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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Last Carriage

“And from there, Bilaam saw the edge of the people.”

Here is a true story. There was an eight-year-old boy who lived in Warsaw. He loved trains and he loved travel. His dream was to go by himself from Warsaw to Lodz, a considerable journey. Over and over again he tried to persuade his parents to let him go. And over and over they told him he was just too young. But he wouldn't give up. Persistence won the day, and eventually his parents capitulated, telling their young son that he could go. His mother packed him sandwiches and his father dropped him off at the train station. Just as the train was leaving, his father pushed an envelope into his young son's hand. He said, “When you get near the end of your journey, open this letter.”

The train left the station and the young boy was in seventh heaven. Alone on a train! The beautiful scenery speeding by; blurred occasionally by wisps of gray and white smoke from the train's engine; the chattering of the wheels congratulating him on the fulfillment of his most precious wish; the train's whistle heralded his great journey. He opened up his sandwiches and decided to eat one now and save one for later.

The afternoon came, and the sun carved a lazy arc into the rolling hills in the distance. People started to look at him. Who was this young boy by himself on a train? Some of them looked a bit strange. The carriage started to get dark and the landscape

grayed into night. His euphoria was replaced first by a slight twinge of loneliness, and that gave way to full-blown fear.

It was then he remembered the envelope. He put his hand into his right pocket. It wasn't there. Then, his left pocket; it wasn't there either. Finally, he found it. With trembling hands, he opened the letter. It said, “By the time you read this, it will be getting dark and you may be feeling a little lonely and scared, but don't worry – I am in the last carriage on the train. Love, Daddy.”

There's something unusual about Parshat Balak. It's the only Torah portion in which the Jewish People – the “stars of the show” – seem to only have a “walk-on” part. We see them from a distance – from the top of a hill, across a field; in the wilderness.

At the end of sixth century, the Byzantine Empire completely destroyed the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel. Unknown to the Jews of Babylon, the Byzantines then poised themselves to also make Babylonia ‘*Judenrein*’. Before they could implement their plans, however, the Moslem revolt toppled them from power.

Jews played a prominent role in the overthrow of Czarist Russia and in the subsequent Soviet government. Secretly, however, in 1953 Josef Stalin tried unsuccessfully to destroy the Jews in what

became known as "The Doctors' Plot." According to one theory, if the "Doctors' Plot" had carried on and reached its climax there would have been a mass expulsion of Soviet Jewry. But these plans died along with Stalin on March 6, 1953.

In the series of Psalms that make up Hallel, is the shortest Psalm (117). It speaks of a world in the time of the Mashiach:

"Praise Hashem all nations; laud Him all the peoples; for His kindness to us was overwhelming."

Once, a Russian prince asked Rabbi Itzaleh of

Volozhin why non-Jews will be expected to praise Hashem for His kindness to Israel. Rabbi Itzaleh replied, "The princes of the nations constantly plot our annihilation, but our merciful King foils your plans. You keep your plots so secret that we Jews don't even realize in how many ways you have tried to harm us and in how many ways Hashem has saved us. Only you, the nations of the non-Jewish world, truly see the extent of Hashem's kindness to us, and therefore only you can praise Him adequately."

Even when the night is closing in and we feel very much alone, we should know that our 'Daddy' is riding right there along with us 'in the last carriage'.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Balak, King of Moav, is in morbid fear of the Bnei Yisrael. He summons a renowned sorcerer named Bilaam to curse them. First, G-d speaks to Bilaam and forbids him to go. But, because Bilaam is so insistent, G-d appears to him a second time and permits him to go. While en route, a malach (emissary from G-d) blocks Bilaam's donkey's path. Unable to contain his frustration, Bilaam strikes the donkey each time it stops or tries to detour. Miraculously, the donkey speaks, asking Bilaam why he is hitting her. The malach instructs Bilaam regarding what he is permitted to say and what he is forbidden to say about the Jewish People. When Bilaam arrives, King Balak makes elaborate preparations, hoping that Bilaam will succeed in the curse. Three times Bilaam attempts to curse, and three times blessings are issued instead. Balak, seeing that Bilaam has failed, sends him home in disgrace. The Bnei Yisrael begin sinning with the Moabite women and worshipping the Moabite idols, and they are punished with a plague. One of the Jewish leaders brazenly brings a Midianite princess into his tent, in full view of Moshe and the people. Pinchas, a grandson of Aharon, grabs a spear and kills both evildoers. This act brings an end to the plague – but not before 24,000 people died. 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.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why did Moav consult specifically with Midian regarding their strategy against the Jews?
2. What was Balak's status before becoming Moav's king?
3. Why did G-d grant prophecy to the evil Bilaam?
4. Why did Balak think Bilaam's curse would work?
5. When did Bilaam receive his prophecies?
6. G-d asked Bilaam, "Who are these men with you?" What did Bilaam deduce from this question?
7. How do we know Bilaam hated the Jews more than Balak did?
8. What is evidence of Bilaam's arrogance?
9. In what way was the malach that opposed Bilaam an angel of mercy?
10. How did Bilaam die?
11. Why did the malach kill Bilaam's donkey?
12. Bilaam compared his meeting with an angel to someone else's meeting with an angel. Who was the other person and what was the comparison?
13. Bilaam told Balak to build seven altars. Why specifically seven?
14. Who in Jewish history seemed fit for a curse, but got a blessing instead?
15. Why are the Jewish People compared to lions?
16. On Bilaam's third attempt to curse the Jews, he changed his strategy. What was different?
17. What were Bilaam's three main characteristics?
18. What did Bilaam see that made him decide not to curse the Jews?
19. What phrase in Bilaam's self-description can be translated in two opposite ways, both of which come out meaning the same thing?
20. Bilaam told Balak that the Jews' G-d hates what?

Answers

1. 22:4 - Since Moshe grew up in Midian, the Moabites thought the Midianites might know wherein lay Moshe's power.
2. 22:4 - He was a prince of Midian.
3. 22:5 - So the other nations couldn't say, "If we had had prophets, we also would have become righteous."
4. 22:6 - Because Bilaam's curse had helped Sichon defeat Moav.
5. 22:8 - Only at night.
6. 22:9 - He mistakenly reasoned that G-d isn't all-knowing.
7. 22:11 - Balak wanted only to drive the Jews from the land. Bilaam sought to exterminate them completely.
8. 22:13 - He implied that G-d wouldn't let him go with the Moabite princes due to their lesser dignity.
9. 22:22 - It mercifully tried to stop Bilaam from sinning and destroying himself.
10. 22:23 - He was killed with a sword.
11. 22:33 - So that people shouldn't see it and say, "Here's the donkey that silenced Bilaam." G-d is concerned with human dignity.
12. 22:34 - Avraham. Bilaam said, "G-d told me to go but later sent an angel to stop me. The same thing happened to Avraham: G-d told Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak but later canceled the command through an angel."
13. 23:4 - Corresponding to the seven altars built by the Avot. Bilaam said to G-d, "The Jewish People's ancestors built seven altars, but I alone have built altars equal to all of them."
14. 23:8 - Yaakov, when Yitzchak blessed him.
15. 23:24 - They rise each morning and "strengthen" themselves to do mitzvot.
16. 24:1 - He began mentioning the Jewish People's sins, hoping thus to be able to curse them.
17. 24:2 - An evil eye, pride and greed.
18. 24:2 - He saw each tribe dwelling without intermingling. He saw the tents arranged so no one could see into his neighbor's tent.
19. 24:3 - "Shatum ha'ayin." It means either "the poked-out eye," implying blindness in one eye; or it means "the open eye", which means vision but implies blindness in the other eye.
20. 24:14 - Promiscuity.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 17) – BLESSING OF THE RIGHTEOUS

“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 thirteenth blessing reads: “On the righteous, on the devout, on the elders of Your people the House of Israel, on the remnant of their scholars, on the righteous converts and on ourselves; may Your compassion be aroused, our Hashem, and give goodly reward to all those who sincerely believe in Your Name. Put our lot with them forever, and we will not feel ashamed, for we trust in You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Mainstay and Assurance of the righteous.”

In the previous blessing, the *Tur* explained that the twenty-nine original words in the blessing were a hint to the *zeidim* and the fact that they turned their backs on the Written Torah, the Oral Torah and the holy letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The *Tur* offers another fascinating insight about how the letters in our present blessing allude to the blessing’s theme. He points out that this is the only blessing in the *Amidah* where every letter of the alphabet appears. It is as if the blessing is teaching us that because the righteous value every single holy letter, not one of them could be omitted from their blessing!

Why do the righteous merit having their own blessing? In *Ya’arot Devash*, Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshitz writes that it is imperative that we recite this blessing with great intensity. This is in accord with the verse in *Mishlei* (10:25), “The *Tzaddik* is the foundation of the world.” He explains that as long as there are *Tzaddikim* in the world, there will be blessings and goodness in the world. The concept of righteousness is so momentous that Rabbi Chiya bar Abbah taught in the name of Rabbi Yochanan (*Yoma* 38b), “Even if there is only one *Tzaddik* left in the world, the world will continue to exist in the merit of that *Tzaddik*’s.” The Vilna Gaon writes that righteousness has such far-reaching consequences that even after the death

of the *Tzaddik*, their merits continue to protect the world.

What is the definition of a *Tzaddik*? Someone who lives entirely centered on doing what Hashem wants them to do, trying their hardest not to make mistakes. And when errors do occur, they take responsibility for their actions and do not try to justify them. The route to true “righteousness,” “devoutness” and being an “elder” is found only within the Torah. The Rambam writes (*Hilchot Issurei Biah* 14) that the foundation of a truly righteous person is someone who has acquired Torah knowledge so that they can understand and correctly fulfill the mitzvahs.

The blessing goes on to mention the “remnants of their scholars.” Rabbi Yoshe Ber Soloveichik (1903-1993) was a scion of the illustrious Soloveichik dynasty. In 1932, just before the rise of fascism to power in Germany, he relocated from Berlin to Boston, eventually succeeding his father as the head of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in New York. Rabbi Soloveichik explains that one of the most vital and challenging responsibilities for the spiritual leaders of each generation is to transmit the Oral Torah exactly as it has been transmitted throughout the generations. Therefore, the “remnants” of the previous generations are the most vital component in that process, as they are the ones who heard it directly from those who came before them, in a chain that extends all the way back to the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. We beseech Hashem that He will have compassion on our spiritual leaders because without them we would be bereft, as we would be incapable of learning His Torah accurately.

Immediately after mentioning the “remnants of their scholars,” we refer to the “righteous converts.” The Maharal (*Gevurot Hashem* 9) explains the connection between these two groups. Both the spiritual leadership and the converts feel detached from their environment. Before becoming Jewish, converts feel a sense of disconnect from their non-Jewish surroundings. There is some kind of an instinctive urge that pushes the convert towards the Torah and serving Hashem despite the fact that it will separate them from everything that has been familiar to them until now. In a similar way, a Torah scholar feels a comparable sense of detachment from the physical realms as their intellect draws them up towards the spiritual spheres.

But we do not pray only for the *Tzaddikim*. We pray for ourselves as well. Every single Jew has an innate connection to righteousness. It may be hidden underneath many layers of cynicism and ennui, but, given the correct frame of mind, we too can join the ranks of the *Tzaddikim*. In *Vayikra* (11:44), Hashem instructs us to “Sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy.” Rabbi Moshe Schreiber (1762-1839), commonly known as the *Chatam Sofer* after his

brilliant and erudite works, was the founder and the head of the Yeshiva in Pressburg, Bratislava, which was considered to be one of the most prestigious and influential Yeshivas in Europe. In his commentary on the Torah, the *Chatam Sofer* explains this verse in the following way: “Sanctify yourselves” – *pretend* that you are holy, and if you do – “You will be holy!” We are all influenced by our actions. Therefore, we should *act* like *Tzaddikim* even if we have not yet reached that level, because, by pretending, eventually it will become our reality!

“And give goodly reward to all those who sincerely believe in Your Name.” The phrase “goodly reward” seems somewhat unnecessary. After all, what is reward if not good? There are a select group of extremely pious individuals who regard everything that occurs in their lives as good. Even when something may not seem that way, they look at it, and regardless of the negativity they see the Hand of Hashem and feel His loving embrace. However, the majority of us are likely not to be on such a lofty level. Therefore, we ask Hashem to send us “goodly reward” – reward that is recognizably good to everyone, not just to the elite few.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

On Dry Land

The root CHET-REISH-BET appears over 500 times in the Bible and means various things, including “sword,” “destruction/desolation” and “dry.” This last meaning is the topic of our discussion, as we will discuss the very “dry topic” of three Hebrew terms for “dry”: *chorev*, *yavesh* and *negev*. In this essay we attempt to differentiate between these apparent synonyms, speculate about their etymologies and learn a little of Tanach.

The Vilna Gaon (to Isa. 8:23) differentiates between these two ostensible synonyms by explaining that the term *chorev* implies that there is still some moisture, even though most of the water or liquid has been

dried out, while *yavesh* implies something that is totally dry. He adduces this distinction by citing the following passage regarding the end of the Great Flood in Noah’s time: “And it was in the year six-hundred and one, on the first [month] on the first of the month, the waters dried [*charvu*] from upon the land, and Noah removed the cover from the ark, and he saw that the surface of the ground has dried [*charvu*]. And in the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the land was dried [*yavshah*].” (Gen. 8:13-14) In this passage, the postdiluvial world dried up in two stages, the first denoted by a cognate of *chorev*, and the second, by a cognate of *yavesh*. The Vilna Gaon sees in this word-

switch a process whereby at first the land was only *partially* “dried” (*charev*) and then subsequently became more *completely* “dry” (*yavesh*).

This understanding can already be gleaned from Rashi (to Gen. 8:13-14) who wrote that when the Torah says *charvu* it means that the land became “like mud whose upper surface crusted over,” and then when it says *yavshah* it became totally “dry land like it was supposed to be.” Similarly, *Sefer HaChachmah*, ascribed to the late 12th century Ashkenazi scholar Rabbi Elazar Rokeach of Worms, writes that in general *yabashah* means a place that is “truly dry,” while *chareivah* means “a muddy place dripping with moisture.”

The Malbim proffers an explanation similar to that of the Vilna Gaon in understanding the appearance of these two terms in the context of the Deluge. In a separate discussion, the Malbim bolsters this position by citing various proof-texts where the terms *charev* and *yavesh* appear side by side. In all such instances, the cognates of *charev* always precede the cognates of *yavesh* (e.g., Isa. 19:5, Iyov 14:11). To the Malbim this implies that *yavesh* connotes a more intense form of “drying up” than *charev*, hence his understanding that *charev* means something only *partially* dry, while *yavesh* means more *completely* dry.

Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) also follows the approach of the Vilna Gaon and the Malbim. He adds that this distinction can help us understand an otherwise difficult passage where the Torah refers to two sorts of meal-offerings: one that is “mixed with oil” and one that is *chareivah*. (Lev. 7:10) The word *chareivah* is seemingly a cognate of *charev* and presumably means “dry,” but there is no sort of meal-offering that is totally dry. Based on the above explanation, Rabbi Wertheimer resolves this by explaining that the term *chareivah* refers to an oil-free meal offering, as it is *drier* than a meal offering that has oil, but is not *totally* dry. Thus, the fact that it is called *chareivah* and not *yeveishah* tells us that even this meal-offering is not “totally dry” in the sense of it having no moisture whatsoever. (I must note, however, that Rabbi Tanchum HaYerushalmi’s lexicon of Rabbinic Hebrew equates the term *chareivah* in Proverbs 17:1 with the word *yavesh*, leaving open the possibility that the two terms are indeed synonymous.)

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) offers two ways of explaining the difference between *yavesh* and *chorev*. In one place in his work *Yeriot Shlomo* (as well as in his work *Cheshek Shlomo*), Rabbi Pappenheim follows the above-mentioned distinction that sees the difference between *yavesh* and *chorev* as quantitative, meaning that *chorev* denotes something “a little bit dry,” while *yavesh* denotes something “very dry.”

However, elsewhere in his *Yeriot Shlomo*, Rabbi Pappenheim offers a slightly different take on these two terms. He notes that in practice both *yabashah* and *charavah* refer to “dry land,” as opposed to bodies of water like seas, lakes and rivers. But when comparing *yabashah* and *charavah* to each other, each one refers to a *qualitatively* different type of “dryness.” He postulates that there are two different types of “moistness,” one refers to something wet on the outside but not necessarily moist on the inside, while the other refers to something saturated with liquid on the inside but dry on the outside. Rabbi Pappenheim also ties this distinction into the two Hebrew words for “moisture”: *ratuv* and *lach*.

Based on this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the same sort of distinction may be drawn regarding the two words for “dryness”: *chorev* refers to superficial dryness, wherein the outer layer of something is dry (whether or not it was ever previously wet in the first place). In contrast, the term *yavesh* refers to something whose inside is bereft of liquid (again, whether or not it was initially soaked with liquid). To better illustrate this distinction, Rabbi Pappenheim notes that a marshland can justifiably be called a *charavah* because, after all, its surface is dry enough that one can walk on top of it, but it cannot be called *yavesh* because its interior is still saturated with water.

In the story of the Splitting of the Sea, the Torah reports: “...and Hashem directed a strong eastern wind the entire night, and He made the sea into dry land [*charavah*], and the waters split. And the Children Israel came into the sea on dry land [*yabashah*]...” (Ex. 14:21-22) Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) in his commentary to this passage quotes Rabbi Pappenheim’s second explanation for the distinction between *chorev* and *yavesh* without offering any additional comments. To me, his intent is clear: the bank of the Red Sea dried out in stages; first it became superficially dry on the surface (so the word *charavah*, which implies a marshy

land, is employed) and only after that did it become even more dry, such that it was not even muddy or otherwise moist on the inside (such that subsequently the word *yabashah* became appropriate).

Honing in on the word *chorev* specifically, the work *Shoresh Yesha* accounts for the alternate meanings of CHET-REISH-BET ("destruction, sword") by explaining the core meaning of this root is the concept of "destruction" as the opposite of something living and thriving. Accordingly, a "sword" fits in because it is the implement used for bringing about destruction, and "dryness" fits in because when something is totally dry and juiceless, it withers away as it fails to live and thrive. Rabbi Pappenheim put forth an explanation similar to this one.

In speculating about the etymology of *chorev*, I propose two ideas: First of all, Maimonides' son Rabbi Avraham Maimuni (in his commentary to Gen. 31:40) seems to say that the term *chorev* implies "dryness" as the result of *heat*. Now, if we look at the root CHET-REISH-(HEY), the words derived from this root mean "anger/heat." The Radak in his *Sefer HaShorashim* contends that the core meaning of that root is "heat," with "anger" being the result of somebody getting "heated up" about a certain issue. Accordingly, we may speculate that the root CHET-REISH-BET – from which *chorev/charev* derives – may somehow be an offshoot of CHET-REISH-(HEY). The "destruction" meaning of CHET-REISH-BET may allude to the eventual consequence of uncontrolled "anger," and the "sword" meaning would refer to the tool used to bring about such "destruction." The downside of this theory is that most grammarians and lexicographers agree that the letter BET cannot serve as a radical added to a biliteral root to create a trilateral root.

Alternatively, I also suggest that perhaps the root CHET-REISH-BET can be best understood as a portmanteau of the roots CHET-REISH ("hole," as in *chor*) and REISH-BET ("many," as in *rav/harbeh/rabbim*). These two roots were compounded to mean *chorev/charev* because as something dries, the less moisture it has to hold it together, which would result in it possibly developing many holes or cracks. Once something develops many holes within it, it is much more susceptible to "destruction," so it is cogent to argue that the words for "destruction" and "sword" are also derived from that compound root.

When it comes to the word *yavesh*, Rabbi Pappenheim sees its ultimate root as the biliteral BET-SHIN ("delay/withholding"), as in: "And the nation saw that Moshe delayed [*boshesh*] in descending from the mountain..." (Ex. 32:1) In that case, Moses' return was "delayed" such that his presence was "withheld" from the nation. Another derivative of this root is the word *bushah* ("humiliation") since one who is embarrassed might feel so much shame and disgrace that he "delays" or "withholds" from showing his face in public. In the same way, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *yavesh* implies "delay" or "withholding" the sort of prosperous blossoming that could be expected of something. With plants and other flora, this is often the result of "dryness," so the word *yavesh* came to refer to anything that has become "dry" and thus bereft of its life-giving juices. Case in point, when Jeroboam's hand miraculously became limp and lifeless as he offered illegal sacrifices in Beth El, the Bible uses the word *vativash* (I Kings 13:4) to denote his hand "drying up and shriveling" in a figurative way.

Interestingly, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) writes that the core meaning of the biliteral BET-SHIN is "finishing" or "completing" a project. He claims that this original meaning of the root is still known to us through Akkadian and is manifest in two Hebrew roots: YOD-BET-SHIN and BET-SHIN-LAMMED. The former refers to "dryness" and seemingly denotes the "end/completion" of the drying process. This explanation dovetails with those of the Vilna Gaon, Malbim and others cited above who explain *yavesh* as "completely dry." The root BET-SHIN-LAMMED gives us words like *bishul* as "cooking" and *bishul* as "ripening" (like in Gen. 40:10), which represent the "completion" of preparing a foodstuff for consumption. What is also interesting about Rabbi Marcus' explanation is that he supposes that the SHIN of BET-SHIN stands for *aish* ("fire," ALEPH-SHIN) and alludes to the importance of "heat" in "cooking," "ripening" and "drying."

Another word for "dry" in Hebrew is *negev*. This word actually has two seemingly distinct meanings: of the 110 times it appears in the Bible, in almost all of those instances it means "south," while in a few cases it could mean "dry" (see Joshua 15:19, Judges 1:15, Isa. 21:1, Ps. 126:4). In Mishnaic Hebrew, cognates

of *negev* are the standard word for the act of “drying” something that was once wet (see *Chagigah* 3:1, *Avodah Zarah* 2:11, 5:11, *Menachot* 8:4, 3:3, *Keilim* 25:6, *Taharot* 2:1, 3:8, 10:2, 10:8, *Machshirin* 3:5, 4:9, *Mikvaot* 10:4, *Tvul Yom* 3:6, *Parah* 5:2, 7:8, 9:1, 11:8).

Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) in *Meturgaman* points out an interesting thing when look at how the Targum treats the words for “dry.” Sometimes, the Targum leaves the word *charev* as *charev* (Isa. 19:5) and *yavesh* as *yavesh* (Gen. 8:14, Ex. 14:22, Isa. 19:5, Job 14:11, Ps. 102:12), but at other times the Targum translates *charev* as *negev* (Gen. 8:13, Ps. 106:9, Iyov 14:11) or *charev* as *yavesh* (Gen. 7:22, Ex. 14:21), but never *yavesh* as *negev*!

Rabbi Yaakov Zev Lev (1946-2018) in *Me’at Tzari* (to Gen. 8:13) offers a partial resolution to this, positing that *negev* cannot mean “completely dry” like *yavesh* implies, but can only refer to the sort of partial dryness implied by *charev* (in line with the explanations cited at the beginning of this essay).

Why does *negev* mean both “dry” and “south”? Rabbi Yehuda Leib Shapira-Frankfurter (1743-1826) writes

that the southern part of the Holy Land is called the Negev (Gen. 12:9) because *negev* means “south.” He explicitly notes (probably based on Ibn Ezra there) that that area is not called *negev* because *negev* means “dry,” because only in Aramaic does *negev* mean dry, not in Hebrew. The way he sees it, *negev* only means “south” in Hebrew and only means “dry” in Aramaic.

His explanation notwithstanding, the most plausible way of understanding the word *negev* is that its core meaning is indeed “dry” and that the southern part of the Holy Land is called the Negev because it is an arid, waterless region. There are various explanations given why the word *negev* also means “south” (most of them assuming that the south always receives more light/heat from the sun, see Ibn Ezra to Gen. 12:9, *Peirush HaRokeach* there, and Rabbi Hirsch there). However, I think the most reasonable explanation is that once the south part of the Holy Land became called Negev (on account of its “dryness”), that word was borrowed to refer to the southern direction in all places.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yevamot 100-106

Putting Prayer Into Focus

Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yossi arrived and said, "One who prays should direct his eyes downward (i.e. towards the Land of Israel, where the Divine Presence is present – Rashi), and should direct his heart to the heavens, in order to fulfill both of them (i.e. two seemingly contradictory Torah verses: one verse indicating that a person who prays should direct his eyes downward toward the Land of Israel, while the other verse seems to indicate that one's eyes should be directed upwards towards the heavens.)"

We learn in our *sugya* an important halacha regarding how a person should be properly focused while praying to Hashem. The *gemara* tells of a dispute between Rabbi Chiya and Rabbi Shimon son of Rabbi. One said that a person during prayer should have his eyes directed downwards, towards the Land of Israel, in our earthly world. He cited a verse as proof: "My eyes and My heart shall be there forever." (Melachim I 9:3). The other Sage said that the eyes should be directed upwards towards heaven as a different verse states: "We shall lift our hearts with our hands to Hashem in heaven." (Eichah 3:41)

When Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yossi arrived to the place where these Sages were learning, he asked what they were learning. When they told him of their different views about focus during prayer, citing the appropriate verses, he explained to them: "One who prays should direct his eyes downward, and should direct his heart to the heavens, in order to fulfill both verses.

The Maharsha poses a question on this halachic conclusion, based on a *gemara* in *masechet Berachot* that teaches: "When a person prays, he should direct his heart towards the Land of Israel (and not heavenward)." This clearly implies that a person in

prayer should not only direct his eyes towards the Land of Israel, but he should direct his heart to there as well.

The manner in which the Aruch Hashulchan explains the halacha in practical terms provides an answer to the question of the Maharsha. The Aruch Hashulchan bases his ruling on the words of the Tur and the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 95), as well as the writings of Rabbeinu Yonah and other *Poskim*. He explains that the concept of one's heart being upwards in prayer means to "see" in one's mind that he is standing in the Beit Hamikdash of Above, which is directly over the place of the earthly Beit Hamikdash (or its location, after its destruction). As Rabbeinu Yonah writes: "And while the person is in that state of focus – being in front of Hashem in the King's Palace, in the Beit Hamikdash of Hashem in Heaven – the person should rid himself of any negative connection to pleasures and temptations of everyday life in the physical world." In a sense, this can be seen as "step one of two," and is the manner of prayer described in our *sugya*. The Aruch Hashulchan, concludes: "And after the person has achieved internalizing this thought of negating any negative physical desires, he should then also 'look downwards' (including lowering his head slightly) and envision himself as standing in the earthly Beit Hamikdash before Hashem. In this way his prayer is more powerful and more acceptable to Hashem." Accordingly, this is the second step of preparation for prayer, one that is consistent with the teaching in *masechet Berachot* that one should stand in prayer with both his eyes and his heart facing the Land of Israel and the place of the earthly Beit Hamikdash.

May it be Hashem's will to always answer our prayers and the prayers of the entire nation with mercy and favor.

• *Yevamot 105b*

PEREK SHIRA

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE HEN

The hen says: “He provides sustenance for all flesh, for His kindness is forever.” (*Tehillim* 136:25)

Every day, the hen lays eggs, each one being compacted with nutrients, similar to how Hashem provides abundant sustenance for His countless creatures on a daily basis. It also expresses this idea in that it is a large, almost flightless bird that is conveniently bred for food. In addition, its unrestrained fruitfulness expresses faith that Hashem will provide for its hatchlings. As a result, it sings with its existence: “He gives food to all flesh, for His kindness is forever.”

Hashem created the world in order to deal with kindness with His creatures. At times, Hashem has to maintain law and order in His world by disciplining us and withholding His bounty and His kindness is hidden. Nevertheless, one act of kindness remains unquestionable at all times: His provision of food for all His creatures, each according to its need and desire, every day. This casts light on other, less obvious, kindnesses. When we thank Hashem for satiating us, and also practice similar benevolence, we too sing this song of His everlasting kindness.

- Sources: *Kenaf Renanah*, quoted in *Nachalei Devash*

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

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

D.A.: District Attorney or Divine Agent?

In many ways, the sin of *Baal Pe'or* is the most odious of the many committed by the people in the wilderness. The timing – right after the miraculous defeat of the mighty kings Sichon and Og, leaving no obstacles left to enter the promised Land, and the content – unabashed licentiousness combined with a most abhorrent form of idol worship consisting of defecating before the idol, both contributed to the severity of this catastrophe. The sheer number of those killed (24,000 as opposed to the 3,000 after the sin of the golden calf) also attests to its crushing reprehensibility. But there is yet another, more subtle aspect of this chapter, which casts a further web of shame.

Jewish criminal law is based entirely on the process of indictment. The court has no authority to act on its own initiative if there is no accuser. Unlike criminal law as we know it, there is no publicly appointed prosecutor, no district attorney on behalf of the state. Instead, the entire nation acts as the prosecutor, on behalf of the Torah.

A criminal sentence could be issued only under specific, stringent circumstances: 1) Two men must have warned the sinner of the prohibition and of the punishment attached to it. 2) Despite the warnings, the individual committed the crimes within a very short amount of time. 3) The same men who warned him must bring the criminal to court, and by testifying, in the name of the Torah, demand that he receive the punishment due him.

But in this instance, no one warned, and no one brought the sinners to court. Because there were no willing prosecutors or witnesses, the judges had no legal authority to adjudicate. This very fact elicited Hashem's anger; for in this widespread open defection from Torah, no men intervened to warn the offenders, apprehend them, and bring them to court in order to prevent the spread of the evil. This implicated every passive onlooker as an accessory to the crime, inviting blame to the entire nation. In response, Hashem instructed Moshe, in a temporary suspension of legal procedure, to bring the offenders to justice himself.

The language used here sheds light on the purpose of carrying out criminal punishment in the first place: the men are to be hanged *for Hashem, in the presence of the sun*. The entire procedure must be done *by daylight*. It does not have a dark, vindictive spirit; rather, by removing criminals from the earth, the nation affirms the depravity of the sin, and reestablishes its commitment to purity and their G-dly mission.

Next week, we will examine the acts of one Pinchas, who well understood this mission and acted for the honor of Hashem and the honor of Torah.

- Source: Commentary Bamidbar 25:4

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