

מתוקים מדבש

*Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah*RABBI MICHA BERGER**Bemachashavah Techilah**

In *Bereishis* (1:16) the Torah says: “And G-d made the two large luminaries – the large luminary to rule the day and the small luminary to rule the night – and the stars.”

“The Gemara (Chullin 60b) points out an inconsistency in the verse. R. Shimon ben Pazi asks why the Torah first describes the sun and moon as “the two large luminaries”, but then it calls the sun “the large luminary” and the moon is called the small one.

The Gemara answers with a story. Originally the sun and moon were the same size. But the moon complained to Hashem, “Can there exist two kings sharing the same crown?” How can both the sun and the moon share the glory? G-d replies, “Go and make yourself smaller.”

The moon is hurt. “Master of the Universe, because I presented You with a true complaint, I should reduce myself?” Hashem offers consolation, and permits that unlike the sun, “Go and rule over the day and the night.”

The moon sees this as no consolation. If the sun is shining all day, it continues, “What good is a candle at noon?” It will out-shine me, how do I gain by shining then? Hashem offers an alternate consolation. “It is destined for Israel to use you to count days and years.” To this day, the Jewish people use a lunar calendar.

This too the moon finds insufficient. “Without the sun they can not

count seasons either.” Rashi¹ explains that the leap years are based upon the seasons. The second Adar is added to insure that Pesach is always in the spring. Since the Jewish year must average one solar year, the Jewish calendar is not purely lunar, and it does not offer the moon the compensation it seeks. G-d provides a third consolation. Righteous men will be called by your name, for example (Amos 7) “*Ya'akov haKatan* [the small]”, “*Shmuel haKatan*” [a tanna], (Shmuel 1 17) “*David hakatan*”.

The moon thought about it, but was still unsatisfied. Hashem commands, “bring a *kaparah*, a *korban* of forgiveness, in My Name, for I have wronged the moon.”

Reish Lakish points out that this *korban* is indicated in the Torah in this week's *parashah*. The *pasuk* says, “And one *sa'ir*, he-goat, for a *chatas Lashem*, an expiation-offering unto G-d” (Bamidbar 28:15). No other holiday's *chatas* offering include this last word, that the *korban* is for G-d. on *Rosh Chodesh*, when the moon is not visible, the *korban chatas* is to “atone” for G-d “wronging” the moon.

The Talmud and *midrash* are not a compendium of odd stories. These stories are a way to balance the needs of recording *aggadic* [non-halachic] material, and the injunction against recording the Oral Torah. These ideas were conveyed as the sub-text of these stories, so that they are preserved, yet

not written out. For *halachah*, where legal decisions need precise language, this mode is not an option, although still as terse a form as possible is used. The Maharsha is a commentator well known for providing explanations for many of the aggadic stories, and he provides one here as well.

The Maharsha explains that the moon symbolizes the Jewish people who appear small in this world. The *midrash* is a discussion about the need for Israel to be oppressed in this world, so that they may shine brighter in the next.

He identifies the *sa'ir*, the he-goat of the *Rosh Chodesh chatas* offering, with Rome the children of Ya'akov's brother Esav. The connection between the goat and Rome is that both the word “*sa'ir*” and Rome's ancestor's name “Esav”, indicates hairiness.

Surely of all of the nations of the world, history is dominated by Rome and the western civilization it spawned. And, like the moon, Israel's fortunes rise, fall and rise again under its shadow.

Aside from the difference in ascendancy between Israel and non-Jews, there is a more obvious difference between this world and the next. Only in this world is there a physical existence.

We saw in our study of the *parah adumah*², that red represents the physical man. Similarly, hair is a

¹ Ad loc

² See <<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/chukas.pdf>>

symbol of vanity. *Tum'ah*, the adulteration of the mind by physical urges, is iconified by the red heifer and the elimination of *tum'ah* by its burning.

Hair is also a symbol of physicality. It serves no purpose but esthetic. This is why a married woman covers her hair and a nazir, who takes a vow of asceticism, lets it grow wild.

Esav is called by two names. As we noted already, "Esav" is a reference to his hairiness at birth. His other name "Edom" – which is also the Hebrew name for Rome – means red. The Torah holds up Esav before us as the archetype of man controlled by physical urges, and names him by two symbols of those urges.

We are introduced to Esav when, as a young man, he feels enslaved to a need for some red lentil soup. (Bereishis 25:30-34) Even Rome's religion was a pantheon of G-ds representing the forces around him, of love and war, chaos and fate, etc... and show Edom's view of being a physical creature.

Esav's brother, Ya'akov-Israel, will shine in the next world. Why then are we placed in this world, in an inferior position? So that we can plant a seed, an idea, that man need not be a victim of fate, a passive subject of the physical forces. Taharah is possible, the mind can use the physical world to achieve its own ends.³

This is the distinction described by

³ There is also need to discuss the third, spiritual part of man, which is also passive, and is there to offer a meaningful goal for man to strive for. But that is outside the scope of this discussion.

The story of Pinchas¹ represents a new dimension in the Sinai desert experience of the Jewish People. In response to the adverse events that

¹ Bamidbar 25:1-15.

their father, Yitzchak. "*Hakol kol Ya'akov, the voice is the voice of Ya'akov; vehayadayim yedei Esav, but the hands are the hands of Esav*"⁴

The sun-moon relationship between Israel and the West is described again by Yitzchak, when he blesses Esav.

So Yitzchak his father answered, and said to him, "Behold, the fat of the land is your dwelling, and the dew from the sky above. By your sword shall you live, but your brother you must serve. However, when you feel wronged, you will cast off his yoke." (Bereishis 27:39-40)

Again, we see Esav described as a creature of the earth who lives by physical might. He is subservient to Ya'akov, but only up to a point. Esav has the power to remove the yoke, and take his turn at leading.

This can help us understand the meaning of the Gemara, and the words of the Maharsha. Not only is the Maharsha talking on the political level, but also inside each man. Edom only has ascendancy now because what it represents, that might makes right, that man is merely a physical animal, has ascendancy within the mind of the common man.

The moon's complaint about two rulers sharing the same crown is an observation about human nature. Man

⁴ Ibid. 27:22. This is actually taken out of context Yitzchak was describing his perplexity trying to identify Ya'akov who was disguised to feel like his brother. There is ample precedent to indicate that this second meaning is also intended by the verse.

surrounded him, Pinchas acts. A review of the various negative episodes that marked the desert years will indicate that this is somewhat unique. The people complained. The people called to Moshe to do something. The people even specifically called upon Moshe

is incapable of having two primary goals. Each person must choose between *tum'ah* and becoming a slave to his body or taharah and purposeful existence.

G-d diminishes the moon. This seems like a mistake. Is the proper response to this problem to give the Israel principle the lower hand, to place man in a universe where the physical seems to reign supreme? To which G-d replies that even in the midst of the physical world, the higher man is what truly reigns - it shines both in the day and in the night.

But, the moon continues, the higher man's say in this world is like "a candle at noontime." It is so hard to perceive that voice within ourselves. Externally, the political arena is dominated by the misled, who oppress us. To which G-d replies that it is only through the modesty of a Ya'akov, David, or Shmuel, that true greatness comes. Only then, by not pursuing physical power, do you hear the real strength in being more than animal. It is only in the crucible of oppression can Israel become great.

When Hashem asks us in this week's *parashah* to sacrifice a *korban chatas* for Him, it is not an admission of a mistake, for G-d does not make mistakes. G-d put us in the physical world, where we need to work toward hearing that voice for a purpose. The monthly *chatas* is for Him because he put us in the world, but it is an atonement for those times when we refuse to put in that effort, when we refuse to listen to the "the voice of Ya'akov".

RABBI BENJAMIN HECHT

Bakeish Shalom

to pray for them.² But the people did not act; they did not even pray for their own well-being. Pinchas is the first to take matters into his own hands. He responds to the situation

² See, for example, Bamidbar 21:7.

and acts. Effectively, he is the first to assume responsibility.

One could challenge that Pinchas is, in fact, not the first to act. In response to G-d's punishment of the nation in the fallout of the report of the spies, there were members of the nation that wished to go up to Israel.³ Effectively, did this group not accept responsibility and act in response to an adverse situation? In a certain way, one could say the rebellion of Korach was predicated on similar grounds; the supporters of Korach were effectively acting in response to what they perceived to be a negative situation. Obviously there is a major distinction between these cases and the case of Pinchas. In the former, the actions were clearly against the express directions of G-d. In Pinchas' case, he was acting in accord with the Torah law. As such, we should really describe Pinchas' action as the first case, in the desert, of an active human response that is Divinely sanctioned and even praised. It is the first case in the desert of the correct assumption of human responsibility.

In fact, the story of the group that wished to enter Israel without Divine sanction and the story of Korach highlight the very fact that the role of human responsibility is a most significant factor in understanding the events of the Sinai desert. In his immediate response to the report of the spies, Caleb declares that the nation can, despite the reports, master the situation.⁴ It is only subsequently, in Bamidbar 14:6-9, that Yehoshua joins Caleb in praising the land and declaring that G-d will certainly bring them into the land. Caleb's first charge is to the nation: it must recognize that it can conquer the land. The nation had to have confidence, a confidence that would lead to respon-

sibility that would lead to action. From the spies permeated a lack of confidence; this was a fatal flaw. The people who wanted to go to Israel wished to show that they had learned their lesson. They will have confidence. They will accept responsibility. They will act. G-d's response was that this confidence, acceptance of responsibility and, thus action, was incorrect. This was the nation's dilemma. When is an acceptance of human responsibility correct and when is it not? The nation thus fluctuated in their responses as they attempted to deal with this dilemma. We thus see Korach and his followers, expressing a belief in the power of each individual within the nation, declaring with extreme assertiveness that they wish to act. We thus also see a nation who feels so powerless that they can't even pray to G-d for assistance; they need to ask the intervention of Moshe. How to have a correct sense of power and responsibility? This was the nation's dilemma in the desert in preparation for entry into Israel. And the answer finally came in the action of Pinchas.

The act of Pinchas was an act of a *kanai*, a zealot. Sanhedrin 82a informs us that, in circumstances similar to those found by Pinchas, if an individual asks for permission from the court to respond as Pinchas did, the person is directed not to act as such. The response must come from within the individual; the *kanai* must be driven to respond.⁵ The allowance in *Halachah*, in specific cases,⁶ for one to effectively take the law into one's own hands is, in fact, greatly

limited.⁷ There is reason for concern when a power to punish is transferred into the hands of an individual. Can we be sure that the motivation is correct? On a grander scale, do we truly wish someone driven by an instinctual drive and emotional energy to have such power and authority? There is, in fact, some controversy on whether, even though the *kanai* is permitted to act, the action of the *kanai* is really proper.⁸ Nonetheless, in the case of Pinchas, there is ultimate praise for his action as G-d declares a special bond between Himself and Pinchas. On some level, Pinchas is a model for future generations.

It is an understatement to say that the Torah lifestyle demands intellectual contemplation. Allegiance to *Halachah*, by definition, challenges a sole reliance on instinct and demands thoughtful consideration before acting. Paradoxically, in the cases where the *kanai* is permitted to act on instinct, such thoughtful considerations actually render the act prohibited. The motivation to act must come from within, not from the external demand of the *Halachic* system. Such was the case of Pinchas. While *Halachah* permits one to act, it does not demand one to act. Only a feeling from within, the feeling of the zealot, can move someone to act in these circumstances. There must be personal affront and outrage. Pinchas cared. He cared that the Jewish people were threatened by a plague. He cared that G-d's Name was being profaned amongst the people. He thus assumed respon-

³ Bamidbar 14:40-45.

⁴ Bamidbar 13:30.

⁵ See, further, Rashi, Sanhedrin 82a, d.h. Amar Rav Chisda.

⁶ The Mishnah on Sanhedrin 81b enumerates three cases where the zealot is allowed to respond including the case of a public act of sexual cohabitation between a Jew and a non-Jewish idolater.

⁷ See Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Issurei Bi'ah 12:5. See, also, Rashi, Sanhedrin 81b, d.h. Kina'im who specifically mentions that this allowance does not apply to all individuals but only to those who meet a certain standard of righteousness.

⁸ See, further, Nechama Leibowitz, Studies in Bamidbar, Pinchas 1. See, also, Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Issurei Bi'ah 12:4 with Ra'avad and variant notes. As an extension of this debate, see Sotah 2b-3a.

sibility with the assumption that his act would make a difference. And he was right.

There are problems in stating that Pinchas' act of zealotry is an everlasting model of behaviour for the generations. But in the specific circumstances of the desert, with the problem of finding the base for correct assumption of human responsibility, Pinchas is a most important historical model. Confidence and responsibility must be instinctual. A person must

believe within himself/herself that he/she can make a difference and that he/she is called upon to make a difference. This must burn as a fire within. While *Halachah* ultimately must direct action and demands a removed contemplation before action, the underlying passion built upon confidence and responsibility must never be extinguished. This instinct cannot simply emerge with a change of mind, as in the case of those who wished to go up to Israel in the aftermath of the spies. It also

cannot emerge in a realm that does not recognize societal structure and lacks respect for authority, as in the case of Korach. The development of the instinct of confidence and responsibility flows from the transmission of values within a system as it touches the individual in a positive development of self. It is Pinchas, the student of Moshe, who becomes the one who demonstrates the meaning of responsibility. It must flow from within.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Sefasai Tiftach

They were taken from Jerusalem in chains, and brought to the rivers that nourish the fertile plains of Babylon. There their captors taunted them, "Sing for us from the songs of Zion!" "How can we sing the songs of G-d on alien soil?"¹ The echoes of our mother Rachel's crying as they passed her gravesite in Beis-Lechem were still in their ears. Song? Who could think of song?

The despair at that moment was indescribable. Alienated from their land, unsure of their covenant with the Almighty, with their purpose of existence. The *midrash*² tells us that the Levites were asked to play their sacred music in worship of the Babylonian gods. In response, they bit off their thumbs, so that they could never again lift an instrument in song. The image is jarring, but their world was jarring.

The chapter concludes with an even more shocking image. "The daughter of Babylon, who is to be destroyed, happy will be he who will repay you as you have done to us. Happy will be he who will dash your infants against the rocks." (v. 7) These are the words of a people who saw themselves robbed of any future, who saw Divine Justice as a remote event,

not for their eyes

There is a question as to who wrote "*Al Naharos Bavel*". According to Rav Yehudah, Rav attributes this *perek* to David haMelech. Hashem showed him the fall of the first *Beis HaMikdash* and David wrote "*Al naharos Bavel – by the rivers of Babylon...*" (v. 1) He showed David haMelech the fall of the second at the hands of the Romans, the descendants of Edom, and he responded "Hashem, remind the children of Edom of the day of Jerusalem..." (v. 7)

The Ibn Ezra does not take this authorship for granted. He writes that it was written by Levi'im who were there at the time, and was later added to Tehillim. This implies that the entire chapter is about the fall of the first *Beis HaMikdash*. It also implies that the Ibn Ezra understands Rav's words allegorically.

Whether the connection was made by G-d or first articulated by Rav, there is deep purpose in associating this *perek Tehillim* with the one who made Jerusalem his capital and consecrated the Temple Mount. "Remind the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem..." Jerusalem stands as a beacon of hope. The moment of Divine Justice, in which G-d reveals himself is the day of Jerusalem.

The Shelah established the custom to say *Al Naharos Bavel* on weekdays,

immediately before *bentching*. Some only say it during the period of Three Weeks that we just entered. Why are we saying this at the conclusion of our meal? Our table is a miniature altar, our meal, a form of offering. But we are in exile; the Divine Presence is in exile. How can we bless G-d, consecrating our meal, elevating it to the level of worship, while alienated from the land? "How can we sing the song of G-d on foreign soil?" How can my tongue speak, "if I do not place Jerusalem at the head of my joys" (v. 6)? The food we eat becomes sacred, no less so than the song of the Levites. Every act can be imbued with purpose and sanctity, every joy sublime, if we live to work toward the source of hope, the Day of Jerusalem.

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Mesukim Midevash is a project of The AishDas Society, offering words of machshavah, mussar and tefillah each week. For more information, email mesukim@aishdas.org or call (201) 757-0246.

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¹ Tehillim 137:3-4

² Midrash Tehillim, ad loc.