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OUTSIDE ISRAEL - SAVE THIS FOR NEXT WEEK

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A Divine Kiss

“This is the decree (chok) of the Torah...” (19:1)

It always amazes me that people professing to be atheists, when opening up their daily paper often go straight to the horoscope page.

Up to a third of self-declared atheists in China believe in astrology. A quarter of Brazilian atheists believe in reincarnation, and a similar number of their Danish counterparts think some people have magical powers.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, belief in séances, tarot, mesmerism, and other seemingly supernatural phenomena flourished, quite often independently of particular religious belief systems. One of the most rational minds of the time, or the creator of the most rational mind of the time, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, believed in fairies. The physicist Pierre Curie, a pioneer researcher into radioactivity, was “an atheist who had an enduring, somewhat scientific, interest in spiritualism.”

I think that the reason for all this may be that being an atheist requires an awful lot of faith. Faith that the world just ‘plopped’ into existence; faith that the incredibly complex and wonderfully beautiful world that we live in just ‘evolved’ from some primordial slime in unspecified days of yore. Faith that love, courage, jealousy, avarice are all just chemical dances in our brains.

Instinctively, we know we come from somewhere and we are going somewhere. The soul intuits its

own immortality in spite of the body’s determined arguments to the contrary.

“This is the decree (chok) of the Torah...”

There are three kinds of laws in the Torah: *Mishpatim*, *Aidut*, and *Chukim*. A *Mishpat* is a law like “You shall not murder.” It is a seemingly logical law that is shared by all the civilized world. An *Aidut* is a testimony of faith, like Shabbat whose observance testifies that Hashem created the world and everything in it in six days. A *chok* is a mitzvah that is ostensibly self-contradictory, like the purifying process of the ashes of the red heifer. Its ashes purify those who are contaminated and contaminate those who prepare those ashes. Why? Go figure?

A basic concept of Judaism is that man’s inability to understand Hashem’s wisdom shows only man’s limitations – and not Hashem’s.

A *chok* is as self-contradicting as a soul inside a body. It is like a Divine kiss, only understood by the partners to its intimacy.

- Sources: “Atheists & Agnostics Also Frequently Believe in the Supernatural - a New Study Shows; “Religion,” June 13th, 2019; Tosefot to Talmud Bavli in Avoda Zara 35a

Q & A

Questions

1. "Take a perfect Para Aduma (red heifer)." What does the word "perfect" temima mean in this context?
2. How many non-red hairs disqualify a cow as a Para Aduma?
3. A man dies in a tent. What happens to the sealed metal and earthenware utensils in the tent?
4. What happens to the one who: a) sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the Para Aduma; b) touches the water; c) carries the water?
5. Why was the mitzvah of the Para Aduma entrusted to Elazar rather than to Aharon?
6. Why does the Torah stress that all of the congregation came to Midbar Tzin?
7. Why is Miriam's death taught after the law of Para Aduma?
8. During their journey in the midbar, in whose merit did the Jewish People receive water?
9. Why did Moshe need to strike the rock a second time?
10. When Moshe told the King of Edom that the Jewish People would not drink from the well-water, to which well did he refer? What do we learn from this?
11. The cloud that led the Jewish People leveled all mountains in their path except three. Which three and why?
12. Why did the entire congregation mourn Aharon's death?
13. What disappeared when Aharon died?
14. Which "inhabitant of the South" (21:1) attacked the Jews?
15. For what two reasons did G-d punish the people with snakes specifically?
16. Why did the Jewish People camp in Arnon rather than pass through Moav to enter Eretz Canaan?
17. What miracle took place at the valley of Arnon?
18. What was the "strength" of Amon that prevented the Jewish People from entering into their Land?
19. Why was Moshe afraid of Og?
20. Who killed Og?

Answers

1. 19:2 - Perfectly red.
2. 19:2 - Two.
3. 19:14,15 - The metal utensils are impure for seven days, even if they are sealed. The sealed earthenware vessels are unaffected.
4. 19:21 - a) Remains tahor; b) He, but not his clothing, contracts tumah; c) He and his clothing contract tumah.
5. 19:22 - Because Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf.
6. 20:1 - To teach that they were all fit to enter the Land; everyone involved in the sin of the spies already died.
7. 20:1 - To teach that just as sacrifices bring atonement, so too does the death of the righteous.
8. 20:2 - Miriam's.
9. 20:11 - After he hit it the first time, only a few drops came out since he was commanded to speak to the rock.
10. 20:17 - To the well that traveled with the nation in the midbar. This teaches that one who has adequate provisions should nevertheless purchase goods from his host in order to benefit the host.
11. 20:22 - Har Sinai for receiving the Torah, Har Nevo for Moshe's burial, and Hor Hahar for Aharon's burial.
12. 20:29 - Aharon made peace between contending parties and between spouses. Thus, everybody mourned him.
13. 20:29 - The clouds of glory disappeared, since they sheltered the Jews in Aharon's merit.
14. 21:1 - Amalek.
15. 21:6 - The original snake, which was punished for speaking evil, is fitting to punish those who spoke evil about G-d and about Moshe. And the snake, to which everything tastes like dust, is fitting to punish those who complained about the manna which changed to any desired taste.
16. 21:13 - Moav refused them passage.
17. 21:15 - The Amorites hid in caves in the mountain on the Moabite side of the valley in order to ambush the Jews. When the Jews approached, the mountain on the Eretz Canaan side of the valley moved close to the other mountain and the Amorites were crushed.
18. 21:24 - G-d's command, "Do not harass them" (Devarim 2:19).
19. 21:34 - Og had once been of service to Avraham. Moshe was afraid that this merit would assist Og in battle.
20. 21:35 - Moshe.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 16) – BLESSING AGAINST HERETICS (PART 2)

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”

(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The twelfth blessing reads: “And for slanderers let there be no hope; and may all enemies be cut down speedily. May You speedily uproot, smash, cast down and humble the wanton sinners, speedily in our days. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who breaks enemies and humbles wanton sinners.”

The Maharal (*Be’er HaGolah*) explains the meaning of the words “And for the slanderers let there be no hope.” We are asking that their evil and wicked plans be thwarted, and that they feel so frustrated and disheartened that they repent for their wickedness. And who exactly does this refer to? The blessing uses the word *zeidim*, which is a somewhat enigmatic description. The term *zeidim* is also found in a special prayer recited on Chanukah. We say a prayer that begins: “*Al hanisim* – For the miracles, and for the salvation, and for the mighty deeds, and for the

victories, and for the battles which You [Hashem] performed for our forefathers in those days, at this time,”; In this prayer, we also say, “You delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, the impure into the hands of the pure, the wicked into the hands of the righteous, and the *zeidim* into the hands of those who learn Your Torah.” The two parts of each pair are the opposites of each other, as the negative becomes more and more pronounced until it climaxes with the *zeidim*.

Who are these *zeidim* who are deemed to be worse than the “impure” and the “wicked” Greeks who defiled our hallowed Temple and trampled on everything holy to us? The Rabbis teach that there are no real expectations that a conquering army will take into account the religious sensitivities of the nation they have vanquished. It was no surprise that the Greeks followed their own cultural mores and desecrated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in the

process of conquest. However, it was absolutely reprehensible was that Jews aided and abetted the Greeks in their unholy mission in the Holy Land. *Zeidim* are Jews who have fallen to the lowest levels of infamy. In their reckless pursuit for cultural acceptance, they were prepared to betray their beliefs and turn their backs on everything that they had once held dear.

A Jew has truly hit rock-bottom when there is absolutely no vestige left of their Jewish identity and there is no sensitivity to their fellow Jews. The Midrash teaches (*Ber. Rabbah* 65) that even Jewish traitors who have slipped to the lowest levels still retain a tenuous connection to their heritage. Sometimes they have to be forcibly reminded of their connection to the Jewish nation, but the relationship can be rekindled instantaneously. The Midrash tells the story of an individual called Yosef Meshita, which happened at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple. As the conquering Roman army approached the Holy Temple, they could not find the way into the Temple compound. And so they enlisted the help of Yosef Meshita. He had given his allegiance to the Romans in hope that they would generously reward him. And his voracious desires were met. The Romans told him that he could take anything that he wanted from the Temple as payment for his treacherous services. So, Yosef Meshita entered into the Holy Temple and brought out the Menorah made out of solid gold. However, the Romans understood something that Yosef Meshita did not. They told him that it was inappropriate for him to take for himself something that was so incredibly valuable. They told him that he should go back into the Temple and take something less impressive instead. He refused. He told them that it was enough that he had angered Hashem and

defiled His Temple once already, and that there was no way he could possibly do it again. The Romans offered him enormous financial incentives, but he would not change his mind. Finally, the Romans, tiring of him, executed him in the most horrendous fashion. And, as he was being tortured to death, the only thing that distressed the perfidious Yosef Meshita was the fact that he had angered his Creator!

Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Kahaneman, the Ponevezher Rav, questioned what it was that caused Yosef Meshita to have had such a change of heart. What caused him to change from lacking even the most rudimentary sensitivity to Jewish values, to becoming someone prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice and give up his life rather than anger his Creator one more time? The Ponevezher Rav gave a timeless response: "When a Jew enters into a place of holiness, it is inconceivable that he can come out unchanged. Even someone as spiritually corrupt as Yosef Meshita, who entered the Holy Temple for the vilest possible intentions, left as a different, new, person."

However, there is one group of people who have sunk to such indescribable depths that they have

disconnected themselves entirely from the Jewish People – the *zeidim*. As disturbing as it is to have to write these words, *zeidim* have no spiritual redeeming qualities whatsoever, which is why our blessing is composed using such stark language.

According to the Ashkenazic tradition, our blessing consists of twenty-seven words. However, that was not always the case. Originally there were twenty-nine words, but changes were imposed upon the Jewish communities in Europe by rabidly anti-Semitic censors at various periods in history, and all "detrimental" references to heretics and apostates were forcibly reworded. The Tur writes (Orach Chaim 118) that the original text of twenty-nine words alluded to the *zeidim* who denied the veracity of the Torah. The Holy Torah comprises two parts – the Written Torah and the Oral Torah. These are written using the equally holy letters of the Hebrew alphabet, of which there are twenty-two regular letters and five final letters. Together, the Written Torah and the Oral Torah and the combined letters of the alphabet total twenty-nine, which was the original number of words used for the blessing.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Empty Exaggerations

Moses said that when the Ten Spies reported back to the Jewish People about the Land of Canaan, they claimed to have seen "great and fortified cities in the Heavens" (Deut. 1:28). The Talmud (*Tamid* 29a, *Chullin* 90b) says that in this verse the Torah speaks hyperbolically, because the Spies did not literally see the Canaanite cities reaching the Heavens. As Rabbi Ami put it, in this case the Torah speaks in "words of *havai*." Rabbi Ami further explains that the prophets of the Bible, and even the rabbis, are also wont to speak in hyperbolic exaggerations. The Talmud (there) uses two different terms to refer to such "exaggerations" – *havai* and

guzma. Because the Talmud ostensibly uses these two terms interchangeably, they seem to be synonymous. But when we explore the etymologies of these two different terms, we will see that their origins differ from one another.

As mentioned above, the Talmud states that the not only does the Bible sometimes speak in hyperbole, but so do the rabbis. They offer various examples of this in the Mishna: The Mishna (*Tamid* 3:4) states that the animal sacrificed in the Daily Offering would drink from a golden cup. The Mishna (*Tamid* 2:2) also states that sometimes the pile of ashes upon

the Temple's altar would be 300 *kor*. Another Mishna (*Middot* 3:8) describes a Golden Vine in the Temple, upon which people who wanted to donate gold could affix an additional golden grape or cluster. The Mishna concludes by noting that this golden vine was so enormous that it took three-hundred Kohanim to move it. A fourth Mishna (*Shekalim* 8:5) states that the *parochet* in the Temple was so heavy that it took it required three-hundred Kohanim to lift it to immerse it into a mikveh. The Talmud says about some or all of these cases that the rabbis spoke "words of *havai*," or offered a *guzma*. As Rabbi Yissachar Ber Eilenberg (1550-1623) clarifies, these examples are just a sampling of the instances in which the rabbis exaggerated in the Mishna, but not an exhaustive list of all rabbinic hyperboles.

Going back to the passage about the "cities in the Heavens," Rabbi Meir Pozna of London posits that the exaggeration in that passage was not the spies exaggerating about the enormity of the Canaanite cities, but was rather Moses exaggerating the spies' rhetoric. He notes that when the Bible speaks about what the spies themselves actually said, it quotes them as saying: "And the cities are great and fortified" (Num. 13:28). It was Moses who exaggerated the spies' report as though they said that the cities were "in the Heavens" (a phrase Moses himself repeats later in Deut. 9:1).

In explaining what a *guzma* is, Rashi (to *Bava Metzia* 38a, *Chullin* 90b) writes that it is merely extraneous words, or "simply words" that do not reflect the actual reality (see also Rashi to *Erachin* 11a). Similarly, Rashi (to *Chullin* 90b) explains that "words of *havai*" refers to speech spoken by common people who often speak in vulgar ways that exaggerate the matter at hand. He notes that even though such people are not trying to lie, *per se*, they are not careful to speak the exact truth.

The Talmud (*Beitzah* 4a) asks why there was a *Baraita* that explicitly taught that one is allowed to do two things that are obviously permitted, and it answers that this *Baraita* is simply a *guzma*. Rashi (there) explains that *guzma* refers to a sort of rhetorical device whereby one attempts to stress a specific idea by adding to it. In this case, neither rulings taught in the *Baraita* were untrue, yet they are still branded a *guzma* because the way these rulings were presented

implied that they were novel even though in truth they were utterly obvious.

After citing the above Talmudic sources that talk about *guzma* and *havai* in the Bible and in Rabbinic works, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) in *Sefer HaTishbi* declares that *guzma* and *havai* mean the exact same thing – i.e., the act of overstating something in a way that it is not literally true. HaBachur claims that *guzma* is actually a Greek loanword, an assertion also made by Rabbi Binyamin Mussafia (1606-1675) in *Mussaf HaAruch*. Nevertheless, after some searching, I have been unable to pin down a specific Greek word from which *guzma* may have been borrowed or even derived. Because of that, I prefer to assume that *guzma* is of Semitic origin.

In Biblical Hebrew, the root GIMMEL-ZAYIN-MEM appears only five times: Three times in the word *gazam*, which is a type of grasshopper (Yoel 1:4, 2:25, and Amos 4:9) and twice in the proper name Gazam, whose family were among the Netinim who came to the Holy Land with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:48, Nech. 7:51). In Rabbinic Aramaic, this root took on the additional meaning of "threatening" (see Targum to Ps. 8:3, Prov. 15:30, Iyov 30:21, and *Shavuot* 46a).

Rabbi Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) posits that *guzma* in the sense of "exaggeration" is based on this last meaning of the root. He explains that just as most threats are simply "empty threats" aimed at intimidating somebody, even though, in truth, the threatener has no intention of actually carrying out his threat, so too is a *guzma* a hyperbole that does not line up with the actual truth.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 11:6, Lev. 26:4, and Deut. 18:10) connects the Rabbinic Hebrew term *guzma* to the Biblical term *gazam* by explaining that just as locusts tend to travel in swarms – with an inordinate amount of grasshoppers joining together – so too does a *guzma* imply a hyperbolic rendition of something true, yet whose numbers are likewise inflated.

Fascinatingly, Rabbi Hirsch also connects this root to the words *yazam* ("planning/enterprising") and *kasam* ("magic") via the interchangeability of GIMMEL, YOD, and KUF: *yazam* denotes the ability to create something *more* out of something less, and *kasam* denotes the ability to circumvent the limitations of

nature to yield something *more* than usual (or because the magician purports to have access to *more* knowledge than the average person). Rabbi Hirsch also connects *gazam* to *geshem* via the interchangeability of ZAYIN and SHIN, explaining that a *geshem* is a solid mass comprised of a hyperbolic amount of parts.

Because *guzma* is not a Biblical Hebrew word, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) does not discuss its etymology, yet his explanation of the root GIMMEL-ZAYIN may prove helpful for understanding the word *guzma*. Rabbi Pappenheim understands the core meaning of the biliteral root GIMMEL-ZAYIN to be: “shaving/trimming something in a way that leaves some parts attached and some parts detached.” Other words derived from this root include: *geiz* (Ps. 72:6), grass that remains after trimming; *gozez* (Gen. 38:12, 31:19), shearing wool from sheep; *gazam*, a type of grasshopper that eats some produce and leaves the rest; *geza*, a tree whose top is truncated; and *gazit*, shaven/hewn stone.

Moreover, the root GIMMEL-ZAYIN-MEM (*gozem*) in Rabbinic Hebrew has another meaning that is similar to that of GIMMEL-ZAYIN – “to clip, prune” (see *Avodah Zarah* 50b). This is done when one trims a plant for the benefit of the plant itself, i.e., so that it will continue growing properly. In light of this, I would like to suggest that *guzma* is conceptually similar to this idea, because it denotes an exaggeration that is not completely detached from reality, but is rooted in some sort of truth (albeit in an overstated and excessive fashion).

Interestingly, Rabbi Shmuel Jaffa-Ashkenazi of Istanbul (1525-1595) writes in his commentary *Yefeh Mareh* (end of Jerusalem Talmud *Shekalim*) that the word *guzma* is a portmanteau of *egoz* (“nut”) and *meah* (“one hundred”), as the term denotes the sort of exaggerating whereby when speaking about a single nut, one would refer to it as though there were one hundred nuts. Unfortunately, he does not explain why *egozim* in particular were chosen to illustrate this idea (see also *Eruvin* 2b regarding *guzma* and the number one-hundred).

While the word *guzma* appears neither in the Bible nor in the Mishna, the term *havai* already appears in the Mishna. The Mishna (*Nedarim* 3:1-2) rules that if one takes a vow in the style of *havai*, then the vow does not come into effect. For example, if a person

vows to forbid something to himself on condition that “I did not see [as many people] on this road as [the number of people] who exited Egypt” or “I did not see a snake [that was as long] as the beam of an olive press,” then even if he did not literally see 600,000 people on the road or did not literally see a snake that was as long as a beam used for pressing olives, the vow does not come into effect. This is because the fellow who undertook the vow simply intended to accentuate – by way of exaggeration – the large amount of people that he saw on the road, or the length of the snake that he saw – but he never really intended to undertake a serious vow that was tied to the literal meaning of his own words. The Mishna brands such invalid vows “*nidrei havai*.”

The word *havai* can be spelled in two different ways: HEY-VAV-ALEPH -YOD and HEY-BET-ALEPH-YOD. If we follow the first spelling, it seems that *havai* is a form of the verb “is/to be.” In that sense, *havai* refers to an exaggeration as something that “just is,” i.e., it simply reflects the way that people talk, but otherwise there is not much to it.

If we follow the second spelling, *havai* seems to derive from the biliteral root HEY-BET. Rabbi Aryeh Leib Feinstein of Brisk (1821-1903) understands the core meaning of that root to be “raising one’s voice” (see Prov. 30:15), with *havai* as “exaggeration” being a way of figuratively raising one’s voice to make oneself heard. Rabbi Pappenheim similarly sees HEY-BET as referring to “calling/commanding others to prepare something,” although he does not explicitly deal with the post-Biblical word *havai*.

Putting a different spin on it, HaBachur suggests that the word *havai* is derived from the Aramaic term *hovai* (“thorn”), found in Targum (to Isa. 7:25, 32:13, Iyov 30:4). He understands the connection by explaining that just as thorns are considered unimportant vis-à-vis the rest of a plant, so too are words of *havai* considered unimportant and untrue when compared to other rhetorical or literary devices. This explanation is actually first cited by Rabbeinu Nissim (to *Nedarim* 20b) when explaining the Mishnaic term *nidrei havai*. It also bears some thematic resemblance to Dr. Alexander Kohut’s explanation that compares the word *havai* to a similar Persian word meaning “breath/air/nothingness/futile.”

Rabbeinu Tam (1100-1171) and Rabbi Eliezer of Metz (1115-1198) are quoted as explaining that the word *havai* relates to the Biblical word *habaim* – “engaging in stupidities” (see Targum to Yechezkel 20:29), presumably because if a hyperbole does not fully reflect the reality that it purports to describe, then it is nothing but mere stupidity (see also *Tosafot Yeshanim* to *Nedarim* 20b).

Earlier, we cited the Talmudic passage saying the Mishna’s report about the massiveness of the GoldenVine in the Temple was merely hyperbolic. Rabbi Yaakov Emden explains that this does not mean that the Mishna was *lying* about how many Kohanim it took to move the Golden Vine. Rather, it means that what the Mishna says should not be literally taken as true exactly the way it sounds, but that it is still true if properly interpreted.

In other words, Rabbi Emden explains that the Golden Vine really did require 300 Kohanim in order to move it, but the Mishna exaggerated in implying that all 300 Kohanim were needed at one time to carry the golden ornament. In truth, Rabbi Emden assumes, it took 300 Kohanim to carry the vine because it was so heavy that when some Kohanim became tired from carrying it, others had to take their place. Thus, the Mishna means that *in all*

there were 300 Kohanim involved in moving the Golden Vine, but not that all of them were needed at the same time, as the Mishna’s wording implies.

Thus, Rabbi Emden maintains that even when the rabbis state that something is a *guzma* or reflects “words of *havai*,” this does not mean that what is stated is not literally true, but rather that only the *prima facia* implications of what is stated is inaccurate, but what is actually stated is still literally true.

In the same vein, Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen of Izmir (1659-1729) explains that the Canaanite cities were said to reach the Heavens because when one looks upon something that is very tall, it appears as though it reaches the Heavens. Therefore, the literal meaning of that verse is not totally false, even though it is not “factually true.”

A similar sentiment is expressed by the Italian Kabbalist Rabbi Menachem Azariah of Fano (1548-1620), who writes that the word *havai* does not imply that something is totally null and void. Rather, it implies something that still needs to be understood and studied. He finds an allusion to this in the fact that *havai* can be understood as an acronym for the verse *hinei barchu et Hashem*, “behold they are blessing Hashem” (Ps. 134:1). In this way, he intimates that “words of *havai*” should be taken *seriously* but not necessarily *literally*.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yevamot 93-99

Eternal Speech

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, “Every Torah scholar whose teaching is quoted and attributed to him, his lips move in the grave.”

This reason is given in our *sugya* to explain why Rabbi Yochanan was distraught upon hearing that his student Rabbi Elazar had taught others something learned from Rabbi Yochanan without mentioning Rabbi Yochanan as the source.

We learn in our *sugya* that King David prayed to Hashem that people will continue to teach others words of Torah that were originally heard from him. As Rashi explains King David’s prayer, “May it be Your will that others continue to say words of Torah in my name because then my lips will move in the grave as if I were still alive in This World.” The main premise taught here seems to be metaphysical in nature despite being described in graphic, physical terms. Do we find any examples of this concept in the Torah? Is it possible for us to attain a “logical” understanding of this principle? I recall the first time learning this *gemara* that a Torah scholar’s lips quiver in the grave and how it astounded me and prompted me to ask others for further explanation. But first, let us examine a Torah source for this phenomenon that the Maharsha cites.

The Maharsha notes that the specific way that Yaakov Avinu described himself when expressing his distress when hearing that his son Yosef had died. He refused to be comforted and said, “I will go down to my grave in mourning.” (Ber. 37:35) The word in the Torah for mourning in this case is *avel*, and not *yagon* as is found in a different verse when he protested against the brothers taking Binyamin to Egypt. (Ber. 42:38) Why did the Torah express Yaakov’s mourning as *avel* and not *yagon* when hearing the news of Yosef’s death?

The Maharsha explains that besides Yaakov’s concern for losing Yosef, he had an additional grief for the

special Torah teachings that Yaakov had taught Yosef and would now not be passed on to the next generation. This secondary concern is based on the Midrash saying that Yaakov Avinu had taught Yosef, in particular, all of the Torah teachings that Yaakov had learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. For this reason, the Torah’s word expressing Yaakov’s grief when hearing of Yosef’s death is *avel*, which Chazal explain to convey that the mourner “has no mouth.” In one sense it means that the mourner is speechless, but it can also describe – as in this case of Yaakov and Yosef – that Yaakov was left literally without a mouth since Yosef would not be able to share his father’s teachings and Yaakov’s lips would therefore not move in the grave as if he were still alive. (See the beautiful, fuller explanation of the Maharsha, who also explains how the gifts that Yosef later sent to Yaakov to prove he was still alive alluded to the Torah teachings that Yaakov had taught him and had counted on him to teach to the next generation.)

Here I share one explanation explaining the meaning and significance of a Torah scholar’s lips moving when his words of Torah are recited by someone else after his passing. The Talmud Yerushalmi describes that the pleasure of the deceased when his Torah teachings are taught in his name after his passing is comparable to the pleasure of drinking aged wine, a pleasure that remains for a long time after the wine is gone. True, only in This World can a person fulfill mitzvahs, for which he receives reward in The World to Come. But a person can still receive a spiritual pleasure – an additional reward in The World to Come – whenever someone in This World teaches words of Torah that were originally heard from, and attributed to, a Torah scholar who no longer walks amongst us.

▪ *Yevamot 96b*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The laws of the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer, are detailed. These laws are for the ritual purification of one who comes into contact with death. After nearly 40 years in the desert, Miriam dies and is buried at Kadesh. The people complain about the loss of their water supply that until now has been provided miraculously in the merit of Miriam's righteousness. Aharon and Moshe pray for the people's welfare. Hashem commands them to gather the nation at Merivah and speak to a designated rock so that water will flow forth. Distressed by the people's lack of faith, Moshe hits the rock instead of speaking to it. He thus fails to produce the intended public demonstration of Hashem's mastery over the world, which would have resulted had the rock produced

water merely at Moshe's word. Therefore, Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon that they will not bring the people into the Land. The Jewish People resume their travels, but because the King of Edom, a descendant of Esav, denies them passage through his country, they do not travel the most direct route to Eretz Yisrael. When they reach Mount Hor, Aharon dies and his son Elazar is invested with his priestly garments and responsibilities. Aharon was beloved by all, and the entire nation mourns him for 30 days. Sichon, the Amorite, attacks Bnei Yisrael when they ask to pass through his land. As a result, Bnei Yisrael conquer the lands that Sichon had previously seized from the Amonites on the east bank of the Jordan River.

PARSHA PONDERERS

by Rabbi Rafi Wolfe

The Dormant Merit

“Hashem said to Moshe: ‘Do not fear [Og], as I have given him, his entire nation, and his land into your hand. You shall [be able to] do to him as you did to Sichon, the Aramean King, who dwelled in Cheshbon.’”

After forty years in the wilderness, the Jews had begun their final journey towards the Land of Israel. They entered the land of Sichon, the King of the Amorites. They successfully conquered his land, and further journeyed towards the land of the Giant Og, King of Bashan. Hashem told Moshe not to fear Og, as their victory was guaranteed. It would seem as if Moshe was afraid of Og? Why? Rashi brings an explanation from our Sages that Og had actually been alive since the time of Avraham. He was the one who informed Avraham that the latter's nephew Lot had been taken captive during an intense civil war. This knowledge gave Avraham the chance to rescue his nephew, which he successfully accomplished. Moshe was worried that this merit from hundreds of years earlier might grant Og victory over the Jews. Hashem comforted him and told him

not to worry, as the Jews would emerge victorious. (Niddah 61a; Midrash Tanchuma, Chukat 25)

How could Moshe have been worried that Og telling Avraham about Lot would give him any merit? We know that Og had bad intentions. He told Avraham solely so that Avraham would die in battle and Og could then marry Avraham's wife Sarah. (Rashi, quoting Midrash Aggadah, Numbers 21:26) Although it was a very good thing that he did, having negative intentions should have prevented it from being considered a mitzvah. As well, Hashem already promised Moshe that He would bring them into the Land of Israel. What was there to fear? How could Og have ever stopped them?

It would appear that Moshe surely knew that Og couldn't have stopped them. However, every mitzvah deserves its reward. (Pesachim 118a) At the end of the day, Hashem's name was sanctified with Avraham's miraculous victory in the civil war. This was because Og informed Avraham about Lot's capture. Since he was the cause, there was some merit that was generated. Even though his negative intentions deserved punishment, the good that came from it comes with its reward.

This tension needed a resolution. Would Og be meritorious enough to stop the Jews? Or would his evil intentions override the reward? Of course, Hashem's judgment would determine that the Jews would be victorious. They were promised to enter the Land of Israel, and there was no way Og could stop them. However, Moshe wanted their victory to be a result of Hashem's love, not as a result of His judgment. Hashem reassured Moshe that their victory would be solely because of His love for the

Jewish nation, and not because of a judgment call weighing out Og's reward against the promise to the Jews.

At the end of the day, we can learn from this the power of a single good deed. Although Og had horrible intentions – he wanted Avraham to die – it created some reward. This reward was dormant for hundreds of years. It was almost enough to override Hashem's promise to the Jews. One might think it would not count for anything. However, since at the end of the day something good came of it, it could not be completely ignored. When we perform good deeds, they may not always have pure intentions. Of course, having no ulterior motives is the ideal. At the same time, whatever motivates us to help others, there is some reward in store for us. That should inspire us to do our best to get rid of those ulterior motives.

- *Source: based on Darash Moshe, Numbers 21:34, by Rav Moshe Feinstein*

PEREK SHIRA

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE ROOSTER

The Rooster says: “At the time that Hashem enters to be with the righteous in Gan Eden, all trees of Gan Eden emit aromatic spices and sing and praise, and then the rooster too awakens and praises. In the first call it says: Raise, gates, your heads, and let the eternal entrances be raised, and let the King of glory enter. Who is the King of glory? Hashem, strong and mighty, Hashem the mighty warrior. In the second call it says: Raise, gates, your heads, and raise, eternal entrances, and let the King of glory enter. Who is He, the King of glory? Hashem, L-rd of hosts, He is the King of glory, Selah! (Tehillim 24:7-10). In the third call it says: Rise, righteous ones, and engage in Torah study in order that your reward will be doubled in the World to Come. In the fourth call it says: For Your salvation I yearn, Hashem! (Ber. 49:18). In the fifth call it says: Until when shall you lie down, lazy man, when will you rise from your sleep? (Mishlei 6:19). In the sixth

call it says: Do not love sleep, lest you become impoverished. Open your eyes, be satiated with bread (ibid. 20:13). In the seventh call it says: It is a time to act for the sake of Hashem; they have annulled Your Torah (Tehillim 119:126).

This song speaks of a Heavenly rooster that crows every hour from midnight to daybreak, which is a period of particular Divine favor. It also speaks of the roosters on earth that join in its crowing. They call with increasing urgency for Torah scholars to rise and engage in Torah study in these hours. With the first calls, it directs the Heavenly gates to rise for Hashem to enter the Beit HaMikdash of earth, and with the second, for Him to enter the Beit HaMikdash of Heaven. At the third hour it calls, “Rise, righteous ones, and involve yourselves in Torah study,” since it is with the onset of the third part of the night that Divine favor increases. Their

reward is doubled because they engage in Torah study day and night equally. The fourth call takes place three hours before daybreak. It calls out that in the merit of Torah study at night we will be redeemed from this exile. Similarly, the final Messianic war will take place during the three hours before dawn on Hoshanah Rabbah.

The fifth call, two hours before daybreak, heralds the preparation for prayer, which will commence in one more hour. The sixth hour is the time to don the *tallit* and *tefillin* and set out for prayer, and it calls that excessive sleep in the morning impoverishes a person and removes him from the world. The seventh call is “It is a time to act for the sake of Hashem; they have annulled Your Torah,” because

the time of Divine favor has ended and the time for the performance of mitzvahs has begun.

In our urban societies we no longer rise to the call of the rooster, and yet its song shall not be silenced. It calls for us to engage in Torah study that delights the Creator before our day becomes filled with matters of temporal, earthly value. Its very existence is a daily reminder to awaken and to waken others, to rise and live alive.

- Sources: *Perek B'shir* (Rav Chaim Kanievsky); *Zohar Vol. 3 171b*; *Zer Zahav 1:9*; *Beis Elokim*

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

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