

Kol

קול

Mevaseret

מבשרת

A Compilation of
Insights and Analyses
of Torah Topics

by the students of

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INTRODUCTION

פסוק concludes with the following lesson learned from a מסכת ברכות: ישעיהו 1:

אמר רבי אלעזר אמר רבי חנינא, תלמידי חכמים מרבים שלום בעולם,
שנאמר 'וכל בניך למודי ה' ורב שלום בניך'² אל תקרי בניך אלא בוניך.

How does רבי חנינא's changing of the original פסוק by switching the word בניך, your sons, to בוניך, your builders, enhance the meaning of the verse?

The answer lies in understanding the meaning behind the term בוניך. רבי חנינא equates תלמידי חכמים to builders, presumably in praise of the way they “build” the world around them, infusing spirituality into physicality. The root of the verb בנה is very similar to the word בינה, understanding, because a key step in the learning process is להבין דבר מתוך דבר, essentially building on each idea in order to grasp the next level of comprehension.

At MMY, we spent a year trying to achieve a certain level of בינה in a range of Torah subjects: הלכה, תנ"ך, הלכה, גמרא, and Hebrew language. And whether we believe that we achieved it or not, our Torah study has impacted the rest of the world in ways we, as humans with limited perception, cannot see. We have been these מסגרת, increasing the level of שלום in the world far beyond the level of MMY.

The class of תשע"א was unique in many ways, but perhaps one aspect of our “legacy” lies in being the last year in the beloved building on רחוב נלארה, a street once characterized by Rabbi Haber as being “sketchy on the outside, but pure קדושה on the inside.” A large portion of our year focused on the new building in בקעה,

¹ סד.

² ישעיהו יג:נד

and even though during the school-year we didn't see the actual construction in progress, a פסוק in תצא כי gave us a clue as to how the building, or at least the roof, would look: כי תבנה בית חדש ועשית מעקה: ³לגגך ולא תשים דמים בביתך כי יפל הנפל ממנו

This מצוה of מעקה requires the owner of a building to put a fence or a type of guardrail (as translated by רש"י on the פסוק) around the roof, lest someone fall. The ספר החינוך's⁴ explanation of this מצוה offers a perspective on the general topic of פרטית, השגחה, saying that ה' has already decreed what should happen to a person, but that does not mean that the person can rely on a נס and purposely endanger himself, thinking that he will not fall if ה' has not decreed for it to be so. Contrarily, ה' runs the world based on natural principles, and if a person steps off the roof, he will inevitably fall to the ground. Thus, we need to actively take measures to protect ourselves against danger, regardless of what has been decreed in the מעלה של בית דין. This idea can be expanded to almost every area of Jewish life – believe that ה' is in control, but you cannot just sit back and wait for the actualization of ה'’s decrees. The same is true in regards to לימוד התורה: Every year, the amount of Torah that a person will gain is decreed on ראש השנה, but if the person does not take the initiative to learn, he will obviously not gain what was expected of him.

As set forth in פרקי אבות⁵, there is another type of protective fence – ועשו סיג לתורה. Here we are advised to take precautionary measures to keep from accidentally sinning. An example of a סיג is מוקצה of איסור דרבנן, stopping us from picking up certain objects so that we will not accidentally use them to do a מלאכה שבת. The idea of a סיג is remarkably similar to that of a מעקה – both of which protect from harm, whether spiritual or physical, respectively.

³ במדבר ח:כ"ב

⁴ מצוה תקמ"ו – ועשית מעקה לגגך

⁵ פרק א משנה א

To the תלמידות of MMY תשע"א: We have all made remarkable strides in our לימוד התורה, but we cannot just stop there. We will always be encountering barriers, and hopefully the סיגים of הלכה that we have learned this year will keep us well within the parameters of שומרות תורה ומצוות as we continue striving for growth. We may have been the last year in גבעת שאול, but we have become the בוניים that have the power to perpetuate תורה in the world, if we take advantage of our opportunities and not rely on thinking that we will get what ה' has decreed for us regardless of what we have actually done.

May we all continue building our lives as Jewish women, regardless of what building in which we find ourselves.

Ronit Goldberg

Rebecca Ihilchik

Yaelle Lason

תנ"ך

Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis

The Intrinsic Parallelism

Between **אלהיו** and **יונה**

"צויתי שם אשה אלמנה לכלכלך" ותני רבי אליעזר **יונה בן אמתי** בן צרפתי

אלמנה היה (ילקוט שמעוני יונה רמ"ז תק"ג)

This **מדרש** links two seemingly distinct storylines, featuring two **נביאים** who appear to lie in stark contrast to one another. One by land, one by sea, **אלהיו** and **יונה** each utilizes his unique personality traits to accomplish the task at hand. Superficial readings of their respective accounts would not result in any inkling of similarities between the two; in fact, this would perhaps indicate an even wider rift between the two leaders' methodologies. However, once one begins to dig beneath the surface of the two accounts, textual analysis reveals the intrinsic parallelism between **אלהיו's** and **יונה's** personalities, casting light on the unifying theme.

Let us first take a look at their **הקדשות** (initiations):

מלכים א פרק יז

(א) ויאמר אליהו התשבי מתשבי גלעד אל אחאב חי ה' אלקי ישראל אשר

עמדתי לפניו אם יהיה השנים האלה **טל** ומטר כי אם לפי דברי:

(ב) ויהי דבר ה' אליו **לאמר**:

(ג) **לך מזה** ופנית לך קדמה ונסתרת בנחל ברית אשר על פני הירדן:

(ד) והיה מהנחל תשתה ואת הערבים צויתי לכלכלך שם:

יונה פרק א

(א) ויהי דבר ה' אל **יונה בן אמתי לאמר**:

(ב) **קום לך** אל נינוה העיר הגדולה וקרא עליה כי עלתה רעתם לפני:

(ג) ויקם יונה לברח תרשישה מלפני ה' וירד יפו וימצא אניה באה תרשיש

ויתן שכרה וירד בה לבוא עמהם תרשישה מלפני ה':

(ד) וה' **הטיל** רוח גדולה אל הים ויהי סער גדול בים והאניה חשבה להשבר:

(ה) וייראו המלחים ויזעקו איש אל אלקיו ויטלו את הכלים אשר באניה אל

הים להקל מעליהם ויונה ירד אל ירכתי הספינה וישכב וירדם:

Their superficial characteristics are apparent from the start, as their opposite personalities seem to begin to diverge from the very first פסוקים in each story. אליהו initiated his own leadership role, declaring a drought for בני as a punishment for practicing עבודה זרה. He seemed to make brash decisions in the heat of the moment. He assumed authority, as it says, לפי דברי.

אליהו's initiation differs from יונה's conduct, which appears passive in the sense that he did not act until receiving the commandment from ה', and also seemed to be running away from his responsibility as a נביא. Since the opening פסוקים of the פרק tend to be the most declarative, only after the divergent beginnings do the פסוקים tell us that אליהו also received the commandment, דבר ה', from ה', and the continuation of precisely what he must do next.

Although from the bare text אליהו's decree for a drought seems arbitrary and spontaneous, in actuality אליהו acted with calculated reason. In order to explain his logic, ¹ draw on סמיכות חז"ל, which ends off with the death of חיאל's sons after rebuilding יריחו. אליהו told חיאל that חיאל was an important man, and he should go comfort him. אליהו refused, because he felt that if people would anger him, he would not be able to refrain and control himself. ה' responded that whatever אליהו would decree, ה' would follow through. So אליהו went, and found חיאל studying the topic of swearing that whoever rebuilds יריחו would be cursed. (He said that when the builder lays the foundation down his eldest son will die, and when he puts up the doors marking the completion of the city, his youngest will die.)² The אהאב, who was

¹ סנהדרין קיג. (וכן ירושלמי פ"י הל"ב, תנא דבי אליהו זוטא ח) אמר ליה: השתא לווטתא דמשה לא קא מקיימא, דכתיב (דברים י"א) וסרתם ועבדתם וגו' וכתיב וחרה אף ה' בכם ועצר את השמים וגו', וההוא גברא אוקים ליה עבודה זרה על כל תלם ותלם, ולא שביק ליה מיטרא דמיזל מיסגד ליה, לווטתא דיהושע תלמידה מקיימא? מיד (מלכים א' י"ז) ויאמר אליהו התשבי מתשבי גלעד חי ה' אלהי ישראל ... אם יהיה ... טל ומטר וגו', בעי רחמי והבו ליה אקלידא דמטרא, וקם ואול.

² וישבע יהושע בעת ההיא לאמר ארור האיש לפני ה' אשר יקום ובנה את העיר הזאת את יריחו בבכרו ייסדנה ובצעירו יציב דלתיה: (יהושע ו:כו)

present at the *שבעה* house, retorted and questioned how it could be that the curse of *יהושע*'s master, *משה רבינו* (that if *בני* worship *זרה*, *עבודה זרה*, would stop rainfall³), did not come true, but the curse of the servant, *יהושע*, materialized? *אהאב* bluntly declared that *בני* were practicing *עבודה זרה*, and the rainfall had not been stopped as promised! Subsequently and characteristically, *אליהו* jumped up furiously and swore that *ה'* would stop the *מטר*. The purpose of this *אגדה* seems to be to add some perspective, to explain that *אליהו*'s decree was not simply as "spur-of-the-moment" as one might have initially presumed.

The allusions to *טל* are embedded carefully within the text of *יונה* in the form of phonetic similarity with the word *הטיל* (bolded in the table above), to help tie the two together via contrast; the first *טל* shows that *ה'*, "on His own," interjected in nature with a strong wind, and the second (*הטילו*) describes the sailors dumping the vessels overboard to lighten the load on board. Both seem to show *יונה*'s relative passivity, but really imply no less calculation and initiative than *אליהו*'s course of action. *יונה* wanted the sailors to throw the vessels off the boat so that he would be able to sneak to the bottom of the ship while chaos ensued. Because he understood that he was the reason for the storm, he figured that if the ship were to sink, he would die first at the bottom, the storm would cease, and the rest of the boat would be saved. *יונה*'s seemingly cowardly escape to the bottom was really an expression of initiative and direct leadership action.

Additionally, the *מפרשים* explain key information which illustrates *יונה*'s independence and precision, clarifying the entire sequence of events. *יונה*'s escape was not a denial that *ה'* was omnipotent, rather there was much reasoning behind his attempt

³ דברים יא:טז-יז - השמרו לכם פן יפתה לבבכם וסרתם ועבדתם אלהים אחרים והשתחוויתם להם: וחרה אף ה' בכם ועצר את השמים ולא יהיה מטר והאדמה לא תתן את יבולתה ואבדתם מהרה מעל הארץ הטובה אשר ה' נתן לכם.

to evade נבואה. According to the מלבי"ם, for example, יונה knew that the נבואה he was to receive would be about arousing the evil city of נינוה to do תשובה to avoid destruction. After declaring נינוה's destruction, he did not want to be viewed as a נביא שקר if their תשובה would be able to reverse the decree. יונה also knew that in the future, if saved, נינוה would be the enemies of his beloved nation and would cause them much harm. Also, he did not want בני"י's תשובה to pale in comparison to נינוה's, which would anger ה'.

In essence, יונה's escape was not an act of timidity, rather it was a carefully crafted plan designed to protect his people. Hence we see from just these first פסוקים that while the text seems to highlight the differences between the two נביאים in activity and passivity, it simultaneously hints at their similarities; both used insightful calculations that superficially appear to lack careful thought.

Both stories also involve harnessing the forces of nature to teach spiritual lessons. However, the one point of difference still lies in which individual initiated the stirring of nature; אליהו declared the drought without even consulting with ה', but in ספר יונה it was ה' Himself who brought about the רוח גדולה.

Furthermore, both יונה and אליהו used water as a means to carry out their plans- אליהו used the lack of rain to reprimand בני"י, and יונה went out to sea to avoid receiving נבואה. (One of the ways to prevent getting נבואה is to be outside of ארץ ישראל⁴ or to be at sea.) Water symbolizes rebirth and purity. It washes impurities away and allows for fresh starts. It makes sense that the motif of water comes up in both places, since both נביאים were dealing with nations who needed to do תשובה.

Additionally, a number of details of the story are reminiscent of the מבול. A יונה was sent by נח to determine the status of the flood. Also, סנהריב מלך אשור settled in נינוה and was killed by his sons,

⁴ מכילתא א

who ran away to הרי אררט, where the תיבה rested after the flood. There is also the forty day and forty night flood, which parallels the forty day warning period for נינוה. The parallelism links יונה, the person, with יונה, the bird, in that they both sought serenity and calmness after warnings for תשובה to avoid destruction. Further similarities arise, including אליהו walking in the desert in despair for forty days and nights and יונה giving נינוה forty days to repent.

However, although both נביאים had honest intentions, ה' found fault in their overly exuberant zealotry to achieving their goals, and communicated this to the נביא in a very clear way. In אליהו's case, ה' told him to drink from נחל כרית (from the שורש כ.ר.ת., meaning "cut off"), which eventually dried up (ויבש), and that ravens, although notorious for their cruelty, would sustain him. The message seems to be that if even these cruel animals were kind enough to feed him during the drought, how could אליהו be so cruel as to deprive the nation of food? For יונה, ה' showed him that it is prohibited to run away from נבואה by attacking his ship with a wild storm, sending a big fish to swallow him, and then having him spit out onto dry land (יבשה).

Additionally, both the widow whom אליהו visited and the sailors on the ship placed blame on each נביא's shoulders. These "bystanders" were designated as messengers through whom ה' was able to convey rebuke:

מלכים א פרק יז

(יה) ותאמר אל אליהו מה לי ולך איש האלהים באת אלי להזכיר את עוני

ולהמית את בני:

יונה פרק א

(י) וייראו האנשים יראה גדולה ויאמרו אליו מה זאת עשית כי ידעו

האנשים כי מלפני ה' הוא ברח כי הגיד להם:

Both נביאים were addressed by the people in the same type of questioning, accusatory manner, with tones of disdain. Both were resented for their negative impacts on the people, be it via storm or absence of water. Additionally, while אליהו's famous moment on הר כרמל occurred on top of a high mountain, יונה's

miracle happened in the depths of the sea. This symbolic contrast highlights the intrinsic parallelism between the two narratives.

The climax of the parallelism comes when the נביאים are each exhausted from their mission and feel a sense of helplessness; אליהו in the desert after his escape from the life-threatening אהאב and his wife איזבל, and יונה after ה' destroyed his last hope of shade, his קיקיון.

מלכים א פרק יט

(ד) והוא הלך במדבר דרך יום ויבא וישב תחת רתם אחת אחד וישאל את

נפשו למות ויאמר רב **עתה ה' קח נפשי כי לא טוב אנכי מאבתי:**

(ה) וישכב ויישן **תחת רתם** אחד והנה זה מלאך נגע בו ויאמר לו קום אכול:

(ו) ויבט והנה מראשתיו עגת רצפים וצפחת מים ויאכל וישת וישב וישכב:

(ז) וישב מלאך ה' שנית ויגע בו ויאמר קום אכל כי רב ממך הדרך:

(ח) ויקם ויאכל וישתה וילך בכח האכילה ההיא ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה

עד הר האלהים חרב:

(ט) ויבא שם אל המערה וילן שם והנה דבר ה' אליו ויאמר לו מה לך פה

אליהו:

(י) ויאמר קנא קנאתי לה' אלהי צבאות כי עזבו בריתך בני ישראל את

מזבחתיך הרסו ואת נביאיך הרגו בחרב ואותר אני לבדי ויבקשו את נפשי

לקחתה:

(יא) ויאמר צא ועמדת בהר לפני ה' והנה ה' עבר ורוח גדולה וחזק מפרק

הרים ומשבר סלעים לפני ה' לא ברוח ה' ואחר הרוח רעש לא ברעש ה':

(יב) ואחר הרעש אש לא באש ה' ואחר האש קול דממה דקה:

יונה פרק ד

(א) וירע אל יונה רעה גדולה ויחר לו:

(ב) ויתפלל אל ה' ויאמר אנה ה' הלוא זה דברי עד היותי על אדמתי על כן

קדמתי לברח תרשישה כי ידעתי כי אתה אל חנון ורחום ארך אפים ורב

חסד ונחם על הרעה:

(ג) **ועתה ה' קח נא את נפשי ממני כי טוב מותי מחיי:**

(ד) ויאמר ה' ההיטב חרה לך:

(ה) ויצא יונה מן העיר וישב מקדם לעיר ויעש לו שם סכה וישב **תחתיה**

בצל עד אשר יראה מה יהיה בעיר:

(ו) וימן ה' אלהים קיקיון ויעל מעל ליונה להיות צל על ראשו להציל לו

מרעתו וישמח יונה על הקיקיון שמחה גדולה:

- (ז) וימן האלהים תולעת בעלות השחר למחרת ותך את הקיקיון וייבש:
 (ח) ויהי כזרח השמש וימן אלהים רוח קדים חרישית ותך השמש על ראש
 יונה ויתעלף וישאל את נפשו למות ויאמר טוב מותי מחיי:
 (ט) ויאמר אלהים אל יונה ההיטב חרה לך על הקיקיון ויאמר היטב חרה לי
 עד מות:
 (י) ויאמר ה' אתה חסת על הקיקיון אשר לא עמלת בו ולא גדלתו שבן לילה
 היה ובן לילה אבד:
 (יא) ואני לא אחוס על נינוה העיר הגדולה אשר יש בה הרבה משתים
 עשרה רבו אדם אשר לא ידע בין ימינו לשמאלו ובהמה רבה:

Beyond the simple textual parallels, there is a very significant contrast being demonstrated here.

Let us examine אליהו's case: He somewhat abruptly took י"ל קוט שמעוני ירמיהו רמז שכה – "ועוד נוסף עליהם דברים, נמצאת אומר שלשה בנים הם אחד תבע כבוד האב וכבוד הבן ואחד תבע כבוד האב ולא כבוד הבן ואחד תבע כבוד הבן ולא כבוד האב, ירמיה תבע כבוד האב וכבוד הבן שנאמר נחנו פשענו ומרינו אתה לא סלחת לפיכך נכפלה נבואתו שנאמר ועוד נוסף עליהם דברים רבים, אליהו תבע כבוד האב ולא כבוד הבן שנאמר קנא קנאתי לה' צבאות כי עברו ישראל את בריתך, מה כתיב שם ויאמר ה' שוב לדרכך דמשק ואת יהוא בן נמשי תמשך למלך ואת אלישע בן שפט תמשך לנביא תחתך שאין ת"ל תחתך אלא שאי אפשר בנבואתך. יונה תבע כבוד הבן ולא כבוד האב מה נאמר בו ויהי דבר ה' אל יונה שנית לאמר, שנית נדבר עמו שלישי לא נדבר עמו"

that he was at fault for acting overly excited. When he prayed for the widow's son's recovery, he pleaded to ה' that he should be healed, especially if the sickness came as a result of his unwavering passion and punishing of the nation.⁷

When אליהו was escaping the wrath of the idolatrous king and queen, he felt faint from lack of food, water, and shelter. His feelings of unworthiness, especially relative to his more righteous ancestors', led him to ask ה' to take his soul from him, for he had been in perpetual danger.⁸ We see that ה' was showing אליהו a taste of the drought he hastily brought upon בני without regard to their sustenance. Then when ה' taught אליהו that He is not in the wind, the thunder, nor the fire, rather gives off a thin sound⁹, He is telling him that ה' awaits patiently for תשובה, and that his rash declaration for drought was premature. It is interesting to note that צרפת, where the widow lived, can be broken down into צר פת, meaning narrow, or shortage, of bread, in other words, a famine. Moreover, אליהו's name is composed of שם ה', fitting for a man who devotes his whole life to guarding the sanctification of ה'.

יונה's language when requesting death is strikingly parallel to that of אליהו's. When יונה was suffering from strong heat, ה' designated a קיקיון to provide shade for him. This intense heat is reminiscent of the drought during אליהו's time. The next day, ה' sent a worm to destroy it. יונה's gladness over the קיקיון was thus short lived, and יונה felt faint once the sun beat on his head again. יונה pleaded to ה' to take his life, and ה' asked him if he was so deeply grieved over his loss of the קיקיון. ה' therein taught יונה a lesson: How could he be so distraught at the loss of a קיקיון which he did not even toil to create, yet be content letting an entire

⁷ אלשיך יז:כא

⁸ ויאמר רב-כלומר רב לי עוד בעה"ז ואני בו בסכנה כל יום רד"ק יט:ד

⁹ יט:יב

nation in נִינְוָה be destroyed? By evading the נְבוּזַא which would lead to their salvation, he was essentially proclaiming his indifference to people who hardly knew their "left from their right."¹⁰ If the קִיקִיּוֹן, a small plant, was so important to him as a creation of ה', how much more so should a nation of over one hundred twenty thousand of ה'’s creations! The city is fittingly called נִינְוָה, meaning נֵין (great-grandson) of ה', an endearing term illustrating ה'’s care for all His creations.

יוֹנָה shows his own form of zealotry, but coming from the other side of the spectrum, namely zealotry for the כְּבוֹד (Hence the aforementioned contrasts in the פֶּשַׁט, like passivity vs. activity and כְּרִמְל vs. depths of sea.) יוֹנָה overstepped his zealous-boundaries by neglecting to balance the scale when he avoided ה' מצוֹת to receive the נְבוּזַא. He took his responsibility for national safety very seriously, in that he could not pass on a call for תְּשׁוּבָה to a nation that might harm בְּנֵי in multiple ways (see above). יוֹנָה, too, was guilty of misplaced mercy; he did not balance the רַחֲמִים scale well enough, placing too much weight on the glorification of בְּנֵי, thereby diminishing כְּבוֹד הָאֵל. ה' then taught יוֹנָה that He is a G-d of mercy and awaits תְּשׁוּבָה patiently.

Neither אֱלֹהֵי nor יוֹנָה had the authority to take matters into his own hands to such a far extent regarding others' תְּשׁוּבָה. Also, both learned their lessons in part from a strong wind, symbolic of their overly powerful courses of action. These winds (along with the wind sent to אִיּוֹב) are considered so mighty that they could have destroyed the world.¹² אֱלֹהֵי, ironically, was punished with the same רֹחַ גְּדוּלָה that punished יוֹנָה on the ship.

¹⁰ יוֹנָה ד:יא

¹¹ יִלְקוּט שְׁמֵעוֹנֵי שֵׁם

¹² בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה (וִילָנָא) פֶּרֶשָׁה כֹּד – אָמַר רַבִּי הוּנָא ג' רוּחוֹת עַל יְדֵי שִׁינְאוֹ שֶׁלָּא בְּמִשְׁקָל הִיא עוֹלָם חָרַב בָּהֶם וְאֵלּוּ הֵן, א' בִּימֵי יוֹנָה, וּא' בִּימֵי אִיּוֹב, וּא' בִּימֵי אֱלִיהֵן, אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹדֵן בְּרַבִּי יִשְׁמַעְאֵל, שֶׁל יוֹנָה, עַל

יונה's name is also very fitting his fervor for taking responsibility for בני. בני are compared to a יונה in numerous ways, as noted in the מדרש.¹³

The paradigm of misplaced mercy is also found in the story of שׂאול and עמלק. ה' commanded שׂאול to destroy the entire nation of עמלק, but שׂאול's personal logic told him to have pity on the animals and the king. Unbeknownst to him, ה' would descend from this king and bring terrible hardships upon בני. When the two נביאים asked ה' to take their souls, the word "request" (וישאל) shares the same שרש as the king's name, שׂאול.

עבדיהו is שׂאול's foil during his story, a man who is described as a ¹⁴ ירא ה', and who shows respect for his people by saving the נביאים from איובל and sustaining them. This is in contrast to אליהו who failed to sustain his people physically while campaigning for ה'. However, after אלישע's time of rule, his successor אלישע was most clearly viewed as his primary foil. At the time of his appointment

אותה הספינה היה שנאמר (שם /יונה/ א) וה' הטיל רוח גדולה אל הים, של איוב על אותה הבית היה שנאמר (איוב א) והנה רוח גדולה באה מעבר המדבר ואין לך קוזמיקון אלא של אליהו שנאמר (מלכים א יט) והנה ה' עובר ורוח גדולה וחזק מפרק הרים ומשבר סלעים

¹³ שיר השירים רבה (וילנא) פרשה א - יונים, מה היונה הזאת תמה, כך ישראל נאים בהילוכן כשהן עולין לפעמי גלים, מה יונה זאת מצויינת, כך ישראל מצויינת בתגלחת במילה בציצית, מה יונה זו צנועה, כך ישראל צנועים, מה יונה זו פושטת צוארה לשחיטה, כך ישראל, שנאמר (תהלים מ"ד) כי עליך הורגנו כל היום, מה יונה זו מכפרת על העונות, כך ישראל מכפרים על האומות, שכל אותן שבעים פרים שמקריבים בחג כנגד שבעים אומות שלא יצדה העולם מהם, ה"ד (שם /תהלים/ קט) תחת אהבתי ישטננו ואני תפלה, מה יונה זו משעה שמכרת בן זוגה עוד אינה ממירה אותו באחר, כך ישראל משעה שהכירו להקב"ה לא המירוהו באחר, מה יונה זו נכנסת לקנה ומכרת את קנה ושוכבה וגזוליה ואפרוחיה וחלונותיה, כך ה' ג' שורות של תלמידי חכמים כשהן יושבין לפניו, כל אחד ואחד מכיר את מקומו, מה יונה זו אע"פ שאת נטל גזוליה מתחזקה אין מנחת שוכבה לעולם, כך ישראל אע"פ שחרב בית המקדש לא בטלו שלש גלים בשנה, מה יונה זו מחדשת בכל חדש וחדש גרן, כך ישראל מחדשין בכל חדש תורה ומעשים טובים, מה יונה זו שוגרת רוגליות הרבה וחוזרת לשוכבה, כך ישראל, ה"ד (הושע י"א) יחרדו כצפור ממצרים, זה דור המדבר, וכיונה מארץ אשור, אלו עשרת השבטים, אלו אלו והושבתים על בתיהם נאם ה', רבי אומר יש מין יונה שמאכילים אותה וחברותיה מריחות אותה ובאות אצלה לשוכבה, כך בשעה שהזקן יושב ודורש הרבה גרים מתגיררים באותה שעה כגון יתרו הוא שמע ואתא, רחב שמעה ואתיא, אף בחנניה מישאל ועזריה הרבה גרים נתגיררו באותה שעה

by אליהו, the first action of his we hear about is feeding his קרבן to the entire nation, an act of sustenance. Interestingly, in the last פסוק of יונה, when ה' was just about finished teaching יונה his lesson of misplaced mercy, ה' says that נִינוּה is comprised of more than שְׁתֵּים עָשָׂר רְבוּ.¹⁵ Is it coincidence that when אליהו first approached אלישע he was plowing twelve pairs of oxen? And when אליהו performed the miracle on הר כרמל he used twelve buckets, the number twelve representing the twelve שבטים, or עם ישראל in its state of completion.

We might ask ourselves: Why do these similarities manifest themselves in יונה and אליהו? How could two נביאים be so strikingly comparable? חז"ל, as noted above, identify the boy whom אליהו revived as none other than בן אִמִּיתִי, as the פסוק alludes: וְתֹאמַר הָאִשָּׁה אֵל אֱלִיהוּ עָתָה זֶה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹקִים אַתָּה וְדָבַר ה' בְּתַפְיךָ אִמָּת.¹⁶ אליהו breathed his spirit into יונה, as if to "father" him, passing along his "spiritual DNA" to the child.

אליהו and יונה are independent trail blazers. Their unwavering adherence to their strategies, although perhaps inappropriate at times, nonetheless seems to accomplish the task. At the end of the day, the nation enthusiastically proclaimed ה' הוא תְּשׁוּבָה after קרבן אֱלִיהוּ went up in flames. And נִינוּה did תְּשׁוּבָה through crying and wearing sackcloth.

It is difficult to analyze יונה's level of success and to evaluate the honesty of נִינוּה's repentance, because the same type of תְּשׁוּבָה is most certainly not expected from a Jew and a גוי alike. It is most probable that יונה was not held responsible for the sincerity, or lack thereof, with which נִינוּה repented. But don't the successive chapters after הר כרמל deal with nonstop עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, and kings who continually did evil in the eyes of ה'? Maybe the generation at הר כרמל needed a different, less fundamentalist approach? Maybe the

¹⁵ ד:יא

¹⁶ מלכים:יז:כד

הר כרמל on נס was a short-sighted approach, evident by its short-lasting effect. Perhaps the full תשובה process needs to run its course and be personalized and internalized! After all, just as we have witnessed time and time again, נסים גלויים are not a quick fix for a deep-seated crisis of faith. However, idyllic or flawed, successful or unsuccessful, אליהו and יונה each made an indelible mark as a leader uncompromisingly devoted to his cause. Their successes, as well as the limitations they were taught to realize, provide example and inspiration for Jewish leaders of all time.

איש and the יוסף

וילכו אחיו לרעות את צאן אביהם בשכם: ויאמר ישראל אל יוסף הלוא אחיך
רעים בשכם לכה ואשלחך אליהם ויאמר לו הנני: ויאמר לו לך נא ראה את שלום
אחיך ואת שלום הצאן והשבני דבר וישלחיו מעמק חברון ויבא שכמה: וימצאהו
איש והנה תעה בשדה וישאלהו האיש לאמר מה תבקש: ויאמר את אחי אנכי
מבקש הגידה נא לי איפה הם רעים: ויאמר האיש נסעו מזה כי שמעתי אמרים
נלכה דתינה וילך יוסף אחר אחיו וימצאם בדתן:¹

This brief narrative tells the story of יוסף's fateful journey to meet his brothers – a journey which, as we know, ended with יוסף being sold into slavery. At first glance, this strange narrative contains a lot of superfluous information. Why does the text focus so much on the names of places (שכם, עמק חברון, and דותן) – why are the exact locations important? Also, who is the איש that יוסף met? One can assume that יוסף had asked many people for directions in his lifetime. Why is this particular encounter written up for us?

To make the question stronger, we can ask why this event took place at all? Why did יעקב need anyone to tell him how his family and livestock were faring? The brothers were all adult men; they could take care of themselves without someone checking up on them. Why was יעקב worried that something might have happened to them? And even if יעקב did need someone to check on the flock, why did he specifically send יוסף? Couldn't he have sent one of his servants?

It is clear that this narrative has a purpose, and that there must be embedded significance. Many מפרשים, bothered by the larger question, have developed different ways of finding meaning in this seemingly pointless story. The right combination of פשט

¹ בראשית לו:יב-יז

and דרש adds dimension and foreshadowing to the narrative while remaining faithful to the text.

פשט quotes מדרשים that fit into and explicate the basic פשט of the text, as he says in his well-known commentary in בראשית ג'ה, ואני לא באתי אלא לפשוטו של מקרא ולאגדה המישיבת דברי המקרא דבר דבור על אופניו, "I am only coming to explain the text simply and to add מדרש which resolves the words of the text."

In his commentary on our section, he tells us that this story shows us the true motivations of all the individuals involved. He first notes that there are dots over the word אה in the first sentence, and explains that this hints that the word should be eliminated, and that the לרעות פסוק should instead read as if it said, וילכו אחיו לרעות את צאן אביהם בשכם. This means that the brothers went to shepherd themselves; it was their father's sheep that were in שכם. In other words, the brothers didn't go to שכם in order to work, but rather to have a good time, so it's no wonder that יעקב wanted to check up on them!² In direct contrast to the brothers, יוסף was ready and willing to follow יעקב's command with alacrity, as he stated, הנני רש"י adds that the encounter with the איש is not random; he was a מלאך, sending a specific message to יוסף.⁴ When the איש says, נסעו מזה, it doesn't just mean that the brothers left שכם. It means that they left the brotherhood entirely;⁵ they were no longer interested in having a relationship with יוסף. Also, דותן can be read as a contraction for דותות; נכלי דותות; the brothers went to find legal pretenses to kill יוסף. Read this way, the מלאך wasn't simply telling יוסף that the brothers weren't physically there. He was saying that

² רש"י בראשית פרק לז - "לרעות את צאן - נקוד על את, שלא הלכו אלא לרעות את עצמן:"

³ רש"י בראשית פרק לז - "הנני - לשון ענוה וזריזות, נודדו למצות אביו, ואף על פי שהיה יודע באחיו ששונאין אותו:"

⁴ רש"י בראשית פרק לז - "וימצאנו איש - זה גבריאל [שנאמר (דניאל ט כא) והאיש גבריאל]:"

⁵ רש"י בראשית פרק לז - "נסעו מזה - הסיעו עצמן מן האחוה:"

they also were spiritually far away.⁶ This narrative tells us the true intentions of יוסף and his brothers and explains to us that the sudden decision to sell יוסף a few פסוקים later was not quite so rash after all.

רש"י also adds that the conversation with the איש occurred because of divine intervention. We first see this idea from the superfluous identification of יוסף's departure point, עמק חברון. עמק can mean either a valley or something deep, but חברון is on a mountain, as it says "They went *up* and went until חברון," implying that it's on a hill, and therefore "the valley of חברון" is an oxymoron.⁷ So according to רש"י, this verse means that this narrative occurred because of the deep counsel of the one that was buried in חברון, and the one whose name, חבר נאח, can be contracted into חברון; in other words, Avraham.⁸ (אברהם wasn't yet buried in חברון, so this obviously refers to אברהם.) Hashem made a promise to אברהם in ברית בין הבתרים that his descendants would be in a foreign country for 400 years, and therefore this account took place in order to facilitate the completion of the promise.⁹ This story may initially have a bad ending, but this was all in Hashem's master plan. These six short פסוקים help us understand the events to come by showing us the השגחה and the true motivations of everyone involved.

Although רש"י adds a lot of flavor, this is not the simplest way of understanding the text. The מפרשים that focus on the simple

⁶ רש"י בראשית פרק לו – "נלכה דתינה - לבקש לך נכלי דתות שימיתוך בהם. ולפי פשוטו שם מקום הוא, ואין מקרא יוצא מדי פשוטו:"

⁷ במדבר פרק יג פסוק כב – "ויעלו בנגב ויבא עד חברון"

⁸ רש"י בראשית פרק לו – "מעמק חברון - והלא חברון בהר, שנאמר (במדבר יג:כב) ויעלו בנגב ויבא עד חברון, אלא מעצה עמוקה של [אותו] צדיק הקבור בחברון, לקיים מה שנאמר לאברהם בין הבתרים (לעיל טו יג) כי גר יהיה זרעך:"

⁹ בראשית פרק טו – "(יג) ויאמר לאברהם ידע תדע כי גר יהיה זרעך בארץ לא להם ועבדום וענו אתם ארבע מאות שנה: (יד) וגם את הגוי אשר יעבדו דן אנכי ואחרי כן יצאו ברכש גדול:"

meaning are able to explain everything straightforwardly without adding supernatural or extra information. They do not assume that the brothers were up to no good, as there is no explicit mention of their behavior, for good or for bad, in these פסוקים. They translate איש simply, he was man, a random passerby, and not a מלאך.¹⁰ חברון, שכם, דותן are simply place names, and are not symbolic of anything.¹¹ Even so, they are still bothered by the apparent insignificance of these פסוקים and also work to find some embedded meaning.

רשב"ם is a commentator who is known to stick to the literal meaning of the text as much as possible, as he declares: "the text doesn't leave its simple meaning,"¹² and therefore, he explains the פסוקים without resort to מדרש. Even so, he is able to find significance in these events. He says that we are told this story in order to know what יוסף was thinking, to understand his true motivations. The פסוק says that the איש encountered יוסף as he was בשדה, wandering in the field. יוסף was searching everywhere for his brothers, even though they hated him and were likely going to give him a nasty greeting upon his arrival.¹³ ספורנו adds that once יוסף found out the location of his brothers, he even sought them out in דותן; he went אחר אחיו, going above and beyond his father's orders. He was so scrupulous in following his father's command that he wasn't willing to go back empty-handed. ספורנו also adds that יעקב sent specifically יוסף to check up on his brothers in order to change יוסף's mindset; יעקב knew that there was animosity between the

¹⁰ אבן עזרא בראשית פרק לו – "וימצאהו איש דרך הפשט אחד מעוברי דרך:"

¹¹ רשב"ם בראשית פרק לו – "בדתן - לפי הפשט שם העיר, וגם בשופטים היא נזכרת:"

¹² רשב"ם בראשית פרק לו – "אלה תולדות יעקב - ישכילו ויבינו אוהבי שכל מה שלמדונו רבותינו כי אין מקרא יוצא מידי פשוט:"

¹³ רשב"ם בראשית פרק לו – "וימצאהו איש והנה תועה וגו' - להגיד חשיבותו של יוסף נכתב זה שלא רצה לחזור לאביו כשלא מצאם בשכם אלא בקשם עד שמצאם, ואעפ"י שהיה יודע שמתקנאים בו הלך ובקשם כמו שאמר לו אביו והשיבני דבר:"

brothers and hoped that sending יוסף would somehow repair the relationship. רד"ק explains that the יעקב didn't realize the danger in doing so because he thought that the brothers feared him enough not to harm יוסף, but he was mistaken. These מפרשים attempt to extrapolate the thoughts of יעקב and יוסף from this narrative.

Although the פשוט commentators find significance, there isn't so much there, especially compared to רש"י. A lot more significance can be found, and the מדרש, quoted by the תורה שלמה, to the opposite extreme, learns many things from each פסוק in this section. For example, יעקב asked about the welfare of the flock, since one needs to ensure the wellbeing of possessions from which one benefits. Also, the פסוק equates the brothers and the sheep – "שלום אחיו ושלום הצאן" – so we learn from this that יעקב treated animals like humans, who have souls, too. The מדרש also adds that the term "והשבני דבר" is a נבואה that יוסף would return home (he sent him on the condition that he would return), and therefore יעקב was comfortable sending יוסף to his volatile brothers. Additionally, we hear about שכם because it's a place where bad things happen – previously, the rape of דינה, currently the initial step of the selling of יוסף, and later on the splitting of kingship from הרבעם.

The מדרש also notes that the word איש mentioned three times. This shows that there were three separate מלאכים that visited יוסף. It is interesting to note that אברהם was also once visited by three מלאכים. This is the second reference to אברהם in this section, with עמק חברון being the first. This מדרש, therefore, is adding another reference to פרשה השגחת ה' in this פרשה.

Also, "תועה בשדה" is foreshadowing. יוסף will be doing a lot of wandering in the future, once he is sold into slavery. Also, חתיה has a numerical value of 470 (469+1). This shows that his descendants wouldn't be returning for another 470 years (a pasuk tells us that there was 430 years at יציאת מצרים, plus 40 years in the desert equals 470).

We see from all this that the מדרש adds a lot of dimension to this story, and we can learn a lot of life lessons from this

seemingly insignificant story. However, a lot of it is unrelated to the story at hand, and therefore even detracts from the storyline. It gives us advice, tells us of יעקב's positive traits, and foreshadows events much later in יוסף's life, and even future events in the history of ישראל, as opposed to sticking to the immediate story at hand. Without some balance and context, the approach of the מדרש can be overwhelming.

מדרש רמב"ן explains our section simply, while using enough מדרש to flavor it with motivations, foreshadowing, and significance. The first half of the story shows the כבוד that יוסף has for his father. We hear about the place names to show the large distance, which explains why the brothers tried to kill יוסף as they thought they could get away with it. The narrative also shows 'השגחה ה', as we saw with the מדרש about עמק חברון referring to the deep counsel of אברהם אבינו. He quotes this מדרש because the idea of divine presence is essential in the understanding of why this story took place and why such a seemingly terrible event occurred.

רמב"ן believes that the story of the איש can be understood on two planes: we should read the story on the פשוט level while taking the messages from the מדרש. The איש was probably just a random passerby, but the מדרש adds another dimension to what happened. He explains that the מדרש is demonstrating the השגחה while also adding foreshadowing and intentions of the brothers. In other words, the איש's responses have a double meaning: on one level, it simply means that the brothers are in דותן, but the מדרש shows that there is a hidden meaning as well, that the brothers were up to no good. יוסף only understood the simple meaning, which is why he put himself in danger by looking for them in דותן. The reader, however, understands the full picture of this encounter through the added dimension of מדרש. By sticking mostly to the פשוט with a little bit of דרש, he adds depth, like רש"י does, while keeping the story on its simple level, as the פשטנים do.

ולמה רמיתני: The Age Old Question

ויאמר שאול אל מיכל **למה ככה רמיתני** ותשלחי את איבי וימלט ותאמר מיכל אל שאול הוא אמר אלי שלחני למה אמיתך.¹

“asked שאול, ‘Why did you trick me this way? You sent away my enemy so that he escaped.’ And מיכל replied, ‘He said to me, Let me go or I will kill you.’” This exchange took place when שאול tried to kill דוד and had messengers waiting outside דוד’s room to kill him when דוד left the room. מיכל knew that her father was planning this, which is why she told דוד to run away and sent him out the window.

There are two other instances in תנ"ך containing the phrase **למה רמיתני**. In בראשית כ"ט:כ"ה, it states:

ויהי בבקר והנה הוא לאה ויאמר אל לבן מה זאת עשית לי הלא ברחל עבדתי עמך **ולמה רמיתני**.

When יעקב woke up the morning after his wedding, he expected to see רחל there and instead he found לאה. He challenged לבן using the expression **למה רמיתני**.

Similarly, in שמואל א' כ"ח:י"ב, it says, **ותרא האשה את שמואל ותזעק**, שמואל אל שאול לאמר **למה רמיתני** ואתה שאול. בקול גדול ותאמר האשה אל שאול לאמר **למה רמיתני** ואתה שאול.

This was the reaction of the אשת בעלת איב after the disguised שאול asked her what she thought of the king. She screamed and asked “Why did you trick me (למה רמיתני)? You are שאול!”

What is the significance of this phrase which appears in each of these stories? The commonalities between them help to explain the connection. First of all, all three stories involve the hiding of an identity. In בראשית לבן hid the fact that he gave לאה to דוד instead of רחל. In שמואל א' מיכל placed the תרפים in דוד’s bed,

¹ שמואל א' י"ט:י"ז

causing שאול's officers to believe that it was really דוד in bed. Later on, in שמואל א', שמואל disguised himself when he went to the אשת בעלת אוב for help.

Furthermore, all three places include someone from the family of רחל. רחל herself is in בראשית. שאול is one of the main figures in both stories in שמואל א' and he comes from בנימין, the son of רחל.²

Another commonality that all three stories share is the תרפים. רחל hid her father's תרפים. The זוהר says that זרה is תרפים:

ולבן הלך לגזוז את צאנו וגו', אמר רבי יוסי מאן תרפים אלא ע"ז הווי.³

רחל hid תרפים under the blanket to make it look as if דוד was in bed. שאול asked the אשת בעלת אוב to do witchcraft for him. Elsewhere, תרפים are equated with witchcraft with idolatry:

כי חטאת קסם מרי ואון ותרפים הפצר יען מאסת את דבר ה' וימאסך ממלך.⁴

We also learn from דברים י"ח:י' that no one from ישראל should be found to have caused their children to become sorcerers: לא ימצא בך מעביר בנו ובתו באש קדם קסמים מעונן ומגזש ומכשף. This emphasizes just how bad witchcraft is.

An interesting side point about the תרפים is that both רחל and מיכל used similar excuses to explain why the תרפים cannot be discovered.

ותאמר אל אביה אל יחר בעיני אדני כי לוא אוכל לקום מפניך כי דרך נשים

לי ויחפש ולא מצא את התרפים.⁵

רחל was unable to get up because she was sick, "for the way of women was upon her." מיכל told שאול's officers that דוד was sick. וישלח שאול מלאכים לקחת את דוד ותאמר חלה הוא.⁶

One last thing that each has in common is the involvement of women in each incident: רחל and לאה, מיכל and אשת בעלת אוב.

² שמואל א ט:א-ב – "ויהי איש מבנימין ושמו קיש...ולו היה בן ושמו שאול"

³ זוהר כרך א' (בראשית) פרשת ויצא דף קס"ד

⁴ שמואל א טו:כג

⁵ בראשית לא:לא

⁶ שמואל א יט:יד

Here is a chart that shows all of these commonalities between these three sources.

Women Involved	תרפמים	Connec- tion to רחל	Identity Hidden	
לאה and רחל	תרפמים ש'לבן hid רחל (later on)	רחל	לאה	בראשית כט:כה
מיכל	תרפמים put the מיכל in דוד's bed	שאול	תרפמים	שמואל א יט:יז
אשת בעלת אוב	תרפמים=idolatry= witchcraft	שאול	שאול	שמואל א כח:יב

Based on all of these shared factors, it can be said that the common denominator is רחל. רחל's entire identity is about being unfulfilled. In *Biblical Images*, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz writes, "רחל is perhaps one of the most poignant expressions of the person who has everything – and yet remains lacking." רחל felt that something was missing, causing her to attempt to surpass ה' to get what she needed. For example, picking the דודאים as a fertility agent symbolized the fact that רחל tried to circumvent ה' controlling the world. She could not get pregnant naturally and so she decided that she would try to "cheat the system" by selling her night with יעקב — the physical, biological way for her to get pregnant, in exchange for the דודאים.

This may help explain as to why שאול felt the need to go to ה' which caused him to resort to witchcraft. רחל was also limited by her father's rules. She could not marry יעקב when she desired to do so; she had to wait until לבן said she could. This is similar to מיכל, who was viewed as a political object by שאול. He married her off to דוד as a reward.

Rabbi Steinsaltz continues, "רחל personified another aspect of the Jewish nation: its feeling of being chosen, overconfidence in the love of God, which often led to disaster...She represents the feeling that – do what we will – in the end, we are the favored ones. No matter how shameful our deeds, the love of God will be

forthcoming to us and not to others.” According to this, רחל had this overconfidence that no matter what she did, ה' would always love her. This ultimately led to her death. She died during childbirth because יעקב cursed the person who stole the תרפים from לבן. Although she was only trying to prevent her father from worshipping idols, she had a sense that she was divinely chosen by ה', and so she assumed this would protect her.

I think that שאול was unable to overcome this overconfidence as well. He was told that he had lost the מלוכה and continuously chose not to accept it. He did not understand that his actions had consequences. Additionally, it was not uncommon for רחל's descendants to hide their identity. Other than שאול, both יוסף and אסתר (also descendants of רחל) hid their identities. Fortunately for רחל, שאול and all of their descendants, אסתר was able to turn everything around. There is a גמרא that states,

בשכר צניעות שהיתה בה ברחל – זכתה ויצא ממנה שאול, ובשכר צניעות שהיה

בו בשאול – זכה ויצאת ממנו אסתר.⁷

“As a reward for רחל's modesty – she merited for שאול to come from her, and as a reward for שאול's modesty – he merited for אסתר to come from him.” אסתר's mission began like רחל, when she acted passively in אחשורוש's palace. Finally, מרדכי made it clear to her that she had to take control of the situation if she wanted the Jewish people to continue on. אסתר was רחל's redemption. She never had the “feeling of being chosen” or the overconfidence. She had to create these feelings in order to save the Jewish people. She managed to take what her ancestors did and change the characteristics of בית רחל for the better.

⁷ מגילה יג:

על מעילה וישועה:

Phonetic Connections

יהושע, ישעיהו והושע in the Books of

When the word מעלות is read in שיר המעלות (in ספר תהילים), it is generally understood to be related to the root עלה, meaning ascension or elevation. However, the word מעלות is also related to the word מעל, meaning to betray or to misuse something good for unholy purposes. This second meaning seems strange, particularly in the context of "שיר המעלות בשוב ה' את שיבת ציון" - תהלים קכ"ו, which discusses the positive subject of עם ישראל's return from גלות. How can this גאולה be related in any way to the root מעל?

This puzzling phonetic connection actually hints at something very profound. There are three types of מעל – betrayal of ה' – that directly connect to making the land of Israel טמא: עבודה זרה,¹ גילוי עריות³ and שפיכות דמים². The connection becomes clear through the sin of committing "הזורעים בדמעה ברינה יקצורו", תהילים קכ"ו in פסוק מעל is directly connected to ארץ ישראל. Once בני take what was holy and desecrate it, the land becomes טמא and as a result, it stops producing its fruit. Eventually, when they sin even more, they are expelled from the land. Thus, when the Jewish people commit מעל, they "plant with tears." However, we also see that they will eventually "reap with joy," indicating that there will be a savior who will redeem the nation and bring us back from the גלות. The idea that there will eventually be a גאולה, even when we commit מעל,

¹ ויקרא כ:ג.

² במדבר לה:לד.

³ ויקרא יח:כז-כח.

is hinted at by the similarity between the *שרש* of the word *מעל* and the word *עלה*. It is therefore quite an appropriate play on words to sing a "שיר המעלות" to celebrate "coming up" from the *גלות* brought about by our *מעל*.

In order for *גלות* to begin, the Jewish people must commit the three different types of *מעל* described in תנ"ך. The nation must also be warned about the effect of these sins on the land, and how they will lead to despair. However, there must also be evidence of a *גאולה*, a redemption through a *מושיע* in the event that we change our ways.

There are three *ספרים* in תנ"ך which connect the ideas of *מעל*, *הושע* and *ישעיהו*, *יהושע* and *גאולה*. These books are *הושע*. Here we have another phonetic connection: all of the names of these *ספרים* come from the root *ישע*, symbolizing the *ישועה* promised by these *ספרים* should the Jewish people change their ways.

In *ספר יהושע*, the *מעל* of *שפיכות דמים* is not an obvious theme; but looking closely, it can be viewed as an undercurrent throughout the *ספר*. The Jewish people had to maintain a certain level of *קדושה* even when they were conquering and killing the seven nations, even in the midst of war. In *ספר יהושע*, before the nation began to fight, they first had to do the *מצווה* of *מילה*. This allowed them to maintain their Jewish identity and keep up the level of *קדושה* that they needed, in order for ה' to help them with *כיבוש הארץ*.⁴

Similarly, when *יהושע* came to *יריחו*, he met a *מלאך* who was holding a sword in his hand and appeared to be a warrior. *יהושע* asked him which army he belonged to: the Jewish army or the army of the seven nations. The angel responded that he led the army of ה', and *יהושע* bowed and asked him what ה' wanted him to do.⁵

⁴ יהושע ה:ב

⁵ יהושע ה:יג-יד

The גמרא explains this enigmatic incident by saying that the angel was rebuking יהושע for not making enough time to learn תורה right before the war. He became caught up in the planning and the physical aspects of the war, and forgot to make enough time to learn תורה — therefore lowering his level of קדושה.⁶

This is related to שפיכות דמים: When the nation conquered the land, they had to kill people. If they took away the spirituality of the כיבוש, they would end up simply killing human beings in order to obtain the land. If they had no spiritual reason for their war, they would end up killing more and more people. Conquering the land without קדושה makes the land טמא because the conquering process is not happening in the proper way.

This idea of the מעל of שפיכות דמים and its connection to the land comes up again in connection with מלחמת העז: Just like ה' won't help the Jewish people when they are טמא and going into a war, He won't answer their תפילות should they cry out to him to save them from their enemies, if they have done a מעל.⁷

A similar theme can be discerned in ישעיהו. The first time the idea appears in the ספר is when ישעיהו talks about how the nation's hands are bloody, how ה' will not hear the תפילות of the Jewish people because they are murdering others. Only after the nation removes these bad actions, מעלליכם, from among them will ה' come back to them. Although the word מעלליכם does not actually mean מעל, there is an interesting play on words here, which hints to the idea that the bad actions the nation is doing are מעל.⁸

The second time this idea appears in the ספר is when the נביא asks how a city of justice (ירושלים) could now be filled with murderers. ישעיהו warns the nation that they will be kicked out of פסוק . שפיכות דמים מעל if they continue to commit the מעל of ירושלים.

⁶ מגילה ג-ג.

⁷ יהושע ז:יג

⁸ ישעיהו א:טו-טז

uses the word *איכה* that is also used in *מגילת איכה* and connotes a great tragedy, alluding to the tragedy that will come when the Jewish people commit this *מעל* of *שפיכות דמים*.⁹

The prophet *הושע* also warns the people that the *מעל* of *שפיכות דמים* will affect the Jewish people in *ארץ ישראל*. The first place where the idea of *שפיכות דמים* is seen in *הושע*, the *נביא* does not specifically mention *גלות* as a punishment, but rather warns that the *מעל* of *שפיכות דמים* is going to cause the land and animals to stop being productive. He warns that the Jewish people are chasing after sin and pursuing evil. In the end, their sin will make the land *טמא*, which will cause it to stop being productive.¹⁰

In addition, *הושע* portrays a vividly violent description of how low the nation has sunk into this *מעל* of *שפיכות דמים*. He rebukes the Jewish nation, and describes how even the *כוהנים* are waiting to ambush and kill people on the road like thieves! Even people who are supposed to work and serve *ה'* in the *בית המקדש* are trying to kill people!¹¹

There are a few significant *מילים* (key words) concerning the *מעל* of *שפיכות דמים*, which appear in the three *ספרים* of *ישעיהו*, *הושע* and *יהושע*. One reappearing word is *הסירו*, or *הסירכם*, which is seen in the books of *ישעיהו* and *יהושע*. These words are used to tell *בני ישראל* to remove *שפיכות דמים* from among them. Another reappearing word is *דמים*. This word appears in both *ספר ישעיהו* and *ספר הושע* and refers to all the acts of *שפיכות דמים* that *בני ישראל* are doing. These words show the connection between the different discussions of *שפיכות דמים* in the three different *ספרים*.

ארץ ישראל is another *מעל* that, if it happens in *ארץ ישראל*, causes *בני ישראל* to be sent into *גלות* and makes the land unproductive. One place where this is warned against is in *ספר יהושע*. The tribes of *מנשה* and *גד* had built a *מזבה* as a sort of

⁹ *ישעיהו* א:כא

¹⁰ *הושע* ד:ב-ג

¹¹ *הושע* ו:ח-ט

tribes of מנשה had built a מזבח as a sort of monument, but the rest of the tribes were afraid it would be used for עבודה זרה. They sent a delegation led by פנחס to discuss the matter with those tribes, and he said that the rest of בני ישראל would be willing to make their נחלות smaller in order to prevent them from doing עבודה זרה. He specifically referred to this sin as מה המעל הזה אשר מעלתם באלקי ישראל.¹²

Near the end of ספר יהושע there is another warning that, should בני ישראל ever do עבודה זרה, they will be severely punished and 'ה will swiftly kick them out of the good land that He gave them.¹³ There is also another warning that if the nation turns to other gods, 'ה will take away all of the good that He has done for us, also hinting to the destruction of the land.¹⁴

In ספר ישעיהו, there are many warnings about worshipping other gods. First, in the very beginning of the ספר, ישעיהו rebukes בני ישראל for filling up their land with the other gods that they made for themselves. They were doing עבודה זרה all over ארץ ישראל and making the land טמא.¹⁵ Later, the נביא describes how 'ה will show His power and all the people that have been making idols for themselves will be hiding in rocks and crags, and will see how ridiculous their actions have been. The ספר describes how they worshiped bats; it's making fun of what they have been doing and saying, "Look what you betrayed me for."¹⁶

The book of יהושע also gives rebuke about this מעל of עבודה זרה. יהושע describes how 'ה wants a relationship with בני ישראל, and how He was calling out to בני ישראל, but the more He called — the

¹² יהושע כב:יג-כ

¹³ יהושע כג:טז

¹⁴ יהושע כד:כ

¹⁵ ישעיהו ב:ח

¹⁶ ישעיהו ב:כ-כא

more they turned away from Him and followed עבודה זרה.¹⁷ In addition, another פסוק states that the idols would soon be eliminated, because they are not from ה'. ה' wants nothing to do with these idols, which were just created by man and will be destroyed by Him.¹⁸ There is also another פסוק that states that the children of אפרים kept searching for even more types of עבודה זרה, and though they already had many different gods and מזבחות, they felt that this was not enough.

There are a few מילים מנחות that repeat themselves in discussions of the מעל of עבודה זרה. Most significant are the words ישיעיהו and יהושע of ספרים, ישתחוו and השתחוויתם. The second recurring phrase is "וזהבם עשו להם עצבים" and "לאשר עשו עצבותיו" — two phrases that appear in ספר יהושע and ספר ישיעיהו. Both phrases show even more how ridiculous בני ישראל's were, putting faith in things made with their own hands and believing these things had power over ה', or had any power at all.

The other מעל that can cause exile from the land of ישראל is גילוי עריות. Warnings against this מעל are often combined with warnings against עבודה זרה and so the two sometimes overlap. We see warnings against this מעל of גילוי עריות in ספר יהושע, such as when פנחס made a specific allusion to the sin of בעל פעור, where there was גילוי עריות with the women of מדין. This sin was connected with the מעל of עבודה זרה. בעל פעור פנחס warned the people never to let either sin happen again because, as he said, the nation was still טמא from that sin, so they should not add to that.¹⁹ There is also a warning that if the Jewish people have inappropriate relationships with the people around them, follow in their ways and intermarry with

¹⁷ יהושע יא:ב

¹⁸ יהושע ח:ד

¹⁹ יהושע כב:יז

them, 'ה will not only stop defending them from their enemies, but He will also send them out into גלות from ארץ ישראל.²⁰

In ספר ישעיהו, many warnings against this מעל of עריות are mentioned as well, such as when ישעיהו says that 'ה will abandon us because of our devotion to עבודה זרה and because of our intermarriage with other nations. These two types of מעל will make 'ה turn away from us.²¹ He also talks about people who do גילוי עריות, more specifically adultery, and at the same time do violent עבודה זרה by killing and sacrificing children.²²

In ספר הושע there are also warnings against these acts of מעל: Certain פסוקים warn about what גילוי עריות can lead a person to do, such as עבודה זרה, and describe the מעל that the Jewish people commit in order to have these inappropriate relations. הושע explains that this is especially bad because many of the men started to actually believe in the עבודה זרה that they originally did only to enable them to engage in גילוי עריות.²³ Another פסוק explicitly says that the טמא being done in שבט אפרים was making them זנות.²⁴ In addition, another פסוק makes a direct connection between committing this מעל of גילוי עריות and the land not producing well. It says that in consequence of גילוי עריות, בני ישראל will not have food to eat or wine to drink. The land will not produce for them.²⁵

Another פסוק also alludes to בעל פעור. Like פנחס, הושע also says how the nation's forefathers sinned, and states that even though God once viewed them as a great nation, after their sin. He loathed them. This פסוק points out that בני ישראל were acting the same way as their forefathers, and just like it made their ancestors טמא and

²⁰ הושע כג:ב-ג

²¹ ישעיהו ב:ו

²² ישעיהו נז:ד-ה

²³ הושע ד:יא-יד

²⁴ הושע ו:י

²⁵ הושע ט:א-ב

made ה' turn away from them, the same thing would happen to the nation now if they repeat this מעל.²⁶

Although all of these ספרים warn us about the מעל that can cause us to be expelled from the land, they also talk about the chance for גאולה. While the word מעל refers to sin, it is also related to the word עלה. The very names of all three of these ספרים, which warn us to stop doing מעל, contain the word מושיע. The names of the ספרים hint to the idea that once בני ישראל stop doing these acts of מעל, they will be saved by a מושיע and brought back to ארץ ישראל.

Each of these three ספרים also states explicitly that there will be a ישועה once בני ישראל stop sinning. In ספר יהושע, we see this towards the end of the book, after בני ישראל had conquered and divided up all the territory. The ספר describes how בני ישראל have received everything that was promised to them. At this point the people were fully committed to ה' and, therefore, they were receiving all of the good things that ארץ ישראל has.²⁷ We also see this idea of גאולה when the פסוק promises that ה' is going to strengthen בני ישראל and fight their enemies, and they will inherit the land promised to their forefathers. These promises were only given because the people were not guilty of any acts of מעל. They were totally faithful to ה' and, therefore, He was helping them and strengthening them against their enemies and bringing them back to ארץ ישראל.²⁸

These ideas of return to ארץ ישראל are also seen in ספר ישעיהו: The promise of גאולה is seen when ישעיהו says that if the people turn around and do תשובה, then ה' will forgive them, as he says, "אם יהיו"²⁹ Only then will the people benefit from the land. The idea of גאולה is also seen later in the book in the image of

²⁶ יהושע ט:י

²⁷ יהושע כא:מג

²⁸ יהושע א:ו-ח

²⁹ ישעיהו א:יח-יט

the people drinking from the springs of salvation.³⁰ Finally, there is a פסוק that again describes how, in the future, there will be a time when בני ישראל will blossom like fruit, using the imagery of the land to talk about the ultimate salvation and return to ארץ ישראל.³¹ Yet another פסוק shows the direct connection between בני ישראל throwing away their idols and recognizing ה' as the one and only G-d, and ה' making the land produce and making the cattle healthy.³²

Another פסוק from ישעיהו states that once בני ישראל stop sinning, ה' will bless them and again improve the land. He will pour water onto the dry land and it will flow with water, and בני ישראל will be like a tree which is taking it in. They will be blessed in the land once again.³³

These ideas of גאולה are also seen in ספר הושע: The first time גאולה appears there, the פסוק says that on the day that בני ישראל remove the names of the idolatrous בעלים from their mouths, they will be saved. ה' will turn all the places of conflict in ארץ ישראל into places of peace, the bow and the sword will be laid down and there will be peace and hope in the land. This again shows the direct connection between not doing a מעל like עבודה זרה, and the ultimate ישועה that comes with doing תשובה.³⁴ Once בני ישראל correct their ways, ה' will make them flourish. Like ישעיהו, הושע too uses the imagery of things blossoming and of plants, connecting תשובה to the productivity of ישראל.³⁵

There are a few מילים מנחות that appear throughout the different discussions of גאולה. The first are the words יצרן and יפרא, which

³⁰ ישעיהו יב:

³¹ ישעיהו כז:

³² ישעיהו ל:כב-כג

³³ ישעיהו מד:ג-ד

³⁴ הושע ב:יז-כ

³⁵ הושע יד:ו-ט

occur in ספר יהושע and ספר ישעיהו. These words emphasize how when בני ישראל do תשובה not only will they flourish, but ארץ ישראל itself will be productive and flourishing.

Our teacher Mrs. Yehudit Elsant pointed out another connection between ספר יהושע and ספר ישעיהו – the word שני meaning “scarlet”. In ספר יהושע, ספר רחב helped יהושע’s spies escape by letting them down a rope. She later put a חוט השני in her window to help the spies identify her and save her. רש"י says that the rope that she used to help the מרגלים was the same rope she would let her harlotry customers use. When she let the מרגלים down the rope, she was doing תשובה for her past sins. תשובה is also connected to the color שני in ספר ישעיהו, as mentioned above.

Without spirituality, ארץ ישראל is just ordinary land. When בני ישראל misuse the land and commit acts of מעל, this diffuses the land of its spirituality, and it becomes just like any other land. They can easily be expelled from it, and it can also be affected like any other land and lose its productivity. However, when בני ישראל stop doing מעל and use the land well, then it reaches a higher level. בני ישראל can then stay in ארץ ישראל, and the land becomes fruitful and flourishes.

Rising to the Challenge: **אסתר המלכה of the Leadership**

"Finely featured, beautiful in appearance and pleasing to the eye."¹ Somewhat surprisingly, this is how אסתר is first described upon her entrance to the plot of מגילה אסתר. This superficial portrayal of our heroine is certainly unlike any description I was ever taught of the brave and courageous המלכה אסתר.

If we analyze אסתר's behavior through פרק ב' of the מגילה, she emerges as a passive individual. Every time אסתר's name is mentioned, someone is doing something to her; she is never acting on her own volition. First is when we hear about her family background: אשר לקחה מרדכי לו לבת,² inferring that מרדכי adopted her, but the words used are that he "took her" as a daughter. Later on, when אחשוורוש held a competition to choose a queen, אסתר was similarly "taken" to the palace: ותלקח אסתר אל המלך אחשוורוש.³ In both of these examples, אסתר was *acted upon*, and we don't even know whether she consented to these acts. In neither of these situations do we hear a word from the object of someone else's will.

In addition, אסתר would not reveal her birthplace. Perhaps we might have concluded that she did this for practical purposes, which makes sense: the fear of anti-Semitism was understandable. However, if we look at the words of the מגילה, it becomes clear that אסתר's reasoning was strikingly different. The פסוק says, לא הגידה אסתר כי מרדכי צוה עליה אשר לא תגיד⁴ אסתר את עמה ואת מולדתה. She would not reveal

¹ אסתר ב:ז: "והנערה יפת-תאר וטובת מראה". שם ב:ט:ו: "ותהי אסתר נשאת חן, בעיני כל ראייה".

² שם ב:ז:

³ שם ב:טז:

⁴ שם ב:י:

her birthplace because מרדכי had commanded her not to. We don't even know whether she understood why she couldn't tell him, but we hear no questions, no complaints, no fights; if מרדכי said it, she acquiesced.

Though it may seem that אסתר was forced into this passive state, when given the ability to decide for herself and take the smallest bit of control, she turned down the offer and chose passivity. When she was preparing to meet the king, the מגילה tells us, ⁵לא בקשה דבר כי אם את אשר יאמר הגי סרים המלך שמר הנשים. When offered from the plethora of oils and cosmetics, she took nothing except for what הגי, the king's chamberlain, advised. It seems like she could have exerted a bit more free will but instead remained unassertive.

Until this point in the מגילה, אסתר seems to epitomize the role of a female in her time: passive, obedient, and objectified. In other words, she seems to be the antithesis of a good leader. However, as the plot thickens in the מגילה, we trace the development of אסתר's personality and see that when greatness as thrust upon her, אסתר made a complete turnaround. She ended up trading in robes of passivity in exchange for gowns of action.

In her first definitive behavior, אסתר ordered התך to go to מרדכי and find out what happened and why he was wearing sack cloth. ותקרא אסתר להתך מסריסי המלך אשר העמיד לפניו ותצוהו על מרדכי לדעת מה זה ועל. ⁶מה זה. Of course התך obeyed and אסתר then found out about the king's decree on the Jews. מרדכי implored אסתר to go to the king and plead on her nation's behalf. ואת פתשגן כתב הדת אשר נתן בשושן להשמידם נתן לו להראות. ⁷את אסתר ולהגיד לה ולצוות עליה לבוא אל המלך להתחנן לו ולבקש מלפניו על עמה. We would expect אסתר to comply, but for the first time, אסתר finally asserted her own opinion and took a stand. כל עבדי המלך ועם מדינות המלך. יודעים אשר כל איש ואשה אשר יבוא אל המלך אל החצר הפנימית אשר לא יקרא אחת דתו להמית

⁵ שם ב': ט"ו

⁶ אסתר ד':ה'

⁷ שם ד': ה'

⁸.לבד מאשר יושיט לו המלך את שרביט הזהב וחיה ואני לא נקראתי לבוא אל המלך זה שלושים יום. She boldly explained to מרדכי why his plan would never work. If she went to the king without being called, מרדכי may as well keep his sack cloth on because he'd be going to her funeral next!

מרדכי, unaccustomed to being proven so blatantly wrong, replied, כי אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת רוח והצלה יעמוד ליהודים ממקום אחר ואת ובית, אסתר ⁹.אביך תאבדו ומי יודע אם לעת כזאת הגעת למלכות that if she would keep silent at a crucial time like this, then someone else would rise to the occasion and become the savior. But what מרדכי did not realize was that אסתר had no intention of keeping silent; she simply needed a better plan of action. Rather than go into the king's chambers without any backup, she requested that all the Jews fast for three days, prior to her approaching אשורוש.

When someone had to stand up and take responsibility, אסתר didn't hesitate for all that long before stepping up to the plate. In fact, when compared with משה רבינו's rise to leadership, אסתר seems far more zealous and courageous. When משה was told by ה' to go to פרעה and take בני ישראל out of מצרים, he hesitated not once, but five times! We can see this clearly in the list compiled below.

1. (ג:יא) ויאמר משה אל הא-לוהים מי אנוכי כי אלך אל פרעה וכי אוציא את בני ישראל ממצרים.
2. (ג:יג) ויאמר משה אל הא-לוהים הנה אנוכי בא אל בני ישראל ואמרת להם א-לוהי אבותיכם שלחני אליכם ואמרו לי מה שמו מה אומר אליהם.
3. (ד:א) ויען משה ויאמר והן לא יאמינו לי ולא ישמעו בקולי כי יאמרו לא נראה אליך ה'.
4. (ד:י) ויאמר משה אל ה' בי אדוני לא איש דברים אנוכי גם מתמול גם משלשום גם מאז דברך אל עבדך כי כבד פה וכבד לשון אנוכי.
5. (ד:יג) ויאמר בי אדני שלח נא ביד תשלח.

In contrast, however, we see that אסתר, whose life was being put in immediate danger, barely once refused the responsibility of going to the monarch to save her people. After she pulled

⁸ שם ד: יא

⁹ שם ד: יד

at the thread of leadership, the curtain she was hiding behind began to unravel and she started to take action. This can be seen through the verbs used to describe her course of action.

First, אסתר got dressed.¹⁰ Then, she stood up.¹¹ Next, she quickly organized a royal party.¹² Finally, she boldly answered the question אחשורוש had been asking.¹³ While these seem to be minor and mundane actions, when compared to the beginning of the מגילה, when אסתר played no active role at all, one can see the obvious turnaround.

By the end of the story, not only did אסתר play a critical role in saving the Jewish people, but her power extended beyond the ordinary. We see המן begging her for his life.¹⁴ We see the king himself asking אסתר what else *he* can do for *her*.¹⁵

This rapid turn of events exemplifies a ונהפוך הוא that we can all take a lesson from. To disprove an old adage, a leopard can change his spots. People *are* capable of change and growth. We can all become greater people, better leaders and more dedicated to תורה and מצוות, no matter what stage of life we are at.

Shakespeare once wrote, "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them¹⁶." May we all be blessed with the ability to rise to life's occasions and to become greater in the process.

¹⁰ אסתר ה:א – ויהי ביום השלישי ותלבש אסתר מלכות ותעמוד בחצר בית המלך הפנימית נוכח בית המלך והמלך יושב על כיסא מלכותו

¹¹ שם ה:ב – ויהי כראות המלך את אסתר המלכה עומדת בחצר נשאה חן בעיניו ויושט המלך לאסתר את שרביט הזהב אשר בידו ותקרב אסתר ותיגע בראש השרביט

¹² שם ה:ה – ויאמר המלך מהרו את המן לעשות את דבר אסתר ויבוא המלך והמן אל המשתה אשר עשתה אסתר

¹³ שם ה:ז – ותען אסתר ותאמר שאלתי ובקשתי

¹⁴ אסתר ז:ו – ותאמר אסתר איש צר ואויב המן הרע הזה והמן נבעת מלפני המלך והמלכה

¹⁵ שם ז:ב – ומה שאלתך וינתן לך ומה בקשתך עוד ותיעש

¹⁶ William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, Act II, Scene V

מה ה' דורש ממך?

Moral Lessons

From an Unexpected Prophet

בלעם describes the prophet בלק's failed attempts to curse the Jews. The ספורנו comments that the whole story of בלעם, in particular the narrative with the donkey¹, is designed to teach us about recognizing the signs that are right in front of us². Of course, the question begs to be asked, exactly what signs are we talking about and what are the lessons that we can learn from them?

Perhaps we can gain some insight from the fact that the chosen for בלק comes from the end of מִיכָה, one of the books of the עשר נביאים. What is the connection between מִיכָה and the story of בלעם?

פסוק³ The הפטרה ends with a very well known and oft quoted הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי אם לעשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם אלוך. This פסוק actually reflects בלעם's transition in פרשת בלק, and represents each of his ברכות to בני ישראל. Let us analyze each section of this פסוק.

that the – הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך פסוק⁴ comments – the reason behind Hashem giving the נביא גוים was so they wouldn't be able to claim that they would have been as righteous as בני ישראל,

¹ במדבר כב: כא-מא

² ספורנו במדבר כב: בח - ויפתח ה' את פי האתון. נתן בה כח לדבר, כענין "ה' שפתי תפתח" (תהלים נא: יז), וכל זה היה כדי שיתעורר בלעם לשוב בתשובה, בזכרו כי מה' מענה לשון גם לבלתי מוכן, כל שכן שיוכל להסירו מן המוכן כרצונו, וכל זה כדי שלא יאבד איש כמוהו.

³ מִיכָה ו:ח.

⁴ רש"י שם ה' ד"ה "ארץ בני עמו" - ...כדי שלא יהי פתחון פה לעובדי כוכבים לומר אילו היו לנו נביאים חזרנו למוטב

had they only had נביא through whom they could communicate with God. Rav Yaakov Weinberg in his ספר קול יעקב points out that even if they had a נביא they could have complained. They could have claimed that he wasn't good enough, saying, if we had a נביא as great as Moshe we would have been righteous, but with a נביא like בלעם we have no real chance! Apparently, though, it must be that בלעם was an extremely wise and righteous person if he was able to receive נבואה altogether. But once he became a prophet, he became corrupt in his power and fell under the circumstances. That, according to the aforementioned רש"י, was what Hashem was telling the nations – I will give you a prophet because that is what you think you want and he will be the best of the best, but you will see that he will crack under the pressure. If you are given a test that you are not capable of handling, you will become corrupt.

The מלבי"ם⁵ explains that לך אדם מה טוב means לך טוב, good for you. I, Hashem, will give you all that is good for you and what you are capable of handling in order to best accomplish ומה ה' דורש, that which I ask of you. בלעם, בלק, and the other nations missed this very important message: There are many things that we wish we had, a big house, a shiny car, a lot of money. However, if we were to attain these things, would it make us better people, or would it corrupt us? Hashem knows what we can handle and what will help us best serve Him.

In לך לך, פרשת לך לך, Hashem told Avraham לך לך, go for **yourself, for your own sake** - what is good for you to best serve Me.⁶ While it was daunting to pick up and leave, Avraham understood that Hashem knew this would be good for him, and therefore, he went. We have to appreciate what Hashem gives us and trust that it will guide us towards true עבודה ה'.

⁵ מלבי"ם מיכה ו, ד"ה "הגיד לך וגו'"

⁶ רש"י בראשית יב: ד"ה "לך לך" - להנאתך ולטובתך

כי אם לעשות משפט ואהבת חסד

One of the strangest parts of the פרשה is the story of the האתון, when the donkey speaks to בלעם. According to רש"י, at the completion of the whole episode, Hashem killed the donkey in order to preserve the honor of בלעם.⁷ Rav Chaim Shmulevitz⁸ explains that at the moment when בלעם finally saw the מלאך, he understood that the donkey was more קדוש than he was, for it was able to see the מלאך before בלעם could. Hashem goes to such great lengths to preserve the כבוד even of evil individuals, including that of בלעם who was on the path to curse the Jews. Yet, Hashem is trying to teach us a very important lesson- if we need to be respectful of the כבוד and feelings of those that hate us as בלעם did, then קל וחומר, how much more so do we have to be careful with the dignity of our friends.

The רד"ק⁹ explains that what Hashem truly wants from us is to do good, that the phrase הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך is not a question but a statement- "I am asking for you to do good things and to be good people." He explains the word משפט as all of the מצות, including דיני ממונות, the laws of money. The גמרא¹⁰ explains בלעם as מושט חסד, and אהבת חסד as גמילות חסדים. When בלעם ultimately arrived with intention to curse them, he ended up blessing them for the first time. In the ברכה, he said: כי מראש צורים אראנו – "from its

⁷ רש"י במדבר כב:לג, ד"ה "ואותה החייתי" – ועתה מפני שדברה והוכיחתיך ולא יכולת לעמוד בתוכחתה כמו שכתוב ויאמר לא, הרגתיה שלא יאמרו זו היא ששלקה את בלעם בתוכחתה ולה יכול להשיב, שחס המקום על כבוד הבריות.

⁸ שיחות מוסר פרשת בלק

⁹ רד"ק מיכה ו, ח- "הגיד לך וגו'" – זהו מענה על השאלה אמר אין חפצי בעולות כי אם בעשות הטוב הנה שמוע מזבח טוב.

¹⁰ סוכה מט: - דאמר רבי אלעזר: מאי דכתיב (מיכה ו) הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי אם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם אלהיך. עשות משפט - זה הדין, ואהבת חסד - זו גמילות חסדים, והצנע לכת עם אלהיך - זו הוצאת המת והכנסת כלה לחופה. והלא דברים קל וחומר: ומה דברים שדרכן לעשותן בפרהסיא - אמרה תורה הצנע לכת, דברים שדרכן לעשותן בצנעא - על אחת כמה וכמה.

origins, I see it rock-like.”¹¹ רש"י explains it as seeing ישראל's strong and established roots like rocks in the ground, planted by the אבות ואמהות of מעשים. בלעם began to understand that our roots are founded in our ancestors, and the legacy they left behind- that of אמת and גבורה, (corresponding to אברהם, יצחק, and יעקב). If בלעם was able to see it, then we, too, have to learn the lessons of our heritage to serve Hashem like יעקב, יצחק, and אברהם.

והצנע לכת עם ה' אלוֹקִיךָ

בלעם attempted twice more to curse בני ישראל and both times he failed. However, something extremely significant changed between the second and third attempts, as explained by the רמב"ן¹². Prior to the third try¹³, the language used to describe בלעם's נבואה was ויקר, “and he happened upon him”. This denotes a removed state of נבואה, one that is transient and void of any sort of real relationship with ה'. בלעם, being a great sorcerer, thought he would be able to use magic in order to take advantage of the moment of Hashem's anger to curse the Jews; however, he stated in his second blessing¹⁴, כי לא נחש ביעקב, “there is no sorcery in Jacob,” and he realized that his plan had no chance of success. Therefore, at the beginning of the third blessing¹⁵, it says וישת אל המדבר פניו – he set his face to the wilderness and opened himself up to the prophecy that Hashem wanted to give over to him. Now, for the first time in

¹¹ רש"י בלק כג:ט – “כי מראש צורים אראנו”- אני מסתכל בראשיתם ובתחלת שרשיהם, ואני רואה אותם מיוסדים וחזקים כצורים וגבעות הללו ע"י אבות ואמהות:

¹² רמב"ן בלק כד:א – “ולא הלך כפעם בפעם לקראת נחשים”- כי בפעמים הראשונים היה מנחש ורוצה לקלל אותם בנחש, והיה השם בא אליו בדרך מקרה, לא בכונתו לנבואה ולא ממעלתו שהגיע אליה. ועתה כאשר נאמר לו כי לא נחש ביעקב ולא קסם בישראל להרע או להטיב להם, הניח הנחשים ולא הלך כפעם בפעם לקראתם, אבל שם אל המדבר פניו אשר ישראל שם, שיראה אותם ויכין להם נפשו שיחול עליו הדבור מאת השם כאשר עשה עמו פעמים

¹³ במדבר כד: א

¹⁴ שם כג:כ

¹⁵ שם כד:א

his life, *Hashem* didn't just happen upon him, but rather He appeared to him in His full glory to give over the נבואה.

It is in this moment of submission to *Hashem* and the realization of His greatness and Ultimate power that we can glean a lesson from this narrative. ¹⁶אברבנאל explains that והצנע לכת means that a person's faith in *Hashem* has to be pure, simple and without question. בלעם was trying to fight back, attempting to curse the Jews again and again. He was slowly learning his lesson, but it wasn't until this moment, when he set his face to the wilderness to allow *Hashem* completely in, that he understood without question that *Hashem* is the Ultimate God. It was then that he was able to look out onto the camp of בני ישראל and utter those famous words - מה טובו אוהליך יעקב, "how great are the tents of Jacob", for the people who dwell inside have accepted *Hashem* into their lives and have vowed to abide by עם אלוך, והצנע לכת, to walk in the ways of *Hashem*. They have made their tents into a place of ultimate service to *Hashem*; in the face of the hardships of the desert they still have אמונה.

That is the final lesson to us from בלעם and from the words of מיכה. We should strive for our faith to be simple, pure and without question. Sometimes we can get so wrapped up in the meaning, or in finding the connection to *Hashem* through intellectual pursuits that we can lose focus. It is important to delve into learning and to understanding the reasons behind the מצוות on some level, but first and foremost, we must strive to fulfill the words הלכת עם אלוך, meaning, to follow in His ways because that's the true way to grow close to Him. It is with this foundation of ultimate וביטחון אמונה that we will be זוכה to build houses of תורה that will be worthy of the words מה טובו אוהליך יעקב.

We have yet to answer one question: why did בלק go through all of this trouble to curse the Jews? What was he so afraid of that he hired בלעם to curse the Jews in the first place?

¹⁶ אברבנל מיכה ו:ח "והצנע לכת"

Furthermore, if he was truly scared, why not just wage war against them with bows and arrows as opposed to attacking them with words?

רש"י¹⁷ explains that he wanted to curse them because he wanted to use their most powerful tool against them. Our most powerful tool is speech – words are what we use to call out to *Hashem*. Therefore, he wanted to use that power against us. Yet, we are still left with the question of what was he so afraid of?

שם משמאל¹⁸ explains that בלעם wasn't seeking to destroy us physically, rather, he wanted to stop us from entering into ארץ ישראל. The Jews' mission is to imbue spirituality into the world, and the ultimate manifestation of that goal is in ישראל, where the physical and the spiritual meet. If we are able to bring in spirituality, then all the nations will be influenced to do the same. It was אברהם אבינו who introduced *Hashem* into the world, the one who brought Him down to us first and brought spirituality into Israel. בלק was afraid to leave everything behind; he thrived in materialism and the physical world, and if בני ישראל would reach ארץ ישראל and complete their mission, then that would be lost for him. In the desert they weren't a threat to him – he could let them live their spiritual lives, as long as they were out in the מדבר in their tents. Therefore, he had to stop them from reaching ארץ ישראל.

In the cycle of life, we often have to sacrifice to achieve our ideals. As Jews, we "forfeit" our Saturdays to celebrate שבת, we "give up" pork, and the ability to eat milk and meat together. If we let the inconvenience of living without those things hinder our observance of תורה and מצוות, we will be stuck. Unfortunately, the

¹⁷רש"י בלק כבד, - "אל זקני מדין" – והלא מעולם היו שונאים זה את זה, שנאמר (בראשית לו, לה) המכה את מדין בשדה מואב, שבאו מדין על מואב למלחמה. אלא מיראתן של ישראל עשו שלום ביניהם. ומה ראה מואב ליטול עצה ממדין, כיון שראו את ישראל נוצחים שלא כמנהג העולם, אמרו מנהיגים של אלו במדין נתגדל, נשאל מהם מה מדתו. אמרו לו אין כחו אלא בפיו. אמרו אף אנו נבא עליהם באדם שכחו בפיו:

¹⁸שם משמאל פרשת בלק

מואבי were able to tempt the men of ישראל בני to be with the מואבי women. The men let their יצר הרע overcome them, and they weren't willing to sacrifice everything for *Hashem*.

However, in מנה עפר יעקב's first blessing¹⁹, he said "who has counted the dust of יעקב." The מדרש²⁰ explains this phrase to mean that everyone treads on the dust, but ultimately it's that dust that will triumph over them all. We are constantly being tread on by the other nations of the world, and even by our own יצר הרע. They are sometimes able to leave a small footprint, but the nature of dust and of dirt is that the footprints are temporary and can be covered up. We can rise above those that have tread upon us and have attempted to make marks on us. In כי מציון, מִיכָה of פרק ד' it says, תצא תורה, that תורה will come from ארץ ישראל. If we follow in the ways of *Hashem*, and we listen to the calls of דורש ממך ה' דורש טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך, and we build those אהלי יעקב, we will be able to imbue spirituality into the world, and ultimately, תורה will be flowing out of every corner of ציון to the rest of the world.

¹⁹ במדבר כג:

²⁰ במדבר רבה (וילנא) פרשה ב ד"ה יג ד"א והיה – הם משולים כעפר מה עפר הארץ עשוי דייש לכל באי עולם כך ישראל עשויים דייש לאומות העולם

Water From the Well: Wisdom We Can ‘Draw’ from Women in תנ"ך

The imagery of a well, a באר, is prevalent throughout תנ"ך. The אבות dug wells, metaphorically digging the foundation of what became כלל ישראל.

אבימלך מלך גרר with ברית at the time of אברהם dug wells in the area aptly named באר שבע.¹ יצחק later re-dug those same wells after the פלישתים had filled them up, showing his renewal of אברהם's philosophies and will to spread monotheism and knowledge of ה' to the world. יצחק's endeavors in well-digging brought about struggles with the פלישתים, and he named the wells עסק, שטנה, and רחובות, in commemoration of those struggles.²

There is much to be learned from the אבות and the “depth” of the wells they dug. Nevertheless, the focus of this article is on some of the more hidden personalities in תנ"ך, the women throughout the early generations of our history. Through an analysis of several of these women, their personalities and their experiences at בארות, we will reveal some of the most important מידות that have since been emulated by all generations of Jewish women.

The first woman in תנ"ך to encounter a well was הגר, during the incident known as גירוש הגר וישמעאל.³ הגר, alone in the מדבר with ישמעאל, cast him under a bush to die of thirst, sat helplessly, and cried. A מלאך called out to her from שמים, reassuring her that ישמעאל

¹ בראשית כא: כב-לד

² שם כו: טו-לג

³ בראשית כא: יד- כא

would flourish and father a great nation. Then הגר פסוק יט describes seeing an elusive באר in the מדבר: מים: מדבר באר in the elusive.

The ספורנו is puzzled by the word ויפקח, which implies a granting of sight – was הגר blind before this happened? Rather, he explains, the word can be understood on a more figurative level, indicating that she received new abilities of intellectual perception, to see ה'’s presence in the world.⁴ As we see from פסוק יד, הגר had gotten lost in the מדבר, which רש"י interprets as her being spiritually lost and returning to the עבודה זרה that she had grown up with in Egypt.⁵ But then ויפקח א-לוהים ה', ויפקח א-לוהים ה' gave her the ability to perceive something that in the past she was unable to see. Interestingly, this פסוק is also part of the traditional תפילה for finding a lost object; we cannot see something unless ה' wants us to be able to see it. Otherwise, we remain blind to what may be right in front of us.

The word ויפקח is also used in connection to ספר אלישע הנביא in ספר אלישע הנביא. The נער with אלישע was afraid of the army of ארם surrounding the city, but ויפקח ה' את עיני הנער, “Hashem opened the eyes of the boy,” and he was able to use his newfound שכל to see many fiery angels and horses on the hills around the soldiers. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz⁷ comments that when the נער’s eyes were opened to see the מלאכים, even though they had actually been there the entire time, he was able to reach a heightened level of בטחון. Similarly, הגר’s eyes were opened to the well that had been there the whole time. After she realized that ה' is always ready to help His people (since they were saved in the זכות of אברהם⁸), she was able to acknowledge all the good that was in front of her.

⁴ ספורנו שם ד"ה "ויפקח אלוקים את עיניה" - נתן בה דעת להכיר מקום מים שהיה שם כי לא היתה סומא קודם לכן

⁵ רש"י שם - ד"ה "ותלך ותתע" - חזרה לגלולי בית אביה

⁶ מלכים ב' ו: טז-יח

⁷ מובא בנפש שמשון - שבת קודש עמ' קב

⁸ בראשית פרק כא: יג - וגם את בן האמה לגוי אשימנו כי זרעך הוא

In a later פרק, we meet הגר again under a different name: קטורה was אברהם's third wife, whom he married after the death of רש"י and the זוהר¹⁰ say that קטורה was actually הגר, and that her name was changed because she had done תשובה and her actions became pleasant like the קטורה, instead of being tainted with עבודה זרה.

הגר is also the mother of an immense nation, and we can learn a tremendous lesson from her story. The first step to realizing the existence of ה' is to open your eyes and see all the good that has been bestowed upon you, and to realize that this good is beyond that which can be explained by natural forces – even if it is not quite as dramatic as finding a well in the middle of a desert. This level of הכרת הטוב is the foundation of אמונה, and thus the foundation of living a life of מעשים that are as pleasant to ה' as the קטורה.

רבקה is the first of the formal אמהות¹¹ to meet her husband at a מדרש משלי. מידת החסד was רבקה's outstanding character trait. באר. רבקה connects רבקה to the third חיל of פסוק¹³: אשת חיל because of all the acts of גמילות חסדים that she performed for יצחק and for the benefit of the future of ישראל. כלל. In the story of her betrothal to יצחק¹⁴, gave water not only to the עבד אברהם, but also drew water for all of his camels, going "well" beyond what was asked of her to do. The פרקי דרבי אליעזר¹⁵ states that רבקה was treated like a מלכים, בת.

⁹ בראשית כה:א

¹⁰ זוהר כרך א (בראשית) פרשת חיי שרה דף קלג עמוד ב - "ויוסף אברהם ויקח אשה ושמה קטורה, קטורה דא היא הגר, דהא תנינן בתר דאתפרשא הגר מניה דאברהם וטעת בתר גלולי דאבהו לבתר אתקשרא בעובדין דכשרן ובגין כך אשתני שמה ואקרי קטורה בעובדין דכשרן"

¹¹ ברכות דף טז: - אין קורין אמהות אלא לארבע [שרה רבקה רחל ולאה]

¹² מדרש משלי פרשה לא - גמלתהו טוב ולא רע. זו רבקה אמנו, שגמלה ליצחק בשעה שמתה שרה אמו

¹³ משלי לא:יב

¹⁴ בראשית כד: טו-טז

¹⁵ פרקי דרבי אליעזר - "חורב" פרק טז - ובת מלכים שלא יצאה לשאוב מימים ימימה, יצאה לשאוב מים באותה שעה

the child of royalty, by her family, and this was the only time in her life that she went out to draw water. How, then, did רבקה accomplish such a difficult, physically demanding task?

The answer lies in רבקה being the recipient of *סיעתא דשמיא*, divine assistance. According to *פסוק יז* on רש"י¹⁶, the *עבד* immediately noticed that this girl was different from the rest because he saw the water leaping from the *באר* into her jug, and realized רבקה had a supernatural *נס* on her side. The *רמב"ן*¹⁷, quoting the *בראשית* *פסוק יז* in ותמלא, if *פסוק יז* points out a grammatical note on the word ותמלא, רבקה is truly drawing the water, the *פסוק* should have said ותשא, if רבקה was truly drawing the water, the *פסוק* should have said ותשא, so perhaps רבקה was not actually filling her jug with water. Rather, he comments that the omission of the word ותשא signifies that the water was drawn through a *נס*. The next *פסוק* writes והאיש – which, according to the *ספורנו*¹⁸, means that the *עבד* was so taken aback by her act of *חסד* and the *זריוות* with which she acted.

Another *נס* that occurred in this story is mentioned in *מסכת* *תענית ד*.¹⁹ the *עבד* should not have made a *שבועה* that the girl who willingly draws water for himself and his camels will become יצחק's wife, because perhaps ה' would send him a lame or blind woman, and he would be forced to bring her back as a wife for יצחק. Rav Hirsch justifies this behavior, saying that the warning against making these oaths applies only to events that could have a completely random outcome. This *שבועה* served the purpose of identifying exactly the type of wife that יצחק would need – one who displays the trait of kindness. Only a girl who would draw enough

¹⁶ רש"י שם - וירץ העבד לקראתה - לפי שראה שעלו המים לקראתה

¹⁷ רמב"ן שם -נראה שדקדקו כן מלשון ותמלא כדה ותעל - שלא אמר "ותשא ותמלא". ונעשה לה הנס בפעם הראשונה כי אחרי כן כתוב "ותשאב"

¹⁸ ספורנו כד: כא ד"ה "משתאה"

¹⁹ תענית ד. - אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר רבי יונתן: שלשה שאלו שלא כהוגן, לשנים השיבוהו כהוגן, לאחד השיבוהו שלא כהוגן. ואלו הן: אליעזר עבד אברהם, ושואל בן קיש, ויפתח הגלעדי. אליעזר עבד אברהם - דכתיב "בראשית כ"ד+ והיה הנערה אשר אמר אליה הטי נא כדך וגו', יכול אפילו חיגרת אפילו סומא - השיבו כהוגן, ונזדמנה לו רבקה.

water for him *and* his camels would be a girl worthy of marrying יצחק, and nothing could be random about the choice. רבקה certainly passed that test.

באר and רחל are the next patriarchal couple to meet at a ²⁰ Throughout her life as יעקב's most beloved wife, רחל's outstanding character trait can be described as calculated passivity; she knew exactly when to be passive and when to take a more active role. When she encountered יעקב at the באר, יעקב was the active personality, single-handedly removing the rock from the באר as if in a dramatic love story. Unlike רבקה who drew all the water for the עבד אברהם, רחל stood by as יעקב drew the water for her sheep, despite her being a "professional" shepherdess.²¹ Right afterwards, however, she assumed an active role in the story, running to tell לבן about meeting יעקב. When יעקב wished to marry her, she may have outwardly appeared passive, but she was secretly undermining his wishes to save her sister לאה's dignity, going as far as to give לאה the signs she had prepared with יעקב so יעקב would not suspect any trickery until after their marriage became official.²²

According to חז"ל, this is what happened; however, the most straightforward reading of the פסוקים indicates that לאה gave לבן ²³ while the only indication we have of רחל's presence in the story is through רש"י's interpretation. On the פשט level, רחל appears to be a completely passive character, letting her sister get married to יעקב; only on a דרש level can we really see the depth of her actions and how she controlled events from behind the scenes.

There are many parallels between this story of יעקב and רחל and the story of the meeting between משה and צפורה at the באר in

²⁰ בראשית כט: א-יב

²¹ רמב"ן בראשית פרק כט פסוק ט - וטעם כי רועה היא - להגיד כי אין לצאן לבן רועה אחר זולתה, כי לה לבדה מסר אביה העדר והיא לבדה רועה אותם כל הימים

²² רש"י שם פסוק כה - ויהי בבקר והנה היא לאה - אבל בלילה לא היתה לאה, לפי שמסר יעקב לרחל סימנים, וכשראתה רחל שמכניסין לו לאה אמרה עכשיו תכלם אחותי, עמדה ומסרה לה אותן סימנים:

²³ שם כט: כג - ויקח את לאה בתו ויבא אותה אליו

מדין. Some of the similarities can be seen in the text itself, and some in the interpretations of the מדרשים. The following table summarizes these parallels:

צפורה-משה	רחל-יעקב
רועה	רועה
Passivity of צפורה (needs to be saved from the רועים)	Passivity of רחל
וישב על הבאר – משה	וירא והנה באר בשדה – יעקב
וישק את צאנם	וישק את צאן לבן
קראן לו [למשה] ויאכל לחם	ותרץ ותגד לאביה... ויביאהו אל ביתו
יתרו imprisoned by משה, saved his life while in jail (See explanation [A] below)	לבן, essentially “imprisoned” by רחל, his love for רחל kept him going ויהיו בעיניו כימים אחדים באהבתו אותה
צפורה had to work to marry משה (See explanation [B] below)	רחל had to work to marry יעקב
אמהות ²⁴ to the צדקות in her Equal	אמהות One of the

[A] According to the מדרש recorded in ילקוט שמעוני²⁵, before משה ran away to מדין, he had stopped in כוש, where he reigned as king for forty years. When משה was sixty-seven years old, the כושים rebelled against him, and he was forced to flee the country. However, he could not go back to מצרים because the death threat from פרעה was still in effect, so he went to מדין and met יתרו. After they brought him home to יתרו, he told יתרו everything that had happened to him, including being wanted in מצרים, and יתרו immediately thought that משה was a fugitive, and therefore a liability. He decided to lock משה in his prison without food or water and wait for him to die, thus avoiding the problem of housing a fugitive. Unbeknownst to יתרו, צפורה would sneak food

²⁴ ילקוט שמעוני תורה פרשת שמות רמז קסח -ותלך צפורה בדרכי בית ישראל לא חסרה דבר מצדקת שרה ורביקה רחל ולא.

²⁵ שם רמז קסח

and water for משה for the following ten years. When יתרו opened the jail, he expected to find a dead body rotting with decay, but instead he found משה, still alive and praying to ה'. answered יתרו's shock by telling him that the עִבְרִים can survive in any condition because their God can perform tremendous miracles. With that, יתרו took him out of the jail, fed and clothed him, and finally let him into his home.

[B] In the same ילקוט שמעוני מדרש, the מדרש discusses how משה was able to obtain his famous מטה, his staff. The מדרש lists the history of the מטה, starting with the point in which אדם הראשון was exiled from גן עדן. The מטה made its way through the generations of אבות, ending its journey in מצרים with יוסף. Upon יוסף's death, the officers of מצרים gave the מטה to יתרו, who put it in his garden. In order for משה to marry צפורה, he needed to remove the מטה from the ground, something that nobody else had ever succeeded in accomplishing. So therefore, when משה removed the מטה, he was working for the ability to marry צפורה.

In the שמות on מדרש רבה, commenting on the statement וישב in reference to משה, the מדרש writes דרך אבות 26. The מדרש says that it was not coincidental that these three couples all met at a באר; actually משה went there because he understood the power of finding his wife at a באר, as learned from both יעקב and יצחק. Yet it is not immediately apparent what the מדרש means to say. Why is the well specifically the place for a man to meet his wife? What is it about the באר that hints to the unique power and importance of the role of the Jewish woman?

Looking at the context of the באר as it appears in נ"ך, we may be able to better understand the significance of the באר as it is used to symbolize various aspects of Judaism. משלי connects the באר to the idea of learning תורה מתוך בארך: תורה 27. שתה מים מבורך ונוזלים מתוך בארך: תורה פסוק on רש"י 27. משה ה' gave to the תורה that משל for the באר is a משל. Interestingly, the בראשית 28 quotes this same פסוק to explain

²⁶ שמות רבה (וילנא) פרשה א לב -וישב בארץ מדין וישב על הבאר, קלט דרך אבות, שלשה נזדווגו להם זוגיהם מן הבאר

²⁷ משלי ה:טו

²⁸ בראשית כח: ב ד"ה "וירא והנה באר בשדה"

why יעקב stopped at a באר on his way to קדם. Every person has a חלק in the תורה, and thus every person has a “well” of חכמה and תורה from which he can “draw” the tools to live a Jewish life.

In a contrasting image to this באר of תורה, we are told by ירמיהו that בני ישראל also have the option of living with empty בארות that give them nothing in return: כי שתיים רעות עשה עמי עזבו מקור מים: מקור ה' בני ישראל left²⁹, חיים לחצוב להם בארות נשברים אשר לא יכילו מים, to dig the broken, crooked wells of עבודה זרה that hold no water, having no actual depth to them. The מצודת דוד³⁰ comments here that these בארות lead to nothing but disappointment. A person can spend his entire life pursuing modern-day עבודה זרה and will have nothing meaningful or lasting to show for his efforts. But if he spends his time involved in תורה and pursuits of רוחניות, he will receive an outpouring of goodness from ה'.

Another dangerous באר to avoid is the באר found in משלי. מצודת דוד comments on this פסוק that this באר is a כג:כז for the non-Jewish woman because she is צרה, meaning she will entrap a man in sin and he will have no way to escape. There is no outsmarting this non-Jewish woman once she has a hold on the man, and no matter how much effort he exerts, he will be unable to rid himself of her negative influence. The מלבי"ם takes the יצר הרע even further, comparing this non-Jewish woman to the יצר הרע that sneaks its way into the person's psyche until the person is completely entrenched in sin, and the end of this person is to eventually drown in this well that he dug with his poor choices. Since the פשט of the פסוק is discussing a non-Jewish woman, the role of the proper Jewish woman is precisely the opposite. חוה was created as עזר כנגדו אדם הראשון³¹, the opposite of a stumbling block of sin. The Jewish woman should create an environment of

²⁹ ירמיהו ב:יג

³⁰ מצודת דוד שם ד"ה "מקור מים חיים" - שאני כמעין הנובע מים חיים ר"ל משפיע להם טובות בכל עת

³¹ בראשית ב: יח

spirituality within her home, and thus instead of being a well-spring of sin and negativity, she will be a באר מים חיים, through which the תורה can flow to her entire family.

The female figure in the תורה who best represents this ideal of being a source of sustenance (whether spiritual or physical) to her "family" is מרים. Her entire life was spent taking care of בני ישראל, being a facilitator for them to get out of גלות and survive for forty years in the מדבר. According to רש"י on the תורה's narrative of the מצרים's role began at a very young age, when she and her mother, יוכבד, saved many Jewish babies from פרעה's decree. The שמות רבה gives מרים the additional name of אפרת because בני ישראל were able to fulfill פרו ורבו thanks to her actions³².

מרים's next task began immediately in the following פרק, the ambiguity once again clarified by רש"י³⁴, when יוכבד and עמרם separated because of another one of פרעה's cruel decrees. מרים convinced her parents to get back together, and יוכבד gave birth to משה. According to the גמרא in מסכת מגילה, when משה was born, מרים was so adamant for her parents to reunite because she had received a נבואה that this child would be the redeemer of בני ישראל and lead them out of the כור הברזל of מצרים³⁵. Even then מרים needed to act as the responsible caretaker. She watched משה from the יאור, waited until he was taken by בת פרעה, and even convinced her to let משה be nursed by a Jewish woman.³⁶

מרים's role became even clearer when בני ישראל were traveling throughout the מדבר. The גמרא in תענית states that בני ישראל received

³² שמות א': טו-כא ורש"י שם – "שפרה זו יוכבד...פועה זו מרים"

³³ שמות רבה א, יז

³⁴ שמות ב א-ב ורש"י שם – "פרוש היה ממנה מפני גזירת פרעה וחזר ולקחה וזהו וילך שהלך בעצת בתו שאמרה לו גורתך קשה משל פרעה אם פרעה גזר על הזכרים ואתה ג"כ על הנקבות"

³⁵ תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה דף יד עמוד א-אמר רב נחמן אמר רב: שהיתה מתנבאה כשהיא אחות אהרן, ואומרת: עתידה אמי שתלד בן שיושיע את ישראל. ובשעה שנולד נתמלא כל הבית כולו אורה, עמד אביה ונשקה על ראשה, אמר לה: בתי נתקיימה נבואתיך

³⁶ שמות ב: ד-ט

three מתנות, or gifts, in the מדבר: the מן in the זכות of משה, the הכבוד ענני in the זכות of אהרן, and the באר in the זכות of מרים³⁷. learn about באר מרים from the juxtaposition of מרים's death to the פסוק which states, ולא היה מים לעדה,³⁸ resulting in the disastrous episode of מריבה. Without this באר מרים, בני ישראל would not have had the most basic source of life – water. The מן and the ענני הכבוד would not have done any good for בני ישראל had they not had water. באר מרים sustained the nation through the desert, the same nation that had grown and multiplied in מצרים and emerged from there thanks to מרים herself.

We find all of these individual מידות merged together in the character of an unnamed woman in שמואל ב'.³⁹ When דוד's army was hiding from the rebellious אבשלום, his two messengers, יהונתן ואחיעזר, were able to uncover where אבשלום planned on attacking דוד that night, and they began running back to דוד to tell him to camp elsewhere for the night. On their way to דוד's camp, they were seen by one of אבשלום's servants who immediately ran to get אבשלום's soldiers to catch יהונתן ואחיעזר. With nowhere to go, they lowered themselves into a man's well outside his house in בחורים, and his wife not only covered the well so they could not be seen, but she went so far as to point אבשלום's army in the wrong direction so they were forced to return empty-handed.

This woman contained all of the character traits that made the women in the תורה into the אמהות and protectors of בני ישראל. She had מידת הבטחון and שכל, trusting that she could help these messengers without being caught by אבשלום's army. She had the חסד of רבקה, acting quickly without asking questions about why there were boys in her well. רחל's and צפורה's cunningness also reveals itself within her – she knew when to act and when to remain passive.

³⁷ תענית ט.

³⁸ במדבר כ א-ב.

³⁹ שמואל ב יז: טז-כ.

As if to highlight her passivity, she remains nameless and her entire presence in the story is a total of two פסוקים. The נביא does not even record יהונתן or אחימעץ expressing any sort of gratitude to the woman; they just climbed out of the well and continued on their way, proving that this woman did not expect any acknowledgement or glory for her behind-the-scenes work.

Finally, we can clearly see מרים's inherent character in this woman because she saved בני ישראל. Without her quick actions and הסד, without taking time to weigh the options and decide whether the risk was worth it, יהונתן and אחימעץ would probably have been caught by אבשלום's army and killed, and דוד would not have gotten the message to camp elsewhere. He would have been attacked during the night and אבשלום's corrupt army would have taken the משיח away from דוד, the anointed ה'.

In מעין גנים באר מים, the שיר השירים, the באר is mentioned once more: מעין גנים באר מים. According to the אלשיך, a באר is a perfect משל for חיים ונוחלים מן הלבנון.⁴⁰ Just like a person cannot drink from a well without exerting effort to draw the bucket, so too a person cannot benefit from the תורה without exerting the effort to learn. But once he starts the process of learning, he receives help from ה' to keep going, and the תורה purifies his soul like the water purifies his body. The six aforementioned Biblical women exerted unbelievable effort for the sake of their nations, and they are the ones who facilitated the transmission of תורה through the generations, infused with their own personal מידות. From them we learn what qualifies a true כלל ישראל and what we each have to do in order to fulfill the role of a Jewish woman. Using these מידות and lessons from these women in תנ"ך, we can see how to lead lives that ensure that the מים חיים of תורה will flow into the next generation.

⁴⁰ שיר השירים ד:טו

מחשבה ומעשה

Prayer: Does it Work?

Prayer is a primary method of religious expression in Judaism. Judaism includes both prayers with set texts, as well as spontaneous prayer. There are set prayers to ask for the sick to be healed or rain to fall. People going on long journeys pray for safe travel, and soldiers going out to war pray for God's help. In emergencies, many Jews' first response is to recite תהלים as a way to ask God for help. Prayer is a routine part of our religious experience that we often take for granted.

However, looking into the essence of prayer leads to the realization that prayer is not as straightforward as it seems. What gives a person the right to pray, to ask the all knowing God to change His mind? If God has decided on a decree, how can man pray and hope to reverse it? If ה' has decided that an event should happen, perhaps that a sick person should die, is prayer really able to change His mind? Are Hashem's decrees similar to those of מגילת אסתר in אהשוורוש, of which it is said that "a decree written in the name of the king ... cannot be called back"¹, or are they more flexible and subject to change?

The very facts that prayer is a formal מצוה and also has been practiced throughout Jewish history imply that it has some efficacy. The ראש השנה (טז.) in גמרא points out that on the one hand we believe a person's fate is decided on ראש השנה, but on the other hand we still pray during the year for sick people to be healed, as if it is not yet definite whether the person will live or die. The גמרא explains that perhaps when praying for the sick we follow the opinion of רבי יוסי, who thinks life and death are judged every day, and not just on ראש השנה. Somewhat dissatisfied with this limited

¹ אסתר ה:ח

answer, the גמרא says even the other Rabbis could agree it is efficacious to pray for the sick, following רבי יצחק's principle that: יפה צעקה לאדם, בין קודם גזר דין בין לאחר גזר דין – crying out is beneficial for man, whether before the decree or after the decree. According to רבי יצחק, even after God has handed down a decree, prayer is still able to appeal His verdict. Prayer, in fact, has the awesome power to change God's plan and reverse His decrees.

However, not everyone agrees with רבי יצחק that it is possible for individuals to overturn their decrees. רבי אליעזר maintains that decrees against individuals are final and unchangeable through prayer. An individual can only appeal to God before his decree has been handed down. As the גמרא clarifies:

דרשו ה' בהמצאו! - התם ביחיד, הכא בצבור. ביחיד אימת? - אמר רבה בר

אבוה: אלו עשרה ימים שבין ראש השנה ליום הכפורים ²

An Individual can “find” and petition God in the ten days between ראש השנה and יום כיפור. However, if on יום כיפור, God decrees that a person will die, according to רבי אליעזר no amount of prayer can save him during the year.

On the other hand, all of the opinions in the גמרא agree that the prayer of a ציבור, as opposed to that of an individual, is effective even after a decree. Not only can the community change a regular decree, they can even rip up a decree so strong it is considered sealed, as the גמרא says:

מניין לגזר דין של צבור שאינו נחתם? אינו נחתם? והכתיב נכתם עונך

לפני! אלא, אף על גב שנחתם – נקרע ³

The power of the group can even be extended to help the individual members of the group. ⁴ תוספות ask how those rabbis who maintain that decrees against individuals are irreversible are able to pray for the sick, even though the sick person's life or death has already been decreed on ראש השנה. They answer that by praying for

² ראש השנה יח.

³ שם

⁴ ראש השנה טז.

a particular sick person “along with all the sick of Israel”, the individual’s irreversible decree becomes tied up with the decree of the community and can consequently be changed through prayer. However, despite the power of a ציבור to pray and change God’s decree, God’s decrees still have force and cannot be changed lightly. A ברייתא⁵ states that on ראש השנה God decrees how much rainfall there will be for the whole year. If the people later do תשובה and deserve more rain, He will increase the efficacy of the rain, but won’t change the actual amount that has been decreed. Even after the ציבור does תשובה ה', may still stick to the letter of the decree than ignore it entirely.

Even if in a certain situation prayer is unable to directly reverse a decree, prayer is still a proper, and perhaps helpful, response. משה has become the paradigm of someone who challenges God’s decrees through prayer. After חטא העגל, משה’s prayer was successful in reversing Hashem’s decree of annihilation against the nation of Israel. However, at the end of his life, משה was unable to change the decree against himself that barred him from entering the land of Israel. The מדרש ילקוט שמעוני⁶ expands on the idea that משה’s prayer in ואתחנן, though unsuccessful, is still is a model of appropriate prayer. The מדרש points out that even as משה was planning for the worst, leaving last instructions and passing on leadership to יהושע, he didn’t stop praying or give up hope that he might still enter the land:

למד משה את באי העולם שלא יאמר אדם הואיל וחולי שלו מסוכן ועושה
דייתיקי וחלק כל אשר לו (לא יאמר) לא אתפלל עוד, אלא יתפלל שאין הקב"ה
פוסל תפלת כל בריה, שהרי משה עשה דייתיקי שנאמר ועריו נתתי לראובני
ולגדי וגו' ולמכיר נתתי את הנלעד וגו' ואצו אתכם בעת ההיא לאמר וגו' ואת
יהושע צויתי וגו' [הרי דייתיקי], שמא תאמר עמד לו ולא התפלל, ת"ל ואתחנן
אל ה'

⁵ ראש השנה יז:

⁶ ילקוט שמעוני פרשת ואתחנן 812

משה taught that a man shouldn't say, since his sickness has become dangerous and he makes a will and divides his possessions, "I won't pray anymore." Rather, he should pray because God doesn't make any creature's prayer worthless. By holding up Moshe's prayer as a model for generations to come, the Midrash implies that his prayer was proper and acceptable even though it was unable to reverse his decree.

Even when a decree of punishment is so strongly sealed, and God Himself swears there is no possibility of reversal, prayer might be able to open a backdoor and partially modify the decree. Hashem told Moshe he won't be given a second chance and allowed into the land of Israel. He also declared that Moshe can no longer pray to try and change the decree. As Moshe recounts the conversation:

ויתעבר ה' בי למענכם ולא שמע אלי ויאמר ה' אלי רב לך אל תוסף דבר

אלי עוד בדבר הזה⁷

However, the very next פסוק testifies that משה's request was partially fulfilled. משה was told that while he still wouldn't be allowed to cross into Israel, he would be able to literally "see" the land.

עלה ראש הפסגה ושא עיניך ימה וצפנה ותימנה ומזרחה וראה בעיניך כי לא

תעבר את הירדן הזה

Picking up on this leniency in God's decree, the גמרא in in maintains that משה's prayer was in fact answered:

אמר רבי אלעזר: גדולה תפלה יותר ממעשים טובים. שאין לך גדול

במעשים טובים יותר ממשה רבינו, אף על פי כן לא נענה אלא בתפלה,

שנאמר (דברים ג) אל תוסף דבר אלי, וסמך ליה, עלה ראש הפסגה.⁸

Hashem wasn't willing to annul the decree against משה, but He also wasn't willing to ignore משה's prayer and leave it totally unanswered. Similarly, in ספר שמואל, ה' says he won't be persuaded

⁷ דברים ג:כה-כו

⁸ ברכות לב:

to change a decree against עלי's family, but the decree was later able to be modified. The פסוק declares:

ולכן נשבעתי לבית עלי אם יתכפר עון בית עלי בזבח ובמנחה עד עולם⁹

The גמרא¹⁰ takes this verse as a model of a decree that is impossible to annul. Yet the גמרא on the same page quotes stories about descendants of עלי, personages no less than רבא and אביי, who merit long life through תורה and חסד despite the decree against them. Although the general decree against עלי's family remains in force, in certain cases individuals are able to remove themselves from the decree.

Prayer has a range of effectiveness in reversing God's decrees. The גמרא records how different decrees can be modified to different degrees. According to some, the decree of an individual can never be changed through prayer. For a community, sometimes a bad decree is completely "ripped up", but other times, like in the case of a decree of limited rainfall, the decree remains in force while only the spirit changes. רבא and אביי surviving the decree against the family of עלי shows how sometimes even irreversible decrees can be circumvented. משה being allowed to see the Land of Israel from afar illustrates how even when prayer is ineffective against a decree, it can nevertheless be answered in an unexpected way. An individual never knows what type of decree she is dealing with. But she can know that prayer, even if it cannot completely annul a particular decree, can still in some way be helpful. In this way, all opinions on the effectiveness of prayer can agree with רבי יצחק's rule that

יפה צעקה לאדם, בין קודם גזר דין בין לאחר גזר דין

"Crying out is beautiful for man, whether before the decree or after the decree."

⁹ שמואל א ג:יד

¹⁰ ראש השנה יח.

Sink or Swim:

A Halachic Analysis of Learning to Swim

Parents often think of swimming lessons together with other after-school activities, such as art and athletics. Perhaps, however, swimming should be considered a separate, more important category. As drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death among children¹, shouldn't the prevention of a life-threatening situation hold more weight among parents than a ballet class, painting lessons or playing junior soccer? It is possible to suggest that a swimming lesson may not be just a pastime, but rather a Halachic obligation.

מאי כל מצות הבן על האב? ... תנינא להא דת"ר: האב חייב בבנו למולו, ולפדותו, וללמדו תורה, ולהשיאו אשה, וללמדו אומנות; וי"א: אף להשיטו במים²

When discussing a father's obligations to his son, the *Shulchan Aruch* lists five functions which a father is required to do.³ Then, there is an additional, albeit more vague, obligation of teaching a child how to swim. The *Gemara* does not elaborate on any *chiyuv* for a father to teach his son how to swim, but does give the reason that it is potentially lifesaving, *chayotia hu*.⁴ *Rambam* comments that if someone is on a boat that sinks, he will be in danger if he does not know how to swim.⁵ On the surface, this may seem like a practical *chiyuv* along with the others listed. However, the *Gemara* does not quote a *psuk*

¹ ראה http://www.statisticstop10.com/Causes_of_Death_Kids.html

² קידושין כט.

³ שם, דת"ר: האב חייב בבנו למולו, ולפדותו, וללמדו תורה, ולהשיאו אשה, וללמדו אומנות; וי"א: אף להשיטו במים

⁴ קידושין ל: מאי טעמא? חיותיה הוא

⁵ רש"י קידושין כט. "אף להשיטו בנהר" - שמא יפרוש בספינה ותטבע ויסתכן אם אין יודע לשחות.

as a מקור for this example. This is in contrast to the others, which are all derived from פסוקים.

So, what is the status of this חיוב? Must a parent teach his child to swim? Could this be based on a Torah obligation akin to the other חיובים listed? Is it מדרכן Or, is it merely an עצה טובה for parents? It would seem logical for reasons of נפש פקח. But, how far can we take this סברה? Can we extend this obligation to other situations of נפש פקח as well?

While this may seem to be a clear-cut הלכה, this יש אומרים שו"ת. ראשונים in the any להלכה is not brought down אף להשיטו במים. The סימן קכ"ה in 6 בנין ציון discusses the absence of this being mentioned להלכה. While only the first three of the חיובים have been brought down in להלכה משנה תורה and מנין המצות of the 7 רמב"ם, all 6 are quoted in 8 פירוש המשניות. Do the last three have a different status than the first three? The בנין ציון explains that ללמודו אומנות and לישא אשה are

⁶ שו"ת בנין ציון סימן קכה - נשאלתי למה השמיט הרמב"ם הלכה ברורה שחייב אדם לישא אשה לבנו וללמודו אומנות וי"א אף להשיטו בנהר והיא גמרא ערוכה קידושין (דף כ"ט) ושלשה מצות הראשונים הנזכרים שם הביא כל א' ואחד במקומו וביותר צ"ע מאחר שהביא בפירושו למשניות אילו השש מצות.

תשובה - לישא אשה לא השמיט הרמב"ם דכן כתב בה' איסורי ביאה (פ' כ"א ה' כ"ה) מצות חכמים שישא אדם בנו ובנותיו סמוך לפרקן והיא הברייטא דסנהדרין (דף ע"ו) ובה נכלל המצו' שחייב להשיא לבנו אשה רק שבברייטא זו מבואר יותר מתי צריך להשיא אשה לבנו גם שמצו' על האב ללמד בנו אומנות אף שכעת לא ראיתי להרמב"ם שכתב בפ' כן מכ"מ לא השמיטה והביאה לפסק הלכה בה' רוצח (פ' ה' ה' ה') שכתב שם אבל אם ייסר בנו כדי ללמוד תורה או חכמה או אומנות ומת פטור ע"ש שמחלק בין כבר למדו אומנות אחרת או לא והיינו ע"פ גמרא דמכות (דף ט') דבלא גמיר מלאכה אחריתי מצו' קעביד ואם השמיט הרמב"ם הך דיש אומרים דגם להשיטו בנהר בזה אין תימה דפסק כת"ק דג"כ לא חשיב הך. הקטן יעקב

⁷ למולו: רמב"ם מנין המצות מצוה ריה למול את הבן שנ' וביום השמיני ימול בשר ערלתו

לפדותו: שם מצוה פ לפדות בכור אדם שנ' פדה תפדה את בכור האדם וכו

ללמודו תורה: רמב"ם הלכות תלמוד תורה פרק א:ב כשם שחייב אדם ללמד את בנו

⁸ מצוות הבן על האב שש מצוות והם אלו למולו ולפדותו וללמודו תורה ולהשיאו אשה וללמודו אומנות ולהשיטו במים

indeed brought down להלכה. In רמב"ם, הלכות איסורי ביאה, writes, מצות חכמים — which is more connected to a ברייתא in בנין ציון in קידושין than to the aforementioned גמרא in סנהדרין ע"ו suggests that this is the source for the a father's obligation to marry off his son, even though the ברייתא is more focused on the timing rather than the חיוב itself. Furthermore, the מצווה for a father to teach his son a trade is mentioned in 9הלכות רוצה. In fact, if a father hits his son to force him to work, he is not חייב for the damage because it is a מצווה for the son to work.

The בנין ציון concludes that רמב"ם does not endorse the last חיוב, namely, להושיטו במים, and he rules like the תנא קמא, against the other opinion of the אימרים יש. Still, there is the question of why the פירוש המשניות quotes all six if he in fact does not agree with the אימרים יש and does not view אף להושיטו במים as a חיוב. Moreover, פירוש המשניות does not even bring in להושיטו במים as a אימרים יש, but presents it as equal to the other חיובים.

While the גמרא does not bring a מקור for teaching how to swim, it explains that this is necessary because his life may depend on it (לחיותא היא). This may fall under the מצווה of לא תעמוד על דם discussed in 10ספר החינוך מצווה רל"ז. He explains that one may not

⁹ רמב"ם הלכות רוצה ושמירת הנפש פרק ה הלכה ה -הבן שהרג את אביו בשגגה גולה וכן האב שהרג את בנו בשגגה גולה על ידו, במה דברים אמורים בשהרגו שלא בשעת לימוד, או שהיה מלמדו אומנות אחרת שאינו צריך לה, אבל אם יסר בנו כדי ללמדו תורה או חכמה או אומנות ומת פטור.

¹⁰ ספר החינוך מצווה רל"ז – שלא לעמוד על דם רעים, שלא נמנע מלהציל נפש מישראל כשנראהו בסכנת המיתה והאבידה ויהיה לנו יכולת להצילו בשום צד, שנאמר [ויקרא י"ט, ט"ז] לא תעמוד על דם רעך. ואמרינן בסנהדרין [ע"ג ע"א] תניא, מנין לרואה את חבירו שטובע בנהר או חיה גוררתו או ליסטים באים עליו שהוא חייב להצילו בנפשו, שנאמר לא תעמוד על דם רעך. ולא מיבעיא אצוליה בנפשיה דמחייב, אלא מיטרח ואגיר נמי אגירי חייב.

ועוד כללו זכרונם לברכה באזהרה זו שלא לכבוש עדות, כדי שלא יאכזר חבירו ממונו. וכן הוא בספרא, מנין שאם נודע לו עדות שאינו רשאי לשטוק עליה, שנאמר לא תעמוד על דם רעך. ומנין שאם ראיתו טובע בנהר וכו'. ומנין לרודף אחר חבירו להורגו שאתה חייב להצילו בנפשו, שנאמר לא תעמוד על דם רעך וגו'.

refrain from saving a person when he sees him in a situation of danger or destruction when he has the ability to save him.

The example that the ספר החינוך gives is directly related to the issue of swimming. If one sees his friend drowning and does not save him, he is guilty of neglecting the command לא תעמד על דם.¹¹ However, the חינוך expands the מצווה beyond a father teaching a son, and indicates that the need to save someone applies to all people – not only a father to a son. In fact, he says that this obligation is נוהגת בכל זמן ובכל מקום בזכרים ונקבות (as opposed to the list of obligations in קידושין where the משנה specifically states that mothers do not share these obligations). Additionally, the גמרא in סנהדרין¹² writes,

כל המקיים נפש אחת מישראל – מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קיים עולם מלא, anyone who saves another life, is as if he has saved the entire world.

Even so, it is possible to suggest that since a father is specifically responsible for the safety of his son, this would be a מצווה that would apply to him uniquely. On the other hand, there is another important חקירה that may make a difference in terms of the חיוב that would make the father פטור from teaching his son how to swim. The פסוק says לא תעמוד על דם רעך¹³ and refers therefore to a case where “blood” may be “spilled.” But, what if there is no imminent danger involved in the situation? Maybe this מצווה only

שורש מצוה זו ידוע, כי כמו שיציל האחד את חברו כן חברו יציל אותו, ויתיישב העולם בכך, והאל חפץ בישובו כי לשבת יצרה. וכבר נתבארו דיני מצוה זו במסכת סנהדרין.

ונוהגת בכל מקום ובכל זמן בזכרים ונקבות. ועובר עליה ונמנע מלהציל ויש יכולת בידו, עבר על לאו, ואין לוקין עליו לפי שהוא לאו שאין בו מעשה, דקיימא לן אין לוקין עליו.

¹¹ סנהדרין עג. – מניין לרואה את חברו שהוא טובע בנהר, או חיה גוררתו, או לסטין באין עליו, שהוא חייב להצילו – תלמוד לומר לא תעמד על דם רעך רש"י שם: לא תעמוד – לא תעמוד עצמך על דמו – אלא הצילהו.

¹² סנהדרין לו.

¹³ ויקרא י"ט:ט"ז – לא תעמד על דם רעך אני ה'

applies to a case of immediate danger, but not to an obligation to prevent future dangers that may later arise.

Rav Ovadia Yosef writes¹⁴, regarding the recitation of ברכת הגומל, that if one has flown on an airplane, nowadays this may not present as imminent of a danger as crossing a sea once had. But, if the same person swims at sea, even if it is close to settlement and a lifeguard is present on a constant basis, he is considered a Halachic sea traveler. Consequently, because of tragedies of drowning that have occurred, he must recite הגומל upon returning to shore. Based on this, even if one is not in imminent danger of drowning, because the possibility is present, it is considered a dangerous situation, and he must say גומל. Therefore, we can perhaps conclude that the מצווה of לא תעמוד can apply to even when the situation is not in front of you, as long as it has the potential to develop into a dangerous situation, which in our case can be prevented and circumnavigated by swimming lessons.

¹⁴ שו"ת יחוה דעת חלק ב סימן כו ד"ה תשובה: במסכת ברכות (דף נד:), אמר רב יהודה אמר רב, ארבעה צריכים להודות (בברכת הגומל), יורדי הים, הולכי מדברות, מי שהיה חולה ונתרפא, ומי שהיה חבוש בבית האסורים ויצא. (וסימן לדבר, וכל החיים יודוך סלה, חיים ראשי תיבות, חבוש יסורין ים מדבר. טור ושלחן ערוך /או"ח/ סימן ריט סעיף א. ושו"ת חוט המשולש שבסוף שו"ת תהשב"ץ /התשב"ץ/ סימן ל). וכולם למדנו אותם מהפסוקים שבתהלים (מזמור קז), שעליהם נאמר: יודו לה' חסדו ונפלאותיו לבני אדם. ודין הולכי מדברות נלמד מהכתוב שם; תעו במדבר בשימון דרך עיר מושב לא מצאו. וכן כתב הרמב"ם (בפרק י' מהלכות ברכות הלכה ח), שהולכי דרכים כשיגיעו ליישוב צריכים להודות בברכת הגומל. וכן הוא לשון הערוך (ערך ארבע) בשם תשובת רבינו האי גאון.... תשובה: במסכת אולם באמת שנראה שאין לדייק מלשון דרך לפוטרו מברכת הגומל, שהרי הטור והשלחן ערוך כתבו הולכי מדברות, ואילו היה חילוק בהלכה בין הליכה ביבשה לטיסה באויר, לא היו נמנעים מלהזכיר לשון דרך, כדי ללמוד שבנסיעה באויר אין צריך לברך הגומל. ועוד, שהרי כתב המאירי (ברכות נד:), יש מי שאומר שאין ברכת הגומל אלא להולכי מדברות שתעו, ויורדי הים שעמד עליהם נחשול של ים לטובעם, וכן חולה שיש בו סכנה דוקא, שבכל אלו יש בהם נס, אבל אם לא אירע להם כן אין צריך לברך. ואף על פי שפשטי המקראות מורים כן, שנאמר תעו במדבר בשימון דרך וכו'. יורדי הים באניות יעלו שמים ירדו תהומות וכו'. מכל מקום אין אני מודה בכך, אלא כל הדרכים בחזקת סכנה, והוא הדין לכל הליכה בים, וכל שעלה למיטה וירד, מברך. ע"כ. נמצא שלא דיבר הכתוב אלא בהווה, שדרכם לבוא לידי כך. ואם כן אין הבדל גם כן בין הליכה ביבשה לטיסה באויר, שכל שיכולים לבוא לידי סכנה, צריך לברך.

To combine the ideas of חיותיה היא and לא תעמוד, a father must teach his son how to prevent himself from being in a state of danger, in order that he be able to save himself. This idea is seen in the next line of – כל שאינו מלמד את בנו אומנות, כאילו מלמדו ליסטות, קידושין כט – a father who has not taught his son a trade, is considered as though he has taught him to be a robber. This potential outgrowth into a negative situation can be applied to a father teaching his son how to swim, so that he won't drown: שמא יפרוש בספינה ותטבע ויסתכן. אם אין יודע לשחות. It would then follow that if a father has the ability to save his son by teaching him, he would be חייב under תעמד.

What about a person teaching himself how to swim if his father has not fulfilled this potential? חייב? If a son has not been taught how to swim by his father, must he teach himself? This קידושין in גמרא¹⁵ is the main source for the חייב of teaching oneself Torah if his father has not. Since דברי תורה נמשלו כמים¹⁶, can we say that just as a son is חייב to teach himself תורה if necessary, that he must also teach himself, or even employ a teacher, to learn how to save himself in water?

Even if we are unable to draw a parallel from the example of תלמוד תורה, someone who does not know how to swim may fall under a different law – codified as the eighth דרבנן of איסור of the ספר מצות השם¹⁷, namely, איסור הסתכנות בדבר שיש בו סכנת נפשות. If one does not know how to swim, he is entering a מצב סכנה and therefore may be חייב to teach himself as a preventative measure – חיותיה הוא. In

¹⁵ קידושין כט:

¹⁶ רמב"ם הלכות תלמוד תורה פרק ג: דברי תורה נמשלו כמים שנאמר הוי כל צמא לכו למים, לומר לך מה מים אינם מתכנסין במקום מדרון אלא נזחלין מעליו ומתקבצים במקום אשבורן כך דברי תורה אינם נמצאים בגסי הרוח ולא בלב כל גבה לב אלא בדכא ושפל רוח שמתאבק בעפר רגלי החכמים ומסיר התאוות ותענוגי הזמן מלבו ועושה מלאכה בכל יום מעט כדי חיוו אם לא היה לו מה יאכל ושאר יומו ולילו עוסק בתורה.

¹⁷ An 18th-century work by Rav Baruch Halpern, summarized in the back of the Eshkol edition of the Sefer HaChinuch

addition, to writing *לא יכניס עצמו בשום סכנה*, the *ספר החינוך* expands this and says, *לא יגרום שתבא סכנה לאחרים על ידו*, which perhaps supports the idea that a father must teach his son to save from potential *סכנה*.

If we can somehow suggest that swimming lessons are obligatory based on the above-mentioned *מצוות דאורייתא* ודרבנן, then perhaps this possibility can also be expanded to teaching a child how to save himself or others in other potential life threatening situations, such as lessons in fire safety, CPR, and the like. At the same time, the *ראשונים* discuss the other *חייבים* at length and do not discuss this *יש אומרים*, so it's difficult to technically describe this as a *מצוה דאורייתא* or *דרבנן*.

At the very least, it seems reasonable to suggest that teaching a son life preservation is an *עצה טובה* – good advice, even if not absolutely mandated. Rav Pesach Yisrael Friedlander, author of *אבני ישפה*, interprets this *גמרא* in a very different way. In a *תשובה* considering whether it is a *חייב* to teach a child how to swim, he says that *חיותיה היא* is explaining the obligation *אומנות* ללמדו, meaning that he must be able to float his logs along the river to ease the process of transporting goods. *ללמדו* is a way in which to perform his *אומנות*, and is *חיותיה היא*. According to this interpretation, there is no *חייב* to teach a child how to swim unless this would be directly related to his livelihood. He does suggest, however, that there is *תועלת* for a parent to teach his child to swim, but there is no responsibility or obligation.

In conclusion, this *ברייתא* is not quoted *להלכה*; however, within the issue of *פקוק נפש*, it is unquestionable that swimming lessons can prevent *סכנה*. While this may not be considered a *מצווה דאורייתא* or *דרבנן*, it can certainly be classified as an *עצה טובה*.

תהלים

If you ask the average religious Jew what to do to help someone who is sick, he or she would probably tell you to say תהלים. Is this correct? Is this really what the תורה wants us to do? Can saying תהלים heal someone?

The גמרא¹ states that רבי יהושע בן לוי said פסוקים before he went to sleep. The גמרא then asks how he did so, as he himself said that it is forbidden to heal with words of תורה. The גמרא answers that there is a difference between using words of תורה for healing and using them for protection. The גמרא then brings a משנה that says someone who whispers over a wound (as a method of healing) has no part in the world to come. You are allowed to say words of תורה while you are healthy, which gives you protection, as רבי יהושע בן לוי did; but once you are sick, you cannot say words of תורה.

The ריטב"א clarifies that, originally, the גמרא thought רבי יהושע בן לוי was saying פסוקים before he went to sleep because sleeping can help in healing (meaning that in essence, רבי יהושע בן לוי was saying פסוקים for healing purposes). The גמרא answers that no, he was saying the פסוקים while he was healthy, for protection, thereby making it permissible. Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim² adds that since sleeping is a vulnerable state, רבי יהושע בן לוי became aware of other vulnerabilities, making him wish for G-d's protection. He, therefore, engaged in the greatest תורה, מצווה, תלמוד תורה, to gain merit through learning ideas in תורה. He wanted to gain merit; he did not think a specific פסוק could shield him.

¹ שבויעות טו:

² ראה <http://www.mesora.org/tehillim5770.htm>

תוספות adds, based on a גמרא in מסכת שבת, that you are also allowed to say פסוקים in times of danger. Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim explains that in times of danger, when you can easily become distraught, you can say פסוקים in order to keep your presence of mind to fully be able to react correctly and rationally to the danger.

רמב"ם³ says that if you whisper over a wound and say a פסוק from the תורה, not only are you guilty of violating the prohibition against doing נחוש (enchantments), you are also a כופר. But, someone who says פסוקים and songs from תהלים for merit, in order to gain protection, is allowed to do so.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim points out that the רמב"ם was very exact in his wording. First, he specifically says that when you say פסוקים for protection, it is "allowed." He does not list it as a commandment or even as a suggestion that will actually have any results. But he does use "the harshest condemnation" to describe that which is forbidden, "which must cause your trepidation, not your dismissal."

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim continues by explaining that the problem with saying a פסוק to heal someone is assuming a causal relationship exists where none does, namely between the recitation of words and someone's health. The essential problem is assuming a specific פסוק has the ability to heal someone. רמב"ם also specifically uses the singular word, פסוק, when describing the prohibition, illustrating this message: Someone may not assume a specific פסוק has a causal relationship with health. However, when describing what is allowed, רמב"ם uses the plural word, פסוקים. רמב"ם is not assuming a specific פסוק can shield against a specific harm, but rather the general rule that תורה learning can provide merit for protection. Someone who is healthy and says a specific פסוק for general protection, or someone who says many פסוקים for healing

³ הלכות עובדי כוכבים יא:יב

from a specific eventual harm, is violating נחוש. The ⁴שלחן ערוך rules in accordance with the רמב"ם. The רמ"א adds that some say it is only forbidden if it is said in לשון הקודש, but if it is said in any other language, it is okay.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim brings a few more interesting points. One point is that דוד המלך himself did not use תהלים for healing. When his own son was dying, דוד fasted and cried. He did not say תהלים. "No one can give his work a new designation, which דוד did not." Another point is that people should be sure to keep in mind that תהלים is no more effective than learning any other part of תורה, and that תהלים has no inherent healing properties. The last point is that when asked why many contemporary Rabbanim encourage this practice if it is indeed forbidden, Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim said that it is important to note that the Rabbanim do not "endorse תהלים alone, without a subsequent prayer of 'מי שברך'". When the latter is recited, it is upon that Tefillah that we rely for healing, and not the verses ... which cannot heal."

Rabbi Ari Enkin⁵ says that the custom of saying תהלים for healing comes from a different גמרא, which states that to cure a number of ailments, you should engage in תורה study. But, the מפרשים point out that you should not assume that תלמוד תורה either has a direct ability to heal; rather that in the merit of learning, God should bring healing. Specific words do not have the ability to heal, but when reciting תהלים, keep in mind that no specific chapter of תהלים has an inherent capability to heal over other chapters or books in the תורה. Any תורה learning is what gives merit.

If one chooses to say תהלים over any part of the תורה to gain general merit, he needs to make sure he keeps in mind these prohibitions. תהלים is a good ספר to choose because of its short פרקים, so it is understandable why many people turn to תהלים when they

⁴ יורה דעה קעט:ח,

⁵ ראה <http://hirhurim.blogspot.com/2008/11/reciting-tehillim-for-sick.html>

want to try to finish an entire sefer. It makes it easier when there are ready-made, small sections to read. Additionally, תהלים expresses words of heartfelt prayer very eloquently, and people find that reading these particular sections of the תנ"ך allow them to express their thoughts better than they could themselves.

At the same time, it is important to remember that תהלים is not intrinsically better than any other part of תנ"ך. Especially, one should not choose to specifically say פרוקים that mention healing or the like. This runs the risk of falling under נחוש and assuming a causal relationship exists where none does. Although, Rabbi Ari Enkin says that there are those who say that it is not a problem as long as you say an entire chapter, as opposed to isolating a few.

However, the main thing is to keep in mind that תהלים have no inherent abilities to heal like some magical incantation. It is a book of תנ"ך, and as such, has the power to grant merit. You cannot assume this merit will go towards something specific. You may hope, but don't think it will definitely be applied to the specific thing you have in mind. Another possible solution to the halachic dilemma is that if you do say תהלים in order to gain merit to help heal someone, it might be better to say it in translation into a different language, such as English. This may have the benefit of helping the person understand what he/she is saying and can add meaning to it, and additionally would rely on the לשון הקודש that it is only a problem in רמ"א's lencency.

Generally, when someone is sick, people aren't asked to merely pray for the sick person, but rather, to say תהלים. Many people seem to emphasize תהלים over other forms of prayer. Why is this so? Throughout our history, we have been told to turn to prayer to ask for what we want or need. With this idea in mind, I felt it appropriate to end by delving into the essence of praying for others, and the meaning behind it.

In the *Pirchei Shoshanim Roadmap To Prayer* project, Rabbi Avigdor Miller is quoted as saying that not only are we asking for a physical healing in the bracha of רפאנו, but we are also asking

asking for a spiritual healing, namely to remove our sins. “Physical illness comes to humble the arrogant and also remind the one who’s ill that it is time to change their ways. This bracha in reality is one of doing תשובה...” Sickness is one of the methods God uses to “give us a wake-up call” and get us to do תשובה.

Rav Aryeh Lev Gorden, in the introduction to *Siddur Avodat HaLev*, explains that the grammatical form of the word להתפלל indicates performing an action on oneself, meaning that praying involves performing an act upon oneself. He also says that the meaning of that word relates to the process of judging. Rabbi Gordon says that praying is not spontaneous; it involves an intensive thought process. We have to sort through our various wants and make a judgment as to priority. Through this process, we reaffirm the importance of our dependant relationship with Hashem.

So if prayer relates to תשובה or prioritizing our own needs, what are we doing when we pray for others? Rabbi Reuven Mann says that “it could be due to the merit of another more perfected person, that I will obtain God’s favor: God might save me, since my death could negatively impact another person.” In essence, he is saying that God may heal one person because it will negatively impact a more perfected person. This is what you are doing when you pray for someone else. You are asking God to heal them because of your own merits.

I don’t think this means you have to be a perfected person to do so, although that would help; but even if you are not yet there, I don’t think it is arrogant to pray for others. It is possible that something you did can give you merit that you should not have this specific pain. God is merciful. It can never hurt to pray for that which you want. He may give you something you didn’t think you deserved out of His abundant mercy.

Rabbi Mann further says that when a person becomes sick, it can be part of a punishment for that person’s own sins, and therefore תשובה would be required for God to heal them.

Outside events are inconsequential. However, if a righteous individual will be impacted by the death of the sick person, then God may heal the sick person because of the righteous individual's merit, not because of the sick person's merit. It is God answering the other person's prayer, not the one who was sick. And therefore, the one who is sick would still need to do תשובה.

If the true essence of asking God for our own healing is to do תשובה, than it makes sense that just praying for someone you don't know and will never meet won't be as helpful as for someone you are closer to, although the fact that you even put them in your prayers shows that you do care. There can be some benefit for praying for others you barely know, but obviously prayer for those with whom you have a closer relationship is even more beneficial.

Bible Codes:

They May Be Cool, But Are They Real?

Twenty percent of Aish HaTorah's Discovery Seminars, a group of lectures designed to bring masses of Jews closer to Judaism, is focused on proving the Divinity and "hidden genius" of Torah through the statistical significance of "Bible Codes".¹ Unbeknownst to many of these seminar participants, is the shocking reality that the modern concept of Bible codes (also known as Torah codes or צפנים בתנ"ך), is arguably one of the most empirically and statistically controversial phenomena of the middle 1990s. In addition to the mathematical debate over whether contemporary Bible Codes exist, Aish HaTorah is flawed in its conclusion that these codes prove the Torah is of Divine origin.

The basis of Bible codes, skipping equidistant intervals in order to reveal a hidden message in the Torah, is attributed to the discoveries of Rav Michoel Dov Weissmandl, a savior of thousands of Jews during the Holocaust. Rav Weissmandl disclosed many of his findings while hiding in a bunker in WWII. Although, he died only twelve years after the Holocaust, he recorded many of his codes in his incomplete sefer תורת חמד. Contrary to the modern haphazard computerized method of deciphering Bible codes, which will be described later, Rav Weissmandl, by hand, used specific meaningful skip intervals like 49 or 50 when deciphering Torah codes.² For example, in בראשית, based on חז"ל's statement that the

¹ Aish HaTorah, <http://israel.aish.com/discoveryisrael/program.htm>

² The number 49 in Jewish tradition symbolizes the Omer, the days counted to Shavuot. And the number 50 symbolizes the Yovel year. According to Kabbala, these numbers have an underlying significance in this world.

world was created for the sake of אברהם, Rav Weissmandl decoded the word “אברהם” with 50 letter skips. He based his idea of looking for Bible codes on statements of the Kabbalist רבינו בחיי and the Vilna Gaon, who coined the phrase “ליכא מידי דלא רמזי באורייתא” – there is nothing that is not hinted to in the Torah.³ However, Rav Weissmandl’s codes were not fully popularized until the rapid technological advancement of the computer which created a generation of Bible codes mania.

In fact, modern Bible codes made their first global debut in a 1994 article in the journal *Statistical Science* titled “Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis”. The paper was written by Associate Professor of mathematics at Hebrew University Eliyahu Rips, Doron Witzum, and Yaov Rosenberg (collectively known as WRR), as a way to publicize their invention of a computer program that turns the Torah into a matrix of Hebrew letters, thus skipping random letter intervals to create hidden messages. The article delineates their “Great Rabbis Experiment”, in which Professor Rips and his team used their self-designed computer software in order to decode the names and dates of 32 famous Rabbis buried in the book of בראשית. In order to substantiate the significance of their findings, Professor Rips attempted to find the names and dates of the Rabbis in close proximity to each other. Accordingly, the paper employs complicated statistics in order to prove the statistical significance of this intricate cross-word puzzle in the Torah. In the article, Professor Rips claims that “randomization analysis shows that the effect [meaning the hidden message] is significant at the level of 0.00002,” and that his data resulted in .000016, thereby deeming it statistically significant. Professor Rips includes in his experiment a control group in which the same ELS (Equidistant Letter Sequences) method was used in a Hebrew version of Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. Oddly

³ <http://torahone.com/docs/TorahCodes.htm>

enough, Rips' results came back over 1, which is completely statistically insignificant. In the article, Rips concludes that his discovery in בראשית "cannot be explained purely on the basis of fortuitous combinations."⁴

In fact, the WRR's paper was reviewed and approved by three levels of secular peer review. Among these reviewers was *Statistical Science's* Editor Robert Kass who was "baffled" by Rip's results. In addition, Harold Gans a, senior Cryptologic Mathematician [code breaker] at the US Department of Defense, repeated Professor Rip's experiment and came out with similar statistically significant results.⁵

While Professor Rips' article introduced the concept of Torah codes to a global academic audience, Bible codes weren't popularized until Michael Drosin's 1997 *New York Times* best-selling book *The Bible Codes*, and later his 2002 book *The Bible Codes II*. In his books, Drosnin astoundingly claims to have used the Bible codes to find certain predicted events hidden in the Torah. Among his findings is the exact date of the Gulf War, Yigal Amir's assassination of Yitchak Rabin, a series of earthquakes in Japan, and the Febuary 25, 1996 terrorist bombing of a Jerusalem bus. In addition, Drosnin claims to have found many predictions which we now know failed. For instance, Drosnin predicts an Atomic Holocaust that would end the world by 2006 and the assassination of Yassar Arafat, who eventually died of natural causes.⁶

Due to the many apparent fallacies in Drosnin's books, the scholarly world reacted with different approaches. Eliyahu Rips, Witzum, and Rosenberg maintained their belief in the

⁴ Doron Witzum, Eliyahu Rips, Yaov Rosenber: *Statistical Science* 1994 *Equidistant Letter Sequences in the Book of Genesis*

⁵ Aish HaTorah, <http://israel.aish.com/discoveryisrael/program.htm>

⁶ Drosnin, Michael (2001-09-11) *Bible Code II: The Countdowns*

statistical significance of Bible codes. However, they dismissed Drosnin's codes by claiming he "employs no scientific methodology." In addition, aside from the Halachik prohibition against predicting the future, Witzum claims using the codes to predict "the future is impossible."⁷

Likewise, Australian mathematician Professor Brendan McKay, Israeli psychologist Maya Bar-Hillel, Israeli Mathematician Dror Bar-Natan, and Gil Kalai (conjointly referred to as MBBK), concur that "all semblance of scientific method" is missing from Drosnin's books. In addition, Professor McKay employed the same techniques as Drosnin for Charles Dicken's *Moby Dick* and ironically uncovers a prediction of Drosnin's death.

On the other hand, unlike Professor Rips and his colleagues, MBBK utterly denied the statistical significance of Torah Codes. Beyond critiquing just Drosnin's methodologies, in an article published in *Chance*, an American Statistical association magazine, the group of mathematicians attacked the WRR's original Bible codes article as well. In addition, in a *Statistical Science* publication, Professor McKay and his team more extensively critiqued Professor Rips' research. MBBK's refutation includes a presentation of four major points.⁸

The first and most glaring refutation is based on the work of Bible scholar Professor Jeffery Tigay. In an article titled "Text of the Torah," Tigay details the questionable precision in the Koren edition, and thus of our current text, of the Torah. The Koren edition of the Torah, which was published in Jerusalem in 1962, is a form of the Masoretic text. Ostensibly, the Masoretic text of the Torah is based on texts from the ninth and tenth centuries. Astonishingly, these older manuscripts have remained consistent since the late Second

⁷ Rich Milne: Leaderu.com. <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/bibcode.html>

⁸ "Scientific Refutation of the Bible Codes" by Brendan McKay <http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/torah.html>

Temple times, 300 BCE, as exhibited in the Dead Sea scrolls from Qumran. However, the uncovered Dead Sea scrolls were not a complete version of the Tanach, and by comparing the Koren edition of the Torah with the Leningrad Codex, an older complete manuscript of the entire Bible, from 11th century CE, it is apparent that the ancient documents “have 45 letters more than the Koren edition.” And therefore, while the text of the Torah has been preserved particularly well, it is evident that the precise text is not 100% what was given to us at Sinai. Due to spelling differences in words with vowels and straight out transcription errors, it is “inconceivable that this text, or any other known text of the Torah, is identical to the original text, letter for letter.”

“Proponents [of Bible Codes] depend on the assumption that the text of the Bible on which they base them is ... completely identical to the original text.” However, these minute changes in our text of the Torah, “drastically affect the number of letters it contains.”⁹

Another one of Professor McKay’s arguments is that identical statistical reasoning employed by WRR for Bible Codes can be used with the *King James Bible*, the *Quran*, and certain classical works of literature. However, a considerable facet in the belief of the Torah is that there is no other book from God. Therefore, a belief in the Torah’s divinity established by the Bible Codes would negate the belief that no other book is divine. The idea that there are those who adopt Professor Rips’ ELS decoding method for the *King James Bible* and the *Quran* is dangerous ground for any Orthodox Jew, especially a kiruv organization which veers far away from the notion of religious pluralism.

In addition, Professor McKay’s discoveries that ELS works on other texts like *War and Peace*, *Moby Dick*, and Shakespeare

⁹ Professor Jeffery Tigay: “The Text of the Torah” <http://www.sas.upenn/~jtgat/codetext.html>

completely undermines the statistical uniqueness of Torah Codes. For instance, using ELS in *War and Peace*, MBBK decoded ראש השנה and הנורה references along with predictions of the deaths of Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, and Princess Diana with her chauffeur Henri Paul, within close proximity. Most surprisingly, by considering every possible variant (adding and removing some names), when using the ELS method in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, McKay's results were .0000001 (one in a million), which is extremely statistically significant.¹⁰ Subsequently, if codes found in Tolstoy are statistically significant and sometimes even higher in significance than messages found in the Bible, there is nothing unique in decoding random words or phrases in the Bible.

Another one of Professor McKay's refutations reveals that WRR's experimentation with Bible codes was "exceptionally susceptible to systematic bias" due to data manipulation. MBBK sources the WRR's data manipulation to the fact that before going about his experimentations on Torah Codes, Professor Rips chose the words and concepts, which thus created an experimenter bias on the study sample. Professor McKay suggests that despite Professor Rips claims that his "appellations" (experiment sample – 32 Rabbis) were prepared by an independent expert, the earliest available documents on the experiments (a lecture given by Rips in 1985) makes no mention of an independent expert. Rather, Professor McKay points out that Rips says that he took "every possible variant that [he] considered reasonable."¹¹

Because Professor Rips speaks of an independent expert in his article, Brendan McKay's suggestions are really no more

¹⁰ "Scientific Refutation of the Bible Codes" by Brendan McKay <http://cs.anu.edu.au/~bdm/dilugim/torah.html>

¹¹ B. McKay, D. Bar-Natan, M. Bar-Hillel, and G. Kalai (1999). Solving the Bible Code Puzzle. Statistical Science, 14. projecteuclid.org.

than conspiracy theories on a debatable experiment. However, as Robert Auman, winner of the 2005 Noble Prize in economics eloquently expresses,

Though the basic thesis of the research seems widely improbable, for many years I thought that an ironclad case had been made for the codes; I did not see how 'cheating' could have been possible. Then came the work of the opponents [MBBK]. Though this work did not convince me that the data had been manipulated, it did convince me that it could have been; that manipulation was technically possible.¹²

Most striking of MBBK's arguments is that Professor McKay attempted to replicate Rips' experiment and "all of them failed to detect anything not easily explained by random chance." One of the most important principles with experiments is that if other scientists or researchers are unable to repeat the experiment and receive similar data, then the original hypothesis (in this case, the statistical significance of Torah codes) is not conclusive. MBBK reason that most of Professor Rips' statistically significant results are "too good to be true," anyway. Indeed, Professor McKay's definitive conclusion regarding Professor Rips' flawed data is that his "experiments were tuned toward an overly idealized result consistent with the common expectations of statistically naïve researchers;"¹³ thereby creating an additional experimenter bias.

As one would expect, Rips, Weitzmen, and Rosenberg attempted to discredit Professor McKay's attacks. In fact, Doron Weitzmen claimed that an interview with one of the experts on the MBBK staff revealed that some of Professor McKay's experiments

¹² "Analysis of the "Gans" Committee Report"

¹³ B. McKay, D. Bar-Natan, M. Bar-Hillel, and G. Kalai (1999). Solving the Bible Code Puzzle. *Statistical Science*, 14

validated WRR's work. In addition, in 2006, three new Torah codes papers were published at the 18th International Conference on Pattern Recognition.¹⁴ However, this battle over the validity and statistical uniqueness of Torah codes is rather set in a stalemate.

Due to the plethora of reasoning and proofs for each side of the discrepancy over the statistical significance and uniqueness of modern Bible codes, one can choose to take any side of the debate. Harold Gans, the aforementioned US Security Code breaker, opts to believe in the significance of the codes. In fact, due to this conviction, Gans expresses that "it would be natural to conclude that the author [of the Torah] is a Divine being."¹⁵ Accordingly, this logic, that the statistical significance of Bible codes proves the Divinity of Torah, is something Aish Discovery Seminar participants are regularly exposed to. Nevertheless, this reasoning is flawed. In reality, Professor Rips himself, the lead professor of this entire revolution declared in a public statement that "the only conclusion that can be drawn from the scientific research regarding the Torah codes is that they exist and that they are not mere coincidence."¹⁶ Even Professor Rips does not say that Bible Codes should be used to prove that God authored the Torah. In addition, *The Bible Codes* author, Michael Drosnin, is an agnostic despite the fact that he makes a living off the 'existence' of the codes. "Everyone I met seemed to assume that if the code was real, it must be from God. I did not."

In a CNN interview with Drosnin, he was asked how to explain the codes in light of the fact that he doesn't believe it proves God, and he bluntly responded: "I can't". Additionally Drosnin answered to a reporters question over whether a time traveler

¹⁴ H. J. Gans.."A Primer on the Torah Codes Controversy for Laymen

¹⁵ Aish HaTorah, <http://israel.aish.com/discoveryisrael/program.htm>

¹⁶ Professor Rips' public statement against Michael Drosnin's book *The Bible Codes* http://www.despatch.cth.com.au/Articles_V/Torah_Extracts.htm

wrote the Bible and put the predictive codes in, “I’m a reporter and can’t go past the hard evidence. There is a code; therefore, there is an encoder. I don’t know what he or she is.”¹⁷ And so, even if one would make the (albeit controversial) assumption that Bible codes are statistically significant and unique, Drosnin’s personal belief is clear evidence that Bible codes do not necessarily prove the Divinity of the Torah.

Essentially, the use of contemporary Bible Codes as a basis of belief that God gave us the Torah comes down to two main issues. Firstly, there is a serious mathematical debate over whether these codes actually exist in the sense that they are meaningful. Additionally, Drosnin’s agnostic beliefs prove the idea that hidden messages in the Torah don’t necessarily indicate a Divine source. Accordingly, *Moby Dick* is attributed to the authorship of Charles Dickens not God despite the fact that Professor McKay successfully used ELS codes in order to find secret messages within *Moby Dick*. Therefore, if the quasi-statistical significance of Bible codes doesn’t necessarily prove God authored the Torah, then why are Kiruv organizations wasting a good portion of their lectures on it? How could such a fragile foundation of belief in the Torah’s Divinity create sincere worship of God?

Conclusively, the use of the controversial ELS Bible Codes to establish or strengthen the tenet that God authored the Torah is an unwise move. What happens if these Aish Hatorah Discovery participants find out that modern Bible Codes don’t necessarily mean anything or that the codes didn’t convince the lead researchers that the Torah is Divine? On the other hand, a legitimate uncontroversial way to strengthen a pre-existing belief in the Divinity of Torah would be through Rav Weissmandl’s meaningful Torah codes, which are not subject to the statistical significance debate.

¹⁷ Interview on CNN “Meet Michael Drosnin the Author, The Bible Code.” <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9706/04/israel.bible/drosninlog.html>

I believe that we should establish our belief in the Torah's Divinity based on the brilliance of what the Torah actually says, along with its historical validity. Additionally, I think we should spend more of our time and effort on what God actually wants from us by studying the Torah itself, and not searching for the alleged mystifying codes hidden within? As former research associate with Probe Ministries Minister Rich Milne eloquently concludes his article of Bible codes,

An important question to ask ourselves is "Why are we so fascinated by codes and mysterious messages in a book as clear as the Bible?" Do we not trust that God has given us all we need to know....in a text that all of us can read? ... God has given us a Bible so that we might know him and make him known. ELS codes in the Bible do not seem to do much more than pique curiosity.¹⁸

¹⁸ Rich Milne: Leaderu.com. <http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/bibcode.html>

Must a Woman's Role Involve Motherhood?

It is often assumed that a woman's main role in 'עבודת ה' is through motherhood.

Does the תורה itself make this assumption? Is this message explicitly relayed within the Holy Scripture? Is this a תורה obligation, or is it merely a natural assumption based on a woman's biological make-up? Is it simply a logical action for a woman to perpetuate her legacy, or does this logic assume some Divine backing? An attempt at answering these questions entails an exploration into the depths of תורה and חז"ל to see if the תורה portrays an ideal role for women.

In order to understand these questions, we must first understand what characteristics the Torah identifies with women. In the creation of man and woman it states, [מסטריו¹].² God created the woman from the inner and internal part of man; thus woman is fundamentally imbued with a tendency towards the internal approach. It is this fundamental internality which we will now explore.

Another insight into the true essence of woman is also expressed in בראשית. חוה is described as עזר כנגדו³. אדם, man, is not complete without his counterpart. It therefore may seem that חוה or woman's destiny is to feel whole and complete through helping others and understanding their ways. This understanding, also

¹ רש"י בראשית ב:כא

² בראשית ב:כא

³ בראשית ב:יח

known as *בינה יתירה*⁴, is relayed through the story of *אברהם* and *שרה* and *יצחק* and *רבקה* who are the next paradigms of parents in the *תורה*. In both stories, the woman's *בינה יתירה* is revealed. The couples each argued about which child would perpetuate the Jewish nation and we see that the woman in both stories had the foresight and insight to choose the correct child for the perpetuation of *כלל ישראל*.

מהר"ל describes the woman as being a *קליעה*, a braid or a connector⁵. It is the woman who is able to connect that which is in the inside and the outside. In his *אבות על דרך החיים* *מהר"ל* explains why the world was created with the letter *ה*⁶. The outer part of the *ה* (which is a *ד*) represents the four directions in which reality can scatter, whereas the *ו*, which is at the center of the *ה* represents the union of these four points into one. Therefore, the *ה* is the female force; the ability to unite a seemingly fragmented world. This highlights the female's unique ability to be involved with the physical and mundane in order to produce the spirituality from within.

It is through both of these characteristics and with the *מהר"ל*'s insight into the woman that we can now better understand the woman that is presented by *תורה*. The insight granted to her by the *צלע* coupled with her inclination to be the connector, brings together her *בינה יתירה* (an intuition which allows her to connect and understand others) and her desire to be *עוזר כנגדו* (to help others in what they need).

These characteristics, bestowed upon the woman as a creature, are the impetus for the woman's inclination to make connections with her children. Her intuition, when used correctly, facilitates a deeper understanding of the needs of her child and

⁴ נדה מה: – "מלמד שנתן הקב"ה בינה יתירה באשה"

⁵ מה"רל חידושי אגדות נדה מה ע"ב ד"ה מלמד שקלעה

⁶ בראשית ב:ד – "בהבראם"

creates a deeper connection through her desire to help and be of service to those who need her. All of these traits seem to be the quintessential characteristics of a mother.

Yet, does this mean that women have an obligation to utilize these traits for motherhood? If there is an individual woman who does not embody these characteristics or does not desire these connections, is she still required to cultivate these relationships?

To answer these questions, we first must see whether women in general have a Torah obligation to be mothers. In בראשית ויברך אתם we find the first מצוה of the Torah, that of procreation: אלוקים לאמר פרו ורבו פסוק. By virtue of the fact that the beginning of the פסוק is written in plural and directed at both man and woman, there are מפרשים who view this statement as a blessing for procreation for both⁷.

In addition, from the very first curse of חוה we see that her role as woman is destined to include motherhood, הרבה ארבה עצבונך, ויהרנך בעצב תלדי בנים⁸. This idea is further evident in אבן עזרא's commentary regarding the prohibition of גבר על אשה, where he writes: כי האשה לא נבראת כי אם להקים הזרע⁹. Clearly, אבן עזרא sees the woman's role of motherhood as not only intuitive and natural, but also as somewhat of an obligation.

If we continue into גיטין, we find that a woman is obligated under the general obligation of procreation לשהבית יצרה¹⁰. There are those that read this as a source for a general obligation of procreation and thereby relate to it as obligating women in procreation.¹¹

⁷ רמב"ן טז, רש"י, סנהדרין נט:

⁸ בראשית ג:טז

⁹ דברים כב:

¹⁰ ישעיה מה:ח

¹¹ תוספות – חגיגה ב, בבא בתרא יג, גיטין מא:

This thread continues into Chazal. In פרקי אבות we see that both men and women are asked three questions after 120 years when they get to שמים. God does not differentiate between gender when it comes to the Day of Judgment. The woman's role of procreation supersedes the rest of the mitzvot in importance and relevance at the end of her days. After 120 years, God wants to know whether the woman utilized that which God blessed her with. And in this vain she is no different than man; she, too, has an obligation.

Furthermore, it is the woman alone who determines the Jewishness of her family. It is through the mother that the הלכה determines whether or not a child is considered Jewish. One cannot deny that the תורה views the woman's role as mother integral to the paradigm of Jewish family dynamics.

It is on the premise of this integral role and seeming obligation that many have suggested and accepted the reasoning behind a woman's exemption from מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמא first put forth this idea, which has since been widely accepted and developed: he suggested that women are exempt from the straining time-bound מצוות in order to enable them to fulfill the primary and integral role of serving their husbands (and perhaps by extension, their entire families).¹²

Through the specific characteristics allocated to women in creation, stories throughout תנ"ך and in issues of הלכה, it seems to be clear that the woman's role as a mother is viewed as both integral and imperative. Throughout the sources, women seem to have an obligation in motherhood and parenting like men. Yet, the normative הלכה maintains that despite these facts, the actual מצוה of procreation does *not* apply to women. The consensus is that the הלכה is¹³ האיש מצווה על פריה ורביה אבל לא האשה.

¹² אבודרהם השלם, שער השלישי ע' כה

¹³ בראשית א: כח; רמב"ם הלכות אישות טו:ב, טור שולחן ערוך אבן העזר א:יג, קידושין לה.

This presents a puzzling question. Many assume women are exempt from מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמא on the premise that the תורה and חז"ל view their primary role as one of motherhood. If so, why did the תורה not include women in פרו ורבו? If it is so obvious that an integral part of the woman's role is to be a mother, why not give her an explicit תורה command that can be fulfilled every time she does not do a מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמא?

A commonly suggested answer to this dilemma is the approach suggested by מלב"ם, extracted from the פסוק that describes the תורה as דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום¹⁴. He explains that the תורה would not obligate an individual to do something that by definition involves pain, suffering or physical danger. Therefore, the command of childbirth, which by definition is cursed to be that of suffering and pain, is not commanded upon the woman.

The problem with this reasoning is that there are מצוות which God commands a person to not only suffer for, but at times even to die for – יהרג ואל יעבור. Some מצוות even have a built-in condition which mandates one to both suffer and/or give up one's life to fulfill, like that of מלחמת מצוה – an obligatory war, which we are commanded to not only suffer in pain for but also give up our lives for. War by definition is dangerous and painful and yet the תורה still commands it and we still endure pain for it. Therefore the question remains: why not command a woman to fulfill פרו ורבו if its importance is so obvious and integral?

In addition, even if one could explain why people must give their lives for war efforts but not for childbirth, is it rational to say that the תורה would not command people to harm themselves, but would command them to harm another individual instead? In other words, if childbirth is so painful that a woman can't be commanded to participate because it does not qualify as דרכי נעם, then why should a man be allowed, and even commanded, to

¹⁴ משלי ג:י"ז

commit that type of crime against a woman but putting her in that situation?

A different answer is suggested by author Tzvi Freeman:

This also explains another distinction between gender roles in Torah: Where the man has a command to do a mitzvah, the woman often has a mitzvah -- but no command. Like in this mitzvah of having babies (which happens to be the first mitzvah in the Torah). The way our tradition reads it, the man is commanded. God tells him he must procreate. The woman is not commanded. It's optional. And yet, she has nine months of the mitzvah, plus most of the nurturing. Not much room to compare there. So, too, in many other mitzvahs. Like hearing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, sitting in the sukkah on Sukkot, studying Torah and more¹⁵. A man must do these things. Women take it on voluntarily. Most of prayer is this way as well: Women have a minimal requirement in prayer, with no obligation to get to the minyan. What men are required to do, women take on voluntarily.

A man conquers, therefore God deals with him by conquering – by commanding him to do¹⁶. A woman carries the world upward spontaneously, from within. Therefore, her mitzvahs come as a natural response, from within. In existential terms: there is Doing and there is Being. The man is about the causative – making some-

¹⁵ רמ"בם ספר המצוות מצוה ר"מח

¹⁶ בראשית א: כח – "וכבשה" – ללמדן שהאיש שדרכו לכבוש

The idea represented here, that a woman's desire to procreate, "comes as a natural desire from within," is echoed in the Gemara קידושין מא. – "Because she desires [to be married] by nature, God therefore does not need to give her an extra command."

חז"ל derive the details of the מצוות from the texts and contexts of the פסוק that they reference. Therefore, to better understand why חז"ל chose to distinguish between man and woman in the מצווה of פרו ורבו, let us understand the context and words therein. The מצווה of פרו ורבו is suggested in: יבמות טז: to be referring to the individual, based on the word וכבשה. The beginning of the פסוק (פרו ורבו) was commanded to "you" in the plural. But the second half of the פסוק (וּמִלְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וּבְרַשְׁתֶּם), which is written without a ו, is suggested to be hinting at the singular – meaning only the man. If the end of the פסוק is commanded to the conqueror, then the beginning would also be, highlighting חז"ל's interpretation of פרו ורבו as commanded only to man.

There are those who hold though, that this פסוק is in fact not a command but rather a blessing for procreation¹⁹, as the beginning of the פסוק states, וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים. These מפרשים derive the ואתם פרו ורבו שרצו: פרשת נה from a different verse in מצוה

¹⁸ קדושין לא.

¹⁹ סנהדרין נט: - רש"י, רמב"ן טז:

בְּאֶרֶץ וְרֵבּוֹ בָּהּ²⁰ This command is directed at נָח and thus is viewed as the source for פָּרוּ וְרָבוּ which is in the singular and directed at the man.

In addition, the next instance in which the פָּרוּ וְרָבוּ command is expressed, is through יַעֲקֹב.²¹ God tells יַעֲקֹב: אֲנִי אֶל-שְׂדֵי פָרָה: יַעֲקֹב. It is in the singular and directed at יַעֲקֹב.²² While it is true that God directed the same command the second and third time towards man alone, maybe the command to the man was in the context of their conversations, and the woman, as was usual, was not a part of God's interactions with man. According to this, הוּא didn't include her in the direct command because it would not fit in the context of the conversation; they felt her role was so obvious in all the other sources that it would be superfluous. Or perhaps, the command is in fact meant to include man only and is not written in the singular or plural consistently for the reason laid forth by the מַהֲר"ל, that before the sin of חוה, this מצוה was written in the plural, because she was in fact commanded to do the dangerous procedure. But once חוה sinned and was punished with painful childbirth, the command was removed. Therefore all the following commands that we find are directed at the man only, or written in the singular.

Yet, if we don't accept the position of the מַלְב"ם and we claim that the תוֹרָה and therefore הוּא are not trying to avoid a command which could result in possible pain or death, we are still left with the question: If הוּא felt that women on a whole would benefit from this obligation and extra explicit command, why wasn't she included in the explicit command?

I would like to suggest that the question of why women didn't get an explicit command (and thus greater reward) for doing

²⁰ בראשית ט:ז

²¹ בראשית לה:יא

²² יבמות סד:

what comes naturally to them, is not a question at all. We are not meant to use our halachic system to focus on the calculations of the reward and benefits of the system of מצוות. This idea is reflected through the statement of חז"ל that, "We should not be like servants who work to get a reward, but rather like servants who work not for reward."²³ The rewards of the halachic system are not meant to drive what we choose to do.

רמב"ם discusses the idea that there exist מצוות השכליות, logical מצוות, which we should come to follow of our own accord. רמב"ם applies this idea in many places²⁴; for example, in regard to killing someone. רמב"ם discusses that a person should not say, "If I were able to [based on הלכה], I would; but rather, even if I could I still would not," because that is the moral and logical decision²⁵.

I believe this concept applies here, in regard to women's role in procreation. God created the world through a system in which people have to procreate. Women as a whole have a natural desire to be married both to ensure their legacy, as is seen through רחל אמינו's prayer to God, וואס אין מטה לי²⁶ and also to actualize the traits which God gave them. Therefore, to command a woman explicitly in a מצווה which comes naturally to her, namely marriage and procreation, would be superfluous and unnecessary²⁷. Men, however, were not endowed with this desire. The תורה therefore had to explicitly command men in order to ensure the continuation of humanity and the Jews.

Additionally, I would like to suggest that perhaps the תורה and חז"ל had another intention in not explicitly commanding women to have children. Perhaps they recognized that there might

²³ אבות א:ג

²⁴ הלכות רוצח ושמירת נפש פ"א הלכה טז

²⁵ שמונה פרקים לרמבם פרק ששי

²⁶ בראשית ל:א

²⁷ משך חכמה – בראשית ט:ז

be exceptions, women to whom the usual desire for motherhood would not apply. And even though the majority of women have an innate desire for procreation and have traits that are imperative to being a good parent, maybe the תורה and God are sending us an important message: It does not *have* to be for every woman; there are numerous roles which a woman can fulfill.

We see throughout תנ"ך that the woman is capable of many different positions. In the wise words of שלמה המלך, אשת חיל has numerous roles in which she excels. כרם נטעה, she plans for a field, and buys it, with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard." It is through the woman's intellect that she has the ability to עשתה לה שש וארגמן לבושה make covers for herself; her clothing is fine linen and purple²⁸.

In addition, דבורה, יעל and אביגיל each represent female leaders of ישראל. Each woman led in her own individual way with the general characteristics which have been identified with women. דבורה led in modesty from under a palm tree, יעל with her understanding of the motivations of חיסרה was able to manipulate him and bring about his downfall, and אביגיל the wife of נבל, through her desire to provide for the needs of her husband, was able to save him without embarrassing or disgracing him even when her life was at risk.

Perhaps, therefore, the תורה was creating a leniency for a woman who does not exhibit the ordinary desires and qualifications for motherhood. Perhaps we can suggest that the תורה exempted women from having children in order that if such an individual woman were to arise, she would not be obligated to procreate and enter motherhood until she felt the need to do so.

²⁸ משלי לא:ט, י

Maintaining a Healthy Lifestyle: A Jewish Perspective

Imagine there is a town, a very nice town with all of its streets laid out in a grid. The houses are neatly lined up. There is a post office, a hospital, a school, a supermarket and a bookstore; every need can be met in this town. The mayor of the town is the best mayor, perfectly leading and governing the town. And because of this mayor, everyone wants to move into this town. The town hall comes up with a new housing project, but there is just one catch: the new housing project will be next to the garbage dump. It will be so close that it's practically on top of the landfill. The houses will be beautiful just like the houses in the rest of the city but they might be a little smelly. Is this how someone wants to live? In filth? Surely not. One might reason, "Well, it's part of such a great town and it's a place to live, and everyone needs a house. Maybe one day the garbage dump will be closed." Sure, it's a place to live, but it's not livable.

Now imagine the town is a body. All the parts are working correctly. Everything is in working order. Everything except for one thing: the lifestyle of the person who inhabits that body. Healthy food and exercise are not important. Unhealthy habits are the essence of the body. Is this a way to live? Surely not. Is this a way to serve 'ה? Definitely not. The body may be able to live, but 'עבודת ה' is not up to par.

The תורה says ¹רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד. This פסוק, found in ארץ בני ישראל enters before נאום משה in the middle of פרשת ואתחנן. ונשמרתם מאד לנפשותיכם, later², he warns them again, ישראל.

¹ דברים ד:ט

² דברים ד:טז

An obvious question arises. Why in the middle of all this חיוק and תוכחה are בני ישראל being told to “guard their souls”? Can souls really be guarded? Why is שמירת הנפש emphasizing משה? In order to understand these פסוקים פרק ד', as a whole must first be understood.

פרק ד' begins with משה telling בני ישראל to listen to the תורה and follow the מצוות because they are a great nation³. What other nation deserves to get these מצוות and the chance to get close to ה'? Then משה warns them that נפשך לא תשכח רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד. Why? The פסוק continues: פן תשכח את הדברים אשר ראו עיניך ופן יסורו מלבבך כל ימי חייך והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך⁴. According to נסים משה, is talking about all the נסים that ה' performed for them in the מדבר and on סיני. The reason why they deserved such great נסים and מצות is because they are special, and because of the fact that they are special, they must guard their souls.

The יקר takes a different approach.⁷ He says that guarding yourself refers to the body. Then the פסוק proceeds to talk about the נפש. Why does the פסוק say מאד only at נפש? Because the נפש is more important, but in order to guard our נפשות, we must guard our bodies. [The irony of the name of the מפרש who makes this comment must be noted. כלי means vessel and יקר means precious. The body is the precious vessel that contains the soul.]

³ דברים פרק ד'

⁴ דברים ד:ט

⁵ ...חזר ואמר רק אני מזהירך מאד להשמר ולשמור עצמך מאד מאד לזכור מאין באו אליך המצוות, שלא תשכח מעמך הר סיני מכל הדברים אשר ראו שם עיניך הקולות והלפידים את כבודו ואת גדלו ודבריו אשר שמעת שם מתוך האש, ותודיע כל הדברים אשר ראו עיניך במעמד הנכבד ההוא לבניך ולבני בניך עד עולם. ופירש הטעם כי השם עשה המעמד ההוא כדי שתלמדו ליראה אותו כל הימים ואת בניכם תלמדון לדורות עולם, אם כן עשו אתם ככה ואל תשכחו אותו...

⁶ רק השמר לך - הטעם, אם תשכח כל דבר, אל תשכח יום אשר עמדת בסיני

⁷ השמר לך, רוצה לומר שמירת הגוף. ולא הזכיר נו מאוד כמו בשמירת הנפש אשר בשמירתה צריך האדם להזהר ביותר מבשמירת הגוף, לכן אמר ושמור את נפשך מאוד

⁹ משנה תורה הלכות דעות פרק ד הלכה א

Now that it has been established that the נפש needs to be guarded because of the קדושה it holds, let us recall the כלי יקר's first statement – רוצה לומר שמירת הגוף. Why is the כלי יקר talking about the body? What is the connection between body and soul?

In order to guard the soul, there is a necessity for simultaneous שמירת הגוף. שמירת הגוף doesn't only mean "guarding your body." It means taking care of it, watching it, keeping it healthy. This way, you will keep your נפש healthy, too. The uniqueness of בני ישראל is their innate קדושה, housed in the נפש which is in turn housed within the body.

רמב"ם writes in משנה תורה all about how to live a healthy life. There is a whole chapter of instructions regarding how to maintain this lifestyle. He advises what foods should be eaten, the amount of sleep one should receive, and when to go to the bathhouse, among many other things⁹. He writes about healthful eating and ways of living as part of הלכה. He emphasizes the importance of a balanced diet and lifestyle. As a physician, רמב"ם understood the significance of a healthy lifestyle. As a rabbi, he preached it.

רמב"ם advises to stay away from unhealthy things and to behave in a healthy way. The reason, he explains, is מדרכי ה' הוא¹⁰. Again we find another ראשון explaining the reason to be healthy because it is the way of ה'. This follows the logic of being healthy because ה' קדוש is בני ישראל and they follow the ways of ה'.

The תורה gives us guidelines of how and what to eat in the laws of כשרות. Although it is possible to eat unhealthily even within the parameters of כשרות, maybe these laws were given in order to remind us and help us be aware of what we do eat. Every time we open our mouths to take a bite, we must first make a ברכה. We are not allowed to eat certain foods because they do not have the correct סימנים. If we follow the logic of "you are what you eat," then anytime we eat something unhealthy, we are damaging our bodies

¹⁰ שם פרק ד הלכה א

and therefore damaging our souls. Maybe we have כשרות not only as guidelines, but also as a way to be aware of what goes into our bodies. If the reason we have כשרות is in fact because we are supposed to be קדושים, then we must certainly maintain that קדושה by leading healthy lifestyles.

In מורה נבוכים, when discussing the prohibition against eating pig, he writes, “The major reason why the law abhors it is its being very dirty and feeding on dirty things.”¹¹ The pig is a very dirty animal. This again follows the logic that if בני ישראל are קדושים, dirty things should not enter their bodies, in order to protect their souls. He then gives reasons for the prohibition of certain types of fat, חלב. He explains that it “makes us full, spoils the digestion, and produces cold and thin blood...[it is] difficult to digest and constitutes harmful nourishment.”¹²

The restriction of eating מן החי, אבר מן החי, the רמב"ם proposes, is to curb cruelty. He also suggests that the reason for שחיטה is also to prevent cruelty. “Now since the necessity to have good food requires that animals be killed, the aim was to kill them in the easiest manner, and it was forbidden to torment them through killing them in a reprehensible manner.”¹³ The aspect of anti-cruelty is also in the commandment to not slaughter a mother animal and its baby on the same day.

רמב"ם isn't just preaching. It is obvious that he is trying to convey an important idea about כשרות. According to רמב"ם, the reason for כשרות is to ensure that we don't “inherit” the negative characteristics of what we do eat. In this case, the reason we don't eat pig is so that we don't become dirty. We don't eat מן החי so

¹¹ מורה נבוכים מה:קיא

It should also be noted that quotes from מורה נבוכים in this article are presented in English translation. מורה נבוכים was originally written in Arabic.

¹² שם

¹³ מורה נבוכים 112a page 48 Chapter

as not to become cruel. We become aware of what we eat. We, the people of Israel, cannot become cruel or dirty. We must follow in the ways of ה'. נשמה helps us be aware of what goes into our bodies. We do not want to have these bad features and we do not want them to become parts of our personality.

We also become aware of everything that we eat when we say a ברכה. Every time we put something in our mouths, we say a ברכה and recognize that it is from ה'. In this way we not only put food into our bodies, we also put ה' into it. We maintain our קדושה in our bodies, and therefore keep our souls קדוש.

Rabbi Akiva Tatz, in his book *Worldmask*, has a whole chapter called *Eating as Connection*. In this chapter he writes, "Food nourishes; it provides the energy for the bond between the body and the נשמה. This bond is life, and life itself is the greatest pleasure imaginable. The blessing we pronounce after experiencing the pleasure of food, 'בוראי נפשות', is worded for the life energy we derive from the food, the energy which connects the opposite poles of body and נשמה into an integrated whole which can move towards unity with the Creator."¹⁴

Now exchange נפש and נשמה and the point is proven. The body and the soul are connected. We use food as the way to connect them. But the food that is eaten needs to be healthy food, otherwise the connection is damaged.

It is obvious that we must live healthy lives. If the point of our lives is to continually grow and work on ourselves, why ruin our קדושה with unhealthy habits? Those of us who are lucky enough to learn תורה should know and understand the importance of leading a healthy life. Just as it is impossible to live a Jewish lifestyle and serve ה' without the תורה, it is impossible to live any kind of life without the proper nutrition.

¹⁴ ראה 152, *Worldmask*, Rabbi Akiva Tatz,

Do Disabilities Disable?

Many societies today place a heavy emphasis on adaptations for and inclusion of people with physical disabilities. For example, there is an entire law in the United States dedicated to assisting those with physical disabilities. What insights does the Torah offer on this subject? How are the Jewish people guided in behaving toward individuals with physical disabilities? Can individuals with disabilities benefit from viewing תורה personalities in similar situations as role models?

The Torah states, ¹ לא תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ויראת מא-להיך אני ה' – “You shall not curse a deaf person and you shall not place a stumbling block in front of a blind person and you shall fear your God, I am Hashem.” Following the interpretations of חז"ל, many of the מפרשים extend these איסורים to all people, not just the blind and deaf.² They are nevertheless an obvious source of how one is expected to behave towards the blind and deaf, and presumably anyone with a physical impediment.

According to the ספר החינוך,³ the reason for this מצוה is to prevent the individual with a handicap from being cursed or tripped. It is cruel to do, and one does not know if it will have a serious effect on the individual. Rav Hirsch adds that such behavior displays an utter lack of respect.⁴ He understands the word לקלל to be derived from the root word of קל, meaning light, the opposite of כבד, from כבד, meaning heavy. Although teasing or bullying a physically disabled person may seem light, petty and

¹ ויקרא יט:יד

² לדוגמא, ראה רש"י שם

³ ספר החינוך רלא

⁴ שם

unimportant because, after all, the victim cannot see or hear or walk, the victim should be treated with the same "heaviness," substance and significance as anyone else.

However, רמב"ם's reason for these מצוות is different.⁵ According to him, the מצוה is directed toward the one involved in cursing or tripping. He explains that one who would do something as cruel as tormenting a deaf or a blind person is simply harming himself. The person being tormented has no idea he is being tormented; rather it makes the tormenter become cruel and inhumane. This ספר החינוך⁶ says אדם נפעל כפי פעולותיו, a man is formed according to his actions. Though one's actions may not obviously affect others, they inevitably will affect oneself.

Though these reasons are valid and legitimate, it is difficult to understand the need to justify such an obviously reasonable מצוה. In fact, these מצוות in general seem so obvious it is surprising that they are explicitly written in the תורה at all. When one looks in the stories about physically disabled individuals in תנ"ך, however, one realizes that these מצוות are more relevant and necessary than one might have originally thought.

מפיבשת בן יהונתן, a temporary king of Israel, is described as being נכה רגלים⁷, unable to use both of his feet. דוד realized such an individual might in fact require extra help, and as a token of his respect for שאול, he promised מפיבשת the inheritance of שאול's land as well as a lifelong invitation to eat at his table. From these immensely kind gestures, it is evident that דוד properly cared for מפיבשת in an additional way.

Their relationship appears to be sound until ציבא's servant, approached דוד during אבשלום's rebellion claiming that מפיבשת was disloyal to דוד. דוד believed this falsehood and promised

⁵ ספר המצוות להרמב"ם מצות ל"ח שיז

⁶ ספר החינוך מצוה טז "אל תחשב"

⁷ שמואל ב ד:ז

half of מפיבשת's land. The מלבי"ם⁸ explains that דוד's immediate punishment for this was גרה שמעי בן cursing him and throwing stones at him as an act of disrespect and rebellion. דוד also received a long term punishment for splitting מפיבשת's field between him and ציבא: his kingdom would eventually be split in two⁹.

When דוד paid a visit to ירושלים and found מפיבשת in an unkempt and neglected state, he learned that ציבא had tricked him and taken advantage of מפיבשת's disability to steal מפיבשת's rightful inheritance. Nevertheless, מפיבשת did not act angrily towards דוד, assuming דוד knew of ציבא's lies, and still referred to דוד as מלאך אלוקים. כל כך שמח בלבו על ביאת מלכו עד שלא ירע בעיניו גם אם יקח מלבי"ם explains, he was at his worst state, financially and physically, yet מפיבשת was at his worst state, financially and physically, yet he still had the ability to regard דוד with awe and be happy with whatever he had at that moment. Because of this spark of optimism, מפיבשת merits to be called an אדם גדול בתורה¹¹.

The end of מפיבשת's life is undeniably tragic. דוד was forced to offer the גבעונים the lives of seven of שאול's descendants to compensate for שאול's poor dealings with them. Unfortunately, מפיבשת was one of these seven descendants. The גמרא¹² explains that in order to decide who was to be killed, דוד had each descendant pass before the ארון. If the ארון seized them, they were destined to die. How could it be then, that the פסוק says, מפיבשת על מפיבשת¹³ The גמרא explains that דוד did pity מפיבשת. He prayed fervently that the ארון wouldn't seize him, but it did. דוד realized this was a situation in which מפיבשת deserved to be treated like anyone in his place, despite his disability.

⁸ שמואל ב טז:

⁹ שבת נו:

¹⁰ מלבי"ם שמואל ב יט:כה

¹¹ ירושלמי קדושין ד:א

¹² יבמות עט.

¹³ שמואל ב כא:ז

The complicated story of מפיבשת's life depicts the very fine line between circumstances which demand special attention for disabled individuals and situations which demand that they should be treated the same as anyone else. Perhaps, then, this is the lesson the תורה is teaching regarding this population. דוד himself had trouble making the proper distinction between these two cases.

מפיבשת's relatively positive attitude despite his situation is inspiring. What is more inspiring is that of אהוד בן גרה, who not only achieved greatness despite his disability, but actually *used* his disability to accomplish something. אהוד is described as ¹⁴אטר יד ימינו, unable to use his right hand. רש"י offers two explanations¹⁵, גמיד...דבר כוון מחמת חול, clearly connoting a negative, sickly trait, and אטום...שלא היה שולט בה, indicating a lack of control of his hand. אהוד was able to use this apparent disability to trick עגלון's guards by having his sword on his right hip instead of the usual left, thus succeeding in killing עגלון.

אהוד represents someone who had a disability in one area but compensated with intellect and strength in another area. It is possible, as well, for one to use the very aspect that is the cause of a disability as the source for success. משה רבינו is the quintessential model for this situation. When משה appeared to ה' for the first time with his mission to go to פרעה, פרעה felt incapable of speaking to משה, as he was ¹⁶לשון and ¹⁷כבד פה וכבד לשון. There are many explanations among the מפרשים as to what this means, but perhaps the most famous is the מדרש¹⁸ that tells the story of how משה acquired his speech impediment. According to the מדרש, when משה

¹⁴ שופטים ג:טו

¹⁵ שם

¹⁶ שמות ד:יג

¹⁷ שמות ו:יב

¹⁸ מדרש רבא שמות פ' א', כו

was a baby, פרעה's astrologers were worried that he would try to steal the throne from פרעה. In order to test this, they placed משה in front of a tray of hot coals and a tray of gold; if he reached for the gold, than פרעה's crown was threatened and if he reached for the coals, פרעה's crown was safe. משה actually reached for the gold, but a מלאך grabbed his hand and put it in the coal where it was burned and he instinctively inserted into his mouth, causing the lifelong speech impediment.

ה' response to משה's insecurity puts things into perspective. "Who gives man a mouth; who makes man lame or deaf or able to see or blind?"¹⁹ He asked משה. What right did משה have to complain about a disability that ה' had given him? Did he forget that ה' is הצור תמים? ²⁰ פעלו

This is something mankind struggles with all the time. It is not as easy as it seems to view every person as a perfect creation, בצלם א-להים. ה' has a plan for every individual creation to reach his or her full potential, whatever physical, mental or spiritual state he or she is in. ה' promised משה he did not have to worry about his speech impediment because יהיה לך לפה²¹ - [אהרון] יהיה לך לפה²¹ - "משה will be a mouth for אהרון", and ה' will be with him. ה' will neither give man a challenge he cannot overcome, nor a test he cannot pass.

אברהם's main discussion of נסיון is in relation to the commandment of יצחק עקידת. On the words, comments²² רמב"ן, והאלוקים נסה את אברהם, כל הנסיונות שבתורה: Tests are for the one being tested, in order to bring their potential into action. From here it

¹⁹ שמות ד:א

²⁰ דברים לב:ד

²¹ שמות ד:טז

²² בראשית כב:א

can be derived that individuals with disabilities are given difficulties that they are fully capable of overcoming, or at least functioning with.

In addition to recognizing that no one is given a disability he or she can't conquer, there are many cases in which 'ה's master plan becomes apparent through individuals with physical disabilities throughout תנ"ך. On יצחק's blindness at the end of his life, ²³למה כהו עיניו של יצחק? כדי שיבא יעקב ויטול את הברכות, comments, בראשית רבא. Though it may seem that יעקב's receiving of the בכור instead of עשו was trying to change 'ה's true agenda, this מדרש reveals the השגחה behind יצחק's blindness.

In some ways, though, the תורה's rules regarding disabilities seem counter-intuitive and difficult to understand. In פרשת ²⁴אמור, ה' gives instructions for אהרן to follow while performing the עבודה. In discussing the criteria for כהנים, one of the more troubling ones is that they may not have a מום. If these מומים were limited to physical defects that prevented כהנים from properly performing the עבודה, their inability to fully participate would be sad, but understandable. However, the criteria listed include a חרם, which ²⁵רש"י explains to mean lacking a nose bridge, a שרוע, someone with asymmetrical eyes or limbs, among other defective physical traits. Though these are clearly physical abnormalities, why should a כהן be unable to bring קרבנות when he may very well be physically capable of doing so?

The ²⁶כלי יקר differentiates between a person who is likely to get a מום as a result of misdeeds and someone who is born with a מום. Though the restrictions for one born with a מום are less extreme, one is still left with the unsettling feeling that the תורה

²³ בראשית רבא סה, ה

²⁴ ויקרא כא:טז-כג

²⁵ רש"י ויקרא כא:יח

²⁶ כלי יקר ויקרא כא:יז

seems to be, discriminatory. It seems that there has to be some other explanation.

In fact, there is. In ²⁷מסכת מגילה, there is a discussion about whether a כהן with a מום can perform the מצוה of נשיאת כפים. The conclusion is he is not permitted to do so because the congregation would be בו מסתכלין. As to רש"י, the congregation would be distracted by whatever physical disability the כהן would possess and resort to staring at him and inevitably staring at his hands which is prohibited. Rather than condemning the כהן for having this מום, this הלכה sheds light on human nature. It is our inability to get past the superficial trivialities of physical appearance that prevents the כהן from being able to participate in this מצוה. ה' knew his creations well when he passed on these laws to משה. Perhaps in a perfect, ideal world, we would be able to see past physical defects and disabilities and view every individual as a pure נשמה created by ה' for a specific purpose. Since that is not the case, however, the הלכה is formulated with this realistic understanding of our limitations in mind.

Physical disabilities are dealt with and handled differently in every specific situation in תנ"ך. Though on the surface, physical disabilities seem like nothing more than obstacles in a person's life, the examples in תנ"ך show the significance of these disabilities and give us much insight on how to respond to individuals with physical disabilities.

The most important thing to remember is that every individual is created בצלם א-להים, and therefore one has the obligation to respect and perform acts of חסד for any person, whether he or she has recognizable disabilities or not. We will never understand why ה' creates people a certain way, but it is our duty to treat them with love and respect and bring our society as close to ideal and perfect as possible.

²⁷ מגילה כד:

Humorayta: An Analysis of Comedy in Jewish Texts¹

The importance of humor in our lives is no laughing matter. Being funny has been a vital quality of the Jewish people since our very origins and has perhaps even been an integral part of our national survival. When the Jews wandered through the desert after 210 years of brutal slavery in Egypt, they infamously cried out, המבלי אין, קברים במצרים לקחתנו למות במדבר², a rather shocking request just after being miraculously saved from the throes of slavery. Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch³, however, explains that “this sharp irony even in moments of deepest anxiety and despair is characteristic of the witty vein which is inherent in the Jewish race from their earliest beginnings.” Even before actually becoming a nation, the Jews had a sense of humor, an appreciation for wit despite – or maybe because of – their trying circumstances.

A similar approach can be found when שמואל הנביא criticized שואל for not following his orders in destroying the entire nation of עמלק and instead keeping אנג, the king and the cattle, alive. שמואל said ומה קול הצאן הזה באזני וקול הבקר אשר אנכי שמע⁴. It is possible that שמואל used the sheep-like word ומה as a way of adding a sense of humor (albeit a slightly dark and twisted one, considering the eventual

¹ Much of this article relies heavily on “Does the Gemara Have a Sense of Humor” by Rabbi Yitzhak Blau, yutorah.org and parts of Daniel Z. Feldman, “The Lomdus of Laughter: Toward a Jewish Ethic of Humor”, delivered at the March 2011 Orthodox Forum.

² שמות פרק יד פסוק יא: ויאמרו אל משה המבלי אין קברים במצרים לקחתנו למות במדבר מה זאת עשית לנו להוציאנו ממצרים.

³ רב שמשון רפאל הירש על התורה ספר שמות, עמוד 180-181

⁴ שמואל א פרק טו פסוק יד

outcome of the situation) in a time of tragedy. This is what Daniel Z. Feldman⁵ refers to as a coping mechanism.

The אמוראים also clearly had a developed sense of humor. When discussing בדיקה חמץ in the גמרא⁶, it is suggested that even after you rid your home of חמץ, you may need a subsequent cleaning due to the possibility that a חולדה (weasel) may have foraged through your concentrated stash of חמץ and transferred it to a formerly חמץ-free zone of your home in order to store food for itself. However, a less weasel-suspecting source states that a second בדיקה is superfluous. אב"י settles this contradiction by proclaiming that on יג ניסן there is still a plethora of חמץ to be found in Jewish homes, so a bread-seeking weasel will not feel the need to desperately rummage through your חמץ for himself, thus spreading חמץ throughout your home. Accordingly, if one were to clean his or her home on יג ניסן, a second בדיקה is not needed. However, on יד ניסן, when most homes are חמץ-free, a weasel will feel more pressured to grab any חמץ he can to create his own stash for the long holiday ahead. רבא, however, questions אב"י's explanation and wonders, וכי חולדה נביאה היא? Is the חולדה a prophetess? Does it really have the intellectual capacity to differentiate between the thirteenth and fourteenth day of the month and schedule his חמץ stealing accordingly? In his rather sarcastic rebuttal, רבא did not need to refer to the weasel as a נביאה; simply calling it "smart" would have relayed the same message. He uses the word נביאה as a pun, a clever reference to one of the שבע נביאות⁷ named חולדה.

Daniel Z. Feldman, "The Lomdus of Laughter: Toward a Jewish Ethic of Humor", ⁵ delivered at the March 2011 Orthodox Forum.

⁶ פסחים ט: - אמרינן אין חוששין שמא גררה חולדה? והא קתני סיפא: מה שמשיר יניחנו בצנעה, שלא יהא צריך בדיקה אחריו! - אמר אב"י: לא קשיא; הא - בארבעה עשר, הא - בשלשה עשר. בשלשה עשר דשכיח ריפתא בכולהו בתי - לא מצנעא, בארבעה עשר דלא שכיחא ריפתא בכולהו בתי - מצנעא, - אמר רבא: וכי חולדה נביאה היא? דידעא דהאידינא ארביסר ולא אפי עד לאורתא, ומשיירא ומטמרא? אלא אמר רבא: מה שמשיר - יניחנו בצנעה, שמא תטול חולדה בפנינו, ויהא צריך בדיקה אחריו.

⁷ מגילת יד. - שבע נביאות מאן נינהו? שרה, מרים, דבורה, חנה, אביגיל, חולדה, ואסתר.

Another humorous account in the תלמוד⁸ is that of בישא חנן. חנן was found guilty of hitting someone and was fined half a זוז by רב הונא. Always the financial fiend, חנן wanted to use his one old זוז coin and get back the appropriate and up-to-date money in return. Naturally, however, people were unwilling to give him change for his obsolete currency. His solution to the problem was to hit the person again and give him a whole זוז. In what Rabbi Yitzchak Blau calls "slapstick humor," it is clear that the גמרא understood the inherent comic value in this story. Its recording of such a tale indicates a level of appreciation of humor.

Furthermore, the אמוראים had a sarcastic side as well. ר' states in יהודה הנשיא⁹ that the trait of ענוה, humility, no longer exists in the world, to which ר' יוסף replies, "Don't say there is no one else humble. There's me!" Likewise, the גמרא¹⁰ recounts a minor disagreement between ר' לוי and ר' שמעון in רבי's class. רבי is known for a famous teaching from the second פסוק in תהילים, כי אם תהילים¹¹, that a person can only learn parts or areas of תורה which his heart desires. When ר' לוי and ר' שמעון had finished their unit, they were divided as to what to learn next: ר' לוי was in a משלי mood while ר' שמעון had a thirst for תהילים. Eventually, ר' לוי force ר' שמעון to learn תהילים. One פסוק later, they reach רבי, נתת לנו, כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה וילילה, to which ר' לוי responds, "Rabbi, you have given me permission to stand" or in other words, "I'm out of here."

8 בבא קמא דף לו. - חנן בישא תקע ליה לההוא גברא, אתא לקמיה דרב הונא, א"ל: זיל הב ליה פלגא דזוזא; הוה ליה זוזא מכא, בעי למיתבה ליה מיניה פלגא דזוזא, לא הוה משתקיל ליה, תקע ליה אחרינא ויהביה נהליה.

9 סוטה מט: - משמת רבי - בטלה ענוה ויראת חטא. אמר ליה רב יוסף לתנא: לא תיתני ענוה, דאיכא אנא. 10 עבודה זרה יט. - כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו - א"ר: אין אדם לומד תורה אלא ממקום שלבו חפץ, שנאמר: +תהלים א' - כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו. לוי ור"ש ברבי יתבי קמיה דרבי וקא פסקי סידרא, סליק ספרא, לוי אמר: לייתו [לן] משלי, ר"ש ברבי אמר: לייתו [לן] תילים, כפייה ללוי ואייתו תילים, כי מטו הכא כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו, פריש רבי ואמר: אין אדם לומד תורה אלא ממקום שלבו חפץ, אמר לוי: רבי, נתת לנו רשות לעמוד.

11 תהלים א': ב'

It is critical to note that in all of the above cases in the גמרא, an important *Halachik* principle or Jewish ideal is derived from each of these instances; it seems that humor is used as a mode to relay significant rulings and ideologies. ¹²רבינו חם asks, from a *Halachik* standpoint, which types of cases are permitted to be judged in בבל. He quotes חנן בישא's ludicrous story as an example of an assault case judged in בבל and thus concludes the הלכה that such cases can, in fact, be judged there. Thus, while חנן's slap-happy ways were undeniably funny, they ultimately serve as the source of a הלכה. Furthermore, ר' יוסף's seemingly sarcastic א תיתי can actually teach a fundamental lesson about the concept of humility: While ענוה is commonly defined as having a low self esteem, this cannot be accurate because otherwise ר' יוסף, by definition, would not have been able to call himself that. Rather, says the נצי"ב¹³, true humility is when one is not concerned with honor. ר' יוסף is the paradigm of such a trait - when both he and רבה were selected as candidates to be the ראש ישיבה of פומבדיתא (a major city of תורה study in בבל), ר' יוסף turned down the position, exemplifying his remarkable capability to decline an admirable title. Hence, while ר' יוסף's tongue-in-cheek comment to יהודה הנשיא is no doubt humorous, it also demonstrates important—and commonly misunderstood—traits of humility. Likewise, in regard to ר' שמעון and his disagreement with ר' לוי, the significance placed on enjoying one's topic of learning and the overall vitality of the ¹⁴שמחה של מצווה indicates an important component of the learning process.

12 ספר הישר סימן תקמ"ט

13 העמק דבר במדבר יב:ו'

14 מסכת שבת ל': - ושבחתי אני את השמחה - שמחה של מצוה, ולשמחה מה זה עשה - זו שמחה שאינה של מצוה. ללמדך שאין שכינה שורה לא מתוך עצבות ולא מתוך עצלות ולא מתוך שחוק ולא מתוך קלות ראש ולא מתוך שיחה ולא מתוך דברים בטלים, אלא מתוך דבר שמחה של מצוה, שנאמר +מלכים ב' ג+ ועתה קחו לי מגן והיה כנגן המנגן ותהי עליו יד ה'. אמר רב יהודה: וכן לדבר הלכה. אמר רבא: וכן לחלום טוב. איני? והאמר רב גידל אמר רב: כל תלמיד חכם שיושב לפני רבו ואין שפתותיו נוטפות מר - תכנינה, שנאמר +שיר השירים ה+ שפתותיו שושנים נוטפות מור עבר, אל תקרי מור עבר אלא מר עובר,

Ultimately, these comedic cases indicate a humor that contains wisdom. In ¹⁵ ר' דוסא בן הרכינס, מסכת אבות lists four problematic things in this world: morning sleep, afternoon wine, childish chatter and purposeless loitering. In ¹⁶ תפארת ישראל, Rabbi Israel Lipschitz explains that sleep, wine, and gatherings are necessary to our physical lives; however, one must limit them quantitatively. In regard to שיחת ילדים (i.e. comedy), though, he makes a qualitative distinction. He identifies the inherent value in "joking around" as it brings happiness to an individual; however, it should take place among אנשים גדולים because דברי השכל, their jokes contain an element of intelligence. Simply put, laughing is good and even necessary. One must avoid, however, humor that is coarse and meaningless and should instead aim for a humor of refinement and worth.

Humor can further be seen as an effective educational tool. The ¹⁷ גמרא records רבה starting off every שיעור with a joke to make his students laugh. In the text of the גמרא, this immediately follows the notion that G-d's שכינה only rests with those who are joyous, giving שמחה (and jokes) an almost divine level. ¹⁸ רמב"ם, who as a physician was qualified to prescribe laughter as the best medicine, explains that this was in order to save their spirits and have a bit of fun. Similarly, רש"י notes that their hearts became more open to learning from this שמחה.

However, some object to the idea of רבה having a pre-class comedy routine and instead read מילתא דבדיחותא not as jokes, per se,

אל תקרי שושנים אלא שושנים! לא קשיא, הא - ברבה והא - בתלמיד. ואיבעית אימא: הא והא ברבה, ולא קשיא, הא - מקמי דלפתח, הא - לבתר דפתח. כי הא דרבה, מקמי דפתח להו לרבנן אמר מילתא דבדיחותא, ובדחי רבנן. לסוף יתיב באימתא ופתח בשמעתא.

15 משנה מסכת אבות ג:יד - רבי דוסא בן הורכינס אומר שנה של שחרית ויין של צהרים ושיחת הילדים ישיבת בתי כנסיות של עמי הארץ מוציאים את האדם מן העולם.

16 תפארת ישראל אבות סד

17 שבת דף ל: - הא דרבה, מקמי דפתח להו לרבנן אמר מילתא דבדיחותא, ובדחי רבנן. לסוף יתיב באימתא ופתח בשמעתא.

18 הקדמה למסכת אבות שמונה פרקים פרק ה'

but an *aggadic* exaggeration or riddle used as a thought-provoking tool for his students. Some even say that מילתא דבדיחותא is merely a reference to the joys of learning תורה.

Similarly, the גמרא¹⁹ bans “filling one’s mouth with laughter in this world” based on the אז ימלא שחק פינו פסוק²⁰, that only “then” (i.e. when משיח comes), shall our mouths be filled with laughter. The שולחן ערוך²¹ quotes this הלכה למעשה, and the משנה ברורה²² explains that excess שמחה (i.e. laughter) can cause one to forget the מצוות. We see, therefore, that excessive laughter poses a spiritual danger, and is inappropriate for our time period when we need to commemorate the destruction of the בית המקדש.

Rav Hershel Schachter’s²³ understanding of a suggestion by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik can lead to a different interpretation of this somewhat troubling prohibition of laughter. The גמרא²⁴ recounts that God divides his day’s activities into four parts, one of which is משחק עם לויטן. Citing the Rav’s eulogy for Rav Moshe Shatzkes, Rav Schachter suggests that, therefore, humor is a part of our obligation of *imitatio dei*, behaving like God. To imitate God requires playfulness and laughter, an overall need to “not take everything so seriously.” Coming from the Rav, who has referred to

19 ברכות לא. - אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: אסור לאדם שימלא שחוק פיו בעולם הזה, שנאמר: +תהלים קכ"ו+ אז ימלא שחוק פינו ולשוננו רנה, אימתי - בזמן שיאמרו בגוים הגדיל ה' לעשות עם אלה. אמרו עליו על ריש לקיש, שמימיו לא מלא שחוק פיו בעולם הזה מכי שמעה מרבי יוחנן רביה.

20 תהלים פרק קכ"ו פסוק ב'

21 שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תק"ס סעיף ה': (כ) אסור לאדם שימלא פיו שחוק בעולם הזה.

22 משנה ברורה סימן תק"ס ס"ק כ': אסור למלאות פיו שחוק - שהשמחה יתירה משכח המצוות. ועיין בט"ז ופרישה דאפילו בשמחה של מצוה כגון בחתונה ופורים לא ימלא פיו שחוק:

23 נפש הרב עמוד 69.

24 תלמוד בבלי מסכת עבודה זרה דף ג' עמוד ב': והקב"ה יושב ומשחק, שנאמר: יושב בשמים ישחק [וגו']. א"ר יצחק: אין לו להקב"ה שחוק אלא אותו היום בלבד. איני? והא אמר רב יהודה אמר רב: שתיים עשרה שעות הוי היום, שלש הראשונות הקב"ה יושב ועוסק בתורה, שניות - יושב ודן את כל העולם כולו, כיון שרואה שנתחייב עולם כלליה, עומד מכסא הדין ויושב על כסא רחמים, שלישיות - יושב וזן את כל העולם כולו מקרני ראמים עד ביצי כנים, רביעיות - יושב ומשחק עם לויתן, שנאמר: +תהלים קד+ לויתן זה יצרת לשחק בו! אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק: עם בריותיו משחק, ועל בריותיו אינו משחק אלא אותו היום בלבד.

religion as “constant conflict” and “not a paradise but a paradox,”²⁵ this is especially significant. His advocating of שחק ultimately points to a more “serious” topic. According to Daniel Z. Feldman²⁶,

It seems indicated that the Rav’s intent was to highlight humor [or in this case playfulness] as an indication of one’s awareness of the relative importance, or lack of same, contained in various elements of life. Humor thus represents one’s ability to maintain accurate perspective, recognizing that significance is both an absolute and a relative concept, and as a function of the second aspect, important things matter more when other things matter less. If humor is defined solely as possession of this perspective, it is fair to say that God in His omniscience maintains the ultimate “sense of humor.”

Thus, having a sense of humor is critical to keeping things in perspective and our priorities in check. It is vital to our מצווה of acting like God²⁷. While the ban on laughter codified in the שולחן ערוך could be interpreted as prohibiting mindless and excessive silliness, it could also be a warning against having a “full mouth,” the mistaken belief that one can have a complete understanding of God. As humans, we, by definition, are restricted from total clarity of God’s perspective and outlook. Until we gain that full understanding and can “look back and laugh,” people “strive, in imitation of God, to cultivate His perspectives; but we maintain awareness that will always be flawed in attempt.” According to this view, laughter is restricted not because it is spiritually dangerous, but actually because it is so exalted.

Sacred and Profane, pg 7-8 ראה 25

Daniel Z. Feldman, “The Lomdus of Laughter: Toward a Jewish Ethic of ראה 26 Humor”, delivered at the March 2011 Orthodox Forum.

27 דברים פרק כה

It becomes clear then that the importance of having a sense of humor is of ultimate meaning. We see it as a key educational tool, as it both generates the necessary שמחה for proper learning and also is an effective means of engaging with and relating to students. Furthermore, as Rav Hirsch previously noted, an appreciation for wit has been an inherent part of the Jewish people since their earliest origins; it is perhaps this value that has, in a Darwinian sense, enabled the Jews to survive and thrive despite all odds. Whether a pun or sarcastic comment, one-liner or ironic statement, humor is also what gives us the Divine ability to maintain an appropriate sense of world perspective.

The גמרא²⁸ recounts ר' ברוקא scouting out the market-place and asking עולם הבא אליהו הנביא who will merit the עולם הבא. After much searching, אליהו finds only a worthy jail warden who kept the men and women separate and, more significantly, the אנשי בדוחי, the comedians who would use their jokes to create peace between two fighting parties. This is a clear indication of the power of humor as a social tool as well – one that will result in one of the greatest rewards known to man, עולם הבא.

Ultimately, the multifaceted nature of humor and its remarkable value is nothing to laugh at.

²⁸ תענית כב. - רבי ברוקא חוזא הוה שכיח בשוקא דבי לפט, הוה שכיח אליהו גביה, אמר ליה: איכא בהאי שוקא בר עלמא דאתי? - אמר ליה: לא. אדהכי והכי חזא לההוא גברא דהוה סיים מסאני אוכמי, ולא רמי חוטא דתכלתא בגלימיה. אמר ליה: האי בר עלמא דאתי הוא. רהט בתריה, אמר ליה: מאי עובדך? - אמר ליה: זיל האידנא ותא למחר. למחר אמר ליה: מאי עובדך? - אמר ליה: זנדוקא אנא, ואסרנא גברי לחוד ונשי לחוד, ורמינא פוריאיא בין הגי להני כי היכי דלא ליתו לידי איסורא. כי חזינא בת ישראל דיהבי נכרים עלה עינייהו מסרנא נפשאי ומצינא לה. יומא חד הוות נערה מאורסה גבן דיהבו בה נכרים עינייהו, שקלי דורדייא דחמרא ושדאי לה בשיפולה, ואמרי: דיסתנא היא. אמר ליה: מאי טעמא לית לך חוטי ורמית מסאני אוכמי? - אמר ליה: עיילנא ונפיקנא ביני נכרים כי היכי דלא לידעו דיהודאא אנא, כי הו גזרי גזירתא מודענא להו לרבנן, ובעו רחמי ומבטלי לגזירתייהו. ומאי טעמא כי אימנא לך אנא מאי עובדך ואמרת לי זיל האידנא ותא למחר? - אמר ליה: בההיא שעתא גזרי גזירתא, ואמינא ברישא איזיל ואשמע להו לרבנן דלבעי רחמי עלה דמילתא. אדהכי והכי אתו הנך תרי אתי. אמר ליה: הנך נמי בני עלמא דאתי נינהו. אזל לגבייהו. אמר להו: מאי עובדיכו? - אמרו ליה: אינשי בדוחי אנן, מבדחינן עציבי. אי נמי, כי חזינן כי תרי דאית להו תיגרא בהדייהו - טרחינן ועבדינן להו שלמא.

For PETA or For Pita?

A Deeper Understanding of the Role of Animals in Judaism

There are two reasons why ה' created the world, says רש"י¹. Since we, בני ישראל, are one of the reasons the world was created, then one could posit that we should certainly be allowed to freely benefit from all of ה'’s creations, since everything must have been created for our benefit or there would have been no purpose for its creation.

Alternatively, we could suggest that ה'’s creations have worth merely for existing, and that they were not created only to benefit us. It says in the גמרא that everything ה' created in this world is not for naught; ה' created everything with a specific purpose.² The גמרא continues to bring examples of the purpose of certain insects, for example it says that flies were created to heal a bee sting and other similar cures and remedies.³ The question, therefore, is whether we should view the purpose for the creation of animals only in terms of their value to humans, or whether the fact that they are living creatures automatically put them on a higher level of creation, lending their existence a higher sense of purpose.

Regarding the תורה’s account of the creation of animals, רד"ק comments that unlike אדם and חיה, animals were not given the ברכה of פרו ורבו, to be fruitful and multiply, because of the damage and destruction that animals have the potential to inflict. Because

¹ רש"י בראשית א:א

² שבת עז: "כל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו לא ברא דבר אחד לבטלה"

³ שם - "ברא שכלול לכתית, ברא זכוב - לצירעה, יתוש - לנחש, ונחש - לחפית, וסממית - לעקרב"

of that danger, he continues, חיות, wild animals, were placed in a location far from human habitation, while the בהמות, domestic animals, were placed near human habitation for their use and benefit.⁴ The dangerous, wild animals were still needed, however, because they are a major part of the food chain which allows all life on earth to continue and function properly.

When it was time for the מבול, ה' told נח how many animals he should bring with him on the תיבה. More kosher animals than non-kosher animals were saved, says רד"ק, so that נח would be able to bring קרבנות after the מבול ended.⁵ This shows that a significant reason for the saving of the animals was so that נח and all future generations would be able to bring קרבנות, and thereby connect with ה' and establish a relationship with Him. In addition, רד"ק comments that because the animals were so few after leaving the תיבה, ה' now gave them the ברכה of פרו ורבו.⁶ ה' also rescinded the prohibition against man eating meat,⁷ and now permitted it as much as He allowed them to eat the ירק עשב at the beginning of creation⁸ (as it says, פני כל הארץ⁹). הנה נתתי לכם את כל עשב זרע זרע אשר על פני כל הארץ⁹). נח and his family, the only surviving people of the מבול, were told to save the animals, and we see two purposes in doing so: this act benefited them in both the physical way of being able to eat meat and the spiritual way of connecting to ה' by the means of bringing קרבנות.

Another way that animals benefit us physically is shown by דוד המלך. The מדרש relays how דוד once questioned ה' what the purpose in the world was for spiders, not understanding why their

⁴ רד"ק בראשית א:כה

⁵ רד"ק בראשית ז:ב

⁶ רד"ק בראשית ח:יז

⁷ בראשית ט:ג

⁸ רד"ק בראשית ט:ג

⁹ בראשית א:כט

existence was necessary. ה' therefore placed דוד in a situation in which he was clearly able to understand and resolve his confusion: when דוד was running away from שאול, he hid in a cave, and שאול, seeing a spider web covering the cave opening and assuming דוד could not possibly have hid there without breaking the web, walked right past that cave without even looking inside. דוד saw this and realized that just as there is a purpose of spiders in helping man, so too everything ה' creates has a purpose in this world of benefiting man in some way.¹⁰

In addition to providing for us physically, animals have an even deeper way of helping people. In the שלחן ערוך, it states that we are allowed to harm animals if we need to for a certain purpose. The רמ"א comments, however, that we should try to avoid such behavior because if we treat animals with cruelty, then we will become cruel people.¹¹ As the ספר החינוך states, the way we act, whether for the good or for the bad, has a deep, internal effect on us.¹² Therefore, if we treat animals properly, that positive behavior will have a positive effect on us.

The תורה has also given us many halachic boundaries to prevent us from treating animals with cruelty. For example, one of the אבר מן החי is שבע מצוות בני נח directly from a live animal, because it is דרך אכזריות, a way of cruelty, and that too will affect us negatively.¹³

¹⁰ אוצר המדרשים (אייזנשטיין) עמוד לה - אמר לו מפני מה הקב"ה ברא בעולמו... עכביש שמפסידין ואין בהם הנאה? אמר לו פעם אחת היה דוד מלך ישראל ע"ה יושב בגנו וראה צירעה אוכלת עכביש ובא שוטה ובידו עץ והיה מגרשם, אמר דוד לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע מה הנאה באלו שבראת בעולמך... עכביש יארוג כל השנה ולא ילבשנו... אין בו הנאה לעולם. אמר לו הקב"ה דוד! מלעיג אתה על הבריות תבא שעה ותצטרך להם ותדע למה נבראו. וכשנחבא במערה מפני שאול המלך שלח הקב"ה עכביש וארגה על פי המערה וסגרה אותו, בא שאול וראה ארוג אמר בודאי לא נכנס אדם הנה שאם נכנס היה קורע הארוג לקרעים והלך ולא נכנס לשם, וכשיצא דוד וראה העכביש נשקה ואמר לה ברוך בוראך וברוכה את, רבש"ע מי יעשה כמעשיך וכגבורתיך שכל מעשיך נאים"

¹¹ אבן העזר ה:יד ורמא שם - "ומ"מ העולם נמנעים דהוי אכזריות"

¹² ספר החינוך מצוה טז - "אחרי הפעולות נמשכים הלבבות"

¹³ רד"ק בראשית ט:ג

We also have all of the הלכות of שחיטה. We slaughter animals in the least harmful manner because the act of killing alone has a horrible effect on us and we want to diminish that cruel effect as much as possible. It says in בראשית רבה that all the מצוות were given in order to refine us. The מדרש continues to say that the reason that ה' commanded us to slaughter animals at a specific part of the neck is to refine us, even through the cruel act of killing.¹⁴

בני ישראל states that משה was chosen to be the leader of בני ישראל only after it was seen how he treated animals. Since he was a good shepherd and treated his sheep exceptionally well, ה' decided that he would be a great shepherd for His own flock-בני ישראל.¹⁵

From all of these sources, we can see that treating animals properly is a beneficial and necessary way to work on our מידות. In fact, the עירובין in גמרא teaches that if we didn't have the תורה, we would have learned different character traits by observing the behavior of animals.¹⁶ Animals also shed light onto methods of serving ה'. In פרק שירה, we see the way that all of creation, including animals, praise ה', and we are supposed to read this, learn from it, and take the same potential that we have and use it to serve and praise ה'.¹⁷

From all of these sources, it appears that animals exist for man's benefit, both physical and spiritual. However, different sources, and even some of the same ones seen through a different perspective, lead to a different conclusion.

רד"ק comments that both man and animals were created from ארץ. They were created of equal stature until ה' gave man a נשמה

¹⁴ בראשית רבה (וילנא) מד:א- "וכי מה איכפת ליה להקב"ה למי ששוחט מן הצואר, או מי ששוחט מן העורף, הוי לא נתנו המצוות אלא לצרף בהם את הבריות"

¹⁵ שמות רבה (וילנא) ב:ב - "אמר הקב"ה יש לך רחמים לנהוג צאנו של בשר ודם כך חייך אתה תרעה צאני ישראל"

¹⁶ עירובין ק: - "אילמלא לא ניתנה תורה היינו למידין צניעות מחתול, וגזל מנמלה, ועריות מיונה, דרך ארץ מתרנגול"

¹⁷ פרק שירה (Artscroll)

חיים, which moved him to a level greater than that of animals.¹⁸ Animals, however, are still called נפש חיה in the פסוקים. ¹⁹ While they may not have the נשמה that man has, they have something extra which puts them on a higher level than the rest of creation. The אור גדליהו, quoted in נצי"ב, says that man is the highest form of creation, known as 'מדבר', but animals come right underneath them, as 'ח'.²⁰ Therefore, although on a lower level than man, it appears to be that animals have *something* indicative of inherent value.

Animals are מוקצה on שבת and יום טוב because man has no great need for them on these days.²¹ However, for the purpose of avoiding צער בעלי חיים, we are still allowed to move them and even violate certain other איסורים דרבנן in order to put their suffering to an end.²² רש"י comments in שמות כג:ה that if a donkey is burdened, we must unburden it,²³ and this can apply as a general rule to all animals in a similar situation. The שחיטה process can also be viewed in a different light. ספר החינוך states that we slaughter animals in the least harmful way simply in order to avoid causing pain to the animals as much as possible.²⁴ Also, the גמרא in ברכות says that it is אסור for man to eat his meal before feeding his animals²⁵ (as learned from the פסוק דברים יא:טו in ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך: דברים יא:טו) and then only after it says ואכלת ושבעת).

¹⁸ רד"ק בראשית ב:ז

¹⁹ בראשית א:כד

²⁰ אור גדליהו - פרשת תזריע-מצורע

²¹ שולחן ערוך אורח חיים שח:לט - "אסור לטלטל בהמה, חיה ועוף", ומשנה ברורה סימן שח ס"ק קמו - "דהם בכלל מוקצה כעצים ואבנים"

²² ילקוט יוסף סימן שח סעיף ו, אות כא - "ומכל מקום אם...יש בזה צער בעלי חיים, מותר לטלטלם"

²³ רש"י שמות כג:ה - "לפרק המשא. מלמשקל ליה, מליטול משאוי ממנו"

²⁴ ספר החינוך מצוה תנא - "כדי שלא נצער בעלי החיים יותר מדאי, כי התורה התירן לאדם למעלתו ליוון מהם ולכל צרכיו, לא לצערן חנם"

²⁵ ברכות מ. - "אסור לאדם שיאכל קודם שיתן מאכל לבהמתו, שנאמר: +דברים י"א+ ונתתי עשב בשדך לבהמתך והדר ואכלת ושבעת"

There is a story in the בבא מציעא גמרא in that a calf broke loose from its owner on the way to the slaughterhouse and hid under יהודה הנשיא's coat, crying. רבי took the goat and said, "Go, for this is the purpose for which you were created." Because of רבי's lack of compassion for this calf, suffering was brought onto him, and he endured this pain until another circumstance occurred in which he had compassion for baby weasels, thereby showing that he had learned his lesson.²⁶ All of these examples indicate that animals have some sort of inherent value for which they deserve to be treated nicely.

This second group of sources shows that it is important and necessary to treat animals with compassion and humane behavior, not just because it has a positive effect on ourselves as people, but because there is something more to animals for which they deserve to be treated in that way. We know they don't have a נשמה, as only man was given a נשמה.²⁷

However, animals still contain a life force within them. They don't have a נשמה, they don't have בחירה, and they don't have the high level of intellect that man has, yet they are still נפש חיה. They are living creatures with some sort of נפש and therefore deserve to be treated in a proper way. Yes, man receives both physical benefit from animals through eating, and spiritual benefit by treating animals properly, via fulfilling מצוות or by refining his character. However, the fact that animals have a life force within them demands that they should be treated properly for this reason as well.

²⁶ בבא מציעא פה. - "דרכי - על ידי מעשה באו ועל ידי מעשה הלכו. על ידי מעשה באו מאי היא? דההוא עגלא דהו קא ממטו ליה לשחיטה, אזל תליא לרישיה בכנפיה דרבי, וקא בכי. אמר ליה: זיל, לכך נוצרת. אמרי: הואיל ולא קא מרחם - ליתו עליה יסורין. ועל ידי מעשה הלכו - יומא חד הוה קא כנשא אמתיה דרבי ביתא, הוה שדיא בני כרכושא וקא כנשא להו, אמר לה: שבקינהו, כתיב +תהלים קמה+ ורחמיו על כל מעשיו. אמרו: הואיל ומרחם - נרחם עליה."

²⁷ בראשית ב:ז

It seems, therefore, that the conclusion to our question is that it is complex, and there are two different aspects to the matter. Although in principle animals deserve to be treated with compassion, ה' sometimes dictates that we should behave in a manner that doesn't seem to follow these guidelines. In such a case, we are still obligated to follow the רצון of ה', even to go as far as to sacrifice animals in order to establish and increase our relationship with Him. Assumedly, this is because serving man's needs is of a higher priority.

קנאה The World Runs on

explains that the "we" in the פסוק refers to ¹ויאמר אלהים נעשה אדם 'ה Himself and the מלאכים. Why did 'ה include the מלאכים in the process of the creation of man? Until now, the מלאכים were the only other beings in the world aside from 'ה and since man was now being created, 'ה did not want them to be jealous.

From the very beginning of man's existence, 'ה brought about recognition of the מידה of קנאה - jealousy. It is almost as if the world was created with this מידה deeply planted within its roots.

The incident of the נחש is a clear example of the תורה's early recognition of קנאה. According to the מדרש, the נחש envied אדם and desired to kill him in order to marry חוה, his wife.³ Because of this קנאה and his malicious desire to murder, the נחש was cursed and had to live the rest of his life crawling on his stomach in order to get from one place to the next, while only having the dust to keep him nourished.⁴ The world had been in existence for a short period of time when the מידה of קנאה began affecting daily life.

What is it about this מידה that it seems to be a founding factor of the world? What is it about קנאה that can bring us to

¹ בראשית א: כו

² נעשה אדם - עונותיו של הקב"ה למדנו מכאן לפי שהאדם הוא בדמות המלאכים ויתקנאו בו לפיכך נמלך בהן וכשהוא דן את המלאכים הוא נמלך בפמליא שלו שכן מצינו באחאב שאמר לו מיכה (מלכים א' כב) ראיתי את ה' יושב על כסאו וכל צבא השמים עומדים עליו מימינו ומשמאלו וכי יש ימין ושמאל לפניו אלא אלו מיימינים לזכות ואלו משמאילים לחובה וכן (דניאל ד) בגזירת עירין פתגמא ובמאמר קדישין שאלתא אף כאן בפמליא שלו נטל רשות א"ל יש בעליונים כדמותי אם אין כדמותי בתחתונים הרי יש קנאה במעשה בראשית:

³ תוספתא סוטה ד

⁴ בראשית ג:יד

שער הקנאה in אורחות צדיקים⁵ The עשרת הדברות teaches that envy brings a person to lust. Lust leads one to steal, as it says in מיכה, "They coveted fields and they stole from them."⁶ The statement in the עשרת הדברות refers to one who acts upon his jealousy. Thereby, one who is overtaken by lust will come to steal and violate one of the most basic principles of Judaism.

It states in הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציין את האדם מן העולם, מסכת אבות⁷ The statement explains the different aspects of this statement. קנאה, just as רש"י says in מסכת אבות, is the jealousy that a man feels of another, תאוה refers to physical desires, and כבוד is the desire to gain people's respect.

As one focuses on קנאה, it becomes apparent why this מידה is a main focus in our lives. It is stated in משלי⁸, קנאה causes one's inner being to decay, as is explained in the גמרא: Anyone who has קנאה in his heart, his bones will corrode. One who does not have קנאה in his heart, his bones will not corrode.⁹

מלאכים refers to a מדרש in רש"י that says the מלאכים were jealous of אדם and the amazing treatment he received in גן עדן and they therefore sent the יצר הרע in the form of a snake in order to entice him.¹⁰ This קנאה caused the מלאכים's "inner beings" to corrode.

יונה describes the different types of קנאה that would cause someone, as the משנה says, "to be taken from this world." The first type of קנאה is jealousy of a person's good actions, for the wrong reason. If a person is walking בדרך ה' one may respond with קנאה if one hates those who love Hashem and succumb to His will. This type of person is referred to as a שונא ה' and has reached the

⁵ שמות כ:יד

⁶ מיכה ב:ב - "והחמדו שדות וגזלו ובתים ונשאו ועשקו גבר וביתו ואיש ונחלתו"

⁷ ד:כא אבות

⁸ משלי יד:ל

⁹ שבת קנב:

¹⁰ רש"י לאבות ד:כא

worst type of קנאה. Furthermore, a שונא ה' can be somebody who does not approve of people going בדרך ה' because one does not feel the same way and does not want others to be better than he or she is. Because this individual only wants what is best for oneself and not for others, he or she receives the title of a שונא ה'.

יונה continues to speak about a different type of קנאה: jealousy of a person's wealth. He categorizes this type into three levels. Firstly, there are individuals who do not want anyone to have more than they do. This is the most negative type of קנאה because these individuals are not looking out for the welfare of others, but rather are interested only in themselves. The second level is one who does not hate the person, but hates the fact that the person is wealthy, due to one's desire for wealth. The best level, although still harmful, is someone who is just jealous of the actual wealth. This jealousy has nothing to do with the person, but of the wealth itself. It is these thoughts that remove someone from this world.

Let us look at the story of קין and הבל.¹¹ Brothers, קין and הבל, are the first to bring קרבנות ה'. ה' accepts הבל's קרבן which was of lesser value than קרבן of קין. Because of this, קין killed his own brother. What brought קין to do this? As ספורנו¹² explains regarding the text ויחר לקין מאד¹³ קין was jealous that the קרבן of הבל was accepted and his was not. Furthermore, the תורה writes, הלא אם תשיב¹⁴ The אבן עזרא explains the word שאת to mean "lifting up." If one improves, he or she will be forgiven. Had קין approached the situation correctly and constructively, he could have used it to uplift himself.¹⁵ However, as both ספורנו and רמב"ן explain,¹⁶ קין

¹¹ בראשית ד

¹² ספורנו על בראשית ד:ה

¹³ בראשית ד:ה

¹⁴ בראשית ד:ז

¹⁵ אבן עזרא על בראשית ד:ז

allowed his קנאה to overtake him, causing him to spill innocent blood.

The קנאה היא ענף מן הכעס, ואין שער הקנאה in אורחות צדיקים explains, אדם נמלט ממנה. It leads to חמדה, coveting — and as explained previously, this is prohibited in the עשרת הדברות. Envy is a deficiency of the soul – מגרעות הנפש. By expressing קנאה, one is proving that he or she does not desire what ה' decreed. The individual does not recognize that ה' is providing what is best for him or her. As we see through the actions of קין, קנאה ruins intellect and concentration. The גמרא also explains that when one desires something that belongs to others, it causes that person to lose what he or she does have.¹⁷

¹⁸מסילת ישרים in רמח"ל discusses קנאה in the light of one who is jealous and therefore causes oneself loss. It states in איוב, ופתה תמית, איויב. Just as רבינו יונה said, the worst type of קנאה is when one is jealous of another individual's good, and this קנאה causes the one who is jealous to experience great suffering. רמח"ל defines various types of jealousy, as well. For example, one feels jealous of a friend if the friend rises above him or her in importance. Similarly, if one is of equal stature to another, the fact that one is more successful than the other can cause great jealousy.²⁰ One can see this idea in the story of קין and הבל. They were both of equal stature but because קרבו הבל was successful, קין was overtaken by jealousy, leading him to kill his very own brother.

¹⁶ רמב"ן על בראשית ד:ז

¹⁷ ומי שנוהר שלא יקנא, אין גופו כלה ואין התולעים שולטים בו, דכתיב (משלי יד ל): "ורקב עצמות קנאה", כל מי שיש לו קנאה בלבו עצמותיו מרקיבים, כל שאין לו קנאה בלבו אין עצמותיו מרקיבים (שבת קנב ב)

¹⁸ מסילת ישרים פרק יא

¹⁹ איוב ה:ב

²⁰ בראשית יט: ד

Rav Wolbe explains in עלי שור²¹ that one who is jealous only sees the good in what others have and does not recognize the good that he has. Even worse, he believes himself to be lacking. The verse from משלי, "Jealousy leads to rotting of the bones," can be interpreted according to Rav Wolbe's idea, as jealousy occurring when a person considers his own bones rotten.

Rabbi Dan Roth points this idea out in his book, *Relevance*, along with the idea that the word עצם means both bone and self. One can be so preoccupied with what his friend has that he completely forgets about himself and all that he is fortunate enough to have. If one does not look at the positive aspects of one's own עצם, and what he or she has, one will view the עצם, the bones or inner self, as rotten.

קנאה can ruin a person, causing him or her to drop to the lowest of levels. It is clear why the תורה warns us about this מידה from early on. An individual who is taken over by קנאה cannot reach any level higher than that of focusing on what a friend has and not what he or she has. Everything else becomes null and void. Jealousy takes over one's being.

However, one cannot disregard the fact that there is a type of קנאה that is permitted and even positive. רבינו יונה mentions that קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה²². קנאת אורחות צדיקים²³ explains that one *should* envy those who are close to Hashem because it will lead him to a similar level. מצוות that are not done לשם שמים will eventually become לשם שמים. As we see from the beginning of creation, the world runs on קנאה. When a person acts one way, it causes others to yearn to act in that manner as well. Therefore, one must make sure that all actions are done לשם שמים.²⁴

²¹ עלי שור א:לז-ב:פג

²² בבא בתרא פרק כא:א

²³ רבינו יונה מסכת אבות

²⁴ אף עלפי שהקנאה היא מידה רעה מאד, יש מקום שהיא טובה מאד, והיא מידת עליונים, שישים קנאתו על יראת שמים, כענין שנאמר (משלי כג יז): "אל יקנא לבך בחטאים כי אם ביראת ה' כל היום". ועל דרך

It is important to strive for a level of “Loving your neighbor like you love yourself.” How does one achieve this level? Rav Eliyahu Dessler writes in מכתב מאליהו explains that the ultimate way to reach this point is by removing jealousy from within oneself. One must want only good for a friend.²⁵

If this is so, how does one go about removing jealousy from within oneself? The מסילת ישרים פרק יא points out that one must know, “A person cannot touch even a hairsbreadth of what is set aside for his fellow.”²⁶ Everything is from ה'. When one can fully understand this, he will realize that ה' gave each individual that which he or she needs. Therefore, if a friend has something that another person does not have, it is clear that the other person does not need it.

It states in משלי 27. נפש ברכה תדשן, משלי. If one desires that which is best for others, it will fill his heart with joy and happiness, causing his bones to become fat. This can be contrasted to the jealous person in whom we understand from the פסוק in משלי, that being jealous causes ones bones to rot.

Working on this מידה of jealousy is a life-long task. It is a struggle that one has to deal with on a daily basis, a challenge

זו אמרו רבותינו, זכרונם לברכה (בבא בתרא כא א): קנאת סופרים תרבה חכמה. כי יראה אדם שלומד, יתפוש קנאה בלבו ויאמר: לומד זה כל היום - גם אני אעשה כן! וכן לעניין כל המצוות יקנא כל אחד בחבירו ויתפוש מעשי חבירו הטובים

לעולם יכבד אדם יראי שמים ועוסקים במצוות, ויתן להם יד, ויסייע להם בגופו ובממונו, ואז יקנאו בו אחרים ויחשבו: אם גם אנחנו עושים כן, יכבדו ויעזרו גם לנו. ומתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה! אמר הקב"ה: קנא ל! שאלמלא הקנאה אין העולם עומד, אין אדם נוטע כרם, ואין אדם נושא אשה, ואין אדם בונה בית (שומר טוב לו א). כי כל אלו העניינים באים מחמת שאדם מקנא בחבירו: אם יבנה בית גם אחר ישים דעתו לעשות כן, וכן לעניין אשה כל אחד מקנא בחבירו. וכיון שקיום העולם תלוי בקנאה, ישים כל הקנאות לשם שמים

²⁵ מכתב מאליהו פרק של חסד והכרת הטוב

²⁶ יומא לח:ב

²⁷ משלי יא:כה

²⁹ ישעיהו יא:יג

that has been in existence from the beginning of creation. However, there will *אם ירצה ה'* be a day, when this will not be so. As it is stated in *ישעיהו*, *יקנא את יהודה*, *והיהודים לא יצרו את אפרים*²⁹ One must be sure that all actions are geared *לשם שמים* because the reality is that the world *does* run on קנאה. It is our job to ensure that the קנאה makes the world run in the proper direction.

The Personal Paradox: Can Individuality Exist within הלכה?

We, the Jewish People, are the People of the Book. Since the beginning of our existence, we have prided ourselves on our strict adherence to the laws of the תורה. From the daily, to the weekly, to the yearly, our הלכה governs every aspect of our lives in order to bring us together as a nation, one unit serving God.

However, as much as we are one nation, one ציבור, we are also a people made up of individuals, each with our own personalities, our own needs and wants, our own paths of life and direction. Rav Yehuda Amital, in his book *והארץ נתן לבני אדם*, writes that every person is his/her own individual world, each created by God, and each unique and distinct from the next.¹ בני ישראל have always been compared to the stars, as 'ה told אברהם in *פרשת לך לך*², and Rav Amital explains that even though when we look up at the stars they all look the same, a mass unit in which one perhaps cannot tell one star from the next, every star is in fact its own world, an individual creation with its own unique characteristics. The גמרא states that one who looks onto a large group of בני ישראל should say, "Blessed is the [One who created them], for all their ... ideas are different, one from the other."³

Understanding a group of people whose religion is based simultaneously on the significance of the יחיד – the individual, and

¹ *הארץ נתן לבני אדם: הפן האישי בעבודת ה' 55*

² בראשית טו:ה

³ גמרא ברכות נח. - "הרואה אוכלוסי ישראל אומר: ברוך חכם הרזים. שאין דעתם דומה זה לזה, ואין פרצופיהן דומים זה לזה."

the *ציבור* – the community, can be quite difficult. It seems paradoxical. How can a group of people, all directed by the exact same laws, also truly be a group of individuals? Can individuality exist within such specific guidelines?

Many defining moments of Jewish history have happened as a *ציבור*, without a trace of individuality to be found. Much of *בני ישראל's* becoming a nation in the *מדבר* relied heavily on their experiences as a whole, and not as individuals. We can see this, for example, at the most pivotal moment in our nation's history, when *בני ישראל* accepted the *תורה* as one. When *משה*, as commanded by *ה'*, asked *בני ישראל* if they would accept the *תורה*, the *יהודי* clearly states that *בני ישראל* answered *together*, when they said *נעשה*.⁴ There was no individuality at this point in our national history. As *רש"י* comments on the words *נגד ההר*,⁵ *בני ישראל* were at that moment like one man with one heart.⁶

On the other hand, there is a well-known statement of the *גמרא*⁷ that illustrates an interesting picture. The *גמרא* says that *ה'* held *הר סיני* over the heads of *בני ישראל* and gave them a choice – choose the *תורה* or you will be buried under this mountain – and as *רש"י* elucidates, this was *תחת ההר ממש*, they were actually under the mountain. Taken literally or figuratively, *בני ישראל* were essentially “forced” to accept the *תורה*. This also took place together as one single unit.

Four *פרשיות* later, in *כי תשא*, *בני ישראל* began to panic. *משה* had not yet come down from *הר סיני*; to whom would they turn for leader-

⁴ שמות יט:ח

⁵ שמות יט:ב

⁶ רש"י שמות יט:ב-כאיש אחד בלב אחד

⁷ גמרא שבת פח.-"ויתיצבו בתחתית ההר, אמר רב אבדימי בר חמא בר חסא: מלמד שכפה הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם את ההר כגיגית, ואמר להם: אם אתם מקבלים התורה - מוטב, ואם לאו - שם תהא קבורתכם."

⁸ גמרא שבת פח., רש"י-תחתית ההר

ship? As a nation, they faced אהרון הכהן and said⁹: קום עשה לנו אלהים אשר ילכו לפנינו כי זה משה האיש אשר העלינו מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה היה לו.

It is here that בני ישראל committed the ultimate communal sin. There is such a stark contrast between the pure individuality of אהרון, who attempted to stop בני ישראל from creating the עגל הזהב, and the people who remained as a mass, dedicated to the task at hand. The very unity of purpose which was so praiseworthy at קבלת התורה became the nation's downfall at חטא העגל. Rav S.R. Hirsch¹⁰ points out that this was not a classic case of idolatry, but rather an attempt to create a replacement for משה, an emissary between them and God. בני ישראל were not yet familiar with the concept of a personal connection with ה'. They did not realize that although leaders such as משה are able to be the nation's messengers, every individual has the capability and responsibility to create their own relationship with the Creator.

בני ישראל were forgiven by ה', and just one פרשה later, they began to build the משכן. It is in this context that the concept of individuality began to become familiar to the people. ויעשו כל חכמי לב. בעשי המלאכה את המשכן...¹¹ Not only did the people cooperate wholeheartedly when asked for donations for the משכן, as we see from the fact that משה even had to request that they stop bringing donations¹², but each person was able to channel their own individual talents to help with the work needed to build a dwelling place for God. Rav Hirsch¹³, on his explanation of the משכן, describes it as a place "to permeate the nation as a whole, and each individual of it." The building of the משכן was not only a

⁹ שמות לב:א

¹⁰ פירוש רש"י הירש לשמות לב:א עשה לנו אלהים אשר ילכו לפנינו כי זה משה האיש אשר העלינו וגו'

¹¹ שמות לו:ח

¹² שם לו:ו

¹³ רב הירש שמות לב

project of great unity but also a clear display of individuality within בני ישראל.

The תורה states, in reference to the donations brought for the משכן ¹⁴. ויקחו מלפני משה את כל התרומה אשר הביאו בני ישראל, משכן Rav Hirsch comments on the words מלפני משה to mean that משה represented all בני ישראל. Once all the individual donations were given to him, they were then given over to the nation as a כלל. It is here that בני ישראל fully succeeded in making an ideal balance between their individual talents and capabilities and their ability to work together as a ציבור. A nation cannot thrive on the ציבור aspect alone, but it is, of course, necessary. As much as הר סיני lacked the individuality of the משכן, it has always been one of ישראל's praiseworthy moments, for they accepted the תורה without question. This was an essential process in our growth as a people, bringing us together as a community. The building of the משכן came at the right time, perhaps to serve as a תיקון for the earlier communal sin of the הזהב. With the thriving display of individuality shown through the building of the משכן, this concept was implanted into the minds of the people and into the mind of the nation as a whole.

Soon after, we see yet another display of the success of distinctiveness, with the קרבנות of the נשיאים of each שבט. At the inauguration of the משכן in ¹⁶פרשת נשא, the תורה records identical קרבנות brought by each of the נשיאים, one after another. Rav Amital¹⁷ quotes the רמב"ן¹⁸, who asks the obvious question of why, if each of the נשיאים brought the same thing in their קרבן, did the תורה need to write each individual קרבן in the פסוקים? The רמב"ן concludes that

¹⁴ שמות לו:ג

¹⁶ במדבר ז

¹⁷ והארץ נתן לבני אדם: הפן האישי בעבודת ה', 55-56

¹⁸ רמב"ן במדבר ז:ב

although each *קרבן* was physically the same, each *נשיא* had their own individual *כוונה* regarding their offering. As Rav Amital summarizes, each *נשיא* put their own unique “stamp” on their *קרבן*, emphasizing their individual thoughts and intentions as well as the importance of the existence of individuality in Judaism in general. Rav Kook extends these ideas further in his book *אורות הקודש*¹⁹. He explains that every person needs to understand that it is as if they were created as their own world, with their own personal needs rooted in their *נשמה*. Individuals are not to get confused with the other influences surrounding them, but should instead stay focused on keeping the *תורה* through humility, knowing that what they are doing is an exhibit of their individuality. The *גמרא*²⁰ states, *כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר בשבילי נברא העולם*. “Everyone is required to say, ‘the world was created for my sake’.” Rav Kook comments that we are not to feel arrogant or self-centered as we focus on our own personal “worlds,” but rather, ultimately through modesty, focus on our personal *תפקיד* that God has allotted to each of us.

As we have demonstrated, the concept of individuality is emphasized in *תנ"ך* and has been thoroughly discussed by many great *תורה* scholars, but where does it fit into our daily lives? Where does individuality appear within *הלכה*? To many, this question may once again seem to be a paradox. Is there really any leg room within what seems to be such a binding set of laws?

The answer appears to be yes. If we look at *תפילה*, one of our most personal *מצוות*, we can see that we have been given the opportunity to express our individuality within the framework established by *חז"ל*. We are given the minimal daily requirements in our everyday *סידורים*, but there are several opportunities throughout the *תפילה* that allow for creativity. Not only is every person's *כוונה*

¹⁹ רב קוק *אורות הקודש ג* (דרך הקודש, סדר ראשון סי' יט)

²⁰ *גמרא סנהדרין לו*.

completely different from the next, but a גמרא in עבודה זרה²¹ brings statements by רבי יהושע בן לוי and רב חייא בר אשי concerning the addition of personal תפילות in עשרה שמונה. Even though the תפילה is set in its text, one is allowed to ask for their own needs or the needs of others in the ברכות of רפאינו and שמע קולנו. Even after עשרה שמונה, before the three steps back, there is a chance to communicate in whatever way one wants. We therefore see that within such an essential part of our עבודת ה' הלכה gives ample opportunity for individual expression within the standardized structure.

Another such גמרא, which emphasizes the ability of הלכה to allow some breathing space, exists in מסכת סוטה.²³ The גמרא discusses the fact that it is permitted to say many different תפילות in a language that one understands. This shows that not only may people add to their individual תפילה, but they are also able to make such a quintessential מצוה become more accessible to their own personal needs, as long as it is within the boundaries of הלכה.

Another such מצוה which allows for individual expression is that of ואהבת לרעך of מצוה דאורייתא. We know that there is a גמילת חסדים, but how exactly does one go about fulfilling this commandment? The גמילת חסדים הלכות אבל in רמב"ם²⁵ discusses and the several different ways one can fulfill their obligation. He then writes, כל דברים שאתה רוצה שיעשו אותם לך אחרים, עשה אתה אותן לאחרים. In addition to set requirements such as ביקור חולים and ניהום אברים, we

²¹ גמרא עבודה זרה ח. -"א"ר חייא בר אשי אמר רב, אע"פ שאמרו: שואל אדם צרכיו בשומע תפלה, אם יש לו חולה בתוך ביתו - אומר בברכת חולים, ואם צריך לפרנסה - אומר בברכת השנים. אמר ר' יהושע בן לוי, אע"פ שאמרו: שואל אדם צרכיו בשומע תפלה, אבל אם בא לומר אחר תפלתו, אפילו כסדר יוה"כ - אומר."

²³ גמרא סוטה לב. -"אלו נאמרים בכל לשון: פרשת סוטה, וידוי מעשר, קרית שמע ותפלה, וברכת המזון, ושבעות העדות ושבעות הפיקדון."

²⁴ ויקרא יט:יח

²⁵ רמב"ם שופטים, הלכות אבל, פרק יד' הלכה א

are obligated to additionally do other forms גמילות חסדים for people, according to our understanding of what we would want others to do for us. One is thus able and obligated to channel his individual skills and creative mind for the benefit of others.

From a halachic standpoint, both תפילה and גמילות חסדים offer the option of creativity and individual expression, making the law code that the Jewish people have been instructed to follow a little less constricting.

One final example of the individuality which exists within הלכה is the מצוה of שמחת יום טוב. Regarding the שלוש רגלים, we see in ספר דברים²⁶ that there is a מצוה of שמחה on יום טוב. How, however, is one able to fulfill a מצוה that seems so vague? The שולחן ערוך²⁷ explains that men are required to drink wine, while women are meant to be made happy with jewelry and clothing, and children with sweets. The ביאור הלכה²⁸ on the other hand states that one is to fulfill the מצוה of שמחת יום טוב through eating meat. This מצוה seems very specific. What if one's happiness does not come through wine or meat?

The ספר יראים²⁹ writes, כל שמחה הראויה לאדם לכל דבר המשמחו חייב לעשות, if one does not find שמחה in the suggestions of the שולחן ערוך or the הלכה, they are obligated to eat, drink, or buy whatever it is that makes them truly happy. It is here we see that הלכה can conform to the individual wants and needs of a person, within certain guidelines.

When בני ישראל transformed in the מדבר from just a ציבור to a made up of individuals, they expanded the seemingly narrow path of הלכה into a much wider scope for individual expression. The importance of the intertwining of the ציבור and the יחיד is highlighted throughout שמות, as בני ישראל proved that in order for

²⁶ דברים טז:א-יז

²⁷ שולחן ערוך אורח חיים סימן תקכ"ט סעיף ב

²⁸ ביאור הלכה שם

²⁹ ספר יראים א' תכ"ז

them to succeed as a unified nation, they must be able to express themselves in their own unique ways. תפילה, גמילות חסדים, שמחת יום are just a few examples of the role individuality plays within הלכה.

By fulfilling שמחת יום טוב, we are able to create a personal connection with the תורה and הלכה by playing into our own needs and desires. גמילות חסדים allows us to take our individual expression to another level, as we thrive in the performance of a מצוה בין אדם לחבירו. Finally, once we have helped ourselves and helped others through our own individual paths within the framework of הלכה, we are able to fully focus our attention and כוונה towards ה' through the medium of תפילה, with the appreciation of the Creator Who, in His infinite wisdom, allowed for a תורה that values not only the nation as a whole, but the individuals within it.

ולהגיד גדולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, שאדם טובע כמה מטבעות בחותם אחד - כולן דומין זה לזה, ומלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא טבע כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון - ואין אחד מהן דומה לחבירו. לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר: בשבילי נברא העולם.³⁰

To tell of the greatness of Hashem, for when man mints coins, he makes them all with the same stamp, and every one is the same. But the King of Kings, Hashem, when he creates every man in the image of אדם הראשון, each one is not the same as the next. This is why every-one is obligated to say, 'For me the world was created.'

³⁰ גמרא סנהדרין לו.

- בין אדם למקום and בין אדם לחברו

Which One is Greater?

The Torah addresses two different types of relationships: בין אדם למקום and תנ"ך throughout Jewish history. However, throughout Jewish history, there often appears to be tension between the two relationships. For example, ה' visited אברהם after his circumcision, but then three men came to visit him and he ran to do the mitzvah of אורחים.¹ We then see throughout פרק יח, that אברהם kept running back and forth between the guests and ה'.² Additionally, אברהם went and smashed his father's idols, which was good in the eyes of ה', but not good according to his father.³ Similarly, רחל took her father's idols away from him to prevent him from serving זרה עבודה.⁴ This was viewed highly in the eyes of ה', but not looked at positively by her father. These cases illustrate the tension between בין אדם למקום and בין אדם לחברו. The question now remains, which relationship is greater?

There are many examples within the תורה that seem to stress בין אדם לחברו to be of greater value and substantiate its importance. For example, ה' brought the מבול onto the people as a consequence for their actions to one another.⁵ In contrast, with the story of מגדל בבל, the people built a tower to try and reach the heavens. As a result, ה' confused all their languages and spread

¹ בראשית יח:א-ב

² שם יח:יג, טז, כב

³ בראשית רבה פרק לח פסוק ח

⁴ שם לא:ל-לד

⁵ שם פרקים ו-ז

them across the entire earth.⁶ When the people rebelled against ה' like in מגדל בבל, He only mixed up their languages and scattered them, but when they went against each other like the המבול ה', He destroyed them and the whole world. This certainly implies that בין אדם למקום is regarded more highly than בין אדם לחברו.

In פרשת יתרו, when referring to the reason for שבת within the לוחות, the פסוק states ואת השמים ואת הארץ פסוק. The reason for שבת is to commemorate the six days of creation from ה'. Then in פרשת אתחנן, an additional reason for שבת is stated.

⁸ למען ינוח עבדך ואמתך כמוך ... וזכרת כי עבד הייתה בארץ מצרים. If one remembers what it was like in מצרים, then they will take pity on their servants and allow them to rest. These reasons for שבת include both a Godly and human aspect. As רמב"ן⁹ explains, the recognition of God can be accomplished through the remembrance of our slavery in מצרים. Since even the Godly aspect is expressed through our interaction with our fellow humans, this is yet another indication that בין אדם לחברו is of greater importance.

שמיטה is another example of something where the reason appears to be for ה' but in reality it is a source of צדקה for other people. In משפטים פרשת, the תורה gives us reasons for leaving the land untended once every seven years¹⁰. It says that we must do so for the sake of the poor, to allow them to come and take what is in the field to eat. However in בהר¹¹ פרשת in reference to שמיטה it states, לה'. At first glance, this appears to be conflicting, going back and forth between בין אדם למקום and בין אדם לחברו. However, upon further examination, it appears that from here as well that בין אדם לחברו is a

⁶ שם פרק יא

⁷ שמות כ:ח-ט

⁸ דברים ה: יב-יד

⁹ דברים פרק ה: יג

¹⁰ שמות כג: יא

¹¹ ויקרא כה: ד

stronger obligation. Later in the פסוק, after describing שמיטה as לה' שבת, the תורה declares that the produce of the land in this year is designated for all people, including slaves and maidservants. Since the charitable nature of שמיטה is considered to be of great value and is mentioned twice, it appears that בין אדם לחברו seems to be on a higher level.

Other sources also demonstrate the primacy of בין אדם לחברו. For example, we are told that רבי עקיבא's students died because of how they treated each other, not because of a lack in their relationship with ה'.¹² His students were engrossed in intense Torah learning reaching tremendous heights in their עבודת ה', but since they lacked respect for one another, they were killed. Similarly, בית ראשון was destroyed due to sins committed against ה'. These sins include murder, adultery, and idolatry, the three cardinal sins.¹³ This exile lasted for seventy years until the building of בית שני. Due to the hatred people had towards each other, שנאת חנם, the second בית הקדש was destroyed. The גמרא¹⁴ states that this demonstrates that שנאת חנם is equivalent to these three cardinal sins. However, given the fact that this second exile is still in effect, even after almost two thousand years, perhaps this shows that sins against our fellow man are even more serious.

In life, we sometimes find it hard to befriend someone who is not worshipping ה' properly, but if בין אדם לחברו is a greater value, then there appears to be a conflict. So, then, which one should we view to be of the most importance, בין אדם למקום or בין אדם לחברו?

The תורה mentions יובל, the year after the seventh cycle of שמיטה, in connection to man and God. In פרשת בהר¹⁵ it says, יובל הוא

¹² יבמות סב:

¹³ יומא ט:

¹⁴ שם

¹⁵ ויקרא כה:

לכם. Then, in פרשת בחקותי¹⁶ it states, 'והיה השדה בצאתו ביובל קדש לה'. It seems that the תורה is showing us two different sides of the same exact מצוה (for man and for ה'). Perhaps this can give us a different perspective on the relationship between בין אדם למקום and בין אדם לחברו. Maybe these are not conflicting values but rather, complementary ones, each one leading to the other.

In פרשת יתרו¹⁷, included in the עשרת הדברות is the מצוה of כיבוד אב ואם. As their children, we are obligated to treat our parents with honor because they were partners in our creation¹⁸ and provided us with life and sustain us. Therefore, we should honor them as part of our הכרת הטוב. This מצוה appears to fall under the category of בין אדם לחברו. However, it is worth noting that this מצוה is grouped with the first five of the עשרת הדיברות, the בין אדם למקום group. Rav Hirsch explains this anomaly by connecting the role of parents with that of God. God is revealed to the Jewish people through the many facets of our history. But the only way He is acknowledged through these events is if Judaism is sustained. Therefore, the role of parents is to transmit the Jewish past and mission onto their children in order to bring about knowledge of God. If the parents fail to do so, the Jewish past will be lost and the nation will become non-existent. Parents are the vehicles through which recognition of God is imbued within their children, and for this reason, they must be honored and loved deeply by their children. This is another example from which we may conclude that there is no tension between בין אדם לחברו and בין אדם למקום; rather they are one in the same within the bigger picture.

The relationships of בין אדם לחברו and בין אדם למקום cannot be placed on different rungs on the ladder. To the contrary, they must be placed upon the same rung. People need to first work on their relationship with others, solidify them and grow from them.

¹⁶ ויקרא כז: כא

¹⁷ שמות כ: יב

¹⁸ קידושין ל:

Only then can they work on connecting and getting closer to God because, once they know how to act towards each other, then they will know how to act before ה', making a relationship with Him much more accessible.

It appears, therefore, that בין אדם לחברו is not actually greater than בין אדם למקום. Rather, its primacy comes from the fact that it is a means to the goal of בין אדם למקום. In ספר ויקרא¹⁹ a few מצוות that are בין אדם לחברו are listed and after several of them, the phrase 'אני ה' is repeated. This is stated four times throughout this section. רמב"ם²⁰ explains the מצוה דארייתא of והלכת בדרכיו as imitating God's actions. In general, one is closer to someone that they are similar to. In order to come close to ה', one should fulfill מצוות that are בין אדם לחברו, and become a better, more compassionate person. The two cannot be separated. If one neglects בין אדם לחברו, then he has erred in their בין אדם למקום as well. The נצי"ב²¹ believes that אמונה is the basis for all our בין אדם לחברו מצוות. If people believed that everything is from ה' and that He is constantly present, then they would not steal, or speak הרע לשון הרע, etc. If this is true, then the opposite can be said as well. Our בין אדם למקום can lead us to better our relationships בין אדם לחברו. In the end, בין אדם למקום and בין אדם לחברו go hand in hand and can both lead us to the ultimate relationships in both respects, as it says, 'ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני ה' ²²

¹⁹ ויקרא יט:יא-יח

²⁰ ספר המצוות מצות עשה ח

²¹ העמק דבר דברים כה:יז

²² ויקרא יט:יח

Death is Not the End

If someone were to lend you something and ask for it back, should you return it? This is the question posed by Bruriah, the wife of Rabbi Meir, upon the sudden death of her two sons. Rabbi Meir replied, "Yes, you should return it," and when he then saw his two sons dead his response was, "Hashem gives and Hashem takes away."¹

Bruriah understood that God runs the world, and she was able to see past her pain and recognize that even this was an act of God. When a friend or loved one passes away, it is important to intellectually understand that it was meant to be, that the person was a gift from God who is now being returned. However, this is not so easily done, as we have an emotional response as well. What is it that makes us feel that something has been ripped out of our lives? What exactly is taken away when someone dies? How do we deal with this sense of loss?

The first time death is described in the Torah is after the sin of Adam. Hashem says *עפר אתה ואל עפר תשוב* – "For you are dust, and to the dust you shall return."² The body will return to the ground and, as Shlomo says, *וישב העפר על הארץ כשהיה והרוח תשוב אל האלקים* – "And the earth returns to the land as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it."³ When a person dies, the two parts that make up each individual are separated. The body returns to the source of physical life, and the soul returns to Hashem, the source of spiritual life.

¹ מדרש משלי לא

² בראשית ג:ט

³ קהלת יב:ז

What are you – a body or a soul? In order to understand the loss felt when a death occurs, it is first necessary to comprehend what defines a person, and what is lost when he or she dies. According to Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, a person is a combination of thoughts, memories and personality. He compares death to a book being burned; although the physical make-up of the book is destroyed, the contents are intact.⁴ When a person is living, he or she thinks, acts, and exists in God's דעת, or knowledge.⁵ However, when someone dies, that person is not gone. The individual's thoughts and memories still exist, and they exist now in God's בינה, in His memory.⁶ If the definition of who we are is our memories, then when someone passes away it is not only in God's memory that they exist, but in ours as well. The memories they leave behind, the actions they did that affected others, are parts of themselves that stay with us, in our memories and in our lives.

There is comfort in the fact that although a person's body no longer lives, the essence of the individual has the potential to stay alive in us forever. But it still begs the question: Why does this happen? Why do people die?

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lutzatto, in his work, דרך השם, explains that death must have meaning because regardless of how meaningful life can be, it is only temporary. The Midrash explains that life is the connection between the soul and the body. When Adam sinned, he damaged the equally balanced relationship between his body and soul and consequently brought the concept of death into the world, the possibility for a body and soul to be disconnected. God therefore said, לא טוב היות אדם לבדו – "It is not good

⁴ראה *The Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan Anthology*

⁵ שערי אורה ח, פרדס רימונים ח:ט, כג:ג

⁶ עץ חיים, שער מד:ד, שער הקליפות ב

for man to be alone,” for the soul to exist isolated from the body⁷. Adam’s sin damaged the perfect connection (life) between his soul and body, hence death was inevitable. עולם הבא will be the place to correct the sin of Adam, a place where the body and soul can reconnect in the right way. According to רמב"ן on this verse, עולם הבא is where we will live immortally with this perfect connection. ה' created two periods, one for earning reward and one for receiving it. In God’s kindness, He limited the earning period, making the receiving period last for eternity. In the earning period, in this world, we are supposed to get as close to perfection (as close to God) as possible, through our own efforts.⁸ However, in order to allow us to be able to actually make the choice to get close to God, it is crucial for us to have the physical and spiritual in constant strife. The objective is to subjugate the physical and not allow it to restrain the spiritual, much like Adam before the sin.

Before his sin, Adam had the physical and spiritual in a perfect balance. He was supposed to choose good and throw the balance off in that direction, but when he sinned he increased the evil in the world, making it harder to attain good as the dominant force. In consequence, though we are supposed to try and reach perfection, the effects of the sin make it impossible for us to achieve it in our current, fallen state. Therefore, we first have to go through a state of destruction, in order to rebuild the perfect connection properly.

This process will happen through תחיית המתים. When someone dies, the body is buried and deteriorates. When the person will be resurrected, a new body will be formed and the soul will then enter this new body, and “shine with great purity.”⁹ With this perfect connection once again established, a person will be able to experience the true reward he has worked for in the

⁷ בראשית ב:יח

⁸ דרך ה', עמוד נא

⁹ זוהר א:קיו.

earning period.¹⁰ Death is, therefore, not a negative thing; it is the second necessary step in attaining perfection in life, it is the medium through which we return to the connection Adam had, before the sin.

A very similar idea is portrayed in פרשת וישלח. When רחל passed away, she named her son בן אוני, meaning “son of my suffering.” However, יעקב called this child בנימין, meaning “son of my right hand,” which is meant to symbolize strength. רמב”ן explains that what יעקב was essentially doing was taking רחל’s death and transforming it into a source of strength for him.¹¹ Although יעקב experienced suffering after the death of his wife, he chose to focus on the positive element of the situation, on the fact that she had moved on to the next stage, and that she had accomplished so much good while she was alive. This allowed him to find a way to utilize the intense emotions that followed her death and transform these feelings into a foundation of strength for him.

Clearly, I would never go so far as to say that death is a good thing. But, ultimately, I believe that death is necessary. The way of the world is to have people pass through it; it is not the end, but a means to an end. Naturally, when people have completed the stage called life, they move on to the next one, death; and eventually, they experience the ideal life.

From the perspective of the individual, the death of a loved one feels intrinsically wrong. We miss the person who we’ve lost. To us, this sense of loss cannot be comforted. We feel an intense sense of abandonment that cannot be simulated nor replicated, a unique kind of pain. I think that’s the point. The way it makes us feel to have a loss like death is a unique occurrence. Perhaps, in this situation alone, the emotions are evoked that spur complete and utter recognition of the limits of this world and shed light on the subjectivity of man to a higher power, a lack of control we can

¹⁰ כתובות קיא:

¹¹ בראשית לה:יח

rarely admit to ourselves except in a situation like this, where we have no choice but to recognize that someone or something other than man is running this world. The power of the emotion that is evoked by a sense of loss such as death is a force stronger than most of us realize. People have created *צדקה* organizations in memory of their loved ones, have started revolutions to help people in numerous kinds of situations, and have initiated innovative acts that are fueled by an event, a loss, that sparked inspiration and determination. A rare determination, one that will not fade with time, because the action taken after a death – in honor or in memory of someone – is meant to last forever, to remember in our lives, the greatness of the life that was lost.

Think about it: What would it mean to model our lives after our great and beloved ancestors, to turn even their deaths into the single most powerful event in our lives? What would it mean to literally bring their ideas and memory to life?

Secular and Jewish Names

A name is an important part of a person. It is a word that identifies each person and, without a doubt, will be heard constantly throughout life. So if you were to pick one word that would define you for your whole life, what word would you choose? A name in לשון הקודש that evokes holy concepts, which is what one's life should revolve around? Or a name in a different language, one that has no innate connection to you? The answer seems obvious, but the popular trend in at least some circles seems to be the use of secular or non-Jewish names. How is such a trend justified?

The first case of naming in the Torah appears in בראשית ב:יט:

ויצר יהוה אלהים מן האדמה כל חית השדה ואת כל עוף השמים ויבא אל האדם לראות מה יקרא לו וכל אשר יקרא לו האדם נפש חיה הוא שמו.

God was in the midst of creating everything from nothing when He told אדם to name all the creatures. This seems strange, because after all, אדם had only been in existence for a few hours himself. How could he name the animals better than God? ספורנו¹ explains God wanted him to name the creatures according to what he saw and understood was a worthy name for each of them according to their special characteristics. רבינו בחיי² agrees that it was according to the creature's nature and recognizable character traits. Rav Hirsch³ puts an interesting twist on this. He claims man was meant to give names subjectively based on their impression on him. Giving something a name indicates its place in the world. God made a clear point that it should be man who bestows the names, but the names should also be meaningful –

¹ ספורנו בראשית ב:יט

² רבינו בחיי בראשית ב:יט

³ רב הירש בראשית ב:יט

not just a random word that sounds nice, but a word that describes the bearer of the name in his מדות and his role in the world.

When Hashem commanded אדם to name the creatures, language wasn't specified. In a few places in the Torah, it says that even our forefathers had names in other languages. The first instance is משה.⁴ His name may have been Jewish, but he was raised by an Egyptian princess in an Egyptian king's house and she most likely didn't know Hebrew when she named him.

אבן עזרא⁵ says the name משה comes from the Egyptian name Monios. ויקרא: בראשית מא:מה is another example. It plainly says in פרעה שם יוסף צפנת פענח.

מפרשים⁶ and Rav Hirsch⁷, among many other מפרשים, agree that this is an Egyptian name. Rav Hirsch examines the etymology of the name and claims it can be rooted back to Hebrew to mean "hidden." The name as a whole means in Egyptian "He with whom the most secret things are kept." There is no objection to the use of this Egyptian name. One should also recognize that even though it wasn't Hebrew, the name he was given had meaning: To the Pharaoh, as a dream interpreter, he knew secrets.

Another prime example of this is אסתר המלכה.⁸ She had a Hebrew name, הדסה, though throughout the מגילה our heroine is referred to as אסתר. According to the גר"א⁹ based on מסכת מגילה יג:א, she was called אסתר from "Esthar," a Persian goddess. Note that in

⁴ שמות ב:י

⁵ אבן עזרא שמות ב:י - שם משה מתורגם מלשון מצרים בלשון הקדש. ושמו בלשון מצרים היה מוניוס.

⁶ רשב"ם בראשית מ"א:מ"ה - "צפנת פענח" - כתר'ג. ולשון מצרים הוא. וכן היה דרכם לקרוא לאדם בשעה שממנים אותו על ביתם שם הראוי. וכן ויקרא משה להושע בן נון יהושוע, כשנעשה משרתו. וכן ויקרא לדניאל בל טשצר. כדכתיב די שם שמייה בל טשצר בשם אלהיה.

⁷ רב הירש בראשית מא:מה

⁸ אסתר ב:ז

⁹ גר"א אסתר ב:ז

all three examples, there seems to be no negative connotations in relation to the names, and the characters still had Hebrew names.

There are a number of well-known מדרשים¹⁰ that say that our nation only merited salvation from Egypt because they did not change several things about themselves, including their names. This was one of their top priorities, and clearly they were correct to give it so much value because it allowed them to be saved from the most backbreaking and horrible persecution. If they had changed their names to Egyptian names, our nation would have assimilated amidst the slavery, like any other nation would have under the pressures of persecution.

גבורות ה' פרק מ"ג in מהר"ל says that if we had not been an but we had assimilated, we would not have merited redemption. Rav Moshe Feinstein¹¹ and מהר"ל mention the possibility that since we were not yet a nation, we needed this added חזק to allow us to develop into an עם רב ועצום. However, after מתן תורה, we no longer needed this extra גדר because from then on, we have had the מצוות and תורה to hold us together and keep us on the correct path. According to this approach, a Jewish name is a nice addition, but there is no need to only choose Jewish names. However, if we analyze our current situation, we can see that we are a nation in a very long גלות. Can this have been the reason for it? Maybe our change of names (signifying great assimilation) is the cause of our גלות. It was an added חזק then, so why not now?

Even if there is no direct obligation to stick to Jewish names, it may fall under the auspices of other מצוות. There are two obvious מצוות for which this may be applicable - the prohibition

¹⁰ ויקרא רבה ס"ב ס' ה:ד, שמות רבה פ"א ס' כ"ט, בתנא"א סוף פרק כ"ג, שיר השירים רבה פרשה ד ד"ה גן - בי הונא בשם בר קפרא אמר בזכות ארבעה דברים נגאלו ישראל ממצרים, שלא שינו את שמם, ולא שינו את לשונם, ולא אמרו לשון הרע, ולא נמצא בהן אחד פרוץ בערוה.

¹¹ אורח חיים ד' ס' סו - בשביל האמונה שיגאלו ורצו שיהיו ניכרין שהם ישראל הנהיגו להקפיד שלא ישנו את שמם ולא ישנו את לשונם ומטעם זה שייך זה להגאולה משום שבשביל אמונת הגאולה הקפידו על זה, אבל אחר מתן תורה אין לנו חוב מדינא וגם לא מענייני זהירות ומוסר אלא מה שנצטוינו התרי"ג מצוות לדורות והמצות שנצטוו לשעה.

קדושים תהיו and the positive commandment of ¹²חוקות עכו"ם against ¹³explains the מצוה of חוקות עכו"ם: We should be different from the other nations and not follow in their ways. Specifically, he gives examples to not cut hair or wear clothes like the other nations, but these acts don't make us different by themselves. This prohibition leaves leeway to make one's own judgment calls, but honestly, non-Jewish names are questionable. It may seem trivial, but so does a haircut.

Additionally, there is the commandment of קדושים תהיו ¹⁵. There is much dispute regarding this phrase. ¹⁶רמב"ן seems to take a very rational approach to what it means. He says the מדרש explains קדוש as פרושים, meaning one should be separate in general; in the way one acts, thinks, and views oneself. This is the foundation of other מצוות and through this one can achieve correct מצוות of כוונה ¹⁷. He explains דברים וי"ה teaches a similar idea on דברים וי"ה. He explains מצוות of כוונה the פסוק to mean one's intentions when taking action must be for

¹² ויקרא יח:ג

¹³ ויקרא יח:ב

¹⁴ הלכות עובדי כוכבים יא:א - אין הולכין בחקות העובדי כוכבים ולא מדמין להן לא במלבוש ולא בשער וכיוצא בהן שנאמר ולא תלכו בחקות הגוים, ונאמר ובחקותיהם לא תלכו, ונאמר השמר לך פן תנקש אחריהם, הכל בענין אחד הוא מזהיר שלא ידמה להן, אלא יהיה הישראל מובדל מהן וידוע במלבושו ובשאר מעשיו כמו שהוא מובדל מהן במדעו ובדעותיו, וכן הוא אומר ואבדיל אתכם מן העמים, לא ילבש במלבוש, המיוחד להן, ולא יגדל ציצית ראשו כמו ציצית ראשם, ולא יגלה מן הצדדין ויניח השער באמצע כמו שהן עושין וזה הנקרא בלורית, ולא יגלה השער מכנגד פניו מאזן לאזן ויניח הפרע מלאחריו כדרך שעושין הן, ולא יבנה מקומות כבנין היכלות של עכו"ם כדי שיכנסו בהן רבים כמו שהן עושין, וכל העושה אחת מאלו וכיוצא בהן.

¹⁵ ויקרא יח:ב

¹⁶ רמב"ן ויקרא פרק יט פסוק ב - "פרושים תהיו". וכן שנו שם (שמיני פרק יב ג), והתקדשתם והייתם קדושים כי קדוש אני, כשם שאני קדוש כך אתם תהיו קדושים, כשם שאני פרוש כך אתם תהיו פרושים...לומר שאנחנו נזכה לדבקה בו בהיותנו קדושים

¹⁷ רמב"ן דברים וי"ה - "ועשית הישר והטוב בעיני ה'" - על דרך הפשט יאמר תשמרו מצות השם ועודתיו וחקותיו ותכוין בעשייתו לעשות הטוב והישר בעיניו בלבד. ולמען ייטב לך - הבטחה, יאמר כי בעשותך הטוב בעיניי ייטב לך, כי השם מטיב לטובים ולישרים בלבבותם. ולרבותינו בזה מדרש יפה, אמרו זו פשרה ולפנים משורת הדין. והכוונה בזה, כי מתחלה אמר שתשמור חקותיו ועודתיו אשר צוך, ועתה יאמר גם באשר לא צוך תן דעתך לעשות הטוב והישר בעיניי, כי הוא אוהב הטוב והישר.

the purpose of being good for ה'. The תורה doesn't dictate how to make each decision. This פסוק is teaching us a mindset of how to choose based on what one honestly thinks ה' wants. Again, this is a very ambiguous commandment and we cannot be sure names fall under this category. But if a name is how a person is identified, being called a secular name essentially brings the person to identify with the other nations.

What if one has a secular name and wants to go by a Hebrew name? No primary sources discuss this issue however the ראש גמרה in ראש may shed some light on this question. רבי יצחק said four things can change a person's decree: charity, crying out, changing one's actions and changing one's name. The changing of one's name seems to have a lot of power. God doesn't cavalierly make decrees; once a decree is made, it is rarely nullified. Yet somehow, the renaming of oneself could make God change His mind. It could mean the difference between life and death, poverty and wealth, sickness and health, success and failure. This is the reason why many times when someone is sick, a name is added to their pre-existing name.

Rav Moshe Feinstein seems to view this topic from two perspectives. In ¹⁹ אבן העזר ס' לה, he writes that the practice of using secular names is clearly against the common praise of our nation in Egypt, and that we should condemn the practice. However, this phenomenon has been going on since at least the time of the ראשונים. Secular names are so integrated within society that people don't even realize that they have no Jewish significance. However in ²⁰ אורח חיים ס' טו, he explains that it is important to name children

¹⁸ ראש השנה טז: - ואמר רבי יצחק: ארבעה דברים מקרעין גזר דינו של אדם, אלו הן: צדקה, צעקה, שינוי השם, ושינוי מעשה.

¹⁹ אג"מ אבן האזר ג' ס' לה- בדבר ענין השמות שעורר כתר"ה שבמדינה זו כמעט רובא דרובא אף מיראי השי"ת ואף מרבנים נקראים בשמות הנכרים של המדינה משמות האנגליים, אשר הוא נגד השבח ששיבחו חז"ל את אבותינו במצרים בכמה מדרשות שלא שינו את שמם ושבשביל זה נגאלו ממצרים... אבל הא אין נוהגין כמותו וצריך טעם ע"ז.

²⁰ אג"מ אורח חיים ד' ס' טו- שלכן ח"ו לנו לומר שלא עשו כהוגן דאחרי שכבר נתרגלו ישראל באלו השמות אין בזה שייכות לטעם הגנאי ואין לשנות לקרא שם בנו או שם בתו על שמות הזקנים והזקנות

after past גדולים and family members, Jewish or secular. This isn't only כתבי קודש — the גמרא and the אונקלוס תרגום — but they are written in Aramaic. These two approaches seem to contradict one another, but they could be clarifying each other. When a name is given for an honorable reason, to give someone rightful honor, a secular name is even praised. It is important to recognize the greatness of those before us. But when there is no praiseworthy motive, a secular name becomes devoid of meaning.

After all this, it isn't only about the actual name you were given as a child, but the name you make for yourself. It says in פרקי אבות²¹ that a person can receive three crowns in life, but better than those three crowns is a fourth called the כתר שם טוב. A כתר שם טוב is defined as someone who makes a good name for himself (or herself), meaning the reputation that is left behind. It is something that follows a person, clinging closer than one's shadow. It is someone with a שם טוב who is deserving of true honor, unlike the other three crowns. The גמרא ברכות²² is an example of the difference between someone with a כתר שם טוב and someone who is lacking a כתר שם טוב. The גמרא says that the ראשונים established תורה and then made work temporary. However, the אחרונים established work and made תורה temporary. The אחרונים who worked still valued תורה, but they didn't correctly emphasize its importance. The same is true of someone who does not establish a שם טוב for themselves. This shows the importance of establishing a שם טוב, as this is what truly defines the essence of a person.

שנקראו בשמות לעז שהוא ענין כבוד המשפחה אף שהם מדור הקודם שעכ"פ איכא עליו לכבדם וכ"ש כשיש עליו לקרא על שם הוריו ממש שחייב בכבודם וגם בדברי חז"ל במדרשים איתא שקורין עכשיו הבנים והבנות ע"ש דורות הקודמים צריך לקרא כפי השם שנקראו אף שהוא שם לעז בלא שינוי.

²¹ משנה אבות ד:יג-רבי יהודה אומר הוי זהיר בתלמוד ששגגת תלמוד עולה זדון רבי שמעון אומר שלשה כתרין הם כתר תורה וכתר כהונה וכתר מלכות וכתר שם טוב עולה על גביה.

²² מסכת ברכות לה:–מר רבה בר בר חנה אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי יהודה ברבי אלעאי: בא וראה שלא כדורות הראשונים דורות האחרונים, דורות הראשונים עשו תורתן קבע ומלאכתן עראי - זו וזו נתקימה בידן, דורות האחרונים שעשו מלאכתן קבע ותורתן עראי - זו וזו לא נתקימה בידן.

עמלות בתורה On the Value of

that the comments regarding תשמרו ואת מצותי תלכו ואת פסוק means תורה so that one can fulfill the מצוות.² However, it says in the גמרא in קדושין³ that there is no reward in this world for מצוות. If this is true, and the פסוק is referring to learning תורה, then how could the following פסוקים talk about the reward being good land and other physical rewards? תלמוד תורה must mean something more than שתהיו עמלים בתורה since תלמוד תורה is a מצוה and would therefore bring no earthly reward.

According to נתיבות שלום, תורה refers to the הידור מצוה of תלמוד תורה.⁴ What does this mean?

In הלכות תלמוד תורה רמב"ם's, it says that someone who learns תורה in order to be "crowned with the crown of תורה" doesn't waste his time thinking about other things and won't think that he can acquire this with any sort of wealth or respect, rather only by learning. רמב"ם adds that the תורה way of life is that we should need nothing more than bread, salt and water. Then he ends with: – as they say colloquially: no pain, no gain.⁵

Hence, the reward that we get in this world is not for the תלמוד תורה itself, but for עמלים בתורה, that we should work hard and pain ourselves over תורה.

² ויקרא כו:ג

³ לט:

⁴ נתיבות שלום ויקרא, "שתהיו עמלים בתורה"

⁵ הלכות תלמוד תורה גו:

כי אם בתורת ה' חפצו ובתורתו יהגה יומם ולילה⁷: explain the verse: ⁶חז"ל. It is first called תורת ה', and only after that, תורתו after he grasps and "kills himself" over תורה, is it called his own תורתו:תורה, because he has merited the "crown of תורה."

A man once came to his Rebbe and said: "I desire, anticipate, and love תורה, but it's just not coming to me. I just don't get it." His Rebbe answered: "Man doesn't merit this unless he is מוסר נפשו למיתה עליה, unless he pains himself over תורה to the point of metaphorically 'killing himself' over it." Anticipating, loving, and desiring תורה clearly isn't enough. Only when someone is מוסר נפשו and עמל בתורה, will he merit the "crown of תורה." And just like ריש לקיש said in the גמרא in שבת⁸: אין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה.

In the גמרא in יומא⁹, the rabbis discuss three people who come before Divine Judgment after they die: a rich man, a poor man and an evil man. The poor person will be expected to have learned תורה despite his poverty, just as הלל did. The rich person will be expected to have learned תורה despite his wealth, like רב אלעזר did. The evil person will be expected to have learned תורה despite his good looks – just as יוסף הצדיק did.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz asks how these ordinary people can possibly be compared to הלל, רב אלעזר, and יוסף. One can understand why the three aforementioned people were able to learn תורה despite their situations. They were on such a high level that nothing could prevent their study of תורה! But don't the "regular people" get cut a little slack for their situations? They are on a much lower level than הלל, רב אלעזר, and יוסף הצדיק!

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz answers that if the question was about neglecting a single מצוה, allowance would be given to the

⁶ ע"ז יט.

⁷ תהלים א:ב

⁸ פג:

⁹ לה:

“regular people” because of their respective situations (poverty, wealth and good looks). However, תורה is not just one מצוה. It is the very essence of one’s eternal existence. Rav Chaim says: “When a luxury item is unavailable, one endeavors to obtain it in proportion to one’s refined taste. When bread is lacking, however, rich and poor, wealthy and impoverished, will pursue it with equal vigor.” And this is the difference between any other מצוה and תלמוד תורה.

The מדרש connects walking in G-d’s ways to דוד המלך’s statement: “I calculated my ways and returned my feet to Your testimony.”¹⁰ Rabbi Henoah Leibowitz¹¹ explains that although דוד never neglected his responsibilities as king, he never spent any more time and effort on them than necessary, so that he could learn תורה as much as possible. The יצר הרע always tells us to spend more time on things that don’t involve תורה, but דוד overcame these temptations because of his thirst for תורה.

Our teacher Rabbi Hanoah Teller tells about the unwillingness of Reb Nison Alpert to waste any time on anything besides תורה: “On July 20th, 1969, the entire country was occupied with one thing and one thing only. Every man, woman and child could be found with eyes riveted to the television screen to witness the event of the century: as Russia ate its heart out, a Yankee astronaut was about to land on the moon. Those who did not personally own a television crowded around the windows of appliance stores or availed themselves of their friends’ hospitality. No one wanted to miss this stirring moment. The United States was agog

¹⁰ תהלים קיט:ט

¹¹ ראה Teller, Hanoah. "Time Management, Parsha BeChukosai." *A Midrash and a Maaseh: an Anthology of Insights and Commentaries on the Weekly Torah Reading, including Hundreds of Old Favorites and New Stories*. New York: New York City Publ, 1996. 188-190.

with anticipation... [Reb Nison's] son, who had saved him a seat in a neighbor's living room, hurried in [to Reb Nison's home, where he was busy learning גמרא] to tell Reb Nison that if he were to come immediately he would not be wasting a second [of learning תורה] since the "moon walk" was just about to begin. But, as his son recalls, it wasn't even as though Reb Nison had to battle between natural impulse and a sense of propriety – he simply was not interested. There was nothing that could interest Reb Nison more than a page of גמרא.¹²

תורה must be a continual investment, with constant work, pain and struggle. Nothing else in the world is more important, and thus we cannot waste our time thinking or being busy with anything but תורה. After 120 years, no one, regardless of his situation, will be given any reprieve for neglecting to learn תורה. Just like דוד המלך and Reb Nison, we must realize that nothing else is worth our "extra" time.

The Essence of a Name

Naming a child is, essentially, one of the most powerful acts a person can do. When אדם named the animals, he exercised the power of creation. When לאה and רחל named the שבטים, they were actually defining the whole nature of the future of בני ישראל.

In בראשית רבה לז: it is written: "Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said, 'The first ones were endowed with divine inspiration therefore they named their children after an event; however we, who do not possess that quality, name after our ancestors'." It can be inferred from Rabbi Shimon's statement that during the times of the תנ"ך, everyone's name reflected his or her mission in life; however, nowadays, names come from our ancestors. Despite this fact, there is still a certain power involved in the naming of a child. A child's name provides a connection to the previous generations. In addition, the name reflects on the parents, indicating what they want their child to be like. One does not just pick a name out of a hat.

Alfred Kolatch, in his book *These are the Names*, gives us six categories of names in תנ"ך. These include: names influenced by the experiences of the parents, names of animals, names of plants or flowers, theophanic names (which have God's name either as a prefix or suffix), conditions or experiences of mankind or the nation, and names which express hope for the future or a desired condition.

When man was created, Hashem gave him the power of speech. This power differentiates us from the animals. A מדרש teaches us that אדם, the first man, had the power to use his speech properly and was able to name animals using the רוח הקודש that he had. He was able to see the characteristics of the animal and attribute a name to it.

The מדרש רבא in ויצא says that names have positive aspects or negative aspects, depending on one's actions. Some examples of

individuals in תנ"ך who are not positive role models include עשו and ישמעאל. These names can have positive connotations or negative connotations. עשה is עשו, to do, and שמע is ישמעאל, to listen. עשו did not do and ישמעאל did not listen. They did the opposite of what their names meant.

Each שבט was named for a particular reason and a particular purpose. The first ראובן, שבט ראובן, was named ראובן because, as it says in בראשית פרק לט, "Hashem had discerned my humiliation and my husband now loves me." ראובן's name can be interpreted different ways and we can see how his name plays out.

The מדרש רבא and רש"י both say that ראובן can be an acronym for "to see what is between." This means that ראובן was able to see the clear picture, in any situation. ראובן was not bitter about the losing his first born rights, he just accepted it (unlike עשו, earlier in בראשית). In addition, with regards to the events that occurred with בלהה where the Torah tells us of ראובן's sin of sleeping with בלהה, the תלמוד מסכת סוטה teaches us that ראובן realized his sin and admitted to it, and for that he inherited the עולם הזה. A different opinion, recorded in מסכת שבת, teaches us otherwise and informs us that ראובן did not sin; rather, he simply switched the beds to make it look like he slept with בלהה. He reasoned that if his mother's sister brought his mother pain, therefore, the maid-servant of his mother would also bring her pain. ראובן was overseeing this situation in order to help out his mother. Another event where ראובן took the role as a בכור and protector is in the story of the דודאים. According to אברבנאל, ראובן took the דודאים for לאה because he heard that they were good. Later, רחל asked for them because she was barren. A third occurrence of ראובן's role took place in regards to the selling of יוסף. ראובן did his best to make sure that יוסף was safe. The מדרש רבא לוי' says that this day, when יוסף was sold, was ראובן's day. He was the בכור and so he knew that it was his responsibility to save יוסף. He told the brothers not to kill יוסף, but rather, to put him in the pit. Unfortunately, once ראובן left, יוסף was sold.

שמעון (meaning 'ה has heard I'm unloved) and לוי (the third son) share a ברכה by יעקב. They are blessed to be comrades and to have the craft of weaponry among them. But, because they both have played out the trait of anger in their life, they should be separated. In the ברכות of משה, only לוי is blessed to teach. שמעון, meaning "hear," is blessed to be able to have weapons. This probably means that he can hear the cries of בני ישראל in war. However, he is rarely mentioned later in תנ"ך. This probably is why משה did not bless him; but the ברכה from יעקב carried forward.

The next שבט יהודה, means "to praise 'ה." יהודה was blessed by יעקב to be a lion cub; to be the scepter and lead the people. He is blessed by משה saying that he would help the Jews return and help in wars. This shows us that יהודה fulfilled his name in his lifetime. He sinned, yet he recognized his sin and was a leader for all the people.

דן means "Hashem had judged me." He was blessed by יעקב saying that he would avenge his people and unite the tribes. In the ברכה of משה, he is said to be a lion cub. This ברכה makes sense due to דן's name. דן, being the judge, will help to unite the people.

נפתלי, meaning, "Schemes have come so I can equal my sister," was blessed by יעקב saying, "Let loose to those who deliver greater sayings." In ברכות משה, he will satiate with flavor and fill 'ה with blessings. Again, this makes sense according to his name. נפתלי, meaning to scheme, will be able to scheme in order to gain acceptance.

גד, meaning "Good fortune has come," was blessed by יעקב saying, "He will recruit a regiment and it will retreat," and in משה's ברכות saying, "He will be like a lion." גד will clearly bring בני ישראל good fortune with wars.

אשר, meaning "satisfaction," is blessed by יעקב saying that he will have bread and richness, and in משה's ברכות is blessed saying that he will be able to dip his feet in oil. We can clearly see that אשר will have great wealth according to his name.

יששכר, meaning “ה gave me a reward,” is blessed in ברכות יעקב to be a strong-boned donkey, and in ברכות משה to be “in their tents.” We can see that יששכר is blessed to have reward and strength, just as his name means.

זבולון, meaning “Good endowment,” is blessed in ברכות יעקב to settle by the ships’ harbor, and in ברכות משה to have the riches of the sea. We can thus also see the reflection of זבולון’s name directly with his ברכה.

יוסף, is blessed in ברכות יעקב to have an embittered life, yet still remain strong. In ברכות משה, he is blessed with dew and crops. We can clearly see that יוסף, which means to eliminate disgrace, went through much disgrace in his life yet, as stated in the ברכה, he remained strong. This did happen in יוסף’s life.

בנימין, which means or “the son of my right hand,” is blessed by יעקב to be a predator during the day; and in the evening, to disperse all of the spoils. By משה, he is blessed that ה' will dwell with him. Throughout בנימין’s life, especially in the story of יוסף, we can see how בנימין is the young son and the younger brother of יוסף. He is well protected by all of his brothers, and mainly by ה'. We can see from all of the above that the שבטים’s names connect to their ברכות and, later, to their roles in ישראל.

In the book *Shem Israel*, Rabbi Zvi Beluski comments about the meanings and symbolisms of names of תנ"ך. For example, the name יעקב means heel. יעקב was a lowly person, yet he was able to still achieve much more for himself. In גמרא ברכות יג. it says, “One who calls אברם, אברהם, has sinned; yet, one who refers to ישראל as יעקב has not.” The name ישראל means “To strive with God and man.” This indicates that יעקב had achieved some sort of success with all of his endeavors, yet he still thought of himself as a heel. Meanwhile, עשו, which means “done,” felt that he (and everything else) was perfect.

Similarly, the rape and marriage to דינה can be explained upon examination of the name שכם. שכם means a portion. שכם wanted to be a part of יעקב’s family, which is why in בראשית לד:ט

שכם did not refer to דינה as דינה, but rather as “The daughter of יעקב”. שכם wanted to be a part of יעקב’s family. Each name has a powerful connotation indicating what its essence and mission is.

Names are the most powerful words on this earth. We all respond to our own names. Not only that, but a name is the root of one’s soul. When parents have a baby, they receive some type of רוח הקודש as to what they should name their child. It’s not just a coincidence that parents want to name a specific child after one particular person, and not another. Neither is it just a coincidence that the parents find a particular name to be nicer than a different one. Naming a child, as in the story of אדם, has an aspect of creation and creativity.

FACULTY

על כנפי נשרים

The Connection of the נשר to גאולה

Introduction

The נשר is the most prolific bird mentioned in תנ"ך, appearing twenty six times in fifteen different books¹ of תנ"ך. It is generally used in a metaphorical sense but also appears in the literal sense as a טמא bird, unfit for eating. There are a number of metaphors which speak of the נשר relating in some way to גאולה and therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore why the נשר in particular is used as a primary metaphor for redemption.

Metaphors

Metaphors are commonly used in תנ"ך. This suggests that there is a value to metaphors that literal language does not and cannot provide. Nechama Leibowitz expresses this succinctly:

Poetic imagery cannot be translated into abstract terms, without losing some of its significance. If it could, a metaphor would be no more than a cipher to be cracked by the one who had the key. The artist does not use imagery where he could express just what he wants to say in so many precise transparent words. If this were the case the employment of metaphors would merely constitute a barrier and brake on the understanding of the text. The intention is surely not to conceal the author's

¹ שמות, ויקרא, דברים, שמואל ב', ישעיה, ירמיה, יחזקאל, הושע, עובדיה, מיכה, חבקוק, תהלים, משלי, איוב, דניאל.

*intention from the reader. We must assume therefore that a metaphor with all its subtle associations and allusions can never find its exact equivalent in conceptual terms. The full implications will always elude definition. Its effectiveness and impact derive precisely from this.*²

What is the נשר?

The נשר is described by the גמרא³ as king of the birds, just as the lion is king of the wild animals. תוספות⁴ refute the commonly accepted idea that the נשר of the תנ"ך is an eagle. If that is the case, what species of bird is the נשר?

In terms of the etymology of the word, the root is נ.ש.ר which means "fall off, fall away"⁵. This supports the words of מיכה who says, הרחבי קרחתך כנשר⁶, "Expand your baldness broad like a *nesher*". The root נ.ש.ר, commonly referring to the loss of hair, would fit this description of the נשר as a bald bird. This פסוק substantiates the claim of the תוספות for there is no known eagle that is truly bald.⁷

Another description of the נשר, this time in איוב, further distances the נשר from being translated as an eagle: אם על פיך יגביה נשר וכי ירים קנו. סלע ישכן ויתלנן על שן סלע ומצודה. משם חפר אכל למרחוק עיניו יביטו. ואפרחיו

² ראה Nehama Leibowitz, New studies in Shemot (Exodus), translated and adapted from the Hebrew by Aryeh Newman, Haoman Press, 1976, Yitro 1, "You yourselves have seen...", p.291-292

³ חגיגה יג:

⁴ חולין סג, ד"ה "נץ"

⁵ ראה The New Bantam – Megiddo Hebrew & English Dictionary, Dr. Reuven Sivan and Dr. Edward A. Levenston, Bantam Books, 1975

⁶ מיכה א:טז

⁷ The bald eagle is not actually bald, its white plumage merely gives it a bald appearance.

.הוא. *“Is it by your command that the eagle soars, or makes its nest on high, dwelling and lodging in the clefts of rocks, upon rocky cliff and tower, from there he searches for food, his eyes look out to the distance? His eaglets gulp up blood, and where there are corpses there he is.”*⁸

Eagles do not usually feed on corpses; they generally kill their own live prey. This seems to suggest that the נשר is actually a vulture. Birds feeding on carcasses would consider a bald head as advantageous as the feathers would not get in the way or become infested with decaying material when the head is dipped inside the carcass. The bird usually suggested is the griffon vulture.⁹

The root in Arabic and Aramaic, נשר, is used to refer to both the eagle and the vulture. There is no clear answer to the identity of the נשר and indeed many commentators identify the word נשר in certain places as the eagle, and in others as the vulture.

Physical Attributes of the נשר

In addition to the baldness already mentioned, the גמרא provides us with further physical attributes of the נשר. In פרשת שמייני, the תורה lists forbidden birds:

וְאֵת אֵלֶּה תִּשְׁקָצוּ מִן הָעוֹף לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ שֶׁקֶץ הֵם אֶת הַנֶּשֶׁר וְאֶת הַפֶּרֶס וְאֶת הָעֹזְנִיָּה...¹⁰

“These you shall make into an abomination from among the birds, they may not be eaten – they are an abomination: the נשר, the פרס, the עוזניה...”

The גמרא in חולין¹¹ discusses the signs of the permitted birds. The גמרא notes that the תר has all four signs of כשרות and all

⁸ איוב לט:כו-ל

⁹ For the purpose of clarity, I will not translate נשר in the article, but rather transliterate it where required.

¹⁰ ויקרא יא:יג

¹¹ חולין סא-סא:

other birds possessing all four signs are also כשר. Any bird lacking even one of the signs is not considered כשר. The four signs are listed in the משנה:

סימני בהמה וחייה נאמרו מן התורה, וסימני העוף לא נאמרו. אבל אמרו חכמים: כל עוף הדורס טמא. כל שיש לו אצבע יתרה וזפק וקרקבנו נקלף טהור. רבי אליעזר בר צדוק אומר: כל עוף החולק את רגליו טמא.¹²

The משנה explains that the first sign is that any bird that is דורס is not kosher. ¹³רש"י explains that this refers to the way the bird claws its food and raises it from the ground. ¹⁴רבינו חם explains this differently, as a bird that is a predator that devours live prey.

The second sign brought in the משנה is the presence of a raised hind toe. The third sign is the possession of a crop. The crop is part of the digestive tract used to temporarily store food. The fourth sign is a pocket within the gizzard that can be peeled away from the flesh using the hand without needing a knife.

It is interesting that the גמרא in חולין identifies that out of the twenty four non-kosher birds listed in ויקרא the נשר is the only one that lacks all four of these signs, making it perhaps the quintessential טמא עוף. If the נשר is indeed the paradigm of non-kosher, then why is it specifically the נשר that is used to describe the process of גאולה?

Perhaps we can suggest that just as the נשר has no סימנים, so too, the essence of גאולה is that we do not recognize any סימנים until we step into the bright light of redemption.

There is also, perhaps, another lesson we can learn. The נשר comes to teach us that גאולה can come in any form. We should not think that being טמא excludes the נשר from being the vehicle of redemption. This is also true of modern times. When the State of Israel was established, there were certain groups within the nation

¹² משנה חולין ג:ו

¹³ רש"י חולין נט.

¹⁴ תוספות חולין סא. ד"ה הדורס

who claimed that this cannot be the start of redemption due to the secular Jews who initiated the return to Zion.

The נשר comes to refute this claim. We should accept ה' salvation through whichever path He chooses, and recognise His hand in all stages of deliverance. We should not discount miracles solely because of the method of their implementation. Just as being carried by the נשר did not lessen the miracle of יציאת מצרים, the miracle of the State of Israel is not diminished by the lack of תורה observance of those who led us home; we are still lacking a fully תורה-observant state, but that does not mean that we should not fully acknowledge and express gratitude for this great miracle as a small step in the lengthy process of redemption.

The נשר in תנ"ך – Metaphorical Appearances

The נשר appears many times in תנ"ך in various different contexts. This article will concentrate on those relating specifically to גאולה.¹⁵

The נשר appears in ספר שמות as an introduction to סיני in which ה' describes the path from Egypt to תורה:

אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואבא אתכם אלי¹⁶
"You have seen what I did to Egypt and that I bore you on the wings of נשרים and I brought you to me."

In the song of פרשת האזינו, the נשר is used to show the kindness ה' showed to us as His nation:

כנשר יעיר קנו על גוזליו ירחף יפרש כנפיו יקחהו על אברתו¹⁷
"He was like a נשר arousing its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings and taking them, carrying them on its plumes."

¹⁵ The Nesher is also used many times relating to punishment and is also used numerous times as a metaphor for Bavel. It is, however, beyond the scope of this article to relate to these.

¹⁶ שמות י"ט:ד'

¹⁷ דברים ל"ב:י"א

Concerning the future redemption, ישעיהו describes that the ציון will have a swift and easy return to ציון:

וקי' ה' יחליפו כה יעלו אבר כנשרים ירוצו ולא ייגעו ילכו ולא ייעפו¹⁸

"Those who hope in Hashem will have renewed strength; they will grow wings like נשרים; they will run and not become weary, they will walk and not become tired."

The סנהדרין in גמרא¹⁹ uses this פסוק as proof of there being no pain for those צדיקים who will be alive when ה' renews the world. ה' will make them wings like נשרים and they will fly over the water but it will not be painful for them.

גאולת מצרים

The נשר appears twice in reference to גאולת מצרים and in both cases it is an aspect of ה' behavior towards us that is compared to the נשר. גאולת מצרים is seen as the model for future redemptions and therefore if we look at the significance of the נשר in גאולת מצרים, we can extrapolate to all other redemptions.

We will start with the פסוק appearing in שמות:

אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואבא אתכם אלי²⁰

This פסוק is the opening to מעמד הר סיני, the final step in the liberation of the nation, signaling the transition from physical bondage to spiritual commitment.

חזקוני²¹ explains that the metaphor refers to the manner in which ה' took us across the ים סוף, like an airborne bird who carries its young across the river. רשב"ם agrees with the חזקוני and adds another reason: וגם: שהעברתי אתכם את הים ביבשה כנשרים שעוברים ימים דרך פריחה. וגם: שלא הזקתם כדכתיב כנשר יעיר קנו על גוזליו ירחף (דברים לב:יא)²²

¹⁸ ישעיה מ:לא

¹⁹ סנהדרין צב. -צב:

²⁰ שמות יט:ד

²¹ חזקוני על שמות יט:ד, ד"ה על כנפי נשרים

²² רשב"ם שם, ד"ה "על כנפי נשרים"

נשר brings two reasons for the metaphor of the נשר, the first is that ה' brought us across the ים סוף on dry land just like נשרים cross a body of water by flying. The second reason he gives is based on the פסוק האזינו which we will deal with in more depth later. He explains that the metaphor also demonstrates that we were not harmed; ה' protected us just as a נשר shields its young. With these words the נשר adds an extra dimension to the metaphor. Whereas the חזקוני refers to the flight of the נשר which is universal to all birds, the נשר adds that the נשר protects its young. However, it seems unlikely that this trait is unique to the נשר. Other animals are also protective and caring towards their offspring.

The נשר²³ and the עזרא²⁴ highlight the position of the נשר in the sky.²⁵ The נשר reaches the loftiest heights, soaring above every other bird. עזרא explains the significance of this in terms of all other birds being fearful of the נשר whereas the נשר compares this attribute to ה' separating us from all other nations to be His. This direction is very relevant in terms of גאולה. If we view גאולה as the return to our true selves, we are destined to be an עמ סגולה, ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש.²⁶ This פסוק is two פסוקים after the one referring to the נשר and is described as a consequence of our listening to ה', rather than a directive. This is the essence of גאולה, as no גאולה is complete without תשובה.

נשר also refers to a characteristic unique to the נשר:

כנשר הנושא גזוליו על כנפיו, שכל שאר העופות נותנים את בניהם בין רגליהם לפי שמתיראין מעוף אחר שפורח על על גביהם, אבל הנשר הזה אינו מתירא אלא מן האדם שמא יזרוק בו חץ, לפי שאין

²³ ספורנו שם, ד"ה "ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים"

²⁴ ראב"ע הארוך שם, ד"ה "על כנפי נשרים"

²⁵

This fits in well with the גמרא in חולין קל"ט: that implies through a halachic discourse that נשר is specifically the expression used to refer to a דרך in the sky.

²⁶ שמות יט:

עוף פורח על גביו, לכן נותנו על כנפיו, אומר: מוטב יכנס החץ בי ולא בבני, אף אני עשיתי כן... והיו מצרים זורקים חצים ואבני בליסטראות, והענן מקבלם.²⁷

compares the נשר to all other birds. Whereas other birds place their young between their feet to protect them from the נשר which soars above them, the נשר is only fearful of the arrows shot by men, as no other bird flies higher than the נשר. Therefore, the נשר places his offspring on his wings, preferring the arrow to hit him rather than his offspring. רש"י differs from the other commentaries seen so far in that he hints to the relationship²⁸ between the carrier and those who are carried. The application of this, according to רש"י, was evident in the ענן that defended ישראל from the Egyptians' weapons.

The אור החיים elaborates on this theme:

הנה האריך האדון בבחינת האהבה... לזה אמר ראו חיבתי בכם כרחם אב על בנים חביבין, שאפילו מדרך כף רגליכם חסתי עליו, ונשאתי אתכם על כנפי נשרים פירוש ענני הכבוד היו ממוצעים תחתם...²⁹

The אור החיים explains that ה' showed His love for us like a father for a son, and carried us on ענני הכבוד to prevent us from becoming footsore. According to this explanation, the clouds were not merely protection but also a sign of majesty and glory. Perhaps this also could be a sign of גאולה. Not only will we be protected but we will also be in a position of honour and grandeur.

The נצי"ב interprets the metaphor in a very different way:

שהיה הפרנסה באופן גבוה מדרך הטבע וזהו משל לכנפי נשרים³⁰
The נצי"ב, like the ספורנו and עזרא, relates to the height of the נשר's flight, but interprets it as a metaphor for the fact that their פרנסה was received in a way that was out of the realms of the normal

²⁷ רש"י על שמות יט:ד, ד"ה "על כנפי נשרים"

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The אור החיים on this רש"י points out that the נשר as the bearer shows love towards the borne in carrying them on his wings.

²⁹ אור החיים על שמות י"ט:ד, ד"ה "ואשא אתכם"

³⁰ העמק דבר שם, ד"ה "על כנפי נשרים"

rules of nature. This could also be an indicator of a new reality in the times of משיח.

The נשר reappears in the תורה towards the end of ספר דברים. The context is the kindness that ה' showed to us, bringing us from the מדבר to ישראל:

ימצאנו בארץ מדבר ובתהו ילל ישמן יסבבנהו יבוננהו יצרנהו כאישון עינו. כנשר יעיר קנו על גוזליו ירחף יפרש כנפיו יקחהו ישאהו על אברתו. ה' בדד ינחנו ואין עמו אל נכר³¹

"He found him in a desert land, and in desolation, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He granted him understanding, He kept him like the pupil of his eye. Like a נשר arousing its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings and taking them, bearing them on its pinions. Hashem alone did guide them, and there was no strange god with Him."

The נשר here serves as a simile in contrast to the metaphor we found in שמות. Nechama Leibowitz³² also points out that in האזינו a series of actions are described, whereas in יתרו in פסוק only one action is depicted. She explains that these differences imply that the נשר has a unique purpose in each פסוק. If we study the context in פרשת האזינו, the emphasis is on ה' exclusive and paternal Providence. However, if we look at the internal context within the פסוק in יתרו, we see that the metaphor of being borne on the wings of נשרים signals the transition from Egypt – אתם ראינתם אשר עשיתי למצרים – to the service of ה' ואביא אתכם אלי-ה'.³³ Nechama Leibowitz explains that the purpose of the נשרים in שמות were to symbolise the idea of training and education to transform the nation from עבדי פרעה into עבדי ה'. One who lives under the yoke of תורה is one who is truly free

³¹ דברים לבי-יב

³² ראה Nechama Leibowitz, New studies in Shemot (Exodus), translated and adapted from the Hebrew by Aryeh Newman, Haoman Press, 1976, Yitro 1, "You yourselves have seen...", p.295

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Most interpret this as meaning to ה' סיני. הר רשב"ם differs from the mainstream approach, interpreting it as "להיות לכם לאלקים", that ה' brought us to Him for Him to be our God.

but one cannot fully accept this until one has cast off completely an alien yoke. Therefore, this metaphor signifies a momentous spiritual and physical transition.

The two purposes of the פסוקים are highlighted by another difference. The נשר in האזינו is just one נשר showing the personal love that ה' shows each one of us. This is in contrast to the נשרים, in plural, mentioned in שמות which Nechama Leibowitz describes as *"flocks of eagles flying their precious cargo swiftly and safely away from their country of imprisonment."*³⁴ This metaphor represents the enormity and public impact of יציאת מצרים.

We will now look in detail at the mention of the נשר in שירת האזינו, and this is what he says about the first section in which we find our נשר:

השירה הזאת אשר לנו לעד אמת ונאמן תגיד כול המוצאות אותנו בביאור. הזכירה תחילה החסד שעשה עמנו הקדוש ברוך הוא מאז שלקחנו לחלקו, והזכירה הטובות שעשה לנו במדבר ואשר הנחילנו ארצות הגויים הגדולים והעצומים, ורוב הטובה והעושר והכבוד אשר הנחילנו בה, וכי מרוב כול טובה מדרדו בה' לעבוד ע"ז.³⁵

The רמב"ן explains that this שירה is eternally true and tells us of all the historical events that would occur. The שירה begins with a description of all the חסד that ה' bestowed upon us from the time He took us to be His, including the goodness He did for us in the desert, and making the Land our inheritance. As a result of all this benevolence, we rebelled against ה' and turned to idol worship.

However we see from the פסוקים that the kindnesses are described from the time of us being in the desert, ימצאנו בארץ מדבר. Why does the depiction begin from the desert and not from Egypt? The אברבנאל³⁶ strengthens the question by asking why יציאת מצרים is not mentioned being the first חסד we received, even before entering

³⁴ Nechama Leibowitz, *New studies in Shemot (Exodus)*, translated and adapted from the Hebrew by Aryeh Newman, Haoman Press, 1976, Yitro 1, "You yourselves have seen...", p.296

³⁵ רמב"ן על דברים לב:מ, ד"ה "כי אשא אל שמים ידי"

³⁶ אברבנאל בספק השישי על פרשת האזינו

the desert. Nechama Leibowitz³⁷ explains that the best answer to this question is that יציאת מצרים is a means to an end, the path towards the real goal which is the greatest kindness of all. The final objective was the selection of the nation through מתן תורה to be ה' s people. Nechama Leibowitz explains how this is evident in our פסוק האזינו in נשר. The נשר hovers over its nest in order to teach its young to fly. The offspring represent all the different nations. The נשר takes one tired or scared fledgling, and places him on its wing until the young נשר dares to fly on its own after its father. ה' chose us as His people, protects us and guides us until we fulfil our destiny as His people.

However, most מפרשים do connect this פסוק back to גאולה. מצרים³⁸ explains each section of the משל in connection to ה' s behaviour towards us. The פסוק describes the mercy of the נשר towards his children; he does not enter his nest suddenly, but rather he flaps and shakes his wings above his children so that they will awaken and have the strength to receive him. So too, ה' treats us with mercy and compassion. The נשר in hovering over his young, does not rest his weight upon them but covers them, not quite touching them. The same is true of ה', Who, when He came to give the תורה, revealed Himself from four directions and not just one. On the last part of the פסוק רש"י repeats the idea he mentioned on the פסוק יתרו, about the נשר placing his young on its wings to protect them from the arrows of men in contrast to the other birds who carry their young in their feet to protect them from the נשר.

The אברבנאל³⁹ brings four comparisons from the analogy of ה' s goodness to us as His people. The first is that the נשר chirps before it reaches its nest so that its fledglings will not think that it is another bird. The second characteristic is that the נשר,

³⁷ נחמה ליבוביץ, עיונים בספר דברים, בעקבות פרשנינו הראשונים והאחרונים, מאור-ולך, ירושלים.

האזינו – ימצאהו בארץ מדבר

³⁸ רש"י על דברים לב:יא

³⁹ אברבנאל על דברים לב

after flying from a distance, does not land suddenly on its young. Instead, he hovers over them so he will not harm them with his talons, but will rest upon them calmly. The third trait is that when the נשר wants to move his young, he places the nest, together with the young in it, on him so that he can transport them in comfort. The fourth and final attribute is that when the נשר wants to transport its nest, young, or eggs, it does not place them on the outermost section of the wing lest they fall. He places them instead on the section of the wing closest to its body where they will be safest.

The אברבנאל continues to explain how ה' displayed these four attributes. When ה' descended to Egypt to redeem us, He sent משה and אהרן to announce the imminent redemption and to awaken the people. This is parallel to the first trait. The second trait is parallel to the fact that ה' did not immediately reveal Himself with all His greatness in Egypt as He later did at הר סיני. The third attribute is parallel to ה' bringing us out of Egypt with all the sheep, cattle and רכוש גדול⁴⁰. The final characteristic is shown through ה' protection of us from the Egyptians when they tried to harm us and from עמלק. The אברבנאל finishes the comparison by highlighting ה' personal Providence over us. ה' Himself watches over us without an intermediary.

The entire משל is explained beautifully by Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch in his commentary on the פסוק:

"The picture is: Just as the eagle does not bear its young aloft sleeping or in a passive condition but rather first stirs the nest up and then spreads its wings not under but above its nestlings, so that, with keen courageous eyes they fly up to rest on the mother's outspread wings awaiting them above, and with free, conscious, brave, decision trust themselves to the upward flight into the heights –

⁴⁰ בראשית טו:יד

the eaglets must fly up out of the nest by themselves, set themselves on the wing - so did God first awaken His people and get them used to have the courage to trust themselves with free-willed decision and full consciousness to His guidance. This conscious free-willed trust was the preliminary condition for the whole of the future further guidance and was to make them fit and suitable and worthy of it. Only a young eagle has the courage to leave the firm, warm secure nest and trust himself to the upward flight into the isolating heights where his parent hovers. And it does require courage, while everywhere men and nations only feel themselves secure in the comfortable life built up on human power and art, to sacrifice all the life of purely material human greatness and imagined security and bring into it all that is spiritual and moral of the life men are meant to live; and it does require courage to deny this worshipping of nature and men, and to reach the lofty heights of mind and morals which man can and should soar up to, turn from the geniuses of the world, and alone with one's God give oneself over to the Almighty Wings of the One Unique God. And to obtain this courage, which can only be found in firm rock-like trust in the guidance of God, the whole wandering in the wilderness with all its experiences and teachings was given, to awaken, educate and train the People of God. For just as the uplifting power of the eagle alone bears the young with it up into the isolating heights so...does God also lead His People, 772, separated from all others, up to the heights of

*its calling, and will not tolerate being connected
with the powers which the other nations deify.*"⁴¹

Conclusion

We have seen two main approaches to the use of the נשר as relating to גאולה. The first refers to the method of the redemption and the second refers to ה' s relationship to us. In the first, we saw that the נשר is an analogy to our education to be worthy of being ה' s chosen people. It symbolizes a transition period, both physical and spiritual, to be able to accept the yoke of Heaven. The second aspect shows ה' s love for us, He takes care of our every need with the devotion of a father. These two facets are inextricably linked for even when we live in a time of הסתר פנים, it is our challenge to recognize ה' s guiding Hand in all that occurs. If we can do that then we will merit the future גאולה. As Rav Hirsch explains, ה' reaches out to us but we have to have the courage and self-belief to take that leap, leaving behind human materialism and striving towards spirituality and an elevated existence. The only way to find this courage is to trust in ה'.

May each of us find this courage within and through this we will merit a swift and complete גאולה. Let us conclude with the words of the גמרא:⁴²

'הידעת עת לדת יעלי סלע חולל אילות תשמור' יעלה זו אכזרית על בניה בשעה שכורעת ללדת עולה לראש ההר כדי שיפול ממנה וימות ואני מזמין לה נשר שמקבלו בכנפיו ומניחו לפניו ואלמלי מקדים רגע אחד או מתאחר רגע אחד מיד מת בין רגע לרגע לא נתחלף לי

The גמרא tells of how a wild goat is cruel to its young. It ascends a mountain in order that the baby will fall to its death when it is born. ה' prepares a נשר to catch the baby on its wings

⁴¹ ראה The Pentateuch, Volume V Deuteronomy, translated and explained by Samson Raphael Hirsch, rendered into English by Isaac Levy, second edition, Judaica Press LTD., Gateshead, 1989. p.640-641

⁴² בבא בתרא טז. טז:

and return it to the mother. If the נשר would come a moment earlier or later then the young goat would die. 'ה' does not miscalculate by a moment. So too, just like the נשר, the גאולה will come at the most opportune time for עם ישראל. In the meantime, we must take the lessons of the נשר and strive to be the עם נבחר, bringing and recognizing 'ה's Presence in the world.

כח ההשפעה

כתוב בפרשת וישב, "ויהי בעת ההיא וירד יהודה מאת אחיו"¹. פירש רש"י לפי המדרש, "ללמד שהורידוהו אחיו מגדולתו כשראו בצרת אביהם. אמרו: אתה אמרת למכרו, אילו אמרת להשיבו היינו שומעים לך"². פירוש הדברים: כשהגיע יוסף לראות בשלום האחים בשליחותו של יעקב, רצו האחים (שמעון ולוי) להרגו, וראובן הציע להשליכו לבור ולא להרגו בידיים, והתורה מעידה עליו שהיה בדעתו להחזירו ליעקב. יהודה, שחשש שיוסף ימות בבור, הציע לאחים למכור את יוסף כעבד, וכך עשו. עכשיו, כשהאחים ראו איך שיעקב מצטער על היעדרותו של בנו האהוב, כעסו על יהודה והאשימו אותו בטענה שהיה לו לדרוש מהאחים להשיב את יוסף ליעקב.

ובאמת נשאלת השאלה: למה יהודה לא דרש מן האחים לשחררו? למה הסתפק בהצעה למכור אותו כעבד? מסביר הרב פאם זצ"ל שכנראה יהודה חשב שהאחים לא ישמעו אליו ולא יסכימו. וכלל גדול אמרו לנו חכמים: תפסת מרובה לא תפסת. אין לנסות לעשות יותר מדי, ולכן הציע פשרה. אבל יהודה טעה. הוא לא הבין עד כמה מגיע השפעתו על יתר האחים, עד כמה כוחו כמנהיג וכמשפיע. ומפני שהתרשל במנהיגותו הורידוהו מגדולתו.

אבל לא רק יהודה טעה. לפעמים גם אנחנו טועים. ישנם מקרים בחיינו שאנו רואים אנשים המתנהגים בדרך מוטעית, בין בעניינים בין אדם למקום בין בעניינים בין אדם לחברו. ואנחנו מהססים לדבר אליהם, להסביר להם בנעימות שהתנהגות זו אינה מתאימה. חושבים, "מי אני?", או, "בודאי לא ישמעו אלי, או, "למה להתערב? זה לא יעזור", וכו'. מאוד ייתכן שאנו טועים. אנחנו לא מספיק מודעים לכח שיש לכל אחד ואחד להשפיע על אחרים. כל אחד חייב לעשות את ההשתדלות שלו, וסייעתא דשמיא יזכה לקרב אחרים לתורה ולעבודה ליראת שמים ולאהבת הבריות.

¹ בראשית לח: א

² רש"י שם

Is this the Final גאולה?¹

Walking the streets of Israel, it is almost impossible to ignore the extent to which today's wondrous reality conforms to the predictions of the Biblical prophets and the Talmudic rabbis. 150 years ago, the Land of Israel was a desolate wasteland (as it had been for untold centuries), and the Jewish people were scattered around the world and powerless. Today, by contrast, millions of Jews live in our national homeland, which is a sovereign independent state with a powerful army, impressive agriculture and industry, and a thriving economy. Whether one sits in the study hall of a Yeshiva in Jerusalem, rides a tractor through fields in the Jezreel Valley or vineyards in the Golan Heights, or strolls past gleaming skyscrapers in Tel Aviv's financial district, the words of the prophets and the rabbis come alive.

In the Torah itself, Avraham Avinu was assured, "I have given the land of your inhabitation – all of the land of Canaan – to you and your descendents after you as an eternal estate"². Later in the Torah, we are promised, "If your banished ones reach the far ends of the heavens, from there shall Hashem gather you and from there shall He take you. And Hashem your God will bring you to the land your forefathers inherited, and you shall inherit it."³ The prophet Zecharia foresaw a simple life of normalcy in rebuilt Zion: "It shall yet happen that old men and women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one holding his cane because of old age, and the streets shall be filled with children playing in the streets."⁴ The

¹ Originally published as part of Yeshiva University's "Yom Haatzmaut To-Go 5771" (www.yutorah.org)

² Bereishit 17:8

³ Devarim 30:4-5

⁴ Zecharia 8:4

rabbis of the Talmud⁵ told us that there is “no greater indication of the End of Days” than the fulfillment of the verse⁶ “And you O mountains of Israel, give forth your branches and produce your fruit for [the benefit of] My people Israel – who are coming soon.” All of these verses, which just a few generations ago seemed like impossible dreams, are today simple realities that we sometimes take for granted.

For this reason, many Religious Zionists⁷ view the State of Israel as the beginning (and perhaps more than that) of the messianic redemption that we have been awaiting for all of history. In fact, as a movement that sought to bring about the ingathering of Jewish exiles and their return to the ancient homeland of *Eretz Yisrael*, even secular Zionism could not ignore the profound parallel between their plans to create a Jewish State in Palestine and the biblical prophesies of redemption. Herzl himself – an avowed secularist and agnostic – made explicit reference to this in a number of places⁸. Certainly, Torah scholars who formulated opinions on

⁵ Sanhedrin 98a

⁶ Yechezkel 36:8

⁷ As a political movement, Zionism began in 1897. However, the roots of Zionist ideology began to form in Europe at least several decades earlier, during a period sometimes known as “proto-Zionism”. Already from this early stage, religious leaders were divided in their attitudes towards the emerging movement. Some were opposed, and some in favor (with the majority seemingly undecided). Thus “religious Zionism” is as old as Zionism itself. And religious Zionism has never been simply “Zionism by people who happen to be religious” – it has always been a separate movement which shared similar goals to secular Zionism, but always maintained its own unique terms of reference and ideology.

⁸ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, Jacob M. Alkow, trans., New York: American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946, pp. 96, 155-156. See also *Altneuland*, Herzl’s 1902 utopian novel depicting his vision of a future Jewish State in Palestine, which draws heavily on Biblical imagery.

Zionism could not ignore this connection. They were, however, divided on its significance⁹.

Among those Torah thinkers who can be described as “Religious Zionists”, there have always been two schools of thought¹⁰ regarding the nature of the Zionist project. One group, which we will refer to as the “messianic” school of thought, sees the State of Israel as the beginning of the process of redemption. According to this view, the initiative to form a Jewish State brought about the partial fulfillment of Biblical prophecies, including those regarding the physical rebirth of the land, the ingathering of exiles and the restoration of Jewish sovereignty. This is viewed as the initial stages of the final redemption. According to this point of view, the Biblical prophecies have already been partially fulfilled, granting our generation a unique status that has been variously referred to as *אתחלתא דגאולה*¹¹ or *ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו*¹². While setbacks and delays are possible, this view maintains that the process is essentially irreversible, and that we can declare with certainty – as a matter of

⁹ As explained below, some Religious Zionist leaders built their ideologies around these connections, while others distanced themselves from them. Among the opponents of Zionism, there were also different camps. Some (most notably Rav Yoel Teitlebaum, the late Satmar Rav) based their opposition on this very idea, believing that the *Mashiach* must come as a Divine miracle with no human involvement. Others, however, focused on more practical issues, chiefly the secular nature of the State and the non-religious character of secular Zionist leaders.

¹⁰ Of course, as in any attempt to group great thinkers together, these camps are not monolithic, and there are numerous variations and nuances among the different thinkers. Still, two general lines of thought can be discerned.

¹¹ Megillah 17b.

¹² “The first flowering of our redemption”. This phrase is part of the standard edition of the *Tefillah Lishlom HaMedina*, the prayer for the well-being of the State of Israel, which is attributed to Rav Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog.

religious faith backed by nothing less than the Torah itself – that the State of Israel will exist forever, and will continue to progress and develop until the final messianic vision of the prophets emerges organically from it. Among other things, adopting this view requires one to take certain positions regarding the nature of the ultimate redemption – including the idea that it can happen slowly and in stages, and that it can come about through a natural historic process, as opposed to a miraculous supernatural one.

Since the earliest days of Religious Zionism, however, there has always been an alternate viewpoint that denies, or at least questions, a messianic role for the State of Israel. The State of Israel is viewed as a positive development insofar as it has saved Jews who were in distress and danger, allowed Jews to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Yishuv Eretz Yisrael*¹³ and has allowed Torah study and religious observance to flourish. However, this analysis is limited to the here and now. All of these things can be cherished and valued without declaring that this has anything to do with the ultimate redemption.

Adherents to this view are not necessarily less “Zionistic” than the messianic Zionists. They support efforts to create and sustain the State of Israel, and view its successes as miraculous Divine gifts worthy of rejoicing and gratitude. They may issue strong calls for Aliya, place a priority on strengthening the State and its religious character, can celebrate Yom HaAtzmaut (and even recite Hallel), and speak passionately of the miraculous gifts that Hashem bestowed on us and our responsibility to express gratitude.

However, according to this school of thought, we cannot ascribe messianic significance to these events. Those who hold this view may symbolically express this by either omitting or altering¹⁴

¹³ The *mitzvah* to live in the Land of Israel. See Ramban, *Additions to Sefer HaMitzvot*, *Mitzvat Aseh* 4. See also Rambam, *Hilchot Melachim* 5:9-12.

¹⁴ Some people omit the phrase, praying for the well-being of the State but not connecting it with the redemption in any way. Others modify it

the phrase ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו in the prayer for the State of Israel, and they will avoid making any statements (and certainly any decisions) that express certainty about how the future will unfold. They are generally more cautious and tentative in their worldview.

In the coming pages, we'll briefly trace the existence of these two schools by referencing a few of the many notable leading figures in each camp, from the middle of the Nineteenth Century until today. We'll also discuss how historical events have had their own impact on the debate, with different viewpoints achieving dominance in different time periods in response to the events of the time. Finally, we'll try to at least tentatively suggest a new, "middle of the road" approach that is both rooted in traditional sources and perhaps ideally suited to the situation we find ourselves in today.

The Messianic School of Religious Zionism

In the year 1862, Rav Zvi Hirsch Kalischer¹⁵ published a small book with the title *Drishat Zion*. In this book and in further writings and letters over the coming years¹⁶, he developed the idea that the long-awaited *geula* of the Jewish people would not happen spontaneously and miraculously; rather, it would require a this-worldly effort to raise funds, organize immigration to *Eretz Yisrael*¹⁷, rebuild the land¹⁸ and even build a *mizbeach* on the

to say something like שתהיה ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו, turning the phrase into a prayerful wish, as opposed to a descriptive declaration.

¹⁵ 1795-1874. Born in Prussia, he studied under the great Rabbi Akiva Eiger. For more than 40 years he served as the rabbi of Thorn. Kibbutz Tirat Zvi, located in the Bet Shean valley, is named in his memory.

¹⁶ Both the original book and the later writings have been reprinted multiple times over the past century. A recent edition, in modern typeface and with additional notes, references and photos, was published by Mosad HaRav Kook in 2002. References in footnotes in this article refer to that edition.

¹⁷ *Drishat Zion*, pp. 37-41.

Temple Mount and re-institute the offering of *korbanot*¹⁹. While he knew his positions were unconventional, he expressed hope that other Torah scholars would come to agree with him,²⁰ and corresponded with a number of them on the topic. He was also an ardent supporter of the immigration group *Hovevei Zion*, putting his theoretical ideas into practical action.

For Rav Kalischer and some others of his generation²¹, it was clear that the redemption of the Jewish people required a program of action similar to that which eventually became known as Zionism. In his generation, of course, many of these ideas remained primarily theoretical.

Several decades later, though, waves of immigration had brought tens of thousands of Jews to the land, agricultural and urban settlements had been founded and political Zionism was a reality. Talk of a future Jewish State was in the air. In this environment, Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook wrote extensively about the messianic nature of what was happening²². Rav Kook spoke in mystical terms of the rebirth of Am Yisrael that he perceived in his generation. For many centuries, he taught, the Jewish people had been in exile, and as such could be compared to a soul without a body. For this reason, Jews in exile had focused mainly on the spiritual aspects of Torah – study and prayer. As important as these are, Rav Kook said, they represent only part of the totality

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-98.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²¹ Such as Rabbi Yehuda Alkalai of Sarajevo, who had written similar ideas (though with a Kabbalistic orientation, and without including the idea of reinstituting *korbanot*) as early as 1834. Other rabbis who expressed similar ideas included Rav Eliyahu Gutmacher and Rav Shmuel Mohilever.

²² This theme is found in many of Rav Kook's extensive writings. For example, see the book *Orot* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1949), especially the first two sections.

of service of God demanded of us. In returning to our land and restoring our national existence and political sovereignty, the “body” of the Jewish People was being revived. Rav Kook saw great significance in all aspects of the emerging country – the agricultural revival, the development of cities, of a political system and army, and all other aspects of national existence. To him, these were all part of the approaching redemption of Am Yisrael.

Rav Kook passed away in 1935 and thus was unable to relate to the actual State of Israel. But his son, Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook, lived through the establishment of the State in 1948 and the miracles of the Six Day War in 1967. He further developed his father’s ideas and formulated a vision that equated the modern State with the messianic redemption in very clear and precise terms.

According to Rav Zvi Yehuda, it is absolutely clear that the redemption will take place in a gradual fashion, and that the first step in this process is the re-establishment of Jewish sovereignty, which was achieved in 1948²³. He said that this is not a matter of interpretation, a hope or a wish – it is as clear as day and an absolute certainty.²⁴ Although at the end of the process we will be ruled by the *Melech HaMashiach* who will be a descendent of King David, the present democratic government of Israel represents the beginning of his reign.²⁵

According to Rav Zvi Yehuda, the *Ymot haMashiach* have already begun. Although the process is not complete, it is well underway²⁶ and anyone who doubts this demonstrates a lack of faith²⁷. As a result of this, he ruled that all of the wars fought by the IDF have

²³ *Sichot HaRav Zvi Yehuda: Eretz Yisrael*, edited by Rav Shlomo Aviner, Yeshivat Ateret Kohanim, 2005, p. 163.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 233-234.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

²⁶ *Sichot Harav Zvi Yehuda: Moadim II*, p. 130 and 138 and many other places.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

the halachic status of *milchemet mitzvah*²⁸. When the IDF captures territory, this is a fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of *Kibbush Eretz Yisrael* (conquering the land), and thus it is forbidden to subsequently relinquish this land, even in the context of a peace treaty.

As we will explain later on, in the decades following the Six Day War, these views achieved dominance in Religious Zionist circles, at least in Israel. Many – indeed most – of the rabbinic leadership of Religious Zionism²⁹ spoke in these terms, leading many people to think that being a Religious Zionist requires accepting all of the above concepts. There has, however, always been another point of view.

Non-Messianic Religious Zionism

Rabbi Yitzchak Yaacov Reines³⁰ was a member of the pre-Zionist *Hovevei Zion* movement, and one of the first Rabbinic supporters of Herzl's Zionist movement. While most of the rabbinic leadership of the time was opposed to the Zionist movement (largely because of its secular character), Rav Reines founded the Mizrachi party – the first institutional body of Religious Zionism.

There were a number of reasons why Rav Reines supported Zionism. Firstly, he identified with Herzl's idea that Jewish nationalism and an eventual Jewish state could protect Jews against anti-semitism³¹. Beyond this, he believed that a Jewish state could provide a “spiritual center”³² for the Jewish people,

²⁸ An obligatory war. Assigning our reality to this halachic category carries a number of ramifications, including making universal military service a halachic obligation.

²⁹ Rav Shlomo Goren and Rav Avraham Shapiro are two of many notable examples.

³⁰ 1839-1915

³¹ Rav Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, *Or Chadash Al Zion* (written in 1901), New York, 1946, pp. 7-8, 21.

³² The name “Mizrachi” is an acronym for *Merkaz Ruchani*, “spiritual center”.

where Torah learning and *mitzvah* observance could thrive. He felt that the Zionist movement would first and foremost be a fulfillment of the Mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*³³, and would also encourage the Jewish people and help revive their faith³⁴, restore their pride and enthusiasm³⁵, would protect them from assimilation and constitute an essential element of the process of *teshuva*³⁶. However, he was careful to never categorize these positive developments as the final redemption, or even its beginning. He viewed all of this as part of the long historical development from *churban* to *geula*, but not as the redemption itself³⁷.

Several decades later, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik articulated very similar views. The Rav was a Zionist, a member of Mizrachi and honorary president of the Religious Zionists of America. He spoke many times about his love for the Land of Israel and support for the State, and addressed it in a number of places in his writings. He marveled at the intense opposition that Israel faces from the nations of the world, and reasoned that this can only mean that the State is endowed with intense holiness and spiritual significance³⁸.

Perhaps the clearest articulation of his reasons for this support can be seen in the well-known passage in his landmark essay *Kol Dodi Dofek*³⁹, in which he articulated the “six knocks”,

³³ *Or Chadash Al Zion*, pp. 33-60.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-204.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

³⁷ See Aviezer Ravitsky, *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 33.

³⁸ Rav Hershel Schachter, *Nefesh HaRav*, Jerusalem:Reishit Yerushalayim Press, 1994, p. 86.

³⁹ Based on a speech given at Yeshiva University on Yom HaAtzmaut 1957, it was originally published as a pamphlet in 1977 by the Israeli

the six great miracles that he saw in the establishment of the State of Israel: 1) the almost supernatural political development in which a majority of nations of the world voted to support Jewish independence, 2) the miraculous military victory of the outnumbered, poorly trained and poorly equipped Jewish army against their numerous Arab enemies, 3) the historic repudiation of Christian theology regarding the rejection of the Jews, 4) the re-awakening of Jewish spirits as an antidote to assimilation after the Holocaust, 5) the ability of Jews to defend themselves and avenge their martyrs, and 6) our newfound ability to save Jews in distress and protect them from danger.

Noticeably absent from this list is anything having to do with the coming of the Mashiach. Whereas for Rav Kook, the metaphysical entities of *Klal Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael* – and thus by extension of *Medinat Yisrael* – occupy central roles, the Rav placed these values into halachic contexts that bring them into line with many other halachic concepts, values and principles⁴⁰. For Rav Zvi Yehuda and others of his school of thought, the State of Israel has *intrinsic* significance and holiness, but for the Rav its significance lies in its ability to actualize and facilitate the *mitzvah* of settling the land.⁴¹

In a number of cases, the Rav was explicit about his opposition to attributing a messianic character to the State. This cannot be the ultimate redemption, he said, since the Jewish people have not yet achieved real independence and sovereignty – as demonstrated, for example, by the fact that the Secretary of State of the United States can summon the Israeli Prime Minister to Washington at will. “Under such circumstances,” the Rav once

Ministry of Education, and later reprinted in *Ish HaEmunah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1986).

⁴⁰ Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, “Al Yachso shel ha-Grid Soloveitchik za”l LaZionut”, *Alon Shvut Bogram* Vol. 17 (2003), pp. 164 and 168.

⁴¹ *Nefesh HaRav*, pp. 86-87.

explained, “there is no real independence, no real sovereignty. [Only] with the arrival of the Mashiach, the Jewish people will reappear [on the stage of history].”⁴² In a 1957 letter, the Rav succinctly summarized his approach to Zionism as a “third halakhic approach” in between that of the non-Zionist haredim “whose eyes are shut and reject [the significance of the State]” and the messianic Zionist “dreamers” who “adopt a completely positive stance to the point where they identify the State with the [fulfillment] of the highest goal of our historical and meta-historical destiny”. His own approach “would be positively inclined toward the State and would express gratitude for its establishment ... but would not attach excessive value to the point of its glorification and deification”.⁴³

The difference between the Rav’s approach and that of Rav Zvi Yehuda is not merely theoretical. There are ramifications in the halachic and public policy spheres, for example regarding the question of relinquishing land in the context of a peace treaty. As noted above, Rav Zvi Yehuda ruled that this would be forbidden under any circumstances, since this would represent a repudiation of the historic mission of *Kibbush HaAretz* and a reversal of the messianic process. For the Rav, however, if the continued existence of the State would require relinquishing land, this would be both permitted and required.⁴⁴

⁴² August 28, 1974 address in Boston, recorded in Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, Volume 2, Jersey City, NJ:Ktav Publishing House, 1999, p. 132.

⁴³ Letter to Mr. Moshe Meisels, editor of the Hebrew weekly *Ha-Do’ar*. Published in Nethaniel Helfgot, ed., *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, Jersey City, NJ:Ktav Publishing House, 2005, pp. 163-166. I am indebted to my friend and neighbor Rabbi Reuven Zeigler for directing me to this source.

⁴⁴ *Nefesh HaRav*, p. 98. While the question of relinquishing land is not by necessity linked to the question of the messianic nature of the State, it is certainly related to it and influenced by it.

Beyond this, there are ramifications also on the national, communal and personal levels, regarding the relative weight one assigns to supporting and developing Medinat Yisrael and encouraging Aliya, as opposed to other Torah values. If this is, as Rav Zvi Yehuda held, the advanced stages of the coming of the Mashiach, then it is more important than almost anything else. Conversely, if one ascribes to Rav Soloveitchik's view, than Medinat Yisrael is a very important Torah value – but it is not necessarily more significant than other Torah values. Indeed, the Rav has been invoked (rightly or wrongly) in support of the idea that American Jews – at least those involved in the community's leadership – should support Israel from afar, but not necessarily make Aliya⁴⁵.

History's Pendulum

Until 1967, the majority of the Religious Zionist rabbinic leadership was careful not to speak in definitively messianic terms about the State of Israel, reflecting the caution inherent in the classic approach of Mizrachi and Rav Soloveitchik. However, following the Six Day War, Rav Zvi Yehuda's messianism became much more popular, and as noted above, ultimately achieved dominance. There can be little question about the role of historical events in this ideological shift. The miraculous military victory and subsequent resettling of our ancient homelands in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria (a movement which was initially led by Rav Zvi Yehuda's students) seemed to leave little room for doubt that the process of the final redemption was reaching an advanced stage.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Rabbi Reuven Spolter, "In Search Of Leaders", *Jewish Action* Volume 64, No. 3 (Spring 2004 – accessible online at <http://www.ou.org/publications/ja/5764/5764spr/INSEARCH.PDF>), and this author's response in the "Counterpoint" section of the Fall 2005 issue (<http://www.ou.org/publications/ja/5765/5765fall/COUNTERP.PDF>). See also *Nefesh HaRav*, pp. 98-99.

This view occupied center stage for at least two decades, and is still quite dominant in the Religious Zionist community here in Israel. However, over the past twenty years the pendulum has begun to swing back in the opposite direction, largely due to additional historical developments. First in the 1978 Camp David agreement and subsequently in the Oslo Agreements of the 1990s, land that was captured in the miraculous wars was in fact relinquished to the Arab countries and the Palestinian Authority. These facts led many to question whether Rav Zvi Yehuda's assessments of the messianic character of the State were in fact correct.

More recently, the traumatic 2005 withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and consequent destruction of Gush Katif and expulsion of its residents from their homes and towns has caused a genuine ideological crisis within the community. The crisis is particularly acute because these events were brought about not as a result of a military defeat, but rather by decision of the Israeli government as implemented by the IDF. Thus, the very entities which Rav Zvi Yehuda saw as the embodiment of the redemption became the vehicles for the apparent reversal of some of the steps towards this redemption.

As a result of this trauma, some elements in the Religious Zionist community have ceased to identify with classic Zionism and have loosened their identification with the State and the government. Other elements within the community – alarmed by these developments – have called for a return to the classic approach of Mizrachi, which emphasized the importance of building the State for all that it accomplishes in the present, and downplays or removes connection with the future redemption.⁴⁶ It seems that time and history have demonstrated both the limitations and inherent dan-

⁴⁶ For example, see also the recent *Jerusalem Post* opinion piece “The Struggle for the Soul of Religious Zionism”, April 2, 2011, by Rabbi Yosef Blau (accessible online at <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-EdContributors/Article.aspx?id=214872>).

gers of excessive messianism. This is driving the return to a more cautious approach that focuses on the here and now, and leaves the process of history largely in God's hands.

At the same time, I believe we must be careful not to swing too far in the opposite direction. As I write these words in my home town of Alon Shevut in Gush Etzion – glancing out the window at beautiful mountain vistas dotted by Jewish towns and farms in the very hills where the *Avot* walked and the *Maccabim* fought, with the Jerusalem skyline visible in the valley below – the observations mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this essay still seem very significant. Looking around my *shul* as I sometimes do, realizing that I have the privilege to pray in this unique location with a congregation of Jews who have gathered together and come back home from tens of different countries on every continent on earth, it seems impossible to deny that we are literally living and walking inside a prophetic vision. If we downplay the significance of all of this and view Medinat Yisrael as nothing more than an important tool to fulfill *mitzvot*, we run the risk of tragically missing an historic opportunity. Indeed, Rav Soloveitchik himself warned against this very danger in *Kol Dodi Dofek*.⁴⁷ It seems, therefore, that the events of our generation urgently call for a third, nuanced approach that lies somewhere between those of Rav Zvi Yehuda and the Rav.

B'chezkat Mashiach

Perhaps the source for just such an idea can be found in the Rambam. When discussing the *Melech HaMashiach*, the Rambam takes the position that we are not to expect him to perform any supernatural acts or miracles:

Do not think that the messianic king must perform signs and wonders, create new elements in the world, revive the dead or things of that nature. This

⁴⁷ *Ish HaEmunah*, pp. 74-77, 83-86.

is not the case, [as can be proven by the fact] that Rabbi Akiva was among the great scholars of the time of the Mishnah, and he was a supporter of the king Ben Koziva (Bar Kochba), and he and all the other scholars of his generation saw him as the messianic king – until he was killed due to sins. [Only] when he was killed did they determine that he was not [the Mashiach], but they never asked him for signs or wonders⁴⁸.

Since Rabbi Akiva considered Bar Kochba to be the Mashiach even though he had not done any miracles, the Rambam deduces that an ability to perform miracles is not an essential quality for the Mashiach⁴⁹. This proof is fascinating, since, as the Rambam notes, Rabbi Akiva himself eventually realized that this ruling had been incorrect. How, then, can the Rambam quote this as the source for a halacha?

The answer is provided in the next paragraph, where the Rambam discusses the criteria for evaluating a potential Mashiach:

If a king shall arise from the House of David, who is learned in Torah and observant of *mitzvot* like his ancestor David – following both the written and the oral Torah – and he compels all of Israel to follow it and strengthens its observance, and he fights wars on behalf of God, then this [king] is to be **presumed** to be the Mashiach. If he is successful in his endeavors, defeats all of the nations surrounding him, builds the *Bet HaMikdash* in its correct location and gathers the remotely dispersed exiles, then he is **definitely** the Mashiach. But if he does not succeed in all of that or is killed, it is clear

⁴⁸ *Hilchot Melachim*, 11:3.

⁴⁹ Later on, in 12:1-2, he implies that there will be no miracles at all in the *Ymot HaMashiach*.

that he is not the one to whom the Torah's promises referred, but rather he is among all the other good and proper kings from the house of David who died.⁵⁰

The term "*b'chezkat Mashiach*" – "presumed to be the Mashiach" – is a halachic concept. In Jewish law, there are certain assumptions that one is allowed – and in fact obligated – to make, even though one does not know for certain that they are true. For example, a *mikveh* that was measured and determined to contain a sufficient quantity of water is considered kosher and is assumed to contain the correct amount of water until proven otherwise or unless there is reason to be concerned that some of the water has escaped. One may use the *mikveh* and rely on this assumption, even though we know that it is possible that it no longer has enough water to be kosher⁵¹. The *chazaka* – the halachic assumption – remains valid unless proven otherwise.

It is clear from context that the Rambam's ruling regarding *b'chezkat Mashiach* is based on Rabbi Akiva's decision regarding Bar Kochba. In the end, it turned out that Rabbi Akiva's ruling was not correct, but he still acted according to the halacha by making this assumption⁵². Therefore, if such a situation were to arise again in the future, we are to act exactly as Rabbi Akiva did and make the same assumption, even though we realize that it may once again turn out to be incorrect!

If the king in question succeeds in his mission, then we will know with certainty that he is, in fact, the Mashiach. But if he

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 11:4. Parts of this passage are missing from the standard editions of the Rambam due to Christian censorship, but can be seen in several contemporary editions based on earlier manuscripts.

⁵¹ *Shulchan Aruch*, YD 201:62-65.

⁵² Some commentators suggest that Rabbi Akiva was not completely wrong in his assumption, and that Bar Kochba had the potential to be the Mashiach or even was some sort of a precursor of the Mashiach.

ultimately fails as Bar Kochba did, then we will know retroactively that he was not the Mashiach. Nevertheless, once he has met the requirements for being considered the presumptive Mashiach, we are obligated to follow him, support him and assume that he is the Mashiach, even as we realize that this assumption may later turn out to be false.

Today's reality does not directly fit into the Rambam's category of *b'chezkat Mashiach* in the sense that we do not have a king who meets the criteria. At the same time, though, perhaps this category can provide a model for a contemporary, revised Religious Zionist ideology. We can recognize, as Rav Zvi Yehuda did, that we are witnessing the fulfillment of Biblical prophecies, and that this very much appears to be the final redemption. In fact, we will assume that it is and act accordingly. At the same time, we can also maintain the Rav's caution and recognize that we don't absolutely know this to be the case. This possibility will remain in our minds even as we contemplate events through the prism of messianic redemption.

We will view our generation as something that we might call *בהזקת אתחלתא דגאולה*, *presumed to be* the beginning of the *geula*. We will exercise caution and not base any decisions on assumptions regarding the future, since we have not yet reached the stage of certainty regarding future fulfillment of prophesies. But in the meantime, we will continue to view this as the redemption, express boundless gratitude to Hashem for bringing this development in our generation, and do everything within our power to continue to advance the process until we reach the point when all of the Rambam's conditions are fulfilled. May it happen speedily in our days.

