

**Kol**

**קול**

**Mevaseret**

**מבשרת**

A Compilation of  
Insights and Analyses  
of Torah Topics

by the students of  
**MICHLELET MEVASERET YERUSHALAYIM**

Jerusalem, 5777

**Editors in Chief:**

Sarah Engel • Ariella Etshalom • Bailey Frohlich

**Editorial Staff:**

Eliana Benoff • Yael Feder • Chaya Green  
Aleeza Katz • Rivka Lichtenstein • Davida Respler  
Sara Schatz • Eli Sharvit • Nina Weiss • Michal Yacker

**Faculty Advisor:**

Rabbi Eliezer Lerner

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# מכללת מבשרת ירושלים

## Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim

Rabbi David Katz, *Director*

Mrs. Sharon Isaacson, *Asst. Director*

Mrs. Sarah Dena Katz, *Asst. Director*

Derech Chevron 60  
Jerusalem 93513

Tel: (02) 652-7257 / US Tel: (212) 444-1657  
Fax: (02) 652-7162 / US Fax: (917)-793-1047

[office@mmy.org.il](mailto:office@mmy.org.il)

**U.S. Mailing Address**

500 W. Burr Blvd  
Suite #47  
Teaneck, NJ 07666

[www.mevaseret.org/mmy](http://www.mevaseret.org/mmy)

**HaDaF Typesetting**

[HaDaF.Dovid@gmail.com](mailto:HaDaF.Dovid@gmail.com)

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The work you are holding is not just a book of nice *divrei Torah*. It is a journal full of articles on diverse Torah topics, reflecting each unique *talmida's* personal passions and interests which were fostered during her *shana ba'aretz*. It reflects hours spent poring over a wide range of texts in the *beit midrash* and time spent taking the learning to the next level, by thinking, processing and synthesizing information, creating a masterpiece to share with the world.

In fact, at its essence, this journal reflects the values of MMY: passion for Torah, text-based learning, deep commitment to *halacha*, and high-level thinking. When woven together, they create a tapestry of thoughtful, intellectual, spiritual Torah concepts, and in large reflect each unique Torah tapestry of Jewish identity woven by every *talmida* at MMY during her *shana ba'aretz*.

All of this could not be possible without the incredible *rebbeim* and *mechanchot* at MMY. Their patience and diligence gives us the abilities to grow into independent students of Torah, learning both the skills and the wider personal development and spiritual philosophies that cultivate our own rich Jewish path. The balance of tremendous diversity and the simultaneous uniting desire to serve Hashem through an intellectually honest approach to Judaism is empowering and inspiring. In particular, we must thank Rabbi Lerner, the MMY *Rosh Beit Midrash*, for being the driving force behind this work. Without his tireless efforts both inside and outside of the *beit midrash*, MMY would be a very different place, and this *Kol Mevasseret* journal would almost certainly not have come to fruition.

We also must thank the editors, the authors, and everyone else in the MMY community for taking time out of their busy schedules to bring a taste of MMY Torah outside the four walls of our *beit midrash*. We hope this journal can spread even the smallest drop of light into the world, and help inspire the burgeoning interest in Torah study.

With tremendous appreciation,

The Kol Mevasseret 5777 Editors





# INTRODUCTION

A few years ago there was a very popular, yet strange, “Middle Eastern style” song that was constantly played on Israeli radio. **לֹא אֶקְטוֹף אֶת הַיָּרֵחַ בְּשִׁבְלֶךְ** – “I will not lasso the moon for you.” The punchline of the song was, **אֲנִי אוֹהֵב אוֹתָךְ אֲבָל מִצִּיאוֹתַי**, – “I love you but ... in a realistic way.”

I thought that it was strange, at least as love songs go, wondering what would happen if I would buy my wife an anniversary card with that song as its message! Yet when one reflects on it, perhaps there is a very profound idea to be internalized from the words of the song.

We are all familiar (as popularized by the multitude of wedding and engagement tunes to its words) with the last of the *Sheva Brachot* at a wedding and during the post-wedding week.

מהרה ה' אלוֹקֵינוּ יִשְׁמַע בְּעֵרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבַחֲצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, קוֹל שְׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שְׂמִיחָה,  
קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כְּלָה, קוֹל מִצְחָלוֹת חֲתָנִים מַחֲפָתָם, וְנִעְרִים מִמִּשְׁתֵּה נְגִינָתָם.

The source for the imagery that *Chazal* chose to use in this *bracha* are the *pesukim* in Yirmiyahu 33:10-11:

כֹּה אָמַר ה' עוֹד יִשְׁמַע בְּמִקוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם אֹמְרִים חָרֵב הוּא מֵאִן אָדָם  
וּמֵאִן בְּהֵמָה בְּעֵרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבַחֲצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם הַגִּשְׁמוֹת מֵאִן אָדָם וּמֵאִן יוֹשֵׁב  
וּמֵאִן בְּהֵמָה. קוֹל שְׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שְׂמִיחָה, קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כְּלָה, קוֹל אוֹמְרִים הוֹדוּ  
לֹה' צְבָקוֹת כִּי טוֹב ה' כִּי לַעֲוֹלָם חֲסֵדוֹ, מִבָּאִים תוֹדָה בֵּית ה'. כִּי אֲשִׁיב אֶת  
שְׁבוֹת הָאָרֶץ כְּבִרְאשׁוֹנָה, אָמַר ה'.

The imagery (and text) of **קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כְּלָה** appears three additional times in Yirmiyahu.

וְהַשְׁבֵּתִי מֵעֵרֵי יְהוּדָה, וּמִחֲצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, קוֹל שְׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שְׂמִיחָה, קוֹל חֲתָן  
וְקוֹל כְּלָה, כִּי לַחֲרֵבָה תְּהִיָּה הָאָרֶץ. (ו:לד)

כִּי כֹה אָמַר ה' צְבָקוֹת, אֵלֶי יִשְׂרָאֵל, הַגָּנִי מִשְׁבֵּית מִן הַמִּקוֹם הַזֶּה לַעֲיִנְכֶם,  
וּבִמְיֻכָּם קוֹל שְׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שְׂמִיחָה, קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כְּלָה. (טז:ט)

וְהָאֲבֹדֵתִי מֵהֶם, קוֹל שְׁשׁוֹן וְקוֹל שְׂמִיחָה, קוֹל חֲתָן, וְקוֹל כְּלָה קוֹל רְחִים, וְאוֹר  
נֵר. (כה:י)

In Yirmiyahu 33:10-11, the source of the *bracha*, the imagery of the future *geula* is portrayed positively. The other three times, regarding the *churban*, the imagery is negative. The three negative references all use the bride and groom imagery to express the cessation of the normal order when there is *churban*. For example, in 25:10 the sounds of silence from the bride and groom are parallel to the sounds of silence coming from the mill for grain and from the lack of light from the proverbial candle. Conversely, the positive reference, and thus the one *Chazal* used in the *bracha*, expresses the return to the normal world order when there will be *geula* and thus the return of the joyful sounds emanating from the bride and groom.

However, when they took the text of the positive *pasuk* and utilized it for the final *bracha* of the *Sheva Brachot*, *Chazal* did not use the whole *pasuk* – even though the imagery there is certainly appropriate and could have easily been inserted in its entirety into the text. Why didn't *Chazal* just quote the entire series of *pesukim*? It would seem that the continuation of the *pesukim* the way they appear in Yirmiyahu would have made a beautiful *bracha*!

Rav Yehuda Amital zt"l explains that the negative *pesukim* represent the **extreme** of *churban*. The *pesukim* speak of the cessation of *kol chatan* and *kol kallah* as the lowest point in the destruction. So too, therefore, the positive *pasuk* must be expressing the extreme of the *geula*. Is there nothing in between that Yirmiyahu could have spoken of? Is it really all meant to be in the extreme?

Evidently, it is beautiful to speak of extremes when speaking of *galut* and *geula*, but when we bless the actual *chatan* and *kallah* in the *Sheva Brachot* we don't want to bless them with something that is unattainable. *Chazal* utilized the imagery of Yirmiyahu, but only to express a reality that makes sense within the confines of a real marriage, not a fairy tale relationship. We wish our bride and groom that they should have a **normal** life.

One full of *simcha*, but in an attainable way – a life that may not come with lassoing the moon, but one that is enriched by the hard work of relationship building that real connections require.

*Kol Mevaseret* represents the hard work, energy and effort that goes into Torah study. It isn't just a euphoric exercise of inspiration – here today and gone tomorrow. The experience has given the contributing writers the tools and real life experience to put together concepts and thoughts with sources, and to develop works of scholarship. In essence, it is a microcosm of what we believe a year of Torah study in *Eretz Yisrael* is meant to be – a wonderfully inspiring and emotional connection to *Am Yisrael*, *Eretz Yisrael*, *Medinat Yisrael* and *Torat Yisrael*, but also an experience that exposes our students to the real world challenges of each of those wonderful and lofty concepts, giving them the tools to help them confront those challenges throughout their very real daily lives.

We pray that this journal provides them, and all of us who read and benefit from it, with a real love of Torah that will serve *Am Yisrael* well as we face the future with confidence.

באהבת העם, הארץ, המדינה, והתורה (אבל מציאותי),

Rabbi David Katz



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תנ"ך

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## **Life Lessons from the Story of Achav Ben Omri**

*"A man can learn wisdom even from a foe." – Aristophanes*

Achav ben Omri was the seventh king of Israel. He was criticized by Eliyahu for leading *Bnei Yisrael* into *avodah zarah*, for killing Navot, and for following in the evil ways of his wife Izevel. Despite this, what can one glean from Achav's story?

Throughout his reign, there were threads of inadequacy and failure woven into his political and spiritual roles, and in his personal interactions, as well. Within the few first pesukim of Achav's introduction, his father's name, Omri, is repeated three times, suggesting their spiritual connection. Omri was an evil king who caused *Bnei Yisrael* to sin greatly, and their linkage is a foreboding of Achav's rule. Of course, the fact that Achav had no positive leadership models could have had an impact, as well. Instead, he only knew of sin. The fact that Achav is first presented to us through Omri, already alludes to his eventual spiritual failures.

During Achav's reign, important battles were fought against Ben-Hadad, king of Aram. Although Achav errs individually regarding the wars, he was ultimately successful on a national scale. Achav's first political mistake was his initial reaction to Ben-Hadad's threat.

Ben-Hadad sends messengers declaring that all of Achav's treasures belong to him, not Achav (Melachim I, 20). Rather than investigate or prepare for defensive war, Achav completely surrenders and replies that all he owns is now Ben-Hadad's. He is incapable of asserting his authority against the threat and chooses to submit.

Another personal mistake Achav makes in battle is his initial unwillingness to go out to war. Radak explains that when the pasuk says, "And the king of Israel went out," it is indicating that

Achav only went out after everyone else, reflecting cowardice (20:21). By entering only after the nation is winning, he is placing the responsibility onto others. A king must always have enough individual strength and faith in his army to lead the army into battle.

Achav then plots to dress as a commoner in order to stay safe; but this too fails, and he is killed in battle (24:34-37). This provides another insight into his weakness as a leader.

Achav is a complex character though, and he doesn't fail in every realm. He succeeds in the political sphere. He plans and formulates a good strategy for the first battle with Aram. As a result, many enemy soldiers are killed and even their king attempts to escape (20:19-21). Likewise, when the two nations soon wage war again, Achav listens to military advice and acts intelligently, ending with another victory (20:29-30). In these examples, we see Achav's military skills and leadership.

On a spiritual level, Achav is seen as a deeply flawed figure and a failed leader of Israel. He builds a house of *ba'al* in the Shomron, erects an altar to it and makes an *asheirah* (16:32-33), normalizing *avodah zarah* among *Bnei Yisrael*.

In Masechet Sanhedrin (102b), R' Yochanan says that there was no grove of trees in the land which Achav did not taint with *avodah zarah*. This is an intentional act on the part of Achav, which served to publicize his wickedness and further led *Bnei Yisrael* to disobey Hashem.

The Metzudat David (Melachim I 17:1), depicts another aspect of Achav's spiritual corruption. He cites the story of Achav confronting Eliyahu saying, "the curse of Yehoshua came true but not the curse of Moshe?!" That curse states that when the Jews do *avodah zarah*, the rain will stop.

Through these three examples, we see that Achav, in effect, is forcing *avodah zarah* into every "nook and cranny" of society, whether it be through national declarations, use of land, or even conversation.

The *gemara* (Sanhedrin 90a) lists Achav among the people who do not have a portion in the World to Come. His personal



spirituality is so broken that he does not even merit a small portion in the World to Come, showing the magnitude of his failure.

The entire episode of murdering Navot in order to take his vineyard for his own personal use is another example of the depth of Achav's personal and spiritual failure (Melachim I, 21). Achav asks to buy Navot's vineyard. Navot declines, since the vineyard was from the land of his forefathers. Achav becomes sad and upset. He does not leave his bed, nor will he show people his face, and he refuses to eat. This is not the reaction of a sophisticated adult, let alone a king.

His retelling of the interaction also demonstrates Achav's limited mindset. After Izevel asks Achav what is bothering him, Achav forgets Navot's explanation, and just remembers that it was a "no". There is an absence of logical reasoning for Achav and all that matters is whether he achieved his goal. These qualities lead to negative consequences in his leadership – bringing him to make rash decisions and ultimately, to murder an innocent man. Rabbi Meir Yehuda Shapiro (Mikdash Melech, p.193) adds that Achav's sin with Navot shows his lack of responsibility and emphasizes his willingness to hide behind Izevel.

The Rambam (Hilchot Rotzei'ach 4:9) also discusses Achav's depravity with regard to the sin of murder and explains the relationship between this sin and all of Achav's previous sins. Although there are sins that are more serious than murder, they do not lead to destruction of civilization in the way that murder does. Anyone who commits such a sin is a completely wicked person, and all the *mitzvot* that he may have performed throughout his life will not save him from judgment.

Rambam uses the example of Achav. When Achav's sins and merits were set out before Hashem, there was no sin that made him deserving of being wiped out, nor any other matter that stood against him, as much as the fact that he was responsible for the killing of Navot.

Yet, Achav did have some spiritual strengths. After being punished for Navot's death, Achav attempts to do *teshuva*. Rashi says that Achav walked barefoot as a sign of mourning and made an effort to repair his relationship with G-d (21:27). The Yalkut Shimoni

(Melachim I 222) adds that Achav would make himself get forty lashes three times a day and that he fasted throughout the day and prayed for forgiveness at night. This extent of mourning shows true regret for his action.

Hashem has mercy on Achav and diminishes his punishment. This causes Achav to become an image of repentance, as shown in the Pesikta de-Rav Kahana (Shuva 24:11). *Bnei Yisrael* say to Hashem: “Master of the Universe, if we engage in *teshuva*, will You accept us?” He answers, “I accepted the repentance of Achav; shall I not then accept your repentance?” This further proves the effectiveness of Achav’s *teshuva* and adds to the complexity of Achav’s character.

We learn in Pirkei Avot (4:1): “Who is wise? One who learns from everyone.” So, too, we can learn practical life lessons from Achav’s story. Through Achav’s character, we recognize the value of a positive environment. As the Rambam famously notes, surroundings have the power to elevate or to negatively influence a person. In Achav’s case, his wife, Izevel, heavily influences his inclination toward pagan practices and murder. She transforms his thoughts into practice.

Additionally, the story of Achav highlights the consequences of our actions. Sometimes we can make a wrong decision, thinking from an individualistic perspective and rationalizing that it won’t matter. From Achav and the punishment of death to his descendants, we are shown the opposite. Therefore, we should recognize that each act we do, big or small, has a lasting impact.

A third practical lesson we can learn from Achav’s general character is the importance of taking responsibility and stepping up to the plate. Achav fails to internalize these values and in the various battles with Aram, he either waits for the nation to be winning before he shows up or disguises himself so that others would be killed first. In the end, Achav was targeted and killed regardless. Achav’s story is a tragic one, especially when we consider the potential he had for success had he followed Eliyahu’s advice.

May we take heed and learn from these three lessons – to surround ourselves with positive influences, to realize the long term

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consequences of our actions, and to take responsibility when we make mistakes. May we face new challenges with integrity and courage, and maximize the opportunities presented before us.



## Parallels Between Yehuda and Yehuda HaMaccabi

Yehuda HaMaccabi, the protagonist of the Chanukah story, bears a strong resemblance to another important Yehuda in Jewish history: Yehuda, the son of Ya'akov Avinu and one of the twelve *shevatim*.

Generally, the first-born sons were the ones who were chosen to lead their families. This is not so in the case of the Yehudas. Yehuda HaMaccabi was the third son of Mattityahu-HaChashmonai, a *kohen* from the village of Modi'in. Similarly, Yehuda was the fourth son of Ya'akov and Leah. This seemingly insignificant detail strengthens the connection between the two and draws a distinction between them and the normal practice of their times.

Both Yehudas were natural leaders. They did not sit idly by when those around them were in need of assistance. Yehuda HaMaccabi was a fearless leader, a brilliant warrior, and a man who inspired thousands to take up arms in the battle for the preservation of Judaism. It was Yehuda HaMaccabi who conceived ways for the Jewish people to defeat the larger, better equipped, and more advanced Greek army. Yehuda, the son of Ya'akov, is expressly depicted in Bereshit as assuming a leadership role among the ten eldest brothers. It is Yehuda who spots a caravan of *Yishmaelim* coming towards them, on its way to Egypt and suggests that Yosef be sold to the *Yishmaelim* rather than be killed (Bereishit 37:26-28). In addition, Yehuda's line of descendants is the one from which the kings of Israel come. Even when he is no longer alive, Yehuda is still leading *Bnei Yisrael*.

Yehuda HaMaccabi and Yehuda ben Ya'akov both cared so much for those they loved and were willing to do anything to help them. In the Chanukah story, Yehuda HaMaccabi leads

*Bnei Yisrael* in a first set of battles against Antiochus and the Greek army. *Bnei Yisrael* won and the *Beit HaMikdash* was restored. However, Yehuda HaMaccabi did not return to Modi'in as he wanted to. He knew that the fighting was not over and that *Bnei Yisrael* would be attacked again, so he stayed in the camp instead of returning home. His hunch was right and he again led *Bnei Yisrael* into battle against their enemies. Yehuda HaMaccabi sacrificed his own desires for the sake of the Jewish People and their continued safety.

In Bereishit, Yehuda offered himself to Ya'akov as collateral for Binyamin's safety – a risky move considering that he had no idea what would happen once he and his brothers returned to Mitzrayim. When the brothers returned to Egypt with Binyamin, Yosef tested them by demanding the enslavement of their youngest brother. Yehuda showed his love for his family and pleaded for Binyamin's life. Yehuda risked his own life in order to save Binyamin's and could have easily been killed for disobeying the orders of Egypt's second in command.

Finally, both Yehudas display a deep connection to Hashem. Before his death, Mattityahu called his sons together and urged them to continue fighting in defense of Hashem's Torah. Yehuda was called "Maccabee," a word composed of the initial letters of the four Hebrew words *Mi Kamocha Ba'eilim HaShem*, "Who is like You, O G-d?" He recognized that Hashem is like no other being in existence and that nobody will ever match His greatness.

During the Yosef story (Bereishit 44:18) it says: "Then Yehuda approached him and said, 'Please, my lord, let now your servant speak something into my lord's ears, and let not your wrath be kindled against your servant....'" It is easy to assume that this statement means that Yehuda came close to Yosef. However, the *pasuk* does not specify exactly who Yehuda approached. Since it is written ambiguously, this phrase can be seen as an allusion. "And Yehuda approached him," is really referring to Hashem. Even in times of trouble and despair,

Yehuda still had faith in Hashem and trusted that He was there to guide His children (Bereshit Rabbah 93:4, “*Rabanan amru hagashash letefillah*”).

There is much to learn from these two courageous men. We should strive to emulate their strong leadership qualities, passion for providing loved ones with safety and security, and ability to closely connect with Hashem even in difficult times.





## Nachshon ben Aminadav

I remember as a child learning about Nachshon Ben Aminadav in connection to *kriyat Yam Suf*. He is the paradigm of *zerizut* and *bitachon*, evidenced by his willingness to jump into the water before the sea actually splits. It was only much later that I realized that his actions are not mentioned in the Torah.

*Parshat Beshalach* recounts Hashem's instructions to Moshe to tell *Bnei Yisrael* to camp by the sea. Pharaoh believes that *Bnei Yisrael* have wandered off and are lost in the desert. He gathers an army, and chases after them to reclaim them as his slaves. When *Bnei Yisrael* catch sight of Pharaoh and his army steadily approaching, they cry out to Moshe, bemoaning what would become of them and Moshe begins to *daven* to Hashem. In response, Hashem rebukes Moshe for praying, commanding him instead to "tell *Bnei Yisrael* to go forward" (14:15). Many *mefarshim* raise the question of why Hashem rejects Moshe's *tefillah*, ordering *Bnei Yisrael* to go forward instead. How could they go forward when facing an immense body of water? Why does Hashem give this command?

The Talmud (Sotah 37a) teaches that the twelve tribes knew what was expected of them; they knew that that one tribe had to enter the water first. Yet none of the tribes wanted to be the first to enter the sea. Nachshon ben Aminadav, the prince of the tribe of Yehuda, steps into the water, showing complete faith in Hashem's ability to save the Jewish people from the oncoming Egyptian army and the terrifying sea before them. As a result, the miracle of *kriyat Yam Suf* transpired. It is because of this that the tribe of Yehuda merits the kingship as "Yehuda became His holy nation, Israel His dominion" (Tehillim 114:2).

Upon falling into the water, Nachshon cries out to Hashem saying, “save me, Hashem, for water has come up to my soul. I have sunk in muddy depths and there is no place to stand; I have come into the deep water, and the current has swept me away” (Tehillim 69:2-3). The name Nachshon originates from the phrase ‘*nichshol byam*’, jumping into (the waves of) the sea (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:9).

An alternate version within the Midrash is that once Nachshon jumped into the sea, the rest of *Shevet Yehuda* followed suit, and it is because of this leadership quality that his tribe merited the kingship.

While Nachshon brings great honor to his *shevet*, the midrash expounds upon the multiple rewards he personally merited for his action. Included among Nachshon’s descendents are David HaMelech, Daniel, Chananya, Mishael, Azariah and Melech HaMashiach (See Sanhedrin 93b). Nachshon merited being the first prince to bring a *korban* in the *Mishkan* (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:9). He was also one of the seventy elders.<sup>1</sup>

Examining the story of Nachshon reveals how one ‘small’ action can have a ripple effect of long-lasting consequences. By entering the sea first, Nachshon paved the *emunat Hashem* through concrete action and helped *Bnei Yisrael* realize they must never doubt Hashem and always trust that He knows best. Sometimes an outcome appears to be uncertain. Yet with the proper level of belief, one can gain clarity and forge on successfully. *Bnei Yisrael* saw the *Yam Suf*, an impossible impasse – a roadblock in their journey. Yet, Nachshon had crystal-clear *emunah* in *Hashem* and allowed the confusing details of the moment to fade away.

Initially, it may feel as though stating one’s thoughts in the midst of a crowd would be too polarizing and that it would be better to silence any beliefs which would go against popular opinion. Yet a person just has to have faith, believe in his self-worth, take the

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<sup>1</sup> See Rashi, Shemot 24:10 and Seder Olam Rabbah 12 (with Bei’ur HaGra).

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plunge, proclaim his beliefs for the world to hear, and equip himself with the knowledge that *Hashem* created us to be unique. It takes only one person with clarity to illuminate the situation to everyone else.



## Yosef and David

There are numerous similarities between Yosef and David:

1. They were both shepherds.<sup>1</sup>
2. Hashem was with both of them.<sup>2</sup>
3. They were both good looking.<sup>3</sup>
4. They both found favor in the eyes of their masters.<sup>4</sup>
5. Both were sent by their fathers to check on their other brothers.<sup>5</sup>
6. They were both sought out to be killed by people that were supposed to like them. Instead of being killed, they rose to great heights.<sup>6</sup>
7. They both encountered famine during their rule.<sup>7</sup>
8. In both stories people are hung.<sup>8</sup>
9. It is also noteworthy that the haftarah for Parshat Vayechi (which ends with Yosef's death) tells the story of David Hamelech's death.

There are also clear differences between them:

1. Yosef's father favored him over his other sons while David's father thought that he was the least of all of the brothers.<sup>9</sup>
2. David pursued a forbidden relationship with Batsheva while Yosef refused to pursue a forbidden relationship with Potiphar's wife.<sup>10</sup>
3. David was busy shepherding in the field alone while his brothers were together with his father at the house. Yosef was alone with his father in the house, while his brothers were all together in the field.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bereishit 37:2; Shmuel I 16:11

<sup>2</sup> Bereishit 39:2; Shmuel I 16:13

<sup>3</sup> Bereishit 39:6; Shmuel I 16:12

<sup>4</sup> Bereishit 39:4; Shmuel I 16:22

<sup>5</sup> Bereishit 37:14; Shmuel I 17:17-18

<sup>6</sup> Bereishit 37, 41; Shmuel I 18

<sup>7</sup> Bereishit 41; Shmuel II 21

<sup>8</sup> Bereishit 40:22; Shmuel II 21:9

<sup>9</sup> Bereishit 37:3; Shmuel I 16:11

<sup>10</sup> Bereishit 39:12; Shmuel II 11

4. David's brothers had to go and call him from the sheep, whereas Yosef had to go out to his brothers who were shepherding.<sup>12</sup>
5. David's joining his brothers began his ascent to power (his anointment). Yosef's reunion was the beginning of his decline.<sup>13</sup>
6. Yosef's brothers removed his garment and dipped it in blood to show their father that he was killed; David removed a piece of Shaul's garment to show that he didn't kill him, even though he could have.<sup>14</sup>
7. Yosef overcame the famine without any noticeable loss of life. The famine during David's reign led to the demise of seven of Shaul's descendants.<sup>15</sup>
8. Yosef sets the stage for *galut* (Mitzrayim), while David sets stage for *geulah* (the building of the *Beit Hamikdash*).

There is an interesting custom regarding the *ushpizin* recited on Sukkot. Except for Yosef, they are basically arranged in chronological order (Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef and David). Yosef appears near the end, right before David. Perhaps this arrangement emphasizes that Mashiach ben Yosef will come immediately preceding Mashiach ben David.

The contrast between them is portrayed in the different roles that they fill. It seems as though Mashiach ben David is coming as a *tikkun* for something lacking in David's kingship. David is known as a military and political leader. He fights wars and expands the boundaries of *Eretz Yisrael*. However, David is incapable of building the *Beit Hamikdash* because his hands are too stained with blood.<sup>16</sup> The way that I understand this is that he prioritized the physical, military, and political aspect of his kingship and perhaps did not focus enough on the spiritual aspect of his role. Mashiach ben David

<sup>11</sup> Bereishit 37:12-13; Shmuel I 16:11

<sup>12</sup> Bereishit 37:14; Shmuel I 16:11-12

<sup>13</sup> Bereishit 37:23-28; Shmuel I 16:12

<sup>14</sup> Bereishit 37:31-33; Shmuel I 24

<sup>15</sup> Shmuel II 21

<sup>16</sup> Divrei Hayamim I 22:8

may then come as a *tikkun* for David. He is primarily a spiritual leader, coming to ensure that everyone is spiritually prepared for the *Beit Hamikdash*. In contrast, Mashiach ben Yosef, a descendant of Yosef Ha-Tzaddik (a master of spirituality), is the one who will lead the battles of *Gog U'Magog*. He will be the warrior.

It is the joint effort of these two great leaders, themselves descendants of great leaders, who will bring about the ultimate Redemption.





## Achav “HaTzaddik”?

הרואה אחאב בחלום ידאג מפורענות (ברכות נז:)

One who sees Achav in a dream should fear punishment.  
(*Berachot* 57b)

Shomron, c. 871 BCE. The Land of Israel is ridden with immorality and idolatry. Leadership becomes a form of violent competition rather than a peaceful dynasty. A regal profession suddenly includes that of a *Ba'al* priest, and *asheirah* trees replace regular greenery in the backyard of the common man. Suddenly, news breaks out that the king, Omri, has passed away, and a new ruler is taking his place: his son, Achav.

Achav was a peculiar personality that probably many assumed would not last very long as leader. After all, the *pesukim* immediately describe him as “He did bad in the eyes of G-d” (Melachim I 16:30-31). The *pesukim* even explicitly state that Achav was worse than Yeravam ben Nevat, indicating that what Yeravam did were “light” sins.. This is evident in his marriage with the malicious princess Izevel HaTzidonit, whose influence brewed an epidemic of idolatry across the Land of Israel. But perhaps what makes Achav so unique from all the other evil kings is the fact that he ruled an almost peaceful kingdom<sup>1</sup> for a staggering twenty-two years. What made Achav, the sinful king of *malchut Yisrael*, merit such a reward?

No individual blindly blossoms into a villainous personality overnight. He always come with a backstory. Achav’s backstory,

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<sup>1</sup> Achav’s kingship was, surprisingly enough, relatively peaceful. Much of chapter 20 describes in great detail Achav’s miraculous victories towards Ben-Hadad, king of *Aram*. The *gemara* (Sanhedrin 102b) relays a story that Ben-Hadad wanted Achav’s Torah scrolls, but Achav was hesitant to give them over because he recognized their importance, stating that he had to consult with the elders first. It was because of this show of respect that Achav merited twenty-two years of kingship, parallel to the twenty-two letters that the Torah had been given (*Radak* Melachim I 20:6).

however, is a bit more violent than most. His father, Omri, became leader through unnatural means. After assassinating the king of the time, Zimri, a civil war erupted within *Malchut Yisrael*, beginning a fierce power struggle between Omri and Tivni. Following Omri's victory<sup>2</sup>, there is not much description of his leadership qualities. He was "bad in the eyes of G-d, and worse than all those before him ... And he went in the ways of Yeravam ben Nevat" (Melachim I 16:25-26). *Chazal* state that Omri was in fact worse than Yeravam (just like his son Achav would be, one day), because unlike Yeravam, he had the opportunity to learn mussar from the experiences of previous evil kings (Rabbi Melachim I 16:25). Therefore, it's not surprising that Omri only ruled for a brief seven years.<sup>3</sup>

As one can plainly tell, Achav was not raised in the most righteous of homes. Thus it was only inevitable that some of Achav's initial actions as king would mirror those of his father. The Navi lists Achav's sins, ranging from serving idolatry to the rebuilding of Yericho, the city that had been forbidden to rebuild since the times of Yehoshua.<sup>4</sup> *Chazal* go even further to describe that "there was not a furrow in the Land of Israel that Achav did not erect *avodah zarah* and [subsequently] bowed down to it" (Sanhedrin 102b). By doing so, he disgraced G-d's name, truly becoming (as he depicts himself) a כּפּר בַּאֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל<sup>5</sup> (Sanhedrin 102b).

Upon a deeper analysis, it is clear that Achav's sins were inevitably influenced by his environment. As mentioned before,

<sup>2</sup> *Seder Olam Rabbah* states that Omri only became king after giving his daughter to Yehoshafat, son of Asa, who was the king of *Malchut Yehudah* at the time. (Rashi 16:22).

<sup>3</sup> Technically, Omri ruled for twelve years but was caught up in a civil war with Tivni for five of them; so he only ruled seven full years (*Rashi* Melachim I 16:23).

<sup>4</sup> See Yehoshua 6:26 for more detail.

<sup>5</sup> *Chazal* bring down that Achav wrote on the doors of Shomron: "כּפּר בַּאֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל." Thus, says R' Yochanan, Achav did not receive a portion with the G-d of Israel. (See Sanhedrin. 102b)

Izevel, a non-Jewish villain, married Achav at the start of his reign. *Chazal* state that in the first year of her partnership with Achav, "she taught him the ways of serving idols" (*Tana Devei Eliyahu* 9). However, her crude actions were not limited to simple schooling; they were immeasurably seductive, as it explains in *Melachim I* 21:25, "There had never been anyone like Achav, who sold himself to do what was evil in the eyes of Hashem, because Izevel his wife had **impelled** him."

The *Tosefta* in *Sanhedrin* (4:3) states that the prohibition in the Torah for kings not to marry too many wives applies to alluring women such as Izevel. She attempted to murder the righteous prophets (*Melachim I* 18:4), and brought false witnesses to testify against Navot who refused to sell his vineyard.. His murder allowed Achav to inherit the vineyard<sup>6</sup>, leading Eliyahu HaNavi to ominously predict: "In place where the dogs lapped up the blood of Navot, so too will dogs lap up [Achav's] blood." Although Izevel cannot fully be blamed for all of Achav's horrendous actions,<sup>7</sup> she still played a rather significant role in submerging immorality within the kingship and *Malchut Yisrael* as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

However, Izevel is not the only one who can be blamed for Achav's atrocities; he also had quite a few corruptive friends. Chiel, in particular, is introduced as "*Beit HaEli*," – the man who went against the curse [of Yehoshua Bin-Nun] (*Rashi . Melachim I* 16:34), and in that regard is most famous for rebuilding Yericho.

<sup>6</sup> *Chazal* state that Navot was actually Achav's first cousin, and therefore he was able to inherit that vineyard (*Sanhedrin* 48b).

<sup>7</sup> *Ralbag* implies in *Melachim II* 6:32 that Achav was equally as murderous as Izevel in the case of Navot and the murder of the *nevi'im*, as he did not stop her from doing these actions.

<sup>8</sup> *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* (1:42) writes that Izevel was the reason why *Malchut Yisrael* was so immersed in idolatry in the first place. The verse in *Shir HaShirim* (1:6) hints to this, saying, "The children of my mother (Izevel) caused anger at me. They made me guard the vineyards (other G-ds), and so I did not guard my own vineyard (Hashem)."

The *mefarshim* imply that it's this story that epitomizes Achav's general leadership, mainly the daring rebelliousness behind Chiel's actions, and his complacent lack of care towards the word of G-d. The *gemara* (Sanhedrin 113a) relates that both Eliyahu HaNavi and Achav went to visit Chiel while he mourned for his sons, and Achav, with great audacity, proclaimed:

Is it possible that the curse of the student [Yehoshua] was fulfilled, and the curse of Moshe Rabbeinu was not fulfilled? After all, it states, 'If you stray and serve other gods ... G-d's anger will be ignited against you and he shall close the heavens and there shall be no rain.'

It was for this reason that Eliyahu HaNavi cursed *Malchut Yisrael*, exclaiming, "As long as Hashem, G-d of Israel, lives...there shall be no dew nor rain" (Melachim I 17:1), which ultimately resulted in a three-year drought.<sup>9</sup>

We see that Chiel's unrelenting boldness made a deep impact on Achav's character. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 10:2) relates that the pair had an interesting "charity" deal. Chiel would tell Achav how much weight he gained and Achav would donate that "worth" to pagan deities. This shows that the pair encouraged blatant mutiny against the word of G-d.

Nevertheless, despite Achav's unpleasant influences, there was still another who facilitated a radical counteraction against his entire lifestyle: Eliyahu HaNavi, the main prophet of the time. As a classic example of what today's society would define as "frenemies," Eliyahu and Achav did not have such a close-knit relationship. In fact, their first recorded interaction was when Eliyahu brazenly cursed the land with drought. With context of the *midrash* stated earlier, it's easy to tell that Achav and Eliyahu did not exactly see eye to eye. Eliyahu became Achav's primary

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<sup>9</sup> Ironically enough, Chiel is next seen later at *Har HaCarmel*, again showing his utter defiance against G-d when he lies under the *Ba'al's* altar and attempts to light a fire in order to prove its "godliness" to the masses. Hashem subsequently sends a poisonous snake that murders him (Yalkut Shemoni, Melachim 214).

source of rebuke, appearing only when G-d had a message for him, including their famed encounter at *Har HaCarmel*.

Arguably the most climactic moment in Achav's kingship, Eliyahu appeared on the scene, prepared to end the drought with a battle between him and the *Ba'al* prophets, which obviously resulted with triumph from Eliyahu. But what made this event so interesting was Achav's development throughout the entire process. When Achav first confronted Eliyahu following his curse, immediately Achav angrily asked, "Is that you, the troubler of Israel?" (Melachim I 18:17) not even acknowledging the fact that perhaps this drought came because he (Achav) did something wrong. However, almost miraculously, Achav had a complete change of heart; he even rushed to Izevel to relay to her the righteousness of Eliyahu (Malbim Melachim I 19:1).

After that, Achav seemed to have a change of heart throughout the rest of his life, as if Eliyahu had inflicted a newfound revelation of G-d that he had never experienced before. This confused state of mind eventually exploded when Eliyahu appeared later after the Navot fiasco and Eliyahu tells Achav that "anyone [of the house] of Achav...the dogs will eat" (Melachim I 21:24). Immediately, Achav surprisingly responded with signs of mourning<sup>10</sup>, causing G-d to tell Eliyahu, "Since [Achav] has humbled himself before me...I will rather bring the evil upon his house in the days of his son" (Melachim I 22:29).

We see that his attitude comes full circle at the end of Achav's life. After Achav was mortally wounded by an arrow that Naaman<sup>11</sup>, randomly shot, he stood resolutely in his chariot

<sup>10</sup> *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* (#34) expounds on this saying, "He sent for Yehoshafat, King of Yehuda, and he would administer forty lashes to him three times every day, and with fasting and prayer he would arise and go to bed before G-d, and he occupied himself with Torah all of his days and never again returned to his evil deeds."

<sup>11</sup> See *Midrash Shocher Tov* 78:11. Naaman would eventually become king after Ben-Haddad and follow in his ways, leading to Hashem striking him with

although he was bleeding to death. He didn't want his soldiers to panic had they realized that their king was dying. Chazal praise this deed (Moed Katan 28b). This displays that not only Achav's silent acceptance of G-d's punishment for him, but his resilient refusal to allow the Jewish nation to be disgraced if their leader died in the middle of a battlefield. It is for this reason that R' Nachman (*Sanhedrin* 102b) describes Achav as “*shakul*”, a mix of bad and good.

Overall, Achav was not necessarily the “evil” person that is depicted by the pesukim. Although one cannot forgive Achav for his horrendous actions (and *Chazal*, *Sanhedrin* 90a, definitively express that Achav did not receive a share in *Olam Haba*), his inner core was not inherently cruel. In true “Shlomo HaMelech”-fashion<sup>12</sup>, Achav knew that peace with other nations was a prerequisite for peace within his own nation, which therefore caused him to make a treaty with Etbaal Melech Tzidon (*Melachim* I 16:31) and marry Izevel, and also form a friendly alliance with Yehoshafat, King of Yehuda (*Melachim* I 22:45). Thus, much like Shlomo's time, Achav's era was a time of peace and prosperity, and *Chazal* even state that “[during the time of Achav] no one spoke lashon hara” (*Devarim Rabbah* 5:6).

Putting his sins aside, Achav's reign was a rather successful, lengthy one, as his meritorious characteristics were able to outplay his ugly ones on a national standpoint. It is for this reason that it states in *Berachot* (61b), “The world was not created except [for the sake of] Achav ben Omri. [What does this mean?] For Achav ... *Olam HaZeh* [was created].”

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*tzaraat*. He would subsequently be healed from *tzaraat* by Elisha HaNavi and become a *gair toshav*. (see *Melachim* II Chapter 5)

<sup>12</sup> Shlomo HaMelech, described in *Divrei Hayamim* I (22:9:10) as “a man of peace,” was known for his peace treaties with other nations, most famously his pact with Chiram Melech Tzur (*Melachim* I Chapter 7) and his political marriages to women from other nations (see *Melachim* I Chapter 11, *Shabbat* 56b, and *Sanhedrin* 21b).

So where did Achav err at the end of the day? We can understand this by looking at another affluent king who we briefly mentioned earlier who had reigned years before him: Shlomo HaMelech. At the end of Shlomo HaMelech’s life, it states that he did “bad in the eyes of Hashem” (Melachim I 11:6). The pesukim expound on this, stating that Shlomo’s wives influenced him to sin, despite the fact that Shlomo clearly married these women simply for political purposes, creating a deep gash in Shlomo’s formerly virtuous reign.

As we saw with Achav, something quite similar occurred. Achav allowed himself to associate with horrific individuals, obviously clouding his capability to become a righteous leader. It is for this reason that it states in Pirkei Avot (1:7), “Distance [yourself] from a bad neighbor, [and] do not befriend an evildoer.” Had Achav only heeded to this, he quite possibly could have become one of the best leaders in the Kingdom of Israel. However, he instead demolished his reputation for eternity, ultimately leaving his only claim to fame as “Achav HaRasha.”





# Tehillim 30: David's Repentance

## for *Mechirat Yosef*

While one would expect the content of Tehillim Chapter 30 to reflect the introductory line: “A song for the inauguration of the Temple, by David”, strikingly, David composes a poem not of joy and appreciation for the Temple itself, but rather, one of personal thanks for being healed from illness. Rav Hirsch comments that this attitude towards Temple worship, one which links personal salvation with communal practice, does in fact coincide with the nature of the Temple. Ultimately, the Temple is the link between individual souls and the Creator.

However, Rav Hirsch's answer still does not address why this particular passage, not the only one that discusses David's thanks for overcoming obstacles, is chosen to be sung at the future inauguration of the Temple.

An answer perhaps lies in the parallels between this chapter of Tehillim and the *Mechirat Yosef* story in Bereishit.

תהלים ל	בראשית
1 [ד] ה' העלית מן שאול נפשי חיייתי מירי (כתיב מירדי) בור:	[לז:כח] ויעברו אנשים מדגים סחרים וימשכו ויעלו את יוסף מן הבור וימכרו את יוסף לישמעאלים בעשרים כסף ויביאו את יוסף מצרימה:
2 [ו] ואני אמרתי בשלי בל אמוט לעולם	[לז:א] וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו בארץ כנען
3 [ח] ה' ברצונך העמדתה להררי עז הסמרת פניך הייתי נבחל:	[מח:ג] ויאמר יוסף אל אחיו אני יוסף העוד אבי חי ולא יכלו אחיו לענות אתו כי נבהלו מפניו:
4 [י] מה בצע בדמי ברדתי אל שנת היודף עפר היגיד אמתך:	[לז:כו] ויאמר יהודה אל אחיו מה בצע כי נהרג את אחינו וכסינו את דמו
5 [יא] שמע ה' ותגני ה' היה עוז לי:	[לז:ב] והיה ה' את יוסף והיה איש מצליח והיה בבית אדניו המצרי: [לז:כג] אין שר בית הסתר ראה את כל מאוזה בידו באשר ה' אתו ואשר הוא עשה ה' מצליח:
6 [יב] הפכת מספדי למחול לי פתחת שקי ותאזיני שמותי:	[לז:לד] ויקרע יעקב שמלתיו וישם שק במתניו ותאבל על בנו ימים רבים: [מח:כו] וידברו אליו את כל דברי יוסף אשר דבר אלם וירא את העגלות אשר שלח יוסף לשאת אתו ותחי רוח יעקב אביהם:

The most glaring literary reference to the Yosef story can be found in the words, **מִהַּ בָּצַע בְּדָמַי**. Once one detects the theme of Yosef, it becomes difficult to ignore the parallels within the chapter.

In order to understand the relationship between this chapter of Tehillim and the Yosef story, we have to delve into the sequence of events.

Bereishit 37 begins, **וַיָּשָׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְדוֹר אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן**. This opening line reveals much about the origin of the struggle of Yaakov and his sons. When Yaakov left Canaan, he made a promise to return and build an altar to G-d (Bereishit 28:22):

וְהָאֵבֶן הַזֶּה הָיְתָה אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמַעְתִּי מִצְבֵּה יְהוָה בֵּית אֱלֹקִים וְכָל אֲשֶׁר תַּתֵּן־לִי עֲשׂוּ  
אֲעֲשֶׂהנוּ לָךְ.

Later in Bereishit (31:13), G-d appears to Yaakov and tells him to return home and fulfill the promise:

אֲנִכִּי הֵאֱ-ל' בֵּית־אֵל אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁחַתָּ שָׁם מִצְבֵּה אֲשֶׁר נָדַרְתָּ לִּי שָׁם נָדַר עֲתָה  
קוּם צֵא מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְשׁוּב אֶל־אֶרֶץ מוֹלְדְּתְךָ.

Rashi notes here that the promise in question is:

אשר נדרת לי וצריך אתה לשלמו שאמרתי יהיה בית אלקים, שתקריב שם  
קרבנות

that he must build a house of G-d where sacrifices will be brought.

Yaakov's goal in life at this point is to return, and inaugurate a place where everyone can worship Hashem. It is possible that he believed that his exile from home and experiences in the house of Lavan fulfilled the prophecies of the *brit bein habetarim*. He and his family would be able to settle permanently in the Land of Israel. The destruction of Shechem, however, disrupted his plan of drawing the natives closer to G-d. When Yaakov attempts to quietly settle in Eretz Canaan, the Kli Yakar comments (Bereishit 37:1):

אמר לו כן שלא יבקש לו ישיבה של שלוח אפילו בארץ שלו ... ויעקב  
לא למד ממנו לעשות כן ע"כ קפצה עליו רוגזו של יוסף.

The Rosh notes that the three letters of the word **יָשָׁב** correspond to the three sons (Yosef, Shimon, and Binyamin) that Yaakov almost lost as a result of his desire for quiet settling.

While the story of Shechem seems to be the tipping point for the inability of Yaakov to build this house of worship, the sale of Yosef, orchestrated by Yehuda, was the last straw that rendered his generation unfit to build a house of G-d. Now, many years later, David, and ultimately Shlomo, stand in that same position ready to fulfill the desire that Yaakov had aspired to many years earlier.

Why did David choose to present the culmination of his desires to build the Temple and his son's success in doing so, with veiled references to the sale of Yosef? An examination of the sequence of events in the lives of Yaakov and David, and both of their reasons for not completing a temple, can help shed light on this issue.

Abduction and Rape of Dina	Rape of Tamar by Amnon
She is avenged by her brothers Shimon and Levi	She is taken in and later avenged by Avshalom
Strife among the sons of Yaakov	Strife among the sons of David
Intended murder, resulting in sale of Yosef	Murder of David's sons by Avshalom

Many thematic elements from the Yosef story appear throughout the story of Amnon and Tamar, as well as Avshalom's response and vengeance.

I.	Story of Yosef ( <i>Bereishit</i> )	Story of David's life ( <i>Samuel 2</i> )
II.	וַעֲשֵׂה לּוֹ כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים (37:3) וַיַּפְשִׁיטוּ אֶת־יוֹסֵף אֶת־כְּתֹנֶתוֹ אֶת־כְּתֹנֶת הַפָּסִים אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו: (37:23)	וְעֲלִיָּה כְּתֹנֶת פָּסִים כִּי כֹן תִּלְבָּשׁ ֹבְדוֹת־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַבְּתוּלֹת מַעֲלִים וַיֵּצֵא אוֹתָהּ מִשְׁרָתוֹ הַחוּץ וַנֶּעַל הַדֹּלֶת אַחֲרֶיהָ: (13:18) כְּתֹנֶת הַפָּסִים אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו קָרָעָה (13:19)
III.	וּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה כְּשֶׁמַּעֲמֵם וַיִּתְעַצְבוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים וַיִּחַר לָהֶם מְאֹד כִּי־נִבְלָה עֲשֵׂה בְיִשְׂרָאֵל לִשְׁכַּב אֶת־בְּתִי־יַעֲקֹב וְכֹן לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה: (34:7)	וְתֹאמַר לוֹ אֶל־אֲחִי אֶל־תַּעֲזֹנִי כִּי לֹא־יַעֲשֶׂה כֹן בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַנִּבְלָה הַזֹּאת: (13:12)
IV.	וַיִּרְאוּ אֲחָיו כִּי־אֵלָיו אָקֵב אֲבִיהֶם מִכָּל־אֲחָיו וַיִּשְׁנֹאוּ אוֹתוֹ וְלֹא יָכְלוּ דַּבְּרוֹ לְשָׁלֹם: (37:4)	וְלֹא־דָבַר אֲבִשְׁלֹם עִם־אֲמִנֹן לְמַרְעֵ וְעַד־טוֹב כִּי־שָׁנֵא אֲבִשְׁלֹם אֶת־אֲמִנֹן עַל־דָּבַר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֵת תִּמְכָּר אָחִיתוֹ: (13:22)
V.	וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב שְׂמֹלְתֵי וַיֵּשֶׂם שָׁךְ בְּמַתְּנָיו וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל־בָּנָו יָמִים רַבִּים: (37:34)	וְאֲבִשְׁלֹם בָּרַח וַיִּלָּךְ אֶל־תִּלְמִי בֶן־עַמְיָחֹר (עַמְיָהוּד) מֶלֶךְ נֶשֶׁר וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל־בָּנָו כָּל־יָמָיו: (13:37)
VI.	אֵינָנו גְּדוֹל בְּבֵית הוֹיָה מִמֶּנִּי וְלֹא־חֲשַׁךְ מִמֶּנִּי מֵאוֹמֶת כִּי אִם־אוֹתָהּ בְּאֶשֶׁר אֶת־אֲשֵׁתוֹ וַאֲחִי אֶעֱשֶׂה הָרָע הַגְּדוֹלָה הַזֹּאת וְחָסְאִי לְאֵלִיקִים: (39:9)	וַיֵּצֵר לְאֲמִנֹן הַתַּחֲלִוֹת בַּעֲבוּר תִּמְרָ אָחִיתוֹ כִּי בְתוּלָה הִיא וַיִּפְלֵא בְּעֵינָי אֲמִנֹן לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהּ מֵאוֹמֶת: (13:12)

Immediately following this sequence of events, Yehudah's leadership role temporarily ends: וַיְהִי בָּעֵת הַהִוא נִירַד יְהוּדָה מֵאֶת אָחָיו (Bereishit 38:1). Yehudah failed to unite the brothers and establish his leadership, which could have culminated with his building of a temple. Instead, he was demoted by his brothers. Shlomo, however, a descendant of Yehudah, unifies the kingdom and builds the First Temple in accordance with the wishes of his father.

*Chazal* (Bereishit Rabba 52) describe the incident of Yehudah and Tamar as laying the foundation for the coming of the *Mashiach*. It is therefore no coincidence that a direct descendant of this union is given the opportunity to rectify the past misdeeds of his forefathers. A different Tamar plays a pivotal role in the life of David in the struggle between his sons for leadership and their descent towards sin. In addition, the qualities attributed to Tamar in the Bereishit story resurface in the life of David. The words to describe the three Tamars (Yehudah's wife, David's daughter and Avshalom's daughter) are strikingly similar: Regarding the first Tamar, Rashi comments that she was extremely beautiful (38:7) and exceptionally modest (38:15). The second Tamar (in the Amnon story) is also described by Rashi (Shmuel II 13:2) as modest, and Tamar, Avshalom's daughter, is explicitly referred to as beautiful (Shmuel 14:27).

This link sheds light on a thread that runs throughout the life of David. His life in many ways is a reflection of his forefathers before him: מעשה אבות סימן לבנים.

However, in many cases, children fail as their forefathers did. The Ramban (Bereishit 12:10) comments on the descent of Avraham to Egypt:

ודע כי אברהם אבינו חטא חטא גדול בשגגה שהביא אשתו הצדקת במכשול עון מפני פחדו פן יהרגוהו והיה לו לבטוח בשם שיציל אותו ואת אשתו ואת כל אשר לו כי יש באלקים כח לעזור ולהציל גם יציאתו מן הארץ שנצטווה עליה בתחילה מפני הרעב עון אשר חטא כי האלקים ברעב יפדנו ממוות ועל המעשה הזה נגזר על זרעו הגלות בארץ מצרים ביד פרעה במקום המשפט שמה הרשע והחטא.

But, where in most cases, the sins of the forefathers often reflect on the future sins and punishment of their children, David sees this as an opportunity for rectification. This is similar to what

we find in the story of Esther and Mordechai who attempt to amend the sins of their ancestor Shaul by not taking from the spoils of Amalek. (See Megilla 13a).

וַיְהִימֶלֶךְ שְׂאוּל וְהָעָם עַל־אַנְגִּי וְעַל־מִיטֵב הַצֶּאֱלָו וְהַבְּקָר וְהַמִּשְׁנֵים וְעַל־הַכְּרִים וְעַל־כָּל־הַטּוֹב וְלֹא אָבוּ הַחַרְיָם וְכָל־הַמִּלְאכָה נִמְבָּחָה וְנָמַס אֹתָהּ הַחַרְיָמוֹ: (Samuel 1 15:9)	וּבְבֹחַ לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם: (Esther 9:10)
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This remedy to his forefathers' sins is perhaps why David brilliantly laces Tehillim 30 with references, not just to the actions of Yaakov and Yehudah, but to his own life and actions. They not only reflect these original themes, but seek to reconcile them and culminate with the ultimate building of the Temple.

In Tehillim 132, when David restates his yearning to build a Temple, he opens with a reference to Yaakov and his original vow to build a temple: **אשר נשבע לה' נדר לאביר יעקב**. The Ibn Ezra explains that the name of Yaakov is mentioned as a reminder of his promise to establish a place of worship of G-d.

The later verses describing the eventual construction and inauguration focus primarily on the will of David as opposed to Shlomo who actualized this sacred project (Melachim I 8:17-20):

וַיְהִי עֲסִלְבָּב דָּוִד אָבִי לְבָנוֹת בֵּית לְשֵׁם ה' אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־דָּוִד  
אָבִי יַעֲזֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה עֲסִלְבָּב לְבָנוֹת בֵּית לְשֵׁמִי הִטִּיבְתָּ כִּי הָיָה עֲסִלְבָּב:  
רַק אַתָּה לֹא תִבְנֶה הַבַּיִת כִּי אֲמִבְנֶה הַיָּצֵא מִחִלְצִי הוּא־יִבְנֶה הַבַּיִת לְשֵׁמִי:  
וַיִּקָּם ה' אֶת־דְּבָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר וַאֲקָם תַּחַת דָּוִד אָבִי וַאֲשַׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא יִשְׂרָאֵל  
כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' וַאֲבָנָה הַבַּיִת לְשֵׁם ה' אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Although David wanted to build the Temple and had the right intentions, it was not destined to be fulfilled through him, in the same way that Yaakov himself was unable to fulfill his desire to construct a house for the Lord. Rather, it was the destiny of his son to actualize the dreams of his father. Where Yehudah and the sons of Yaakov failed, Shlomo acknowledges his father's struggles to accomplish this goal, and attributes his success to him. That is why David composes this Psalm around the Temple, fortified with the message of ultimate repentance and forgiveness, which is what the Temple's function is to the nation. The Temple allows the nation to make mistakes, rectify them, and ultimately overcome the same challenges when faced with them yet again.



## Chizkiyahu HaMelech: A Struggle with Pride

In Sichot LeSefer Devarim, Rav Nevenzhai explains that the role of a Jewish king is to be there for his nation. A king's job is to help *Bnei Yisrael* become closer to Hashem, to know what they need in order to accomplish this closeness and give them the tools to achieve this goal. The Rambam adds that a king must have wisdom in order to know what the nation needs and how to deal properly with them, as well as *yir'at Shamayim*. Without these factors, a king is more inclined to fall into one of the most common traps many leaders face – haughtiness. This is why a Jewish king has so many specific laws guiding his everyday activities. He is not allowed to have excessive amounts of horses, nor too many wives. He is not allowed to accumulate too much wealth and he must always have a sefer Torah with him, in order that his heart does not become haughty.

Despite the negative influences of his father, Achaz, Chizkiyahu Hamelech exhibits greatness in his leadership. Even with the exile of *malchut Yisrael* during his reign, Chizkiyahu was able to turn around his nation spiritually and set them in the right direction. At first, Chizkiyahu serves as a prime example of a tremendous “*Baal Emunah*,” a person that Jews in all generations can and should learn from. Metzudat David comments in Divrei Hayamim (31:20) that when the *pasuk* says Chizkiyahu did *והאמת הישר* it means that Chizkiyahu did everything *leshem Shamayim*. Unfortunately, the longer Chizkiyahu was king, the more he struggled with a growing sense of haughtiness. Ultimately he was punished and lost the ability to become *mashiach*.

Looking at Chizkiyahu's background, it is clear that he was the light among the darkness within his family. Chizkiyahu was one of four people who were able to recognize Hashem on their own and so Hashem was with him (Bamidbar Rabbah 14:2). The *gemara* (Sanhedrin 63b) relates that Achaz wanted to sacrifice Chizkiyahu

for *avoda zara*. Hashem saved him by creating a fireproof shield for him, and allowed Chizkiyahu to be successful in all of his endeavors (Melachim II 18:7). Chizkiyahu's name indicates that Hashem strengthened him and he strengthened *Bnei Yisrael* (Sanhedrin 94a).

What did Chizkiyahu do to turn *Bnei Yisrael* around? How did he accomplish this? Firstly, Chizkiyahu dealt with the "*Nachash Hanechoshet*," the copper snake Moshe Rabbeinu crafted in the desert. (Melachim II 18:4). During Chizkiyahu's time, *Bnei Yisrael* were worshipping it like *avodah zara*. At first, Chizkiyahu called this *nachash hanechoshet* by a degrading name – "*Nechushtan*" – to show that there is really nothing special or supernatural about it in any way. Then Chizkiyahu ground it up and completely destroyed it. Mikdash Melech explains that Chizkiyahu did this to try and reaffirm the *emunah* and *bitachon* of *Bnei Yisrael*. He demanded that from now on, anyone who needed to be healed would have to come to the *Beit Hamikdash* and ask Hashem to be healed.

Chizkiyahu also succeeded in removing the *bamot* – the personal altars, something that no other king had dared to do before. Moreover, he restored knowledge of Torah to *Bnei Yisrael*. Chazal explain (Sanhedrin 94b) that Chizkiyahu would "light oil in the shuls and *batei midrash*," educating all of Klal Yisrael, men and women, young and old, with knowledge of the laws of purity and impurity.

Unfortunately, one can begin to detect some flaws in Chizkiyahu's *yir'at Shamayim*. When Sancheriv started to attack the cities in *Malchut Yehuda*, Chizkiyahu stripped the golden covering of the doors of *Heichal Hashem* and gave them to Sancheriv (Melachim II 18:16). The *Midrash Zuta* on Shir Hashirim (*parsha* 1), writes that this is why Chizkiyahu became ill later on. Why did Chizkiyahu get punished? Wasn't he trying to prevent any further fighting?

Sancheriv's attack came right after all of Chizkiyahu's success in reforming *Bnei Yisrael*. Naturally, Chizkiyahu must have felt pretty good about all his accomplishments. On a high from all of **his** success, it seems that Chizkiyahu forgot who was really in charge and therefore gave away the golden overlays of the doors. The *pasuk* states that the coverings were for the doors of the *Heichal Hashem*



for Hashem's Temple. Chizkiyahu used gold designated for honoring G-d to appease potential enemies, so Hashem caused Chizkiyahu to fall ill, sending the strong message that, 'Those doors are not yours! They are not yours to give away! Remember who's in charge here! Remember who is really orchestrating your success here.' Instead of trying to appease the enemy by bribing him with property that did not belong to Chizkiyahu, the proper response would have been to daven to Hashem for assistance.

Evidently, Chizkiyahu understood the message. When Rav'sshakeh, one of Sancheriv's advisors, later came and threatened to attack, Chizkiyahu comforted the nation, showing what it meant to be a real *Ba'al Emunah*. When Chizkiyahu saw that the nation was becoming more and more frightened because of Rav'sshakeh, he exclaimed that Rav'sshakeh may have a lot of manpower with him, but we Jews have Hashem on our side (Divrei Hayamim II 32:8). What powerful emotional words of *emunah* coming from Chizkiyahu! We see that these words of *chizuk* were very successful in strengthening *Bnei Yisrael's* faith. The pasuk continues that *Bnei Yisrael* relied on Chizkiyahu's words. They trusted him and believed what he was saying.

Nevertheless, Chizkiyahu became very sick and Hashem told him he's going to die. Why? The *midrash* Shir Hashirim Rabbah (parsha 4) suggests that Chizkiyahu's sin, and the reason he lost the ability to become mashiach, was that he did not sing a *shira* of praise to Hashem after he won the war with Sancheriv. Rav Ezra Bick, in his essay on Ha'azinu (VBM), elaborates on this *midrash*, explaining why "not singing *shira*" warranted such a harsh punishment. After the war, Yeshayahu came to Chizkiyahu and told him that he should be singing praise to Hashem. When Chizkiyahu asked why, Yeshayahu replied "Because He (Hashem) has done great things." Chizkiyahu responded that this was already known throughout the land. R' Levi explains (in the aforementioned *midrash*) that Chizkiyahu really said: "Why should we retell the greatness and miracles of G-d, when this is already well-known from one end of the world to the other?" Chizkiyahu's response shows that he

did not properly understand the nature of *hakarat hatov*, which subsequently became the core of his struggle with haughtiness.

*Hakarat hatov* is a mindset, not a one time expression of thanks. A person needs to continuously recognize that all of the good that he has, and all of the good in the world as a whole, is all from Hashem. One should not stop feeling grateful to Hashem because “Oh, I already thanked Him, I already recognized the good He did for me”. *Hakarat hatov* needs to be a constant *avodah* in order to be done properly. When a person does not constantly realize that Hashem is the one providing him with all the good he has in life, he **forgets** that Hashem is the one providing everything. He can begin to think that all of his success, and all of the good things in his life occur because of his own hard work, or his own doing. This perspective can quickly turn into haughtiness.

Chizkiyahu’s struggle with haughtiness became more extreme, sometimes even leading him to try and control his own fate. Yeshayahu told Chizkiyahu “that he was going to die and not live” (Melachim II 20:1). Chazal (Berachot 10a) say that the double language refers to *Olam Haze* and *Olam Haba*. Why was he given such a harsh punishment? Chizkiyahu saw via *ruach hakodesh* that his son would be evil. He tried try to avoid this, and therefore never married. Chizkiyahu might have had the best of intentions. He didn’t want someone evil to be a future king who would lead and influence *Bnei Yisrael*. Nevertheless, he was wrong to think that he could control his fate and circumvent what Hashem had planned.

However, once Yeshayahu explained to Chizkiyahu that he was going to die, he immediately did *teshuva*. Even when Yeshayahu told him it was too late to undo his death sentence because what’s decreed is decreed, Chizkiyahu’s response showed an incredible amount of *emunah*. “Even with a sword drawn at your neck, do not despair from Hashem’s mercy.” Chizkiyahu’s response to Yeshayahu in this case teaches us an important foundation of Judaism: True *emunah* and *bitachon* is believing that Hashem can save you “in the blink of an eye” even when the situation appears to be hopeless. When Hashem told Yeshayahu to tell Chizkiyahu that he was going to live, Yeshayahu was concerned that Chizkiyahu wouldn’t believe

him because he had previously just told him he was going to die. Hashem responded that he shouldn't worry. Chizkiyahu is a great person and he will have faith and trust in what you tell him. (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10:2)

Unfortunately, once the visitors from Bavel came to visit Chizkiyahu, he began to once again struggle with his emunah. Rashi (Melachim II 20:14) says that Hashem found "a bucket of cloudy water" (*marshal* for impurity) when inspecting Chizkiyahu because of his haughtiness. When Yeshayahu asked Chizkiyahu who the officers of Bavel were, Chizkiyahu should have responded 'Yeshayahu, you are the *navi*! For sure you know who they are. Why are you asking me?' Instead Chizkiyahu did not pick up on the sarcasm of Yeshayahu's question because he was too full of haughtiness to notice. Chizkiyahu was punished *midah k'neged midah*: Just like he showed the officers of Bavel all of his treasures (and did not mention that it was Hashem who gave him the treasures, or at least that Hashem was the Being who healed him), Bavel came later and took all of his treasures.

Although ultimately Chizkiyahu could not succeed as *ma-shiach*, there are still many positive aspects to his leadership and many lessons to be learned from him. He single handedly was able to turn a generation of *Bnei Yisrael* that was steeped in *avodah zara* into a generation of people that were *ovdei Hashem*. Furthermore, when Chizkiyahu was not struggling with his haughtiness, he showed what it meant to be a *baal emunah*. Even when death was decreed upon him, he did not give up. He still believed that Hashem could save him and would allow him to live longer.

Moreover, there are lessons to be learned from Chizkiyahu's faults as well. Although Chizkiyahu himself did not understand the true meaning of *hakarat hatov*, we ourselves, looking back now, can understand it through his misunderstanding. Chizkiyahu had both successes and failures. By exploring his leadership as a whole, we are able to learn invaluable lessons for life.



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# מחשבה ומעשה

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## ביני ובין בני ישראל

Shabbat davening is quite different from that of weekdays and of the various holidays. On the holidays, although there is a special *Amidah*, it remains the same for *Maariv*, *Shacharit* and *Mincha*. Only *Musaf* is different. However, the Shabbat davening of each *tefillah* is unique. There are different paragraphs praising Shabbat; one beginning **אתה קדשת**, the next **ישמח משה**, and finally **אתה אחד**. Even in the paragraph that is mainly the same, **אלוקינו ואלוקי אבותינו**, there is also a small change. In *Maariv* we say **וינוחו בה** (feminine form), in *Shacharit* we say **וינוחו בו** (masculine form), and in *Mincha* we say **וינוחו בם** (plural form). These changes represent three different aspects of Shabbat: its place in creation, its role as an identifier of the Jewish people, and its connection to *Olam Haba*.

According to the **עיון בתפילה**, these three distinct paragraphs represent three different eras in history. The first paragraph, from *Maariv*, represents the first two thousand years of the world's existence, a period of "nothingness". During that time there was no Torah in the world and no clear recognition of Hashem. The only purpose in Creation was the sanctity of Shabbat. The *pesukim* in this *tefillah* describe only Hashem's relationship with Shabbat; at that time, only Hashem sanctified Shabbat properly and could testify to its greatness. Here, Shabbat is referred to in the feminine (often meaning weaker) form. Although Shabbat was definitely there, it was not properly observed, and thus was not at full strength.

The second set of two thousand years, represented by the paragraph of **ישמח משה**, spans the time when Avraham Avinu began spreading word of Hashem through the era of the destruction of *Bayit Sheini* until the writing of the Mishna. This era is thus known as the era of Torah. *Am Yisrael* received the Torah on Har Sinai, and

continued to expound upon it, with *Torah Shel Ba'al Peh*. The idea of Torah is highlighted in *Shacharit* where we mention Moshe receiving the *luchot* and the command to observe Shabbat. There is also a paragraph relating that Shabbat was given only to *Am Yisrael*, as they were exclusively chosen to be His people, and receive His Torah. In *Shacharit*, Shabbat is referred to in the masculine (stronger) form. Now that Shabbat is being observed properly, it is much more powerful in its effect on the world.

The Mincha paragraph, **אתה אחד**, represents the two thousand year era of *Mashiach*, the time period during which *Mashiach* will come. It relates Hashem's Oneness, and His connection to the Jewish people. The phrase **תפארת גדולה**, refers to the first phase of *Mashiach*, when the Jewish people will be recognized to have great splendor, and there will be worldwide peace, but otherwise life will continue as we know it. The second phase of **תחיית המתים**, the resurrection of the dead, is connected to the phrase, **ועטרת ישועה**, a time when the righteous will once more be alive and will sit crowned in splendor. The third time period will be completely different, a time that will be similar to our Shabbat, a **יום מנוחה וקדושה**. We, however, have already experienced a taste of this final stage through our Shabbat, because Hashem saw fit to give it to us already (**לעמך נתתה**). This paragraph also refers to our *Avot*. It is because of them and their merits that we have this gift of Shabbat. They will rejoice and sing when they see their descendants achieving and observing the ultimate "rest" of Shabbat (**עץ יוסף**).

Reference is also made to the prophecies of Hoshea. The phrase **מנוחת אהבה ונדבה** refers to **אהבם נדבה** (Hoshea 14:5), that is, the idea that Hashem loves and always will love us unconditionally. **מנוחת אמת ואמונה** refers to **וארשתוך לי באמונה** (Hoshea 2:22), that Hashem loves us (betroths us to Him) because of the *emunah* that we had in Him and His promises. These *pesukim* do not directly refer to what it will be like for us in the times of *Mashiach*. Rather they refer to our connection to Hashem, and His connection with us, through which *Mashiach* will come. In this *tefillah*, Shabbat is



referred to in the plural, because while it will still exist in its present form, it will be expanded and intensified to the whole week.

When we celebrate and keep Shabbat, we are testifying that we believe in these three principles: that we acknowledge that Hashem created the world, and rested on Shabbat, that He gave us this special mitzvah and chose us to be His nation, and that He will one day bring *Mashiach*. It is because of these special principles, that observing Shabbat is considered central to Judaism. It defines our past, our present and our future, as well as our certainty that Hashem has control over it all.



## The Missing Years of Jewish History

The Second Temple period was a time of controversy and chaos, including an academic and Judaic discussion over certain unaccounted-for years in its chronology. There are “missing years”, some say 165 years, some say 169 years, between the defeat of the Babylonians until the time of the Romans. Different arguments have been brought to attempt to explain what was happening, who was ruling and when certain known events during this time period actually took place.

In Yirmiyahu (29:10) it states,

כי כה אמר ה' כי לפי מלאת לבבל שבעים שנה אפקד אתכם "והקמתי עליכם את דברי הטוב להשיב אתכם אל המקום הזה.

In the midst of Yirmiyahu's prophecy about the exile of the Jewish People to Babylonia at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, a beacon of hope shines through: “For thus said Hashem: After seventy years for Babylonia have been completed I will attend to you and I will fulfill for you My favorable promise, to return you to this place.” It is later stated in Daniel (9:1-2) that in the first years of Darius, son of Ahasuerus the Mede, Daniel contemplated the seventy years and attempted to calculate if the seventy years had been completed. Additionally, in Zechariah (1:12) it is asked why Hashem has not had mercy on Yerushalayim, which He has scorned for the past seventy years.

In Ezra (6:7), it states that he ascended from Babylonia to Eretz Yisrael during the seventh year of King Artaxerxes, but earlier in the *sefer* (4:24) it is recorded that the building of the Second *Beit Hamikdash* was halted during the reign of King Artaxerxes, and not completed until the second year of the reign of Darius, king of Persia. In Daniel (11:2-3) it states:

וְעַתָּה אִמַּת אֲגִיד לְךָ הִנֵּה עוֹד שְׁלֹשָׁה מְלָכִים עֹמְדִים לִפְרֹם וְהָרִבִּיעִי יַעֲשֶׂה  
 עֹשֶׂה גָדוֹל מִכָּל וּכְחֻזְקָתוֹ בְּעֶשְׂרוֹ יַעֲרֶה הַכֹּל אֶת מַלְכוּת יוֹן: וְעַמֵּד מִלֶּךְ  
 גָּבוֹר וּמִשָּׁל מִמִּשָּׁל רַב וְעֹשֶׂה כְּרָצוֹנוֹ.

The angel of Hashem came to Daniel to give him the message that:

Now I will tell you the truth. Behold, three more kings will arise for Persia. The fourth will acquire the greatest wealth of them all; and when he grows strong with his riches he will arouse all [of his kingdom] against the kingdom of Greece. A mighty king will then arise, he will rule with great domination, and he will do as he pleases.

But just who are these four kings, and do they have anything to do with the kings that have been mentioned consistently throughout other *sefarim*? Rashi comments here that *Chazal* identify the first three kings as Koresh, Ahasuerus, and Darius, and the fourth king who will go against Greece is Alexander the Great.

According to the traditional Jewish chronology, the defeat of Babylonia by Persia until the period of the Greeks was 52 years (*Seder Olam Rabbah* 29). During these 52 years there were three Persian kings and one Medean king. The Second Temple was built in 351 BCE and destroyed in 69 CE, lasting 420 years. The Persians ruled for 34 of those years and during the remaining 386 years, the Greeks, the Hasmoneans, and the Romans ruled over the Jews. Accordingly, this year is indeed 5777.

However, according to the academic conventional chronology, the defeat of Babylonia by Persia until the Greek period was 207 years – a vast difference! These 207 years span ten different Persian kings. The Second Temple was built much earlier, in 520 BCE, standing for 589 years until 69 CE. During these 589 years, there were 188 years of Persian kings and 401 years of Greek, Hasmonean and Roman leaders ruling over the Jews. This, however, leads us to a present calendar year of 5945!

According to Rav Saadia Gaon, the Christians purposefully manipulated the years to fit their own agendas. In his *sefer*, *Emunot VeDe'ot* (chapter 9), Rav Saadia writes:

I have found, then, that the advocates [of the Christian doctrine] had no other means [of supporting their theory] except the contention that an addition is to be made in

the chronological calculation. They maintain, namely, that the government of the Persians over Palestine existed for a period of something like 300 years before ... However, I have refuted this contention ... [pointing out] that it was impossible that between the time of the government of Babylon and that of the Greeks more than four Persian kings should have ruled over Palestine....

Rabbi Alexander Hool, in *The Challenge of Jewish History*, argues that the Greeks manipulated the records because they wanted it to seem like Persia was totally destroyed, when in actuality, the Persian Empire slowly continued on, even after the defeat of Darius at the hands of Alexander the Great. Epstein, Dickman and Wilamowsky (in their *Hakirah Journal*, "A Y2K Solution to the Chronology Problem," vol. 3, p. 80) suggest that:

the Chachamim were concerned about the acceptance of the Mishnah. To ensure its unequivocal adoption, they wanted the completion of the Mishnah to occur approximately 2000 years after the start of the Torah period.

If that meant adjusting the years of the Second Temple Period, then so be it. Rabbi Menachem Leibtag suggests that the Seder Olam justified skipping 165 years since there was no significant Jewish progress, particularly in the context of the second *Beit HaMikdash* and the return from the exile (sabahillel.blog). They are not worthy to have existed.

Many suggestions have been given to try and explain the missing years within the Second Temple period. Whether the Jewish view or the academic view is accurate, whether the years were removed for noble or selfish reasons, the question of why certain years are missing and what events transpired during them is one that will continue to be pondered.



## **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle: Is Environmentalism a *Mitzvah*?**

As of January 1st, 2017, Israeli supermarkets have been legally bound to begin charging for plastic shopping bags. The reason given – global warming and environmental concerns. Are these concerns halachically binding? Are they even Jewish values at all?

After the creation of man in Parshat Bereishit (1:28), G-d gives man a charge to “be fruitful and multiply and fill up the land and conquer it”, seemingly defining man’s role as one who needs to take charge of nature and utilize it to the advantage of mankind, thereby setting up a relationship where the earth is there to serve the needs of humanity. However, later on in the same *parsha* (2:15), G-d gives man a seemingly contradictory imperative, asking man to live in the Garden of Eden in order to protect it. This *pasuk* seems to set up a more symbiotic relationship between humanity and the earth, where humanity’s role is to preserve the earth as best as possible. How are the two seemingly contradictory approaches reconcilable?

One needs to recognize the nuanced, balanced view Judaism has towards ecology. In some circumstances, G-d wants man humanity to protect the world, acting more like a naturalist, and in other circumstances, G-d needs man to conquer the world, acting more like a conqueror.

This dual premise is reflected elsewhere in Tanach. In Tehillim (19:2) it says, “The heavens declare the glory of G-d, and the expanse of the sky tells of His handiwork”. G-d is reflected in nature, and man is required to protect and guard this delicate ecological testimony. Elsewhere in Tehillim (115:16) it says: “The heavens are the heavens to G-d, but the earth He gave to mankind”, reflecting the more proactive side of man’s relationship to the earth, the one of conquering and conquest. When is it appro-

priate to access these different aspects of the dual responsibility regarding man's ecological imperatives? When should one act more like a conqueror and when should one act more like a naturalist? A look at the mitzvah of "*bal tashchit*", the prohibition against unnecessary waste, clarifies this matter.

The placement of the Torah source for *bal tashchit* offers insight into the mentality that this *mitzvah* is meant to foster. It is in Sefer Devarim (20:19-20) in the midst of a discussion about the proper behavior when engaging in war. The Torah explicitly prohibits the destruction of edible fruit-bearing trees during war; only non-fruit bearing trees may be cut down in the situation of siege and war. The Sefer HaChinuch (529) expands on this, quoting the *gemara* in Masechet Kiddushin (32a) that includes in this prohibition any wasteful act such as tearing clothing, burning things, or breaking vessels for no reason.

The reason for this *mitzvah* is to teach us to embrace what is good and purposeful, and through this, we will distance ourselves from any form of destruction or evil. This is the way of the righteous people- they appreciate all of creation and bring the world closer to Torah, and they will be careful even with a grain of mustard to make sure it does not get wasted. These righteous people will do everything in their power to ensure that nothing ever goes to waste. Evil people, the Sefer HaChinuch writes, are characterized by their happiness while engaging in wasteful actions, and through this destructive behavior they end up destroying themselves.

The Sefer HaChinuch explains the parameters of the prohibition of *bal tashchit* by defining "waste" as any inherently destructive action to which there is no purpose to the destruction. He explains that it is permitted to cut down fruit trees when there is value to the wood because that would result in significant financial gain. This *halacha* was also codified by the Rambam in *Hilchot Melachim* 6:8 who writes that one is permitted to cut down a fruit tree if it is harming other trees or if the wood is objectively valuable; the act of cutting down the tree is considered purposeful



and therefore is not a violation of *bal tashchit*. In addition to preventing damages and causing financial gain, we can assume that the definition of “purpose” extends also to engaging in a destructive act for the needs of a *mitzvah*. There are plenty of *mitzvot* which require Jews to engage in seemingly destructive acts but are permitted because the purpose of the act is *avodat Hashem*, such as tearing clothing in mourning as well as the obligation to burn *chametz* the day before Pesach commences (Bereishit 37:34 and Shulchan Aruch OC 455:1).

This fits perfectly into the premise of man having a dual relationship with the earth. On the one hand, man must respect earth as G-d’s creation and live by the “naturalist” paradigm of striving to protect the earth and minimize waste. However, ecological concerns must be framed within the context of our *avodat Hashem*. When there are certain purposeful reasons for destructive actions, man is permitted to engage the “conqueror” paradigm set up in Bereishit, whether it is for financial gain, minimizing damages, or for the needs of a *mitzvah*.

When it comes to ecological concerns, from this perspective, Jews must be concerned with wanton waste out of the prohibition of *bal tashchit*. We must strive to reduce our carbon footprint and eliminate waste; however, we must keep the dual relationship premise in mind constantly and allow it to keep us balanced. When engaging in an activity that is less-than-ecologically sound for a purpose, and the more ecologically sound routes are really not viable, we are permitted to carefully tread into the world of waste for the sake of our *avodat Hashem* and limited finances, but we must tread very carefully.

Rav Hirsch explains the Jewish relationship to nature within the context of the prohibition of *bal tashchit*. If we believe wholeheartedly that G-d created the world, we will thus view everything in nature as one of G-d’s creations and therefore must treat it with the deserving respect. Rav Hirsch writes, “Waste nothing! ... Be wisely economical with all the things G-d grants you, and transform them into as large a sum of fulfillments of

duty as possible” (Horeb 46:501). As Jews, we must tend to the side of ecological awareness as much as possible and treat the Creation with the utmost respect. To that extent though, we are not engaging in ecological pursuits exclusively for the sake of environment; as Jews, every action in our life must be directed towards our *avodat Hashem* (Rambam Hilchot De’ot 3:3). So when it is necessary to infringe on these ecological concerns for the purpose of *avodat Hashem*, we must do so wisely and carefully, minimizing the waste as much as possible.

One can also approach a Jewish imperative to engage in ecological concerns from a monetary lens. Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel writes extensively about this in his “Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues” (pages 52-61). Certain forms of pollution that cause damage to personal property or comforts have penalties that must be repaid according to the halachot in the Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat. For example, if a person litters and puts garbage in public property, the rabbis have a right to fine the person. If the garbage causes any damage, the litterer is responsible for paying for the damages (Choshen Mishpat 414:1).

A big movement within the environmentally-conscious community is a push towards more respect towards and appreciation of nature. How are Jews supposed to interact with the natural world around us? As quoted above by Rav Hirsch, we must relate to nature as the fulfillment of G-d’s creation in the world and treat it accordingly. Avot deRabi Natan (31:3) teaches that for everything G-d created in nature, He created a parallel within man. As Jews, we can observe nature and everyday miracles of the world around us to work on our *middot* and understand more about human nature, thus allowing us to come closer to Hashem.

A classic example of someone who did just this is the mishnaic sage R’ Akiva (Avot deRabi Natan 6). One day, the ignorant, 40-year-old shepherd, Akiva, was walking in the woods and noticed that a slow trickle of water was making a hole in a rock. He realized that if water could make such a noticeable indent in a rock, the Torah must be able to penetrate the head

which he likened to stone. This motivated him to begin attending Torah classes until he developed himself into one of the greatest Tannaim.

Additionally, as Jews, we prioritize continuity especially in regard to future generations. Whether it be in our Torah study or our performance of *mitzvot*, Jews are always focused on children and engaging future generations. The *gemara* (Ta'anit 23a) cites a story of a man who planted a carob tree. He was asked about his intentions, for he was an old man and carob trees take seventy years to grow. Why would he plant the carob tree if not for himself? He responded by saying that someone had to have selflessly planted all of the trees he currently enjoys, so he himself is planting a tree for the future generations to enjoy. When it comes to our attitude towards nature, we must do our best to preserve it for future generations.

Judaism is centered on the ideas that everything in life needs to be done within the framework of *avodat Hashem*. From the time a person wakes up in the morning, until the moment he goes to sleep, his actions are dictated by halachic guidelines that allow the person to maximize his service of G-d.

While Judaism may look positively on nature-inclined attitudes, it is critical to contextualize these passions within the framework of *avodat Hashem* and to constantly ask the question, "Is this action enhancing my mitzvah performance and relationship with G-d, or is it detracting from it." As we say every week during *Kabbalat Shabbat*, "Hashem is greater than other *elohim*" (Tehillim 96:4). The causes in our lives can take hold of us and almost become "*elohim*", gods, in our lives. But every *Shabbat*, it is important to refocus and remember that while we can be passionate about causes, we cannot let the causes become gods in our realm. We must contextualize everything we are passionate about within the framework of our *avodat Hashem* so that we can enhance our *mitzvah* observance in every way possible.



## Working Toward a Higher Purpose

As young children, we are given candies and prizes as motivation for doing the right thing. We are conditioned to enjoy positive actions from a young age, hoping that eventually we will do these things for selfless, G-d-conscious reasons. This concept is referred to in the *gemara* (Pesachim 50b; Sanhedrin 105b) as מתוך שלא לשמה בא לשמה. This idea is an encouraging one. It maintains a positive outlook on all of our actions and pushes us to act properly no matter how we feel. The goal that we will eventually have the right intentions, encourages us to continue doing the right thing, despite the fact that not all our actions are initially done for the best reasons.

This is a central attitude of Judaism, one that has kept the Jewish people motivated throughout the generations. We are human beings, with constantly changing emotions. If we acted according to the Torah only when we had the proper intentions, we would often lose opportunities to perform *mitzvot* due to the frequent human state of apathy. Rather, we utilize our own personal desires to motivate actions which maintain a constant connection with Torah life, hoping that in the end we will condition ourselves to perform the mitzvah consistently for the “right” reasons.

There is, however, a seemingly conflicting statement in the *gemara* (Berachot 17a): One who learns Torah for the wrong reasons – it would have been better had he not been created. That is a pretty extreme statement. The harshly critical idea that “one who learns for any reason other than to serve G-d would have been better off never being born” seems to contradict the idea that the practice of a mitzvah with the wrong intent will eventually lead to the right emotions. If they were never born, they would not have the opportunity to eventually reach the right intent. Additionally, in

Masechet Taanit (7a), there is a statement that if one learns for the wrong reasons, his learning becomes a potion of death for him; again, not a very promising statement in terms of eventually reaching the proper intentions and emotions through initially uninspired *mitzvah* performance.

Tosafot (Taanit 7a) beautifully resolves the apparent contradiction. These last two negative phrases refer to people who learn just for the sake of causing an argument or in order to show up a friend in a dispute. These types of intentions will never be able to turn into positive ones. That is why the *gemara* condemns them so harshly. The earlier citation refers to those who study to achieve fame and honor. As long as one is not doing anything for specifically *bad* reasons, the initially uninspired *mitzvah* performance is permissible because it will eventually lead the person to performing the *mitzvot* from the right mindset.

Once we are discussing the idea of doing *mitzvot lishmah*, we should consider exactly what it means to have “good intentions”? If we are doing the proper thing, like giving *tzedakah*, but we are doing it because G-d told us to instead of doing it out of the desire to help someone in need, is that better than giving *tzedakah* just because we are compassionate people? Would G-d prefer that we had no compassion, only a strong urge to follow His *mitzvot*, to the point that the actual commandment would be irrelevant? Or do we believe, like Rambam that every *mitzvah* has an inherent meaning? As he writes in *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:31):

Every one of the six hundred and thirteen precepts serves to inculcate some truth, to remove some erroneous opinion, to establish proper relations in society, to diminish evil, to train in good manners or to warn against bad habits.

If we believe the latter, than doing a good deed *lishmah* becomes very hard to define. If we do not understand the reasons for each of the *mitzvot*, we cannot set for ourselves a proper goal to attain the *lishmah* feeling. What then are we to do?

While many suggest different methods of dealing with this dilemma, I think the answer is simple. Putting it into action, however, is a bit more difficult. First we need to divide the *mitzvot*

into two categories; those that clearly improve our *middot* and those that do not clearly seem to affect our *middot*. For those that do not, we can honestly say we are doing them *lishmah*, because if the commandments did not exist, we probably would not do them. For example, when I see an ad for a non-kosher candy that looks delicious, I am allowed to say I would eat it if I could, but G-d told me not to (Rashi, Vayikra 20:26).

With regards to the *mitzvot* that seem to have an impact on our character development, we can only do our best; we work towards finding a balance and doing the *mitzvot* both out of the kindness of our hearts and for the sake of G-d. We work towards wanting and getting benefit out of each of the commandments, while always having in mind that no matter what the actual law is, we would be doing it anyway just because of the fact that G-d commanded it. Hopefully, I would not react the same way as I did with the non-kosher food as I would when I saw someone killing someone, because that is a law that seems to impact our *middot* and assumedly would be important for moral reasons even without G-d's explicit commandment.

The examples I gave are two extremes that make the world appear black and white. We either understand or do not understand the reasons for the *mitzvot*. But in real life, we deal with a lot of grey areas. Many *mitzvot* are not always straight-forward in every situation, but either way we are supposed to reach a level of doing them *lishmah*. Therefore, all we can do is try our best to separate all of the reasons or excuses we could find to not follow these commandments, and just do them. We are humans – it will not be that easy to practically integrate this nuanced approach into our everyday behavior. With any type of commandment from G-d, our goal should be to reach the point where we perform *mitzvot* primarily out of desire to live according to G-d's will, while keeping in mind, as well, the Divine moral aims.





## ***Eilu ve'Eilu***

Some questions have multiple, legitimate answers, while others mandate a single, solidified resolution. Throughout the copious volumes of the Talmud, many questions are posited and a seemingly interminable number of answers are proposed. Intellectual dichotomies ensue and logical thought processes are dissected, yet practical conclusions are not always universally attained. Division lingers, causing halachic observance to break into various channels as different people cleave to different rabbinic perspectives. Is half of the Jewish nation violating *halacha* by following incorrect opinions, or does the system implicitly allow for multiple, simultaneous truths?

This, in a nutshell, is the central controversy regarding the famous Judaic dictum, “*Eilu ve’eilu divrei Elokim chayim*.” The phrase first appears in Eruvin (13b) in the context of a major debate between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel. A *bat kol* emanates from the heavens with this purposefully ambiguous assertion, which can be translated as, “These and these are the living words of G-d,” or, “These and these are the words of the living G-d.” Then the same *bat kol* continues to say this case’s *halacha* should follow Beit Hillel. Chazal struggle to interpret this strange scenario. Does the *Bat Kol* intend to suggest that both Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai offer equally legitimate halachic perspectives? If so, why does it ultimately pronounce Beit Hillel’s dominance here? How can two differing opinions both merit the title, “the living words of G-d?”

Many propose a pluralistic approach to multiple truths. The Ritva comments (Eiruvim 13b) that when Moshe Rabbeinu went up Har Sinai to receive the Torah, Hashem showed him about every matter of law that there are forty-nine approaches to rule permissively as well as forty-nine to rule prohibitively. Essentially, Moshe receives a staggering ninety-eight options for halachic ruling! Confused, he asks Hashem for the reasoning behind such a broad

spectrum of legitimacy. Hashem explains that regulation of the halachic system is supposed to be within the jurisdiction of the rabbinic process. G-d intends and embraces the concept of multiple truths; there is no single objective halachic reality, rather a continuum which leaves enough room for internal rabbinic dissent. While there is the ability to propose an approach beyond the confines of the legitimate system, any well-versed rabbi who approaches a Torah issue with genuine sincerity is able to uncover a truth of Torah.

The Maharshal explains the underlying basis for the pluralistic model on a more mystical level. At Har Sinai, all *neshamot* of the future generations bore witness to the spectacular phenomenon of revelation and experienced the *kolot* through multiple channels according to their distinct identities (Introduction to Yam Shel Shlomo, Bava Kama). By nature, human beings acquire quite different messages. Hashem created people with disparate intellectual approaches and therefore wholeheartedly allows for simultaneous halachic perspectives.

There is also a monistic model of *eilu ve'eilu*. G-d must have created the world with an objective halachic right and wrong; otherwise, how can we assign any intrinsic value to the fulfillment of His commandments? Hashem Himself established one ultimate truth, but He intentionally created the halachic system in a manner which would inevitably lead to intellectual confusion. The value of the rabbinic process outweighs the unfortunate consequence of resulting ambiguity. With each new generation of *poskim*, some decisions might differ from the original Divine Will, yet will remain sanctioned by Hashem, so long as they go through the halachic process with the proper gravity.

Why are incorrect approaches still dubbed "*eilu ve'eilu*?" The Chida explains that we only see truth upon its comparison to falsehood and therefore there is value in an incorrect opinion (Petach Inyanim LaChida, Eiruvim 13b, page 88). The Netziv suggests that even wrong opinions enlighten our knowledge with elements of truth (Ha'ameik She'eilah, Mosad HaRav Kook, page 18-19). Rav Tzadok HaCohen, meanwhile, proposes that we are only

able to reach the right answer through making mistakes beforehand (Tzidkat HaTzaddik 166).

The Igrot Moshe (in his introduction to *chelek alef*) writes that there may be two levels of *emet*, one in heaven and one in the earthly rabbinic realm. If a qualified rabbi carefully *paskens halacha*, his *psak* becomes truth. Although Heaven has a different conclusion, his ruling is allowed to take on the role upon which truth is meant to play. In a similar vein, the Ran writes in Drashot HaRan 11, that parallel truths bridge the gap between G-d and mankind. Hashem's overarching will is for *Bnei Yisrael* to observe the dictum of the rabbinic process; He did not give over multiple, conflicting possibilities but told us to follow the rabbis even though doing so would later lead to multiple perspectives. Will following an incorrect approach have any tangible negative impact upon an individual's *neshama*? The Ran states that Hashem places overwhelming value upon the rabbinic halachic system. It is critical in G-d's eyes that obeisance to its rulings quantitatively overrules whatever spiritual damage may have been caused by any purported "sin."

Essentially, there is *machloket* regarding how to define *machloket*. Some insist all perspectives are stamped with the authenticity of G-d's true will, while others believe G-d's desire for the rabbinic process simply outweighs the pitfalls of incorrect rabbinic opinions. Either way, following a legitimate halachic approach constitutes fulfillment of Hashem's will, whether one is fundamentally correct because of subjective halachic reality or retrospectively correct despite the conflicting objective halachic reality.



## ***Kiddush Hashem***

Sanctifying Hashem's Name is at the basis of Jewish life. We are all equally obligated in this commandment. Nechama Leibowitz defines making a *kiddush Hashem* as "the propagation of human acknowledgement and recognition of Him and His holiness" (Studies in Vayikra p. 213). In order to accomplish this, it is essential to start with ourselves. We must act in this manner before spreading a positive message to others. Sanctifying Hashem's Name is something we need to constantly work on. To fulfill this commandment, we must be aware of what it means in our everyday lives. We must consistently find ways to bring honor, respect, and glory to Hashem's Name.

To understand this concept on a deeper level, it is crucial to examine a well-known story in Chumash. In Bamidbar (20:12), Moshe was punished because he failed to sanctify Hashem's Name. Hashem said to Moshe, "Since you did not have faith in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly to the Land which I have given them." This blatant lack of *kiddush Hashem* is the cause of Hashem's refusal to allow Moshe to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. Ibn Ezra explains that the implication of **עַן לֹא הֵאֱמַנְתָּ בִּי** – "Since you did not have faith in Me," is that Moshe failed to make a *kiddush Hashem*. Making a *kiddush Hashem* requires us to take our *emunah* and *bitachon* and apply it to all we do.

*Kiddush Hashem* should be practiced not only in public but in private as well, as in the case of Yosef, who fulfilled the command of sanctifying Hashem's Name in restraining himself in the face of temptation with Potiphar's wife (Sotah 36b). The sanctification of Hashem's Name is not dependent upon an audience; you can still affect others even with no one present.

Rambam states in Hilchos Teshuva (3:4) that "a person should always look at himself as equally balanced between merit

and sin and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin. If he performs one sin, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of guilt and brings destruction upon himself. On the other hand, if he performs one mitzvah, he tips his balance and that of the entire world to the side of merit and brings deliverance and salvation to himself and others". This form of living is that of *kiddush Hashem*. If we live in a constant state of trying to positively tip the balance, we will be sanctifying Hashem and His Name.

There is a commandment to live *al kiddush Hashem*, but one must also be willing to die *al kiddush Hashem* as well. A person is required to die rather than violate *avodah zarah*, *gilui arayot*, and *shefichut damim* (Masechet Pesachim 25a-25b, Masechet Sanhedrin 24a-b). Generally, one is required to violate all other commandments to avoid death. There are other factors, such as the time period or whether the prohibition is done in public or private, that help distinguish whether or not a Jew is obligated to sin or die. In Judaism, martyrdom is called *kiddush Hashem*, "the sanctification of G-d's Name," and a martyr is called "holy." Yet, the Rambam writes in Yesodei HaTorah (5:4) that a Jew is forbidden from volunteering to be a martyr. We are supposed to choose life. We are expected to live our lives, making a *kiddush Hashem*, instead of idealizing martyrdom.

The *mishnah* in Avot (4:7) says, "One hour of satisfaction in the World to Come is more beautiful than the entire life of this world." That same *mishnah* goes on to teach that "good deeds in this world are more beautiful than all the life of the World to Come." Judaism is an affirmation of life, seeking redemption in the present. We do not focus on how to earn a place in heaven. Rather, we concentrate on our actions of the here and now, hoping that these actions will merit us a place in the World to Come. The more abundant our good deeds are, the greater it will be for us in *Olam Haba*. In the Talmud, the concept of *kiddush Hashem* is also discussed in the context of our financial dealings with non-Jews (Bava Kama 113a-113b). We must always strive to reflect honor upon G-d and the Torah by striving for moral excellence.

I was always told to make a “*kiddush Hashem*” in a very specific case. While growing up, the only times I heard the term “*kiddush Hashem*” were on school trips. The teachers expressed to us that they wished to ensure we positively represented the Jewish people outside school grounds. While this was an essential point to make, there is more to it than that. A *kiddush Hashem* should not only exist in the context of a school trip. We should sanctify Hashem’s Name in every action of our lives. Everything we do should be representative of our identity and why we are here.

Part of establishing a personal connection with Hashem, is individually working on our own forms of making a *kiddush Hashem*. No matter where we go or what we do, whether people realize it or not, we are Jews. Hashem put us in this world and it is incumbent upon us to sanctify His Name. This is a commandment that applies to all Jews, but it is also a personal commandment. Making a *kiddush Hashem* should not be limited to going on a field trip; rather it should be about the way in which we live our lives as *ovdei Hashem*.





## The Development of the Hebrew Alphabet

The origin of the Hebrew alphabet is not as straightforward as it may seem, and actually has tremendous ramifications on Jewish theology. Historians claim that the early alphabetic symbols were comprised of images that stood for a full word, sentences or phrases and not just a specific sound. The Egyptians were the first to invent symbols that represent individual sounds. This was a necessary means for communication with the Canaanites when they would come down to Egypt for trade or other international affairs.

However, the Egyptians never thought of making this alphabet (that represented individual sounds) mainstream, nor did they ever encourage its widespread use amongst their own people. Only later did the Canaanites bring this alphabet back to Canaan. After the Canaanites propagated this method of writing, it became known as the alphabet because the first two letters were *alef* and *bet*. Ancient writings from the period ranging from 1700 BCE until *Bayit Rishon* in the 600s BCE are written in this script, referred to as *ketav Ivri*. Today, the Hebrew script we use is known as *ketav Ashuri*, and all Jewish texts written after *Bayit Rishon* are written with this alphabet.

This is religiously relevant to Judaism, which places a tremendous value on learning Torah directly from the text the way it was written. We believe that the text has inherent *kedusha*. So, which alphabet is embedded with *kedusha*, *ketav Ivri* or *ketav Ashuri*?

The *gemara* brings three opinions (Sanhedrin 21b-22a):

1) The original alphabet used was *ketav Ivri*. The Torah was given to *Bnei Yisrael* in *ketav Ivri* and *Lashon Hakodesh*. When Ezra served as the leader of *Klal Yisrael*, he changed the alphabet of the Torah to *ketav Ashuri* and the language to Aramaic. This script is

called *ketav Ashuri* because it came from *Ashur*. In the end, the Jewish people decided they did not want a translated Torah but rather preferred to have it in the original Hebrew. Therefore, *ketav Ashuri* and *Lashon Hakodesh* is what we use today. The *gemara* continues and says that the Jews left the Aramaic and *ketav Ivri* for the *Kutim*, today referred to as Samaritans.

2) The second opinion: The original script that the Torah was written in is the one we have right now, *ketav Ashuri*. When the Jews sinned leading up to the destruction of the First Temple, they lost their familiarity with *ketav Ashuri* and the alphabet of the Torah was changed to *ketav Ivri*. When *Bnei Yisrael* did *teshuva*, the original *ketav Ashuri* was returned. It is referred to as *ketav Ashuri*, not after the Assyrian Kingdom, but rather from the Hebrew word *me'ushar*, beautiful, because this script is aesthetically appealing.

3) The third opinion: There was never an alternative script. The Jews always used *ketav Ashuri*. The *gemara* quotes a *pasuk* from the *mishkan* (Shemot 27:10). Just like the pillars in the *mishkan* would never be replaced with something else, so too the letters (e.g. *vav*) never changed.

The Geonim<sup>1</sup> and the Rambam<sup>2</sup> agree that the Torah was originally given in *ketav Ashuri*. Opponents argue that there are no archeological findings from before the First Temple period in *ketav Ashuri*. The findings have consistently been written in *ketav Ivri*.

The Ritva (Megillah 2b) writes that we learn many *halachot* and foundations of Torah from every detail of the letters. He is bothered that one can even suggest that the Torah could have been given in *ketav Ivri*. *Lashon hakodesh* and *ketav Ashuri* must have been the one used on the *luchot*. However, due to its holiness, all other writings were in *ketav Ivri*.

The Radbaz (3:442) suggests a different theory. Only the first *luchot* were written in *ketav Ashuri*, but the script of the second *luchot* was *ketav Ivri*. Since Hashem wrote the first *luchot* and

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<sup>1</sup> As cited in the Teshuvot HaGeonim (Harchavi) *siman* 355, and Rabbeinu Chananel on Sanhedrin 22a.

<sup>2</sup> See Peirush HaMishnah LeRambam, Masechet Yadayim 7:5.

Moshe wrote the second, it is logical to say that *ketav Ashuri* was the divine script and has inherent *kedusha*, and the *ketav Ivri* used by Moshe Rabbeinu was merely a human expression of this.

The Sefer ha-Ikkarim (3:16) says that everything was originally written in *ketav Ivri*, and that *ketav Ashuri* actually originated in *Ashur*. The Jews switched to *ketav Ashuri* from *ketav Ivri* after returning to Israel as a remembrance of their redemption from exile.

The Ramban (in the appendix to his Biblical commentary) writes that he found coins in Acco with writing, but he could not understand it. He asked the *Kutim*, and they easily read it because it was in *ketav Ivri*. One side of the coin read *shekel ha'shekalim*, and on the other side, it read *Yerushalayim ha'kedosha*.

In conclusion, the discussion over the usage of two distinct alphabets throughout Jewish history actually has significant ramifications regarding the general view of Jewish texts. Since text is a central part of Jewish life and learning, this debate sheds light on the various aspects of Judaism and is significant not just historically and archaeologically, but also theologically.



## A Jewish Attitude Toward Non-Jews

Throughout Jewish history, Jews and non-Jews have often had a very tense relationship, dating back to the Egyptians, Persians, Romans, Crusaders, the Inquisition, and in recent history, the Holocaust. It is no shock that in Jewish literature, non-Jews are usually not portrayed very positively and at times in a derogatory manner. As someone who grew up with non-Jewish relatives and friends, I was deeply bothered by this attitude. Why were people I greatly respected demeaning an entire segment of society for being born to non-Jewish parents? Why was it acceptable to make broad statements about the “*goyim*” that seemed extremely contradictory to my encounters with them? There had to be another approach, and I was determined to find out.

There are two often quoted phrases that seem to demean non-Jews that must be analyzed. The first is “*Am Segulah*” – a chosen nation. The *pasuk* in Shemot (19:5) says:

ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקולי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים כי לי כל הארץ.

Seforno comments:

והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים אף על פי שכל המין האנושי יקר אצלי מכל יתר הנמצאים השפלים, כי הוא לבדו המכוון בהם, כאמרם ז"ל (אבות) חביב אדם שנברא בצלם מכל מקום אתם תהיו לי סגולה מכלם.

Although there is a unique relationship with *Am Yisrael*, all of mankind is precious in Hashem's eyes.

Rav Hirsch writes in his *Nineteen Letters* (#15): When the Torah speaks of the Jewish people as “*segulah*” (an exclusive treasure), it does not mean that G-d does not belong to any other people, but that this people must not belong to any other god. G-d has exclusive claim to their devotion and service.

This attests to the fact that although we are exclusively G-d's, but we are not G-d's exclusively. G-d cares about all of his creatures. Rav Hirsch (Shemot 4:22) further develops this idea:

So that when G-d speaks of Israel as **בני בכורי**, it expresses the idea that with Israel, the mother womb of humanity is opened, with Israel is commenced the list in which the names of all the nations should appear as My sons. So that in your own name and in the name of the whole of humanity I come to you. *Israel is My first but not My only child, it is only the first nation that I have won as Mine* (In the same sense our sages have taken **שבוור וחזור ובורר ואבדיל אתכם מן העמים** (כאדם שבוור וחזור ובורר). Not as **בני בכורי** but as **בני**, do I demand freedom for Israel, as I would for any other nation that gave itself to me as My son. *Israel is not the first in rank, but the first in time.*

We are the first – but not the only – child. According to this opinion, there does not seem to be an inherent Jewish superiority. This statement is in no way a “knock” on the innate uniqueness of the Jewish people; rather it is merely giving value to other nations as well.

The second phrase that is often mentioned is “*or lagoyim*” – a light unto the nations (Yeshayahu 49:6). This *pasuk* is quoted at times to diminish the status of non-Jews, leaving an impression that Jews have a “holier than thou” feeling. On the *pasuk* (Yeshayahu 70:3) **והלכו גוים לאורך ומלכים לנגה ורחק**, Metzudat David comments that Jews are meant to enlighten the eyes of non-Jews in the ways of G-d. The job of a Jew is to be a teacher, an educator, and a role model to the outside world.

In order to understand this role, one must refer to the other educators within Judaism: the *kohanim*. In Shemot (19:6), Jews are referred to as a “*mamlechet kohanim*”:

ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש אלה הדברים אשר תדבר אל בני ישראל.

This *pasuk* draws a parallel between the role of *kohanim* among the rest of *Bnei Yisrael* to the role of Jews among non-Jews. As Rav Hirsch comments in Devarim (28:10), “This effect which the whole nature and appearance of your nation is to have in

influencing the rest of mankind to spirituality and morality is the purpose of your mission in the history of the world.”

Just like the *kohanim* in the *Beit Hamikdash* were tasked as educators, so too the Jewish people were tasked as educators to the world. While always being watched in this way can easily be a burden, it is, in reality, a gift and a tremendous privilege. We can easily achieve the status of being a walking, living *kiddush Hashem* by simply learning to be morally upright people, adhering to our beliefs. This is an awesome opportunity that we are given each day.

But how can this unique role be accomplished? Using simple rules of pedagogy, we know that a teacher who uplifts and encourages her students is far superior to a teacher who belittles and denigrates them. As Jews, our role is to educate. But if this is the case, why is our teaching method a recipe for failure? If we want to be the real definition of *or lagoyim*, why is a derogatory attitude towards non-Jews productive for that agenda? Why would anyone believe Jews are good people if we just shun others, and mock them and call them demeaning names behind their backs like children on a playground?

In sum, it is quite clear according to Jewish philosophy that non-Jews should be treated with respect regardless of their faith. This has been the main ideology since the birth of our nation. The Netziv expounds upon this idea in his introduction to Bereishit when he discusses the special characteristics of the *Avot*. He specifically praises Avraham for being morally upright in the way he pleaded for Sodom, even though he despised their evil ways. Avraham went above the “letter of the law” because it was the right thing to do. As the descendants of Avraham Avinu, this should already be ingrained within us. Let’s continue in the footsteps of our forefathers and live up to the true meaning of *or lagoyim*, to be role models to the world.





## Purim – An Eternal Holiday

The Rambam in Hilchot Megillah (2:18) states that in the times of *Mashiach*, all of *Nevi'im* and *Ketuvim* will be nullified, except for Megillat Esther, which will remain together with the *Chamisha-Chumshei Torah*, and we will continue to celebrate the holiday of Purim.

Why will the other holidays (with the exclusion of Yom Kippur, which will also be kept) be nullified, and what is unique about the Megillah and the holiday of Purim itself that it will not be nullified with all the other holidays and books? The Siftei Chaim, (Moadim II, in the chapter, “*Purim Lo Yitbatel – Gilui HaYichud*”) answers that we will experience such great miracles in the times of *Mashiach*, that the miracles we commemorate on our other holidays will be insignificant. Even the great miracles we saw in *Mitzrayim* and at *kriyat Yam Suf* will become insignificant compared to the miracles we will experience during the *geulah* in the times of *Mashiach*.

This further begs the question – the miracle we are celebrating on Purim is a *neis nistar*, a hidden miracle, so why will it still be remembered so far in the future? Every event that happened, Achashverosh making his original party, calling for his wife and later having her killed, choosing Esther, Mordechai’s eavesdropping on the conversation between Bigtan and Teresh, and Esther throwing a party and making her request to Achashverosh that turned everything around, can be explained *bederech hateva*, in the natural order. It is only when we stream this line of events together in hindsight that we begin to see *yad Hashem* in the background. Why then is this such a great miracle that in comparison to our other *yeshuot*, we will forever celebrate this holiday?

The Maharal (in his second introduction to *Gevurot HaShem*) explains that a *neis nistar* is actually a greater indication of

*gadlut Hashem* than a *neis galui*, an obvious miracle. The Ralbag, as quoted by the Maharal, even questions the purpose of *nisim geluyim*. Hashem set up natural laws during the six days of creation. When Hashem deviates from the natural laws that He set in place, this seemingly indicates that His laws could not contain the outcome that He wanted and He therefore needed to deviate from His original plan.

The Maharal continues that during the six days of creation, Hashem set out laws and plans even for the miracles that were to take place, so they were in fact part of His original plan and not a deviation at all. But in fact the Maharal does agree that through the natural order we can clearly see Hashem's *gadlut* even more so than through His miracles. When Hashem works through *hester*, we see how He is able to create natural laws that will accommodate His every will. Therefore, Purim, which is the holiday of *hester panim*, is so great that it will not be canceled in the times of *Mashiach*.

The Siftei Chaim continues to explain how Purim shows *gadlut Hashem*. In the times of *Mashiach*, *yichud Hashem* will be revealed to us. Now we see Hashem as having a *midat harachamim* and *midat hadin*, but in the future we will see that even the punishments of the wicked were not in order to punish, but rather to bring the creation to its ultimate purpose – to reveal *yichud Hashem*. All the bad that we see in this world is really for the good. Hashem does not actually operate on two different realms. Rather, His *midat hadin* and *midat harachamim* are one and the same. In reality, they are both His *midat harachamim*.

On Purim, we already get a slight glimpse of this. We celebrate the *ve'nahafoch hu* sequence of events: a nice Jewish girl is brought into the palace of a wicked king. A decree is made to kill out all of *Bnei Yisrael*. Gallows are made for Mordechai to be hanged. Yet, as the story unfolds, we realize that Esther is brought into the palace to save her people from the evil decree, the evil decree is what allows for another decree to be made – that the Jews can now fight back and kill their enemies, the same gallows that are built for Mordechai are used to hang Haman, the instigator of all the

evil. Not only did Hashem send the Jews a salvation, but the salvation came through those events that had originally looked so terrible for the Jews. Even the name of the holiday itself reveals the switch from *hester panim* to recognizing *yichud Hashem*. Rav Soloveitchik, in *Reflections of the Rav*, writes that Purim, which comes from the word *pur* (lottery), represents the seemingly complete randomness of events that took place. He states:

The Megillah is a book of contradictions. It is filled with events that are unreasonable, even absurd, coincidental, pure chance. At one moment the Jews live in security in Persia; at the next, they face destruction. Mordechai is threatened with execution; then, suddenly, he is the Prime Minister. Irrational events and moods transform fear into festivity and entire situations are suddenly reversed. (p. 45)

There is an atmosphere in the Megillah of randomness, of fear, and of the evil that will transpire.

Rabbi David Fohrman, in a video lecture entitled, “Purim: Why Name a Holiday After Its Enemy?” has a completely opposite view of the name “Purim”. He asks, why would we name a holiday after the vehicle set to annihilate us? We call Pesach by its name because that represents Hashem passing over the Jewish houses and only killing the Egyptian first-borns, which led to our salvation. We would not think to call Pesach “*Avodat Parech*” after the backbreaking labor that Pharaoh made us do, but this is seemingly what we are doing on Purim! We are naming the holiday after the lot that Haman cast to determine the date on which he should destroy us. Rabbi Fohrman answers that perhaps the word “Purim” has an additional meaning. It comes from the same *shoresh* as *lehafer* – to annul. In essence, we are calling this holiday “the Annulment”. This is a much more fitting name – we are celebrating the annulment of the evil plans that Haman had set out for us.

Both the Rav’s and Rabbi Fohrman’s interpretation of the holiday’s name help us understand the full essence of the chag. We are celebrating the *ve’nahafoch hu* even within the name itself. We went from seemingly random events, from a state of *hester panim*, in which it appeared as though Hashem had allowed all evil to

ensue, to a state of annulment of that evil. There is a complete turnaround of events and through the events that looked so terrible in the beginning, our salvation emerged.

Purim reveals *yichud Hashem* because it teaches us how Hashem uses challenge or adversity to bring about salvation. This is why we will continue to celebrate Purim *le'atid lavo*. While all the other miracles will be insignificant compared to the miracles we will experience during *yemot haMashiach*, Purim will remain because it reveals *yichud Hashem*, which will also be revealed during the times of *Mashiach*. Similarly, Yom Kippur remains because of its revelation of this same quality (Siftei Chaim, page 204, quoting the Yalkut Mishlei). On Yom Kippur, we take the *se'ir la'azazel*, the literal scapegoat, and use it to atone for *Bnei Yisrael*. Here too we are using the bad for good. In addition, the bad deeds themselves are made good through the process of *teshuva mei'ahava*, about which Chazal say that our misdeeds that we did purposefully will be turned to merits. Because of the common denominator of Purim, Yom Kippur, and the miracles in the times of *Mashiach*, all of which reveal *yichud Hashem*, we will continue to commemorate these events *le'atid lavo*.

There is still one more question to be asked—we know that Purim is a holiday of *hester panim*, but when reflecting upon the Purim story, that case is not clear. Although the miracle was not as overt as the splitting of the sea, the complete *ve'nahafoch hu* sequence of events seems hard to categorize as a time of *hester panim*; it seems blatantly clear that Hashem was running the events. Why then, do we consider Purim the epitome of *hester panim*? In the last *perek* of the Megillah, the *pasuk* says:

וְכָל מַעֲשֵׂה תִקְפוֹ וּגְבוּרָתוֹ וּפְרָשֶׁת גְּדוּלַּת מֶרְדֵּכַי אֲשֶׁר גָּדְלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ הָלֵא הֵם  
כְּתוּבִים עַל סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי מֹדִי וּפְרָס.

all his mighty and powerful acts, and the account of the greatness of Mordechai, whom the king had promoted, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia” (Esther 10:2).

This *pasuk* seems troubling, because we have just read an entire book about Achashverosh and Mordechai. Why are we now told that if we want to learn about them we should look in the Book of Chronicles?

The purpose of the Megillah was not to recount the history of what took place, but rather to recount the miracle that Hashem performed for *Bnei Yisrael*. Therefore, when we read the Megillah it does seem hard to imagine that this was a time of *hester panim*. The Megillah even tells us that if we want to find out more details about Achashverosh and Mordechai, if we want to know about the details of everyday life and a recounting of the history, then we should look in the Book of Chronicles. Living everyday life during the time of the Purim story, it was simply normal life, the events seemed as though they were running their natural course. Only when the Jews took a step back and looked at the story as a whole were they able to understand that the course of events was in fact a miracle from Hashem. The purpose of the Megillah is to share that miracle, and is therefore written in a way where the hand of Hashem can be clearly seen. Therefore, the Purim story really was a time of *hester panim*, although this was not discernable to the Jews at the time.

The holiday of Purim brings great comfort to us in our current times of *hester panim*. On Purim we got a glimpse of how the seemingly terrible events were ultimately for our good. We saw that what we consider Hashem's *midat hadin* really becomes His *midat harachamim*. And we understand that in the course of everyday life, it might be impossible to see this big picture, but by taking a step back, and often looking in hindsight, it all becomes clear. There is hope that one day soon, *be'ezrat Hashem* we will be *zocheh* to *yemot haMashiach* when *yichud Hashem* will be clear to all, and we will be able to see the entire picture, understanding that everything that happened was ultimately for the best.



## **To Cure or Not to Cure: Is it Even a Question?**

Just about every member of the Jewish community has a parent, sibling, aunt or uncle who is a doctor, so typically (or stereotypically) careers in medicine seems to be profoundly Jewish. Dating back from the time of the Rambam, throughout the Middle Ages, Enlightenment and Modern Era, we have a history of thousands of Jews who practiced as physicians. There are also many Jews who made medical history by inventing life-saving cures, such as Jonas Salk's famous polio vaccine, or Robert Baram's ear and brain damage treatments, which earned him a Nobel prize.

Yet, as common as the reality is, is it justified? By practicing medicine, do we deny G-d as the Ultimate Healer? After the splitting of sea, as the Jewish people escape their Egyptian slavery, Hashem says: **כל המחלה אשר שמתי במצרים לא אשים עליך כי** (Shemot 15:26), promising that He will not place any maladies that he placed in Egypt on the Jewish people because He is our healer.

Furthermore, later in Shemot (23:25), this power is expressed, **ועבדתם את ה' אלוהיכם ... והסירותי מחלה מקרבך**. Physical maladies are clearly recognized as messages from Hashem, as Moshe pleads on behalf of his sister Miriam's *tzaraat*, **קל נא רפא נא לה** (Bamidbar 12:13). Later on in Tanach (Melachim II chapter 5), Naaman, general of Aram, was also afflicted with *tzaraat*, and is told to turn to the Jewish prophet Elisha to cure him. When Elisha recommends a bathing process to cure him, Naaman is frustrated that Elisha did not just invoke G-d's name to heal!

Moreover, many years later, the *Tanaim* (Kiddushin 82a) saw human doctors in a bad light: טוב שברופאים לגיהנם. Even the best of the doctors are headed for *gehinom*! Clearly, the issue is not as simple as it seems to be from a look at society.

The first step to answering the question is by looking at the comprehensive use of רפואה in the Torah. In many instances, מחלה and רפואה might refer to spiritual ailments, such as the expressions of Hashem's ability to heal broken hearts, as we find in Tehillim (147:3) הרופא לשבורי לב ומחבש לעצבותם, or in any of Yirmiyahu's many laments, such as (16:14) רפאני ה' ורפא, begging for emotional and circumstantial healing.

The key turning point, however, is a *pasuk* regarding capital crime, found in Parshat Mishpatim (Shemot 21:19): אם יקום והתהלך בחוץ על משענתו ונקה המכה רק שבתו יתן ורפא ירפא. If he then gets up and walks outdoors upon his staff, the assailant shall go unpunished, except that he must pay for his idleness and his cure. The *gemara* (Bava Kama 85a) uses this *pasuk* as proof for needing to pay medical costs in a case of physical damage one causes to another.

The *gemara* explains, מכאן שניתן רשות לרפוא לרפאות, meaning, those two words for the *pasuk* give permission for a doctor to cure. The *gemara* (Berachot 60a) quotes the same line in context of the discussion regarding which prayer one should say when undergoing medical treatment. When Rav Acha suggests a prayer expressing the total control G-d has over medical state, Abaye objects on the grounds of this statement: man has involvement in curing illness.

However, the *Rishonim* are still puzzled by the need for the *gemara* to ever release this statement. Why is it necessary for the Torah to give permission in this explicit manner?

The Tosafot (Bava Kama 85a) suggests that without this permission, one might have come to the conclusion that treat-



ing illness that comes suddenly “in the hands of heaven” might seem like rebellion against G-d’s decree, and so the statement must prove otherwise.

The Ramban (Torat Ha’adam, Mossad Harav Kook ed. p. 41), on the other hand, believes that the concern rests in the doctor himself, who might hesitate to treat a patient in fear of making a mistake or killing the patient in the process. Therefore, the *pasuk* is understood to bestow the faith of the doctor.

A different perspective comes from the Tosafot R’ Yehuda HaChasid (Berachot 60a), who interprets this as granting permission to a physician to charge a fee for his services. According to any of these approaches, it seems clear that there is something unique about the medical profession that either “steps into” G-d’s territory or involves great risk, yet the Torah explicitly permits it.

Let us now revisit our earlier question on the statement of the *gemara*: טוב שברופאים לגיהנם. At first glance, the *gemara* seems to be harshly criticizing the medical profession. Yet, some Rishonim can help us better understand this statement, and decipher what is meant, and how that may impact our career choice. Rashi comments that these doctors are the ones who do not treat the illness seriously and often end up killing patients or pass up the opportunity to treat a poor person. Hopefully, this is not the typical doctor.

Another perspective suggested by the Meiri puts the doctors at fault for their malpractice. They often will kill the patients out of despair and lack of hope or will treat the patient even in situations where they are ignorant but pretend to be knowledgeable. nevertheless.

Once we’ve limited the *gemara*’s seemingly derogatory statement about doctors, we must now examine the positive statements in the *halachic* sources that greatly support and require doctors to cure. The Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 336:1) writes

explicitly that it is a *mitzvah* for a doctor to treat patients. It is in the category of *pikuach nefesh* and refusing to treat him is equivalent to murder.

This concept stems from two crucial *sugyot* in the *gemara*. The first in Bava Kama (81b) quotes a *beraita* which requires a person to “return a person’s body”, or save a person from a situation of being lost in desolate areas. It is a fulfillment of a Torah based *mitzvah* (Devarim 22:2): והשביתו לו. The other *gemara* (Sanhedrin 73a) requires a person to save lives in potentially life threatening cases such as drowning or being attacked by animals or bandits. This too is a Torah-based *mitzvah* (Vayikra 19:16): לא תעמד על דם רעך.

The Rambam and Ramban, not only esteemed *talmidei chachamim* but also practicing physicians, present opposing views on the topic. The Rambam comments in his Peirush HaMishnayot on the Mishna in *Pesachim* (4:10). The Mishna discusses the accomplishments of Chizkiyahu Hamelech including his banning the “Sefer Refuot”, Book of Remedies, which was popular during his days. The Rambam explains that this medical book was similar to what in the Rambam’s day was the popularity of the “talisman”, a pendant that was believed to have magical curing powers – it could inflict a person or cure him from illness. The Rambam explains that learning and knowing about this kind of medicine is permissible but using it in practice is forbidden, and therefore, Chizkiyahu removed the book.

He wrote this explanation in great contrast to others who read the line in the Mishna as a warning to not involve oneself in physical remedies, in order to solely rely on Hashem’s cure. The Rambam strongly disagrees with this approach, which he compares to a hungry man satiating himself: Does this person lack faith in Hashem, he asks rhetorically. How could that scenario or any scenario of a doctor treating a patient come from a lack of trust in G-d?

The Ramban (Vayikra 26:11) argues with the Rambam's definition. While he concedes that today we are on a level that doctors treat patients, Ramban in fact interprets the line the *gemara* strictly, specifying *מכאן שניתן רשות לרופא לרפאות*, meaning that the doctor has permission to treat only a patient that comes before him, but generally a person should be more careful to not approach the doctor himself. In an ideal world, when the Torah is being fully kept, there should be no need for physical *refuah*! Everyone should be able to fully rely on Hashem, like in the time of the *neviim* where all people, Jews and non-Jews, sought out healing from the prophets, who were in contact with Hashem.

Ramban ends his commentary by acknowledging the importance in *halacha* to pay for medical costs in court cases because the Torah does not rely on miracles, yet at the same time it is simply not ideal to visit a doctor.

Rav Eliezer Waldenberg (Tzitz Eliezer 11:41), former *posek* for Shaarei Tzedek Hospital, writes fervently about the necessity of medical treatment. Seeking medical treatment, according to the Tzitz Eliezer, is absolutely necessary and fundamental in the Torah, and anyone who denies medical help to rely solely on divine help is simply foolish. Rav Waldenberg goes as far as to compare one who allows himself to suffer from illness without seeking aid to a person entering a fire, expecting to get burned.

These opinions represent opposing ideologies that one can employ when addressing an illness and how to approach it. However, aside from the *hashkafic* lens, we must examine whether the attitudes posed by *Chazal* and the *Rishonim* a practical effect. What is the *halacha* regarding cases of employing voluntary medical treatment, such as cosmetic surgery and vaccinations?

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe O.C. 3:90) introduces a particularly interesting case of voluntary treatment, where he

addresses a question regarding a sick patient who is forbidden to fast on Yom Kippur. Should he use an intravenous tube for hydration and nourishment, in order to technically fast. R' Moshe's approach on the issue is that it is not a successful way to achieve fasting on Yom Kippur. If the patient is unable to fast, he simply should eat, and not try to find a way around it. He does not see fit to employ the *heter* to treat illness in a case where not necessary.

However, in the case of cosmetic surgery, Rav Moshe was particularly lenient to allow it, yet many of the reasons were for the protection of mental health and happiness. Therefore, it is unclear what Rav Moshe's broader approach to these issues would be (Rabbi Chaim Jachter, *Kol Torah*, "Cosmetic Surgery – A Review of Four Classic Teshuvot – Part One"). When it comes to preventative medicine, such as vaccinations, it would seem that although not immediately necessary, most *poskim* would permit (& require) treatment for the purpose of avoiding future malady.

This topic is constantly referenced when discussing ramifications of *hishtadlut* and *bitachon* when it comes to relying on G-d or acting in any area of life. However, one more specific outgrowth of the topic is human beings "imitating G-d" by mimicking him as the *Rofei Cholim*, healer of the sick. By practicing medicine, man comes closer to his Creator, not only by his kind deeds, but also simply by copying Him. Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveichik intricately describes this idea in *The Lonely Man of Faith*. He writes:

This world, woven out of human thought processes, functions with amazing precision and runs parallel to the workings of the real multifarious world of our senses. The modern scientist does not try to explain nature. He only duplicates it. In his full resplendent glory as a creative agent of God, he constructs his own world and in mysterious fashion succeeds in controlling his

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environment through manipulating his own mathematical constructs and creations.

[I express my appreciation to R' Yonatan Emmet for advising me and providing me with many of the sources for this article.]



## ***Hishtadlus vs. Emunah***

How much *emunah* is a Jew required to maintain? Does one need to trust that Hashem will always take care of him? Can a person sit around and assume Hashem will fix all of his problems, or does he need to do his part, actively seeking a solution? Both Rashi and Ramban discuss this matter regarding Avraham.

Hashem makes a famine in *Eretz Yisrael* and Avraham goes down to Egypt to find food. Rashi and Ramban (Bereishit 12:10) disagree as to whether or not Avraham is correct in leaving *Eretz Yisrael*. Rashi explains that Hashem is testing Avraham to see how he will respond. Will he continue to believe in Hashem, even though Hashem made him leave the Land he was promised, or will he reject Hashem? One can understand from Rashi, that Avraham does the right thing by going down to Egypt. This is his *hishtadlus*. He searches for food in a foreign land and is able to maintain and attain a higher spiritual connection to Hashem.

Ramban, however, criticizes Avraham for journeying down to Egypt. He claims that Hashem is testing Avraham to quantify his level of *emunah*. Will Avraham have faith that Hashem will provide for him, or will he doubt Hashem's abilities and thus, attempt on his own to find nourishment? Ramban writes that Avraham fails this test. He was supposed to remain in *Eretz Yisrael*, trusting that Hashem will provide for him.

This question is raised again with the story of Yosef. Is Yosef correct in asking the *sar hamashkim* to mention his name to Pharaoh, or is he supposed to only daven and ask Hashem to release him from jail? Based on Rashi's previous assessment, one might assume that Rashi would praise Yosef for doing *hishtadlus*-like Avraham. Rashi (Bereishit 40:23), however, criticizes Yosef for attempting to rely on someone other than Hashem. He is sentenced to an additional two years in prison since he is lacking in his *emunah* in Hashem to take him out of jail. How could this be? Rashi

praises Avraham for doing his part while believing that Hashem will help him succeed. How does one reconcile Rashi's contradictory opinions?

The Gur Aryeh (Bereishit 40:23), offers the following solution. There is a certain degree of *hishtadlus* that is perfectly acceptable. But Yosef placed too much trust in the *sar hamashkim*. Twice, Yosef asks the *sar hamashkim* to mention him to Pharaoh. It is interesting to note that even in Yosef's case there is a positive outcome to his *hishtadlus*. Ultimately, it is through the confession of the *sar hamashkim* who finally tells Pharaoh about Yosef, that Yosef is released from prison.

The concept that Hashem encourages *hishtadlus* can also be seen in the story of *kriyat yam suf*. *Bnei Yisrael* see the Egyptians chasing after them and a big sea in front of them and they cry out to Moshe. Moshe then proceeds to *daven*, and Hashem answers, *מָה תִצַּעַק אֵלַי דָּבַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָסֵעוּ* – “why are you still crying out to me? Go speak to the nation and tell them to continue traveling” (Shemot 14:15). Hashem is pleased by *Bnei Yisrael* (and Moshe's) *emunah* but wants them to take action, to physically do something at that very moment, to continue on their journey to Eretz Yisrael. While Hashem has the ability to make them float above the sea and get them to the other side, He specifically tells them to keep walking through the sea, to help them understand the idea behind *hishtadlus*. They *daven* their *tefillah*, but they must also put in an active attempt at crossing the sea. Only once they do this, does Hashem split the sea.

In Megillat Esther, the concept of *hishtadlus* is also prevalent. The Jews are sentenced to death by Haman, and Esther takes action. She orders the Jews to fast for three days and only then does she do her *hishtadlus* and go to Achashverosh, declaring (Esther 4:16): “וּכְאֲשֶׁר אֲבָדְתִּי אֲבָדְתִּי” - it is ultimately up to Hashem to decide both my fate and that of the Jewish people. Esther is a prime example of someone who understands the idea of *hishtadlus*. She does her part and knows that her efforts are necessary for the redemption, but she also understands that Hashem is enabling her to do these actions and will ultimately determine the future.



If everything is ultimately up to Hashem, why is anyone required to do anything? Hashem does not need anyone's help.

Rabbi Ben Tzion Shafier shares a beautiful idea in an article on Parshas Terumah entitled "*Hishtadlus* for a *Dvar Mitzvah*". He points out that in Chovos Halevavos, Rabbeinu Bachya says that every person is obligated to act *bederech hateva*, in accordance with the natural way of the world. What does this mean? A person must act in life as though the outcome of their actions are contingent on their efforts, while comprehending that the results are out of their control and will only occur if Hashem wills it to be so.

Rabbi Shafier gives a great example:

We work for a living, knowing the amount of money we are to make has been set on Rosh Hashanah. We go to doctors when we are sick, even though we know our health is determined solely by Hashem. We put in our effort, knowing all the while it is Hashem's world and He alone determines the outcome.

Essentially, Rav Shafier explains that it is neither one nor the other; rather, one must have a combined perspective. People must do their part and *hishtadlus*, while simultaneously maintaining the belief that everything comes from Hashem. Going to another source for help is encouraged, so long as a person recognizes that this indirect source is fulfilling the will of Hashem.

The Tzitz Eliezer expands this idea and says that it can be derived from the Rambam that one is not allowed to rely on miracles and is therefore obligated in *hishtadlus*. The Tzitz Eliezer continues, explaining that one not only has an obligation in *tefillah* but also in *hishtadlus*.

The Ba'alei Mussar point out that Hashem does the Jewish people a *chesed* through the obligation of *hishtadlus*. How? It is human nature to want to be proactive in a difficult situation. If a person was told they could not do anything because it is Hashem's job, one would feel helpless. Therefore, Hashem does the Jewish people a kindness and obligates us to partake in the solutions to the problems that arise.



## ***Shem Hashem in Tefillah***

Our ability to communicate with Hashem is complicated. Although G-d is almighty and infinite, finite human beings have a responsibility to create a relationship with Him. How do we accomplish this seemingly impossible feat? Rav Yitzchak Kirzner writes (*The Art of Jewish Prayer*, p. 17) that we should be praying to G-d directly through dialogue, even though we are unable to define G-d and His essence. This creates a difficult paradox for the human race, where we must create a relationship with a concept that we cannot even define.

Building on this idea, Rav Pincus comments (*The Gates of Prayer*, p.39), about the words we use to refer to Hashem in *tefillah*. Although we say “You”, we should not delude ourselves and think that we know even a little bit about Hashem and His almighty power. Rambam writes in *Hilchos Tefillah* (9:7) that it is forbidden to describe G-d in any unauthorized way, and we should refrain from suggesting character descriptions of Him. On Yom Kippur, Sephardim say the prayer *Keter Malchut*, written by Ibn Gabirol. It describes Hashem’s holiness, with each sentence starting with different pronouns referring to Hashem, as if He is a relatable concept.

Additionally, when *Derech Hashem* (4:5) comments on the names of Hashem, he writes about the relationship between the finite and infinite. Everything is constantly being willed into existence by G-d, so it would be strange if the finite could not thank the Creator for this privilege. Hence, Hashem developed names for Himself, each one unique to different blessings and requests, so that His creatures could be inspired by His kindness and call out to Him in thanks. This concept is reinforced by Shemot (20:21):

“Wherever I permit My name to be mentioned I shall come to you and bless you”.

Rav Pincus (p.136) draws another solution to this challenge saying we technically should not be able to reference G-d like this, but one solution for why we can is because G-d is *Kol Yachol*, and He gives us the ability to have a dialogue where we can reference His name, but still acknowledge that He is *Ein Sof*, without any end.

Furthermore, *tefillah*'s great strength is due to the authors of the nusach. The words of *tefillah* were written by the *Anshei Knesset HaGedolah*, some of whom had *nevuah* and *ruach hako-desh*. There was a great presence of G-d when the words were being written, and it was in the merit of our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. These authors destroyed tremendous barriers that were placed between the Jewish people and G-d, to the point where the correct intentions during *tefillah* can lift a person to the status of *Adam HaRishon* before he sinned.

There is a *midrash* (Chagigah 12a) that after *Adam HaRishon* sinned, G-d diminished his knowledge of the world. G-d did not take away the knowledge, but diminished it to within Adam's body. Therefore, it is possible to bring out that inner essence, but it takes a great amount of purity and strength. The words of *tefillah*, created by and in the merit of holy people, give us the opportunity to stand before Hashem as if we were *Adam HaRishon* before the sin. If we achieve this great spiritual level, referring to Hashem in prayer is more understandable. A person praying is in a different, holier state where they can relate to G-d through the merits they are using.

In conclusion, *tefillah* is a means of connecting to Hashem, and with all of the different approaches on uttering *Shem Hashem*, we need to have a constant focus on the magnitude of our words and to Whom we are speaking. The Chayei Adam (5:1) writes that when a person recites the name of Hashem, his limbs should be quivering with fear because he should be so concentrated and focused on who he is speaking to. Even if we have not yet reached

that level, we still need to recite *Shem Hashem* with the proper respect.

In a time where we do not have the *Beit Hamikdash*, the *shul* acts as a makeshift *mikdash* and our *tefillot* are symbolizing the *korbanot* (Seder Hayom, Seder Tefillat Minchah). *Korbanot* gave off a scent of incense that spread all over the cities and up to Hashem, and our *tefillot* do the same. According to the *midrash* (Shemot Rabbah 21:4) our prayers are collected by the angel of *tefillot* and made into a crown for Hashem. In essence, every time we pray, we are re-inaugurating Hashem as King. The *Yefeh To'ar* beautifully adds that when we recite *Shem Hashem* and glorify His name in prayer, we are essentially crowning Hashem in *Olam HaZeh* as well. By reciting His name, we are spreading His name to all of the surrounding cities and re-crowning Him. To be able to uplift ourselves and crown G-d through saying His name is the overall goal in saying *Shem Hashem* and will hopefully be able to bring us closer to Hashem to have a deeper, more meaningful connection.



## A Torah Perspective on Mental Illness

450 million people worldwide suffer from some sort of mental illness. Jews included. Many people, especially within the Jewish community hide it in a “dark closet of fear and shame” (*The Torah View of Mental Illness: Sin or Sickness?*, Marvin Wikler). A prevalent attitude in the Jewish community is that mental illness is a sin rather than sickness. But what does Torah say about those who suffer from these mental illnesses? Is there a Torah precedent for mental illness?

The Torah states (Devarim 4:9): רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך מאד, you must guard yourself and watch yourself scrupulously. Taking care of your body and your “*nefesh*”, soul, are Torah imperatives. The Kli Yakar asks, what is the word “*meod*” doing by the soul part of the *pasuk*? He explains that it means one needs to be more careful with taking care of your soul more than your body. It is important for people to take care of their bodies but even more so when it comes to one’s soul.

The Rambam (De’ot 4:1) writes that one must take care of his health and stay away from harmful things. This is talking about physical health; one cannot serve Hashem when they are not healthy. How can one perform *mitzvot* if they do not have a functioning body to perform them with? So, how does the Torah view mental health? The Tzitz Eliezer (4:13), when discussing the permissibility of surgery on a mentally ill person to ease his life, writes:

יש להקל בעשיית ניתוח זה אפילו לסתם חולה רוח מסוכן ולא רק למסוכן מאד, כמו שמקילים בעשיית ניתוח לסתם חולי מסוכן ואפילו במקום שעצם הניתוח מסוכן.

The *psak* is clear; even if the surgery itself is dangerous, it should be performed to help the mentally ill person. We see from here that to ease the mental pain of the patient and the danger it causes to themselves and others, even potentially life-threatening surgeries should be performed.

According to Tosafot in Masechet Shabbat (50b **צערו** **בשביל** **צער**),  
**ואם אין לו צער אחר אלא שמתבייש לילך בין בני אדם שרי, דאין לך צער גדול מזה**  
 – Psychological pain is the worst type of pain and there is no other pain like it. For this reason the *gemara* permits a man with a blemish on his face that causes him not to leave his house from psychological pain to go under the knife and remove it to relieve his pain. This is one of the sources allowing cosmetic surgery.

Shaul is the only person in Tanach (Shmuel I 16:14) where it explicitly says that he suffered from *ruach ra'ah* when the *ruach Hashem* was taken away from him. The Malbim comments that when the intense spirituality and clarity was with him, he was physically fit and uplifted. When this was taken away from him, he was anxious, sad, and didn't know what to do with himself. He wasn't crazy. He was feeling this complete lack of G-d and worried all the time about his kingdom and his sin.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe E.H. 1:65) also talks about mental health. A woman is allowed to go on birth control for psychological reasons so that she does not cause harm to herself or others. Rav Moshe Feinstein also publishes a letter (O.C. 4:47) responding to a woman asking about her depressed daughter and how to handle the difficulty. He gives beautiful advice to help her daughter restore her psychological health. This is a non-halachic *teshuva*, which he rarely publishes, but he thought this advice to be so important that he published his response. He also doesn't usually publically offer to daven for people but at the end of the *teshuva*, he gave her a bracha and davened for her.

The Aruch HaShulchan (Y.D. 345:4) discusses how to deal with someone who committed suicide. It is imperative to avoid



entirely blaming the person for their actions. It is important to say that they weren't in their right mind at the time; they were overcome with so much pain; it was done by force; he wasn't in control. This message is powerful. The Torah takes mental illness into account, especially when it comes to something as serious as death.

Sefer Melachim II (chapter 18) records a story about the king of *Aram*, who is very ill, and asks Elisha HaNavi to ask Hashem if he is going to die. Elisha tells the king's servant to tell him he will live but Hashem has revealed to me that he will really die. How can Elisha lie like that? How can Hashem tell him to tell the king of *Aram* he is going to live when he will really die? Rabbi Dr. Bleich says that Hashem cared about the king's psychological health. If Elisha told the king he would die then he would lose hope and die quicker (*The Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society*, No. 15, "Truth Telling to Patients," p. 104). By giving him hope, the king died at his right time. From here we also see the strong correlation between mental health and physical health.

The Rambam, in his Regimen of Health, talks about the core connection between mental and physical health. This connection, mentioned by the Rambam in the 1100s was only acknowledged by the medical world in the past 100 years. He talks in depth about depression and anxiety and how they affect a person's well being. He also prescribed herbal supplements for treatment. Today, these same herbs are considered some of the most effective herbal treatments for alleviating stress.

Now that we see that the Torah clearly acknowledges the seriousness of mental health issues, does it support seeking help and taking care of it? The *gemara* (Sanhedrin 100b) says that a man with worry in his heart should find a distraction and talk to someone.

These are two great methods that people use nowadays as therapy. Again, we see the Rambam (De'ot 2:1): "What is the

treatment for illness of the spirit? One should go to experts who are physicians of the soul and they will treat the illness.” He discusses the ideas of what is presently known as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, doing the opposite of what your brain is telling you and being aware of it, something that has only been used formally since the 1960s.

In his introduction to Pirkei Avot, the Rambam lists things that will help a person’s “melancholy”, like listening to music, taking walks, and surrounding oneself with beautiful things. Melancholy is an ancient term used for depression. It comes from the Greek word for black bile. In rabbinic literature, depression is called “*mara shechora*” which also means black bile.

Finally, the Torah advocates for the idea of support. Yitro, when giving Moshe advice, tells him he needs to create a judicial system because: “you will surely wear yourself out, and these people as well. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone” (Shemot 18:18).

Rashi explains that Yitro was telling Moshe that judging all of those cases alone was too much for a person, even for the leader of all leaders! If Moshe did not listen to Yitro he wouldn’t have been able to stand as a leader. How much more so do we, Bnei Yisrael, the average people, need to create our own support systems to help us when things are overwhelming.

Additionally, the *gemara* (Berachot 5b) relates that R’ Yochanan was sick and R’ Chanina helped him stand up and cured him. The *gemara* asks why R’ Yochanan didn’t cure himself? The *gemara* then answers, אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים, a prisoner cannot free himself from jail (and a sick person cannot cure himself).

No one can live life on his own. Everyone needs a support system to go through the ups and downs that inevitably life throws at them. In fact, the Torah sources outlined above strongly encourage everyone to find that support system for himself and

break the stigma against mental health. Reach out to those who need you. And don't forget to help yourself by seeking aid, reaching out to friends and professionals. May we all be *zocheh* in finding peace within ourselves and reaching levels of *emunah* to get through the hardest of times.



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# הלכות שבת

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## ***Korei'a* – Can We Fix It?**

One of the thirty nine prohibited *melachot* mentioned in the *mishna* is *korei'a*; tearing in order to sew two stitches. The *gemara* (Shabbat 74a-75a) asks where was *korei'a* used in the building of the *Mishkan*. Rava and R' Zeira explain: When a curtain in the *Mishkan* had a worm that made a tear, the craftsmen would tear the curtain to lengthen the tear, enabling them to sew it back up properly. The *mishna* is teaching us that the only time something is *melechet korei'a* is when the tear is in order to sew. Seemingly tearing for any other constructive purpose other than fixing the actual tear itself is not prohibited by the Torah.

Earlier (48a), however, the *gemara* says that a person who opens the neck hole of a shirt on Shabbat violates a Torah prohibition. The Rishonim discuss what *melacha* this person has violated, and attempt to define the parameters of *korei'a*.

According to the Rambam (Shabbat 10:10-11), a person violates *korei'a* when he tears in order to sew or tears out of anger or grief, or tears open the neck hole of a shirt. Only if the tearing is a purely destructive act is one exempt from punishment. Tearing for any constructive purpose is *korei'a*.

Rashi, on the other hand, understands that when a person tears open the neck hole on a shirt, he violates *makeh be'patish*. He explains that the case is referring to one taking a piece of fabric and tearing a hole in it, allowing him to put his head through the opening and wear it as a shirt. This is *makeh be'patish* because it completes making a shirt out of a piece of fabric. It does not violate *korei'a* because it is not tearing in order to sew. The Ritva agrees with Rashi's overall assessment, but understands that the garment already had a hole for the head, but was sewn up.

The Bei'ur Halacha (340:14) explains that Rashi agrees with the Rambam that an act is *korei'a* as long as it is done for some

constructive purpose. However he argues with the Rambam as to how to define the parameters of what is called a “constructive purpose”. The Rambam defines a constructive purpose as one that comes as a result of the tearing, whether in a direct or indirect fashion. According to Rashi, any time the constructive purpose is a direct function of the tearing, it is *makeh be’patish*. Only when the constructive purpose is achieved as an indirect result of the “destructive act” of tearing can we qualify the act as *korei’a*.

The Bei’ur Halacha also explains the opinion of the Ritva. One violates *korei’a* only if he is tearing with the intent to sew the tear up again. Why did he explain that the hole had already existed but had been sewn up? The Ritva wished to emphasize that this is a case where you are tearing stitches and one might think that you plan on sewing it up again (classifying it as *korei’a*). Nevertheless since you don’t have any intent to sew it back up, it is not *korei’a*.

Rashi explains the case as one of tearing a brand new hole in the fabric. Even in a case where you are tearing a brand new hole in the garment and it is clear that you have no intent to sew it back up again, nevertheless it would have been classified as *korei’a* if not for the fact that the tearing itself is a directly constructive act.

In summary: According to the Rambam any constructive purpose violates *korei’a* whether it is a direct or indirect function of the tearing. According to Rashi if the constructive purpose is a direct function of the tearing, it is *makeh be’patish*. If it is an indirect function of the tearing, it is *korei’a*. According to the Ritva, any time the constructive purpose is not to sew up the tear it is not considered *korei’a*. The Shulchan Aruch rules like the Rambam.

The *mishna* (105b) states that one who tears out of anger or mourning a death, is exempt from punishment. The *mishna* adds: *וכל המקללין פטורין* – all destructive acts are exempt. However, one who performs a destructive act in order to repair would be not be exempt.

The *gemara* questions the *mishna*’s ruling by referring to a *beraita* that tearing out of anger or mourning is punishable. In the first stage of the answer, the *gemara* distinguishes between two different situations of mourning. One where the tearing of clothing is



obligatory, the other where it is not required. Only if one is required to tear, is the act viewed as something constructive.

In the next stage the answer of the *gemara* deals with the contradiction regarding tearing out of anger. The *gemara* suggests that the *mishnah* represents the opinion of R' Shimon, who says מלאכה שאין צריכה לגופא is exempt, while the *beraita* quotes the opinion of R' Yehuda that מלאכה שאין צריכה לגופא is liable. (There ensues a discussion in the *gemara* trying to determine when tearing out of anger is considered a constructive act.)

According to Rashi, this approach can also resolve the difficulty regarding tearing for mourning. Both the *mishna* and *beraita* deal with the *mitzvah* of tearing for a close relative. This is a constructive act, but considered a מלאכה שאין צריכה לגופא. The *mishna*'s ruling is accordance with R' Shimon, while the *beraita* follows the opinion of R' Yehudah.

Tosafot disagrees. The *Gemara*'s first explanation regarding mourning still stands. If the tearing is not obligatory, it is a destructive act and is exempt according to all opinions. If it is a *mitzvah*, it is constructive and also classified as a מלאכה שצריכה לגופא. He is liable even according to R' Shimon.

The Rambam has a third approach. (See *Maggid Mishneh*, Shabbat 8:8) He agrees that tearing a garment out of anger is a מלאכה שאין צריכה לגופא, but he rules according to R' Yehudah that a מלאכה שאין צריכה לגופא is liable. Additionally, if tearing a garment helps an angry person calm down, it is considered a constructive act. The *Mishna* (re: tearing out of anger) follows the ruling of R' Shimon. The *beraita* is according to R' Yehudah. (The different rulings regarding tearing for mourning can be resolved by distinguishing between an obligatory and non-obligatory tearing).



## **“Chopping” the *Shulchan Aruch*: Analyzing the Parameters of *Melechet Tochein***

There are two key sections in *Masechet Shabbat* that deal with the *melacha* of *tochein* (grinding food).

*Amar Rav Papa, hai man d'parim silka, chayav mishum tochein* (44b)

*Rebi Chiya bar Abba, amar Rav Yochanan, Yom HaKippurim shechal lehiyot beshabbat mutar beknivat yerek* (114b)

Tosafot (114b) explains that the prohibition of *tochein* applies only if the food is cut into very small pieces. The second quote is referring to a situation where the cut pieces are large. This position is reinforced by the language employed by Rashi (*Shabbat* 74b), the *Shiltei Gibborim* (*Alfasi Shabbat* 32a) and the *Rambam* (*Hilchot Shabbat* 21:18). Rashi writes: “*mechatcho dak*”; the *Shiltei Gibborim* and the *Rambam* use the term: *dak dak*<sup>1</sup>

The *Terumat Hadeshen* (#56) defines a second parameter of *tochein* with food: “*Ein tochein ela begidulei karka*”. The *melacha* applies only to that which grows from the ground since those items are the ones most likely subjected to grinding.

The parameters of *tochein* with food are twofold: concerning the action (*ha'peulah*) and the object (*ha'nifal*). Only a case that fulfills both requirements would violate *tochein* with food.

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<sup>1</sup> There are three opinions among the *poskim* as to the definition of *dak dak*. According to Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Igrot Moshe* O.C. 4:74), the first *dak* refers to cutting one way and the second refers to cutting the perpendicular way through the first cut. The *Mishna Berurah* (321:41) writes that it is the normal way you would cut small pieces. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach suggests that *dak dak* means the pieces are small enough to swallow without the need to chew. (*Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata* chapter 6, note 6).

It is important to note that Rosh's opinion (*Shabbat* 7:5) is that the prohibition to cut items into tiny particles does not apply to food. The *Korban Netanel* explains that the Torah never limited us from eating small pieces of food. Nevertheless, the *Rishonim* cited above (and others) clearly disagree with the Rosh.

The Shulchan Aruch is consistent with these parameters. He permits chopping cooked meat into very small pieces (321:9), but prohibits doing so with vegetables (321:12).

The Rama (321:9), however, prohibits chopping raw meat into tiny pieces to feed the birds, despite the fact that meat does not grow from the ground, since this process makes the meat edible. The prohibition seems connected to *tochein*, since the Shulchan Aruch (324:7) allows cutting up raw meat (into larger pieces) to feed dogs, even though this makes the food edible for the canines.

Accordingly, we must revise the second of our parameters. *Tochein* applies either to food that grows from the ground or to a food that becomes edible through the chopping process.

The Terumat Hadeshen, however, adds in another qualification. He permits chopping cooked meat into very small pieces to feed someone who is incapable of chewing larger pieces. This *psak* seems to contradict the ruling about chopping meat for the birds! One must therefore distinguish between a case where the majority of those who eat the item are capable of eating even larger pieces (and therefore chopping is not *tochein*) and a situation where the majority of those eating are incapable of eating larger pieces (and therefore chopping is considered *tochein*).

We now need to examine a *psak* of the Rama (321:12). After the Mechaber writes that cutting a vegetable into tiny pieces is prohibited, the Rama writes that one is also prohibited to cut up figs and carobs in front of older people. What is the Rama adding?

The Beiur Halacha suggests that the Rama is just giving one example where people might desire to cut up produce into very small particles. One could still ask why the example is needed.

The Chazon Ish (O.C. 57), on the other hand, has a different understanding of the thrust of the Rama's comment. The Rashba (Teshuvot 4:75) writes that there is no prohibition of *tochein* when chopping vegetables into small pieces, if it is being done for immediate consumption. The *gemara* tells us that there are leniencies in the *melacha* of *borer* when done for immediate use. The Rashba compares *tochein* to *borer*. Although the Shiltei Gibborim strongly disagrees, the Rama codifies the ruling of the Rashba.

The Chazon Ish suggests that the ruling of the Rama prohibiting cutting up the figs and carobs for older people is referring even to a situation where it is being done for immediate use. (That is why the Rama writes that the chopping is done “in front of” older people.) Even though we normally allow *tochein* of vegetable cutting for immediate use, this leniency does not apply in a situation where the food could not be consumed by those eating had the chopping not taken place. The question is: Why?

What is the underlying reason of the Rashba’s ruling? When the selection of the food is performed just prior to eating, we do not classify the case as *borer*. Rather it is considered part of the eating process. Similarly, when the chopping of the food takes place just prior to eating, it is not *tochein*. It, too, is part of the eating process.

However, this understanding is correct if the food is already edible. Under these circumstances, the chopping is part of the eating process. If, however, the chopping makes the food edible, that action is not viewed as part of the eating process. Here, we need to examine each case separately. Is this chopping for immediate consumption being done for someone who could eat the food anyway, or is it for elderly people who could not eat the figs and carobs while they are whole? (This is in contrast to the *halacha* of chopping food that does not grow from the ground. As we mentioned earlier, if objectively the food is edible without chopping, it does not violate *tochein* to chop the food even for those who could not eat it otherwise.)

This might be the point of contention between the Beiur Halacha and the Chazon Ish. According to the Beiur Halacha, it is possible that the “immediate use” leniency of the Rashba might apply even in a case where the subjects who are eating, would not be able to do so without the chopping. That might be the reason that the Beiur Halacha explains that the Rama was only giving an example of the *halacha* in Shulchan Aruch and was not breaking any new ground in *psak halacha*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Mishnah Berurah (324:21) who suggests that it is permissible to chop the raw meat for the birds that would not be able to eat it otherwise, if it was done just prior to feeding them.



## Don't Throw Out the Baby with the Wipes

Can one use baby wipes on Shabbat? This seemingly simple contemporary halachic question in fact demands much analysis within the prohibition of *sechita*, squeezing, which could be problematic due to *melabain*, laundering, and *mefarek*, extracting liquids (from solid matter), a *toladah* of threshing.

The *gemara* (Ketubot 6a) forbids tightening a rag inside a barrel of wine on Yom Tov. Tosafot discusses what the prohibition actually is. According to the Ri (R' Yitzchak, *miba'alei haTosafot*) this case is forbidden because of squeezing, a form of *melabain*. Rabbeinu Tam disagrees. The *libun* prohibition applies only to squeezing water, and not other liquids, such as wine. Wine is not a laundering agent.

Accordingly, Rabbeinu Tam suggests that the prohibition is *mefareik*. Rabbeinu Tam was asked to explain a different section in the *gemara* (Shabbat 143a) that discusses squeezing oil out of hair on Shabbat, in order to provide a birthing mother with the oil. The *gemara* argues that this is permitted because there is no *sechita* prohibition with hair. If Rabbeinu Tam's statement is correct that there is only *sechita* in water, the *gemara* should permit this case based on the fact that the squeezed liquid is oil and therefore not eligible for *sechita*. Thus, we can infer that the *gemara* holds that there is in fact *sechita* with oil. Rabbeinu Tam answers that the squeezing is problematic due to *mefarek* which applies to other liquids (just not to squeezing hair).

In the case of baby wipes, the main contents of the liquid is water, and therefore, even according to Rabbeinu Tam, it may

be considered *melabein*. *Melabein*, however, does not apply to disposable items that cannot be laundered. (See Igrot Moshe O.C. 2:70; Orchot Shabbat I, Berurei Halacha #7). However, *mefarek* may present more of a problem.

With regard to *mefarek*, the *gemara* (Shabbat 143b) classifies three categories of fruits: olives & grapes, berries & pomegranates, and other fruit. Squeezing olives or grapes is forbidden on a *deoraita* level if one wants the juice. Squeezing berries or pomegranates for the liquid is forbidden *miderabbanan*. Squeezing anything from the third category of “other fruit” is permissible, provided that it is not a fruit that is commonly squeezed for the juice (Mishna Berurah 320:8).

There is yet another category of food: *kevashim* (fruit or vegetables that have been pickled and preserved) and *shelakot* (fruit or vegetables that have been cooked and still contain the liquid). Both items contain liquid that was not grown naturally within the food.

There is a three way disagreement between Rav, Shmuel and Rav Yochanan as to the permissibility of squeezing such foods for use of the liquid (Shabbat 145a). [There is a consensus among the three that if the squeezing is done for the food, and not for the juice, it is permissible.]

According to Rav, squeezing *shelakot* is permissible. Squeezing *kevashim* is rabbinically prohibited. According to Shmuel, however, both cases are rabbinically prohibited. Finally, Rav Yochanan claims that both instances are prohibited *mi-deoraita*.

Baby wipes are most similar to *kevashim* and *shelakot* as the liquid is not naturally grown within the wipe. Rabbeinu Chananel writes that the *halacha* is in accordance with Rav Yochanan. Others claim that the *halacha* is like Shmuel. (See Shulchan Aruch O.C. 320:7) We must therefore carefully consider whether or not we need the liquid of the wipes.



If one needs the liquid, squeezing liquid out of the wipe would be considered an intentional act and certainly prohibited. But, if a person does not necessarily want the liquid of the wipe and only desires that the dirt attach itself to the wipe, it would be considered a case of *pesik reisha* – the liquid squeezed out would be an inevitable outcome but with no added benefit – *delo nicha lei*.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe, *ibid.*) rules in the case of wiping a table with a wet napkin, that although the liquid may come out, it is going to waste, rendering it a *pesik reisha delo nicha lei*. He further adds that, perhaps if one were to be gentle and not put too much pressure on the wet napkin, it is not inevitable that liquid would be squeezed out, rendering the case a regular *davar she'eino mitkavein*, and therefore permitted.

The Orchot Shabbat challenges this and claims that one must be interested in the liquid that comes out, because without it one would not be able to effectively clean the table or the baby. In addition, even if it was possible to clean the table or the baby without the water, the liquid nevertheless does help in the process, therefore according to him it is a *pesik reisha delo nicha lei*. In addition, we see that, even when only light pressure is placed on the wipe, liquid does flow from it.

The Orchot Shabbat, however, initially challenges the argument that water is squeezed from the wipe. He quotes experts who investigated the material of the wipes. They reported that the wipes were made up of synthetic material and therefore less absorptive causing the liquid to predominantly be on the surface of the wipe, as opposed to absorbed within the material. The liquid that seems to flow from the wipe is actually from the surface and has not been extracted from the material and as a result not considered *mefareik*.

However, the Orchot Shabbat counters that even if some wipes are made of synthetic material, there is still water that can

be absorbed between the fibers and it would be forbidden to squeeze. In addition, there are many different types of wipes and thus one cannot make generalizations regarding their structure. Therefore, one should be stringent and refrain from using baby wipes because, even when applying minimal pressure, liquid is extracted. Moreover, the squeezed water is undoubtedly beneficial for the process of cleaning the baby.

Other *poskim* are more lenient. According to Rav Shmuel Wosner (quoted in Orchot Shabbat) if one does not press too hard on the wipe, because it is to help a baby, there is room to be lenient. [Although at a later stage, Rav Wosner ruled stringently.] Many also rely upon Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, as quoted by the Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (14:7), who states that one may use a wipe for a baby as long as one does not press too hard on the wipe, thereby causing the water to flow out.

The Peninei Halacha (Shabbat 14:6) also rules leniently, arguing that if one's goal were truly to wet the surface, one would merely use water. One's only intention with the wipe is that the dirt attach itself to the wipe, not that the water be squeezed onto the baby.

Another application of this discussion is the use of wipes to remove makeup on Shabbat. An additional potential issue would be the prohibition of *tzovei'a*, coloring. Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (14:21) rules that because it is disposable, *tzovei'a* is not applicable.

Still, one needs to factor in the above issues of squeezing the liquid. Furthermore, according to some, there is less room to be lenient here, because it is for the whims of an adult, not the needs of a baby.

In conclusion, we see that using baby wipes is not a problem of *melabein*. The greater concern is that of *mefareik*. One of the main factors is whether one is interested in the liquid. If one wants the liquid, then it would be prohibited]. If however,

one does not really have any desire in the liquid flowing from the wipe, then it is considered a case of *pesik reisha delo nicha lei*. If there are other mitigating factors, there may be room to rule leniently. Ultimately, there is support on both sides of this issue.



## בנין וסתירה בכלים

שאלה: שחקתי עם קובייה הונגרית ("רובקס קיוב") והתאכזבתי כי לא הצלחתי לפתור אותה. תפסתי את הקובייה בחזקה ושבירתי אותה לחלקים. האם אני יכולה לתקן את הקובייה כדי להמשיך לשחק בה בשבת?

תשובה: בכדי לענות על שאלה זו יש לחקור סוגיא חשובה במלאכת בונה בשבת, והיא – האם יש ענין של בנין בכלים?  
יש שלוש שיטות בראשונים: רש"י, תוספות, ורמב"ן, והם נחלקו בגדר מלאכת בונה.

לשיטת רש"י, אדם שבונה כלי בשבת חייב משום מכה בפטיש ולא משום בונה. הגמרא במסכת ביצה (יא:) דנה בהורדת והחזרת תריסין (סוג כלי) ביו"ט. הכרעת הגמרא היא שאין בניין ואין סתירה בכלים בשבת וביו"ט. רש"י מפרש שלומדים מכאן שאין בנין וסתירה בכלים בשום מקרה – כלומר לעולם בכלים לא יהיה חיוב בונה. בונה שייך רק בדברים שמחזירים לקרקע. בלשונו של רש"י, "אין איסור בנין וסתירה בכלים ... והעושה כלי או גמרו ביום טוב או שבת – משום מכה בפטיש הוא דמחייב." אמנם צריך עיון בדעת רש"י מהגמרא במסכת שבת.

איתא במסכת שבת (קב:) "מסתת משום מאי מיחייב רב אמר משום בונה ושמואל אמר משום מכה בפטיש. העושה נקב בלול של תרנגולים רב אמר משום בונה ושמואל אמר משום מכה בפטיש. עייל שופתא בקופינא דמרא רב אמר משום בונה ושמואל אמר משום מכה בפטיש."

שלשה מקרים הובאו לפני רב ושמואל: (א) חציבת אבן ("מסתת"), (ב) ניקוב חור בלול של תרנגולים (ג) דחיפת להב המתכת של מגריפה לתוך ידית העץ.

בשלושתם, רב אמר חייב משום בונה ושמואל אמר חייב משום מכה בפטיש. לכאורה, נראה שרב פסק שיש בניין בכלים. כיצד רש"י מסביר את דברי

רב? הרי רש"י כתב לעיל "והעושה כלי ... משום מכה בפטיש הוא דמחייב" ורב כותב בפירוש שהעושה מגריפה חייב משום בונה.

יתכן להסביר לדעת רש"י, שהיא גופא המחלוקת בין רב לשמואל; כלומר האם יש בנין וסתירה בכלים? רב סבר דיש ושמואל סבר דאין. ורש"י הכריע כשיטת שמואל.

אם כך היא שיטת רש"י, עדיין ישנם שתי קושיות:

(א) רב אמר עייל שופתא בקופינא דמרא (כלי) חייב משום בונה – והרי הלכתא כרב באיסורא וא"כ מדוע רש"י מכריע כדברי שמואל?

(ב) גם אם נאמר שרש"י הכריע כשמואל, מדוע הגמרא בסוגיא זו אינה דנה כלל בדין "דאין בנין וסתירה בכלים"?

תוספות (שבת קב: ד"ה האי) הזכיר עוד קושיא על שיטת רש"י. הגמרא (שבת מז.) מלמדת שהמחזיר מיטה של קש ("מיטה של טרסיים") בשבת חייב חטאת משום תקע, שהיא תולדת בניין. וא"כ ניתן לומר ש"מחובר לקרקע" הוא תנאי במלאכת בניין! לדעתם, "אין חילוק בין כלים לקרקע אלא במקום שאין חיזוק ואומנות. דבכלי לא חשיב בניין וקרקע חשיב בניין." ובהסבר דברי התוספות, גדר מלאכת בניין הוא מלאכה חשובה. יש שתי דרכים להיחשב כ'מלאכה חשובה'. דברים שמחברים לקרקע חשוב מטבעם, אז בניין במחובר לקרקע נחשב כבניין ממש. כלים שלא מחברים לקרקע – כדי שתיקונם יהיה נחשב כמלאכה חשובה, התהליך של תיקון צריך חיזוק ואומנות. לשיטת התוספות הכלל 'אין בניין וסתירה בכלים' רק שייך אם אינו צריך חיזוק ואומנות לתקן הכלי.

התוספות מסביר סוגיא אחרת. הגמרא (שבת קכב:) דנה במקרה של החזרת דלת שמותר להורידה אבל לא להחזירה בשבת (יכול לסתור אבל לא לבנות). הגמרא מקשה אם אין סתירה בכלים לכאורה אין בנין בכלים, ולכן אם מותר לסתור, כלומר להוריד, את הדלת מותר גם לבנות, דהיינו להחזיר. הגמרא מתרצת "גזירה שמא יתקע". סוגיא זאת מובנת מאד לשיטת התוס'. חוששים שיתקע בחוזקה ובאומנות ויתחייב משום בונה. אך קשה מאד לשיטת רש"י ולכן רש"י יצטרך לפרש שתוקע חייב משום מלאכת מכה בפטיש.

הרמב"ן בחידושו (שבת קב:) לכאורה דומה מאוד לדעת תוספות. אבל במבט מעמיק, נראה שדעתו שונה בתכלית. ובלשון הרמב"ן "יש לנו לתרץ [על רש"י] ... הכא עושה כלי או מתקן כלי מתחילתו אין לך בנין גדול מזה. אין זה

נקרא בנין בכלים שהרי אינו כלי, אבל עושה כלי מיקרי. ואפשר לפי דעה זו שכל כלי שצריך אומן בחזרתו מיחייב עליה משום בונה דהו"ל כעושה כלי מתחלתו שהרי משעה שנתפרק ואין ההדיוט יכול להחזירו בטל מתורת כלי. ברור שחיבור כמה חלקים ביחד, שהוא עשיית כלי, נכלל באיסור מלאכת בונה. הכלל יאין בנין וסתירה בכלים, לא שייך בדברים שאין להם שם כלי. כלי שצריך אומן לתקן אותו, אין לו שם כליו. וא"כ, חזרתו נחשב כבניין.

בעייל שופתא בקופינא דמרא, רב אמר שחייב משום בונה. לפי הרמב"ן, רב סבר שחייב משום תולדת בונה, שהוא עשיית כלי. המעשה לא נכלל באב מלאכת בניין, אבל נראה שיש תולדה שהיא עשיית כלי. ואולי ניתן בכך לפרש את דברי רש"י. שבאמת אין בנין וסתירה בכלים, כל עוד הוי כלי אבל לעשותו כלי לשיטת רב היא שיש בו תולדת מלאכת בונה.

ולכאורה צריך עיון אם יש כלל באב מלאכת בונה שאין בנין וסתירה בכלים? ומדוע אותו כלל לא שייך גם בתולדה? ויש לישב על פי דברי הרב אברהם בן הרמב"ם, שהתנאים של תולדה לא צריכים להתאים לתנאים של האב, רב מבין שאין בניין וסתירה בכלים אבל יש בתולדה של עשיית כלי, והכללים אינם אותו הדבר.

בנוסף לכך, יש נפקא מינא בין הרמב"ן והתוספות. לפי דעת התוספות, שם 'סתירה' חל על דברים שנחשבים ככלים חשובים – שצריכים חיוזק ואומנות לתקן אותם. לפיכך, שייך גם בניין וגם סתירה לכל כלי חשוב. לפי דעת הרמב"ן, כיון שאין בנין בכלים רק בתולדת עשיית כלי, בסותר אין סברה לומר שיש חילוק בין סתירת כלי חדש לכל כלי אחר (אפילו אם הכלי נחשב כחשוב!). בסיכום, לפי דעת תוספות, אסור לבנות או לסתור כלי חשוב. לדעת הרמב"ן, יש כלים שאסור לבנות אותם ומותר לסתור אותם.

בעיון בדברי הרמב"ם, לכאורה, דעתו אינה מובנת. כתב הרמב"ם (שבת י"ב) "הבונה כל שהוא חייב, ... הבונה על גבי כלים פטור", בהלכה הבאה, "העושה אוהל קבע... המגבן את הגבינה ... המכניס יד הקרדום בתוך העין שלו הרי זה תולדת בונה". נראה שהרמב"ם פוסק יש בנין בכלים. הרמב"ם מוסיף (הל' ט"ז, י"ח) ש"המנפח בכלי זכוכית ... הרי זה תולדה מכה בפטיש וחייב". וכן המסתת את האבן חייב משום מכה בפטיש. וצריך עיון בשיטת הרמב"ם. למה בזכוכית ובמסתת לא חייבים משום בונה, ומדוע הרמב"ם אינו עקבי?

בקהילות יעקב (שבת סי' ל"ו), הסטייפלר גאון מצטט מספר שאלות של ר' איסר זלמן מלצר על הרמב"ם:

א. למה הרמב"ם הגביל בנין לכלי אדמה?

ב. למה הקטגוריה של עושה כלי רק תולדת בונה ולא אב מלאכת בונה?

ג. למה עשיית אוהל הוא תולדה ולא אב?

מסביר ר' איסר זלמן שהגדר של מלאכת בונה מפרש לפי לשון הרמב"ם (שבת ז:ז) ש"גבנו ועשהו גבינה, חייב משום בונה שכל המקבץ חלק אל חלק ודבק הכול עד שיעשו גוף אחד הרי זה דומה לבניין". ר' איסר זלמן מפרש בדברי הרמב"ם שצורת מלאכת בונה "מבואר ... שהמקבץ ומחבר כמה דברים נפרדים ... ומקבץ חלק וחלק". ממילא, יש שני צדדים של מלאכת בונה: (א) מחובר לקרקע כמו "עושה אוהל" (ב) "קיבוץ חלקים" כמו מגבן או עייל שופתא בקופינא דמרא.

הסטייפלר מקשה על ר' איסר זלמן שאמר שצריכים שני צדדים להיות אב מלאכה אבל לשון הרמב"ם על הסרת אבן מתוך הבית נשמע כמו אב מלאכה ("חייב משום בונה"), אפילו בלי קיבוץ חלקים. ועוד, הלא העושה אוהל קבע גם קיבוץ חלקים וגם מחובר לקרקע, והן השתי קטגוריות שהוצרך להיות אב מלאכה לפי הגרא"ז – אז למה הרמב"ם אינו כולל אותו עם איסור אב מלאכת בונה? הסטייפלר מסביר שאב מלאכת בונה הוא מחובר לקרקע בקשר אמיץ, אבל כיון שקיבוץ חלקים כל כך דומה לבניין, הוא נחשב כתולדת בונה. לפיכך, יש שני מיני תולדות של בונה:

א. קיבוץ חלקים בדרך קבע, כגון מגבן את הגבינה ועייל שופנא בקופינא דמרא;

ב. עשיית אוהל על הקרקע שלא מחובר בקשר אמיץ, כגון הסרת אבן ("נוטל גבשושית").

הגדר של קיבוץ חלקים, לפי דעתינו, הוא שחלקים נפרדים הופכים לכלי אחד בלתי ניתנים להפרדה. כשראינו בדוגמאות שהרמב"ם מביא, כמו המגבן גבינה ו"הנותן את הטיט", ובמקרה של עייל שופתא בקופינא דמרא, שני החלקים מחזק באופן קבע. זה מאיר למה הרמב"ם דן איסור מכה בפטיש על כלי זכוכית – כי המנפח זכוכית לא מחובר לקרקע ולא קיבוץ חלקים.

התשובה של שאלת קובייה הונגרית: לפי דעת רש"י, הקובייה נחשב ככלי, ולפיכך אין איסור של בונה. אבל נראה שיש איסור משום מכה בפטיש. לפי התוספות, הדין תלוי על חיזוק ואומנות. ברור שאין צורך לאומן לתקן אותו,



אז אם התיקון של הקובייה הוצרך חיזוק, חייב משום בונה. על פי הרמב"ן, הפסק תלוי על אם אפשר לשחק בקובייה כשנשברה, כי אם לאו, הקובייה לא נחשב עוד ככלי. אם צריך אומן בתיקונו, יהיה עובר על תולדת יעשיית כלי. לדעת הרמב"ם על פי הסטייפלר, הקובייה לא מחובר לקרקע אז המעשה לא באב מלאכת בונה בכלל. ועוד, מפני שהקובייה קלה לשבור, התיקון לא תיקון קבע. אז, גם אין בזה תולדה של קיבוץ חלקים לפי מה שבארנו לעיל.



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## ***Bas Mitzvah: A Halachic Analysis***

Although *Bas Mitzvah* celebrations are common and well accepted in many of our communities, they were once a controversial topic, subject to great debate. Before dealing with the *hashkafic* and religious message of the *Bas Mitzvah* celebration, we would be remiss not to delve into that *halachic* discourse.

We should begin our analysis by asking what potential problem there might be with a *Bas Mitzvah* celebration. In truth, there are two categories of opposition. The first group argues that a *Bas Mitzvah* celebration is prohibited, while the second group does not think that there is a formal *issur*, nevertheless, they feel that it is inadvisable.

The first group of opposition was headed by Rav Aharon Walkin (*Zekan Aharon* O.C. 1:6). He opposed celebrating a *Bas Mitzvah*, arguing that it is a violation of *chukas hagoyim*.

The second group is spearheaded by Rav Moshe Feinstein, who clearly opposed the celebration but did not view having a *Bas Mitzvah* as an actual *issur*.

The opposition has two parts. Firstly, he views a *Bas Mitzvah* celebration as just another birthday party and does not consider it to be a *simchas mitzvah*. A *Bar Mitzvah*, however, is considered a *simchas mitzvah* because a boy's transformation into an adult (in contrast to that of a girl) has noticeable *halachic* implications, since now he can be included in a *minyan*.<sup>1</sup> It follows that a *Bas Mitzvah* celebration is not a *seudas mitzvah* and therefore should not take place in *shul* (See also *Igros Moshe* O.C. 1:104, 4:36).

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<sup>1</sup> *Igros Moshe* (O.C. 2:97) based on the Magen Avraham (225:4) and Dagul Mervava (Y.D. 391:2) quoting the Maharshal. The Ben Ish Chai (Parshas Re'eh) agrees that a *Bar Mitzvah* is a *simchas mitzvah*.

Rav Moshe not only removes the motivation to celebrate, he discourages it as well. He argues that this practice comes from the Conservative and Reform Jews. Moreover, it does not lead to *yiras shamayim* and should therefore be avoided (*Igros Moshe* O.C. 1:104). Rav Moshe's opposition is not limited to a *Bas Mitzvah*, but extends to *Bar Mitzvah* celebrations as well. In his view, they also do not inspire people and often have the opposite effect. [In *Igros Moshe* (O.C. 2:97), he writes that there is a *simchas mitzvah*, however the disadvantages outweigh the advantages of these celebrations.] Due to these concerns, Rav Moshe suggests celebrating a *Bas Mitzvah* by making a *kiddush* on Shabbos morning instead.

Others allow for and even encourage the *Bas Mitzvah* celebration. Two of the more famous *poskim* who encourage a *Bas Mitzvah* celebration are Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg (*Seridei Eish* 3:93) and Rav Ovadia Yosef.

How do these *poskim* respond to the aforementioned stringent *poskim*? Why is a *Bas Mitzvah* celebration not considered *chukas hagoyim* and why is it not to be discouraged?

Before examining their *halachic* responses, it pays to briefly look at the topic of *chukas hagoyim* properly. The Maharik (#88), quoted by *Darchei Moshe* and *Shulchan Aruch* (Y. D. 178:1) delineates two different criteria that violate *Chukas HaGoyim*. The first is to adopt a strange non-Jewish practice that lacks a logical explanation. The second is when the practice, even logical, originates from *pritzus*.

Thus, in order to defend the *Bas Mitzvah* practice not being *chukas hagoyim*, one will have to make two claims: firstly, that a *Bas Mitzvah* does not originate from *avodah zara* or *pritzus* and secondly, that there is a logical reason to celebrate a *Bas Mitzvah*. Parenthetically, good reason to celebrate will defend the *Bas Mitzvah* celebration against Rav Moshe's argument as well.

The *Seridei Eish* addresses both of these concerns. First, he quotes the Maharik distinguishing between two different types

of *chukas hagoyim*: practices based on *avodah zara* and practices without any purpose (quoting the Yerai'im). He then points out that even if *Bas Mitzvah* celebrations mimic the Christian Confirmation ceremony, it is not an act of *avodah zara*. Otherwise, he argues, a *Bar Mitzvah* celebration (and *tefillah*) would be *assur* as well. Instead, he claims, the practice has a significant purpose and a noble intention. The purpose is to encourage Jewish women to continue a life of religious commitment, similar to Talmud Torah which was made more available to women for the same reasons.

The *Seridei Eish* concludes that whether or not *halacha* permits the celebration of a *Bas Mitzvah* depends on whether they are trying to act *lesheim shamayim* or to imitate non-Jews. Additionally, he agrees with Rav Moshe that the celebration should not take place in a *shul*. He also suggests an additional reason for this, based on a ruling of Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman that there is an *issur* of *chikui apikorsim* (imitating heretics). (See Chullin 41a.) Because the non-Orthodox celebrate *Bas Mitzvahs* in *shul*, we should not.

Tangentially, regarding the *bracha* “*Baruch ShePitarani*”, Rav Ovadia Yosef (*Yabia Omer* O.C. 6:29:3) claims that it is subject to a *machloket* between the Levush and Magen Avraham as to why the *bracha* is said. The Magen Avraham explains that the *bracha* reflects the fact that the father is no longer responsible for his son's sins. The Levush, however, argues that it is made because a son is no longer subject to being punished for his father's sins.

The difference would manifest itself regarding making a *bracha* for one's daughter. The Levush's reasoning would require a *bracha*, for after all, she too was subject to receiving punishment for her father's sin. By contrast, he argues, the Magen Avraham's reasoning might not mandate a father to recite it, for the father's responsibilities to educate a son is greater than for a daughter (assuming one even has a *mitzvah* of *chinuch* for a daughter).

Rav Ovadia Yosef (Yabia Omer O.C. 6:29; *Yechave Daas* 2:29) takes a strong stance, arguing that celebrating a *Bas Mitzvah* is a *mitzvah* just like celebrating a *Bar Mitzvah*. *Bas Mitzvah* celebrations are more than recommended; they are *mitzvos* with practical ramifications. Since one is obligated to partake in a *mitzvah* when invited to do so, it follows that one who is invited to a *Bas Mitzvah* must attend. Rav Ovadia Yosef then adds that the party should be done in a modest way, an opinion which Rav Nebenzahl upheld when asked in person.

Presumably, our practice follows the Seridei Eish and Rav Ovadia Yosef, precisely because we assume that *Bas Mitzvah* celebrations will, in fact, lead to greater *yiras shamayim*. That position carries within it a subtle but important implication and challenge: we must ensure that our *Bas Mitzvah* celebrations do cultivate greater *yiras shamayim*. This requires us to first understand how and why. What are we celebrating, and how does that lead to *yiras shamayim*?

A *Bas Mitzvah* which transforms Jewish girls into Jewish women ultimately has two causes for celebration. Firstly and most simply, a Jewish woman's status change alone is reason for celebration. Just having another adult member in *Klal Yisrael* is reason enough for celebration and recognizing and internalizing that should increase one's *yiras shamayim*.

However, there is something else worthy of celebration: a girl's *mitzvos* are no longer mere preparation but official *mitzvos* with official status. Once *Bas Mitzvah*, a woman has the opportunity and, moreover, obligation to fulfill *mitzvos*.

The Ben Ish Chai (Parshas Re'eh 17) instructs these young women (as well as young men) to wear a new garment and make a *bracha* of "*she-hecheyanu*" with the intent to include their new status as someone who can perform *mitzvos*. While the first reason for celebration takes joy in what has already occurred in the past, this second reason celebrates what is presently



occurring. This second reason celebrates a woman's potential to live a life dedicated to *avodas Hashem*. Appreciating that potential too should generate *yiras shamayim*.



## **Zionism and the *Bracha* that Breaks the Rule**

The blessing recited after eating food that is of the seven species of *Eretz Yisrael*, is a condensed version of the blessings in the *Birkat Hamazon*, recited at the conclusion of a bread meal. Its official name, therefore, is *Birkat Me'ein Shalosh*.

I would like to explore the concluding words of the blessing for the five grains: **וְנוּדָה לְךָ עַל הָאָרֶץ וְעַל הַמַּחֲיָה** – “And we are thankful to you for the land and the sustenance.”

There is an interesting concept in the *gemara* (Berachot 49a): “We do not conclude one blessing with two subjects”. Rashi explains that using one blessing to thank G-d for two separate ideas would be a violation of the concept mentioned in Pesachim (102b): “We do not perform *mitzvot* in bundles”. At first glance it would seem that this concluding bracha, referring to both the Land of Israel and food, appears problematic. The *gemara* (Berachot) remedies this, explaining that the Land of Israel and the grains it produces are in fact one and the same. Since *Eretz Yisrael* is dependent on Hashem’s mercy for rain, there is an inherent link between the Land and the food it gives forth.

This idea becomes very distinct when the food in question originates from *Eretz Yisrael*. In relation to grape products to the other species of fruit, the wording switches from the general to the possessive for the Land of Israel: *hagafen* to the possessive *gafna*, and from *hapeirot* to *peiroteha*, respectively. Strangely, the *bracha* is not altered for *mezonot* produce grown in *Eretz Yisrael*. The Netziv suggests that in comparison to fruit and wine, *mezonot* products do not hold significant distinction, and taste similar to that of other countries (Meromei HaSadeh, Berachot Chapter 6).

Furthermore, *mezonot* must be altered and manufactured in some way in order to be suitable for consumption. Human effort must be put in to be able to eat *mezonot*, as grains are heavily processed and altered until their initial form is unrecognizable (Otzar HaYediot, Chapter 138). Fruit is very clearly fruit when eaten but one often has to read the ingredients list before knowing the content of *mezonot* food. *Mezonot* foods are not easily identifiable, and therefore their *bracha* is not changed regardless of their origin, in contrast to the *bracha* for wine and the other species.

This distinction in the blessings between food originally from *Eretz Yisrael* and from other countries sharpens the question. How is this blessing's conclusion focused on one central theme, despite the clear divide between thanking G-d for the Land of Israel as well as for produce outside of Israel? Surely we can argue that in *Eretz Yisrael* when one says "for the Land and its nourishment" they are one in the same, but how can the same argument be used for the Diaspora when the *bracha* concludes "for the land and **the** nourishment?" In *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land and its produce are inherently connected. When we thank Hashem for the food we are eating, we can trace it back to the fields in *Eretz Yisrael*, resulting in a deepening of our relationship with Hashem, the Land and its produce. However outside of *Eretz Yisrael* this is not the case.

The Levush (O.C. 208:10) suggests two answer to this conundrum. Perhaps the land referred to in the *bracha* is not just *Eretz Yisrael*, but in fact refers to land in general, throughout the world. We thank Hashem for all lands on Earth and the produce from these lands. If this is the case, then when we thank Hashem for the food we are eating we are simply connecting it to the ground in which was grown, to its origins.

Alternatively, the Levush suggests another understanding of this *bracha*. The nourishment refers to both the food just eaten and also the produce grown in the Land of Israel. When reciting the *bracha* we thank Hashem for the Land of Israel, its produce,

and the produce of all other countries as well. Both interpretations explain why the *bracha* does not violate the *gemara* and is in fact about one single idea.

The Vilna Gaon (Berachot 35a) explains that Hashem created and maintains all life but ultimately there is a direct connection only between *Eretz Yisrael* and Hashem. All other countries receive their sustenance via *Eretz Yisrael*. The *Shechinah* spreads from *Shamayim* to *Eretz Yisrael* and only then to all other countries. If so, then perhaps this is what *Chazal* hoped we would understand when reciting *Birkat me'ein shalosh*. Not only are we thanking Hashem for the food we have just consumed to sustain us in life but also for the Land of Israel, which enables the *Shechinah* to be present, throughout the world.

*Birkat me'ein shalosh* does not just thank Hashem for the meal or snack we are eating in that moment. The bracha powerfully gives us an acute awareness that Hashem is the source of all the food we eat and the land we live in. There is enough to sustain all life on Earth because of Hashem. This bracha reminds us that Hashem created everything including the food and drink we consume and the Land of Israel, placing *Eretz Yisrael* at the center of all creation. Recited regularly, *birkat me'ein shalosh* should serve as a constant reminder of these intertwined ideas, keeping us deeply connected to our beloved *Eretz Yisrael*.

