

Kol

קול

Mevaseret

מבשרת

A Compilation of
Insights and Analyses
of Torah Topics

by the students of
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**DEDICATED TO THE
COURAGEOUS AND SELFLESS
CHAYALIM OF
MEDINAT YISRAEL**

**MAY THE TORAH LEARNED
THROUGH THIS JOURNAL
SERVE TO ELEVATE ALL
THE NESHAMOT LOST
IN THIS WAR
AND MAY WE MERIT THE
SAFE, SUCCESSFUL AND SPEEDY
RETURN OF ALL THE
CHAYALIM AND HOSTAGES**

**יהי רצון
שהקדוש ברוך הוא יברך
את חיילי צבא הגנה לישראל**

ובע"ה ביחד ננצח

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

In Devarim 31:21, Moshe Rabbeinu is told by Hashem: **והיה כי תמצאן** אתו רעות רבות וצרות ... **כי לא תשכח מפי זרעו**. This pasuk is more than a reassurance; it is a declaration. Torah will not be forgotten, even in the face of רעות רבות וצרות. When darkness surrounds us, Torah persists. In fact, it is precisely in moments of national pain and uncertainty that this divine promise becomes most visible. The continued existence and study of Torah in every generation is not only a miracle, it is an act of resistance.

Chazal (Brachot 63b) derive from the pasuk (Bamidbar 19:14): **אין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית את עצמו עליה** that **זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל**. Rashi explains that this refers to someone who separates from physical comforts and devotes himself entirely to Torah. This level of commitment – total immersion despite challenge – is what allows Torah to endure. This year has taught us, perhaps more than ever, that Torah is not something we just do but something we give ourselves over to. The learning found in these pages is not superficial; it is the product of serious, invested work. This is the kind of learning Chazal say is what sustains Torah throughout the generations.

Rashi, citing the Gemara (Shabbat 138b) explains that the phrase of **לא תשכח** reflects Hashem's promise that the Torah will not be forgotten, even through hardship and exile. Hashem's proclamation is not merely a statement of fact; it is a charge. Torah will not be forgotten because it *must* not be forgotten. This implies an active responsibility on each individual: to ensure that Torah continues, even amidst hardship, even when it's difficult to understand or connect to, even when the world offers many reasons to look elsewhere. The continuity of Torah depends on the constancy of its learners.

The Rambam (Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:13) writes: **אף על פי** שמצוה ללמד ביום ובלילה אין אדם למד רב חמתו אלא בלילה. The reference

is not just to the hours of the clock but to the effort that happens when no one is watching – the unseen labor of Torah that builds inner worlds. The Torah in this journal was formed in those hours – in the questions asked, the texts analyzed and the thoughts shaped slowly, deliberately, over time.

The Gemara (Niddah 73a) reminds us: כל השונה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא. The foundation of lasting Torah is consistency. The small, regular acts of learning – even when it's hard, even when the world feels fragile – are what build an eternal legacy.

We hope that this edition of Kol Mevasseret reflects that kind of Torah – a Torah of constancy, a Torah of responsibility, a Torah that answers the call of זרעו מפני לא תשכח מפי not just with words, but with action.

To our esteemed rebbeim and mechanchot: Your unwavering dedication – to our learning, to this incredible institution, and to each of us – has given us the skills, and the grit, to have made this journal. Thank you all for your time, knowledge, guidance, encouragement, and belief that we can succeed.

To Rabbi Lerner: Each year that this journal comes out simply demonstrates, again and again, your devotion to your students. Thank you for spending the hours you did, editing and refining each *talmida's* work to be the very best it can be. This journal is a testament to what each student really can do with her Torah knowledge, and it would not be possible without you.

To our writers: Every time you read this journal and reflect on the beautiful divrei Torah you've created, remember how special Torah is to you and how much you can grow – both spiritually and intellectually – when you keep it close. Thank you for giving over your powerful and insightful words of Torah, and for allowing us to share them with our world.

To our editorial staff: We know firsthand how much time and effort you all put into this journal, dedicating weeks to making sure every article was made as perfect as could be, while staying true to what it was meant to be by the author. Thank you for your

commitment to making this journal something we can all appreciate for years to come. It was a privilege to work with a team as skilled, Torah-focused, and benevolent as all of you are.

To MMY 5785: It has been quite a year – both nationally and personally. Watching each individual grow into her extraordinary self, and then witnessing our group transform into a family, is something we are proud to be a part of. This year brought both highs and lows for our homeland: We witnessed families reunited after more than a year of separation, and others who still tragically remain apart from their loved ones, maybe forevermore. We saw both heartache and joy, suffering and blessing, “pain and pride,” as Rabbi Perez puts it. But we did not just watch; we actively participated, together. These experiences have bound us in ways that will remain, even as we move on our individual paths of helping Am Yisrael in the future.

Sincerely,

The Kol Mevaseret Editors 5785

Esther, Talia and Tamar

INTRODUCTION

Although the writing for each edition of Kol Mevaseret takes place over the course of the Winter Zman (Sefer Bereishit and Sefer Shemot) and the completed edition comes out after Shavuot (Sefer Bamidbar), the main editing work takes place during the post-Pesach Zman – as we read the Parshiyot in Sefer Vayikra.

Acharei Mot, Kedoshim, Emor. This list of parshiyot is also a Hebrew idiom. After a person dies, we only speak about their good attributes. Some use this idiom with cynicism and it reminds us that people aren't as saintly as we sometimes portray them after they are gone. Others use this line as a kind of "command": after a person is gone, there is no point in harping on their negatives. Rather, let's learn from the positive parts of their legacy and let them inspire us all to move forward.

We view the Kohen Gadol as a mega-leader: **הכהן הגדול מאחיו**. The Mishnayot at the beginning of Yoma, however, seem to paint a different picture. We are told that a week in advance of Yom Kippur he is removed from his home and family and asked to review the *seder haavoda*, not only in case he has forgotten but also in case he never learned. The Mishna then suggests that others read for him in case he is illiterate! One would assume he would suffer from insomnia on the night before his big day, yet the Mishna records what the young Kohanim would do to keep him awake on Yom Kippur night.

However, by the end of the masechet, the Kohen Gadol seems to have undergone an enormous change. This potentially illiterate Kohen Gadol reads Parashat Acharei Mot and the relevant part of Parashat Emor from the Torah in front of all, after an elaborate ceremony in his honor with major pomp and circumstance. He then reads the maftir from Parashat Pinchas by heart! After the avoda, the Kohen Gadol returns to his home and family, following an all-nighter. But this time, there is no problem

keeping him awake, as people flock to join the post fast celebration.

What has changed in one short week?

Although one could claim that the description of the Kohen Gadol in the Mishna is a reflection of the historical reality during Bayit Sheni, that claim does not play out by the end of the masechet. There, the portrayal of the Kohen Gadol matches the leadership image we would have expected, and is reflected in the Yom Kippur davening with which we are all familiar – especially in MMY! – אמת מה נהדר היה כהן גדול – The Mishnayot seem to be walking us through a potential transformation that can teach us how transformative the Mikdash experience can be.

The Kohen Gadol says vidui three different times during the avoda. In addition to saying the vidui as a representative of the whole nation, he also says vidui for his family, and another one as an individual. He too is going through a personal journey. It does not matter how wise and strong the Kohen Gadol was “Lifnei Mot.” The challenge is “Acharei Mot” and to rise to the level of “Kedoshim Emor.” The way we each walk in is not the way we each walk out.

I often start the MMY year by stating that a year in MMY is about kedusha and speak about different types of kedusha that we can enhance through our learning and the way we function in the social-setting of the dormitory. I use the metaphor that it is like being in the Mikdash (actually the Mishkan, as the kedusha comes with us even on tiyulim). Now, at this stage in the year, we hopefully can look back and see that mar'eh Kohen Gadol in everyone, בצאתו מבית קדשי הקדשים as they get ready to return to their homes in Chutz LaAretz or begin to build new homes in Eretz Yisrael. This edition of Kol Mevaseret serves as a beautiful testament of what can be accomplished in one very short year in the MMY Mikdash; *Emet Ma Nehedar, MMY, MMY!*

Although we often view the year in Israel as the “be-all and end-all,” in reality the year in Israel is “just” a Mikdash Me’at, a microcosm of the much larger picture of a life-long journey towards

spirituality. Thus, this list of parshiyot can serve as chizuk for us all, at all stages of life. With this in mind we are proud to present this year's volume of Kol Mevaseret to the MMY family and the wider public.

אשרי עין ראתה כל אלה!

Rabbi David Katz

תנ"ך

The Brilliant Balance of Beauty and Bravery in Avigayil

Sefer Shmuel (I chapter 25) relates that David and his men are in Midbar Paran fleeing from Shaul. David contacts Naval, a wealthy man, and asks him for provisions. The Navi introduces us to Naval and his wife, Avigayil with a brief description (25:3): **וּשְׁם הָאִישׁ נָבִל וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲבִיגַיִל וְהָאִשָּׁה טוֹבַת שְׂכָל וַיִּפֶּת תָּאָר וְהָאִישׁ קָשָׁה וְרַע מַעֲלָלִים וְהוּא כְּלָבִי**. He is a difficult and evil man; she is an intelligent and beautiful woman. This pasuk serves as a topic sentence for the entire story that follows, giving insight into who she is and what her character is like. How is this demonstrated throughout the story? How do her traits come to life?

Abarbanel explains that the name Avigayil means father of joy or gladness. **טוֹבַת שְׂכָל וַיִּפֶּת תָּאָר** indicates that she was complete both spiritually and physically. This is in stark contrast to the description of her husband.

After David asks Naval for provisions, Naval insults him and refuses to help David and his men. In response, David plans to seek revenge and attack Naval and his household. When Avigayil hears of her husband's behavior, she decides to intervene. She quickly gathers food, wine, and other provisions and loads them onto donkeys (25:8): **וְתַמְהָרָא אֲבִיגַיִל וְתָקַח מֵאֲתֵימָם לֶחֶם וְשֵׁנִים נָבִלִי יֵין וְחֶמֶשׁ צֶאֱן**. **עֲשׂוּיֹת וְחֶמֶשׁ סָאִים קָלִי וּמָאָה צְמוּקִים וּמֵאֲתֵימָם דְּבָלִים וְתִשֵּׁם עַל הַחֲמוּרִים**. Avigayil knows exactly what needs to be done to avert disaster. She is both caring and clever.

She also tells her servants to go ahead with all the provisions. She will follow behind. The Malbim explains that she was concerned that if she would travel with them, Naval would get wind of what's going on and put an end to her plans. Obviously, she is a very wise woman.

When Avigayil reaches David, she falls to his feet and takes the blame for what happened (25:25): ותפל על רגליו ותאמר בי אני אדוני. העון ותדבר נא אמתך באזניך ושמע את דברי אמתך. Why does Avigayil say this if she had nothing to do with Naval's actions? Why would she lie, portraying herself in such a negative light? Rashi comments: מתחלה אמרה כך, כדי שיטה און לדבריה, ולסוף אמרה לו האמת, אני אמתך. לא ראיתי את נערי אדני. She said this so that she could grab David's attention and he would listen to her and then she would tell the truth – an incredibly wise and clever move.

Avigayil apologizes for her husband's actions and convinces David to abandon his plan to take revenge. He is persuaded by Avigayil's words, refrains from killing Naval and praises her intelligence (25:33): וברוך טעמן וברוכה את אשר כלתני היום הזה מבוא בדמים. והושע ידי לי. The Abarbanel and the Malbim comment that ברוך טעמן refers to both the sweetness and truthfulness of her words; her pleasant character and her wisdom. The next morning, Avigayil tells Naval what happened. He becomes despondent, and ten days later Hashem takes his life. Avigayil ends up marrying David.

Chazal, too, extol Avigayil's traits. The Gemara (Megilla 15a) cites a baraita that there were four women of exceptional beauty in the world, and Avigayil was one of those women (as well as Sarah, Rachav and Esther). Earlier, the Gemara (14a) lists Avigayil as one of the seven נביאות (together with Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Chana, Chulda and Esther) There are so many women in Tanach and only seven of them are listed as נביאות showing how special they are.

How do Chazal discern in the text that Avigayil was a prophetess? The Gemara relates that David planned on killing Naval and then immediately taking Avigayil as a wife. Avigayil dissuades him from any immediate relationship since she is a niddah. In her conversation with David, she hints at a future stumbling block that David will encounter regarding marital relations, alluding to the story of Batsheva. Only a נביאה could be aware of this.

In this context, the Gemara records a very learned halachic discussion between David and the extremely intelligent Avigayil.

She tries to delay any immediate death sentence for Naval by noting that just as one cannot examine the status of menstrual blood at night, so too one cannot judge a capital case at night. There is also a discussion whether legally David has a status of a monarch at this time. Even though he was anointed by Shmuel, Shaul is still alive.

The Midrash (Socher Tov 53:1) highlights another example of Avigayil's wisdom. She gently rebukes David, pointing out that a refusal to provide food for a destitute person is not a capital crime. If David were to kill Naval, all the korbanot in the world would not atone for his sin. Accepting Avigayil's rebuke, David comments that she must have been Heaven-sent.

Furthermore, the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 2:4) quotes the opinion of R' Shimon that a king cannot marry too many wives, even if they are "like Avigayil." She is the ultimate example of a righteous wife of a monarch. The fact that out of all women in Tanach it is Avigayil that is used as an example for such a foundational rule for kings, says so much about her.

All of these sources help prove the point that Avigayil was someone who was **טובת שכל ויפת תאר** in a way unlike any other woman. While it's true that she is one of the most respected women in Tanach, it is interesting to note one slight imperfection mentioned by Chazal. The Talmud Yerushalmi (2:3) comments on three words that Avigayil tells David when she successfully persuades David not to kill Naval, but leave it in Hashem's hands (25:31): **וזכרת את אמתך**. Avigayil is hinting to David that she would marry him after Naval's demise.

Although that is what will happen and the marriage is viewed very favorably, it is not appropriate for a married woman to speak this way while her husband is still alive. The very next pasuk refers to **אביגיל** (with only one letter **י"ד**) not **אביגיל** indicating a very slight fault in her speech. While this does not detract from the greatness of Avigayil, it does teach us that even the most respected characters in Tanach may have flaws, even if they are ever so slight.

By tracing the narrative stemming from the topic sentence: טובת שכל ויפת תאר, one can clearly see how Avigayil is a role model for Jewish women. The final chapter of Mishlei describes the ultimate אשת חיל. One of her outstanding traits is פיה פתחה בחכמה, a most befitting description of Avigayil. Her combination of wisdom and humility allowed her to save and protect the nascent Davidic dynasty and ensure her own place in the annals of great Jewish women. Through her actions, one can learn how to navigate difficult situations, resolve conflicts and protect others from rash decisions with kindness and effectiveness.

Bread, Tears, and Prayer

David HaMelech and Chana HaNeviah are people that we look up to, yet for different reasons. David is a courageous leader of Am Yisrael, and Chana is the role model of proper tefillah. However, through a deeper look into their stories, we see that they are more similar than we realize. Throughout their experiences, one can detect the loneliness that runs through their lives, and observe how they dealt with that feeling. Although for both David and Chana the whole world seems to be against them, they realize at some point that they are never truly alone. Hashem is always with them.

Let us examine the life of David HaMelech. David is known to be an emotional and poetic character; introspective and aware of his surroundings. This perhaps can be attributed to his frequent aloneness. Whether he is out in the field with his sheep, running from Shaul, or on the battlefield against Goliat, David must support and fend for himself. He describes himself as a person of loneliness, “*boded*”, as his enemies curse him (Tehillim 102:8).

We first learn about this loneliness when David is introduced (Shmuel I 16:11). He is by himself, taking care of the flock, separate from the rest of his brothers. When Shmuel anoints him soon afterwards, the ceremony takes place in private. David’s slaying of Goliat and subsequent growing popularity arouse Shaul’s jealousy, forcing him to flee from place to place, leaving behind his loved ones. The description in Tehillim (142:5) is both poignant and powerful: *הבט ימין וראה ואין לי מכיר, אבד מנוס ממני אין דורש לנפשי*.

This sense of loneliness continues throughout David’s lifetime, even after ascending to the throne. His son Avshalom rebels, his trusted advisor, Achitophel, turns his back on him and most of the nation whom he led with great care, betray him. On numerous occasions David cries out to Hashem (Tehillim 25:16, 38:12, 41:10):

כי יחיד ועני אני; אהבי ורעי מנגד נגעי יעמדו וקרובי מרחוק עמדו; גם איש שלומי אשר בטחתי בו אוכל לחמי הגדיל עלי עקב. In all these instances, David feels alone and utterly abandoned by those around him.

And yet, David's loneliness does not translate into hopelessness. He turns to Hashem, nurturing both his faith and trust in His presence (Tehillim 102:2-3): ה' שמעה תפלתי ושועתי אליך תבוא; אל תסתר פניך ממני ביום צר לי הטה אלי אונך ביום אקרא מהר ענני.

Similarly, Chana's life is framed by the experience of feeling of isolation from those closest to her. In the first chapter of Shmuel, we are introduced to Elkana and his two wives, Chana and Penina. Penina has many children while Chana has none.

Every year, Elkana goes to Shilo to bring korbanot, and he gives portions of the korbanot to Penina and all her children. But to Chana he gives a double portion, because he loves her and she is not able to have children.

Penina provokes Chana over and over again to irritate her about her inability to bear children. This cycle repeats year after year – Penina provokes and Chana cries and is unable to eat: וכן יעשה שנה בשנה מדי עלתה בבית ה' כן תכעסנה ותבכה ולא תאכל (Shmuel I 1:7).

Elkana tries to placate Chana: למה תבכי ולמה לא תאכלי ולמה ירע לבבך הלוא אנכי טוב לך מעשרה בנים. “Why are you sad Chana? Am I not better to you than ten children?” (Shmuel I 1:8). The Malbim comments that there are two points being forwarded by Elkana. Firstly, the mitzvah of *pru urvu* is not a women's mitzvah. Secondly, Elkana can provide her needs as well as any child can.

However, Elkana's logical analysis does little to alleviate Chana's pain. Chana has a deep sense of longing for a child, and this leaves Chana feeling alone. And now, not only is Chana childless and being ridiculed by Penina, but she also feels distant from her husband.

Both David and Chana have experiences of pain and suffering. David writes: הוכה כעשב ויבש לבי כי שכחתי מאכל לחמי (Tehillim 102:5). Radak explains that the health of the body depends on the heart.

Because David is in such emotional pain, he has no appetite to eat. Similarly Chana, when taunted by Penina, experiences such deep emotional pain that she is no longer able to eat.

In the end, both David and Chana realize that their loneliness is in relation to people, not to Hashem. Therefore, when Chana is feeling bitter, she goes to daven. But, if Chana had been feeling bitter for so long about not having children, why did it take many years for her to turn to Hashem?

Malbim (1:9) writes that she relied on her husband, a tzaddik, to daven for her, but Elkana had come to terms with the fact that Chana could not have children, and so, he gave up. Once Chana realizes that she cannot rely on her husband or anyone else, she turns to Hashem, the only One left who can help her. Chana learns from this experience that instead of Hashem being her last resort, He should always be her first.

In the words of Chana's tefillah (Shmuel I 2:2): אין קדוש כה' כי אין בלתך ואין צור כאלקיננו. The only being in this world that is always there for us and will always be there for generations and generations, is Hashem. As David says in Tehillim (102:13) ואתה ה' לעולם תשב וזכרך לדר ודר.

Both David and Chana recognize that the only One that we can rely on is Hashem. Perhaps David learned this trait from Chana. Afterall, Chana's son, Shmuel is the one who anointed David, our paradigm of connection to Hashem.

Yehosheva:

Living Aligned with *Retzon Hashem*

Sometimes, the people we learn the least about can have the most to teach us. In Melachim II chapter 11, we read that after Yehu murdered Achazya, king of Yehuda, Achazya's mother, Ataliyah, took over the kingdom. Ataliyah attempted to wipe out all of Achazya's descendants in order to remove any threat to her rulership. However, her daughter (or possibly stepdaughter), Yehosheva, recognized the injustice of what Ataliyah was doing and hid Achazya's son, Yoash, in the *chadar hamitot*. Rashi explains to us that this *chadar hamitot* was an upper level of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*. After six years of concealing him, the Kohen Gadol, Yehoyada, who was Yehosheva's husband, took Yoash out of the *Kodesh HaKodashim* and publicly crowned him as king. Upon hearing this, Ataliyah tore her clothes, cried out, and was ultimately executed.

Even though Yehosheva is only mentioned once in Tanach, she was the main force behind ending the reign of a cruel queen and became the salvation of Malchut Beit David. Yehosheva, along with her husband Yehoyada, not only countered Ataliyah politically, but also ideologically.

Yehosheva was infuriated by what Ataliyah was doing, and therefore saved Yoash, standing up against Ataliyah and stopping her from destroying Malchut Beit David. More broadly, we are told (Divrei Hayamim II 24:7) **כִּי עֲתִלְיָה הַמְרַשָּׁעַת בָּנִיהָ פָּרְצוּ אֶת בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים** וגם כל קרשי בית ה' עשו לבעלים. In contrast to Ataliyah's desecration of the Beit HaMikdash, Yehosheva and her husband were the catalyst for its repair, for Yoash started the initiative to fix the Beit Hamikdash with Yehoyada helping him.

Even from the outset, when the pesukim introduce us to Yehosheva, they are begging us to notice the stark difference between Yehosheva and Ataliyah. The first time we meet Yehosheva she is

called, “*bat hamelech Yoram*,” introducing us to her as the daughter of a king, part of the royal family (Melachim II 11:2). Just like Ataliyah, Yehosheva came from royalty, but what each one did with that power was drastically different. Yehosheva did not abuse her power. Rather, she stayed true to what Hashem wanted of her. While Ataliyah attempted to eradicate her direct descendants in order to maintain power and control over the kingdom, Yehosheva saved Yoash in order to preserve the true line of kingship.

Moreover, Seder Eliyahu Zuta (3) tells us that Ataliyah’s attempt to wipe out Achazya’s family is proof that הנושא אשה לשם גדולה, someone who marries a woman for prestige will end up causing his family to be at risk. Earlier in Melachim, Yehoshafat (Achazya’s grandfather) wanted to marry into the royal family of *Malchut Yisrael*, and this caused his descendants to be mostly wiped out. Ataliyah serves as an ultimate example of what comes from an undesirable marriage.

In contrast, Chazal tell us that “*tovim hashnayim min haechad*” refers to Yehosheva and Yehoyada (Kohelet Raba 4:9). They are the epitome of a marriage that works together as a team. Furthermore, Chazal place Yehosheva as one of the twenty-three righteous women in Bnei Yisrael, grouping her with women on the level of the Imahot (Midrash Tadsheh 21), whereas Ataliyah is grouped amongst the evil women, equating her to characters like Izevel and Vashti (Otzar HaMidrashim).

Chazal clearly view Yehosheva as a role model and Ataliyah as a villain. They want us to reflect the positive attributes of Yehosheva and stay far away from following the actions of Ataliyah. But what does it really mean to act like Yehosheva and not Ataliyah? What do Chazal want us to apply to our lives?

Yehosheva’s name can be split into: *kah* and *shavah*. *Sheva* is a *lashon* of plenty, of bracha, so bringing the two together essentially means *Hashem hu bracha* (See Daat Mikra). Yehosheva was focused on Hashem and what He wants. She recognized that He is the true source of all good. Ataliyah’s name comes from the Arabic word *atal*, meaning strength, showing Ataliyah’s forcefulness and

power. Although Atalyah's name refers to strength and Hashem, it seems that, in this case, we are dealing with the potential that was never actualized. Rather it was hijacked by Atalyah to further her nefarious goals.

In a time when the most prominent woman was dominant and cruel, Yehosheva showed that Ataliyah need not be followed. Despite that notorious woman being related, Yehosheva took an active stand against Ataliyah. In a society that focuses on oneself and maximizing one's personal gains, there can be a shift to the extreme of being Ataliyah-like, to being a woman who never takes no for an answer, taking whatever she wants, perhaps even at the cost of others.

Yehosheva shows us a different way. When we act, it should be for a higher purpose, not just to dominate or to achieve personal desires. Yehosheva exemplifies how a Jewish woman, who is a part of the "royal family" of Hashem, should be conducting herself. She should be preserving what is right and standing up for *retzon Hashem*.

The importance of having this outlook is consistently reinforced. R' Bachye Ibn Pekuda writes that in order to be fully devoted to Hashem, it must be that *הכוונה בנראה ובנסתר במעשה עבודת* האלקים, *לשמו להגיע אל רצונו בלבד*, that all of the *Avodat Hashem* that we do must be solely for the purpose of doing *retzon Hashem* and not for ulterior motives (Chovot HaLevavot Shaar Yichud HaMaaseh chapter 1).

Famously, in Pirkei Avot (2:12), R' Yossi says: "*kol maasecha yiheyu l'shem shamayim*," emphasizing how all we do should be in order to uplift our *Avodat Hashem*. Lest someone think that this is only referring to having the right mindset when doing mitzvot, Rabbeinu Yonah comments saying, *אפילו דברים של רשות ... יהיו כולם לעבודת בוראך או לדבר הגורם עבודתו*, that this rule even applies to non-mitzvah actions.

How exactly are we supposed to be doing seemingly mundane everyday actions *l'sheim shamayim*? It's about our intent and reasoning. The same exact action can be meaningless or for *retzon*

Hashem depending on our inner intentions. For example, Rabbeinu Yonah describes how people can either be eating purely just to get physical pleasure out of the tasty food, or they could have the perspective that they are eating in order to keep themselves healthy to continue doing *retzon Hashem*. Sleeping can be simply enjoyable, or it too can be a part of our *Avodat Hashem* from the mindset that it keeps our energy up in order to keep doing mitzvot.

Both the Rambam (Hilchot Deot 3:3) and the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 231) echo this approach. The latter writes: כללו של דבר חייב אדם לשום עיניו ולבו על דרכיו ולשקול כל מעשיו ... דבר שיביא לידי עבודת הבורא ית' יעשהו ואם לאו לא יעשהו. We have an obligation to self-reflect and weigh what we are really doing for Hashem's sake, and what we are doing for ulterior motives. To truly align everything we do with *retzon Hashem* is incredibly challenging, but there is high praise to anyone who accomplishes this: מי שנוהג כן עובד בוראו תמיד.

Shlomo Hamelech, knowing this task of doing everything for Hashem may seem immense and daunting, gives us a level of *chizuk* in Mishlei (3:6). He says: בכל דרכיך דעהו והוא ישר ארחיך – if you acknowledge Hashem in everything you do, He will “straighten your paths.” If we make sure that we put our focus on everything we do, to be what Hashem wants, then He will lead us and make sure we are successful (Metzudat David). When we do our *hishtadlut* in focusing on Hashem, He will do His part and help us succeed.

Our focus in life is to be viewing the world through a *retzon Hashem* lens. Everything we do should come from a place of what Hashem wants from us, not from any other influences. Yehosheva is an example of someone who lived this ideal. Despite the tremendous risk in going against the ruler of her time, she had the strength to hold her own while battling the tide. In her case, she teaches us that what's really valuable is not conforming to the more “famous” version of what a woman should be, but rather focusing on Hashem and what He wants, which is sometimes not what society wants, and not even what we want. Yehosheva is the ideological counter to Ataliyah, teaching us to not blindly follow the ideologies of our

surroundings, but to do what we know is right. The woman who saved the line of kings teaches us to maintain our alignment with our King.

מה ה' דורש ממך

Exploring Avraham and David's Unwavering Commitment to Hashem

In the modern world, where everyone yearns to have their ideas heard and seen, the thought of not being the center of attention can be daunting. Many strive to have the loudest voice and the biggest impact – to be at the apex of the social hierarchy. While this drive for power is embedded in our human nature, it can often lead to self-absorption and a lack of appreciation for the world around us.

Fortunately, Am Yisrael has had a plethora of leaders who combat this feature of the human experience by prioritizing Hashem's will over their own. By observing Avraham's actions during Akeidat Yitzchak and David's behavior as king, we can see the importance of looking beyond one's personal needs. We have the ability to become better people, friends, and *ovdei Hashem* by emulating their practices.

In the story of the Akeida, Avraham endures the largest *nisayon* of his lifetime – arguably the largest *nisayon* of all time. He is asked to take his only son from Sarah, who was born when Avraham was 100 years old and bring him to Har HaMoriah to offer him as a korban (Bereishit 22:1-2). Despite having waited a lifetime for Yitzchak's birth and Yitzchak's presumed role as the progenitor of Am Yisrael, Avraham rises to the occasion and wholeheartedly heeds Hashem's command.

When Hashem initially calls to Avraham, he replies with one powerful word – *hineni*, I am here. Rashi connotes this response as being: לשון ענוה הוא ולשון זמון – an illustration of Avraham's humility and readiness to fulfill the will of Hashem. Avraham's willingness does not lessen with time. The following morning, וישכם אברהם בבקר, displaying his admirable quality of *zrizut* (Rashi, 22:3). Out of his

love for Hashem, he saddles his donkey rather than delegating a servant to perform the task, and preemptively collects wood for the korban, lest he arrive at a place with an insufficient amount of wood (Rashi, Ramban *ibid.*).

On the way to Har HaMoriah, he walks together with Yitzchak, וילכו שניהם יחדו. Avraham, who knows he is on the way to sacrifice his son, walks with the same willingness and joy as Yitzchak, who is oblivious to the matter (Rashi, 22:6). Upon arriving, Avraham binds Yitzchak and, without hesitation, lifts his knife to slaughter his son, stopping only when the angel commands him to cease.

After this cathartic experience, Avraham brings a ram as a korban in place of his son and is blessed with the promise of countless descendants who will be a source of blessing to all the nations of the world. Avraham's ability to subdue his personal feelings for a greater purpose with a deep sense of urgency and commitment, serves as an inspiration to us, his promised descendants, the links in the chain of Am Yisrael.

One can discern a similar trait when examining the life of David HaMelech. In both his downfalls and his proudest moments, one particular *middah* is consistent. Rav Pincus (Nefesh Shimshon, Tehillim 7:1) tells us that what differentiates David from Shaul is David's trait of *malchut* – his unwavering ability to nullify his wants for Hashem's will – a true representation of what it means to be an *eved Hashem*.

When David is being chased by Shaul, he places his *bitachon* in Hashem. Alone in the cave, he calls out to Hashem. Despite the danger he encountered with Achish, he praises Hashem. In the midst of celebrating with the Aron, he dances enthusiastically, neglecting his personal dignity for Hashem's honor. And at the peak of military distress he calls out to Hashem, recognizing that it is better to die listening to Hashem's will than live going against it.¹

¹ See Radak, Tehillim 59:10; Malbim, Tehillim 142:3 & 34:2; Rambam, Hilchot Lulav 8:15; Yalkut Shimoni, Shmuel II, chapter 5.

Perhaps the paramount example of David's trait of *malchut* arises when he asks permission to build the Beit HaMikdash. Though Natan HaNavi originally permits David to do so, Natan soon gets a prophecy saying otherwise. Upon hearing this news, rather than protesting, David accepts his fate – understanding that it is Hashem's will that his future son Shlomo would build the Beit HaMikdash (Divrei HaYamim I 22:8-10). He maturely recognizes that Hashem can select him to participate in some things and not others, a difficult realization to grapple with (Metzudat David, Shmuel II 7:21). David's capacity to think beyond himself and turn Hashem's will into his own will enables him to be an ancestor of Mashiach.

The centrality of praising Hashem and acknowledging His ability to sustain us is a central point emphasized by David HaMelech in Tehillim, chapter 138. *יְדוּךְ ה' כָּל מַלְכֵי אֶרֶץ* – *All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord.* and *וַיִּשְׁירוּ בְּדַרְכֵי ה'* – *They shall sing of the ways of the Lord.*

אִם-אֵלֶךְ בְּקֶרֶב צָרָה תַּחֲנִינִי – *Though I walk among enemies, You preserve me in the face of my foes;* and *ה' חֲסֹדךְ לְעוֹלָם* – *Your steadfast love is eternal.* When we set aside our feelings and fulfill Hashem's will, we too will come to understand how much Hashem loves us – *ה' חֲסֹדךְ לְעוֹלָם.*

As was shown, both Avraham and David possess the commendable ability to subdue their desires and feelings and completely dedicate themselves to Hashem. They embody the phrase from Micha (6:8) *מָה ה' דּוֹרֵשׁ מִמֶּךָ*, constantly thinking about what Hashem wants from them and how they can serve Him in the most optimal way. Whether it be being *biSimcha* while embarking on a mission to sacrifice a child, or being *biSimcha* performing an unkingly dance for Hashem, Avraham and David clearly understand the verse from Tehillim (138:4) *כִּי גִדּוֹל כְּבוֹד ה'*. It is Avraham and David, subduers of their *ratzon* and followers of Hashem, who chart our path in *avodat Hashem*, laying the groundwork of Jewish history for eternity.

Influence of the Shevatim's Names

Names reflect the innermost nature of a person and can influence one's character for both good and bad. The Tanchuma (Haazinu 8) says a parent should name his child with a name worthy of a tzaddik, for sometimes a name can bring good, or bring ill. This idea shows the true importance of a name and how it can determine the trajectory of one's life.

Reuven is the oldest child of Leah. At birth, the Torah states (Bereishit 29:32): 'וַתֵּלֶךְ לֵאָה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ רְאוּבֵן כִּי אָמְרָה כִּי רָאִה ה' . בעניי כי עתה יאהבני אישי'. As Leah's eldest child, Reuven feels the need to improve his mother's situation with Yaakov. His name, "see a son" (and therefore now my husband will love me), exemplifies this idea. Reuven lives his life feeling and acting as if he has to be the one to improve his mother's situation.

Later in Bereishit (30:14) we are told : וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן בְּיָמָיו קְצִיר חֲטִים : וַיִּמְצָא דֹּדָאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיָּבֵא אוֹתָם אֶל לֵאָה אִמּוֹ . What were these *dudaim*? Seforno suggests that the *dudaim* are fertility flowers. Reuven gave Leah the flowers, hoping this might strengthen the relationship between his parents.

Another example can be seen in Bereishit (35:22): וַיְהִי בִשְׁכּוֹן יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָרֶץ הַהוּא וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת בִּלְהָה פִּילגֶשֶׁת אֲבִיו וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל . As Rashi explains, after Rachel's death, Yaakov moved his bed into Bilha's tent. Reuven felt that this was an insult to his mother and therefore moved the bed into Leah's tent.

This quality of looking and seeing the need to improve a situation, is used not only for his mother's sake but also for the sake of others around him. For example: Reuven's plan to return to save Yosef from the pit after he was thrown in. Unfortunately, when he returned, Yosef was already sold and gone.

On his deathbed, Yaakov speaks to Reuven (Bereishit 49:3): רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אֵתָהּ כָּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי יֵתֵר שָׂאת וְיֵתֵר עָז . Reuven, you are the

firstborn, the one that should have the most power but does not in the end. Called רֵאוּבֵן, he is being challenged לִרְאוֹת, to see and truly understand the consequences of his actions. He is referred to as כַּמִּים פָּחוּז, impetuous as water. Perhaps Reuven acts impulsively and sees things on the surface, without thinking them through, as in moving his father's bed and not standing up for Yosef at the outset.

When Shimon is born, Leah says (29:33): כִּי שָׁמַע ה' כִּי שָׁנְאוֹהָ. אֲנֹכִי וַיִּתֵּן לִי גַם אֶת זֶה וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ שִׁמְעוֹן. There is a clear difference in Leah's mindset between Shimon's birth and Reuven's birth. Reuven's name contains the word בֵּן. Shimon is referred to as זֶה. Another difference in the Torah's wording in the naming of Reuven and Shimon is that with Reuven the pasuk states: רָאָה ה', but with Shimon it says שָׁמַע ה'. What is the significance of the change in words?

The Malbim explains that until Reuven was born, Leah hadn't fully expressed her feelings. After the birth, she assumed that the relationship would improve. When she saw that it hadn't, she cried out to Hashem and now acknowledges that Hashem heard her tefillot.

Shimon's name reflects the situation at home between Leah and Yaakov. He might have been raised in an atmosphere of not feeling fully accepted. This drives him to become the most prominent defender of Leah's family, as seen in the story of Dina and Shechem. Shimon is willing to kill an entire city to protect his family's dignity.

In Bamidbar (25:14) we are told, וְשֵׁם אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמוּכָה אֲשֶׁר הוּכָה אֶת הַמְּדִינִית וְזָמְרִי בֶן סִלּוּא נָשִׂיא בֵּית אָב לְשִׁמְעוֹנִי. Zimri is one of the only descendants of Shimon we read about in the Torah. He possesses the harmful zeal that Shimon had. Members of his tribe come complaining that they are being judged and punished for their actions with the sin of *Baal Peor*. Instead of following Moshe's instructions, Zimri publicly and unashamedly rebels, attempting to defend his fellow tribesmen despite their terrible sins.

Leah's third child is Levi. The pasuk states (29:34): ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר עתה הפעם ילווה אישי אלי כי ילדתי לו שלשה בנים על כן קרא שמו לוי. The naming of Levi shows that Leah's feelings have changed. She hopes Yaakov will be with her now, since she has three children. The Chizkuni states that Leah is outnumbered. She has three kids but only two hands, so she needs Yaakov's help now. Leah hopes that through Levi's birth, Yaakov will have to spend more time with her and subsequently come to treat and love her better.

Even though the shadow of a sad mother yearning for her husband's love envelops them, Levi is able to make a turn for the better while Shimon stays stagnant. Both *shevatim* have anger that is used to destroy the entire city of Shechem when Dina is taken, but only Levi is able to channel his passion into something great. Great enough to become the future leaders of Bnei Yisrael.

Rashi comments: קרא שמו לוי. בכלם כתיב ותקרא, וזה כתב בו קרא ... ששלח הקב"ה גבריאל והביאו לפניו וקרא לו שם זה, ונתן לו כ"ד מתנות כהונה, ועל שם שלוהו במתנות קראו לוי. When Levi is named, the pasuk reports this in passive language – he was named Levi – as opposed to his older brothers whose naming was directly attributed to their mother. Rashi explains that Levi was not actually named by his mother. Rather, the angel Gavriel came down from *shamayim* and gave Levi his name alluding to the twenty-four gifts given to kohanim, future descendants of Levi. Perhaps, this is the reason why Levi was able to change and Shimon did not. He had extra *siyata d'shmaya*, through the naming by Gavriel.

In Shemot (32:26) we see that shevet Levi was able to use their zealotry to serve Hashem: ויעמד משה בשער המחנה ויאמר מי לה' אלי. They followed Moshe's instructions to kill all the men who sinned in *Cheit HaEgel*. They were able to channel this passion into doing what was right.

Leah's next child is Yehudah. The Torah tells us (29:35): ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר הפעם אודה את ה' על כן קראה שמו יהודה ותעמוד מלדת.

The birth of Yehudah is a turning point for Leah. She finally is at a place where she can thank Hashem and show appreciation for her son. Leah has given birth to more than the average share of Yaakov's children, providing her with a sense of belonging in her marriage.

Unlike Reuven, Shimon, and Levi, who felt a need to protect their mother and defend the immediate family, Yehudah was born without the same constraints, enabling him to be a ruler for all. We see this leadership in a number of places. Firstly, the *melucha* comes from the tribe of Yehuda. Secondly, Yehudah is the one who guarantees Binyamin's safety when they bring him down to Egypt (as per Yosef's request). Additionally, when the goblet is planted in Binyamin's bag, Yehuda is the one who steps forward to save Binyamin. Additionally, he has the ability to admit when he is wrong, an important quality of a true leader. In the story of Yehuda and Tamar, he admits (38:26) צדקה ממני. This quality lives on in his descendants as well, as is evident through David. David admits that he sinned regarding Batsheva (Shmuel II 12:13).

Dan is Rachel's first child, albeit through her maidservant Bilha. The Torah tells us (30:6-7): ותהר בלהה ותלד ליעקב בן. ותאמר רחל: דנני אלקים וגם שמע בקולי ויתן לי בן על כן קראה שמו דן. Rachel is expressing that Hashem has heard her plea and given her a son but uses the phrase דנני אלקים. Rashi comments: דנני וחייבני. דנני וחכני. He judged me, declared me guilty, and then judged me and declared me innocent. It seems like there is change; first negative and then positive, hinting at the ability to take a negative situation and turn it into a positive one.

Dan is the first child to be born "from" Rachel, and one could infer that until Rachel had Yosef, Dan was destined to be the chosen son, the one who would inherit and be the favorite. However, when Yosef was born, this special treatment of Dan fades away and he is brushed aside. Later on, when the land is divided up between the *shevatim*, Dan is initially not given land near the other sons of the maidservants, but near Yehudah and Binyamin. Unable

to fully conquer the land assigned to them, they venture forth on their own and conquer an area near their brother Naftali.

However, in *Birkat Yaakov* (49:16), Dan's destiny is described as: **כל ישראל יהיו כאחד עמו** **ידן** **ידן עמו כאחד שבטי ישראל**. Rashi comments: **עמו, ואת כולם ידן, ועל שמשון נבא נבואה זו**. The tribes of Israel will all be united with him. Despite the initial loneness, he will fight and defend all of Bnei Yisrael.

Bilha subsequently gives birth to Naftali. The Torah tells us (30:8-9): **ותאמר רחל נפתולי אלקים נפתלתי עם אחותי גם יכולתי ותקרא שמו נפתלי**. Rachel chooses the name Naftali because she has “waged with her sister and prevailed.” This language of “prevailing” is very similar to the term used when the name Yisrael is given to Yaakov later in Bereishit (32:29). Both struggled and prevailed, highlighting a connection between Naftali and Yaakov. When Yaakov blesses Naftali at the end of his life he says “Naftali is like a deer who delivers beautiful sayings” (49:21). These beautiful sayings are ones of Torah, showing that Naftali was a very Torah-oriented person. So too, Yaakov is described (25:27) as **איש תם יושב אהלים**, someone who sits in tents, studying Torah (25:27). This trait of loving Torah was clearly something that Yaakov passed on to Naftali.

Rashi comments on the choice of the name Naftali: **נפתולי אלקים, נתעקשתי והפציתי פצירות ונפתולים הרבה למקום, להיות שוה לאחותי**. Naftali takes this internal quality of being someone who can “battle” with another with the power of Tefillah and become a **נפתולי**, one who offers words of praise.

Gad is Yaakov's next child, born to Zilpah. The Torah tells us (30:10-11): **ותלד זלפה שפחת לאה ליעקב בן: ותאמר לאה (בגד) [בא גד] ותקרא: את שמו גד**. Leah names him Gad because she is happy that through Zilpah she is able to have children again. The words **בא גד** means luck has come.

In a different approach, the Chizkuni states that another explanation for his name is “betray.” **ותאמר לאה בגד לשון בגידה אע”פ שנתתי לו שפחתי לא היה לו לשכב עמה מאחר שילדתי לו ארבעה בנים ואע”פ שבא אל שפחת רחל, לרחל לא היו לה בנים**. Leah feels betrayed by Yaakov

insofar as he agrees to marry her maidservant. She was hoping that he would refuse when she suggested the idea to him. Does this reason behind his name influence Gad's decision to choose to live in עבר הירדן?

Zilpah's second son is Asher. The Torah tells us (30:13): ותאמר לאה באשרי כי אשרוני בנות ותקרא את שמו אשר. The name Asher means fortunate. Leah felt very fortunate when he was born and therefore Asher spends his life knowing that he is fortunate.

Later in Bereishit (49:20), Yaakov blesses Asher: מאשר שמנה. לחמו והוא יתן מעדני מלך. From the territory of the shevet of Asher will come the best foods and he will provide the king's delicacies. Asher has the ability to take what made him "fortunate" and share it with others.

When Leah gives birth to Yissachar, the Torah tells us (30:18) ותאמר לאה נתן אלקים שכרי אשר נתתי שפחתי לאישי ותקרא שמו יששכר, Leah names him Yissachar because Hashem has given her a reward. In the future, shevet Yissachar will sit and learn, while Zevulun goes out and supports them. The reward Leah is talking about could be the reward of Torah. Since Yissachar grew up with the idea that he was special, he was able to become a great Torah scholar. Similarly, in *Birkat Yaakov*, the pasuk states (49:14): יששכר חמר גרם רבץ בין המשפטים. Rashi explains that this is not necessarily a physical quality. Rather, חמור בעל עצמות סובל עול תורה כחמור חזק שמטעינים אותו. משאוי כבד. Yissachar bears the yoke of the Torah like a strong donkey that one loads with a heavy burden. Yissachar will earn great reward for his Torah learning, but only because of his persistence and great effort. Sitting and learning is not a passive act. It is hard work and only through hard work can one achieve one's *schar*.

Leah's final son is Zevulun. At his birth (30:20), Leah states: ותאמר לאה זבדני אלקים זבד טוב הפעם יזבלני אישי כי ילדתי לו ששה בנים ותקרא את שמו זבולון. Zevulun's name comes from the root "dwelling place." Interestingly, we know that in the future (Bereishit 49:13): As depicted in

Birkat Yaakov, shevet Zevulun will live by the seashore. They will be professional sailor merchants who will successfully support shevet Yissachar who will be Torah learners. While shevet Zevulun will be constantly on the move for their profession, this will provide financial stability and a place to live for themselves and shevet Yissachar.

After a long wait, Rachel gives birth to her first child, Yosef. The Torah tells us (30:23-24): ותהר ותלד בן ותאמר אסף אלקים את חרפתי. ותקרא את שמו יוסף לאמר יוסף ה' לי בן אחר. The name Yosef comes from the word *asaf*, which means to gather, similar to אסף, referring to a harvest. These words might be a reference to the dreams that Yosef will have in the future.

In Yosef's first dream (37:7), he reports: והנה אנחנו מאלמים אלמים. בתוך השדה והנה קמה אלמתי וגם נצבה והנה תסבנה אלמותיכם ותשתחווני לאלמתי. Yosef describes how his brother's bundles of wheat will "gather" around him. Later, Yosef brings a blessing to Potiphar's estate, both in the house and in the field. (39:5) Because Yosef is able to interpret Pharaoh's dream, he is put in charge of the harvests of plenty.

When Rachel names Yosef there are two, seemingly opposite, reasons behind his name. First אסף אלקים את חרפתי, Hashem removed Rachel's shame. The next pasuk says: יסף ה' לי בן אחר. In this context the root אסף means add. It is as if Yosef was born with opposing traits.

As a young boy Yosef was oblivious to his brothers' jealousy and told them his dreams, not noticing or caring about his brothers' feelings. On the other hand, the Torah tells us (37:2): והוא נער. את בני בלהה ואת בני זלפה נשי אביו ויבא יוסף את דבתם רעה אל אביהם. The Midrash Tanchuma (Vayeishev 7) explains: אמר לאביו שהן נוהגין בבני בלהה וזלפה מנהג עבדים וקורין אותן עבדים ואני נוהג בהן מנהג אחיה. Yosef cares for the sons of Bilhah and Zilpa, paying attention to their feelings. Later on, Yosef, the second in command to Pharaoh, humbly forgives his brothers.

Yosef is described in *Birkat Yaakov* (49:24): ותשב באיתן קשתו ויפזו זרועי ידיו מידי אביר יעקב משם רועה אבן ישראל. Yosef's power was established when he became second in command to Pharaoh. He could have easily used that power to take revenge on his brothers, but that wasn't the case. He was רעה אבן ישראל, always taking care of the Jewish people. He exercised both power and sensitivity, seemingly opposite qualities, at the same time.

Rachel's final son, Binyamin, is born in tragic circumstances. The Torah tells us (35:18): ויהי בצאת נפשה כי מתה ותקרא שמו בן אוני. ואביו קרא לו בנימין. Rachel named her child "*ben oni*" the son of my sorrow, because of her imminent demise during childbirth. The *Daat Zekeinim* says: על שם מעשה דפלגש בגבעה שעתיד לצאת עד שם. Rachel was able to see what would happen in the future with *pilegesh b'Givah* (Shoftim, chapters 19-20) and the ensuing civil war with shevet Binyamin, bringing much sorrow to Bnei Yisrael.

Yaakov, however, calls him Binyamin. Rashi explains: בן ימים, שנוולד לעת זקנתו, the son of my old age. As the youngest child, Binyamin is cherished and protected at all costs, coddled by both his father and brothers. Yaakov did not want Binyamin to grow up with the notion that his birth was a sorrowful event. Unlike Leah's eldest children, Yaakov changes Binyamin's name. This new name could also mean the son of my strength, showing high hopes for Binyamin.

One descendant of Binyamin is Yonatan, the son of Shaul. Yonatan had every right to be jealous of David. Yet, Yonatan loved David instead of hating him. This is also true for Binyamin. He had every right to be jealous of the favoritism that Yaakov held for Yosef, his older brother. Yet, Binyamin does not feel that way. Even when Yosef is reunited with the family and returns to his place as his father's favorite, Binyamin does not object.

As is seen by each of the shevatim, names that are given at birth hold the destiny for each and every person. The Chidah (sefer Yosef Ometz) states that even an argument over a child's name can affect him negatively. How much more so can a name with a

beautiful and powerful meaning influence the child for the good, sending him off into the world on the right trajectory.

Eishet Chayil and Women in Tanach

Eishet Chayil, composed by Shlomo Hamelech, is a meaningful and symbolic song found in the last chapter of Mishlei. In line with its flowery language and ambiguous nature, this *shira* has many possible interpretations, including a reference to Shabbat, the Torah, or Ruth.

Midrash Mishlei, however, has a different view. Each verse connects to a different woman in Tanach. The first five verses of Eishet Chayil represent the four Imahot.

מכרה אשר חיל מי ימצא ורחוק מפנינים מכרה refers to Sarah Imeinu. This highlights how Hashem matches women of valor with men of valor. Since Avraham and Sarah held the same standard of kindness and tzedakah, Hashem paired them together. (Similarly, Naama was on the same spiritual level as her husband, Noah, and therefore was also saved from the Mabul.)

בטח בה לב בעלה ושלל לא יחסר. Avraham placed his confidence in Sarah, and achieved wealth as it says: בעבורה (Bereishit 12:16).

גמלתהו טוב ולא רע כל ימי חייה corresponds to Rivka, who gave comfort to Yitzchak when his mother, Sarah, passed away. The Torah relates: ויביאה יצחק האהלה שרה אמו ויקח את רבקה ותהי לו לאשה (Bereishit 24:67).

דרשה צמר ופשתים ותעש בחפץ כפיה refers to the story of Leah giving Rachel her Dudaim, and in return, Yaakov will spend the night with her. Leah goes out to meet Yaakov in the field and greets him pleasantly: אלי תבוא כי שכר שכרתיך (Bereishit 30:16). Consequently, Leah merited to be the matriarch of kings and prophets.

היתה כאניות סוחר ממרחק תביא לחמה refers to Rachel who was ashamed of her childlessness, until she finally merited having a

son. Yosef was considered a “merchant ship,” filled with all the good in the world. During the years of famine, Yosef merited sustaining the world.

ותתן טרף לביתה וחק לנערותיה refers to Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh; an Egyptian who “converted to Judaism,” Batya cared for Moshe, saving him from her own father’s command to kill all of the baby boys and merited entering Gan Eden while still alive.

כי כרם ה' צבקות בית ישראל is a reference to Yocheved, Moshe’s mother. Moshe was the greatest leader of all time and is considered to be equivalent to all of Israel. The Jewish nation is referred to as a vineyard by Yeshayahu (5:7):

חגרה בעוז מתניה ותאמץ זרועותיה. This pasuk is a reference to Miriam, Moshe’s sister. The Midrash explains: Before Moshe was born, Miriam said, “My mother will give birth to a son who will be the savior of Israel.” When the Pharaonic decrees harshened after Moshe’s birth, Yocheved had to remove baby Moshe from her home, placing him in a basket on the Nile. At that point Amram became very skeptical of Miriam’s initial prophecy, challenging its validity. Miriam, however, held steadfast to her faith, and in the end, was proven correct.

טעמה כי טוב סחרה לא יכבה בלילה נרה refers to Chana who tasted the beauty of tefilla. She merited having a child who was equated with Moshe and Aharon (Ta’anit 5b) and would bring light to Israel: ונר אלקים (Shmuel 1 3:3).

ידיה שלחה בכישור וכפיה תמכו פלך is a reference to Yael who killed Sisra with a peg and the force of her hand, rather than using a weapon of war, a possible violation of the prohibition of “begged ish.” From here we see Yael’s tremendous standard of modesty.

כפה פרשה לעני וידיה שלחה לאביון corresponds to the widow in Tzarfat, who provided bread and water to Eliyahu. Even though she was poor and barely had any food, she was gracious enough to supply him with what he needed.

שנים refers to Rachav. When Bnei Yisrael came to destroy Yericho, she was not worried for the safety of her household. Prior to the attack, she had helped Pinchas and Calev, and in return, they gave her a sign to show the soldiers not to attack her house. That sign was to hang a crimson string (חוט השני) in the window.

לבושה מרבדים עשתה לה שש וארגמן corresponds to Batsheva, wife of David HaMelech and mother of Shlomo Hamelech. Shlomo was adorned in royal clothing, similar to שש וארגמן, and merited ruling “from one end of the world to the other.”

נודע בשערים בעלה בשבתו עם זקני ארץ refers to Michal, the second of David's wives to be referenced in Eishet Chayil. Michal saves David's life when her father Shaul was seeking to kill him.

עשתה סדין ותמכור וחגור נתנה לכנעני corresponds to the mother of Shimshon, Tzlelponit. In Sefer Shoftim, an angel tells her she will no longer be barren but she must keep the laws of Nazirut. She merits having a child who is a Nazir. Shimshon becomes a Shofet and saves the Jewish people from the Plishtim. The word סדין hints to the time that Shimshon gives the Plishtim a riddle, with linen as the reward if it is solved. ונתתי לכם שלושים סדינים ושלושים חליפות בגדים (Shoftim 14:12).

עזו והדר לבושה ותשחק ליום אחרון: This verse is linked to the story of Elisheva, Aharon's wife. Four great things happened to her relatives over the course of one day. Her husband Aharon becomes the Kohen Gadol. Her brother Nachshon becomes a Nasi (of shevet Yehuda). Her brother-in-law Moshe has the status of a king, and her sons become Kohanim. Her joy, however, is marred by the tragic death of her two older sons, Nadav and Avihu. Nevertheless she maintains her emunah and pride in her relatives despite her grief.¹

פתחה בחכמה ותורת חסד על לשונה refers to Serach bat Asher. Where do we see her wisdom? In Sefer Shmuel II (chapter 20) the

¹ See Parsha in Pink (Parshat Shemini).

Navi tells us the story of Sheva ben Bichri, who led a rebellion against David HaMelech. When he retreated to the city of Avel Beit Maacha, Yoav laid siege to the city and prepared to destroy it. An **אשה חכמה** calls out from the city and urges Yoav not to destroy the city.² Instead the townspeople kill Sheva and the city is saved. (An alternate explanation might be referencing a much earlier story of Serach. She was the one who gently broke the news to her grandfather Yaakov, that Yosef was still alive.³)

וְלִחָם עֲצֻלוֹת לֹא תֵאָכֵל corresponds to the wife of the righteous Ovadiah. After her husband's death, a creditor threatens to take her sons as slaves. She asks Elisha for help. He instructs her how to miraculously turn the small quantity of oil she owns into a vast amount, enough to pay off the debt to her creditor and save her children from a life of idol worship in the palace of Achav (Melachim II chapter 4).

קָמוּ בְנֵיהּ וַיֵּאָשְׁרוּהָ בַעֲלָהּ וַיְהִלְהָ refers to the Shunamit woman, known as a Great Woman. She graciously provides Elisha with food and lodging. In return she is blessed with a son. When her son suddenly dies, it is Elisha who is granted the power by Hashem to resurrect him (Melachim II chapter 4).

The last three lines of Eishet Chayil are connected to Rut: **רְבוֹת בָּנוֹת עָשׂוּ חַיִּל וְאֵת עֲלִיתָ עַל כּוֹלֶנָה** references Rut who is referred to by Boaz as an **אִשֶּׁת חַיִּל** (Rut 3:11). The next line reads: **שָׁקַר הָחֵן וְהַבֵּל הַיּוֹפִי**: **אִשָּׁה יְרֵאת ה'** היא תתהלל עִמָּךְ עַמִּי, praising Rut for willing to leave behind her family and wealth in order to join her mother-in-law and convert, fully accepting upon herself a life of Torah and mitzvot: **וְאֶלְקִיךָ אֵלֶיךָ**.

תָּנוּ לָהּ מִפְּרֵי יְדֶיהָ וַיְהִלְהָ בְּשַׁעְרֵיהֶם מַעֲשֶׂיהָ: Because of Rut's self sacrifice and righteousness, she becomes the great grandmother of David Hamelech, the great composer of Tehillim, the ultimate words of song and praise to the Master of the World.

² See Radak (20:16) that the wise woman is Serach Bat Asher.

³ See mayimachronim.com.

Each of the women listed here is full of valor and merit being connected to a central part of our Friday night tefillot, serving as role models to the Nishei Chayil of our days and continuing to transmit the timeless teachings of great Biblical women.

“The Giving Tree”:

How Avraham’s *Eshel* Shines Light on Shaul’s Life

The word *eshel* comes up three times in all of Tanach. It was first introduced by Avraham in Bereishit 21:33. The verse states: ויטע אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא שם בשם ה' קל עולם (ibid.). On a *pshat* level, the *eshel* – a tree – is planted, and immediately after, Avraham calls out in the name of Hashem, thus making it into a symbol of spreading Hashem’s name across the world.

On a *drash* level, the tree represents chessed. Rashi provides two ideas of what the *eshel* is: a tree that provided fruit for Avraham’s guests or an inn where Avraham would provide guests with food and lodging. Ultimately, through Avraham’s chessed, the guests would come to recognize Hashem.

The *eshel* comes up in only two other places in all of Tanach, both in Shmuel Aleph. In 22:6 it says: וישמע שאול כי נודע דוד ואנשים אשר איתו ושואל יושב בגבעה תחת האשל ברמה וחניתו בידו וכל עבדיו נצבים עליו. Later, in 31:13, the Navi relates: ויקחו את עצמותיהם ויקברו תחת האשל ביבשה ויצומו שבעת ימים.

The use of the letter “*he*” explains that this is *the eshel*, Avraham’s *eshel*, the one that represents calling out in the name of Hashem and chessed. These two stories relate to the idea of the original *eshel* contextually and thematically. All three stories have in common a relationship with the Plishtim.

In Avraham’s case, he plants the *eshel* tree in Beer Sheva, in the land of the Plishtim, where he also resides. In Shaul’s case, he is in the midst of fighting a war with the Plishtim when he eventually is killed and subsequently buried under the *eshel* tree.

Thematically, the stories all deal with the idea of chessed. Shaul’s original encounter with the *eshel* is introduced when David runs away from Shaul and seeks help from the Kohanim of Nov.

The Kohanim of Nov respond by acting with chessed and give David the *Lechem HaPanim* so he would have food and Goliath's sword for protection. By doing so, they are repaying David's chessed that he did for Am Yisrael when he killed Goliath, and continued to fight their battles.

After sitting under the *eshel* tree (chapter 23), Shaul responds as the anti-chessed paradigm by killing off the *Anshei Chessed*, the Kohanim of Nov. There is one other encounter with the *eshel*, when the people of Yavesh Gilad highlight the motif of the *eshel*, performing the ultimate *chedded shel emet* and bury Shaul under the *eshel* tree.

Shaul's relationship with Yavesh Gilad and the chessed that permeates it is emphasized in Shmuel I chapter 11. Shaul's chessed of saving Yavesh Gilad is entirely built on Hashem – the name of Hashem is clearly emphasized. The question is, what went wrong in the meantime?

In the war with Amalek in chapter 15, Shaul exemplifies *too* much chessed and allows Agag to remain alive. This warped perception of chessed ultimately causes him to lose the kingship. Once Shaul loses the kingship and David is officially anointed, Shaul loses the spirit of Hashem that was with him.

This shows how chessed and *shem Hashem* are connected (as seen in the *eshel* tree). When Shaul's perception of chessed was exaggerated and needed to be trimmed, the spirit of Hashem couldn't rest on him as before.

When Shaul kills off the Kohanim of Nov, he is killing off the people whose job is to call out in the name of Hashem. The fact that these Kohanei Hashem are also *Anshei Chessed* (as seen in their chessed to David) shows the connection between these two traits and how being a representative of Hashem leads to a life of chessed.

However, Shaul has become the antithesis of calling out in the name of Hashem by killing those whose primary job is to do so (the Kohanim). The idea of Shaul killing the *Anshei Hashem* (who are also *Anshei Chessed*) ties into this characteristic of being anti-chessed.

Shaul's original story with Yavesh Gilad is all about his potential as a rising king. However, once he loses his kingship, he seems to also lose his potential. Through the emphasis of *eshel* and Yavesh Gilad, the verses highlight Shaul's best and lowest moments at the same time. He's being paid back for the chessed he did saving Yavesh Gilad with the ultimate chessed of *chessed shel emet*.

On the one hand, we see Shaul in a positive light, as a role model, using the message of the *eshel* as it is meant to be, a sign of chessed. At the same time, we can't help but be reminded of his worst moment, when he kills the Kohanei Nov just a few verses after sitting under an *eshel* tree.

Before this final chapter of Shaul's life, it would be easy to remember Shaul as a failure and forget the reason he was king in the first place. This perek reminds us that Shaul was a complex character. He may have made some fatal mistakes that affected generations going forward, but underneath all of this, we need to also focus on the greatness that lies within. There is a reason that Shmuel introduces Shaul to the nation as: כִּי אֵין כְּמֹהוּ בְּכָל הָעָם (Shmuel I 10:24).

What's in a Name?

Naval HaCarmeli

Shmuel I chapter 25 begins with the statement that Shmuel died. David is in the Paran desert, running away from Shaul. He sends a polite message to Naval, a wealthy man shearing his sheep in the Carmel, asking for food for himself and his men. David reminds Naval of the kindness that they have done in the past, watching over his servants and sheep. Naval, however, responds harshly in a degrading manner: **מִי דוֹד וְאִי בֶן יִשְׂרָאֵל רַבּוֹ עֲבָדִים הַמִּתְפָּרְצִים אִישׁ מִפְּנֵי אֲדֹנָיו** (Shmuel I 25:10). David is infuriated and decides that Naval no longer deserves to live. On his way to kill Naval, Avigail, Naval's wife, reasons with David and saves his life. After ten days, Hashem kills Naval and Avigail later marries David.

What is the significance of the name Naval? Was his wickedness shaped by birth or by choice? Through deep examination of the story we can learn lessons and the answers to these questions.

As it is known, names have significance. It is said in the name of the Ari z"l that when parents choose a name for their child, they are given a level of *ruach hakodesh*, and essentially the name that they give their child possesses the essence of who they become. So, clearly there must be some significance to Naval's name.

Rav Amnon Bazak, in his lectures on Naval¹, explains that already in the beginning of the *perek*, the two central characters are described in an extreme contrast. The pasuk (25:3) states that the man's name was Naval, and his wife's name was Avigail. The woman was intelligent and beautiful, but the man, a Calebite, was a hard man and an evildoer. Throughout the rest of the chapter, Naval will be portrayed in a negative light.

¹ Lecture 47: Chapter 25 | Naval the Carmelite Part 1 by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, hatanakh.com/sites/default/files/47.pdf.

David turns to Naval in the most benevolent way, and in return receives harsh words. Naval's total lack of acknowledgement of the help given by David was villainous, exactly as Avigail interpreted his name: Naval is his name, and *nevala* is with him (25:25).

The meaning of the word *naval* denotes ungratefulness: "Is this how you repay Hashem, [you're] a people who are *naval* and unwise" (Devarim 32:6). The Ramban explains: "One who practices free benevolence is called *nadiv* (generous), and one who requites evil to one who had acted benevolently toward him is called *naval*. Therefore, it was said about Naval the Carmelite, 'Naval is his name, and *nevala* is with him'." David had been compassionate toward Naval in his time of need, yet, Naval refused to repay David for that kindness and instead his response towards David's messengers was harsh.

However, the explanation of Naval's name does not cease here. The Abarbanel comments (25:2) that Naval was not affected by Shmuel's death, nor did he mourn over it, and that was the reason that he died: ולא נצטער על מיתת שמואל ויעל על גוזזי צאנו בשמחה וגיל ולא התאבל על אדם כשר ולכן נענש ומת. Naval had no understanding of compassion and felt no pain for people, even someone as great as Shmuel.

Furthermore, the Malbim (25:3) emphasizes the idea that due to Naval's harsh nature and his evil behavior he had no hope to be a refined human being: אבל מצד שהיה קשה בטבע ורע המעלל לא היתה בו תקוה.

The Radak (25:3) explains that in reality Naval was not the name that he was given from birth; rather, it was a name allocated to him by others due to the actions and decisions he made throughout his life: כי נבל זה לא היה שמו שקראו לו אבותיו אלא מרוב גריעות היו קוראין אותו בני אדם נבל.

There is an idea expressed by the Ramban (Vayikra 19:2) that if not for the mitzvah of תהיו קדושים, a person can technically keep halacha and still be considered a *naval b'rishut haTorah*. This is embodied by a person who acts disgustingly and disgracefully even

within the boundaries of halacha. Naval exemplified this attribute as well. Naval later has an excessive feast and becomes unnecessarily intoxicated, a clear example of *naval b'rishut haTorah*.

Naval is described as a כלבי. The Abarbanel comments on that verse (25:3) that whilst the simple explanation of these words is that Naval was from the family of Calev, Naval's nature was like a dog: מטבע הכלב ומתכונתו אשר ישנאו לבעלי מינם ולא יניחום לאכול ממה שבבית. Naval's instincts were animalistic and he was never willing to share with others even if he had more than enough for himself. The Radak suggests that the word כלבי is כ-לבי; that he acted towards others as he felt in his heart: תוכו כברו וברו כתוכו, evil through and through.

Lastly, Rav Amnon Bazak compares Naval to another devious character in Tanach, due to the similarity of their names, Lavan HaArami. Not only are their names palindromes of each other but their stories share many other similarities – notably that both quarrels reach their climax while the sheep are being shorn: “Lavan went to shear his sheep and Rachel stole her father's *terafim*. And Yaakov outwitted Lavan the Aramean, by not telling him that he fled” (Bereshit 31:19-20). Comparably, “David heard in the wilderness that Naval was shearing his sheep” (Shmuel I 25:4). Furthermore, in both cases, Hashem intervenes only after ten days have passed: “And it was told to Lavan on the third day that Yaakov had fled. And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him a seven day's journey. And Hashem came to Lavan the Aramean in a dream at night” (Bereshit 31:22-24). Which is paralleled in, “About ten days after Hashem struck Naval and he died” (Shmuel I 25:38).

Clearly, both characters have many commonalities which further emphasize Naval's wicked nature, as we know how cunning Lavan was. Rav Bazak goes even further and expresses the idea that actually Naval was worse than Lavan. Why? Because although Lavan tricked Yaakov many times when paying him for his work, at least he understood the value in appreciating a person for the work that he has done for you. This understanding is totally absent in

Naval's story when he does not repay the kindness that David did for him and his workers.

To conclude, whether Naval was wicked by nature or by his own choices, he became his name in a very real way. For ourselves, we can learn from Naval's negative traits and reverse them to make positive ones: treat leaders with respect and reverence, and repay kindness done for us. And, of course, understand the significance of a name.

The Story of Naomi:

From Riches to Rags to Royalty

Naomi plays a central role in the narrative of Megillat Ruth. The basic story is well known. Naomi lives in Beit Lechem, is married to Elimelech and has two children: Machlon and Kilyon. A famine breaks out in the land, and the family moves to Moav. In Moav, Elimelech dies, and Machlon and Kilyon marry two Moabite women: Ruth and Orpah. Machlon and Kilyon then die, leaving Naomi a childless widow.

When she hears that the famine has ended, she decides to move back to Beit Lechem and urges Orpah and Ruth to stay in Moav. Orpah decides to stay, while Ruth follows Naomi. Arriving back home, Naomi suggests that her name should be changed to Mara, meaning bitter, because Hashem had dealt bitterly with her.

In Beit Lechem, Ruth goes to glean in the fields of Boaz, a relative of the late Elimelech, who Naomi thinks could marry Ruth and have the potential to restore the family line. Naomi tells Ruth to go seek out Boaz, which she does, and he agrees to marry her. They have a son named Oved, who becomes the grandfather of David HaMelech.

When analyzing the story of Naomi, a number of questions arise.

Why is she the only one of her family who does not die? Did she not sin like her husband and sons?

Why did she want to go back to Eretz Yisrael when the famine was over? Wasn't she aware of the potential disgrace?

Why did she at first dissuade Ruth and Orpah from coming with her? And why did Naomi subsequently change her mind and allow Ruth to come with her?

Does the way Naomi deals with Ruth show the Jewish people the rules of how to deal with potential converts?

The answers to some of these questions can be found in Rashi's commentary. The Megillah states (1:3): **וימת אלימלך איש נעמי**. Rashi explains that Elimelech was her husband and ruled over her (everything that she had was his), and so the punishment affected only Elimelech directly and not Naomi. A few pesukim later, the Megillah (1:7) says: **ותצא מן המקום אשר היתה שמה**. Rashi asks why is it necessary to say that she left the place where she had been? He answers that the Megillah is informing us how the leaving of a righteous person from a place is conspicuous and leaves behind a great sense of loss. Evidently, even when she was far from the Land of Israel and undergoing great suffering, Naomi still maintained her *tzidkut*.

Later (1:16), Ruth says that she will stay with Naomi and do as she does. Rashi comments that the Sages learn from here that when someone wants to convert to Judaism, they have to be informed of the many restrictions that we are bound by, to see if after that, they still want to become Jewish. (Included in these halachot: *techum Shabbat*, *yichud*, *avodah zara*, *capital punishments*). The Midrash Rabba elaborates (2:2):

ותאמר רות אל תפגעי בי לעזובך לשוב מאחרריך (רות א, טז), מהו אל תפגעי בי, אמרה לה לא תחטא עלי, לא תסבין פגעיך מני, לעזובך לשוב מאחרריך, מכל מקום דעתי להתגייר, אלא מוטב על ידך ולא על ידי אחרת. כיון ששמעה נעמי כך התחילה סודרת לה הלכות גרים, אמרה לה בתי אין דרכן של בנות ישראל לילך לבתי תיאטראות ולבתי קרקסאות של גוים. אמרה לה, אל אשר תלכי אלך. אמרה לה בתי אין דרכן של ישראל לדור בבית שאין שם מזווה. אמרה לה, באשר תליני אלין עמך עמי, אלו עונשין ואזהרות. ואלוקין אלוין, שאר מצוות.

Two pesukim later, the Megillah says: **ותרא כי מתאמצת היא ללכת אתה**. When Naomi realized how determined Ruth was to go with her, she remained silent. Rashi comments that with a prospective convert, we do not overburden them or act too meticulously with them.

The following pasuk states: **ותלכנה שתיהם עד בואנה בית לחם**. Rashi comments on the first two words: **אמר רבי אבהו, בא וראה כמה**

חביבים הגרים לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא. כיון שנתנה דעתה להתגייר השוה אותה הכתוב לנעמי. Once she decided to convert, the Megillah compares the Moabite Ruth to the righteous Naomi.

In the same pasuk: ותהם כל העיר עליהן ותאמרנה הווא נעמי. Rashi says they couldn't believe that this was the same Naomi that in the past would have nice wagons and mules when she travelled. "Have you seen what happened to her because she left Eretz Yisrael?" Naomi used to have so much wealth, and now she has nothing.

Naomi then (1:20-21) asks everyone to call her "Mara" because Hashem made her life bitter. She continues: אני מלאה הלכתי וריקם השיבני ה' למה תקראנה לי נעמי וה' ענה בי ושקי הרע לי. Rashi explains that she went away with so much wealth, and she still had her sons (or that she was pregnant). On the words ענה, Rashi writes that Hashem testified against Naomi that she sinned or that the Divine will of Hashem humbled her. Evidently, Naomi was unsure of her own righteousness, believing that, at least in Hashem's eyes, she sinned.

We see a shift in Naomi's faith (2:20) when Boaz goes out of his way to treat Ruth with kindness, creating a potential for her family line to be restored. ותאמר נעמי לכלתה ברוך הוא לה' אשר לא עזב חסדו את. החיים ואת המתים ותאמר לה נעמי קרוב לנו האיש מגאלנו הוא hope is restored.

Naomi instructs Ruth regarding her rendezvous with Boaz (3:3): ורחצת וסכת ושמת שמלתיך עליך וירדת הגרן אל תודעי לאיש עד כלתו לאכל ולשתות. Rashi comments that with each phrase, Naomi was emphasizing the need to strengthen her conversion to *yahadut*.

In his book *Flames of Faith: An Introduction to Chassidish Thought*, Rabbi Zev Reichman sums up the story of Ruth's conversion, with the help of Naomi, with the following words: "Naomi's departure from Beit Lechem is part of a divine plan to bring Ruth, who possesses a Jewish soul, back to her rightful place within the Jewish nation. The Book of Ruth, traditionally read during Shavuot, parallels Ruth's story of loyalty and conversion with the Jewish people's acceptance of the Torah."

The Megillah ends with a family tree. Starting with Peretz, Yehudah's son, ten generations are listed including Boaz, ending with the birth of David Hamelech. Naomi almost gave up hope for her future, but the steadfastness and sincerity of Ruth, restored her faith. She saw the potential in her daughter-in-law, helped her convert, and played the role of shadchan with Boaz. The family line was restored, planting the seeds of *Malchut Beit David*.

Taking a Step in the Right Direction

From the moment Moshe is born, he is the central figure in the Torah's narrative. Moshe is *Rabban shel Yisrael*, taking Bnei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim, giving them the Torah, and leading them for forty years in the desert until they are ready to enter Eretz Canaan.

Rav Soloveitchik writes in 'The Lonely Man of Faith' that "G-d summoned Adam the first to advance steadily, Adam the second to retreat." Similarly, Moshe lived a life of pursuit and retreat. There are two key moments that exemplify this dual aspect.

The first occurs when Hashem initially appears to Moshe at the burning bush. Moshe, despite being chosen for a monumental mission, pleads with Hashem to send someone else to Egypt, stating: *שלח נא ביד תשלח* (Shemot 4:13). Hashem, however, does not respond kindly to this request and becomes angry with Moshe.

Rashi (Shemot 4:13) comments on this incident, explaining that Moshe was destined to be a Kohen, but because of this request that someone else be sent, the privilege of the *kehunah* was transferred to his brother Aharon. Moshe and his descendants would forever remain Levi'im.

The second instance is found at *Mei Meriva* when Moshe strikes the rock rather than speaking to it as commanded by Hashem. This action, driven by Moshe's frustration, leads to Hashem's disappointment, and as a consequence, Moshe is prohibited from entering Eretz Yisrael. Hashem tells him: *יען לא האמנתם בי להקדישני לעיני בני ישראל* (Bamidbar 20:12).

Both of these incidents come into play elsewhere in the Torah. During the seven days of the *miliuim* of the Mishkan, Moshe serves as the first Kohen Gadol, performing the *avodah* and overseeing the anointments. Nonetheless, although he is the first, these days of

miluim are his last in this position. After he completes this *avodah* of sanctifying the Mishkan, he must give it up for the sake of his brother.

The pasuk (Vayikra 8:23) states: וישחט ויקח משה מדמו ויתן על תנוך און אהרן הימנית ועל בהן ידו הימנית ועל בהן רגלו הימנית. It is significant to note that the word “וישחט” is marked with the rare *shalsholet* cantillation mark. Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger explains that the presence of the *shalsholet* signifies delay or indecision, as seen in other instances in the Torah: Lot’s hesitation in Bereishit 19:16 when Sodom is about to be destroyed, Eliezer’s reluctance in choosing a wife for Yitzchak in Bereishit 24:12 and Yosef’s indecision in his interaction with Potiphar’s wife in Bereishit 39:8. The *shalsholet* here reflects Moshe’s internal conflict: although he understands he is not destined to be a Kohen, he struggles with the painful realization that his children will not carry on this legacy. Yet, he proceeds to perform the final *avodah*, setting aside his personal feelings for the sake of Aharon and his descendants.

In the beginning of Parshat Va’etchanan, just before Bnei Yisrael were ready to enter Eretz Yisrael, the Torah records Moshe’s final appeal to Hashem, requesting permission to enter the land. The Midrash (Devarim Rabba 11:6) states that Moshe prayed 515 times to Hashem: תקט’ו תפלות עשה על זה הדבר כמנין ואתחנן אעפ”כ לא קבל הקב”ה תפלתו. Hashem does not accept his desperate pleas and commands Moshe to cease and desist. Moshe complies and accepts the reality, retreating from his wrestling with Hashem to enter the land.

The only concession Hashem grants Moshe is a quick glance at the land. As described in the last pasuk prior to Moshe’s death (Devarim 34:5): ויאמר ה’ אליו זאת הארץ אשר נשבעתי לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב. לאמר לזרעך אתננה הראיתך בעיניך ושמה לא תעבר. Hashem reveals to Moshe from a distance his most wanted desire. Moshe has long ceased his struggle and as a loyal servant accepts Hashem’s will. וימת שם משה עבד ה’ בארץ מואב על פי ה’.

Moshe's primary *middah* is *anavah*, humility. As the Torah states, he was "more humble than any man on the face of the earth" (Bamidbar 12:3). What makes Moshe the epitome of humility?

Humility does not imply thinking less of oneself; rather, it is rooted in the concept of *gadlut haadam* – the recognition of one's own greatness. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains that "humility is the silence of the self in the presence of that which is greater than the self" ('Covenant and Conversation', Parshat Beha'alotcha).

Perhaps this is the essence of Moshe's modesty: he believed in his own capabilities but recognized that there was a greater, Divine plan at play. In the end, he silenced his personal desires in recognition of Hashem's will. Although, just like Adam I was commanded *וּמִלֵּא אֶת הָאָרֶץ וּכְבָשָׁהּ* to pursue human worth and become great; which he exemplifies by fighting for and not letting go of his aspirations, he ultimately sacrifices and retreats, like Adam II, in order to live a life in accordance with G-d.

True humility is not about diminishing our self-worth, but about thinking of ourselves less. We are obligated to aspire to greatness and achieve remarkable things, without losing sight of our inherent value. Humility is about knowing who we are, stepping back when necessary, and struggling only when it is appropriate. Through understanding Moshe's example, we come to realize that *anavah* is not about never taking the step at all; rather, it is about knowing when to take a step back for Hashem.

Naama: Creator or Destroyer of the World?

When a character in a story is only mentioned once or twice, one would assume that their role is unimportant. However, we know that with the Torah that is not the case. The Torah is meant to be relevant to every person in every generation and contains not even one extra letter. That means that every character in Tanach, even Naama who is mentioned only once in a genealogy list, is crucial to our understanding of Jewish history.

In Bereshit 4:22, we are told that Tuval Kaiyin was born to Tzila (the wife of Lemech), and that Naama was his sister. There is no mention of Naama being the daughter of Tzila and Lemech, only as the sister of Tuval Kayin. Why? Furthermore, since names in Torah are filled with deeper meanings, what does the name Naama tell us about her on a deeper level?

Rashi tells us that Naama was married to Noach. The Gur Aryeh, Maskil L'David, and Sifteï Chachamim expand on Rashi's approach. The Gur Aryeh explains that the reason she was mentioned was to show that her actions were *ne'imim* (pleasant) in the eyes of Hashem. Since she didn't deserve to die in the *mabul* she must have been Noach's wife.

The Maskil L'David adds that even though she was the sister of Tuval Kayin, a *rasha*, her actions remained pleasant (Bereishit Rabba 23:3) and she did not learn from him. This view of Naama shows her as a *tzadeket* who merited to birth the people who would repopulate the world.

The Sifteï Chachamim adds an additional point. Naama had three brothers, Yaval, Yuval and Tuval Kayin. According to Rashi's first opinion, Yaval was a righteous person. The same might be said about Yuval. However, Tuval Kayin was wicked. Following in the footsteps of his ancestor Kayin, he created weaponry for murderers.

According to Chazal, children often take on character traits of their mother's brothers. Noach had two sons that were righteous, Shem and Yafet, and one that was wicked, Cham. This is a further indication that Naama was Noach's wife.

Rav Hirsch understands Naama's beauty differently. Tuval Kayin created the tools and instruments for industry and art. The first purpose of industry is usefulness. But it shows progress when the purpose of beauty is joined to that of usefulness; when taste is applied to industry. Naama may very well have helped her brother by adding charm and grace to his work. Her *neimut* contributed to the elevation of society.

While many agree with this approach to Naama, others view her in a more negative light. In Bereshit 6:2, the Torah tells us of the Bnei Elohim and how they saw the beauty of human women and took wives from those that delighted them. Rashi tells us that these Bnei Elohim were actually angels of Hashem, who intermingled with human women.

The Midrash continues that the angels of Hashem saw the daughters of Kayin walking around the earth naked and went astray after them (Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer 22:3). The Ramban (Bereishit 4:22) suggests that Naama was the most beautiful of these women who enticed the Bnei Elohim, causing them to sin. Her physical beauty was so intense that even the angels could not resist her. Rav Soloveichik¹ writes that Naama was mentioned because her seducing the Bnei Elohim was the last straw before Hashem decided to bring the *mabul*, destroying the beautiful world He created.

The Ramban also quotes a kabbalistic source (Zohar Chadash 1:19:2) that Naama was the wife of Shamdan and mother of Ashmadai, the infamous king of the *shaidim* (demons). It was Naama who brought these demons into the world.

¹ *Chumash Mesorot HaRav* | Chumash with commentary based on the teachings of Rabbi Soloveitchik.

Both these views of Naama teach us the value of beauty. When Hashem created the world, He filled it – and us – with a natural, holy type of beauty, and this beauty could be used for both good or bad. If we reflect Hashem's positive internal beauty like the first view of Naama, we can be *zoche* to creating goodness in this world. However, if we let the beauty Hashem gave us stay on the outside and use it any way we see fit, we will destroy the beautiful world created by Hashem.

This idea of a trait being used for the good or the bad doesn't just apply to beauty. Every quality within a person has the power to be used for positive or negative purposes; it can either help us fulfill our unique *tafkid* or take us further away from it. For example, the middah of *Gevura* allows us to remain strong in our values, but when perverted, it can make a person stubborn and close minded. We need to do a serious *cheshbon hanefesh* of our own individual character traits and make sure we are using them to benefit the world and not to chas v'shalom detract from it.

When Dichotomies Become Harmonies

Dichotomies seem to be a law of the natural world. After all, some things just simply cannot work together. One would not be able to be in two countries at once, and it cannot be day and night at the same time (unless we discuss *Bein HaShmashot*, but that's for another time). There are also dichotomies not borne out of natural order, but raised by axioms of human behavior and sociology, one such example being the simultaneous existence of justice and peace. Unfortunately, throughout history, it has become apparent that *tzedek and shalom* exist only in the absence of the other. After all, if the two could exist together, we would have nothing more to fight for. The main question then is: which would the Torah rather we strive for – justice or peace?

As with most principles in Judaism, both elements are seemingly vital to being a Jew. Starting with peace, most notably in Parshat Naso (Bamidbar 6:26), Hashem commands the Kohanim to give over the priestly blessing which concludes with **יְשָׁא ה' פְּנֵי אֲלִיךָ** וישם לך שלום. In Parshat Shoftim (Devarim 20:10), the Jews are commanded to offer peace to a city when approaching to wage war against it: **כִּי תִקְרַב אֶל עִיר לְהִלָּחֵם עֲלֶיהָ וּקְרָאתָ אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׁלוֹם**. We are also famously taught (Tehilim 34:15): **בִּקֵּשׁ שָׁלוֹם וְרַדְּפֵהוּ**. And the list goes on.

However, justice seems to be regarded with just as much weight. In Devarim (16:20), the Jews are commanded **צִדֵּק צִדֵּק תִּרְדֹּף** למען תחיה וירשת את הארץ אשר ה' אלהיך נותן לך. The Seforno explains that the pursuit of justice is even more important in the Land of Israel, because failure to comply will result in the loss of our ancestral right to the Land. According to this interpretation of the pasuk, our right to the Land, a pinnacle of the Torah, is

dependent on our execution of justice. Additionally, in Vayikra (19:15), Bnei Yisrael are commanded: **בצדק תשפט עמיתך**. And, again, the list goes on.

But what happens when justice and peace collide? What happens when one is forced into a situation in which one must choose to side with only one of these mighty virtues?

There is no clear-cut answer in the Torah to which virtue is of higher precedence. However, in Parshat Ki Tissa (Shemot 32:4), there is a glaring conflict between these two ideals in the story of the golden calf. Perplexingly, Aharon seemingly gives in to the peoples' demands, creating a "leader" for them by beseeching the masses to collect gold and, subsequently, making it into a golden calf.

Approximately three thousand men were ultimately killed by Shevet Levi, but Aharon was left notably unpunished. Though many commentators come to Aharon's defense or designate later events as punishments for Aharon, there is no arguing that Aharon was responsible for making the calf. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 7a) explains that Aharon saw that his nephew Chur, who had been chosen to lead Bnei Yisrael alongside him while Moshe was gone, had been murdered by the people for refusing to create a calf for them. Aharon realized that if he, too, protested, Bnei Yisrael would also kill him. Hashem might forgive the people for worshipping a calf, but there was little possibility they would be forgiven for an even graver sin of killing someone who was both a kohen and a navi.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks offers further insight: "Moses was a man of law, Aharon of mediation. Moses was a man of truth, Aharon of peace. Moses sought justice, Aharon sought conflict resolution."¹ In this case, Aharon was supremely focused on maintaining peace, hence his attempted stalling until Moshe's return. However,

¹ "Between Truth and Peace" By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks | Covenant & Conversion | Ki Tissa.

Rabbi Sacks claims that “at that moment the people needed a Moses, not an Aharon.” This implies that despite this being the wrong time, there are indeed other times when an “Aharon” is needed, further positing that justice and peace are both necessary, yet perhaps unable to exist at once.

The dichotomy here is the synthesis of justice and peace in one single person, but who is to say that justice and peace cannot exist simultaneously, only distributed between two people rather than one? There are plenty of other times when Moshe and Aharon worked together in harmony. It was only this time that their dynamic could not succeed because they were not working together. Perhaps we are to learn from the dynamic of Aharon and Moshe that the way to reach harmony of Torah ideals, especially ones so seemingly discordant as justice and peace, is to join with others. And hence the plethora of relationships filling the Torah.

One such other relationship of this nature in the Torah is shared by Yosef and Yehuda. Yosef and Yehuda become the two leaders of the Shevatim, as Yaakov blesses Yosef with the firstborn birthright and Yehuda with kingship. Yosef is very involved in the world and takes on an incredible leadership role, yet through it all he never fails to mention Hashem.

Additionally, though Yosef was always in situations that made him act, he rarely put himself there. He only ended up in Egypt because he was sold into slavery; he only ended up in jail because Potifar’s wife thrust herself upon him and falsely accused him; he was only exposed to Pharaoh as a dream-interpreter because the freed butler shared his experience.

This is not to say that Yosef did not take any action on his own, just as it would be false to say Aharon never pursued justice, but it shows that Yosef’s dominant philosophy was that of primarily sticking to what he viewed as the Divine Plan, wherever it took him. As the Torah says in reference to Yosef’s experience in jail (Bereishit 39:23): *בְּאִשֶּׁר הָיָה אִתּוֹ וְאִשֶּׁר הָיָה עִמּוֹ מִצְלִיחַ*. Similarly, Yosef says to his brothers when revealing his identity (Bereishit 45:8): *וְעַתָּה לֹא אֶתֶם שְׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הִנֵּה כִּי הָאֱלֹקִים*.

Yehuda, on the other hand, was a clear doer. He put himself into his own situations, and his responses to difficult circumstances reflect this. Rav Shimon Klein² draws out this idea. In Parshat Vayeshev (Bereishit 38:1) the Torah tells us regarding Yehuda: וַיֵּרֶד יְהוּדָה מֵאֶת אָחָיו. Yehuda made the concerted choice to be distinguished from his brothers and set on his own path. Rashi comments that the story of Yehuda and Tamar is placed in the middle of the story of Yosef to show that Yehuda had been degraded by his brothers. Upon seeing Yaakov's grief, the brothers turned to Yehuda and said: "You told us to sell him. If you had told us to send him back to [his father] we would have obeyed you." This exhibits the innate leadership of Yehuda and the significance of his action-oriented nature. Furthermore, Yehuda made the conscious choice to sleep with Tamar, whom he thought was a prostitute. Yosef, on the other hand, was forced into a terrible situation with Potifar's wife.

In Parshat Vayigash, Yehuda pleads with Yosef to let *him* stay in Egypt rather than Binaymin, so as not to cause devastation to his father. This is the pinnacle of Yehuda's character. He is deciding on his own to be a spokesperson of his brothers and sacrifice his freedom for the sake of his father. It is in no way a coincidence that Yehuda exercises this most extreme display of outward action in a crossroads with Yosef, who is the other, arguably opposing, leader of the Shevatim.

Here again, we have two philosophies at odds: submission to the Divine Plan versus taking control of one's own fate, both of which are upheld Torah values. Yosef sees himself as an emissary of Hashem fulfilling a divine plan, while Yehuda sees himself as a more autonomous decider of his actions. From the start, this distinction was clear; Yosef was a leader because Yaakov favored him, and Yehuda was a leader because he made a choice at the very

² "Miketz | Yosef and Yehuda" by Rav Shimon Klein

(etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-bereishit/parashat-miketz/miketz-yosef-and-yehuda).

beginning – when he influenced his brothers to sell Yosef rather than kill him.

These values are not necessarily and absolutely dichotomous. It may be possible to truly accomplish a union between the two, but there is no doubt that it is no easy feat. Though Yosef and Yehuda lived by different philosophies, the two *Mishichim* will ultimately come from Yosef and Yehuda, showing that Redemption will arrive only when juxtaposed forces join together *L'shem Hashem*. When *all* our efforts, including the polar ones, together, are *L'Shem Hashem*, Hashem will reveal Himself.

Elsewhere, we have the dual leadership roles of Ezra and Nechemia who were both active in the return to Eretz Yisrael at the beginning of Bayit Sheini. Ezra was an emblem of spiritual leadership. He is described as a *סופר מהיר בתורת משה*, and *הכין לבבו לדרש את* *ה' ולעשות וללמד בישראל חק ומשפט תורה ה'* (Ezra 7:6, 10). Ezra was greatly distressed upon discovering the rampant intermarriage trend spreading among his people. He made the Jews vow to marry only other Jews, read the Torah publicly, and instituted enactments to ensure strict adherence to the Torah.

Nechemia, on the other hand, was much more of a political leader than a spiritual one. When pleading to King Artachshasta to let him go to Yehuda, he specifically asked, “Send me to Yehuda to *rebuild it*” (Nechemia 2:5). Only three days after arriving, Nechemia led a secretive nighttime exhibition to explore the damage done on the city walls and gathered leaders the very next day to start the rebuilding process. Additionally, he worked passionately to rectify the wealth inequality that was causing poverty-stricken Jews to sell their sons and daughters into slavery.

Just as we found examples of the importance of peace and justice in the Torah, we also find that the Torah supports both spiritual indulgence and political involvement – two values that are extremely difficult to properly fuse. What we see is not that the Torah is contradictory, but that we cannot fulfill every single ideal alone; as in these pairs, one value seems to always be expending the other in its own pursuit. The truth is, perhaps, that there are

dichotomies, even in the Torah itself, but these dichotomies may exist only in individuals. Together, however, as a conglomerate of *ish echad b'lev echad*, we can join and let many truths and ideals, not only coexist, but thrive as one.

This is not to say that individuals cannot overcome inner dichotomies on their own, or to claim that by simply finding a friend, one can cure the world. Rather, it offers insight on the harmonization we can create together; one that would take a lifetime, if at all, for one person to accomplish alone.

Alone, each man was great. Yosef began fulfilling Hashem's promise to Avraham, leading the Jews down into Egypt; Yehuda was the father of the kingship and our ultimate *Mashiach*; Moshe took the Jews out of slavery and received the Torah; Aharon, the inaugural *Kohen Gadol*, led the people in serving Hashem; Ezra helped the Jews in spiritually resettling the Land; Nechemia secured our ability to live in the Land.

But together, these men were even greater. Together, they set the ground for ultimate redemption in all three dimensions: Yosef and Yehuda in laying the foundation for the relationship between our final redeemers, Moshe and Aharon in actually redeeming the nation, and Ezra and Nechemia in settling our Homeland.

Eilu v'eliv divrei elokim chaim. Only together can we truly achieve the multiple facets of our infinitely deep Torah. This was true in the times of the Torah, true in the times of the Neviim, and it is true today. And may it be true again tomorrow, as we harness these relationships to reign in the final redemption.

שבע יפול צדיק וקם

Many stories recorded in the Torah focus on great people who erred, but nevertheless remain great in the eyes of subsequent generations. This essay will examine the actions and legacies of three of these individuals: Adam HaRishon, Yehuda and Moshe Rabbeinu.

After Adam and Chava ate from the Etz Hadaat, Hashem appears and asks **איכה** (Bereishit 3:9). The Ohr HaChaim comments that Hashem was asking, “Why are you hiding yourselves from Me?” Adam’s response seems very straightforward. He was embarrassed to appear naked before the Almighty. However, the Or HaChaim adds that Adam and Chava were painfully aware of having lost their aura of kedusha due to their sin. This was their embarrassment of being “naked.” In essence, Hashem’s question of **איכה** was not asking where are you physically; rather, where are you spiritually? Where did your greatness go?

The Torah continues with Adam’s punishment: he will need to work the land for the rest of his days in order to eat (3:17). The Haamek Davar remarks that the word **בעבורך**, for your sake, implies for your own good. How can this be for Adam’s benefit if it was part of Hashem’s punishment? He explains that part of Adam’s repatriation was for him to have to work and toil over the land. Too much idle time can lead a person astray from proper worship of Hashem. On the contrary, with the correct attitude, one whose life is connected to the success of his agricultural work, can and should develop a healthy dependence on Hashem’s blessings.

Later, the Torah tells us (4:25) that “Adam knew his wife again.” Rashi explains that Lemech chastised Adam for having separated from his wife for 130 years because of the punishment of the sin and its introduction of death to the world. Immediately following this, Adam “knew” his wife, and they had a child. Adam realized his mistakes and worked hard to try to create a new reality,

regretting his past actions and taking positive steps to build a future. He reaccepted upon himself the mitzvah to be fruitful and multiply, setting an example of how it is possible to come back from a mistake, no matter how grave.

In Parshat Vayeishev, the Torah juxtaposes two stories where Yehuda plays a central role. After the brothers threw Yosef into a pit, Yehuda suggested selling him to Yishmaeli merchants, rather than to let him languish and die. Shortly after, the Torah relates the story of Yehuda and Tamar. From a certain perspective, we witness the decline of Yehuda. The brothers are upset at him for failing to demand that Yosef be returned to his father, alive and well (Rashi, 38:1). Later, he suffered the loss of two sons, and failed to allow his daughter-in-law, Tamar, to marry the third son. In his despondency over the loss of his wife, he sleeps with an apparent prostitute (Tamar). Not realizing that he is the guilty party, he orders that Tamar, who is now pregnant, should be killed.

How does one make sense of these actions, while still learning of Yehuda's greatness and how the kingship eventually comes from him?

Once Tamar proved that Yehuda was in fact the soon-to-be father, his first response was automatic (38:26) **צדקה ממני**. Yehuda admits his guilt and proclaims Tamar's righteousness. She had risked her life in order not to embarrass Yehuda publicly by announcing him as the soon-to-be father. Rashi quoting Chazal, comments that a **בן קול** came out and announced that because of Tamar's greatness, the **מלכות** would come from them. Yehuda was finally able to recognize that greatness can only come when one is able to humbly admit one's own failings and recognize the greatness of others.

Later, when the viceroy of Egypt insists that Binyamin accompany the brothers on their next sojourn to acquire food to bring back home, Yehuda displayed new strength and growth as he offered to be a guarantor for his youngest brother's safety, finally convincing the reluctant Yaakov to allow them to make the journey. He was willing to risk his Olam Haba (Rashi 43:9) to do what was

necessary to save the family. Yehuda has come a long way since he failed to save Yosef.

The ultimate testament to Yehuda's complete transformation is presented in Parshat Vayigash. Binyamin is accused of stealing the viceroy's goblet. For this crime, Binyamin will be held as a slave in Egypt whilst the brothers will be free to take food and go back to their father. The brother who once stood up to convince everyone to sell their own kin now stood up with deafening conviction to free and save his brother, offering to take his place. His speech is so moving that by the end, Yosef himself is moved to tears and is forced to expose his identity. With this, Yehuda's ascension to his original spiritual stature is complete.

This is beautifully articulated later on during Yaakov's blessings to Yehuda. Rashi (49:8) describes how Yaakov had to use a supplicating tone since Yehuda was backing away due to fear and embarrassment that his father would rebuke him regarding his actions with Tamar. The full *teshuvah* of Yehuda is clearly seen as he repented from his transgressions. The Gemara (Brachot 34b) states that in the place where penitents stand, even the full-fledged righteous do not stand. Penitents can achieve a standing superior to one acquired by the righteous. This helps explain why Yehuda merited the מלכות over his brothers.

In Parshat Chukat (according to Rashi's understanding) Moshe Rabbeinu fails to follow Hashem's command. He was told to speak to the rock in order to provide water for the complaining and thirsty Bnei Yisrael. Instead, he raised his staff and hit the rock (Bamidbar 20:11).

If, however, Moshe was not supposed to hit the rock, why was he commanded to take his staff with him? Moshe's staff was extremely significant and performed many supernatural miracles in Mitzrayim, at Yom Suf and during Bnei Yisrael's wanderings in the desert. In fact, Bnei Yisrael's entire existence during their forty years in the desert was supernatural: the daily *mahn*, the constant protection from the elements provided by the Clouds of Glory, their

clothing that grew with them and stayed fresh the entire time, etc. There was nothing natural about Bnei Yisrael's journey.

Moshe was perfect for the leadership role during this time, as he was the epitome of someone living a supernatural existence. He was born prematurely at six months and a day. At birth, the whole house filled with light (Rashi, Shemot 2:2-3). Against all odds, he was raised in Pharaoh's palace. He was miraculously saved from death by Pharaoh's decree (Rashi, Shemot 18:4), etc. It is clear that Moshe wasn't destined to live a natural life.

Hashem tells Moshe to speak to the rock. However, He also tells him to bring his staff as part of a test. Before bringing Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael, Moshe needed to show that there was no longer a need to rely on the staff, symbolic of supernatural miracles. Moshe, together with Bnei Yisrael, needed to slowly acclimate to a more natural existence in their Homeland. Moshe tried to draw water from the rock, but when that failed, he reverted to using the staff as he had done forty years earlier in the desert (Rashi, Bamidbar 20:11).

Moshe was punished with the inability to go into Eretz Yisrael. However, this was less of a punishment and more a natural consequence, as his supernatural mindset wasn't equipped to lead the people in the Land of Israel. Although Moshe pleaded with Hashem to rescind the decree, in the end he accepted it as a loyal servant. It is the title of **עֶבֶר ה'**, the highest possible accolade, that the Torah bestows on Moshe Rabbeinu upon his death (Devarim 34:5).

By examining the lives of these three characters, an invaluable lesson can be learned. Adam, Yehuda, and Moshe all sinned, yet they are still viewed as great people. One can err, make mistakes, sin before Hashem and yet recover, repent, and restore himself to a position of greatness. It's interesting to note that very little time and ink are spent in **תנ"ך** writing about those characters that were perfect and never sinned in their entire life. For instance, in Bereishit 5:21, only four pesukim are dedicated to talking about Chanoch, whom Rashi states was removed early from this world

because of his greatness and his closeness with Hashem. However, there are entire chapters dedicated to the stories of Adam, Yehuda and Moshe.

A great person is seen as one who, though he may stumble and fall, arises more honest, humble, and courageous than he was before. A person may make mistakes, but they don't define his essence. It is the outgrowth of these challenges that shape his destiny.

From the stories of these three great leaders, and so many more that cover the pages of Jewish history, one realizes that when it comes to moments where people have sinned or failed, those could actually be the key moments in one's story. They are the make-or-break moments where one is given the ability to recalibrate himself and ensure he is using his divine qualities to serve Hashem, and fulfilling his potential.

As Rav Hutner famously noted, a person does not achieve *tzidkut* despite having stumbled seven times, but rather, the path to *tzidkut* is achieved because he stumbled seven times, yet recovered.

הלכה

Combing Hair on Shabbat

The removal of hair from the skin on Shabbat (*Tlisha*) is a *Tolada* of the melacha of *Gozez* (shearing) and violates a Torah prohibition. Brushing or combing one's hair (*Srika*), often results in *Tlisha* and therefore, may be prohibited as well. This raises at least two fundamental questions: Does *Srika* always result in *Tlisha*? And if *Tlisha* is an unintended consequence, how can it render *Srika* forbidden?

Addressing these questions requires a deeper understanding of how intent (*kavanah*) and unintended outcomes (*Psik Reisha*) impact the prohibitions of Shabbat. To better understand the halachic complexities of *Srika* on Shabbat, we must first examine the concept of *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei* and its relationship to *Melacha She'eina Tzricha L'Gufa*.

A *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei* refers to a performance of a permissible action that definitely results in a prohibited outcome, but the person performing the action derives no benefit from the resulting forbidden act. A *Melacha She'eina Tzricha L'Gufa* is an action that is a Torah-prohibited melacha but is done for a different purpose other than the one the melacha was originally intended to do. For example, digging a hole is a melacha when it is done for the sake of making a hole (as in agricultural work), but if one digs a hole solely to obtain dirt, it is a *Melacha She'eina Tzricha L'Gufa*. This is distinguished from the prohibition itself only through *kavanah*.

In Masechet Ketubot 6a, the Tosafot and the Aruch argue over the halachic status of *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei*. According to the Aruch, *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei* is permissible. However, Tosafot maintains that *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei* is forbidden *l'chatchila* because there is no substantial differentiation between it and

Melacha She'eina Tzricha L'Gufa. Tosafot further explains that any case in Shas that appears to permit *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei* is merely an exception to this rule.

The Rashash clarifies the understanding of these two concepts. He explains that in *Melacha She'eina Tzricha L'Gufa* cases, one intentionally performs the melacha, albeit with a different intent than its primary function. For instance, whether one digs a hole for the sake of the hole or for the dirt, the act of digging remains the same. In contrast, in *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei* cases, the prohibited action occurs as a byproduct of another action rather than as its direct intention. The Aruch recognizes this distinction and therefore permits *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei*, whereas Tosafot categorizes the two concepts as halachically identical since an automatic outcome is equivalent to a direct action and not just a byproduct, and is therefore, prohibited.

What allows us to gain further clarity on this argument is Rav Elchanan Wasserman's¹ examination of similar issues that arise with a *Nazir*. A *Nazir* is allowed to engage in *chafifah* (washing/arranging the hair) but is prohibited from *Srika* (combing), because *Srika* inevitably results in hair being pulled out (*Tlisha*), making it a *Psik Reisha*. This raises the same fundamental question we started with: is *Tlisha* inherently embedded within the act of *Srika* as one unified *ma'aseh*? If so, since the combing is intentional, by definition the *Tlisha* is considered intentional rendering it a *Melacha She'eina Tzricha L'Gufa* of *Tlisha*. This would align with Tosafot's view that *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei* is forbidden, as an inevitable outcome merges with the primary action to form a single *Ma'aseh Melacha*. However, if *Tlisha* is considered distinct from *Srika*, then *Srika* remains an action with an unintended side effect, keeping it within the framework of *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei*. In that case, one could argue that since the person does not want *Tlisha* to occur, it would pose no halachic problem, explaining the Aruch's view.

¹ Sefer Kovetz Shiurim נ"ח - Ketubot 6a.

To add to our understanding of this issue, we must delve into the topic of *Karov L'Psik Reisha*, a case where the prohibited outcome is close to inevitable, and examine whether such situations are identical to *Psik Reisha* or not.

A *Psik Reisha* is defined as an action that will lead to a prohibited outcome every time. If there is even a slight possibility that the outcome will not occur, then by definition, the action cannot be classified as a *Psik Reisha*. The Ritvah (Ketubot 5b) supports this distinction, maintaining that if an outcome is only *Karov L'Psik Reisha*, close to inevitable, it does not qualify as a full *Psik Reisha*. In the case of *Srika*, this perspective suggests that it might be permitted since the removal of hair is not absolutely inevitable.

However, the Rivash (394) challenges this reasoning. He asserts that as long as the prohibited outcome occurs with sufficient regularity, it qualifies as a *Psik Reisha*. Applying this to *Srika*, even if only two weak hairs are inevitably pulled out, the act still constitutes *Tlisha*, rendering it prohibited. Thus, according to the Rivash, a *Karov L'Psik Reisha* is viewed as a full *Psik Reisha* if the outcome is sufficiently likely. This discussion of *Karov L'Psik Reisha* has direct implications for our earlier debate between the Aruch and Tosafot regarding *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei*.

Tosafot equates *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei* with *Melacha She'eina Tzricha L'Gufa*, emphasizing the inevitability of an action's result. If an outcome is only *Karov L'Psik Reisha*, it does not meet the threshold of inevitability. Therefore, if *Srika* does not inherently include *Tlisha* in every single instance, it would not qualify as *Tlisha* itself. The Aruch, on the other hand, distinguishes *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei* from *Melacha She'eina Tzricha L'Gufa* by focusing on intent. Since he allows *Psik Reisha D'Lo Nicha Lei*, he might also accept that *Karov L'Psik Reisha* can still be treated as a *Psik Reisha* under certain conditions.

This debate plays out in Shabbat 120b, where a *Braita* states that if there is a candle behind a door one may open and close the door. Even if the candle extinguishes due to the wind, it is of

no concern. Rav condemns this practice. This raises the following question: why would Rav be stringent if the *Braita* permits it?

The Maharsha explains that this case represents a *Karov L'Psik Reisha* rather than a full *Psik Reisha*. According to Rav, who holds that *Karov L'Psik Reisha* is equivalent to a full *Psik Reisha*, opening and closing the door is prohibited. In contrast, the Tanna of the *Braita* maintains that *Karov L'Psik Reisha* is not a true *Psik Reisha*, and since it is unintentional, it would be permissible according to R' Shimon. The Mishna Berura² rules that *Karov L'Psik Reisha* constitutes a *Psik Reisha*.

The Rishonim establish a clear prohibition against combing hair on Shabbat, primarily due to the concern of *Psik Reisha*, where hair removal is inevitable. Rashi equates the restrictions of a *Nazir* with those of Shabbat, indicating that if a *Nazir* refrains from combing to avoid hair removal, the same principle applies on Shabbat (Shabbat 50b). The Kol Bo (31:43) further strengthens this stance, stating that even combs made of materials less likely to pull out hair are forbidden, since hair removal cannot be fully prevented. The Beit Yosef³ adds another layer, explaining that while we generally follow R' Shimon's lenient stance on *Davar She'Eino Mitkaven* (unintended actions), combing remains forbidden because it inherently involves intent to remove loose hairs.

The Acharonim maintain this strict approach while offering practical applications. In *The Shabbos Home*⁴, Rabbi Simcha Bunim Cohen clarifies that using a hard-bristled brush or comb is prohibited because it inevitably pulls out loose or knotted hairs, constituting the melacha of *Gozez*. However, leniencies exist: a soft-bristled brush, designated specifically for Shabbat, may be used if it does not remove hair. Even in this case, one must be careful to avoid excessive force. This practical halachic application follows the

² See Beirur Halacha 277:1, MB 314:52.

³ Orach Chayim 303.

⁴ *The Shabbos Home*, Chapter 9.

ruling of the Shulchan Aruch, which prohibits combing that results in hair removal due to *Psik Reisha*, regardless of intent (O.C. 303:27). Combing should therefore be avoided entirely if hair removal is very likely, though one may be lenient where removal is not certain and proper precautions are taken.

While intent plays a role in many Shabbat prohibitions, the principle of *Psik Reisha* dictates that inevitable results remain forbidden, even if unintended. The halachic consensus is clear: combing hair on Shabbat is prohibited unless one can ensure that hair removal is neither inevitable nor desirable, reinforcing the importance of mindful practice in maintaining Shabbat observance.

Women's Obligation in Shabbat Meals

To understand the discussion surrounding women's obligation to eat three meals on Shabbat, it is essential to first examine the general framework of women's obligations in mitzvot. The Mishnah (Kid-dushin 29a) states **וכל מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא, אנשים חייבין ונשים פטורות**. **וכל מצות עשה שלא הזמן גרמא, אחד האנשים ואחד הנשים חייבין**. Men are obligated in all positive time-bound mitzvot, while women are exempt. However, women are equally obligated in positive mitzvot that are not time-bound.

It is also important to establish the broader context of women's obligations in Hilchot Shabbat. In the first set of the *Aseret Hadibrot* (Shemot 20:8), the Torah states **זכור את יום השבת לקדשו**. In the second set (Devarim 5:12), the wording changes to **שמור את יום השבת**. Rashi notes (Shemot 20:8) that **זכור ושומר בדבור אחד נאמרו** and Chazal (Berachot 20b) learn from this that anyone who is obligated in the mitzvah of **שמירה** is obligated in the mitzvah of **זכירה**. The mitzvah of *shemirah* refers to the prohibition of doing melacha on Shabbat, a negative commandment that obligates women as well as men. The mitzvah of *zechirah* refers to the requirement to recite kiddush on Shabbat. Therefore, the Gemara concludes, women have a Torah obligation to fulfill the mitzvah of kiddush.

Based on this, the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 271:2) rules that a woman's obligation in the mitzvah of kiddush is equal to that of a man, and a man who listens to a woman's recitation of kiddush fulfills his requirement. The Mishna Berurah agrees but adds a stringency that it is preferable for women to be *motzi* only those men who are members of her household.

With this background, the topic of a woman's requirement to eat three meals on Shabbat can be better understood. The source

for this requirement is found in Shemot (16:25) where the word **היום** appears three times in reference to the *mahn*. The Gemara (Shabbat 117b) understands that this is the basis of the obligation to eat three meals on Shabbat. (The dissenting opinion in the Gemara that there is a need to eat three daytime meals in addition to the Friday night meal is not accepted.)

Are women included in this obligation? On the one hand, this requirement is under the rubric of the mitzvah of Oneg Shabbat, which appears to be a classic **מצות עשה שהזמן גרמא**. If so, women should be exempt. On the other hand, we have already seen that kiddush is an exception to this rule. Is there an exception that applies to eating three meals as well, thereby obligating women?

The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 291:6) states that women are obligated in Seudot Shabbat. The Beit Yosef quotes two explanations from the Rishonim. Rabbeinu Tam adopts a ruling mentioned in the Gemara regarding three other mitzvot: Chanukah lighting, hearing Megillat Esther and drinking four cups of wine at the Seder. All three are **מצוות עשה שהזמן גרמא**, but nevertheless women are obligated because **אף הן היו באותו הנס**. Similarly, says Rabbeinu Tam, women benefited from the miracle of the *mahn*, and therefore have a requirement to eat Seudot Shabbat, which is based on a pasuk regarding the *mahn*.

The Ran, however, writes that it isn't necessary to suggest any innovative reason to obligate women in Shabbat mitzvot aside from kiddush. According to the Ran, when Chazal taught that women are obligated in kiddush because of the **היקש** between **זכור** and **שמור**, included in this obligation are all Shabbat obligations (e.g. Seudot Shabbat). Both reasons are cited by the Mishna Berurah (291:26).

Whereas the Ran writes that Rabbeinu Tam's reason isn't necessary, one could actually question the validity of using **אף הן היו הנס** in the context of obligating women in Seudot Shabbat. Tosafot (Pesachim 108b; Megilla 4a) quotes two understandings of this idea. The first, is that women played a central role in these miracles: Pesach – the righteous women in whose merit we were

redeemed, Purim – Esther, Chanukah – Yehudit. Alternatively, the Gemara is saying that the women benefited from these miracles: they too were redeemed from Egypt, they too were saved from the genocidal decree of Haman, they too had suffered from the dictates of Antiochus. Presumably, Rabbeinu Tam's use of **אף הן היו באותו הנס** regarding the *mahn* would be applicable only according to Tosafot's second explanation, not according to the first.

Secondly, Tosafot (Pesachim 108b) asks why women are exempt from the mitzvah of sukkah. After all, they too benefited from the sukkot that Hashem provided them in their sojourn through the desert. Tosafot responds that Sukkah is a Torah obligation, and the concept of **אף הן היו באותו הנס** applies only to Rabbinic ordinances. Although the Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 30:1) writes that the mitzvah of Oneg Shabbat (which includes eating three meals) is **מדרברי סופרים** (i.e. a Rabbinic mitzvah), the Sefer Yera'aim (#92) and the Levush (see Aruch HaShulchan 291:1) are of the opinion that it is a Torah obligation, based on the pasuk from Shemot that was quoted earlier. Once again, Rabbeinu Tam's use of **אף הן היו באותו הנס** for Seudot Shabbat would apply (according to Tosafot) only with the Rambam's understanding of the nature of the mitzvah, not with that of the Yera'aim and the Levush.

Accepting the opinion of the Ran has halachic ramifications outside of a woman's obligation in Seudot Shabbat. Are women obligated in the mitzvah of havdalah? According to the Rambam (Hilchot Shabbat 29:1) kiddush and havdalah are two parts of the same mitzvah. If, according to the Gemara, women are obligated in part one of the mitzvah (kiddush), they are certainly obligated in part two of the mitzvah (havdalah). However, other Rishonim understand that kiddush and havdalah are two separate mitzvot. If so, are women obligated in havdalah? The answer might depend on whether we view havdalah as one of the Shabbat mitzvot or as a weekday mitzvah. If it is the former, then according to the Ran, women would be obligated. If it is the latter, presumably women would be exempt. (See the discussion in the Bach O.C. 296, and the two opinions quoted by the Shulchan Aruch 296:8.)

Although it is clear from the Shulchan Aruch that women are obligated to eat three meals on Shabbat, the different reasons offered by the Rishonim as to why women are obligated, open up new vistas into our understanding of Halachic analysis.

Can A Jewish Woman Be President of the United States

In the recent election cycle, for the second time there was a woman candidate of a major political party running for the office of President of the United States. This epitomizes the rapid shift of a woman's role in postmodern society. One fascinating halachic question that arises is whether it is permissible for a Jewish woman to be President of the United States. While seemingly new, this question has answers rooted in sources as far back as the Chumash. What are the parameters of kingship and *serara*, and how do they relate to the American democratic process?

The first mention of true, authoritative leadership in the Torah appears in Devarim (17:15): שום תשים עליך מלך אשר יבחר ה' אלוֹיִךְ בוּ. מקרב אחיך תשים עליך מלך לא תוכל לתת עליך איש נכרי אשר לא אחיך הוא. In addition to excluding converts from the monarchy, the Sifrei (piska 157) explains that it says מלך twice in the pasuk to teach us that the Jewish people can only have a מלכה ולא מלך. The Gemara (Kiddushin 76b) expands this limitation on converts to include all leadership positions: תנינא: שום תשים עליך מלך מקרב אחיך, כל משימות. שאתה משים לא יהיה אלא מקרב אחיך. The Midrash Tanna'im, commenting on the pasuk, includes women as well: מלמד שאין מעמידים אשה. במלכות וכן כל משימות שבישראל אין ממנין בהן אלא איש.

The Rambam (Melachim 1:4-5) codifies the halacha regarding both converts and women, applying it to any position of *serara*, including a nasi, an army commander or even the person in charge of water distribution. Evidently, the discretionary positions of power within the Jewish community (*serara*) must be occupied by men.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igrot Moshe YD 2:44-45) discusses this issue in a *teshuva* about a woman becoming a *mashgiach* for *kas-hrut*. He notes that a significant number of Rishonim disagree with

the Rambam's ruling regarding women and leadership positions other than the monarchy. Although under optimum circumstances, one should adopt the stringent opinion of the Rambam, in the specific case he was dealing with (a poor widow with children), Rav Moshe wrote that one can rely on the lenient opinions, and allowed her to be a *mashgiach*.

What is the rationale for excluding women from leadership roles? Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein (*Aruch Hashulchan HeAtid, Hilchot Melachim* 71:9) suggests that people in leadership roles must command the highest degree of respect, something that historically was lacking due to a woman's lower social status in a community. An ineffective leader cannot lead.

Rav Yehuda Gershuni (Kol Yehuda pp.495-507) suggests that a woman's natural tendency for compassion and empathy can interfere with the difficult decisions that a king or other leader must make.

Rav Chaim David Halevy (Mayim Chayim 1:70) explains that the exclusion of women from leadership is a *gezerat hakatuv*, whose logic is not readily discernable. To support this position, he notes that Shlomtzion Hamalka was accepted as a queen because she inherited her position. The only limitation seems to be to appoint a woman as a queen.¹

A number of Rishonim deal with the issue of Devora serving as a judge. The Rashba (Shavuot 30a) suggests that Devora was never appointed a judge. However, the people treated her as if she was a "queen" and followed her leadership. Regarding her ability to judge court cases which is normally limited to men, the Rashba again explains that people approached her and were willing to accept whatever judgment she issued. The Ritva and other Rishonim espouse similar positions.

Based on this, there are some Poskim who want to distinguish between a woman who is appointed to a leadership position and one

¹ This last point is contested by a number of Rabbinic authorities. See: daat.ac.il/daat/mishpach/maamad/nashim-2.htm.

who is democratically elected to that role. If a woman who is normally excluded from being appointed as a judge can be accepted by the people, can one say the same about a woman who was democratically elected as a president or prime minister?

When living in a democracy, the people share an understanding that in free and fair elections, the majority wins, and those who voted in the minority agree to accept the leader chosen by the majority. In the United States, there also exists a system of checks and balances, preventing the president from exercising absolute authority. Furthermore, a president cannot serve for more than four years unless reelected, and in certain circumstances can be removed from office through impeachment.²

It is important to mention Chazal's dictum in Avot (6:4): **אֵל תִּבְקֶשׁ גְּדוּלָה לְעִצְמְךָ, וְאֵל תִּחְמַד כְּבוֹד**. Any person, male or female, must have the right intentions when running for and becoming President of the United States. A president yields great power, but he or she must remember that they are there to serve the people.

The unique role of a president combined with the ability to issue Executive Orders and serving as commander in chief of the armed forces may seem to exclude women from that role. However, the acceptance of rule by majority, the idea of checks and balances, and the requirement for regular elections might somewhat mitigate this halachic opposition.³

² One could distinguish between two litigants who willingly choose a person to adjudicate their case, and people who live in a democracy who are forced to accept the election of a person whom they voted against. In the latter case, they simply have no choice. For further discussion on this issue, see daat.ac.il/daat/mishpach/maamad/nashim-2.htm.

³ There are two other issues that need to be examined. Does the exclusion of women in leadership roles apply outside of Eretz Yisrael?

See daat.ac.il/daat/mishpach/maamad/nashim-2.htm quoting Rav Herzog (and Rav Eliezer Silver) that the ruling might be limited to Eretz Yisrael.

In addition, the Rambam refers to **כָּל מְשִׁימֹת שְׁבִי שִׂרָאֵל**. Over 97% of the population of the United States are not Jewish. Could that justify the election of a Jewish woman? If she could serve, would Jews be allowed to vote for her? This requires further examination.

It is also important to note that the role of women is constantly changing in society, affording women more responsibility. Nevertheless, the U.S. electorate has twice rejected women candidates for the highest office. There might be numerous reasons behind their defeats, but it seems that American secular society is not ready for a woman to sit in the Oval Office. As a result, the concern that a woman leader would not be respected may still be relevant today.

Psik Reisha D'lo Ichpat Lei

One fundamental concept in *Hilchot Shabbat* is *psik reisha*, where an intentional permissible action inevitably leads to a secondary prohibited outcome. This article will explore the various elements of this halachic concept in order to gain a wider understanding of *Hilchot Shabbat* in general.

The Gemara (Kritut 20a) discusses a case of someone who stokes coals on Shabbat. The Tanna Kamma is of the opinion that he is obligated to bring one *korban chatat*, indicating that he violated only one melacha. R' Eliezer b'R' Tzadok, however, requires bringing two *korbanot* since the action of stoking both extinguishes the top coals (the melacha of *mechabeh*) and ignites the coals underneath (the melacha of *mav'ir*). Rav Ashi explains that the melacha was done with the intention of only extinguishing the upper coals, while the lower coals were ignited unintentionally. The ignition of the lower coals, therefore, is considered a *davar she'eino mitkaven*.¹ According to this classification, the *machloket* can be understood to stem from an original *machloket* between R' Yehuda and R' Shimon regarding *davar she'eino mitkaven* on Shabbat. The Tanna Kama follows R' Shimon's opinion that a *davar she'eino mitkaven* is permissible, while R' Eliezer b'R' Tzadok agrees with R' Yehuda that the latter is prohibited, necessitating the bringing of two *chataot*.

The Gemara (20b) presents a similar case: a person stokes coals for warmth, inadvertently igniting them. One Tanna says a person would be *patur*, while another says *chayav*. The Gemara explains that this disagreement is based on the *machloket* between R' Shimon and R' Yehuda regarding *melacha she'eina tzricha*

¹ An action (involving a prohibition) that was unintentionally caused by another (permissible) action.

l'gufa,² (MSETL). According to R' Shimon, one is *patur* for a *melacha sh'eina tzricha l'gufa*, while R' Yehudah says he is *chayav*.

Tosafot is bothered by the Gemara's use of the phrase *davar she'ino mitkaven* (DSEM) when discussing a *psik reisha* case. This concern is compounded when the Gemara states that for a DSEM, R' Yehuda would hold *chayav* and R' Shimon *patur*.³ In actuality, based on many other Gemaras, R' Yehuda holds that a DSEM is *patur*, and R' Shimon maintains that it is *mutar*. Furthermore, there is an accepted rule that regarding cases of *psik reisha*, even R' Shimon agrees that both parts of the action would be *chayav*. Yet, in these particular instances, even though the consequences of stoking coals are inevitable, R' Shimon does not say one would be *chayav*!

Tosafot explains that there are three different types of *psik reisha*.

Psik reisha d'lo nicha lei, in which the second act of the *psik reisha* has a negative benefit on the person and the person prefers that it did not happen.

Psik reisha d'lo ichepat lei (PRDLIL) where the person does not care whether it happens or not.

Psik reisha d'nicha lei in which the person wants both components of the action to happen.

Tosafot also defines some terms the Gemara uses in these cases of *psik reisha*. Whenever the Gemara uses the phrase of *davar she'eino mitkaven*, it refers to a *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei*. When it uses the phrase *melacha she'ina tzrecha legufa*, it indicates that the Gemara is speaking about a PRDLIL. However, Tosafot maintains that both a PRDLNL and a PRDLIL are considered MSETL and have the same halachic implications. Therefore, according to Tosafot, the only time that R' Shimon agrees one would be *chayav* for a *psik reisha* is when it is with a *psik reisha d'nicha lei* because Tosafot

² A melacha not done for its own sake. Further elaboration to follow.

³ These are R' Yehuda and R' Shimon's positions on MSETL.

believes all other instances with an inevitable second consequence are not actually classified as a *psik reisha*. The only “real” *psik reisha* is a *psik reisha* that you actively want to happen, i.e. a *psik reisha d'nicha lei*.

The first case of stoking coals in the Gemara Kritut is an unwanted *psik reisha*, and therefore Tosafot comments that it is an MSETL. As with the second case of stoking coals for their warmth, even though it may seem to be a PRDLIL, Tosafot says that it too is a MSETL because Tosafot equates PRDLIL and PRDLNL halachically.

The Gemara Shabbat (103a) helps to further refine the parameters of unintended but inevitable consequences. The Gemara says if one uproots twigs to use as animal feed, as kindling to cook an egg, or for food for oneself, he is only *chayav* a *chatat*⁴ if a certain quantity of twigs (corresponding to his/her intended use of the twigs) is uprooted. However, if one was weeding to soften the ground, any minuscule amount would obligate a *chatat*.

This raises a question in the Gemara: When a person uproots twigs for a specific use, the Gemara gives a specific quantity of twigs that they would be *mechayev* them. However, whenever a person uproots twigs, they also soften the ground, for which they would be *chayav* for any amount. This makes the original quantities listed in the Gemara obsolete! The Gemara ultimately resolves this issue by explaining that the case is when one is weeding his friend's field to use the weeds, and he does not care if someone else's field gets tilled or not. Because it is not his field, the act of softening the ground is either a *psik reisha d'lo nicha lei* or *d'lo ichpat lei*, not a *psik reisha d'nicha lei*. Since the unintentional softening of the ground is a PRDLNL or a PRDLIL, for which one would not be *chayav* a *chatat*, the minimum quantities listed in the Gemara are, in fact, relevant.

Rashi, at first glance, understands this case of uprooting twigs in someone else's field (for which he is not *chayav* for the unin-

⁴ If done accidentally, *b'shogeig*.

tended consequence of tilling) as a PRDLIL. The Aruch, quoted by Tosafot, does not differentiate between a PRDLIL and a PRDLNL. Accordingly, the Aruch thinks that because the act does not benefit the person, it is considered a PRDLNL. However, unlike Rashi, the Aruch classifies both PRDLIL and PRDLNL as a *davar she'eino mitkaven* and views them as completely *mutar* according to R' Shimon. Finally, Tosafot, using the logic mentioned above, describes this case as an MSETL, and similar to Rashi, says that it is *patur*.

To summarize, based on the Gemara in Kritut and in Shabbat 103a, there are three types of *psik reisha*: *d'lo nicha lei* (the consequence is unpleasant or unwanted), *d'lo ichpat lei* (he does not care about the consequence), and *d'nicha lei* (the consequence is beneficial or wanted). Tosafot and Rashi both say that PRDLIL and PRDLNL are different categories but have the same halachic ramification. At the same time, the Aruch does not even distinguish between a *lo nicha lei* and *lo ichpat lei* – if the *psik reisha* does not benefit the person, it is like a *davar she'eino mitkaven* and allowed.

The Gemara Shabbat 75a, introduces yet another layer to this machloket that will significantly impact Rashi's presumed opinion. If one traps a *chilazon*⁵ on Shabbat and then breaks its shell to squeeze out the dye, he is only *chayav* one *chatat*.⁶ R' Yehudah states he would be liable not only for trapping the *chilazon* but also for extracting the dye from the *chilazon* because it constitutes the *melacha* of *dosh*, threshing. The Chachamim reject his opinion, maintaining that the *melacha* of *dosh* only applies to that which grows from the ground. However, regardless of whether this act is considered *dosh*, this case should still obligate two *chataot* because it involves killing the *chilazon* (*netilas neshama*), which is also a *melacha* on Shabbat. Rava objects, suggesting that the killing of the *chilazon* was unintentional and only happened because the person

⁵ A snail-like animal that produces *techelet* dye.

⁶ He is *chayav* for trapping the *chilazon*, which is the *melacha* of *tzad*.

was preoccupied with his task of extracting the dye and, therefore, does not require another *chatat*.⁷ The Gemara challenges this assumption, arguing that the principle of *mitasek* cannot apply in a case of *psik reisha*. The Gemara answers that this is not a regular *psik reisha* case – the dye of a live *chilazon* is superior, so the person would actually prefer for the *chilazon* to stay alive.

Tosfot classifies this Gemara as a PRDLNL, which means he also considers it MSETL. However, Rashi makes it much more complex. He says that this case is *patur* because it is *mitasek*/PRDLNL, but if the blood would have been the same quality whether alive or dead, it would be a PRDLIL which would be *chayav*. This is a seeming contradiction to the Gemara in Shabbat (103a), where Rashi comments that in that case, a PRDLIL would be *patur*!

To resolve this apparent contradiction in Rashi's opinion, Rav Baruch Gigi of Yeshivat Har Etzion explains that Rashi views the Gemara Shabbat 103a as a *tzurat hamelacha* issue.⁸ The act of weeding the ground in a friend's field is not softening the ground at all and, therefore, would not be a problem at all relating to the *melacha* of *choresh* (plowing). After reinterpreting the Gemara based on the view of Rav Gigi, it is clear that Rashi maintains that a PRDLIL is *chayav*, despite what was originally assumed.

Based on these sources, three major perspectives emerge, each offering a distinct perspective on the nature of a PRDLIL and its halachic implications. To truly understand each opinion, it is imperative to determine how each commentary views a

⁷ This is a case of *mitasek* because the person was preoccupied with something else and did a *melacha* unintentionally and unknowingly, it is not a *melechet machshevet* and is thus exempt from punishment.

⁸ *Tzurat hamelacha* refers to the parameters of the specific *melacha*. If an action does not meet those parameters, it would be exempt. *Klalei hilchot Shabbat* are halachic principles that apply to all/many *melachot* that may exempt an action in cases where they apply.

PRDLIL. Rav Elchanan Wasserman explains that the underlying *machloket* between Tosafot and the Aruch is based on how each commentator interprets a *psik reisha*. When a person does one action that always leads to something else happening 100% of the time, do both of those actions fuse together to create a single act or are they still considered completely separate actions? Tosafot believes that when the consequence is guaranteed to happen, it is considered one unified action. Therefore, the second action is exactly like a *melacha she'eina tzricha l'gufa* because the person is considered to be doing that act but not for its intended purpose (the intended purpose is for the first action). In contrast, the Aruch believes that each action is independent, so while the secondary result is inevitable, it is merely an unintended consequence of the first component. Therefore, the second part is classified as a *davar she'eino mitkaven* and would be *mutar*.

To fully grasp the dispute between Rashi and Tosafot, it is essential to examine their respective understandings of MSETL.⁹ The Mishna Shabbat 93b discusses various forms of *hotza'ah* on Shabbat and mentions a case of a dead body lying on a bed; one would want to remove the corpse from his home. However, moving objects from a *reshut hayachid* to a *reshut harabim* on Shabbat is prohibited. Yet, R' Shimon says one who removes a dead body from his home on Shabbat would be *patur*. Rashi and Tosafot both comment that this is a classic case of a MSETL but explain the exact parameters of a MSETL differently. Tosfot maintains that any *melacha* not performed for the same reason as it was in the Mishkan would be considered a MSETL and *patur* (according to R' Shimon). Rashi explains it based on one's thoughts. If the person didn't want to be put in the situation to begin with, and didn't want to do the action, Rashi would call that case a MSETL. However, even if he didn't want the direct

⁹ Explanation based on Rabbi Azarya Berzon.

action to happen, post facto, if the action did not have any negative effect, it would be classified as a *melacha she'tzricha l'gufa*. According to Rashi, the classification of MSETL is subjective, while Tosfot's opinion is that there is an objective definition of MSETL. For Rashi, if the *melacha* that was done was non-beneficial, a *lo nicha lei*, then the action would not be *chayav* but all others actions would be.

To illustrate by example, consider a light in a refrigerator that was left on before Shabbat in a well-lit kitchen.¹⁰ When people open the fridge, they do not care that the light turns on because they could have identified each object without it, yet they do not proactively wish the light to be off since there still is a slight benefit to the extra light. Tosafot would say that this case is a *melacha she'eina tzricha l'gufa* because this *melacha* is not being done for the same purpose it was in the Mishkan and thus is *patur*. However, Rashi would explain that even though one did not need the light, the minimal benefit would make the action *chayav*. This distinction makes it understandable why Rashi believes that a PRDLIL would be *chayav*. He views any scenario in which there is only a minute improvement as a *lo ichpat* and consequently would classify it as a *melacha sh'tzricha l'gufa* and, therefore, *chayav*. Tosafot does not differentiate between a PRDLNL and PRDLIL because he does not care about the subjective cares of an individual, just the definitive understanding of similarity to Mishkan; thus, both types of *psik reisha* are MSETL.

Understanding the *machlokot* between Rashi, Tosfot, and the Aruch provides critical insight into the broader framework of *Hilchot Shabbat*. The nuances of *psik reisha* and its subcategories – whether *d'nicha lei*, *d'lo nicha lei*, or *d'lo ichpat lei* – are not merely technical distinctions; they shed light on the deeper

¹⁰ For the moment, we are assuming that turning on the light intentionally would involve a Torah prohibition.

philosophy of Halacha – how intent, inevitability and benefit interact within the framework of halachic observance. Recognizing these complexities can greatly enhance our appreciation for the meticulous structure of halacha and how it impacts our daily decision-making.

Tzeiruf

The Mishna (Shabbat 73a) lists the thirty-nine primary categories of work (*avot melachot*) that were involved in constructing the Mishkan. Each of these main categories contains smaller subcategories known as *toladot*. This article focuses on the *tolada* of *tzeiruf* – the process of hardening metal by heating it and then immersing it in cold water.

The Mishna (Shabbat 41a) discusses the halachot regarding adding water to a hot pot. The Gemara quotes two different perspectives from Rav Ada and Abaye on what constitutes *tzeiruf*. The Gemara asks whether it is permissible to place a small amount of water into a hot pot in order to heat it, and whether this act qualifies as *tzeiruf*.

To understand *tzeiruf* more thoroughly, we must also examine a related Gemara (Yoma 34b). The Mishna explains that on Yom Kippur the Kohen Gadol is permitted to place a hot piece of metal into the mikvah before performing tevilah. This is done to ensure that the water is not too cold.

The Gemara inquires why there is no concern of *tzeiruf* in this situation. There are two explanations offered: Rav Bibi suggests that the metal was not hot enough for *tzeiruf* to occur. Abaye asserts that even if the metal was extremely hot, it is still permissible because there was no intention to perform *tzeiruf*.

Rashi understands that since only a piece of metal (not a vessel) is being heated, there is no Torah prohibition of *tzeiruf* even if done intentionally. *Tzeiruf* is a *tolada* of *makeh b'patish*, finishing a vessel, which applies only to completing a full object. Therefore, in this case, the prohibition is only a Rabbinic one

and not a Torah violation. Since it was unintentional, it is permitted.

Tosafot, however, argues that if the *tzeiruf* was done intentionally, it would violate a Torah prohibition even on a piece of metal. In this case, the *tzeiruf* was unintentional and would therefore be prohibited Rabbinically.

However, since this takes place in the Beis HaMikdash, *אין שבות במקדש*, and is permissible. In this case, the act of cooling glowing metal rods by placing them in water could be considered *mechabeh*, as it lowers the temperature of the material, similar to extinguishing a fire.

This leads to the halachic debate: Is the prohibition of *tzeiruf* based on the result of the action (cooling the metal) or the action itself (the heating and cooling process)? The Raavad (Hilchot Shabbat 12:1) writes that the general prohibition is *makeh b'patish*, focusing on the result of the action. The Rambam, however, explains (Shabbat 12:2) that *tzeiruf* is a *tolada* of *mechabeh*, because he focuses more on the actual action and less on the result and reality.

When examining the Rambam's approach, there appears at first glance to be a contradiction between his writings in Hilchot Shabbat 12:2 and Hilchot Avodat Yom HaKippurim 2:4. In Shabbat, the Rambam defines *tzeiruf* as a *tolada* of *mechabeh*, and heating a piece of metal in order to harden it violates a Torah prohibition. However, in Avodat Yom HaKippurim he writes that placing pieces of hot metal in the mikvah so that water would not be too cold, violates only a Rabbinic prohibition and in the context of avodah in the Beis HaMikdash, *אין שבות במקדש*.

After closer analysis, there is no contradiction. In Hilchot Shabbat, the Rambam is referring to an abstract case. However in Hilchot Avodat Yom HaKippurim, he is referencing a specific situation, where the purpose of placing the hot pieces of metal

into the mikvah was done to warm the water. Any hardening of the metal was unintentional, and therefore did not violate a Torah prohibition.

The normal paradigm of the Mishkan is extinguishing fire on wood in order to create coals, which would be a Torah violation of *mechabeh*. However, in other cases that do not follow the pattern of the Mishkan, כוונה is essential to define the action as *mechabeh*.

The Lechem Mishna explains that the Gemara in Yoma proves the Rambam's rule that when dealing with metal, one needs kavanah to distinguish the act as צירוף דאורייתא, since you are deviating from the paradigm of extinguishing wood which was done in the Mishkan. The reason you're liable on Shabbat is that you're cooling off hot metal in order to harden it.

This is similar to extinguishing burning wood to create coals. But here, you're cooling the metal to heat the water, which is further removed from the Mishkan example, making it only a Rabbinic violation.

According to the Rambam, in order for something to be a Torah prohibition, it needs to be exactly like the action done in the Mishkan. In the Mishkan, flames get extinguished to create coals, while here you remove heat to make it stronger.

The Rambam adds another case where *tzeiruf* can still be a Torah prohibition. The kavanah and the action of *tzeiruf* itself make it a toladah of *mechabeh*. All melachot are derived from actions in the Mishkan, and in the Mishkan, *mechabeh* typically involved turning wood into coals to heat something.

The current scenario includes heated metal instead of wood and is thus different from the Mishkan use. The similarity lies in both being *mechabeh*. Since this case differs, it's possible to say it's only a Rabbinic violation. Thus, the action and כוונה together – putting out a fire to create a vessel, elevates its status to be a

toladah of *mechabeh*. This clearly illustrates that כיונה is essential to the process.

The Chatam Sofer (Sukkah 33b) revisits the Rambam and argues that *tzeiruf* applies only if there is intent. He explains that *mechabeh* on metal is only a Rabbinic prohibition because it's not actually burning – it's more of a derivative action since it is metal and not wood.

Therefore, with *tzeiruf*, if there is intent, it becomes a Torah prohibition, and if not, it is exempt from a Torah violation but still forbidden Rabbinically. In Yoma, since there is no intent to perform *tzeiruf* (the goal is just to heat the water), the only concern is *mechabeh* on a Rabbinic level. This is why we say *ein shevut b'Mikdash*.

The Avnei Nezer (יז) clarifies that kavanah is an integral part of the Melachah and raises it to the level of a Torah prohibition. Without kavanah, *tzeiruf* cannot be considered a full melacha: it's simply a derivative of *mechabeh*. This would make it a Rabbinic prohibition, which is permissible in the Mikdash.

The Rambam doesn't quote the Gemara in Shabbat because in the case without kavanah, there is no Torah prohibition and it would be allowed (אין שבית במקדש). When using metal instead of wood, kavanah becomes central for the action to resemble the Mishkan and make it a Torah-level prohibition.

Returning to our original חקירה to reevaluate if the focus should be result or action: In Shabbat, the action seems closer to *makeh b'patish*, while in Yoma, it aligns more with *mechabeh*. These varying views show that the same action of cooling metal can be interpreted in many different ways.

Perhaps the Rambam views the Yoma case as the best model for *tzeiruf* (and Shabbat as an exception) because it involves hardening without kavanah therefore making it a Rabbinic prohibition. Others, however, consider Shabbat as the primary source,

where hardening metal without intent still leads to a Torah violation, as it resembles *makeh b'patish*.

מחשבה

Man on Top of Chomer

In Tanach, the promise of *galut* and *geulah* is often repeated. One notable symbol that appears at key moments of transition is the donkey, which offers a thematic insight, a key feature in the *galut* and *geulah* cycle.

The Hebrew word for a male donkey, *chamor*, shares its root with the word *chomer*, meaning physicality or materialism. True to this etymology, the nature of donkeys is deeply rooted in materialism, making them the embodiment of physicality. Donkeys are strong and enduring, traveling long distances with a heavy load.

Donkeys frame the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim as the nation goes through the process from *galut* to *geulah*. Egyptian society is immersed in a *chomer* environment, consumed by materialism. In the horror and pain of *galut* Mitzrayim and enslavement, the Jewish people become nothing more than a mere object to this corrupt society.

When Moshe arrives on a donkey, the *geulah* process is initiated. Upon his return, the pasuk reads: ויקח משה את אשתו ואת בניו וירכיבם על החמר וישב ארצה מצרים ויקח משה את מטה האלקים בידו (Shemot 4:20). Moshe was raised in *chomer*, having grown up in the house of Pharaoh, until he ran away. In his escape from *chomer*, he found Hashem at the burning bush and was given a clear mission: redeem His people from Mitzrayim, from the house of slaves, from the *chomer*. He returned a changed man, ready to lead the Jewish people to *geulah*.

On the one hand, the donkey represents the lowly aspects of the physical world, but it also holds the potential for transformation and spiritual growth. When the donkey, with its simple nature, serves as the vehicle for Moshe to fulfill his mission, it shows that even in the most material parts of life, there is space for spiritual growth and elevation.

The process of *geulah* from Egypt is slow, but it eventually reaches its climax with the exodus. As the *geulah* is revealed, the narrative pauses to teach the mitzvah of *peter chamor*, redeeming the firstborn donkey: כל פטר חמור תפדה בשה ואם לא תפדה וערפתו (Shemot 13:13).¹

Despite its outward display of *chomer*, the donkey has a redemptive quality. Likewise, despite the outward display of *chomer*, the Jewish people have a spiritual quality that makes them worthy of redemption. The Maharal (Gevurat Hashem 44:2) writes: שיש לישראל מועלה אלוקית נבדלת מן הגשמית וזה מוכח מפני שהוציא אותם מבית עבדים, similar to the innate redemptive quality of the donkey.

Our redemptive and spiritual quality carries with it an expectation and mission to rise above our *chomer*. Even in exile, we must meet the expectations placed upon us as part of our spiritual mission, transcending our limited physical nature.

This idea of surviving exile by following the model of a donkey is rooted in the textual placement of a donkey's presence before entering *galut*. The Patriarchal era ends with Yaakov's death in Mitzrayim. While physically in *galut*, Yaakov experiences spiritual clarity with which he blesses the tribes.¹ Yissachar, the honorable and scholarly tribe that is tasked with the yoke of Torah learning, is blessed with the strength of the *chamor*: יששכר חמור גרם רבץ בין המשפתיים (Bereishit 49:14).

By comparing Yissachar to the *chamor*, Yaakov underscores the strength and patience required for spiritual survival in times of hardship in *galut*. The donkey, which Rashi describes as being "strong-boned" and able to endure heavy burdens, is a metaphor for Yissachar's role in carrying a greater yoke of Torah on behalf of the nation. The tribe needs to understand that its obligation to Torah learning is not a light burden, and they will need to tap into their inner strength and wisdom to carry the spiritual עול תורה.

¹ Rashi quotes a Midrash: בקש לגלות את הקץ. At the brink of the Egyptian exile, Yaakov's focus was on the ultimate redemption in the Messianic Era, teaching us that in *galut* we need to yearn for *geulah*.

A donkey moves onward on its journey, moving forward without rest. Unlike most animals that need to unload their burden when they rest, the donkey remains strong, bearing its load even during moments of rest. Rashi² explains that to be an honorable and scholarly tribe, we must be “*rovetz bein mishpataim*.” Just as the donkey rests with its burden still on its back, a Jew can never shirk the shared national burden under any condition. He must muster the strength to persevere through challenges and properly channel the *chomer*, especially during the isolating pains of *galut*.

This message is directed not only at Yissachar, but also at the entire nation as they stand on the brink of the full scope of the exile in Mitzrayim. The donkey, symbolizing resilience and survival, highlights a refrain that they should carry with them as they enter the exile, keeping this message in mind.

This resilience is the *galut* donkey model. Unfortunately, this model has not always been followed. Yeshayahu (1:3) speaks to his generation when they veer off the path of Hashem. He draws on the metaphor of a donkey: ידע שור קונוהו וחמור אבוס בעליו ישראל לא ידע עמי; לא התבונן; even the lowly donkey knows its owner and can follow in its footsteps, whereas Yisrael doesn't even recognize Hashem.

The word “*ba'alav*” has the imagery of recognizing its master and remembering its mission, but it is also reminiscent of the slave/master dynamic that Hashem redeemed us from in Mitzrayim. We were not redeemed from a nation of *chomer* to follow our desires, but rather to fulfill our G-dly mission despite our physical desires.

In order to remain on this *yashar* path, we need to channel our chomer properly: כי תראה חמור שנאך רבץ תחת משאו וחדלת מעיב לו עיב עמו (Shemot 23:5). This pasuk instructs us to overcome our *yetzer hara* and embrace the responsibility of helping others.

² רובץ בין המשפטים. כחמור המהלך ביום ובלילה, ואין לו לינה בבית, כשהוא רוצה לנוח, רובץ בין התחומין, בתחומי העירות שמולך שם פרקמטיא

As a nation, we have a shared responsibility and cannot afford to focus solely on our needs when others require assistance.

The usage of the term רבץ regarding a donkey, reminds us of its earliest appearance in Tanach (Bereishit 4:7): ואם לא תיטיב לפתח חטאת רבץ ואליך תשוקתו ואתה תמשל בו. This pasuk comes at a turning point in the story of Kayin, as he is battling his feelings of jealousy towards his brother. Hashem assures Kayin that when sin crouches at the door, he has the ability to rule over it. The *chamor*, representing materialistic desires, is linked textually to the *yetzer hara*. Just as we must learn to rule over sin and not let temptation rule over us, we need to train ourselves to rule over the materialistic world and not let it control us. Kayin's failure to overcome the *yetzer hara* leads to his separation from the community and to personal exile.

But just as the *yetzer hara* played a pivotal role in the first exile, this area of struggle will be rectified in the era of the final redemption. This is the restoration of the clear vision of Hashem's presence in the world, which will only come after the Jews have undergone this lengthy process of spiritual refinement during *galut*. The pasuk in Devarim (30:6) that describes the End of Days talks about the "circumcision of the heart," which Ramban elaborates to mean the removal of the *yetzer hara* from the heart: ומול הלב הוא שלא יחמד ולא יתאוה, וישוב האדם בזמן ההוא לאשר היה קדם חטאו של אדם הראשון, שהיה עושה בטבעו מה שראוי לעשות, ולא היה לו ברצונו דבר והפכו.

The Ramban makes an explicit connection between the *cheit* of Adam HaRishon and the rectification of the "circumcision" of the *yetzer hara* which brings spiritual clarity. Clarity happens during *geulah*. We've suffered in *galut* where clarity is absent and isolating us in a world of *chomer*. Our mission is to navigate this world by learning how to ride our *chomer* and not have the *chomer* ride us.

While *galut* is a symptom of spiritual disconnection, its correction and transformation will be a crucial element of the *geulah*, where the *chomer* serves as a vehicle for Divine revelation. There is no better symbol to usher in this long-awaited era than for a man to be riding

on the donkey as the Navi Zecharia (9:9) prophesied regarding Mashiach's long-awaited arrival: גילי מאד בת ציון הריעי בת ירושלם: הנה מלכך יבוא לך צדיק ונושע הוא עני ורכב על חמור ועל עיר בן אתנות. The cyclical journey of *galut* and *geulah* starts and ends on a donkey.

Here is where we enter *geulah* with a sense of triumph,³ ending our long and painful journey of *galut* with the knowledge and ability to overcome the challenges that come with *chomer*. In this way, the transition from *galut* to *geulah* is not just a restoration of spiritual connection, but a transformation of the material world into a spiritual space, where the *chomer* is no longer a barrier but a path toward holiness. This era is the ultimate fulfillment of the Divine promise, where spiritual and physical realms unite in perfect harmony. We finally learned how to be רוכב על החמור.

³ Rashi points out that there is precedent for Mashiach's arrival on a donkey as Moshe Rabbeinu too was a humble man that rode on top of a donkey to usher in a massive and long awaited era of redemption. Rashi writes that this is the same donkey of Avraham Avinu during the Akeidah, and will be the donkey of Mashiach when he arrives (though it is not clear if this is meant metaphorically or physically).

Neuroplasticity and the Power of Teshuva

The National Library of Medicine defines neuroplasticity as a process that involves adaptive structural and functional changes to the brain. It is regarded as the ability of the nervous system to change its activity in response to intrinsic or extrinsic stimuli by reorganizing its structure, functions, or connections. In short, it is the brain's ability to change. Is the theory of neuroplasticity compatible with Judaism? Can people really change? And if so, is *Teshuva* a means to get there?

A classic example of the *Teshuva* process is the story of Yonah, read on Yom Kippur, and his attempt to convince the inhabitants of the city of Ninveh to repent for their actions. At the start of the *sefer* (1:2), Hashem describes the people of Ninveh and their behavior as evil. After Yonah delivers the Heavenly message of the consequences of their actions, they don sackcloth and ashes. Hashem accepts their penitence (3:10): וירא האלקים את מעשיהם כי שבו מדרכם הרעה וינחם. האלקים על הרעה אשר דבר לעשות להם ולא עשה.

However, despite their repentance at that time, the story of Ninveh does not end there. The navi Nachum (3:1), around 100 years after Yonah, envisions the destruction of Ninveh: עיר דמים כלה עיר דמים כלה due to the bloodshed, lies and robbery which filled the city. In addition, Tzefania (2:13) discusses the ultimate destruction of Ninveh, to a desolate wasteland – לשממה.

This is a clear indication that the people of Ninveh failed to maintain their *Teshuva*. They were unable to “rewire their brains” to do good, and instead fell back to their old, sinful ways. The *Teshuva* process was only temporary but did not lead to any permanent change that would have prevented their destruction.

Yiddishkeit, however, is a religion which is surrounded by the idea of *Teshuva* – the months of *Elul* and *Tishrei* heighten our awareness of Hashem's closeness, encouraging us to repent, especially during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*. The Rambam's *Hilchot Teshuva* (2:1) lists four steps in the *Teshuva* process. The first is *charata* (regretting the sin); the second is *azivat hachet* (actively deciding you do not want to do the sin anymore); the third is *vidui* (confessing the sin, verbally) and the fourth is *kabalat la'atid* (accepting upon yourself that you will no longer sin in the future).

The Rambam's list is detailed and extensive, highlighting the absolute importance of the *Teshuva* process. In addition, the last step is a parallel to the idea of neuroplasticity – accepting the fact that you no longer want to sin, and rewiring the brain to prevent it from happening ever again.

Therefore, it is clear that Ninveh cannot be the prime example of *Teshuva*, since it only worked in the short term. Rather we ought to delve deeper to find real proof that *Teshuva* can fully rewire and change the brain for the better.

There are many biblical and talmudic examples of successful *Teshuva*. Menashe ben Chizkiyahu, king of Yehudah did evil, and spilt innocent blood, including that of his grandfather, the navi Yeshayahu (see Yevamot 49b) and spread idol worship throughout the land, even in the Beit HaMikdash. After he was captured and taken to Bavel, Menashe became greatly distressed and davened to Hashem, doing *Teshuva* for all that he did. Surprisingly, despite his past actions, it was accepted by Hashem.

Upon his return to the throne, Menashe goes through a total reformation and changes all his ways, destroying the idols and altars that he had built: ויסר את אלהי הנכר ואת הסמל מבית ה' וכל (Divrei Hayamim II 33:15). He davened to Hashem throughout the remainder of his life, continuing to do *Teshuvah*, until the end. During much of his

life, Menashe was a *rasha*, and yet his sincere *Teshuva* was ultimately accepted by Hashem.¹

There is a well known story about Elazar Ben Durdaya. The Gemara (Avoda Zara 17a) notes that there was not one prostitute in the world with which he did not engage. He then heard about a prostitute who lived at a great distance and charged a great deal of money. He did not hesitate to make the journey and was prepared to pay the fee. It was during this encounter that Elazar Ben Durdaya had *hirhurei teshuva*. He called out for assistance to the mountains and hills, the heavens and earth, the sun and moon and the stars and the constellations, all of which could not help him. He then sat and cried to himself, until his soul left his body. A *Bat Kol* called out רבי אלעזר בן דורדיא מזומן לחיי העולם הבא. Evidently, his regret and grief were so profound that his soul left his body to go to Olam Haba.

This story truly highlights what Teshuva can accomplish. Even a person immersed in debauchery and immorality can turn his life around in a short period of time, gaining acceptance to Olam Haba with the title of רבי.

Rav Kook writes in Orot HaTeshuvah 5, “Teshuva is the healthiest feeling for the *nefesh*.” For some, it is a lengthy process, while for others it can occur in one rude awakening. It can alter your life in this world and gain your acceptance in the World to Come. When done correctly, it affects the individual, rewiring the brain pattern and behaviour, proving that there is space for neuroplasticity within Yiddishkeit. May we merit to be sincere in our Teshuva, and have it accepted by Hashem in His great mercy.

¹ There is a machloket between the Sages and R' Yehuda over whether Menashe ultimately achieved a share in Olam Haba. The Sages list Menashe as one of the three kings (including Yerav'am and Achav) who do not have a share in Olam Haba. R' Yehuda disagrees. In the final analysis, R' Yochanan sides with R' Yehuda, declaring that anyone who says that Menashe has no portion in the World to Come weakens the resolve of potential *baalei teshuva*. See Sanhedrin 90a, 103a.

Those Were the Nights of Chanukah

In explaining the origins of the holiday of Chanukah, the Gemara (Shabbat 21b) states: **ולא מצאו אלא פך אחד של שמן שהיה מונח בחותמו של כהן גדול ולא היה בו אלא להדליק יום אחד. נעשה בו נס והדליקו ממנו שמונה ימים.** On the other hand, in the *Al HaNissim* prayer for Chanukah, there is no explicit mention of the miracle of oil. The emphasis of this tefillah is on the military victory against all odds. These are seemingly two very different reasons for the Chanukah celebration. Which explanation is the accepted one?

There is a famous question posed by the Beit Yosef: Why do we light the menorah for eight days if the oil lasted only for seven extra days? One day's worth of oil lasting eight days is not an eight day miracle. It is a seven day miracle.

The Maharal of Prague suggests in his sefer *Ner Mitzvah* that two different miracles took place on Chanukah. There was a *nes nistar*, a “hidden” natural miracle, the military victory of the *Chashmonaim* over the *Yevanim*. One could attribute the victory of a small, weak army over the vastly superior forces of a world empire to brilliant military strategy, but, in reality, the miracle could not have been possible if the *Yad Hashem* was not behind it.

But there was also a *nes nigleh*, a revealed supernatural miracle, that occurred; the miracle of the oil and the menorah. The Divine intervention in this change in nature was obvious to everyone. Although it is possible to deny the miraculous in a *nes nistar*, the *nes* of the menorah, which was *nigleh*, proved the miracle of the war. The oil of the menorah not only illuminated the Beit Hamikdash; it also shed light on the military victory. If the Hand of Hashem determined one, it must have also orchestrated the other.

Though the main miracle was the *nes* of the war as emphasized in *Al HaNissam*, the Gemara provides the necessary spiritual background to the story. One day of Chanukah is celebrated for the military victory. (After all, Purim, for example, is a one day holiday.) The rest of the holiday celebrates the seven miraculous days of the oil, providing proper perspective for the celebration.

The Ramchal in *Adir BaMarom* explains that Hashem puts people in a world with a G-d who operates in a hidden fashion, where humans must work to reveal Him when He is concealed. The world needs a guiding light in order to find Him, *כי נר מצוה ותורה אור* (Mishlei 6:23). This is why the *nes nigleh*, the revealed miracle, helps prove the *nes nistar*, the hidden miracle of the war. Miracles can only happen by bringing Hashem into the world and revealing Him.

The Maharal (Tiferet Yisrael, chapter 1) states: *והיא כנגד השמיני* *כי השמיני הוא על הטבע ולכן ראוי ל ישראל התורה שהיא על עולם הטבע*. Jews are associated with the number eight because eight is a number that represents *l'maaleh min hatevah*. Seven is the number for *teva* because of the seven days of creation. A *brit milah*, however, is on the eighth day, which represents how Bnei Yisrael is a nation that functions above nature. A nation that is above nature needs to have something specifically just for them that is above nature, which is the Torah. The one flask of oil lasted beyond its natural capabilities, for eight days. So too, the *Chashmonaim* lasted beyond their natural capabilities against the *Yevanim*.

The *Yevanim* wanted Bnei Yisrael to become idol worshipers. It says in Bereshit Rabbah (2:4) that the *Yevanim* told Bnei Yisrael: *כתבו על קרן השור שאין להם חלק באלקי ישראל*. The Rokeach¹ explains that the *Yevanim* wanted to remind the Jews about *Chet HaEgel*. At the time of *Chet HaEgel*, Shevet Levi fought against Bnei Yisrael that sinned, joining with Moshe when he called out *מי לה' אלי* (Shemot 32:26). On Chanukah, once again the *Chashmonaim* from Shevet Levi (and their supporters) fought the battle of *מי לה' אלי*.

¹ Perushei Siddur HaTefillah L'Rokeach, vol. 2 p. 715.

The *Yevanim* tried to prevent Bnei Yisrael from maintaining their kedusha, but Bnei Yisrael responded mightily.

The Ohr Gedalyahu² explains that Malchut Yavan never intended to destroy the Beit HaMikdash. The *Yevanim* just wanted the Jews to assimilate into their culture and remove any vestiges of kedusha. The *Yevanim* translated and interpreted the Torah to defile it. They also defiled the oil in the Beit HaMikdash by removing all the seals that attested to the purity of the oil. They didn't allow *brit milah*, in order to remove Bnei Yisrael's *kedushat haguf*. They prohibited the observance of Shabbat which symbolizes *kedushat haolam*, as if the Jews and the *Yevanim* are in the same world. Furthermore, they did not allow Talmud Torah, which was an attempt to remove the *kedushat haseichel*, trying to create an identical world outlook. They made a decree against Rosh Chodesh which symbolizes *kedushat hazman*, preventing Am Yisrael from renewing themselves spiritually, in order to show that Bnei Yisrael had no kedusha.

Yavan is *k'neged shefichat damim* because blood is the medium that separates life and death. Everything in the human body functions to serve the blood. Yavan was attempting to destroy Bnei Yisrael's kedusha and *chiyut pnimit*. The *Yevanim* were taking away the Torah but letting Bnei Yisrael live physically, allowing them to live in a "dead" state.

The Gemara (Shabbat 21b) says that כשנכנסו יוונים להיכל טמאו כל השמנים שבהיכל, that the *Yevanim* were able to reach the *Heichal* and they defiled everything in the Beit HaMikdash. According to the Maharal (sefer Ner Mitzvah), the *Yevanim* reached the level of kedusha of the *Heichal*, but they couldn't get as far as the *Kodesh HaKadoshim*. The gematria of היכל is 65, and the gematria of *Yavan* is 66, showing that *Yavan* was able to overcome the *Heichal*, but not the *Kodesh HaKadoshim*. The Maharal continues: שלטו יון וטמאו את כל השמנים ולא נשאר רק פח אחד קטן שהיה מונח בחותם של הכהן גדול כי כהן גדול יש לו קדושה על קדושה. *Yavan* could overcome the Jews and

² Rav Gedaliah Schorr, Ohr Gedalyahu, Moadim, audio.yeshiva.edu/shiur-1011865.html.

defile all the oils except the small flask of oil with the seal of the Kohen Gadol. There was the stamp of the Kohen Gadol that remained on the final flask of oil, which shows the *Yevanim* could come as far as the *Heichal* but there is still a limit to how much Hashem will allow to become defiled.

The Torah (Shemot 19:6) says: ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש. Due to our inherent kedusha, we are servants, kohanim, of Hashem. The Sfat Emet on Chanukah explains that everyone has a *pach echad* of *shemen* inside of them and can reach a high level that can last only in a life of holiness, just like the oil lasted with the seal of the Kohanim. May we all be *zocheh* to find our own *pach shemen* and reach a higher level of kedusha and avodat Hashem.

The Brightest Light or the Deepest Dark?

Fire is one of the first things a child is told not to touch. It can bring light into our homes, but it can also destroy our homes. It has brought about much advancement to our world, but has also severely regressed us in many ways. Think of the technological advancements that could never have been possible without it. Think of the homes that would still be here if it hadn't touched them. Think of the heat it provides us on cold winter nights. Think of the Beit Hamikdash and what we lost with it. Is fire good? Is it bad?

The Tanach seems to have this conundrum as well, as *aish* is used in both positive and negative contexts. We first see the word *aish* in the **בְּרִית בֵּין הַבְּתָרִים** (Bereishit 15:17), recording Hashem's covenant granting Eretz Yisrael to Avraham's descendants for eternity. In stark contrast, the next mention of *aish* is in the story of the destruction of Sodom and Amora (Bereshit 19:24). Soon after, the word *aish* appears during Akeidat Yitzchak (Bereshit 22:6). Looking through Tanach, one can readily see the oscillation between the use of *aish* in a positive light and in a negative one.

However, what seems to be a great connecting theme is that *aish* is used in extreme times. The *Akeida*, the *Sneh*, and Eliyahu's ascent to the Heavens were all peak spiritual moments in Jewish History. They were moments where Hashem's glorious presence was so abundantly clear to the world. On the other hand, Sodom and Amora, the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the burning of those around the outskirts of the camp, and, of course, the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash are all rock bottom moments. They are the times when we didn't see Hashem's loving light through the smoke.

Not only does Tanach connect *aish* to such monumental moments, but *aish* is also compared to great and holy entities. One

of the most well-known, is the connection between *aish* and Yerushalayim as seen through the Kabbalistic lens.¹ Each of the four holy cities correspond to one of the four elements, with Yerushalayim connecting to fire. Why? Yerushalayim is “alive.” It possesses a unique energy. Even its terrain isn’t flatlining; its hills can raise a person’s heart rate. Fire feeds continuously off the oxygen in the air, and the more it feeds off of its surroundings, the more it grows. So too, in Yerushalayim, the more you engross yourself in the atmosphere of passion for Torah that’s innate in the city – as the place of Hashem’s *shechina* – the more you will grow as an individual.

In *The Flame of Faith that has Survived all Tyranny*,² Rabbi Jonathan Sacks illustrates how the Jewish people, having survived all that’s come at them, are comparable to a “fragile flame.” “The Jewish people ... having stood face to face with the Angel of Death, still survives, and prays, and gives thanks to G-d.” We are not the fierce fire that burns synagogues, but the single burning light that will outstand it all.

Similarly, a century earlier, Mark Twain wrote³:

Other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains.

The Sifrei (see Devarim 33:2) compares the words of Torah to fire. If one stands too close, he will get burned, and if he is too far away, he won’t benefit from the heat. Similarly, if one approaches the Torah without limits and tries to use it for his own purposes, he

¹ “Israel’s Four Elements: Four Holy Cities: Living In The Heart Of The World” by Shira Goetz | *The Jewish Post*.

² “The Flame of Faith that has Survived all Tyranny” by Rabbi Sacks | *The Times*.

³ “Concerning the Jews” by Mark Twain (1899).

will be lost from this world. If he strays too far, he will die. If he properly toils in Torah, it will provide life.

The Sifrei continues: Just as the effect of fire is visible on someone who uses it properly, so does the learning of Torah leave an impression of refinement on Talmidei Chachamim.

Fire is a double edged sword. It has the ability to enhance society, but it also can cause significant pain and damage to the world. It gives and takes. It builds and it destroys. Chazal tell us that the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed with fire, but will also be rebuilt with fire.

What is the significance of the *Ner Tamid*, the Eternal Flame? There is an ancient tradition to have one lit above the Aron Kodesh in a shul; a reminder of the *ner tamid* that stayed lit in the menorah in the Beit HaMikdash.

Rabbi Yisrael Motzen, Rabbi of the Ner Tamid Synagogue in Baltimore, wrote an article⁴ analyzing the words above the Aron in his shul: *ולנר תמיד אקח לי*. “That is the Ner Tamid. The eternal light. That has somehow outlasted all those seismic changes. We are a light, not only in the fact of survival. But a light in that it shined. We shined. We stubbornly held on to values that seemed backward. We held on to beliefs that seemed archaic. With time, those backward ideas were embraced. To quote the Christian historian, Paul Johnson:⁵ “The world without the Jews would have been a radically different place. Humanity might have eventually stumbled upon all the Jewish insights. But we cannot be sure. All the great conceptual discoveries of the human intellect seem obvious and inescapable once they had been revealed, but it requires a special genius to formulate them for the first time. The Jews had this gift. To them we owe the idea of equality before the law, both divine and human; of the sanctity of life and the dignity of human person; of the individual conscience and so a personal redemption; of collective conscience

⁴ “Ul’Ner Tamid Ekach Li” by Motzen, nertamid.net.

⁵ *A History of the Jews* by Paul Johnson (epilogue, page 585).

and so of social responsibility; of peace as an abstract ideal and love as the foundation of justice, and many other items which constitute the basic moral furniture of the human mind. Without Jews it might have been a much emptier place.”

Rabbi Motzen continues: “And where do we take this light from? *Me’eish Ha’akeidah*. We take it from the fire of the Akeidah. The Akeidah, in Jewish literature, is a symbol. The original Akeidah ... was the first time we were asked to give up our life for our beliefs, but it certainly wasn’t the last. The destruction of the Temple was an Akeidah. The Crusades were an Akeidah. The Inquisition was an Akeidah. And of course, the Holocaust was a cataclysmic Akeidah. But not only did these Akeidot, these moments of sacrifice not hold us down, they propelled us forward. Some of the most creative bursts of Jewish thought and practice were born out of the darkest of times.”

We held the light of the *Ner Tamid* to the world and it left sparks behind, sparks passed on to us from Avraham Avinu, who was the first to stand against all others, and who sparked the original light from the *Akeidah*. The world is represented in darkness. Am Yisrael is the opposite. We are the *aish*. We leave sparks behind. We shape the world into a place of light, eternal light, because we pass on the *Ner Tamid* from one generation to the next. And so, when we say the Jewish people are like *aish* in that we are a “fragile flame,” we have to caveat the statement because we are not just any “flame” that simply perseveres, but we are The Eternal Flame. *Never* going away. *Never* stopping to leave our sparks on the world. *Never* stopping the journey paved for us by our Forefathers.

Olam Haba

Olam Haba is a core element of faith in Judaism, yet it remains somewhat of a mystery. It is so integral, in fact, that the Ramchal writes in *Derech Hashem* that man's primary purpose in this world is preparation for *Olam Haba*. He explains that *Olam Haba* consists exclusively of G-d, so in devoting one's life to knowing and connecting with Him in this world, a person is ultimately preparing to be reunited with Him in the next.

The Chumash does not mention *Olam Haba*, which seems like a significant lapse in content for such a fundamental concept – one that is the ultimate purpose of life and will realistically span far beyond any human lifetime. The *Kli Yakar* (Vayikra 26:12) takes note of this absence and compiles various explanations from the Rishonim. Among them, Rav Yosef Albo in the *Sefer HaIkkarim* suggests that the Torah mentions explicitly only those rewards that are granted to the nation as a whole (rain, crops, peace). *Olam Haba*, on the other hand, is granted to individuals based on their personal merits, and is only hinted at in the Torah.

Rabbeinu Bechaye suggests that perhaps *Olam Haba* is absent from the Torah because the Torah generally describes only that which appears unnatural (e.g., doing a mitzvah would not lead one to naturally expect rain to start falling from the sky), but the return of a soul to its creator in *Olam Haba* is the most natural course of events and therefore requires no explanation. There is something profoundly comforting about this idea: the notion that our souls – so extensively studied as objects of rich complexity and elusiveness – are, in reality, so simply natural that they do not even warrant intellectual discussion.

The Ibn Ezra (Devarim 32:39) suggests that *Olam Haba* is omitted from the Torah because it is so far beyond the limits of human comprehension. This perspective relieves the intellectual

burden of trying to grasp its mysteries, framing *Olam Haba* as something unimaginably complex. A counterargument to the Ibn Ezra's position is that, despite his claim, many Rishonim, as explored throughout the remainder of this essay, have sought to explain *Olam Haba* to the layman reader.

The nature of *Olam Haba* is a subject of debate among the Rishonim and Achronim. Some of the key points of this discussion include the distinction between *Olam HaNeshamot* and *Olam Haba*, whether entry to *Olam Haba* is universal, and if or when the soul will experience reunification with a physical body. Each opinion presents a unique timeline, incorporating – though not necessarily in the same order – death, *Techiyat HaMetim*, *Olam HaNeshamot*, *Gehinom*, and *Olam Haba*.

In *Derech Hashem* (2:2), the Ramchal explains that after death, if necessary, the neshama first enters *Gehinom*, where it undergoes a purification process designed to remove any deficiency, enabling a person to achieve the highest level of G-dliness. Some souls, however, are so wicked that even this purification cannot redeem them; they receive reward for their few good deeds in this world but are owed nothing further, and thus simply cease to exist rather than continue on this posthumous journey.

Gehinom is not just as a punishment, but also as an opportunity for beneficial purification. After the requisite time in *Gehinom*, the soul proceeds to *Olam HaNeshamot*, where it awaits – along with all the souls of the deceased – the coming of Mashiach, who will usher in *Techiyat HaMetim*. At that time, the souls in *Olam HaNeshamot* will be reunited with their bodies, and all the rewards for the mitzvot performed during the soul's initial earthly existence will be activated, producing a physically purifying effect on the body.

This notion that our actions in this world have ramifications in a spiritual world is a reminder of Rav Chaim Volozhin's explanation of *tzelem Elokim* (Nefesh HaChaim 1:1). The word צֶלֶם in the pasuk (Bereishit 1:27): וַיְבָרֵא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹקִים בָּרָא אוֹתוֹ, refers to G-d's ability to be a *Creator*. Similarly, man possesses the

ability to create things that have significant spiritual ramifications. Rav Chaim Volozhin writes: **הוא מקיים ונותן כח בכמה כחות ועולמות** עליונים הקדושים, man's creativity is a force in *higher worlds*.

Rav Yosef Albo (Sefer Ikarim 4:31) offers a different opinion explaining the afterlife. His principal conviction is that there are two versions of *Olam Haba*, one general version for the masses and one elevated version, to which only *tzadikim gemurim* are granted entry after *Techiyat HaMetim*. This aligns with his view mentioned earlier regarding *Olam Haba's* absence in the Torah, where he suggests that it only concerns very specific individuals.

In this timeline, man dies, goes to *Gehinom*, and then proceeds to an *Olam Haba* designed for the masses, also known as *Olam HaNeshamot* and Gan Eden. This is what the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 10:1) refers to when it says **כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא**. When Mashiach comes, souls that are righteous enough to merit *Techiyat HaMetim* will be reunited with their bodies. In *Techiyat HaMetim*, Hashem offers a chance for those who didn't fulfill enough mitzvot for reasons not pertaining to poor character but rather due to inescapable circumstances (e.g. **עול הגלות**, or Moshe and Aharon who could not enter Eretz Yisrael) to do more mitzvot and earn *schar*.

Following this, the *tzaddikim gemurim* will proceed from *Yemot HaMashiach* and *Techiyat HaMetim* into the second and more elite *Olam Haba*. This opinion is unique in its suggestion that there are two distinct rewards of *Olam Haba*, and that man has the ability to acquire *schar* after death.

The Rambam¹ presents a different perspective. He prefaces his suggestions with the warning that there is no *mesorah* for such concepts and that potential rewards for religious practices should not be the foundation of our faith. His principally unique conviction is that man dies *twice*. First, upon completion of his life in *Olam HaZeh*, he dies and the soul enters the *Olam HaNeshamot*. It is

¹ עי' פיהמ"ש סנהדרין פרק י'; הלכות תשובה פרק ח'-ט'; מאמר תחיית המתים

there that the neshama will receive a reward of *ruchniyut*, basking in the presence of the *Shechina*. After the coming of Mashiach, the righteous will merit *Techiyat HaMaitim*. The souls will return to the bodies and live a “long life” and will eventually die and experience the ultimate *Olam Haba*.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner (נא, פחד יצחק, אגרות וכתבים) explains the Rambam’s notion of man dying twice, in relation to Adam HaRishon’s status before and after eating from the *Etz Hadaat*.

Before the sin of *Etz Hadaat*, nature operated on a fundamentally spiritual level. Although Adam HaRishon was a physical being, his existence was spiritual. Had he not sinned, at some point he would have received his reward, and his soul would have departed to an even higher level of spirituality.

Accordingly, the Rambam’s view is that at the point of *Techiyat Hamaitim*, the human soul will be reunited with the body, but living a spiritual existence akin to Adam HaRishon before the sin. This spiritual “life” will continue until some point when the soul will depart to an even higher level of spiritual existence. This second “death” is fundamentally different from the first. At the end of the human lifespan, the body returns to the earth. In this post-sin reality, death is no longer a gradual process of transcendence but rather a sudden, bifurcated switch. But at the climax of *Techiyat Hamaitim*, the emphasis is on the soul that ascends to an even higher existence when the soul ultimately sheds the body as an unnecessary vessel.

The Ramchal’s opinion regarding the change in the natural world introduced by Adam’s sin (דרך ה', חלק ראשון, במין האנושי) directly relates to his previously mentioned ideas regarding the physical rewards for spiritual acts that await man in *Olam Haba* after *Techiyat HaMetim*. He suggests that before the sin, Adam had complete free will in the choice between the *guf* and the *neshama*, but proper choices regarding the *neshama* would lead to purification of the *guf*, such that man could ultimately, and relatively easily, reach *shleimut*. After the sin, however, the *neshama* is unable to purify the *guf* to the point of complete *shleimut*, and death

was introduced as a means of enabling this process of *shleimut*. Now, the physical results of man's spiritual good deeds in this world await him at the time of *Techiyat Hamaitim*. In this sense, the nature of *Olam Haba* is intrinsically linked to Adam's sin.

There is evidently rich and detailed content to the study of *Olam Haba*. However, it is critical to remember, as the Rambam points out, that these are not the foundations of our faith. The ability that we have to build personal relationships with the Almighty, Creator of the Universe is so inherently powerful that this *schar* pales in comparison to religious life itself.²

² Based on Shiurim from Mrs. Shalvie Friedman.

Tzniut: The Power of Privacy

“Why do you always wear a skirt?” This is the question one girl would often ask me while we sat together on the bench at our little league baseball games. The girl sitting next to me was confused and simply wanted to know why anyone would ever actually choose to wear a skirt in the middle of the summer. As a young eight-year-old, however, I could not respond. Why was I wearing a skirt? I understood that it had something to do with tzniut, but I could not explain what that meant. What is tzniut, and where does it come from? Furthermore, what is the purpose of tzniut?

Tzniut is commonly translated as modesty. It is also typically associated with clothing. While modesty and clothing are definitely aspects of tzniut, defining tzniut as a whole with the word “modesty” is not only false but can also be harmful. Tzniut is perhaps more accurately explained as privacy or “*pnimiyut*,” which is internality. Tzniut is also a multifaceted *middah* that applies to both men and women.

What is the root of the *middah* of tzniut? Where does it even come from? The Navi Micha says (6:8) הגיד לך אדם מה טוב ומה ה' דורש ממך כי אם עשות משפט ואהבת חסד והצנע לכת עם אלקיך.

Micha outlines three things that Hashem seeks from Am Yisrael: to do justice, love kindness, and walk with Hashem בצנעה. What is this צנעה? According to the Metzudat Tzion, tzniut is related to concealment.

When something is truly concealed, there is a certain beauty found there. For example: When there is a secret kept between husband and wife or between two friends, it becomes something special between them. Contrastingly, if a person goes behind someone else's back and shares information that was meant to be kept private, the secret loses its uniqueness and there is something lost in the relationship.

The Radak suggests a different interpretation of this pasuk. **והצנע לכת עם אליך** is describing a singular love of Hashem with all of one's heart and soul. The pasuk specifically uses the word **והצנע** because this true and deep connection with Hashem can only occur **בצנעה**, in privacy. Our relationship with Hashem should be something special and private.

Tzniut is very similar to *pinimiyut*. What is *pnimiyut*? In the introduction to the sefer Sha'ar HaEmunah VeYesod HaChasidut, *pnimiyut* is defined as an inner secret nature. In terms of *pnimiyut*, the point of tzniut is to redirect our focus on the internal. Society at large is very focused on the external: our overall physical appearance, clothing, shoes, and possessions. Tzniut reminds us that we are really valued based on our inner unique selves and our own ideas, strengths, talents, and weaknesses. This also applies to our *avodat Hashem*. A person who truly walks with Hashem **בצנעה**, will not be distracted or deterred by external or opposing factors. The relationship is centralized only between Hashem and the individual. Judaism values the inner nature of every single person.

There is a difference between tzniut and shyness or quietness. One does not need to be meek and quiet to be tzanua. Rather, with the *middah* of tzniut comes the recognition that there is a time and place for certain speech and behavior. Tzniut is about realizing what is appropriate in the moment and what is not, what is meant to be kept private and what can be shared at the right time.

In today's society, there is a great emphasis placed on sharing extremely personal aspects of one's life with others. However, there are certain things that are meant to be kept private. For example: Should engagement pictures be shared? What is appropriate to post on social media? What is meant to remain between a person and Hashem? How does tzniut apply to male and female relationships in the workplace? Can private information be posted on a blog? The answers must be based on a balanced approach to the values of tzniut, while being sensitive to the people and communities around them.

There are ways that a person can and should work on the *middah* of tzniut in relation to privacy. The Metzudat David (Micha 6:8) explains that a person should follow in the footsteps of G-d and therefore should do mitzvot in a private and humble manner rather than in a public or boastful way. There are times in life when a person does a good deed and is simply bursting to share this information with everyone. However, he should try to remember that the point of doing a mitzvah is not to impress others, but rather to get close to Hashem.

One must also work on the *middah* of tzniut in terms of what is shared online. Before posting something on social media, a person must ask: Is this something that should remain private? Is this truly something that others should see or read? It is also important to place an emphasis on the internal beauty found within every human being. Society may very well primarily value the external. However, the most significant aspect of a Jew is the most internal: our *neshamot*.

Each person has the ability to work on the mitzvah of *tzniut*. While clothing is an aspect of *tzniut*, we cannot overlook the *middah* of tzniut as a whole, which includes the values of humility, dignity, and privacy. Most importantly, tzniut is a *middah*, and is meant to be used to empower us in our *avodat Hashem*. May we merit to recognize the innate beauty of tzniut and use it to reach higher levels, becoming closer to G-d.

The Dual Nature of Shabbat

A unique aspect of Shabbat is the duality in many of its aspects. Features of Shabbat that are doubled include the obligation of two lamb *Karbanot*; its punishment being described in double wording מות יומת (Shemot 31:14); the Tehillim for Shabbat begins with שיר מזמור, and most famously the commandment to keep Shabbat changes from זכור in Shemot to שמור in Devarim. Why is Shabbat so closely associated with duality?

The Shem M'Shmuel explains that these dual expressions reflect the twofold essence of Shabbat. On the one hand, Shabbat is called by the Zohar the “secret of oneness,” through which all Jews become equal, as we say in Ma'ariv on Leil Shabbat (nusach Sefard): רוא דשבת איהי שבת דאתאחדת ברוא דאחד.

On the other hand Shabbat is described as מעין עולם הבא (Berachot 57b), where we receive reward based on individual merit. Shabbat is characterized by both a *Mitzvat Lo Ta'aseh* and a *Mitzvat Aseh*. All Jews are spiritually equal when performing the passive *Lo Ta'aseh*, but when it comes to the active *Aseh*, we each grow differently depending on how much energy and sincerity we put into our performance of these Mitzvot. The Jewish people have a dual purpose: a unified national mission as the Chosen People to keep Hashem's laws, and an individual specific mission that is unique to that person.

Although everyone's actions appear identical, in reality each person performs Mitzvot with a different mindset and enthusiasm. Perhaps this is why Chazal say that *Mashiach* will come when Jews keep two Shabbatot; one Shabbat of unity that elevates the *Kedusha* of the Jewish nation, and one Shabbat of individualism where each Jew achieves his personal potential.

On a more Kabbalistic note, the question of Shabbat and duality can also be understood through the idea that everything in this

world was created with a partner: a *koach*, potential, and *poel*, actual. This idea is reflected in the concept of masculine and feminine energy: man is the *mashpia* (influencer) by having the *Koach* and woman brings his potential into actuality through the role of a *mekabeil* (receiver).

The Vilna Gaon explains how every day of the week was created with a partner: On Day 1, light was created but on Day 4, this potential came into actuality with the sun, moon, and stars that harness the light to shine on the world. On the second day, the sky and sea were created, but their potential was only brought into actuality on the fifth day, when the birds and fish were created to give the sky and sea purpose. On Day 3, land and plants were created, but their potential was only brought into actuality on Day 6, when animals and man were created to give the land its purpose.

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabba 11:8) describes how Shabbat complained to Hashem that every day has a partner except for it, so Hashem declared that Bnei Yisrael would be its partner. Shabbat is the potential of *Kedusha*, and Yisrael brings this potential into actuality by keeping Hilchot Shabbat. In other words, Shabbat is the masculine *mashpia* and Am Yisrael is the feminine *mekabeil*.

However, this seems to contradict the fact that Shabbat is referred to in the feminine, as a bride during *Kabbalat Shabbat*, implying that Shabbat is the one who actualizes the potential of the holiness of Hashem. Evidently, Shabbat already had a partner!

When looking deeper into this topic, we discover that everything is a mixture of both a *mashpia* and a *mekabeil*, masculine and feminine, *Koach* and *Poel*. For example, a woman is the *mekabeil* towards her husband, but the *mashpia* towards her son, and the moon is the *mekabeil* receiving the sun's light, but the *mashpia* towards the plants and tides that it influences on land.

So too, Shabbat was the feminine *mekabeil* from Hashem, but wanted to also be the masculine *mashpia* that had an impact on Am Yisrael. This gives a deeper understanding to Chazal's saying that *Shamor* and *Zachor* were said בדיבור אחד (Rashi, Shemot 20:8), as

Shabbat is at the same time a *mekabeil* of Hashem and a *mashpia* to Am Yisrael, without one role contradicting the other.

The three *Shemoneh Esrei* tefillot of Shabbat share a phrase about resting on Shabbat, with one different word. On Friday night we say **וַיִּנּוּחוּ בָּהּ** in the feminine, on Shabbat day we say **וַיִּנּוּחוּ בּוֹ** in the masculine, and at Mincha we say **וַיִּנּוּחוּ בָּם**, in the plural. At night we refer to Shabbat as the feminine *mekabeil* from Hashem and in the day we switch to focusing on the role of Shabbat as the masculine *mashpia* on Am Yisrael.

This is further seen by the fact that each Tefillah on Shabbat mentions Shabbat in a different context. On Friday night, the Tefillah focuses on Bereishit where Hashem created Shabbat, but on Shabbat day we focus on Matan Torah, when Shabbat was given to Bnei Yisrael. This is reflected in the custom (Rema O.C. 274:1) to cut the bottom *Challah* on Friday night and the top *Challah* on Shabbat day. The Magen Avraham explains this is because on Friday night, *Shabbat* is the *mekabeil* receptacle for Hashem, but on Shabbat day, it is the *mashpia* on Am Yisrael.

Interestingly, the Mincha tefilla mentions Shabbat in plural language, combining Shabbat's relationship to Hashem and Yisrael. The plural language implies a partnership between the male and female aspects of Shabbat, that could be seen through the imagery of Shabbat being compared to a wedding between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael. Friday night is the *Kiddushin* as we say, **אתה קדשת**. Shabbat day is the *Chuppah*, when we say **ישמח משה במתנת חלקו**, and Mincha is the *Yichud*, as we say, **אתה אחד ושמןך אחד ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ**. This is why Shabbat is such a defining feature of Jewish life; on Shabbat, we, like a bride, declare our unwavering dedication to spending our life with Hashem, vowing to build a world infused with *Kedushah*.

If, however, everything is both a *mashpia* and a *mekabeil*, why are certain items (e.g. the moon or Shabbat) assigned the feminine label? Evidently, the label is based on its main designation. Since the moon is in the sky together with the sun, it is known as the

Levana in feminine, as the *mekabeil* from the sun. A woman is of the same generation as her husband, and therefore is considered primarily to be the *mekabeil* towards him, rather than the *mashpia* towards her children. So too, Shabbat is so enshrined in *Kedusha*, its main role is in *Shamayim* as the *mekabeil* from Hashem.

This idea is also seen with a soul, that is both the *mashpia* on the body and the *mekabeil* from Hashem. The *Neshama* is known in the feminine because its real essence is in *Shamayim* with Hashem, with man being created **בצלם אלקים**. We are all intrinsically holy as we contain a part of Hashem that is yearning to come close to *Shamayim*, its true “home.”

Furthermore, the *Neshama* is known in the feminine to teach us that every second we are alive is because Hashem is actively giving us life. Hashem decided that we are still worthy of that life and have a purpose to fulfill. As we acknowledge in every *Shemoneh Esrei*: **על חיינו המסורים בידך ועל נשמותינו הפקודות לך**.

The Power and Peril of Free Will

The question of free will has been a subject of philosophical and theological debate for centuries. Do we truly have control over our choices, or are we subject to forces beyond our understanding? This question becomes especially pronounced in the biblical narrative of Pharaoh in Sefer Shemot. How can we reconcile the concept of free will with the repeated assertion that Hashem hardened Pharaoh's heart? If Pharaoh's ability to choose was taken away, how can he be held accountable for his actions? The tension between Divine intervention and human autonomy is one of the most profound challenges in understanding the Exodus story, and it offers a crucial insight into the Jewish perspective on moral responsibility.

Free will is a fundamental principle in Jewish theology. The Torah itself commands moral choice: **ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת המוות ואת הרע והטוב** (Devarim 30:15). Without free will, the very concept of reward and punishment would be meaningless. Rambam, in *Moreh Nevuchim* (3:32), argues that free will is essential for human responsibility and the justice of Divine reward and punishment. Similarly, the Gemara (Berachot 33b) states: **הכל בידיו**. While many aspects of life may be predetermined, moral and ethical choices remain in human control. This idea is also reinforced by the Talmud (Kiddushin 40b) that discusses how both external circumstances and personal decisions influence human behavior, yet the ultimate moral responsibility remains with the individual.

When analyzing Pharaoh's free will, the Torah presents a shift in agency. Initially, Pharaoh hardens his own heart: **ויחזק לב פרעה** (Shemot 8:15). However, later, Hashem assumes this role: **ויאמר ה' אל משה בא אל פרעה כי אני הכבדתי את לבו** (Shemot 10:1). This transition raises a critical question: Did Pharaoh lose his free will, or was this a natural consequence of his own stubbornness?

Ramban (Shemot 7:3) explains that Pharaoh initially had the ability to repent but continuously chose defiance. Eventually, as a consequence of his repeated resistance, Hashem removed his ability to do teshuva. This aligns with the principle in Masechet Yoma (38b): *בא לשמא פותחין לו, בא לטהר מסייעין אותו*. Pharaoh's loss of free will was not an arbitrary act of divine interference but the natural outcome of his own choices.

Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 6:3) elaborates on this idea, arguing that when a person repeatedly sins, Hashem may prevent him from repenting, as a form of punishment. Pharaoh serves as a prime example of this phenomenon. Hashem's hardening of his heart was not an initial restriction but a consequence of his obstinance.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks expands on this in *Covenant & Conversation*, suggesting that Pharaoh's downfall illustrates a psychological reality: habitual wrongdoing eventually conditions a person to be incapable of moral change. Pharaoh was not a puppet; rather, he entrenched himself so deeply in evil that he became incapable of making different choices. This concept is further explored in modern psychology, where research on neuroplasticity suggests that repeated behaviors form entrenched neural pathways, making change increasingly difficult. Pharaoh's case exemplifies how moral choices solidify into rigid patterns that ultimately limit one's ability to choose otherwise.

Additionally, the Midrash Tanchuma (Vaera 3) emphasizes that Hashem's intervention was not to force Pharaoh to sin, but rather to strengthen his resolve so that he could face each plague without being coerced into repentance purely out of fear. This nuance suggests that Hashem's actions were not about stripping Pharaoh's free will, but rather preserving the integrity of his choices so that his eventual downfall would be truly his own doing. Rashi (Shemot 7:3) echoes this view, explaining that Pharaoh had already set himself on a path of resistance, and Hashem merely reinforced his existing decisions.

This understanding has significant theological implications. Hashem grants humans autonomy, but choices have consequences.

Repeatedly choosing evil can lead to a state where one can no longer choose good. The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 13:3) compares Pharaoh to someone who repeatedly ignores warnings until he finds himself in a situation where escape is impossible. This highlights the responsibility that comes with free will: it is both a gift and a burden, demanding that we remain conscious of our moral trajectory before our ability to change is diminished. The Sefer HaChinuch (mitzvah 611) similarly warns that human behavior, if left unchecked, can lead to the loss of moral agency. By engaging in destructive habits, a person may reach a state where teshuva is nearly impossible, as seen with Pharaoh.

Just as an individual who repeatedly engages in negative actions finds it more difficult to change, so too Pharaoh conditioned himself into a mindset that was impervious to moral influence. This aligns with the idea mentioned in Masechet Makkot (10b): **בדרך שאדם בורא לעצמו עושה לעצמו**. The concept of habit formation, which is well-documented in behavioral psychology, suggests that Pharaoh's resistance to change was not merely spiritual, but deeply ingrained in his psychological framework.

A similar perspective comes from the Sforno (Shemot 7:3), who explains that Hashem hardening Pharaoh's heart was actually an act of justice, ensuring that Pharaoh's actions stemmed from his own volition rather than fear of Divine punishment. Had Pharaoh relented purely because of the plagues, it would not have been true repentance but coercion. This distinction is critical, as it emphasizes the Torah's view that genuine moral transformation must come from within, not from external pressure.

Furthermore, the concept of free will in Judaism is not absolute in the way modern philosophy often frames it. This idea is addressed in Pirkei Avot 3:15: Hashem knows everything that will happen, yet His knowledge does not compel a person's actions, so free will is preserved: **הכל צפוי והרשות נתונה**. Divine knowledge includes everything that will occur, yet at the same time, **הרשות נתונה**; the ability to choose is given to human beings, and they remain responsible for their actions.

While Hashem's omniscience includes foreknowledge of human actions, this does not negate human autonomy. This is reflected in the teachings of Rav Dessler (*Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, vol. 1), who differentiates between "*bechirah* points" – moments in life where true free will is exercised – and the areas where habitual behavior dominates. For Pharaoh, his repeated choices narrowed his "*bechirah* point" until he effectively lost the ability to choose differently.

The practical implications of Pharaoh's story extend far beyond the Exodus narrative. It serves as a warning about the dangers of moral complacency and the responsibility each person has in shaping their character. This is particularly relevant in today's world, where issues of personal responsibility versus external influence remain hotly debated in ethics, law, and psychology. The Torah's lesson is clear: free will is not just a right but a responsibility, and neglecting it can lead to its erosion.

Pharaoh's hardened heart is not a contradiction to free will but a warning of its potential erosion. His story serves as a cautionary tale about the power of habit and the weight of our moral decisions. Hashem does not immediately revoke free will; rather, He allows individuals to shape their destiny through their choices. The lesson for us is clear: free will is an extraordinary privilege, but it must be exercised wisely. The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (3:16) states: **הכל נתון בערבון, ומצודה פרוסה על כל החיים**. Our choices are not made in a vacuum; they shape who we become. In the modern world, where discussions about free will continue in philosophical and psychological discourse, Pharaoh's story serves as a reminder that our autonomy, once taken for granted, can be lost if we do not guard it carefully.

Ultimately, Pharaoh's downfall teaches us that free will is not an absolute given, but rather a responsibility that must be actively maintained. The balance between Divine intervention and human choice highlights the idea that Hashem desires moral agency but also enforces consequences. In a world where people frequently ask whether their actions truly matter, the Exodus narrative provides a powerful answer: our choices define us. The more we choose

righteousness, the freer we remain. However, the more we choose to ignore morality, the more we risk losing the very freedom that makes us human. The ultimate challenge is to wield our free will responsibly, for it is through our choices that we define ourselves and our relationship with Hashem.

Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Some questions don't just challenge us, they consume us. They haunt the silence, fill the empty spaces of loss, and demand answers we may never receive. And maybe the hardest of them all, the one that lingers in the deepest moments of pain, that shakes our faith, is: Why do bad things happen to good people? It's not just a philosophical dilemma but a cry from the depths of the soul. We see suffering, loss, and injustice, and something inside us refuses to accept it. Especially after last Simchat Torah in Eretz Yisrael, after so much devastation and heartbreak, we find ourselves asking again and again: Why? How could this happen? We search for meaning, for justice, for something – anything that will allow it to make sense. Yet no matter how many times we ask, the answers remain just out of reach. But, perhaps we're searching in the wrong place.

Instead of asking why, a question that might never have a satisfying answer, we need to ask something else. How do we move forward? For what purpose does Hashem place us in moments of darkness? Perhaps the real question isn't about understanding suffering, but about what we do with it. Pain is real, but so is resilience. Loss is shattering, but so is the strength to rebuild. Perhaps the answers we seek are not meant to be found in explanations, but in the way we choose to live despite the questions.

For centuries, thinkers and sages have grappled with the question of suffering, offering different approaches, none of which fully quiet the ache, but all of which provide perspective. The Meiri (Shabbat 55b) asserts that nothing is happenstance; everything is *hashgacha pratit*, Divine providence, measured *midda keneged midda*. If a person suffers in a specific way, it reflects something within them that needs repair. The Vilna Gaon adds that if one

cannot identify the flaw, it is a sign they have not learned enough Torah to recognize it (Chiddushei U'Beurei HaGra Berachot 5).

Yet this idea, that all suffering is punishment, feels incomplete. There are *tzadikim* who seem blameless, and still they experience unimaginable pain. The sefer HaEmunot V'HaDeot acknowledges that no one is completely without sin, and suffering may serve as a cleansing process (Ma'amar 6). But, the Kuzari takes a different approach entirely, saying that perhaps suffering is not a punishment at all but a test. Sometimes, he suggests, having everything we need is the real challenge.

The Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:12) broadens the picture even further, distinguishing between three sources of suffering. Some pain is caused by human free will, people harming each other. Other suffering, he says, is self-inflicted, and is the result of poor choices or lack of discipline. And then, there is suffering that simply comes from the nature of the world – illness, disasters, the very structure of reality. Hashem, from the Rambam's perspective, does not create evil. He is the source of all good. What we perceive as bad is, in reality, only the absence of good.

But even if we categorize suffering, even if we offer explanations, the ache remains. And in that pain we find two different responses embodied by two figures: Iyov and David HaMelech. Iyov, stripped of everything, cries out in anguish (6:4): ... חֲצִי שְׂדֵי עַמְדִּי הֵצִי שְׂדֵי עַמְדִּי – The arrows of the Almighty are in me... the terrors of G-d are arrayed against me. His pain turns outward, demanding: Why me? Why has Hashem chosen to inflict this upon me?

David HaMelech, in contrast, looks at his existence and asks a different question: ... וּתְחַסְּרֵהוּ מֵעַט מֵאֱלֹקִים – מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ... What is man that You should remember him... yet You have made him but little lower than angels (Tehillim 8:5-6). Instead of seeing himself as a victim of Divine will, he sees himself as the recipient of Divine purpose. Why did Hashem choose me, he wonders, to bear the weight of greatness?

This shift, from “why is this happening to me” to “what do I do with this,” is the heart of Rav Soloveitchik’s philosophy in *Kol Dodi Dofek*. He argues that we will never fully understand why Hashem allows suffering because, to do so, we would have to unravel the entire fabric of existence. Hashem says to Iyov (38:4): **איפה היית ביסודי ארץ** – Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? To grasp Divine justice, one would have to have been there at the moment of creation itself. It is beyond human comprehension.

Rav Soloveitchik takes this even further. He distinguishes between two types of people: those who see themselves as objects, carried by the waves of suffering, and those who become subjects, active participants in shaping their destiny. The former are paralyzed by their pain; the latter find a way to transform it. He warns against the seductive ease of philosophical speculation; the temptation to answer suffering with detached, theoretical arguments. He writes that “If you wish to acquire tranquility without paying the price of spiritual agonies, turn unto religion.” But true faith, he insists, is not about avoiding contradiction – it is about wrestling with it.

This is the essence of *Kol Dodi Dofek*: the call to respond, to refuse to remain passive. Hashem knocks on the door of history, and we must answer. Suffering is not something to be solved; it is something to be uplifted. We cannot defeat evil with intellectual speculation, but we can conquer it through action. The challenge is not to understand pain but to respond to it – to take what is broken and build, to hear the alarm and become greater because of it. Maybe this is why Iyov, for all his righteousness, was ultimately incomplete. Before his suffering, he never davened for others. He was “perfect,” but he lacked empathy. Only after experiencing pain did he gain the ability to truly pray for someone else. Suffering, as unbearable as it is, forces us to grow. It forces us to see beyond ourselves. It forces us to choose: will we let it destroy us, or will we let it transform us?

This is the challenge we face now in the wake of *Simchat Torah*, in the hatred that has only grown louder and in the unbearable

pain of families still waiting for their loved ones to come home. Lives have been shattered, futures stolen; the loss is staggering, the grief immeasurable. But we have a choice. We can sit in the ruins and ask why, or we can stand up and say: What now? What does this moment demand of us? How do we rebuild, strengthen, and uplift?

Because if there is one thing history has proven, it is that suffering does not define Am Yisrael; our response does. We are a nation forged in fire. We have walked through the deepest shadows and emerged stronger. We do not surrender to despair. We do not accept defeat. We take the broken pieces and build something even better than before. We take destruction and turn it into destiny.

So maybe the real question is not “Why do bad things happen to good people?” but instead, “What will good people do when bad things happen?” Will we let the darkness consume us, or will we answer to the Kol Dodi Dofek – the knock of history – with immense strength? Because in the end, the only answer to suffering is to rise. The only response to loss is to rebuild. And the only way forward is forward.

Tikkun HaOlam

Oftentimes the phrase tikkun olam, gets brushed off by Orthodox Jews as a “Reform Jewish idea.” Why? Fixing the world seems like a value we all need to embrace. What does tikkun olam mean? What does the Torah have to say about it? Has its meaning changed?

The simple translation of tikkun olam is to repair the world. Because tikkun can also mean “to improve,” tikkun olam is not necessarily only applicable regarding things that are broken, but also improving already good things.¹

The phrase tikkun olam does not appear in Tanach, but the phrase is widely known from the daily tefillah of Aleinu. The second paragraph of Aleinu says *על כן נקוה לך ... לתקן עולם במלכות שכי*. The term also appears in many Mishnayot, especially in the fourth chapter of Masechet Gittin. Let us examine the role of tikkun olam in the following two cases.

The Mishnah Gittin (4:5) discusses a jointly owned slave, who has been freed by one master and not by the other. A half slave cannot marry anyone according to Halacha (neither a complete slave nor a free person), and therefore cannot procreate within a sanctioned marriage and have a family. Engaging in *p’ru u’revu*, the Mishnah notes citing Yeshayahu (45:18), is the reason the world was created. Therefore, “*mipnei tikkun olam*,” for the betterment of the world, Beit Shammai ruled, and convinced Beit Hillel to concur, that the second master *must* let the half slave go free,² so that he can marry and have children.

¹ chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3700275/jewish/What-Is-Tikkun-Olam.htm.

² As compensation, he receives a promissory note for the remaining value owed, to be paid back by the former slave over time.

Another Mishna (4:2) discusses what to do when writing a *get* for a couple that is known by different names in different places. Which name should be written on the *get*? Rabban Gamliel enacted that they should write their common name, followed by any other names they might be known by, “*mipnei tikkun haolam*.” This ensured that the *get* would be accepted in all places where the people were known.

These sources are two examples of the earliest mention of *tikkun olam* in Halacha. The repetition of the phrase “*mipnei tikkun haolam*” in these and other mishnayot, is the key to understanding why certain laws were enacted. This phrase emphasizes how these laws are for the good of the people and society. They are intended to be just and beneficial, upholding moral standards and allowing society to function properly.

In Kabbalistic literature we see a different perspective of the notion of *tikkun olam*. The Ari z”l established the connection between the original “*olam hatohu*,” the world of chaos, and *tikkun olam*. He believed that everything in this world is a spark and a remnant of when Hashem created the world. The contrast of the infinite Divine and the finite earth could not mix, and now all of the sparks from the explosion are left, like a broken vessel that leaves behind many shards. According to the Ari, Hashem left the shards, or sparks, on earth on purpose, so that we can pick them up and try to put them back together – literally *tikkun olam*. The Ari’s vision of *tikkun olam* marks a shift from the view of the Mishna and Gemara, that it is not simply a guide for Halacha and society, but rather the purpose of living.³

Now that the Halachic and spiritual understandings of *tikkun olam* have been established, where do we see these traits depicted in Tanach?

³ chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3593030/jewish/The-Fallen-Sparks-of-Tohu.htm.

Noach is a prime example. After the *mabul*, he and his family were the only living people on earth, and he had no choice but to rebuild. The pasuk (Bereishit 9:20) refers to him as **נח איש האדמה**. What does this mean? The Midrash Rabbah Bereishit (36:3) has numerous explanations for this phrase. The first idea is **שעשה פנים לאדמה**, he remade the surface of the soil. The *mabul* had destroyed the land, and Noach worked and plowed the land to make it capable of yielding crops again.

The next is **שבשבילו נתלחלה האדמה** (because of him the soil was watered), suggesting that Noach, through his *korbanot*, was the cause of the rain. Interestingly, the third idea **מילא כל פני האדמה** does not have anything to do with working the land but rather populating it with his children, grandchildren, and all future generations. Noach represents the physical manifestation of *tikkun olam*, regarding working the land and improving it to support human life. Noach achieved this, by making the land workable, offering *korbanot*, and populating the earth. Noach, the *ish haadama*, and his family were responsible for restarting the world.

Avraham represents a social aspect of *tikkun olam*. The Zohar teaches that each of the *avot* connected to Hashem through a specific trait, and Avraham connected through the trait of *chesed*. After finding Hashem, Avraham travels around with his camp and welcomes people in. Even after his *brit mila*, Avraham pleads with the three travelers to dine and wash by his tent. Avraham went above and beyond to show his love of Hashem and tried to emulate Him in his ways, by showing people the light and reality of Hashem, drawing them away from *Avodah Zara*. He chose to break away from the mold and start a new way of living, rejecting polytheism and focusing on fulfilling Hashem's will.

Nechemia, cupbearer to King Artachshasta, was a Jew living in Shushan decades after the destruction of the First Temple.

One day, a messenger from Eretz Yisrael arrives and tells him that Jerusalem's walls are full of breaches, and its gates have been destroyed by fire (Nehemiah 1:3).

Nehemiah is devastated, but does not waste much time. King Artachshasta allows him to return to Israel and even sends with him troops and materials. Nehemiah arrives and immediately investigates the walls and invigorates the people to start rebuilding. He tells the people (2:17), **אתם ראים הרעה אשר אנחנו בה**, **אשר ירושלים חרבה ושעריה נצתו באש לכו ונבנה את חומת ירושלים ולא נהיה עור חרפה**.

Nehemiah represents an active and industrious version of *tikkun olam*. He sees destruction and injustice in the world and takes the initiative to fix it and literally rebuild. He moves from another country, where he has the king's favor, to an old fallen city of his ancestors in order to rebuild. He feels the pain and does not ignore it, assuming that someone else would do the job. He rebuilds the walls surrounding Yerushalayim and becomes a leader and role model for the Jewish people

All three of these significant characters of Jewish history personified different aspects of *tikkun olam*. Noach represented the physical working of the land, taking that first step of work, and populating the world. Avraham represented the forming of a new nation, going against social norms to do what is right, and treating people with *chesed*. Nehemiah represented the action and initiative necessary for *tikkun olam*, as well as the passion and ability to motivate the people around him. These three giants represent the numerous, important aspects of *tikkun olam*.

Following World War II and the Holocaust, there was a fear within many spheres of Judaism regarding assimilation and Jewish identity. The idea that the American Reform Jewish Community adapted to try and make Judaism more appealing was *tikkun olam*. During the 1950s-1970s, social justice was on everyone's minds, and the Reform Community applied this to

Judaism and tikkun olam. Although they preached lofty ideas of *tzedek*, charity, love, and kindness, they tragically and foolishly ignored the basic foundations of Torah and mitzvot. They would call every small kindness “tikkun olam” and make it the entirety of their Judaism. They were doomed to fail.

Nowadays, is tikkun olam meant to be a priority? What does this mean for our role in this world?

In Sefer Bereishit, the pasuk says (Bereishit 2:15) וַיִּקַּח ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם וַיְנַחֵהוּ בִּגְדֵן לַעֲבֹדָה וּלְשִׁמְרָה. Moreover, the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 11:6) emphasizes that כָּל מִה שֶׁנִּבְרָא בִּשְׁשֵׁת יָמִי בְּרֵאשִׁית צָרִיכִין עֲשִׂיהָ. Everything that was created during the six days of Creation requires some action to bring it to its perfected state, from the plants of the earth to living beings. Wheat needs to be ground and men require a brit mila. Man is obligated to perfect himself and the world around him, to protect and elevate it.

Rav Solovietchik writes in his famous essay *The Lonely Man of Faith*: “civilized man has gained limited control of nature and has become in certain respects her master, and with his mastery he has attained dignity as well... [making] it possible to act in accordance with his responsibility.”⁴ The tools that Hashem has provided us for our lives have been given to us, and by learning to use them for the good and betterment of the world, we get closer to elevating ourselves and achieving our purpose and responsibility.

What happens if we ignore this responsibility, if we decide it's not our problem, and tell ourselves we cannot make a difference anyway?

Sefer Mishlei (24:30) talks about אִישׁ עָצֵל, a lazy man, and אָדָם חָסֵר לֵב, a man lacking sense, who own a field and vineyard,

⁴ R. Joseph B. Soloveichik, *The Lonely Man of Faith*, 2006 edition, page 17.

respectively. The pasuk describes them as overgrown with thorns, covered with chickweed and with a stone fence in ruins.

Both people who are lazy or are lacking sense, according to Sefer Mishlei, do not pay attention to their responsibilities or the world around them. The lazy man ignored his field to the extent that it was overgrown and in ruins, and was unable to support growth or its purpose of farming. This was true for the senseless man as well. The Malbim on Mishlei writes that a field needs hard work – sowing, plowing, etc – but a lazy person will not invest in his land. Even he, however, is capable of looking after a vineyard, which simply needs to be guarded against deterioration. But a man “lacking a heart” to discipline himself at all, does not even realize the importance of this passive care, so that even the vineyard is neglected.⁵

In *To Heal a Fractured World*, Rabbi Sacks tells a story of an old man, walking down the beach at dawn. As he goes further, he sees a young man picking up starfish, one by one, and throwing them back into the water. Even though the starfish on the shore went on for miles, the young man took it upon himself to throw as many back into the water to protect them from the deadly early morning sun. The older man challenged the younger one, asking him whether throwing a few dozen starfish back into the water is really going to make a difference. The young man picked up one more starfish, tossed it back into the water, saying “To *this one*, it makes a difference.”⁶

This young man understood the value of each individual life, and how by changing one life, you begin to change the world. There are so many people and places in the world that can benefit from tikkun olam, and they are waiting to be changed for

⁵ See Malbim on Mishlei, 24:30-31, The Torah Classics Library Edition, page 252.

⁶ Rabbi Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*; chapter 6, footnote 2, Loren Eiseley, *The Star Thrower* (New York: Times Books, 1978).

the better. As Rabbi Sacks ends his chapter of tikkun olam: “For the world is not yet mended, there is still work to do, and G-d has empowered us to do it – with Him, for Him and for His faith in us.”⁷

⁷ Rabbi Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*; chapter 6, ending sentence.

FACULTY

Is it So Difficult?

When Rav Yossi Bar Chalafta was asked how Hashem occupies his time since the completion of the six days of creation, he responded: Hashem sits and makes matches; this woman to this man ... and it (matchmaking) is difficult for Hashem like Kriat Yam Suf (Bereshit Rabbah 68:4). Although intuitively we may understand the difficulties in creating and sustaining a successful marriage, his statement is particularly perplexing. Not only does there seem to be no substantive connection between marriage and the splitting of the Yam Suf, but the notion that something is difficult for Hashem seems to border on heresy, as it appears to undermine Hashem's omnipotence. Is it really "difficult" for Hashem to do anything? Seemingly, neither arranging marriages nor splitting the Yam Suf should be difficult for Hashem.

Looking at the Kriat Yam Suf narrative might enable us to better understand what Rav Yossi Bar Chalafta may have intended. There is an enigmatic pasuk which celebrates the exceptional feat of Kriat Yam Suf: "And they believed in Hashem and Moshe His servant" (Shemot 14:31). Why did Bnei Yisrael discover this only now? What did they think about Hashem until this point? Why did the experience of the ten plagues not already lead to a complete belief in Hashem and Moshe?

This question has two distinct parts. Firstly, what did Bnei Yisrael actually think? How else could they have explained all of the supernatural events they witnessed? Secondly, and perhaps more powerfully, how did they miss the point? How could they have been so inaccurate in their perception to think that this was anything other than Hashem redeeming His people as He had promised?

The Ramban (Shemot 14:10-11) suggests that Bnei Yisrael may have suspiciously thought that Moshe had taken them out of Egypt selfishly to rule over them. Even though Moshe had

performed undeniable miracles in Egypt, indicating that he was operating with Hashem, they rationalized that it was perhaps because he was an excellent magician or alternatively, that Hashem had wanted to punish Egypt. However the second question still remains; how did they miss the point? What was it about Bnei Yisrael that led them to such a cynical, pessimistic and erroneous conclusion?

Perhaps the greatest insight to Bnei Yisrael's mentality at the time is offered by the Ibn Ezra (Shemot 14:13). Why did Bnei Yisrael not fight the oncoming attacking Egyptian army as they approached Yam Suf, especially taking into account how Bnei Yisrael significantly outnumbered the Egyptians? The Ibn Ezra explains that Bnei Yisrael were a broken nation, still suffering from a slave-mentality and lacking confidence in their abilities. Although physically capable of military triumph, mentally, they were completely unprepared to defend themselves against their former taskmasters. Although Bnei Yisrael may have significantly outnumbered the Egyptians, from a psychological standpoint they did not have the strength of character to confront their former taskmasters.

Having established an understanding of Bnei Yisrael's deep-rooted slave-mindset, one may further appreciate how it crippled their ability until this point to recognize Hashem's engagement in their national salvation. Because they were so broken, they were unable to summon the optimism and confidence needed to recognize that Hashem was redeeming them.

Among other things, the ten plagues served as the beginning of a process educating Bnei Yisrael about Hashem. However, even after the ten plagues Bnei Yisrael were still not completely convinced of Hashem's desire to redeem them. Bnei Yisrael's weak psychological state caused by their slave-mentality, paralyzed their ability to see Hashem's hand clearly, and it was not until Kriat Yam Suf that they were able to do so.

In order to help Bnei Yisrael grow into a nation with the correct theological and religious perspective, Hashem performed numerous

miracles culminating in the splitting of Yam Suf. Perhaps one may label this accomplishment as “difficult” for Hashem. In contrast to creation, for example, which was not difficult for Hashem because of his omnipotence, splitting the Yam Suf was difficult as it involved navigating man to develop the correct perspective without limiting his free will. Hashem did not want to force them to believe.

Because self-control was given to another party, enabling that party to govern itself without reclaiming that self-control, is “difficult.” Kriat Yam Suf epitomizes how, via Hashem’s indirect guidance, Bnei Yisrael freely chose to transform from a nation unable to see Hashem properly during the ten plagues, into one that genuinely “believed in Hashem and Moshe his servant.” It was Hashem using His indirect, not direct, guidance that made it so difficult.

Based upon this understanding of Kriat Yam Suf’s success, we can explain why, in a certain sense, it is comparable to the difficulties of a successful marriage. One of marriage’s greatest challenges is for two self-governing people with complete free will to be able to develop and grow into whatever it takes to achieve success. This too, is difficult for Hashem to arrange. Just like Bnei Yisrael needed to be directed into a mindset for success in belief and outlook, so too, every couple needs to be directed into developing a mindset through which a successful marriage can be obtained.

There may be an additional detail which further supports Rav Yossi Bar Chalafta’s comparison. Marriage requires the ability to be flexible and adapt to a new environment, to move aside to allow for a partner’s needs and desires. Perhaps this is captured by the flexibility of the water splitting, allowing Bnei Yisrael to pass through.

Hopefully, the “difficulties” that Hashem is willing to undergo, will provide our marriages with the necessary *siyata d’Shmaya*, allowing us to build our own personal *בנין עדי עד*.

