כי ארכו לו שם הימים in order to explain the thought processes behind both Yitzchak and Avimelech. Rashi and Rashbam (26:8) both explain that Yitzchak became less careful

about how he acted with Rivka after seeing that the Plishtim had not yet tried to take her and violate her.

The Kli Yakar says that because so much time had passed, Avimelech became suspicious as to why Yitzchak had not married any woman if Rivka was indeed his sister. That is why he gazed into their window: to see what was going on. The pesukim then discuss the confrontation between Avimelech and Yitzchak. Avimelech says to Yitzchak: “So she is your wife! Why then did you say that she was your sister?” Yitzchak responds in the same pasuk: “Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her.” This mirrors Avraham’s response to Avimelech when he was in the similar situation: *והרגוני על דבר אשתי*.

Fascinatingly, Avraham does not have a response to Pharaoh’s accusations. This is likely because Pharaoh did not give him enough time to respond; he insisted that Avraham and Sarah leave Egypt immediately. According to the Ohr HaChaim (12:18-19), this was because the Egyptians were unattractive and steeped in immorality and Pharaoh was worried that if Sarah stayed any longer, his people would sin against her and they would all be punished.

Avimelech and his nation did not share this dilemma. This actually connects directly to the Kli Yakar’s commentary (26:10) where Avimelech says: *מה זאת עשית לנו*. The Kli Yakar contrasts this with Pharaoh’s question to Avraham (12:18): *מה זאת עשית לי* – What have you done to **me**? Pharaoh spoke in singular because he was solely responsible for the establishment of proper principles and moral behavior in a nation so corrupt and lewd. Therefore, he felt that he deserved the truth, so that he could prevent others from committing wrongdoing. Avimelech, on the other hand, led a nation that was righteous compared to the Egyptians, and had everyone known the truth, nobody would have thought of touching Rivka.

Avimelech further ensured Rivka’s safety by vowing to kill anyone who dared touch Yitzchak or Rivka. Furthermore, like the first two stories, Yitzchak is granted success and riches – here, in the form of a successful crop, though the following pesukim tell of his acquisition of an impressive amount of cattle. With this, the final episode of this intriguing trilogy concludes.

Though there are countless similarities and contrasts that could be assessed from these three stories, certain ones are particularly noteworthy.

אבימלך ורבה	אבימלך ושרה	פרעה ושרה
The locals asks about Yitzchak's wife and he says that she is his sister. וישאלו אנשי המקום לאשתו (26:7) ויאמר אחתי הוא	Avraham says אחותי, not Sarah. ויאמר אברהם אל שרה אשתו (20:2) אחתי הוא	Avraham warns Sarah to say that she is his sister. (12:13) אמרי נא אחתי את
Immediate reason for אחותי: כי ירא לאמר אשתי פן יהרגני אנשי המקום על רבקה כי טובת מראה הוא (26:7)	No immediate reason given	Immediate reason for אחותי: והרגו אתי ואתך יחיו / למען ייטב לי בעבורך חזיתה נפשי בגללך (12:12-13)
Avimelech does not send for Rivka. Rather, he notices something amiss when he looks in the window. כי ארכו לו שם הימים וישקף אבימלך מלך פלשתים (26:8) בעד החלון	Only after Avraham says אחותי does Avimelech send for Sarah. אחתי הוא וישלח אבימלך מלך גר ויקח את שרה (20:2)	The Egyptians saw that she was beautiful and praised her to Pharaoh, then she was taken. ויראו אתה שרי פרעה ויהללו אתה אל פרעה ותקח האשה בית פרעה (12:15)
Rivka was not put in a box.	Sarah was not put in a box.	Sarah was put in a box.
Hashem does not speak to Avimelech.	Hashem appears to Avimelech in a dream.	Hashem does not speak to Pharaoh.
Avimelech does not give gifts, but gives warning to his nation. Yitzchak acquires wealth from Hashem's blessing: ויברכוהו ה'... וילך הלך וגדל (26:12-13) עד כי גדל מאד	Avimelech gives gifts to Avraham only after he returns Sarah. ויקח אבימלך צאן ובקר ועבדים ושפחת ויתן לאברהם וישב לו את שרה אשתו (20:14)	Pharaoh gives Avraham gifts while Sarah is still in his possession: ולאברהם היטיב בעבורה (12:16)

פרעה ושרה	אבימלך ושרה	אבימלך ורבקה
<p>Hashem afflicts Pharaoh and his household. וינגע ה' את פרעה נגעים גדלים ואת ביתו על דבר שרי אשת אברהם: (12:17)</p>	<p>Pasuk only mentions the affliction after it is inflicted and Avimelech complains. is על דבר שרה אשת אברהם. repeated, like with Pharaoh. כי עצר עצר ה' בעד כל רחם לבית אבימלך על דבר שרה אשת אברהם: (20:18)</p>	<p>Avimelech is the one to command that whoever touches Yitzchak or Rivka will die. ויצו אבימלך את כל העם לאמר הנגע באיש הזה ובאשתו מות יומת: (26:11)</p>
<p>Asks three questions: (1) מה זאת עשית לי (2) למה לא הגדת לי כי אשתך הוא (3) למה אמרת אחתי הוא (12:18-19)</p>	<p>Asks three questions: (1) מה עשית לנו (2) ומה חטאתי לך כי הבאת עלי ועל ממלכתי חטאה גדלה (3) מה ראית כי עשית את הדבר הזה (20:9-10)</p>	<p>Asks two questions: (1) ואיך אמרת אחתי הוא (2) מה זאת עשית לנו כמעט שכב אחד העם את אשתך (26:9-10)</p>
<p>Avraham's response: Did not have one. Sent away immediately.</p>	<p>Avraham's response: רק אין יראת אלקים במקום הזה והרגוני על דבר אשתי ... וגם אמנה אחתי בת אבי הוא (20:11)</p>	<p>Yitzchak's response: כי אמרתי פן אמות עליה (26:9)</p>
<p>Pharaoh sends them away immediately. הנה אשתך קח ולך ... ויצו עליו פרעה אנשים וישלחו אתו ואת אשתו ואת כל אשר לו (12:19-20)</p>	<p>Avimelech offers his land for them to settle in. ויאמר אבימלך הנה ארצי לפניך בטוב בעיניך שב (20:15)</p>	<p>Avimelech only sends them away later, after they were settled and found success. ויאמר אבימלך אל יצחק לך מעמנו כי עצמת ממנו מאד (26:16)</p>

These three stories are bewildering. They raise many questions about the actions of the forefathers, the power of words, and the significance of intentions. However, it is clear from the commentaries and analysis on this topic that there is an underlying meaning to all that the Avot and Imahot did. It is impossible for people in the current generation to truly grasp the greatness and complexity of מעשה אבות.

Rav Hirsch writes beautifully (12:10-13):

The Torah does not hide from us the faults, errors, and weaknesses of our great men, and this is precisely what gives its stories credibility. The knowledge given to us of their faults and weaknesses does not detract from the stature of our great men; on the contrary, it adds to their stature and makes their life stories even more instructive. Had they been portrayed to us as shining models of perfection, flawless and unblemished, we would have assumed that they had been endowed with a higher nature, not given to us to attain.

There is so much to be learned from the ancestors of the Jewish nation, especially in the striking Sefer Bereishit. One simply needs to think outside the box.





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הלכה

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## Keeping Wine Kosher

Someone is sitting at the dinner table and his cousin, who is irreligious, pours him a cup of wine. Is the wine no longer kosher? Is he still allowed to drink it? What if his cousin drank from his cup? What if the cousin did not pour his wine but simply moved or touched the cup or bottle while reaching for something? This article will discuss what might affect the kosher status of the wine, including the halachic implications of non-Jews and non-religious Jews touching or moving wine.

We begin with some basic understanding how wine is made. The winemaking process can be split into five simple stages: (1) picking the grapes from the vines, (2) crushing the grapes, (3) fermenting the grapes by adding yeast, (4) aging the wine in different containers/barrels based on the desired flavor, and (5) bottling the wine.

This process is the same whether one is making kosher wine or non-kosher wine. The subtle differences are not in the actual winemaking, but with the people involved in the winemaking process. To be considered kosher, the wine should be produced under rabbinic supervision and must be handled by a Jew who is *shomer Shabbat*.

To reduce the number of halachic challenges, some wines are cooked, creating mevushal wine. The halacha is that mevushal wine that was subsequently touched by a non-Jew remains kosher. There is a large debate on what must be done to the wine for it to become yayin mevushal. The Rosh (Avoda Zara 2:13) writes that if the wine is heated, it will be classified as yayin mevushal. The Rashba (Torat HaBayit 5:3, citing Ramban) and Ran (Avoda Zara 10a) believe that it is not considered mevushal unless some of the wine is lost in the heating process.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe Y.D. 2:52. See also 3:31) and Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer 8:15) say that the wine does not

have to be boiled to be considered mevushal; instead it will be considered mevushal once it has been heated to 80°C. The Tzelemer Rav (based on Darkei Teshuva 123:15 and the Gilyon Maharsha Y.D. 116:1) disagrees, believing that the wine must be boiled.

Is pasteurized wine considered mevushal? The Rashba (Teshuvot 4:149), the Meiri (Avoda Zara 29b-30a), the Kneset Hagdola (123, Haghot Beit Yosef number 16) and the Sedei Chemed (Maarechet Yayin Nesech) all state that the reason yayin mevushal can be touched by non-Jews is because the taste has been altered by heating it up.

Many expensive wine companies refuse to pasteurize their wines, claiming that the process alters the taste. Experts can clearly tell the difference. On the other hand, the average person would have a hard time distinguishing between pasteurized and non-pasteurized wines. Most American kashrut organizations treat pasteurized wine as yayin mevushal.

A Jew is forbidden to gain any form of benefit from uncooked wine touched by an idolator. This rule is derived from Masechet Avoda Zara 30a, where it is stated that any object of a non-Jew that was used for avoda zara is forbidden to Jews. An example is given of a tree that was used for an idolatrous ritual, where one cannot even cut it up for firewood since one is not allowed to benefit from it. Wine that a non-Jew touched was prohibited out of concern that it was being used for idolatrous practice..

Even if the wine was not directly used to worship false gods, the person touching it might have been thinking about avoda zara while doing so, and therefore would have made the wine prohibited to Jews. Furthermore, the wine of non-Jews is prohibited due to fears of intermarriage. Drinking together with non-Jews may lead one to “marrying their daughters”.

Mevushal wine, on the other hand, was never used for idolatrous practices and was considered to be uncommon. Therefore, these prohibitions do not apply.

What is the halacha regarding a non-religious Jew who has contact with the wine? The Rishonim (Baal Halachot Gedolot,

Rashba, Or Zarua) write that regarding the kashrut of wine, a non-believing Jew who deliberately violates Shabbat is to be treated as a non-Jew. Already in the nineteenth century, poskim questioned whether the parameters of this halacha had changed.

In an era where the vast majority of the Jewish community was Torah oriented and Torah educated, a *mechalel Shabbat* had clearly left the fold. But how are we to treat a Jew who does not observe the laws of Shabbat because he never received a proper Jewish education? What if he goes to work on Shabbat, but recites kiddush on Friday night?

Although it would be better to be stringent in this matter, the Binyan Tziyon (#23) writes that there is a basis to be lenient. Later poskim also sought a basis to be lenient (See the discussions in Yabia Omer vol. 1 YD 11; Tzitz Eliezer 12:56; Teshuvot V'hanhagot 2:400).

In conclusion, the safest approach is to serve yayin mevushal when dining with non-religious relatives or non-Jewish colleagues.  
*Bon appetit!*



## **Avot and Toladot of Melachot Shabbat**

The mishna in Masechet Shabbat (73a) lists the famous 39 avot melachot that are forbidden to do on Shabbat. Each of these avot melacha has toladot. Separating melachot into these two categories raises many questions: What is the difference between the two? How are actions classified as one or the other? And what are the practical ramifications? These issues are explored throughout the gemara and by many Rishonim and Achronim.

Before looking into these sources, one must understand the factors involved in a melacha. A melacha can be broken into three features; the intention (תכלית הפעולה), the action (מעשה הפעולה) and the object that the action is done to (הנפעל). There are different opinions which of these facets is the determining factor of an av vs. a toladah.

The Gemara (Shabbat 73b) discusses the melacha of *zomer*, pruning. According to Rav Kahana, one who prunes a tree (aiding its growth) and collects the cut branches for use, is obligated to bring two korbanot: one on account of harvesting, and one on account of planting. Rav Yosef adds that one who cuts an אספסתא plant is also obligated to bring two korbanot for the same reasons.

Rashi comments on the words *zomer* that one who prunes is obligated to bring a korban because he has performed a toladah of *notei'a* (planting a tree) since his intention is to help the plant grow. According to Rashi, even if the action has the same intention as the av melacha, if it is a different action, it is a toladah. In order for something to be considered an av melacha, according to Rashi, it must not only have the same intention and also be the same action as was done in the construction of the mishkan. *Notei'a* is the same action as the mishkan melacha of *zorei'a*, and therefore Rashi considers it to be an av melacha.

Rabbeinu Chananel in his comments on this gemara, writes that it is possible for a toladah to have a toladah. He explains that *notei'a* is a toladah of *zorei'a* (sowing a seed), not an av. Even though it is the same action of putting something in the ground with the intention for it to grow, because the action is done to a different object (a tree vs. a seed), it is a toladah. This implies that in order for something to be an av, it must have the same type of activity and performed on a similar object as the av melacha that is listed in the mishna.

The Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 7:2-6, 8:1-2), through many examples, explains that an av is an action that shares the same purpose of the melacha done in the mishkan (and listed in the mishna). Contrastingly, for toladot, the melacha is similar to the av. This is the case in the melacha of *tochein* (grinding). Cutting up vegetables is only a toladah because the intention is to take one entity and transform it into many smaller ones. Cutting up vegetables has a similar *מעשה הפעולה*, but not the same *תכלית הפעלה*, making it a toladah.

The Rambam further explains that separating the fat out of milk in order to make cheese is a toladah of *borer* (separating) and *boneh* (building). These actions have a different purpose than the avot they are connected to, but they are similar in their *מעשה הפעולה* (separating and sticking things together, respectively.) The Rambam also explains actions that relate to the avot of *choresh* and *zorei'a*.

All these examples follow his formula that an action is a toladah of an av melacha if it has the same *מעשה הפעולה* (and not necessarily the same intention) as one of the avot melachot listed in the mishna. These examples include toladot of *choresh*, such as weeding around trees, picking grass and flattening the surface of a field. They also include an example of a toladah of *zorei'a*, such as pruning trees and watering plants.

However, categorizing watering plants as a toladah is inconsistent with his formula. Watering plants has the same intention as *zorei'a*, helping plants to grow, but the *מעשה* is not similar to the av at all! According to his formula, watering plants should really be an av. How can we reconcile this?



The Tiferet Yisrael in his commentary on this mishna (כלכלת השבת כללי ל"ט מלאכות) attempts to explain this apparent contradiction in the Rambam. He first describes the actions of grafting and cross-breeding, which expands the definition of an av from something that was done in the mishkan to an action that shares the action and intention as one of the avot listed in the mishna. In the cases of grafting and crossbreeding, they are similar to *zorei'a* and *notei'a* because they are all planting something rootless with the intention for it to grow.

The Tiferet Yisrael further expands the definition of an av to include actions which only have the same intention as the melacha done in the mishkan. One such example is *zomer*, where one cuts a branch off of a tree with the intention to help the plant grow.

He also addresses the inconsistency within the Rambam, explaining that in order for an action to be considered an av, it has to be done to the same object that one intends to affect with the action. This means that an action could share an intention and/or action with a melacha done in the mishkan, but can still be considered a toladah since the action is not done to the same object. The action of watering plants is therefore a toladah, even though the intention seems similar to the melacha done in the mishkan, since one is handling the water and not the plants.

The Tiferet Yisrael also refers to the difference in punishments between violating an av and violating a toladah. If one does a melacha on purpose, with or without receiving a warning, the punishments are the same (*skilah* and *kareit*, respectively) whether he did an av or a toladah.

However, if one does a melacha by accident, the number of *korbanot chatat* he needs to bring may vary. If one does an av and its toladah or two toladot from the same av in the same moment of confusion (where he thought they were allowed on Shabbat) he is only obligated to bring one korban. However, if one does two avot or two toladot from different avot in the same moment of confusion he is obligated to bring two *korbanot chatat*.

The gemara asks why *borer*, *zorei'a*, and *merakeid* are separate avot melachot if they all include the same action of separating the bad from the good. Abaye and Rava explain that although the actions are similar, they were done as separate actions in the mishkan, making them equally important and thus viewed as different. The (י' לז. אבות ותולדות אות י) clarifies and expands upon this question and answer.

An action is considered an av melacha if it is done in the same manner as the action was done in the mishkan. For example, *borer* was done to separate straw, while *zorei'a* was separating pebbles, and *meraked* was sifting flour. Because these were different actions in the mishkan, even though they all have the intention of separating food, they are considered individual melachot, and one would be obligated for each one separately.

Avot and tolados can be distinguished by the way in which they are done. This might be similar to the case of תמחויין מוחלקין (see Keritut 15b). If, before the blood was sprinkled on the mizbei'ach, someone eats from a korban that was prepared in five separate dishes, according to R' Yehoshua he is obligated to bring five separate korbanot. Although he has violated the same exact issur, they are treated separately because they were prepared differently.

The Rashba (Shabbat 96b) uses this idea to explain R' Eliezer's opinion. One who does two different tolados on Shabbat, or does two tolados that fall under one av, would be obligated to bring two korbanot because every action is considered a separate melacha. He would only be required to bring one korban if he did the same av twice with one action.

Avot have some very specific rules, but do those rules also apply to their tolados? The Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 8:7) writes that if someone wounds another being that has skin, he is obligated to bring a korban because of the melacha of *mefareik*, separating liquids from solids.

While it is quite understandable that he would be obligated, R' Daniel HaBavli asks why he is obligated for *mefareik* which is a

toladah of *dosh* (threshing). The melacha of *dosh* only applies to things that grow from the ground, so how can one violate *dosh* for injuring a living being? The Birkat Avraham answers that even though toladot are similar to avot, they are not exactly the same. *Mefareik* is a toladah of *dosh*, not *dosh* itself. The rules that apply to *dosh* (the av) do not also automatically apply to its toladot. One is obligated for *mefareik* because it is similar to the av of *dosh*, not because he did the melacha of *dosh* itself.

If this is the case, why is it necessary to classify something as a toladah of one of the avot? In order to understand why one is obligated for doing a toladah on Shabbat, the action must be connected to an av melacha. Once the toladah is established as an action that will make one obligated for performing it on Shabbat, it is no longer affiliated with its av melacha. Therefore, the rules that apply to the av do not necessarily apply to its toladot.



## מלאכה שאינה צריכה לגופה: דעתו של השלחן ערוך

In Hilchot Shabbat, there is a concept of מלאכה שאינה צריכה לגופה (משאצל"ג). The gemara (Shabbat 93b) mention this concept when it defines the action of removing a dead body from one's house on Shabbat as a משאצל"ג.

There are differing opinions defining the parameters of a משאצל"ג. The Ramban (Shabbat 94b) says that a משאצל"ג is dependent on whether or not the person performing the melacha gets benefit from the action. If the person benefits, then it is a מלאכה שצריכה לגופה. Only when the person does *not* benefit from the action, is it considered a מלאכה שאינה צריכה לגופה.

Rashi (93b) offers another definition of משאצל"ג. An action would be considered a משאצל"ג if it fits one of two categories. The first is אלא לסלקו מעליו, which means that you just want to remove the object from before you. The second is ברצונו לא באה לו, which means that you have no will or intention to do that specific action. If an action fits either of these two categories, it is a משאצל"ג.

Tosafot (94a) defines a משאצל"ג as a melacha that is done for a different purpose than for which it was done in the Mishkan. This is because the גוף המלאכה (essence) is the purpose that it served in constructing the Mishkan. Later on in their commentary, they ask a complex question on Rashi.

In the case of a man tearing his clothing to frighten his family members, Rashi defines the action as a משאצל"ג. Tosfot's question is: How does ripping to frighten family members fall into either of the categories of Rashi's criteria? It does not appear to be אלא לסלקו מעליו, because he in fact wants to scare his family members. It seems like it was a conscious decision with a productive purpose! How can this contradiction be resolved?

In the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 340:14), Rav Yosef Karo paskens that if one separates glued papers on Shabbat, and the intention is not to *only* be destructive, one is *chayav* (meaning he must bring a *korban chatat*). The Bei'ur Halacha uses this *psak* to resolve Tosfot's question on Rashi. He establishes that not only tearing in order to sew, which was the purpose of the action done in the Mishkan, is *chayav*. Rather, tearing which creates a *tikkun* is *chayav*. In any case where the *tikkun* is in the object itself, it's considered a *מלאכה שצריכה לגופה* and *chayav*.

However, in the case of tearing to scare family members, the *tikkun* is not in the object itself, the object being the clothing. After he rips it, he does not do any other action to the clothing itself; it's purely destructive. And if it's purely destructive to the object, it's a *מלאכה שאינה צריכה לגופה*.

There is another way to resolve Tosfot's question on Rashi. Some explain that when the person rips to scare his family members, he is ripping out of anger. This falls under the category of *לֹא בָּאָה לֹא בְּרָצוֹנוֹ*, because anger is an emotion you cannot control. When anger consumes a person, he does not make conscious decisions about his actions. Therefore, when he tears to scare his family members, he does it out of anger, not out of conscious will, making it a *משאצל"ג*.

Now that we understand some of the opinions of the Rishonim, we will attempt to prove that the Shulchan Aruch uses Rashi's definition when paskening cases regarding *משאצל"ג*.

In Shulchan Aruch (316:8), it appears that he paskens that a *משאצל"ג* is *patur aval assur*, meaning that it is downgraded to an *issur derabbanan*. However, somewhat later (340:1), he paskens that cutting hair or nails, in virtually all cases (by *kli* or by hand, by yourself or by others), is *chayav*. One would think that this is a *משאצל"ג* since he is just removing the hair/nails from himself. If so, why would the Shulchan Aruch pasken *chayav* in this case? And if this is the case, does the Shulchan Aruch really pasken that *משאצל"ג* is *patur aval assur*?

In the initial evaluation of this melacha (cutting nails or hair), there is a fundamental misunderstanding of its purpose. The Bei'ur Halacha explains that in reality, the purpose of this melacha is to beautify yourself. Therefore, when cutting your nails or hair, you are improving what is left behind (your appearance). If so, this does not fall under the category of *לסלקו מעליו*, אלא, since you are not *only* removing the hair/nails from yourself; you are improving what is left behind. Cutting hair/nails is a *מלאכה שצריכה לגופה* according to Rashi.

The Bei'ur Halacha analyzes this case a bit further when analyzing a scenario of a woman who needs to go to the mikvah on Friday night and forgot to cut her nails before Shabbat. The *psak* is that a non-Jew should bite off her nails, since she is twice removed from the melacha. The first is that it was done with a *shinui*, and the second is that it is done by a non-Jew. She is clearly not benefiting from the *גוף המלאכה*, and is only having her nails bitten off *l'tzorech hatevila*. (See also Rivash #394)

By looking at the sources, we see that the Shulchan Aruch uses Rashi's definition and parameters of *משאצל"ג* when paskening cases. According to the Shulchan Aruch, cutting nails and pulling out hair is *chayav*, because they are not *משאצל"ג*, rather *שצריכות לגופם*. These melachot fit with Rashi's definition of *משאצל"ג* because they do not fall under either category of *לסלקו מעליו* or *לא באה לו*. ברצונו לא באה לו. It's clear that you are benefiting from the *guf hamelcha*, which is improving the hair or nails left behind.





## BUGging Out

### ***Pesik Reisha* on Shabbat**

It is 2AM on Shabbat, and there is a fly buzzing around my head. I am trying to fall asleep, but this is very bothersome, so I want to cover the fly with a cup to stop the noise. Is this allowed?

In order to determine the halacha, the case first needs to be identified. Covering a fly with a cup could possibly be a violation of the melacha of **תפול**, trapping, but a *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei*. A *psik reisha* is an act that unintentionally results in a melacha, and is prohibited if the outcome is definite. However, this case is a *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei*, a *psik reisha* where the results are not necessarily desirable. In this case, the person is placing the cup over the fly to stop the noise. She doesn't care whether the fly is trapped or not.

There is a disagreement between the Aruch and Tosafot regarding the concept of *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei*. Tosafot (Ketubot 6b) explain that the concept of *p'sik reisha d'lo nicha lei* is the same as a *melacha she'eina tzricha legufa*, and is rabbinically prohibited. A *melacha sheina tzricha legufa* is when one does a melacha not for the purpose for which it was performed in the mishkan, but rather for a byproduct of the melacha. The Aruch says that the concept of *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei* is a separate idea and is permissible on Shabbat.

In order to see how the Shulchan Aruch paskens with regards to this machloket, one needs to examine two cases. The Shulchan Aruch (314:1) discusses a case where a knife is stuck in a barrel. The Shulchan Aruch (R' Yosef Karo) allows one to pull out the knife even though he will widen the opening by doing so, as long as this is not his intention. (It is important to note that even if he intended to widen the hole, the action would only be rabbinically prohibited. See the commentary of the Mishna Brurah.)

However, the Shulchan Aruch later appears to issue a contradicting ruling. He writes (328:48) that one may not place a garment on a bleeding wound because the blood would dye the garment, violating the melacha of dyeing. This too is a *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei*, as the dyeing is just a byproduct and the intention is not to dye the garment with blood. Here too, even if his intention had been for the garment to become stained, the action would only be rabbinically prohibited, since such staining would be destructive, not constructive. Nevertheless, it is prohibited.

The Rema also seems to issue contradictory rulings. He allows one to close a big drawer where there are flies, as long as he doesn't intend to trap them (316:3). In this situation, even if he intended to trap the flies, there would be two independent reasons why this would be only rabbinically prohibited. The flies are *ein b'mino nitzod*, a species that is not usually trapped. Additionally, the small flies are being trapped in a relatively large space and it is not possible to easily grab them in one attempt.

Elsewhere, however, the Rema writes (340:3) that it is prohibited to cut a cake that has letters on it. This is also a *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei* with a "double derabbanan". The person is not interested in destroying the lettering, the erasing is taking place in an unusual manner and the act is destructive.

In order to resolve the apparent contradictions, one must understand that there are two categories of mitigating factors why a particular action will not be a violation of a melacha on a Torah level, but only rabbinically prohibited; those related to the general rules of melacha on Shabbat (*klalei hamelacha*) and those that are related to the specific form of a given melacha (*tzurat hamelacha*).

The leniencies in the first category are not so strong, since the resultant action is still well rooted in the original melacha. If, however, the very format of the action is different from the original melacha, the result is far removed from the original melacha, and under certain circumstances might become permissible.

In the case of the knife in the barrel, the action (if done intentionally) would have been only rabbinically because the *tzurat*

*hamelacha* is different from standard *boneh* or *makeh b'patish*. That is not the case with the garment on the bleeding wound.

In the case of the flies in the drawer, the two mitigating factors dealt with the *tzurat hamelacha*. With regards to cutting the cake, the leniencies dealt with the *klalei hamelacha*.

Now it is time to evaluate the original case with the fly and see if one might be allowed (according to the Rema) to trap it on Shabbat because of *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei* with a “double derabbanan”. The first derabbanan is *ein b'mino nitzod*. Anything that is not normally hunted is only rabbinically prohibited, and flies are not normally hunted. The question is whether there exists the second factor; that the fly is trapped in a relatively large area. If one were to trap a fly in a cup so that the noise would no longer be heard, it seems pretty clear that this fly would be able to be caught in one grasp. In that case, there is only one mitigating factor, and the Rema would permit trapping the annoying fly.

The Shemirat Shabbat K'Hilcheta (25:4) states: “It is prohibited to kill flies and other insects that are not dangerous to people, and you may not trap them or stomp on them in the normal way of walking, even if you do not have intention to kill.” In the footnotes, it says that there are no leniencies given for *tza'ar hanefesh* to trap them and throw them outside. The only solution is to chase away the fly.



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מחשבה

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## The Interplay of Torah and Science

By delving into the philosophy of Rambam's Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah and Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pekuda's Chovot HaLevavot, we can come to an appreciation of the interplay between Torah and science; how one's understanding of the natural world can increase vis-à-vis Torah, and how one's understanding of Torah can increase vis-à-vis the natural world.

Beginning with the Torah standpoint, Rambam states (Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 1:1):

יסוד היסודות ועמוד החכמות לידע שיש שם מצי' ראשון. והוא ממציא כל נמצא. וכל הנמצאים משמים וארץ ומה שביניהם לא נמצאו אלא מאמתת המצאו.

The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a Primary Being who brought into being all of existence. All the beings of the heavens, the earth, and what is between them came into existence only from the truth of His being.

This brings forth a key point: Our appreciation for Torah must precede our appreciation for science; Hashem is the reason that science functions as it does. We are told (Yesodei HaTorah 1:3) **לו שכל הנמצאים צריכין לו**, or “everything that exists needs Him.” If everything ceased to exist, Hashem would continue to exist, but if Hashem theoretically would cease to exist, then nothing would exist.

Rabbeinu Bachya states (Sha'ar HaBechinah 1:1):

What is the examination? Contemplating the marks of the Creator's wisdom manifested in the created things and evaluating these marks according to one's mental capacity.

Rabbeinu Bachya further states (Shaar HaBechinah 1:4):

The reason being that when one and the same thing is always being produced in the same way, it is clear that the maker is not a voluntary agent but a force acting

according to the nature imposed upon it – compelling it to act in a definite way which it has no power to alter.

Rabbeinu Bachya is asserting that everything in nature remains the way it is simply because that is how Hashem created it and how Hashem wants it to remain.

Coming to appreciate science vis-à-vis our appreciation of Hashem can even come from understanding the following (Sha'ar HaBechinah 1:5):

So that the variety shall point to His unity and His free will in whatever He does, as it is said 'Whatsoever Hashem desired, He has done in heaven and on earth'.

Rabbeinu Bachya is teaching us a fundamental concept by saying that through recognizing Hashem as the Creator by virtue of the fact that He chose to create a seemingly endless variety of creatures, species, and human beings, one can come to appreciate the natural world. It is a "Wow!" expression conveying our desire to understand Hashem, and that will allow us to look out at the world and see it in an even more colorful way.

If one uses the lens of Torah to come to appreciate science, it becomes hard to appreciate the world *without* looking at every object and seeing it first as a *kli shel kedusha*, a vessel for holiness. When one employs this method, this world becomes for him a place where it is obvious who the Creator is. This is particularly true when one learns science from a Torah perspective, and it is also true when he observes natural phenomena, thereby coming to appreciate Hashem in a greater manner due to His creation of that nature.

On the other hand, there is something exceptional in coming to find Hashem through science. This requires the realization that it would be impossible for the intricacies of the world to exist if not for His willing them into being. It comes to follow that one must realize that in accordance with his unique faith in Hashem comes the fundamental realization that Hashem is the Creator of all matter on this earth. In what is arguably the strongest statement Rambam brings to emphasize this point, he writes (Yesodei HaTorah 2:9):



כל הנמצאים חוץ מן הבורא מצורה הראשונה עד יתוש קטן שיהיה  
בטבור הארץ הכל מכח אמתתו נמצאו. ולפי שהוא יודע עצמו ומכיר  
גדלתו ותפארתו ואמתתו הוא יודע הכל ואין דבר נעלם ממנו.

All existence, aside from the Creator – from the first form down to a small mosquito in the depths of the earth – came into being from the influence of His truth. Since He knows Himself and recognizes His greatness, beauty, and truth, He knows everything, and nothing is hidden from Him. Hashem created everything.

It is seen in this expression that Hashem's existence becomes visible through the nature that He creates, and even greater than that vision, becomes our understanding of Hashem and all that He does. In accordance with his idea, Rambam makes an essential point (Yesodei HaTorah 2:2):

והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו. בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו  
ובראיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהן חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ  
מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול.  
כמו שאמר דוד (תהילים מב ג) צמאה נפשי לאלקים לקל חי.

What is the path to attain love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His infinite wisdom that surpasses all comparison, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify Him, yearning with tremendous desire to know G-d's great name, as David stated: 'My soul thirsts for the Lord, for the living G-d' (Tehillim 42:3).

Rambam is imparting a principle that must be understood on a deep level; he is teaching that it is necessary for one to spend time contemplating this world and its unique creations, as well as the things that he has personally experienced in order for him to recognize the greatness of G-d. When one realizes His awesomeness, he will want to spend even more time researching the intricacies of His creation, and this causes a cyclical response in which pondering the creation and wonders of His deeds will cause one to love and fear Hashem. This will further encourage him to want to find out more about that which Hashem created, and so on.

The Rambam continues:

וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן מיד הוא נרתע לאחריו ויפחד ויודע  
שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה עומדת בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים  
דעות. כמו שאמר דוד (תהילים ח ד) 'כי אראה שמיך מעשי אצבעותיך'.

When he continues to reflect on these same matters, he will immediately recoil in awe and fear, appreciating how he is a tiny, lowly, and dark creature, standing with his flimsy, limited wisdom before He who is of perfect knowledge, as David stated (Tehillim 8:4-5): 'When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers... I wonder what is man that You should recall Him'.

All of this observation leads one to yirat Hashem, or the understanding that Hashem is the Creator of the fabric of the world and is the cause for its continued existence. This understanding is found in observation of the natural world and in scientific anomalies; Hashem is easily recognized within His wonders.

This sentiment is echoed in the Chovot HaLevavot (introduction to Sha'ar HaYichud):

We found that the examination of the wisdom manifested in the universe is the nearest way to clarify His existence and the clearest path to know His reality....being among the subjects which we have to deal with in regard to the Almighty's service, the purpose for which we were created, as the wise man said (Kohelet 3:14) 'And G-d has so made it that man should fear before Him'.

It is a continued entreaty to focus on observation in order to come to awe of Hashem. One must consider how everything relates back to Avodat Hashem and introspectively consider the *tafkid* which he must fulfill in this world. In fact, the second Sha'ar of Chovot HaLevavot is dedicated to examination of this sort. As cited before, Rabbeinu Bachya explains examination as **התבונן בסימני חכמת הבורא** **בברואים ושערים בנפש כפי כח הכרת המבחין**. A person, according to his ability, must spend time considering how Hashem's greatness is manifest in all which He makes and does. It becomes abundantly clear through the examination of His creations that there is a mastermind behind it all, as he writes (Shaar HaBechinah 1:4):

If these marks of divine wisdom were the same in all created things, no man would have any doubt in them that they all stem from one Source. The wise and the fool would be equal in their recognition. The reason being that when one and the same thing is always being produced in the same way, it is clear that the maker is not a voluntary

agent, but a force acting according to the nature imposed upon it – compelling it to act in a definite way which it has no power to alter, just like fire whose sole function is to burn, or water whose nature is to cool. But one who has the power to do as his will prompts him will act in various ways at various times.

Due to the extreme variety in creation, and even more specifically due to the scarcity of exact replicas of creations in the natural world, it becomes readily apparent that Hashem is the Creator of the entire world.

On both sides of this contemplation, the Chovot HaLevavot in the introduction to Sha'ar HaBechinah sums up:

First we have to note that though the benefits G-d bestows upon His creatures are all-embracing, as Scripture says 'Hashem is good to all' (Tehillim 145:9), nevertheless, the majority of mankind are too blind to recognize these benefits or comprehend their high excellence.

Rabbeinu Bachya is asserting that most people are not spending the appropriate amount of time in the analyses that are essential to be able to appreciating science found in the Torah as well as discovering the Divine wisdom in science.

What emerges from the words of the Rambam and of Rabbeinu Bachya is the necessity for each person to allot time for observation and examination in his avodat Hashem, in order to ensure that they have increased appreciation in Hashem and in all that He has created. Every person who wants to have a deeper appreciation of Hashem, His Torah, and the world He created should spend time investing in these matters in order to come to a greater level of ahavat Hashem and yirat Hashem.



## Freedom in Our World

Freedom is a model that mankind has been striving for over the course of history. The very first mistake Adam made, eating from the Tree of Knowledge, the tree of good and evil, was in the pursuit of freedom. Man wanted that freedom, the ability to choose.

As Jews, this struggle is something we are familiar with. Freedom was fundamental to the establishment of our nation. Yet, when reading through Sefer Shemot, two elements of the story seem to contradict the secular understanding of freedom.

The first strange detail is the verse **שְׁלַח אֶת עַמִּי וַיַּעֲבֹדֵנִי**, which is found five times throughout the Sefer. Hashem is saying that Pharaoh must send Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt in order to become servants of Hashem. When one typically thinks of freedom, transferring control from one leader to another is not what comes to mind. Instead, we think of taking control and being our own leaders.

This contradiction is further emphasized, later in Shemot (21:2), when it speaks about the *eved Ivri*: **כִּי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד עֲבָרִי שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים יַעֲבֹד וּבִשְׁבַעַת יֵצֵא לַחֲפְשֵׁי חָנָם**.

The Ohr Hachaim explains that the Torah wanted us to know that the term *eved* has a temporary status, because in truth, Jews are permanently Hashem's servants. This is one of the reasons that the slave leaves his master in the seventh year.

Rabbeinu Bechayei suggests that the reason that Parshat Mishpatim commences with legislation about how to treat a Jewish slave is because the Jews themselves had only recently emerged from slavery, albeit to masters of another entity. This legislation is also a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt. The essence of the liberation of the Jews from Egypt was to exchange masters. Whereas prior to the Exodus they were enslaved to a cruel mortal master, now their Master is an eternal Master, the most kind-hearted imaginable. By liberating the Jewish people from a cruel fate, Hashem established a claim to their loyalty. While there is no doubt that the transfer of

leadership had an essential impact on Bnei Yisrael, one cannot help but notice that this does not seem like freedom at all.

The second question one can ask is more of a broad philosophical question about free choice in general. When it comes to Pharaoh, the Torah states repeatedly that *פרעה את לב פרעה* or *ויחזק לב פרעה*. While I am not particularly concerned about Pharaoh's freedom, I want to understand the concept of free will, the right that is so fundamental to our role and existence here in this world, and how that can be taken away from us.

Rashi (Shemot 7:3) explains that the first five times the Torah mentions that Pharaoh's heart was hardened, it does not mention that Hashem hardened his heart. Rather, it was his own free choice. Yet beyond that point, Hashem started hardening his heart, making him unable to set Bnei Yisrael free. Rashi justifies the loss of Pharaoh's choice because he was unwilling to acknowledge Hashem. He explains that the purpose of hardening Pharaoh's heart was to show Bnei Yisrael the power of Hashem in order that they repent and become worthy of redemption.

While Rashi may have justified and shown the function of Hashem removing his freedom, he does not address the issue of how hashkafically this could happen. The question of the transfer of Bnei Yisrael's leadership and Pharaoh's loss of freedom can be answered by an idea discussed by the Rambam (Shemoneh Perakim 8:14):

The punishment which G-d then inflicted upon them was that He withheld from them the power of repentance, so that there should fall upon them that punishment which justice declared should be meted out to them. The fact that they were prevented from repenting manifested itself by Pharaoh's not dismissing them. This G-d had explained and told him, namely, that if He had merely wished to liberate Israel, He would have destroyed him and his adherents, and He would have brought out the Israelites; but, in addition to the liberation of his people, G-d wished to punish him because of his previous oppression of Israel....

The Rambam explains that there is a difference between free will and free teshuva. Freedom demands that our choices have consequences. Without consequences, then there would be no genuine

choice. However, as the Rambam explains, teshuva stands in the way of those consequences. Teshuva is a gift given by Hashem to change your outcome despite your past actions. However, if teshuva is void of an acknowledgement of Hashem, then one has no right to the benefits associated with teshuva, to change natural consequences.

We see that Pharaoh's punishment is an outcome of his own actions. In the beginning, he hardened his own heart purely according to his will. Once he had dug his own pit of stubbornness, the natural outcome of this was to continue along this path. Because he was an egotistical leader of the world's superpower, changing his mind would ruin his reputation. Therefore, all that Hashem did by hardening his heart at this point was remove his gift of teshuva.

R. Matis Weinberg, in his book *Frameworks*, mentions an idea that answers the initial question. The Rambam tells us that Hashem was trying to teach Bnei Yisrael a very important lesson. As they were about to embark on a new phase of their history, they had to understand that this newly founded freedom was not a trivial license to behave however they wanted, but rather it was the ability for each person to grow into the kind of person they wanted to become. Your free will and freedom come with consequences.

Hashem re-emphasizes this idea to the new generation about to enter Israel. In Parshat Re'eh, they are told of the blessings and curses that will occur if they do or do not follow Hashem's commandments (Devarim 11:26-28). This idea is repeated in Parshat Nitzavim (30:19): החיים והמות נתתי לפניך הברכה והקללה ובחרת בחיים למען תחיה אתה וזרעך. The choice is yours, but the outcome is clearly defined from the outset.

To the secular world, freedom is defined as the power or right to act, speak, or think. However, through understanding that Hashem only took Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt in order to serve Him, and by seeing the ramifications of Pharaoh's choices, we understand that for Bnei Yisrael, freedom is not an end goal but rather a gift that needs to be used wisely. Often, in the struggle for freedom, the focus is on achieving freedom without the forethought of what one would do with that freedom. Freedom is something that we all have a right to, but as the South African Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein accurately put it, "with every right comes equal responsibility."





## חנוך לנער

In his article “Teach Your Children Well For a Better Future,” Rabbi Jonathan Sacks highlights the fundamental place of education within Judaism. Education plays a key role because it is a system through which values, as well as information, can be instilled within the next generation. Commenting on one of the most important lessons Moshe Rabbeinu taught us, Rabbi Sacks writes, “The world we build tomorrow is born in the stories we tell our children today. Politics moves the pieces. Education changes the game.”

Because of this attitude, chinuch plays a foundational role in Judaism as a central focus that defines and informs much of community life. However, chinuch, just like every core principle in Judaism, finds its grounding in Halacha. It is an example that serves to show how Halacha remains unchanging, whilst the way in which we relate to it shifts over time, proving the dynamic nature of the system.

There are many sources that discuss the halachic obligation of teaching one's children, an obligation which extends from parents to educators. The pesukim **והגדת לבנך ביום ההוא לאמר** (Shemot 13:8) and **ושננתם לבניך** (Devarim 6:7) establish the important principle of educating our children.

The obligation of educating children extends to teachers, who have a parallel role to parents in this regard. The Lubavitcher Rebbe (HaYom Yom, 22 Tevet) writes: “It is an absolute duty for every person to spend a half hour every day thinking about the Torah education of children, and to do everything in his power – and beyond his power – to inspire children to follow the path along which they are being guided.” The Rebbe explicitly applies the obligation of education to everyone, with “every person” needing to consider the best method of education for Jewish children.

Furthermore, the emphasis on children needing to “follow the path along which they are being guided” today implies that, whilst

classroom techniques employed nowadays are not the same as they have always been, they work to fulfill the same original obligation of educating.

Rav Willig in his article “V’Higadta L’Vincha” explains the dichotomy between the two mainstream educational approaches. He outlines the disciplinarian method, which is focused on implementing rules and using punishments to allow the potential of students to be channelled by experienced mentors. He writes how this “19th century attitude ... views discipline as an end in itself.” Rav Willig contrasts this with the recent popular phenomenon of “positive parenting,” whereby strict discipline, seen as detrimental to a child’s “development and self-esteem,” is replaced with discussions about the consequences of the bad behaviour.

However, Rav Willig reconciles these two approaches through focusing on the Torah’s approach of the verse *והגדת לבנך*. The Torah uses both the verbs *אמר* (referring to gentle language) and *הגיד* (harsh language) to illustrate that the Torah is “reject(ing) both extremes.” It is teaching that parents, and by extension educators, have to reconcile these historical and contemporary attitudes towards education. This is achieved by beginning with discipline, where “red lines must be drawn and a child who crosses them must be punished.” This is to ensure that when a child grows up they are capable of conforming to the “exacting norms of Torah and mitzvot.”

But Rav Willig explains that this cannot be the only method of education, for “such an upbringing stunts growth.” Whilst producing short term results, in the long term this approach has a negative impact on a child’s ability to develop his individual talents and personality. Rav Willig concludes that exclusively this style of chinuch “carries a significant risk of rebellion. Perhaps, in earlier times, when we lived in a world of conformity, this risk was minimal. But now ...” The potential of negative societal influences to undermine the Torah teachings given through chinuch has caused a drive, and need, for teachers to inspire.

This supports the idea that “V’*higadta* is no more than a necessary prerequisite for the lifelong responsibility and opportunity of *leimor*.... Discipline your child only in order to teach him, gently and

lovingly, for a lifetime.” This idea is significant as it does not limit or deny the obligation to educate but rather considers the best way to do so in our current society.

Rav Wolbe (*Planting and Building: Raising a Jewish Child*) uses the image of Torah being an “indispensable infrastructure” which forms a basic tenet of Jewish education. Nowadays, living in a more free and liberal society, there is simply more time given to the “essence of education” which Rav Wolbe describes as “enabling a child to develop in his own way, to utilize his own strengths and character traits, to grow on his own – חנוך לנער על פי דרכו –

The Torah ideal of employing both types of chinuch, and neither to an extreme, raises many practical questions. How should this be carried out? What would the educational model look like? Many sources have grappled with the practicalities of this dual approach to education, including discussing the question of hitting a child.

Shlomo HaMelech addresses this topic in Mishlei:

אולת קשורה בלב נער שבט מוסר ירחיקנה ממנו: (כב:טו)

אל תמנע מנער מוסר כי תכנו בשבט לא ימות: (כג:יג)

שבט ותוכחת יתן חכמה ונער משלה מביש אמו: (כט:טו)

The Yalkut Shimoni (Chukat 763) comments that when a child is young, a Rebbe can hit him, but when he is older, the Rebbe should use words instead. The gemara (Ketubot 50a) says the opposite – that until a boy is twelve years old, one should deal with him with nice words if he is not learning; after that age, he should be made miserable. These sources both advocate hitting a child, either until a certain age or only starting at a certain age.

The Midrash Rabbah (Shemot 1:1) comments that one of the reasons why Yishmael sinned, despite being brought up in the house of Avraham Avinu, was because Avraham did not hit him. Therefore, Avraham changed his method with Yitzchak. Yitzchak loved Eisav (Bereishit 25:28) and did not hit him, and Eisav began sinning to the same extent as Yishmael, culminating with his threat to kill Yaakov. Yitzchak would discipline Yaakov by hitting him, and Yaakov became one of the *avot* of Bnei Yisrael.

The gemara (Bava Batra 21a) says that when hitting a child for disciplinary purposes, one should hit him only with a shoelace, and in a way in which the child will not be injured. If they still do not study, they should still be allowed to remain in the company of their friends, because this will cause them to eventually pay attention (Rambam, Hilchot Talmud Torah 2:2).

The Maharsha explains that the reason for using a shoelace is because the damage done will be minimal, and because it takes time for a teacher to remove the shoelace from the shoe. This allows time for the teacher's anger to diminish, and perhaps conclude that the child's behavior does not warrant such a punishment. Chazal are teaching that the students should understand that the Rebbi is doing something he does not really want to be doing (Rav Yisroel Belsky).

This is codified as halacha by the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 245:10). The Shevet Mussar (17:9) writes that it is a bad custom to tell a teacher not to hit the students whilst the students are present. One the students hear that the teacher does not have permission to hit them, they will be less careful about their behavior as they know they will not face corporal punishment.

In any case, hitting a student out of anger is forbidden (Erech Apayim 1:15; Sefer Hazikaron L'Ba'al Hamichtav M'Eliyahu 1; Teshuvot V'hanhagot 2:463; Chinuch Yisrael 2:6; Chazon Ish, Emunah U'Bitachon 4:16; V'aleihu Lo Yibol 2, Mishneh Halachot 15:66). One who hits out of anger tends to hit more, beyond the requirement for chinuch, and this is forbidden (Kuntres Sichat Hayeladim page 13).

The Sefer Chassidim (306) says that one should make sure not to allow his child to be taught by a teacher who has a particularly bad temper or anger issues. Elsewhere he writes (919) that if a child is too young to understand why he is being hit, then he should not be hit. This cannot be considered chinuch; there is no point in striking him because he does not understand and cannot learn from it. Harav Moshe Feinstein zt"l calls such a teacher a "meshuga" (Mesorot Moshe 1, p. 532).

From these halachot and the limits placed on a teacher hitting a child, Chazal clearly illustrate that hitting is only permitted when it aids growth, recognizing that sometimes this action can be beneficial.

The Rambam (Hilchot Talmud Torah 2:2) states that one may not hit children out of hatred. This implies that hitting should only be used as a tool to nurture and spur growth, rather than as an instinctive angry reaction to negative actions.

Because one cannot measure or quantify an attitude or intentions, this approach risks leading to an excessive use of physical punishment. This is, perhaps, one of many reasons why modern education systems do not allow teachers to hit children. The Gemara (Moed Katan 17a) writes that hitting a child is prohibited when it will cause him to strike or curse his parents.

Rav Wolbe claims that today, to hit a young child is the equivalent of putting a stumbling block in front of a blind man and thus is prohibited. Whilst in earlier generations children were perhaps more used to facing harsh, physical punishments and could have tolerated being hit, this is no longer the case. Today children would be (and many are) damaged for life by being hit, especially as its intention is no longer the growth-oriented one implied by the Gemara and the Rambam.

The higher moral standards and changing values within society, paired with an increased chance of rebellion against religion in today's day and age mean that, practically speaking, hitting children within a chinuch setting should never be done. Rather, teachers often utilize a "firm but fair" approach within the classroom. This shows the need for applying "softer forums" to fulfill the halachic obligation of educating.

The Midrash Rabbah (Parshat Nasoh 12:30) explicitly highlights the long-term damage that corporal punishment can have on the recipient. The Midrash tells a story about R' Abahu, who saw someone running with a wooden stick to hit someone, and a spiritual *mazik* running alongside him, with an iron stick. R' Abahu told the man not to strike the other in case he died. The man responded: "Is he going to die just from a wooden stick?" R' Abahu then told him about the spiritual *mazik* alongside him.

This midrash emphasizes the need for a shift in the method used to fulfill the halachic obligation of education. Whilst in earlier generations the "iron fist" attitude was accepted and could be used to

inspire growth, nowadays it is undeniable that a softer approach can more successfully achieve this desired outcome. This is especially true when considering how much of the halachic obligation to educate is centered around encouraging further learning and ensuring that children feel that their unique character means they have the ability to have a unique connection with Torah.

Not only has there been a clear shift in teaching tactics, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world, Jewish education is an opportunity afforded to more people than at any other time in Jewish history. Formal chinuch has changed from being the privilege of only the most intelligent or richest of men and their sons; now a much broader range of people get the chance to learn.

The gemara (Yoma 35b) tells the story of Hillel to serve as evidence that in previous times, only the richest in society had the luxury of learning in the Beit Midrash. Another famous story highlights that, historically, only those considered academic or scholarly received the chance to learn. The Netziv was seen to not be taking his schooling seriously and not achieving expected results. This led to his teacher suggesting to his parents that he become a shoemaker instead. This attitude contrasts to modern society, in which education is a widespread fundamental right provided for most.

As educational methods and audiences shift, the conversation around what topics should be taught have also come under scrutiny. The gemara (Kiddushin 29a) states that a father who does not teach his son a trade teaches him banditry, in the sense that not teaching his son to learn a trade to support himself will cause him to turn to theft. This shows the value of having a job in order to earn a living.

This gemara seems to be an early proponent of secular education as a means to reach the goal of employment and supporting oneself. At a recent *siyum hashas* in Yerushalayim, Rav Rimmon gave a shiur in which he addressed the question of “Working and Learning – Can They Go Together?” He quoted the gemara (Menachot 99b) which tells us to always have bread before us and accessible all the time; one must be able to support oneself financially. Yet, at the same time, he commented, this phrase is also used in reference to learning

Torah. How can one be expected to work “all the time” whilst also learning Torah “all the time”?

However, he explained, “all the time” in reference to Torah is interpreted by some to mean “all the time, whenever one can” as this is enough to fulfill the obligation of limmud Torah whilst also allowing time for a job. The emphasis placed on the importance of earning a living creates a strong argument for the necessity of studying secular studies.

Secular education plays a central role in modern society, and in gaining employment. Arguably, therefore, even Jewish education systems must work to prepare students for competitive business environments. Perhaps learning secular subjects is permissible depending on one’s intentions. Based on this, it could be suggested that if one is learning to get a job and fulfill the obligation of always having bread, it is permitted. This approach suggests that learning secular studies is simply a means to an end (and perhaps not an ideal).

However, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein writes (*Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, p. 94) that “One must seek ‘the best that has been thought and said in the world’, and if, in many areas, much of that best is of foreign origin, we shall expand our horizons rather than exclude it.... There is *chochma bagoyim* [wisdom among non-Jews], and we ignore it at our loss.” As Jews have become more integrated into wider society, arguably this viewpoint has become more meaningful.

Something which has not changed or shifted in any fundamental way is the inherent importance given to chinuch and the Jewish focus on educating. As the “People of the Book,” it is through learning, discussion and education that we transmit the wealth of knowledge from our mesorah to the future parents, educators and leaders of our nation. The beauty of having a timeless halachic system is that one can see how the halachic obligation to educate remains, at its core, the same. Whilst the methods, topics and ideas are living and flexible, altering in accordance with changes to society, the invaluable status of chinuch remains unwavering.





## Living Connected – ובהרת בחיים

In Sefer Devarim (30:19), it is written:

העידתי בכם היום את השמים ואת הארץ החיים והמות נתתי לפניך  
הברכה והקללה ובהרת בחיים למען תחיה אתה וזרעך.

On a surface level this quote seems deceptively simple, but it is evident that the Torah is getting at something deeper here. What is this charge? What is Hashem asking us to do?

Rashi says:

כאדם האומר לבנו, בחר לך חלק יפה בנחלתי, ומעמידו על חלק היפה  
ואומר לו את זה ברר לך.

He takes this as an encouraging statement. Sforno says that the *chayim* being discussed is חיי עד – eternal life. These two words open up a world of possibilities: something in this pasuk holds the key to eternal life. However, we are still left with many questions. What exactly is *chayim*, and how do we choose it?

To answer these questions, we have to go back to one of the first instances that *chayim* is mentioned (Bereishit 2:9).

ויצמח ה' אלוקים מן האדמה כל עץ נחמד למראה וטוב למאכל ועץ  
החיים בתוך הגן ועץ הדעת טוב ורע.

Rashi says that the phrase “*b'toch hagan*” means in the very center of the garden.

Haktav V'Hakabalah comments on the phrase “*v'eitz ha-chayim*” and sheds some light on our discussion. He writes that the fruits of the *eitz hachayim* had an amazing property that would rejuvenate the body and lengthen one's life. Chazal said if Adam had not sinned, he would not have died. After quoting the Sifrei that the command לעבדה ולשמרה is referring to Torah and mitzvot, he concludes that the Torah was available in Gan eden to be studied!

References are made to the numerous comparisons between Torah and a tree.

Firstly, it says in the first perek of Tehillim: **כִּי אִם בַּתּוֹרָה ה' הַפְּצוּ** – a person who toils in Torah will not be like a dry tree; rather, he will be like a sprouting tree at a bank of water. In other words, Torah is what sustains the Jew. Secondly, just as a tree has different branches and leaves that are all necessary for the sustaining of the fruit, so too we have both *mitzvot kalot* and *mitzvot chamurot*. Additionally, just like the existence and survival of the tree is dependent on two parts, the revealed trunk and the hidden roots, so too Torah has mitzvot whose reasons are revealed and those whose reasons are hidden.

Someone who cuts off one branch or leaf from his tree will not lose the tree, because the body of the tree still remains; so too, someone who transgresses one of the mitzvot of the Torah is not a denier of the whole Torah and the Torah does not become nullified because of this. However, it is not the same if he denies one principle of emunah, which is similar to the root of the tree, because it is our life source and connection to Hashem.

In addition, just like a tree has one root that spreads out into many branches, and every branch has many twigs, and every twig has fruits, and every fruit has seeds, and those seeds have the power to produce and grow a whole new tree without end, so too it is the same with words of Torah and mitzvot. Each part of Torah is infinite.

Lastly, Torah is called in many places **עֵצָה**, advice or wisdom, and a tree is an **עֵץ** or **עֵצָה**. The Torah is called *eitz hachayim* because it gives advice to the Jewish nation, and through this advice one can achieve eternal life. The Torah connects us to something eternal – Hashem.

Rabbi Leibtag, in his article “Nitzavim: Back to Har Sinai and Gan Eden,” suggests yet another parallel between the *eitz hachayim* and the Torah. He states: “Just as the *keruvim* of Gan Eden protect the path to the *eitz hachayim*, so do the *keruvim* of the Mikdash guard the path to true *chayim*: i.e. they protect the aron which contains the *luchot ha'eidut* – the symbol of the Torah and our

covenant with G-d at Har Sinai.” Using this strong proof to support the *eitz hachayim* as the Torah, we can delve deeper into its story.

When looking at the commandment of Hashem concerning the *Eitz HaDa’at* (2:17) versus Chava’s interpretation of the commandment (3:3), there are some obvious differences. One difference is the question as to whether touching the tree is against the rules; according to Chava, it seems as though it is, but there is no mention of it in Hashem’s original command. Additionally, there are differences in terminology (fruit versus tree).

The contradiction that is most relevant to our discussion is pointed out by Rabbi Fohrman in his book *The Beast That Crouches at the Door* – the actual location of the “Forbidden Tree.” Chava claims that it is in the center of the garden. However, according to the aforementioned pasuk, it was the *Eitz HaChayim* that was in the center of the garden. Evidently this is representative of a difference in perspective between Chava and Hashem. The Tree of Life is in the center because Hashem *wanted* us to go towards it. This idea sounds reminiscent of the Rashi mentioned above – that Hashem is like a father placing us upon His best portion and saying “choose this one”.

Rabbi Leibtag, in his aforementioned article, provides many textual parallels between the *ובחרת בחיים* pasuk in Devarim and the Gan Eden narrative in Bereshit. Even more astounding is that these two sets of pesukim are bookends of the Chumash. “One could suggest that in this manner Chumash underscores the basic nature of man’s relationship with G-d.”

To give a little context, before the charge to “choose life”, the previous pesukim discuss the reestablishment of our brit with Hashem. Rabbi Sacks in his article “Defeating Death” explains the connection: “You achieve immortality by being part of a covenant – a covenant with eternity itself, that is to say, a covenant with G-d.” That is the essence of eternal life, being a member of a brit with Hashem. After being exiled from Gan Eden, it now becomes our duty to get back to the Tree of Life by becoming people who are

worthy and deserving of its bracha (Rabbi Leibtag). How exactly do we return to the *derech eitz hachayim*?

It is no coincidence that immediately following the וּבְחֵרַת בְּחַיִּים pasuk that we began with (30:19), the Torah says (30:20):

לֹאֲהַבָּהּ אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים לְשִׁמְעַת בְּקוּלִי וּלְדַבְּקָהּ בִּי כִּי הוּא חַיִּיךָ וְאֶרֶץ יִמֶיךָ  
לְשִׁבְתָּהּ עַל הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע ה' לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב  
לֵאמֹר לְךָ אֶת הָאֲדָמָה.

Deveikut is the key to everything. Deveikut is the main point of all the mitzvot and the peak of avodat Hashem according to the Netivot Shalom.

The following parable is based on the well-known part of Shir Hashirim beginning with the pasuk (5:2) אֲנִי יְשֵׁנָה וְלִבִּי עַר קוֹל דּוֹדִי דּוֹפֵק (5:2). There is an orphan girl who is despised and lowly, cast outside with nobody to take her in. One man takes pity on her and brings her into his home, eventually having even more mercy on her, and takes her for a wife. It was not long before she rebels against him and kicks him out of his own home! He returns in the middle of the night, stands outside and knocks on the door: "Please remember the good old days when I had mercy on you, remember how much good I did for you! And now I, your husband and close one, am standing outside and the rain is pouring on me, now please open up for me." HaKadosh Baruch Hu is pleading with us to let him in. He clearly wants a relationship with us.

The Mesillat Yeshtarim explains that we should deduce what Hashem wants even if it is not explicit, and that we should go above and beyond out of our love for Hashem. The book, *A Heart to Know Me* quotes Rabbi Horowitz, saying "The point is to ask this question of ourselves. 'To where does your heart turn?'" Truly, we need to be honest about where our *kavanot* are. In *The Jewish Self*, Rabbi Jeremy Kagan comments on the pasuk, וּנְפַחַת בְּאִפְיֵי נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים (Bereshit 2:7) which is the first mention of *chayim* in the Torah. He explains that this is fundamentally symbolic of the reality that it is all about man and G-d and that that relationship is expressed in every facet of our lives.

The Sifrei tells of two paths, one whose beginning is level for the first few steps and ends in thorns, and another that begins in thorns and ends level. The latter is the Jewish path. It will not be easy, but if we answer that knock, return to the *derech eitz ha-chayim*, and stick to Hashem and His Torah, then we create a connection that is truly transcendent.

So what will it be? The choice is yours.



## Perspectives on Happiness:

### HaRav, The Rav, and The Rebbe

Serving Hashem with happiness is basic to Judaism. עבדו את ה' בשמחה (Tehillim 100:2).  
בואו לפניו ברננה

What does it mean to serve Hashem with happiness? How can Jews be expected to constantly express and feel happiness with everything they are doing? To resolve these questions, we need to define “happiness”, and suggest a way that it can be obtained. Rav Kook, Rav Soloveitchik, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe each explain their different opinions regarding what the term “happiness” means and how it can be applied to one’s daily life.

Rav Kook’s thoughts on happiness can be found in *Orot HaKodesh* (vol. 3). The only way one’s spirit can grow and actualize its potential is through recognition of the absolute good in the world — the Divine Good. Happiness, according to Rav Kook, is recognizing and appreciating all the good that one has in his life, which comes directly from Hashem. Clarifying and strengthening one’s *emunah*, the basics of the knowledge of G-d and the authenticity of the Torah, can be a foundation upon which to build *simcha*. If Jews would notice the specific acts of kindness that happen in their lives which emanate from Hashem, there is no possible way they would be sad and depressed. After all, everything Hashem does for someone is for the greater good. They just may not be able to see the bigger picture.

Rav Kook elaborates (*Shemonah Kevatzim*, 1999, 6:130) on his perspective of happiness. A person can elevate — increase in happiness — any character trait that belongs to him because each characteristic is rooted in holiness. For example, if one has the strong character trait of stubbornness, he can elevate it by connecting to its deeper root and cause, which is something very holy. He can use that stubbornness in amazing ways, such as turning away from assimilation and saying no to eating non kosher foods. However, says Rav Kook, the only character trait that one can’t elevate is sadness

because it isn't deeply rooted in holiness. In order to elevate sadness, one needs to find the actual cause of the sadness and elevate that first. Once the cause is elevated then the sadness will come to be elevated afterwards. Becoming happy and elevating one's character traits comes from holiness. Being happy is holy, and it gives strength and empowers one to get through any time, whether easy or challenging.

A different approach to the role of happiness was developed by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. The essays in *Out of the Whirlwind* powerfully illustrate the Rav's ability to derive a Jewish understanding of both G-d and the human condition from Torah and Halachic sources. In one of his essays titled *A Theory of Emotions*, Rav Soloveitchik formulates his opinion on the role of one's emotions, including happiness. One's existence and total experience in this world manifests itself and depends on the halachot of the wholeness of his emotional life. An important ideology in Judaism is to have total honesty when it comes to one's spectrum of emotions, spanning from joy and humility to anger and sadness. If someone's emotions become absolute at the expense of another emotion, or if one emotion completely demotes a different emotion, it can confuse the religious growth of one's personality. According to Rav Soloveitchik, happiness should not be more important than any other of the emotions belonging to a person, since every emotion has its own significance and role in life. Happiness is not any more holy or special than any of the other emotions, but can still allow one to feel the most content in his life.

*Abraham's Journey* contains thirteen of Rav Soloveitchik's essays on passages and issues from Bereishit (chapters 12-22), including Judaism's approach to oscillating between joy and sadness. His perspective reflects the traditional view of Avraham as a role model for Jews everywhere and at any time. Rav Soloveitchik links a virtuous practice exemplified by Avraham to the normal system of mitzvot developed over centuries by our Rabbis. He makes a specific distinction between fate, determined by circumstances, and destiny, a faith journey pursued through choice, often against societal norms and at great sacrifice. Avraham demonstrates heroic faithfulness to



his evolving destiny, serving as an iconoclast who sets a spiritual and ethical example for his descendants. Chesed and hachnasat orchim are character traits traditionally associated with Avraham. The Rav examines how they are exemplified in specific actions. This kind of ethical wisdom, contextualized for this time, is a practical resource for anyone seeking to live a faithful Jewish life. We learn from Avraham that leading a Jewish life with fidelity means carrying it out with love and kindness, especially to our guests. Rav Soloveitchik points out the tragic part of Avraham's life was that he lived in a state of loneliness.

However, in certain circumstances, one needs to be both happy and unhappy at different times. One cannot be happy and sad at the same time. We see this in *Grief and Joy in the Writings of Rabbi Soloveitchik*. According to the Rav, the Gemara forbids mourning on a festival because the essence of the commandments to mourn and to rejoice on a festival relates to one's inner state. One's inner state during mourning is not compatible with the inner feeling one is supposed to have during a festival — the feeling of joy. These two emotions cannot exist together.

Rav Soloveitchik's true definition of happiness can be found in *Halachic Man* (n. 4) in which he spends over two pages decrying the seeking of happiness through religion. For him, true religion is about challenges, torment from anxiety, anguish, and tension. He claims that those who seek the calmness of peace and tranquility are non-Orthodox Jews and are "typical of this attitudes like the Christian Science movement." He would not be calm about the current Orthodox emphasis on instant happiness through Torah, outreach by promising happiness, or the goal of producing studies to show the whole happiness of Orthodoxy. Rav Soloveitchik is reminding Jews that there is more to religion than simplistic quotients of happiness. Happiness is not needed in every single part of our lives.

Lastly, we see the perspective of happiness through the lenses of Chabad Chassidus. In *Tanya* (ch. 25), Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi claims that the Divine essence of one's soul is inherently more powerful than one's own *yetzer hara*. In the following chapter, Rav Shneur Zalman asks if this is so, why do so many people fall as a

victim to their evil inclination? *Tanya* first gives an analogy: If two people are having a physical fight, who would you expect to win? The one with the most strength who exercises every day should easily win. However, if the stronger person is lazy and sluggish that day, he will easily be defeated by the weaker one. This can be compared to everyday life. If a person is overcome with laziness, then the *yetzer hara* will see this as an opportunity to conquer that person. The *Tanya* explains that one becomes filled with laziness through sadness. There is a cycle. When one becomes overwhelmed with sadness, he will be lazy, and then his evil inclination will take over his life. Who wants to live a life like that?

Thankfully, *Tanya* suggests an easy way to conquer the *yetzer hara* and live a meaningful life. Many need alacrity “which derives from joy and from a heart that is free and cleansed from any trace of worry and sadness in the world.” In order to achieve this pure happiness, one needs to work on conquering his sins. Happiness can be achieved by constantly working on ourselves to become better. This may be different for every person. But one will find that if he begins to work on himself, specifically his middos and avodas Hashem, he will become a happier person, resulting in living a more meaningful life. In addition, *Tanya* (ch. 33), suggests another way to achieve happiness. By strengthening one’s emunah, he can be instilled with happiness and loftiness which come from contemplating Hashem’s Oneness. And then the power, which this intense simcha generates, will enable one to overcome all obstacles which get in the way of fulfilling all the mitzvot.

Another Chassidic perspective on happiness can be found in *The Chassidic Approach to Joy* (ch. 2). The main problem that gets in the way of generally being happy all the time is when bad situations or challenging times arise in someone’s life. One may ask, “How can I possibly be happy right now? Life simply seems to be terrible.” R’ Akiva had a famous quote that he always used to say: “Everything that G-d does is for the good.” This implies that since the situation is ordained by Divine Providence, G-d is behind it. Therefore, it is certain that it will inevitably lead to a positive outcome. R’ Akiva taught that even when a person does not have such

foreknowledge, he should have faith that G-d is controlling his experience and should therefore accept everything with happiness. Even when someone approaches adversity, he needs to have faith that good will emerge from it.

Nachum Ish Gamzu has another similar, yet nuanced, perspective. He believed that since all situations are brought about by Divine Providence, not only would a situation that looked unfavorable eventually lead to a positive outcome, but that it was itself a positive event: "*This too* is for the good."

If Nachum Ish Gamzu and R' Akiva can be happy throughout all of their trials and tribulations, then why can't everyone be happy in every situation that Hashem puts them in? People are simply unaware of what is truly going on around them. People need to realize that they cannot have the same understanding as G-d. Therefore, they cannot always see or understand how a situation is good for them. However, as a G-d-fearing nation, Jews still need to try and see the good that Hashem constantly does for them. Whatever happens to a person is ordained by G-d for a purpose, that is ultimately for his own good. People need to know that there are two kinds of good – goodness that is obvious, and goodness that is hidden, that requires the perspective of Nachum Ish Gamzu or R' Akiva in order to appreciate it.

People often encounter situations that are hard, challenging, and upsetting, but shortly afterwards they see that things work out for the best. This is what it means to be happy always. People need to remember that everything in their life is for the good, and through that perspective, they can always be happy.



## Servant Status:

### Adopting an *Eved Hashem* Identity

The term *eved Hashem* is used in multiple forums of Jewish life. The importance of behaving as an *eved Hashem* is impressed upon the Jewish people through books, speeches, and songs. It is often the simple answer to the profound question of the purpose of life. Yet distilling one's entire identity into being a servant, albeit G-d's, is uncomfortable for many, especially in today's society in which freedom and independence are foundational values. However, after a close examination of the sources for this definition of the relationship between man and G-d, one gains a deep appreciation for and willingly adopts the Jewish identity of *eved Hashem*.

The premise that Jews are supposed to serve G-d can be proven from a variety of sources in Tanach, where Hashem explicitly makes this command. In an article titled "*Eved Hashem* – Servant of G-d," Rabbi Avigdor Meyerowitz encapsulates Parshat Behar's theme as freedom; it discusses topics such as *shemittah*, *yovel*, redemption of land and houses, and emancipation of slaves. In fact, the word גאולה makes multiple appearances throughout the relatively short parsha. Ramban (Vayikra 25:24) defines גאולה as freeing from restraint, as we see in Shemot where Hashem tells Moshe to relay to Bnei Yisrael that He will free them from the enslaving Egypt: וגאלי אתכם בורע נטויה (Shemot 6:6).

Interestingly, Parshat Behar states that the *eved Ivri* is freed at *yovel* because, as Hashem explains (Vayikra 25:42): כי עבדי הם אשר הוצאתי אתם מארץ מצרים לא ימכרו ממכרת עבד כי לי בני ישראל עבדים (25:55): אשר הוצאתי אותם מארץ מצרים. The Sifra comments (25:42):

כי עבדי הם' – שטרי קדם עליהם ראשון. 'אשר הוצאתי אותם מארץ מצרים' – על תנאי שלא ימכרו ממכרת עבד'.

'For they are My servants' – my contract of servitude was created with them first. 'And I took them out of the land of Egypt' on the condition that 'they not be sold in the manner of a slave'.

The Ibn Ezra (25:42) draws further attention to the apparent paradox, explaining that we are G-d's servants, עבדי ה', because He brought us from the house of slavery, Mitzrayim. Jews may not keep a slave forever, or sell one to another owner, not because of a value of freedom, but because of our preexisting "contract" of slavery with G-d. This "contract" negates any other slavery contract we may write, because we already belong to Him. Although this is a logical explanation, the term slavery, even in relation to G-d, creates uneasiness. However, through a greater understanding, the concept of *avodat Hashem* may be redefined from constricting and shackling to expansive and joyful.

The servant-master model is actually deemed the closest way man can connect to Hashem. Moshe Rabbeinu is called an *eved Hashem* when the Torah is describing his death (Devarim 34:5): וימת שם משה עבד ה' בארץ מואב על פי ה'. Rabbeinu Bechaye comments that only after Moshe's death was he called by this title, which describes the ultimate relationship one can have with Hashem.

Similarly, in Parshat Eikev it says (10:20): את ה' אלקיך תירא אתו. תעבד ובו תדבק ובשמו תשבע. Rashi explains this pasuk as a series of steps which culminate in a result: Once you revere G-d, and serve Him, and cleave to Him, it is only then that you may swear by His Name. The service commanded of a Jew does not brand him with a lowly stature, like in the colloquial sense of servitude. Rather it does exactly the opposite, to the point where it even allows one to swear by His holy Name.

A beautiful *nevuah* in Yeshayahu (41:8-10) furthers this idea:

ואתה ישראל עבדי יעקב אשר בחרתיך זרע אברהם אהבי: אשר החזקתיך מקצות הארץ ומאציליה קראתיך ואמר לך עבדי אתה בחרתיך ולא מאסתיך: אל תירא כי עמך אני אל תשתע כי אני אלקיך אמצתיך אף עזרתיך אף תמכתיך בימין צדקי:

Yeshayahu is relaying Hashem's message that He helped and saved Avraham and his descendants throughout the generations. Malbim writes that Hashem is telling Bnei Yisrael, 'don't be afraid, because you are Yisrael My servant, and [therefore] I will not leave you in their [your enemies] hands'.

There are two kinds of king-servant relationships. The first is when the king loves his servant because he needs him, and the latter does his work faithfully. From that perspective, Hashem reassures Bnei Yisrael: וְאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַבְדִּי; they were chosen because of the faithful work they do for Him. However, the servant might be worried that the master will find another servant to replace the work he does, at least as well as him, if not better.

There is, however, a second type of relationship where the king loves his servant for no apparent reason, but he chose him לְנִשְׂאוֹ וּלְגִדּוֹ, to raise him – יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתִּיךָ. In this vein, Hashem is saying He chose them not because of their service, but out of love. Even if He finds a more faithful servant, He won't leave them.

However, they may still be afraid that His attitude will change from love to hatred. Therefore, Hashem says: זֶרַע אֲבֵרָהם אֹהֲבִי. A servant whose fathers were מֶלֶךְ אֹהֲבֵי בְרִיתוֹ and בְּעָלֵי בְרִיתוֹ will never be despised in any way, because אֲבוֹת זָכוֹת stands forever. This is the connotation of זֶרַע אֲבֵרָהם אֹהֲבִי. The Navi continues to reassure Bnei Yisrael that they were chosen out of everyone in the entire world; out of all the nobles and the dignitaries they alone were called His servants – וְאָמַר לְךָ עַבְדִּי אַתָּה. Our *eved* identity is unique.

In Parshat Vaetchanan (6:21) it says וְאָמַרְתָּ לְבָנֶיךָ עַבְדִּים הָיִינוּ. Rav Soloveitchik comments on the Torah's phrase 'slaves to Pharaoh', instead of 'Pharaoh's slaves'. "When we state that someone is Pharaoh's slave, we identify his whole personality with Pharaoh." For example, when the Torah calls Moshe an *eved Hashem*, it is giving a name to his entire identity. "Our service to the Almighty is not foreign and incidental, but rather indispensable to our existence, intrinsic and inseparable from our ontological awareness. We are just servants of G-d, and nothing else" (Chumash Mesoras HaRav, pp. 62-63).

It is total service to Him that breaks our shackles and provides freedom. אנה ה' כי אני עבדך אני עבדך בן אמתך פתחת למוסרי, “O Hashem, I am Your servant, Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have undone the cords that bound me” (Tehillim 116:16). Being G-d’s servant is a constant and all encompassing job, thus necessitating our freedom from anything we might otherwise be bound to.

On a similar note, Rabbi Meyerowitz quotes Rav Kook in *Ein Ayah* (Shabbat vol. 1 p. 80), where he expands on the core Jewish belief that G-d is infinite. The human spirit is constantly yearning for the infinite; when it is confined by human servitude it feels constricted. When we are in service of G-d, however, we connect to the infinite and partake in an everlasting ascension. Serving G-d is precisely what frees us.

Chazal teach many practical ways to live up to the title of עבד ה'. Rashi (11:13) famously defines ולעבדו (in Shema) as davening: עבודה שהיא בלב, וזו היא תפלה שהתפלה קרויה עבודה. The Rambam writes (Hilchot Deot 3:2-3) that each and every activity in our day, no matter how mundane some may seem, can and should be done לשם שמים. It is in this vein that one lives his or her entire life in the service of Hashem. The Torah, with its halachot and mitzvot on sleeping, eating, business, dress, family life and more, helps us view everything in our daily life through an *eved Hashem* perspective.

On a slightly different note, the Oheiv Yisrael (Rav Avraham Yehoshua Heschel / the Apter Rav) defines the term *eved* as doing the master’s duties and tasks in order to relieve him of them. We perform G-d’s work down here, so to speak, by doing His mitzvot and emulating His traits. This can explain the comment of the Sifra (Vayikra 25:42): שטרי קדם, for a Jew cannot be indefinitely enslaved by another because under such circumstances he would be obligated to the tasks of another rather than those of G-d.

To be a Jew is to be G-d’s *eved*, and in the Rav’s words, “nothing else”. This means that there are duties and expectations, a requirement to be constantly evaluating one’s actions against the goal of serving His Maker. One might think that because of the



enormity of this responsibility, the title of *eved Hashem* is reserved only for the greatest of the nation, such as Moshe Rabbeinu. However, the Rambam writes (Hilchot Teshuva 5:2), כל אדם ראוי לו, להיות צדיק כמושה רבנו. May we all become the *ovdei Hashem* we are worthy of being, and may we all be empowered by this title which tells us that we are needed, chosen, and loved.



## A Big Missed-steak?

### Vegetarianism in Judaism

Is there any basis in Biblical and rabbinic teachings advocating a vegetarian diet?

There is a great deal of evidence that proper treatment of animals is an important Jewish value. In Parshat Bereishit, the term **נפש חיה** is applied to animals as well as humans. While the Torah clearly indicates that people are to have dominance over **כל חית הארץ ולכל עוף השמים ולכל רמש על הארץ** (Bereishit 1:20), it is also important to bear in mind that animals are also G-d's creatures, possessing sensitivity and the capacity for feeling pain and must be treated with compassion.

In Parshat Ki Teitzei (25:4), it is written that an ox is not to be muzzled when threshing, and slightly earlier on (22:10), the Torah forbids a farmer to plow with an ox and a donkey, possibly to ensure that the weaker animal not suffer in pain while trying to keep up with the stronger one. Additionally, the gemara (Avoda Zara 18b) denounces hunting for sport.

The angel chastises Bilaam for mistreating his animal (Bamidbar 22:32): **על מה הכית את אתנך**. Based on a pasuk in Parshat Re'eh (Devarim 11:15), **ונתתי עשב בשדך, לבהמתך; ואכלת, ושבעת**, the gemara (Brachot 40a) teaches that a person should not eat before first providing for his or her animals. The gemara (Bava Metzia 32b) derives the prohibition of *tza'ar ba'alei chayim* – causing any unnecessary pain to animals – from the command (Shemot 23:5) to relieve an animal's suffering from the weight of its load, even if the animal belongs to your enemy.

To further highlight the importance of caring for animals, one need only take a look at the mentioning of animals *Na"Ch*. When admonishing Yonah HaNavi (Yonah 4:11), Hashem considered animals as well as people: **ואני לא אחוס על נינוה העיר הגדולה אשר יש בה הרבה משתים עשרה רבו אדם אשר לא ידע בין ימינו לשמאלו ובהמה רבה**.

Various pesukim in Tehillim indicate Hashem's concern for all of His creatures – *מַעֲשֵׂיוֹ עַל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיוֹ* (145:9); *מִשְׁבִּיעַ לְכָל חַי רֵצוֹן* (145:16); *אָדָם וּבְהֵמָה תוֹשִׁיעַ ה'* (36:7); *נֹתֵן לְבַהֲמָה לֶחֶמָה לְבְנֵי עֵרֶב אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאוּ* (147:9).

We are taught to emulate the middot of Hashem (*בְּדִרְכָּיו*), and therefore we must have concern for and act with care and consideration towards animals. This middah of care for animals is seen as praiseworthy, with many of the great Jewish leaders being chosen because of the kindness they displayed toward animals.

Shemot Rabbah (2:2) writes how both Moshe Rabbeinu and David HaMelech were considered worthy to be leaders due to the kindness and consideration which they afforded to the sheep in their care. Rivka Imeinu was deemed worthy of being chosen as a wife for Yitzchak Avinu due to her kindness in providing water to Eliezer's camels. Notably, the *avot* were shepherds, whereas the only two hunters mentioned in the Torah are two *reshaim*, Nimrod and Eisav.

It is clear that we are required to treat animals properly. Nonetheless, the concept of *korbanot* and G-d's instruction to Noach after the flood allowing him to eat meat indicate man's hierarchy over animals. Does all of this impact the question of a vegetarian diet?

One case put forward by several Jewish scholars advocating a vegetarian diet is based on Hashem's initial intention that everyone have a plant based diet. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 59b) writes that Adam HaRishon was not permitted to eat meat based on pesukim in Parshat Bereishit (1:29-30). Based on this initial dietary law, the Ramban (1:29) interestingly remarks that animals possess a slightly elevated element in their essence which make them similar to creatures who possess intellect and they have the capacity to choose for the sake of their welfare and flee from pain and death.

A further explanation of this initial law can be found in Rav Yosef Albo's *Sefer Halkarim* (vol. 3 ch. 15), where he comments that "in the killing of animals there is cruelty, rage and accustoming oneself to the bad habit of shedding innocent blood". Strikingly, in juxtaposition to Hashem laying out the original dietary laws, the Torah writes immediately following (1:31), "G-d saw everything he had made and behold it was good" – conveying the idea that a vegetarian diet was G-d's initial and ideal plan.

Rav Kook writes (חזון הצמחונות והשלום, *A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace*) that permission to eat meat was merely a temporary concession, a claim he bases on his idea of G-d as one Who is too merciful to creatures to institute an everlasting law permitting the killing of animals for food. However, due to the corruption of mankind in the age of the flood, people had sunk to such a low stage that they would eat a limb torn from a living animal. Therefore as a concession to people's weakness, they needed to have an elevated image of themselves compared to animals, so that they would be motivated to improve themselves and their relationships with fellow man and G-d. Rav Kook claims that had these people been denied the right to eat meat, they would have eaten humans instead due to their inability to control their lust for flesh. He views the right to eat meat as a "traditional tax" until a "brighter era" in which mankind would return to vegetarian diets.

In *Fragments of Light*, he expands on this interpretation, writing that the fact that the right to eat meat comes along with many laws and restrictions regarding the consumption of meat, implies a subtle reprimand designed to keep alive a sense of reverence for life, and eventually lead people away from a meaty diet. He believed that in the times of Mashiach people would return to the "natural state" and the diet would be plant-based, based on G-d's ideal. He bases this statement on the words of the prophet Yishayahu (11:6-9): וגר זאב עם כבש ... ואריה כבקר יאכל תבן ... לא ירעו ולא ישחיתו בכל הר קדשי.

Rav Kook himself maintained a vegetarian diet, with the exception of Shabbat, when he ate a minimal portion of chicken for *oneg Shabbat*. Rav Isaak Hebenstreit adds to Rav Kook's argument, writing in "Graves of Lust" that G-d never wanted people to eat meat because of the cruelty; people should not kill any living thing and fill their stomachs by destroying others. G-d only temporarily granted mankind the right to eat animals simply because it was a necessity: all plant life had been destroyed in the flood. Once the taste for meat had been acquired it was hard to return to a vegetarian diet.

Rav Yitzchak Arama, in "Akeidat Yitzchak" explores how after Bnei Yisrael left Egypt, G-d tried to reestablish a plant-based diet in the form of the *mann*, described as being "like coriander seed"

(Bamidbar 11:7). But Bnei Yisrael were not satisfied with the *mann* and asked for meat. This story has important points from a vegetarian perspective: (1) Hashem wanted Bnei Yisrael to be sustained by *mann*, and was indeed angry when they asked for meat. (2) The place where this incident occurred was named “The Graves of Lust”, giving a strong indication that the lust for flesh led to the many deaths.

While no concrete evidence has been established that Judaism advocates a vegetarian diet, it certainly provides a strong case that the ideal diet may very well be a vegetarian one. However, there is an arguably equally strong case for advocating a meat-based diet.

In Chapter 7 of the mystical work *Tanya*, Rav Shneiur Zalman of Liadi writes how in Jewish consciousness, the highest level that an animal can achieve is to be consumed by a human and used in the service of G-d. In fact, he even writes that a chicken on a Shabbat table is a very lucky chicken! There are four levels in the hierarchy of creation, in which sustenance is derived from the level beneath it:

- (1) *Domaim* – the silent, inanimate realm (earth and minerals);
- (2) *Tzomei'ach* – vegetation nurtured by the previous level (earth);
- (3) *Chai* – the animal kingdom, which is mainly herbivorous;
- (4) *Medaber* – humans, who derive nourishment from eating both plants and animals.

When food is eaten, its identity is transformed into that of the one eating it; this is why the gemara (Pesachim 49b) regards it as morally justified to eat animals, albeit only when we are involved in spiritual pursuits. It is only at this point that the human actualises his highest potential, and the consumed animal is essentially elevated to the level of “human.” Based on this view it would appear that there is a basis for eating animals; there is not only a basis, but it is indeed praiseworthy.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that only man was created *b'tzelem Elokim* – in the image of G-d. Failing to recognize this can lead to a dangerous philosophy. When human and animal life are considered equally sacred, killing a human can subsequently be regarded as no more heinous than killing an animal.

Rav Yosef Albo in *Sefer Halkarim* believes that this philosophy is rooted in the story of Kayin and Hevel, the first murder in history.

Kayin brings a grain offering while his brother brings an animal offering. Rav Albo believes Kayin regarded animals and humans as equal, and based on this misguided logic, if it was permitted to kill an animal then surely it was permitted to kill a fellow human.

[The danger of radical vegetarianism can be found in modern society. (1) PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) has a shocking multi-media display, “Holocaust on Your Plate,” which juxtaposes photos of Nazi concentration camp victims with photos of chicken farms, drawing a gross moral equivalence. (2) Princeton University philosopher Peter Singer has written and lectured extensively on how the welfare of animals supersedes that of ill babies; he also calls for society to accept human-animal domestic partnerships.]

Judaism’s permitting the consumption of meat obviates such extremism, reminding man of his unique status among G-d’s creations. Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (author of *Derech Hashem* and *Mesilat Yesharim*) writes that animals carry within themselves solely the instincts for survival, fear, and procreation, to name a few, whereas humans have a divine soul, which makes them the only species with the capability to forge a relationship with G-d that is of a transcendent dimension. Only humans have the ability to pursue “pleasures of the soul,” like giving food for the poor, over the bodily pleasure of hoarding food – something an animal does not possess.

However, while there is certainly moral justification for a meat-based diet, many contemporary Jewish scholars are concerned that some of the current production of meat is done in a way that most likely transgresses the prohibition of *tza’ar ba’alei chayim*. Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igrot Moshe Even Haezer* 4:92) expressly forbids raising veal in cramped and painful conditions, and also forbids feeding animals chemicals in place of food, since this would deprive them of the pleasure of eating food.

This complex and nuanced issue does not have one clear-cut solution. Nevertheless, Judaism does overall seem to favour a meat-based diet, provided the proper intent and mindfulness are present and that the animals are treated properly. One should be aware that he is eating meat to elevate the divine energy contained in the food to a higher level and to serve G-d through the pleasures of His world.





## **Skin Deep?**

### **Beauty Through the Lens of Torah**

On the one hand, we are often told that our external beauty doesn't matter; it is our thoughts, brains and actions which determine our self-worth rather than our appearances. Beauty, after all, is only skin deep. It would be wrong to give any importance to a factor as shallow as looks.

And yet, if we are being honest, we all know that looks do matter – perhaps even more than we may think. Our careers, social status and lives are greatly impacted by our appearance. Attractive people seem more approachable and trustworthy. Why do we allow ourselves to be so greatly influenced by such a baseless prejudice? The hard truth is this: beauty is far from being just skin deep. We are wired as human beings to react positively to beauty.

But why did Hashem create us this way? Does Judaism value one's external beauty?

Many great figures in the Torah are praised for their physical beauty. For example, Rachel Imeinu and her descendants are recognized for their external appearances (although genetics are not explicitly mentioned). In the Torah, their beauty is a clear indication of their relation.

Rachel herself is described as *יפת תאר ויפת מראה* (Bereishit 29:17). It is her beauty which seems to encourage Yaakov to work for seven years and then another seven years in order to marry her. Yosef is known for his handsome appearance. Esther HaMalka's beauty is a tremendous advantage too. Achashveirosh is immediately drawn to her and this allows her to achieve so much influence in the future of Persian Jewry.

Beauty apparently is described favourably at times. What is its purpose and why does the Torah seem to extol external appearances as a virtue?

When we take a closer look into the stories of Tanach, we are taught not only the positive effects of beauty but also the challenges it introduces. Yosef was known to have been vain in his beauty. The pasuk describes Yosef using the words *והוא נער* (37:2) and Rashi cites the midrash that Yosef acted immaturely, like a young lad. He used to fix his hair and touch up his eyes so that he would look handsome. It can be argued that his behaviour was not unusual for a teenage boy, but on the other hand, it is somewhat unusual for a person of Yosef's greatness to engage in such activity. Yosef is referred to as a tzaddik due to his virtue of restraint, how every action he took was done for the sake of Hashem. It is this which makes us question his behaviour of pampering himself.

Even if we were inclined to write of Yosef's behaviour as purely a sign of young age, his appearance is still given clear focus as he (like his mother) is described as *יפה תאר ויפה מראה* (39:6). The Midrash Tanchuma comments that Yosef got carried away in his position of command in Potiphar's house. He began to eat and drink, and again play with his hair. Hashem commented, "Your father is in mourning over you, and you are playing with your hair!"

Both Yosef and Esther were given their beauty, allowing them to succeed in a world which values externality, materialism and superficiality. They were able to rise to prominence in a society which was attracted to them and with this, save Bnei Yisrael, but ultimately, it was digging past the surface of their appearance and finding the Will of Hashem that was their goal. We live in a world in which materialism and superficiality reign free and whilst our success is important, it is essential that we not get caught up in the purely external aspects of life but seek to understand their purpose.

Although beauty is purely a manifestation of physical and temporary perfection, it is intended to be used for a greater purpose. A person who places a great deal of emphasis on his outer beauty because he considers it to be an important goal, will neglect his inner spiritual world.

Devorah is an example of a woman undefined by her beauty but rather her wisdom and skill in guiding the Jewish people. Yet,

even she, in writing her song was temporarily overtaken by egoistic thoughts, overemphasizing her role (Shoftim 5:7,12). Chazal (Pesachim 66b) attribute to this her loss of prophecy, showing that placing too much emphasis on superficial importance, leads to a loss of spiritual focus.

The pasuk says in Eishet Chayil (Mishlei 31:30) שקר הון והבל היפי אשה יראת ה' היא תתהלל. Beauty is not something to be ashamed of; rather, it is a positive thing when used as a vehicle for the amplification of one's inner, spiritual world. To be self-absorbed, causes us to waste time thinking about our own materialistic needs and failing to realize how we can utilize these in our *avodat Hashem*.

Rabbi Zamir Cohen, in his article, "Physical Beauty in Judaism," relates a well-known story which conveys this idea (Nedarim 50b). R' Yehoshua ben Chananya was one of the great Sages and was highly valued by the Roman governor for his great wisdom. His outer appearance, however, was not so pleasing to the eye. The Talmud recounts that one time, the governor's daughter asked him,

"How can such beautiful wisdom be stored in such an ugly vessel?"

In reply, R' Yehoshua said, "In what kind of vessels does your father keep his wine?"

"In earthen vessels," she replied.

"How is it fitting for a king to keep his precious wine in earthen vessels?" R' Yehoshua exclaimed. "Would it not be more appropriate to keep the wine in gold and silver vessels?"

And so, the princess gave orders to have the wine transferred from the earthen vessels into gold and silver ones. The wine became sour in a short time and had to be thrown away. When they came and told the governor what had happened, he called his daughter over and said, "Who told you to do this?"

"R' Yehoshua Ben Chananya" she replied.

They called upon the Sage and the governor asked him, "Why did you tell her to do this?"

He replied: "I told her exactly what she told me" (so she can understand that wisdom improves inside an ugly vessel).

“But there are beautiful people who are also wise”, they responded.

“If they were ugly they would be wiser”, replied R’ Yehoshua.

In other words, a person whose mind is not preoccupied with his outer appearance has a greater ability to focus on wisdom and his inner spiritual world. Therefore, outer beauty generally disables the true greatness and wisdom of a person.

And yet beauty is still an important value in the Torah. A person who examines the Torah will see that many mitzvot were intended to preserve the natural beauty of the Jew and remind him that he’s the son of a King. It is strictly forbidden for us to injure ourselves or shave in a destructive manner, and tattoos are also not allowed. In Parshat Kedoshim, it is written (Vayikra 19:28), ושרט ויגדש לא תתנו בבשרכם וכתבתם קעקע לא תתנו בכם אני ה' . We must present ourselves in a way which does justice to our position as the children of Hashem.

To truly understand the importance of self-preservation within the Torah, we look to the evil King Yehoyakim. The pasuk (Divrei Hayamim II 36:8) refers to a permanent change the king had made to his body: ויתר דברי יהויקים ותעבתיו אשר עשה והנמצא עליו . The Midrash says that some argue that he drew a tattoo on his flesh, and others maintain that he extended his foreskin to conceal his circumcision.

Rabbi Zamir Cohen explains this from a kabbalistic perspective. The damage a person causes to his body exists after his death as well (that’s why it says, “that which was found upon him,” meaning, on his soul – as the person who tattoos his body creates a corresponding blemish in the spiritual part of his soul that fuses with his body). We see that permanent damage can be caused to the soul simply through damage to our own bodies.

Our physical maintenance cannot be totally separated from our spiritual maintenance. We need to preserve the natural beauty of our body because we are the sons and daughters of the King of the Universe. To neglect our outer appearance is not the lesson we

are taught in Judaism but rather it is stressed that we must use our external beauty to complement the inner beauty, rather than resist it.

A spiritual quest that leads to the complete neglect of the body is impractical and goes against the truth. On the other hand, being too extreme in a physical sense leads to both spiritual and physical suffering. The balance that may be achieved through following Hashem's Torah provides a person with the perfect balance of spiritual pleasure and peace of mind, while supplying the body with the physical needs it requires.

Our physical beauty is made redundant when we fail to integrate spirituality into every aspect of our lives, including the way we utilize our appearances. Balance is so essential in today's age. Obsession over external appearances is so common that we forget to focus on our character. We cannot neglect either our external or internal beauty. As the children of Hashem, we must be able to correctly present ourselves, and this comes through the realization that neither self-neglect nor self-obsession will help us to achieve the ultimate goal – *avodat Hashem*.



## Hallel on Rosh Chodesh

In a *nevuah* of Yeshayahu HaNavi (43:21), Hashem says: **עם זו יצרתי לי** – “I fashioned this nation for Myself so that it might declare My praise.”

The question is often asked: Why does Hashem need our praises? Hashem is all-powerful, and doesn't need praise from humans. The answer commonly given is that the point of the praise is for us, not for Hashem. When we praise Hashem, we realize how great He is, and how fortunate we are that we get to speak to Him – Who is so lofty.

One of the major means of praising Hashem is through saying Hallel. Consisting of chapters from Tehillim (113-118), they are overflowing with different praises of Hashem. The recitation of Hallel is a very ancient practice.

The gemara (Pesachim 117a) lists several times throughout Jewish history when the Jews said Hallel: at the time of *kriyat Yam Suf*; when Yehoshua and Bnei Yisrael fought against the kings of Canaan; the battle against Sisra; the threat of Sancheiriv during Chizkiyahu's time; the threat of Nevuchadnezzar against Chananya, Mishael, and Azaryah; and during the time of Haman.

Hallel today has become something that we say in praise and thanksgiving of Hashem to commemorate special days and for the miracles He performed for us. We say Hallel on many of our holidays, including Pesach, Shavuot, Succot, and Chanukah, to thank and praise Hashem for all of the *nissim* that occurred.

This raises an interesting question. We know that we say Hallel every Rosh Chodesh. However, no particular miracle happened on Rosh Chodesh that would declare this recurring event as an appropriate time to say Hallel.

Moreover, the gemara (Shabbat 118b) states, **הקורא הלל בכל יום**, **הרי זה מחרף ומגדר**, “He who reads Hallel every day is thereby belittling

and blaspheming [Hashem]". Rashi comments that Hallel is meant for special occasions as an expression of praise and thanksgiving to Hashem, and should not be recited on any other days. If Rosh Chodesh is not a festival and does not fall into this category of a "special occasion" on which a miracle took place, why then do we say Hallel on Rosh Chodesh?

What is the source for saying Hallel on Rosh Chodesh? The gemara (Arachin 10a-10b), based on a pasuk in Yeshayahu (30:29), declares that Hallel is not recited on Rosh Chodesh:

"השיר יהיה לכם כליל התקדש חג" – לילה המקודש לחג טעון שירה  
ושאין מקודש לחג אין טעון שירה.

Only a day that has *kedushah*, manifested by a prohibition to do *melachah*, is worthy of Hallel.

In another gemara (Taanit 28b), we are told that when Rav visited Bavel, he saw that the people were reciting Hallel on Rosh Chodesh. He considered stopping them because we do not say Hallel on Rosh Chodesh! However, when he saw that they left out some sections of Hallel, he realized that saying Hallel on Rosh Chodesh must have been just a custom of their fathers. This custom then eventually spread from Bavel to other communities.

The Beit Yosef (Orach Chaim 422:9) quotes the Shibolei Ha-Leket who writes: מניין שאומרים הלל בר"ח – מצינו שרמזו דוד בתהלים  
הללוקה הללו קל בקדשו, י"ב פעמים הללו כנגד י"ב חדשים. He points out that Perek 150 of Tehillim includes a hint for reciting Hallel every Rosh Chodesh; it mentions הללו (in various forms) twelve times, to indicate the recital of Hallel at the beginning of each of the 12 months.

So, what miracle are we in fact celebrating? Why is Rosh Chodesh a befitting time to say Hallel? Rav Hirsch (Psalm 113) writes that this uplifting song has accompanied us through the millennia of our wanderings through the ages and has kept alive within us the awareness of our mission in world history and sustained us during days of trial. We say it once a month, to remind ourselves of the miracle of our endurance and our need to thank Hashem for it.



I once heard the following explanation. During the month, the moon waxes and wanes. Towards the end of the month, the moon appears as a sliver that is about to disappear, but then it rejuvenates on Rosh Chodesh. This is similar to the Jewish people. We go through struggles, and at times (such as during the holocaust), we might feel like we could disappear. However, just like the moon does, we always recover, with Hashem's help. We are thanking Hashem for the gift of renewal and the ability He gives us to bounce back, even when we feel so small and hopeless.

This applies even in our own lives, when experiencing a personal challenge in which we feel so low and hopeless. Acknowledging Rosh Chodesh through Hallel comes to teach us that even when we feel like there is no hope, there's always an opportunity for renewal – to get back up and rejuvenate.



## וכל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים

### Three Perspectives

The mishna (Avot 2:12) teaches us, וכל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים, “And let all your actions be for the sake of Heaven.” At first glance, having everything you do be for the sake of Hashem seems extreme, and difficult to put into practice. How is a Jew supposed to obtain this goal?

Three of the most influential figures in Judaism from the twentieth century – Rav Soloveitchik, Rav Kook, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe – each offered different perspectives on this question.

Rav Soloveitchik’s perspective was perhaps best articulated by his son-in-law, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein. In an essay dedicated to explaining this mishna, Rav Lichtenstein elaborates on two approaches – those of the Tashbatz and of the Rambam. The Tashbatz defines the word “*maasecha*” as mitzvot, meaning that the way one does mitzvot should be *l’sheim shamayim*. How does one accomplish that?

According to the Tashbatz, there are two levels. One level is when one does a mitzvah solely because Hashem commanded him to do so. This level considers the motivations that led him to do the mitzvah in the first place. Rav Soloveitchik explains that anyone who fulfills a mitzvah this way fulfills the mitzvah.

But, the Tashbatz also writes that there is a higher level of doing the mitzvah called “*l’shma*” which means that the person has a specific goal which they hope to achieve through doing that particular mitzvah. This more ideal level is concerned with what one has in mind to accomplish by doing the mitzvah.

While the first level focuses on what *caused* one to do the mitzvah, the second level focuses on what *effect* his doing the mitzvah will have.

For example, it is sufficient to fulfill the mitzvah of eating matzah on Pesach by eating the matzah because Hashem commanded one to do so; however, it is a greater level to remember Yetzi'at Mitzrayim and see ourselves as if we were freed while eating the matzah.

The Rambam took a much more expansive approach. He explains in Hilchot Deot (3:2), as well as in the Shemoneh Perakim, that the mishnah requires a person to direct all of his actions, not just mitzvot, to Hashem:

צריך האדם שיכוון לבו וכל מעשיו כולם לידע את השם ברוך הוא  
בלבד.

One must direct one's heart and everything he does entirely to knowing Hashem.

As the pasuk says, בכל דרכיך דעהו, in all our ways we should know Him (Mishlei 3:6).

For example, even when one indulges in physical pleasures such as eating, his purpose should not be to merely get pleasure or to be healthy, but rather to satiate his body to be healthy in order to serve Hashem. If someone is not at full strength, it will be impossible for him to learn to full capacity, and his knowledge of Hashem will be limited.

The Rambam adds that we must not create a situation for ourselves in which we perceive Torah and mitzvot as mere guidelines or restrictions. This mindset, being bound by religion, is essentially a secular view. Instead, our job is to see Hashem as crucial, necessary, and at the center of our lives.

In Shemoneh Perakim, the Rambam explains that the difficulty in doing everything *l'sheim shamayim* stems from a lack of *bitachon*. When one has complete *bitachon*, knowing that Hashem

is in control of everything and that he is fully dependent on Him, one is able to clearly see his job in this world. By acknowledging Hashem in this world and noticing His abundant *chessed*, one feels as if he has no choice but to devote everything he does to Hashem.

If we really realize how ideal and necessary guiding our actions *l'sheim shamayim* is, then we can come to the conclusion that this is not such an extreme demand.

The Rambam concludes by warning that even though this is a very high level to reach, we are still all required to strive to attain this mentality. Rav Lichtenstein shows how the Tashbatz and the Rambam share a very goal-oriented perspective, with their approaches concentrating on every action being done for a higher purpose.

Rav Kook reflects on this mishna in his sefer Mussar Avicha. According to Rav Kook, everything in this world can and should be used to honor Hashem. Using the world for that purpose is the deepest way that a person can reach their personal *shleimut* and achieve their potential.

Rav Kook uses a fascinating *mashal* to express this idea. He writes that just like one's physical body needs movement to keep it healthy, so too the *nefesh* needs "movements" to keep it vital and strong. The more one's actions are suffused with *nefesh*, the more complete and healthy his *nefesh* will be. Training oneself to have *hakarat hatov* is one of the most important exercises for the *neshamah* because it leads to doing everything out of *ahavat Hashem*. If one truly lives his life with *ahavat Hashem*, it is inevitable that all his actions will be done with the right intentions.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, also known as "The Rebbe," delivered many *sichot* to his followers. In some of his *sichot*, he shares his understanding of what it means to live with the idea of וכל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים.

Like Rav Soloveitchik and Rav Kook, the Rebbe believes that everything a Jew does must be done for a greater purpose than oneself. Even when attending to personal matters, such as eating, sleeping, or talking, the actions must ultimately be *l'sheim shamayim*. The Rebbe adds that one's actions affect the whole world, not just his own spiritual growth.

One recurring theme the Rebbe speaks about is that man's job is to make this world a "*dira bitachtonim*" for Hashem. The Tanya states (ch. 36), שנתאוה הקב"ה להיות לו דירה בתחתונים, "Hashem desires a dwelling place in the lowest realm".

It is incumbent upon us to show that even in this world, the lowest level of creation, Hashem's presence can be revealed. The way to accomplish this is by fulfilling יהיו לשם שמים כל מעשיך. The more we can live on that level, the closer we will come to the ideal of creating a home for Hashem in this world. The ultimate expression of this is when one takes even their most mundane actions, not just Torah and mitzvot, and dedicates them to Hashem.

Although Rav Soloveitchik (as portrayed by Rav Lichtenstein), Rav Kook, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe all had the same basic understanding of the mishnah, they each emphasized a unique aspect of this mitzvah. Rav Lichtenstein, quoting the Tashbatz and Rambam, focused on man's obligation in this world. His focus was action-oriented, and sheds light on how the absolute best way to act in this world is by directing one's deeds towards a certain goal.

Rav Kook views guiding one's actions to a greater purpose as a way to actualize one's inner potential and fulfill one's spiritual destiny.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, building on the previous ideas, adds that directing all of one's activities to Hashem not only contributes to his personal perfection, but also affects the whole world by bringing Hashem into the world.

When one is able to truly direct and concentrate on living one's life completely for Hashem, *l'shma*, one can reach the loftiest heights and ultimately have an intimate, deep relationship with Hashem.





## The Power of Three

“Who knows three? ... Three are the *avot*.” Three are also the Batei Mikdash, Regalim, divisions of Tanach, tefillot each day etc. (e.g. Kohen, Levi, Yisrael). What is the significance of the number three?

The number one represents wholeness and completion. Two represents finitude and conflict. One connects to Hashem and two connects to everything else; the creation. On the second day of creation, when Hashem created the division between the upper and lower waters, tension and finitude was introduced (Bereishit Rabbah 4:6). On the third day of creation, Hashem made dry land appear, collecting the lower waters into designated spots. Hashem made a further separation than day two, but it had a positive and orderly effect. As we see in the text, **וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹקִים כִּי טוֹב** is written twice regarding the third day. Hashem recognized the goodness of three.

According to Rabbi Lazer Gurkow (in an article “The Secret of the Number Three”), three represents unity and reconciliation. It is the bridge that forms two lines into a triangle, a unified being. The Maharal describes the number three in an image, a link chain. The first link touches the second link. The second touches both links, but the third does not touch the first link. It is beyond the starting point. Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller describes the number three as representative of something greater than the past but not disconnected. It is harmony on a whole new level (Sivan: The Mystical Power of Three).

Regarding Eretz Yisrael, the number three comes up often.

Three reasons are offered why the Jews did not return at the time of *Shivat Tzion* and the beginning of Bayit Sheni. The first reason was because life in Eretz Yisrael was spiritually challenging. The Jews did not always follow Halacha; they kept their shops open on Shabbat and intermarried. The second reason was that life was physically challenging; it was dangerous to live there, and all of the people surrounding the Jews were enemies and wanted to obliterate them from the land. The third reason was that life was economically challenging; the Jews were very poor and lacked monetary support.

The Rambam (Hilchot Melachim 5:9) lists three reasons that allow a Jew to go to *chutz la'aretz*. A Jew can temporarily leave Eretz Yisrael for Torah learning, for business, or to find a shidduch.

Another connection between Eretz Yisrael and the number three are the three *geulot* and three Batei Mikdash. We have already experienced two *geulot* and two Batei Mikdash. The first geula was great and magnificent. People truly felt redeemed and were immersed in *kedushah*.

The first Beit HaMikdash was glorious. We had Shlomo HaMelech, peace and prosperity.. Here we can see how the number one and the first Beit HaMikdash relate; they are both unified and wholesome and incomparable.

Then the second *geulah* came and it was not as great. Jews did not rush back; they were comfortable in *galut*. Ezra and Nechemia led the Jews to rebuild Yerushalayim, but because of the lack of finances and surrounding enemies, it was fairly difficult. The second Beit HaMikdash was not nearly as glorious; it was made of cheaper materials, and was missing key elements such as the Aron. Jews that had been alive for both Mikdashim mourned at the establishment of the second Mikdash, because they were able to compare it to the memory of the great first Mikdash. The relation between the number two and the second Beit HaMikdash is apparent. Both include conflict, tension, and comparison.

Lastly, we have the third Beit HaMikdash and *geulah*, which will come quickly Be"H. The Zohar describes it as everlasting because it will be Hashem who builds it. Whether that means physically or spiritually, Hashem will have more involvement than the previous two Mikdashim. The third Beit HaMikdash will be a product of our past Mikdashim and *galuyot*, yet it will be greater than they were: like the Maharal described, the third link in the chain.

As opposed to the second Beit HaMikdash period, there will be no enemies, war or tension (Michah 4:1-8). We will reach a greater level of *kedushah* for Am Yisrael and the universe at large. The tragedies and struggles of our *galut*, of our destruction and upheaval, will only propel us towards a greater simchah and appreciation for the third and final *geulah*. This is the magic of the number three.

Throughout our last exile, we have gone through a lot: destruction of the Mikdash, loss of the Shechina's revealed presence, all sorts of persecutions, the Crusades, inquisitions, pogroms, diseases, massacres, the Holocaust, oppression, terrorism, and so many more hardships.

We as a nation bear a lot of baggage, yet we still are devout and loyal to HaKadosh Baruch Hu and the Torah and mitzvot. This only creates a greater yearning for our third and final redemption. It will be the greatest, even more glorious than the first. Like the third day of creation, Hashem will implement the goodness of three.

Another idea depicting the significance of the number three is Hashem's bond with the world, which can be established in three ways. These bonds are represented by the Batei Mikdash. In the first Beit HaMikdash, the bond was established by Hashem sending His divinity downwards. The connection was not dependent on the people's initiative but rather Hashem's, whereas with regards to the second Beit HaMikdash it was the reverse.

The people of the first Beit HaMikdash could not keep their bond with the infinite heavens, so therefore the people of the second Beit HaMikdash focused on the finite. Bnei Yisrael needed to uplift and add *kedushah* to this world in order to establish a bond with HKB"H. During the second Mikdash, the Jews focused on teshuvah in this world, which is why it was able to last longer than the first. Yet the world is finite and therefore this bond could not be everlasting.

However, the third Beit HaMikdash's bond will be a combination of both worlds, the infinite 'above' and the finite "below". This existence embraces both worlds and this fusion will cause the finitude of the world to become infinite (Likutei Sichot, Vol IX, p.26).

This is the power of three. It is the resolution and the harmony that brings us to perfection, to connecting with Hashem, to eternal *shleimut*. Perhaps this explains the significance of the number three. When we repeat tefillot three times, perhaps the third time is when we have the most *kavanah*, understanding and emotion. Perhaps the Kohen-Levi-Yisrael status is what yields the greatest unity and *achdut* while still allowing individual roles. May we merit seeing the power of three in our redemption *B'meheira B'yameinu*. (See also Shabbat 88a.)



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# FACULTY

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## The Best Blessing

### From the Man Who was a Blessing

Yaakov's famous and poignant blessing of Efraim and Menashe – בך יברך ישראל – has become the classic paradigm by which parents bless their sons. Many have questioned why we have so fastidiously adopted the formula of blessing our sons to emulate Efraim and Menashe when *Tanach* and Jewish history are filled with so many other exceedingly righteous and pious individuals?

There are numerous answers to this query, but the most fundamental seems to be the unique circumstances of Efraim's and Menashe's lives. They were raised in a thoroughly non-Jewish environment yet remained steadfast in their observance and commitment. The tenacity to uphold that which is sacred – under all circumstances – is a most worthy blessing to bestow upon our children.

There is yet a different difficulty in the above verse that has not been awarded much attention. The Torah begins by describing Yaakov blessing Yosef, בך יברך ישראל – “through **you** ...” (the implication being Yosef), and yet the blessing turns out to be directed to Yosef's *sons* – Efraim and Menashe – and not to Yosef!

The famous Ponevezher Rav, Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman, points out this difficulty, and his astute resolution is quite consistent with the inspiring persona that he was.

It was Rav Kahaneman who had single-handedly built an unheard of Lithuanian village into one of the greatest Torah citadels before World War II. He opened a pre-school, a *yeshivah ketanah*, a religious high school for girls, a kollel, a top-flight hospital and greatly strengthened the existing yeshivah. In Ponevezh, they used to quip that it doesn't pay to pave the roads, for the Ponevezher Rav will come and build a new building which will require asphaltting

the streets all over again. One person labeled his accomplishments in that little town as the creation of a *malchus fun kinder* – an empire of children. He deeply loved the children that he educated, and every one of 1,000 youngsters enrolled in the Ponevezh network of Torah schools was intimately acquainted with their Rav.

Tragically, all of his tireless work was erased by the Nazi monsters. Each and every one of the schools and virtually all of the pupils including his own wife and children were murdered by the Germans and their iniquitous cohorts. Destroyed as well was his lengthy essays on *shas* that was stored in six cartons.

A lesser man — indeed any man — undergoing such colossal devastation couldn't ever be expected to bounce back and lead a productive life. The Ponevezher Rav, however, found solace and comfort in rebuilding Torah centers and fostering Jewish education. When he arrived in Israel during World War II he visited Bnei Brak which was not much more than a desolate tundra of sand dunes. He looked up at the hill nestled in Zichron Meir and pronounced, "Here will be my yeshivah," and forthwith went out and purchased the property.

People were reluctant to wish him *mazal tov* on the acquisition. It was the middle of World War II, Nazi forces were raging across Europe, and appalling reports were filtering in about atrocities and the mass murder of Jews. It did not seem to be the right time to think about, let alone *build*, new yeshivos. Furthermore, although no one wished to actually articulate the thought, the Nazi juggernaut seemed to be invincible, and Palestine was clearly on Hitler's cross hairs.

The feeling that prevailed in *Eretz Yisrael* at the time was sinking despair. All were absorbed with the catastrophic losses in Europe, and the Ponevezher Rav was no less consumed than anyone else, but he was even more consumed with the necessity to rebuild.

His plan was to erect a building that could accommodate at least 500 students. Indeed, as he would ascend the hill of the not-yet-built yeshivah he would declare, "I can already hear the sound of Torah that will emanate from this place!"



Nothing could have sounded more preposterous, for the youth in the country at the time were singularly focused upon finding employment. And whereas there may have been a few exceptions, they probably didn't number more than a dozen. Five hundred students sounded no less absurd than 50,000 students. But the Ponevezher Rav was characteristically unfazed by the critique. "Days will soon come," he predicted presciently, "when there will be millions and millions of Jews who will live in Israel. Then there will not be enough room for the students in the current yeshivos!"

The Ponevezher Rav's outrageously unrealistic pronouncements raised some eyebrows, but none of this daunted him. In a sea of skepticism and despair, the Ponevezher Rav proceeded undeterred with his plans. No one could even damper his enthusiasm.

When the Rav detailed his ideas to the Chief Rabbi, Rav Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog, the scholar listened patiently, thinking perhaps that after all this man has lost – wife, children, yeshivah, novellae on the entire Talmud – *nebach*, the misfortune had affected his ability to reason. Yet the Ponevezher Rav contended with perfect clarity that with the A-mighty's help he would indeed build an enormous yeshivah, and an educational infrastructure that surpassed the network that he had established in Ponevezh, Lithuania.

"You're dreaming," the Chief Rabbi said at last.

The Ponevezher Rav replied, "Yes, I *am* dreaming, but my eyes are *open*. This dream shall be fulfilled through days and nights of *not* sleeping!"

Not long after this encounter, Rav Shneur Kotler, son of the Lakewood Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Aharon, visited Bnei Brak. The Ponevezher Rav took him to the desolate hill upon which the yeshivah would be erected to give him a "scenic tour". At the very top of the barren knoll, Rav Yosef Shlomo cupped his hand in a gesture fraught with significance, and then whispered as if he was revealing the secret of the century, "Here, from right *here*, the Torah will emanate."

Prodding him incessantly was the agonizing memory of the millions of martyrs who perished, including his own wife and children, the only exception being one son, Avraham. All his life, he kept a photograph of his children in his wallet, and engraved on his heart. These were not the only kindred that he deeply mourned: only a handful of over 1,000 students from the Ponevezh educational network survived the war, and nearly all of his rabbinical colleagues from Lithuania were sacrificed together with their flocks. The most meaningful expression he found for his grief was to build, and he had no doubt that he was spared in order to fulfill the Divine guarantee (Devarim 31:21) **כִּי לֹא תִשָּׁכַח מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ**.

He was constantly uplifting the spirits of the downtrodden and saving them from despair in his inimitable way of revealing illumination in the heart of darkness. His message was that G-d was undoubtedly with them, and they must immerse themselves in Torah study so that the nation might heal itself. Together, they would be able to fulfill the prophecy of Ovadiah (1:17) that not only **פְּלִיטָה** [On Mount Zion there will be refuge] but also **קֹדֶשׁ** [and it will be holy!]. This pasuk is hewn in large letters on the main yeshivah building.

This brief background helps us appreciate the cogent insight Rav Kahaneman had regarding Yaakov's blessing of Yosef's children. To the man committed to building the future, the dreamer whose eyes were always open, it was manifestly clear that the greatest blessing one can offer a father is that *his children* be worthy and productive. The greatest blessing for Yosef concerned his sons Ephraim and Menashe.



Allow me to now personalize the Ponevezher Rav's message to you, the graduating students of MMY. You are now concluding your (rather unusual) year of seminary study. And now you will begin, sooner or later, the most important period of your lives, getting married and building a family **בְּעָרָה**. My humble blessing

to you all is that you dream with eyes open about the future that you will build, and that you will be enabled to establish a home where you can raise future generations like Efraim and Menashe – offspring that will remain committed to Torah values and outlook, no matter where life leads them.



## Following the Footsteps of David HaMelech

The return of the Jewish people to our ancestral homeland has breathed life into a seemingly endless number of areas in Jewish life. One focus which has been well documented is the resurgence of Tanach study, and in particular as it relates to Eretz Yisrael. Despite these encouraging developments, Tanach education on site seems to be lackluster at best for most educated Jews. In fact, the vast majority of tourists encountered at biblical sites outside of Yerushalayim are not Jewish at all! We will try to give just one example of how powerful the encounter with the land and the text can be.



For our illustration, we will focus on one valley: Emek Ha'ela. It can be argued that with the exception of Yerushalayim, nowhere was as central a setting for David HaMelech's life story. There David achieves his victory over Golyat (Shmuel I 17), launching him to a position of prominence in Am Yisrael and eventually drawing the jealousy of Shaul HaMelech. Forced to flee, David first takes refuge in Gat, at the western end of Emek Ha'ela (see map) and the most important Pelishti city at the time. The pasuk states (21:11):

ויקם דוד ויברח ביום ההוא מפני שאול ויבא אל אכיש מלך גת:

I had always been bothered why David would possibly think it safer to run to Gat, the hometown of Golyat. Could it possibly be more secure than a city in Yehuda? A visit to the site, identified quite confidently by archaeologists as Tel es Safi, provides greater clarity and grants a glimpse into David's mindset. The city was, quite simply, massive; it was much larger than any contemporary city in the land. At 500 dunams, approximately 125 acres, Gat was the metropolis of Eretz Yisrael in the tenth century BCE, the period of David. In addition to a huge hill that housed the upper city of Gat, archaeologists have recently found the gate complex to a lower city that dates from David's time period. Of course, this find is particularly significant given that David uses this precise gate to feign insanity. The pasuk states (21:14):

וישנו את טעמו בעיניהם ויתהלל בידם ויתו [ויתיו] על דלתות השער  
ויורד רירו אל זקנו:

Gat would have been a refuge because it rendered David untouchable. Shaul certainly could not have attacked Gat openly, and David felt so alone he was willing to hazard a journey into his enemy's stronghold. David may have also hoped that the size of Gat would have helped him remain anonymous in the bustling metropolis.

When David successfully flees Gat, the Navi tells us his next stop (18:1-2):

וילך דוד משם וימלט אל מערת עדלם וישמעו אחיו וכל בית אביו  
וירדו אליו שמה: ויתקבצו אליו כל איש מצוק וכל־איש אשר לו נשא  
וכל איש מר נפש ויהי עליהם לשר ויהיו עמו כארבע מאות איש:

Before visiting Adullam, let's consider his journey. In fact, one of the most interesting features of experiencing Tanach sites is the insight we gain between the pesukim. The Navi says nothing of his path, but it is safe to assume that David walked from Gat, up Emek Ha'ela, ending in Adullam, one of the Eastern most points along the curving valley. What was David thinking while walking? How alone did he feel? Hunted by all, this hike would have taken several hours at the very least, and all the while the future king must have been debating his next move.

Even more interestingly, on his trip, David would have passed “between Socho and Azeika,” the site of his great victory over Golyat. One wonders if he paused to replay the battle in his mind, drawing strength from his divinely-aided triumph. Or did walking along the stream from which he chose five stones fill him with sadness at his lot in life and how far he had fallen from that moment of glory?

Finally, David reaches Adullam. Tel Adullam, located in modern Park Adullam, is an unexcavated site with several caves throughout and surrounding the *tel*. Geographically, it is located at the edge of the Shephela, the Judean Lowlands. As such, it sits on the seam between the coastal area controlled by the Pelishtim and David’s native hill country. He is quite literally stuck between two worlds. Visiting Adullam, however, adds another layer to our understanding of David. From the edge of the *tel* and the traditional, if not authentic, “Cave of Adullam” in which he hid, he could have seen the entire expanse of the Judean Hills and even made out the hills surrounding Beit Lechem and his home. From Adullam he may have been able to see fires from villages he knew as a boy and fields he frequented with his flocks. Thus, understanding his location and actually setting foot on the site fills in a silence between pesukim. When he arrives at Adullam, David is caught between two worlds. Home is so close, but it may as well be at the other end of the world.

Everything discussed makes one perek of Tehillim all the more remarkable. While the Navi is silent regarding David’s feelings, Perek 34 of Tehillim begins:

לדוד בשנותו את טעמו לפני אבימלך ויגרשוהו וילך:

David writes this perek at some point after he departs Gat, the same “trip” we’ve been discussing. As we’ve seen, it would be understandable for David to seem distraught, but the perek reflects quite the opposite sentiment:

דרשתי את ה' וענני ומכל מגורותי הצילני: הביטו אליו ונהרו ופניהם  
אל יחפרו: זה עני קרא וה' שמע ומכל צרותיו הושיעו:

I turned to Hashem, and He answered me; He saved me  
from all my terrors. Men look to Him and are radiant;

let their faces not be downcast. Here was a lowly man who called, and Hashem listened, and delivered him from all his troubles.

David celebrates the salvation of Hashem. While he sees himself as a “lowly man,” the protection and support of הקב”ה, evaporate his fears and concerns.

At this point we can deeply understand why visiting sites from Tanach is so important. By walking his path, we can appreciate the isolation, fear, and pain David is feeling. Simultaneously, however, David is able to sing the praises of Hashem.

At times, we are faced with a variety of challenges and suffering, some of which may compare to David’s but most of which do not. In those moments, can we draw on a deep faith to see us through our travails? Can we still rejoice at the salvation of Hashem?

If we’re honest, some of this encounter with David and his personality can take place with a map and a Tanach. Walking the path, however, adds seemingly infinite insight to his experience. Only by experiencing the depths of his despair can we fully understand the greatness of his faith. And by walking along with David, perhaps we can deepen our understanding of how we confront challenges and reinforce our faith in our ultimate Savior and Redeemer:

פודה ה' נפש עבדיו ולא יאשמו כל החסידים בו: