

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Bemachshvah Techilah

Right before Moshe leaves for *Mitzrayim*, Hashem tells him that “all the men that want to kill you have died” (Shemos 4:19). Although Rashi,¹ based on several Gemaras,² explains the verse as referring to Dasan and Aviram, and their death to be a “technical death” of becoming poor, most commentators³ understand it to refer to Pa’roh and his servants who had wanted to kill Moshe ever since they had found out that he had killed an Egyptian in order to protect a fellow Jew.⁴ The Torah had told us⁵ that Par’oh had died, and therefore there was no longer any reason for Moshe to fear him.

The tense used is present (“want to kill you”), as opposed to past (“had wanted”), which implies that even after their death they still wanted to kill Moshe. (This is not problematic according to Rashi’s approach, as Dasan and Aviram still wanted to have Moshe killed but were no longer able to achieve that after having lost their wealth.) It may seem strange that such desires would remain even after one is in the grave (or pyramid,

in this case), but with a major tenet of Judaism being that the soul lives on after the body dies, it would only mean that the desires one had while alive stay with the soul even after it departs its host body.

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desires.” With these words, Rav Eliyahu Dessler begins his description of how these desires remain with the soul.⁶ As an example, he brings the Gemara in Berachos⁷ about two souls that wanted to hear from “the other side of the curtain” (in heaven) what would happen in the coming year. Not only was their need to know about what happens here (on earth) an indication that their souls were still attached to this world, but the desire for honor was so much a part of one of them that being buried in a lesser quality shroud (“a mat of reeds”) caused it embarrassment, thus preventing it from leaving the cemetery to find out for itself.

Since a person’s essence, his *she’ifos* (drives, longings), stay with the person after death, one who still longs for physical fulfillment suffers as it cannot be obtained in a spiritual world. Rav Dessler tells us that this is what is known in kabbalistic writings as “*kaf hakela*,” as the soul searches from one end of the world to the other trying in vain to satisfy a physical desire in a non-physical existence. The Steipler Rav similarly writes⁸ about how the next world does not consist of two different realities, i.e. *Gan Eden* and *Geheinom*. Rather it is a

spiritual world that will bring extreme enjoyment to those who strive for a Torah-centered life of pure *ruchnius*, while being torturous to those who despise such an existence. He bases this on the Gemara⁹ that says, “There is no purgatory in the world to come. Instead the Holy One, blessed is He, will take the sun out of its container; the righteous will be healed by it while the wicked will be judged by it.”

If our desires remain with us even after we die, and the nature of these desires will determine our level of enjoyment or suffering when we enter the completely spiritual realm, it

¹ Ad loc.

² Nedarim 7b, 64b; Avodah Zarah 5a

³ E.g. Tosafos in Avodah Zarah 5a d”h “Elah,” Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Seforno, Ralbag.

⁴ Shemos 2:12-15.

⁵ *ibid.*, 2:23.

⁶ *Michtav Me’Eliyahu*, vol. II pg. 62.

⁷ 18b

⁸ *Birkas Peretz*, essay for Shabbos Hagadol, pg. 42.

⁹ Nedarim 8b.

would seem that the goal towards which we should be working is becoming completely spiritual people with as little dependency on physical needs as we can. For this purpose, it matters little whether those physical needs are permissible (i.e. kosher food) or prohibited; if we become addicted to anything of a physical nature, we will experience withdrawal when we cannot obtain it. Viewed

from the other side, if nothing excites us more than understanding the Creator and His ways¹⁰, what could be better than having the opportunity to study it firsthand?

Paroh's desire to execute his adopted grandson, who had undermined all of his efforts to prevent the

¹⁰ Or, if you will, understanding a *sugya* of Gemara.

redeemer of Israel from surviving, may have gone with him past the grave, but our negative desires should be eliminated long before that, allowing the desire to become closer to the One to be our primary *she'ifa* when, after 120 years, we get the chance to do just that.

REB MICHA BERGER

Bakeish Shalom

“**A** *malach* of Hashem appeared to [Moshe] in a flame of fire from within the bush; and he looked, and behold the bush is burning in fire and the bush isn't consumed.... Hashem saw that he was turning to look, and G-d called him from within the bush...”¹

So begins Moshe's illustrious career. This vision, even before Hashem's words, is the first recorded prophecy of the man later described as “There never could arise another prophet like Moshe, who Hashem knew ‘Face’ to face” (Devarim 34:10).

But the words are problematic. The vision is described twice.

At first, Moshe is approached by a *malach*, an angel, and does not perceive Hashem's Presence directly. He sees “a flame of fire within a bush”. However, on the second description, the “bush is burning in fire”. No longer is the fire within the bush; the fire is now larger than the bush; the bush is within it. It is from this second appearance that Hashem Himself calls out to Moshe, not a *malach*. The first calling “‘Face’ to face.”

¹ Shemos 3:2,4

Something momentous happens when Moshe Rabbeinu turns to look.

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik² relates this event, and the uniqueness of

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Moshe's prophecy, to one of Moshe's character traits. In his first vision, the fire is limited to being within the bush. It is an act of *tzimtzum*, constriction of the Divine Presence. Moshe is capable of perceiving this *tzimtzum*. Why? “The man Moshe was extremely *anav*, modest, more than any person on the face of the earth.”³ *Anivus*, modesty, is an *imitatio dei* of this *tzimtzum*. It is a self-imposed restriction. Had Moshe not been the most modest of all men,

Anivus is allowing others the room to be themselves.

he could not have seen this fire from within the bush. And conversely, because Moshe was sufficiently modest to perceive this, when he “turned

² Lecture given in Boston, *motza'ei Shabbos* February 3, 1979

³ Bamidbar 12:3

to look” he became the man who can converse with Hashem.

Note this definition of *anivus* – it is walking in Hashem's ways by imitating His act of *tzimtzum*, the act that made Creation possible by making “room” in which we can exist. *Anivus* is allowing others the room to be themselves.

Perhaps we can use this thought of Rav Soloveitchik's to explain an enigmatic Gemara. “Rabbi Chelbo said in the name of Rav Huna, ‘Whoever fixes a regular place for their *tefillah*, the G-d of Avraham will be in his aid. They will say about him when he dies “Such an *anav*! Such a *chassid*!’” An *anav* is defined as someone who knows his place, rather than the usual human pursuit of constantly striving for more space under his control.

The Alter of Slabodka⁴ offers this bit of advice. At all times a person should keep in one of his pockets a note that reads “For me the world was created”⁵, while in the other pocket he should keep one that reads “But I am dust

⁴ Chassidim attribute this advice to Rav Bunim of Peshischa

⁵ Sanhedrin 37a

and ashes” (Bereishis 18:27). The Alter recommends that one have a pair of dialectical views about one’s self-worth.

However, the Rambam writes that *anivus* does not involve a balance. While the *shevil hazahav*, the golden mean, is essential to the Rambam’s approach to *middos* in Hilchos Dei’os⁶, for *anivus* he makes an exception.⁷ The Alter’s dialectic therefore cannot be a balance between modesty and healthy self-confidence. Rather, *anivus* is itself that dialectic, the awareness of both perspectives.

The Beis HaLevi explains Avraham’s words “I am dust and ashes.” Dust is worthless, but it is the raw material of class or earthenware utensils. As we say in the Yom Kippur *vidui*, “I am dust in my life, how much more so in my death.” Ashes, on the other hand, are something that once had use, but are now

⁶ 2:1

⁷ Ibid, halachah 3

reduced to worthlessness. The expression denotes untapped potential.⁸

The Alter of Slabodka would often refer to the world of our perceptions. Each one of us lives in our own perceptual world, distinct worlds that happen to overlap. That world was surely created for me; its events are defined by what I myself experience, what Hashem allows me to encounter. In this world I know what is going on in my mind and soul. I have some

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awareness of my potential. My perceptual world was truly created and tailored “for me”.

However, in objective reality, one is not judged by potential but by how one actually utilizes that potential,

⁸ Cf. “Bakeish Shalom”, Mesukim Midevash vol. 1 no. 1, Vayeira 5764 <<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/5764/vayeira.pdf>>

brings it to the realm of shared experience. Untapped potential is merely ashes and dust.

Anivus is the dialectic of these two perspectives. It is an awareness of the gap between the potential that Hashem gave me and the little I have done with it. One cannot shirk duty⁹ by claiming to be incapable; the potential is there. However, since that potential is G-d-given and is therefore always underutilized by the person himself, one cannot be haughty, either.

Anivus is then an act of *tzimtzum*, of constricting my private world to allow others room for theirs. To allow others the opportunity to develop their potential is itself a development of my own.

⁹ As Rav Zecharia ben Avkulus was accused of doing, when he refrained from providing a ruling that would have prevented Bar Kamtza’s plot from leading to the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. Gittin 55b-56a

REB JONATHAN BAKER

Sefasai Tiftach

Summarizing recent columns, the morning berachos awaken us to Divine service. The berachah text itself dedicates the object of the berachah to the Creator, in asserting our dedication of things and situations He has formed, to His service, from the most prosaic to the loftiest. We thank G-d for existence, spiritual and physical, then we thank Him for the smallest details of physical awakening, mentioning hints where the Psalmist has praised G-d for parallels to each action.

The next phase begins to look outwards. Just as one awakens gradually, so too one’s mental capacity

Just as one awakens gradually, so too one’s mental capacity for prayer awakens gradually.

for prayer awakens gradually. The final blessing of the sequence of short berachos is really a long berachah, which opens and closes with “Baruch atah...”¹ The opening of this berachah thanks

¹ Mishnah Berachos 1:4; Bartenura, ad loc.

G-d for completing the physical awakening process, and begins to detail a personal awakening – *hama’avir sheinah mei’einai usenumah mei’afapai* – who removes both sleep and dozing from my eyes and face, who helpeth me to stop hitting the snooze button..

Then we begin to awaken as a person. What is a person, if not a social animal? Certainly it is easier to think of oneself in society, than to think of one’s place with respect to the Holy One. So too, this berachah sets us up in our place in society, and asks G-d to help us

maintain our proper place among people. In fact, R' Shimon Schwab notes that the opening of the berachah, about sleep, hints at awakenings from other historic anesthetized states, which themselves defined our relations with other people. First, the deep sleep of Adam, when Eve was created, defined the fundamental relationship between man and woman. Then, at the Covenant Between Pieces (*beris bein habesarim*), Avraham, in a deep sleep, received the blessing of the historic formation of the Jewish people – defining our nation with respect to the rest of the world.

We ask G-d not to allow us to fall into sin, *al tevi'einu liydei cheit*. Not to avoid **leading us into sin**, but to avoid **letting ourselves come into sin** – giving us the strength

not to backslide into any of the three sin states:

cheit, by accident; habituated sin, as in *aveirah goreres aveirah*; or sin willfully entered upon, *avon*. Help us avoid *nisayon*, tests of our faith, and *bizayon*, the shame of having failed at a *nisayon*.

Our evil inclination should not rule over us, *al tashleit banu yetzer hara*. As the Gemara says in Berachos (61b), the verse states *vayyitzer Hashem Elokim es ha'adam* (“And G-d formed the man...” – Bereishis 2:7) with two *yuds*, hinting at two *yetzarim*, inclinations, towards evil. What are they? The verse in Shema tells us, “Do not search after your hearts” into heresy, “and after your eyes” into thoughts of sin (Bamidbar 15:39).

Just as our personal inclinations should be towards good, so too our

external inclinations should be towards good. Keep us from *adam ra*, animalistic man, who has removed his *tzelem Elokim* through sin, says R' Schwab. Instead, *dab'keinu* – help us to counteract these tensions, internal and external, towards evil.

Beyond that, give us all good, whether free *chein*, earned mercy – *rachamim*, or somewhere in between as *chesed*, for us and with everyone around us, *b'eini kol ro-einu*. Grant us goodness that redounds to the merit of others *gomleinu chasadim tovim* – *gomel*, from “ripen” or “requite”, *chasadim*, “good things” as above, *tovim* – what does the extra word add? That the *chasadim* should not only be granted to us but also to *tovim*, to

all good people around us. The

closing berachah summarizes, thanking G-d for having done all

this, awakening us to *chasadim*, which are His Torah and Mitzvos, his *tovim*, which we use for the rest of society.

The following paragraph, *Yehi ratzon*, asks for G-d's help in our secular entanglements. We ask help in avoiding *shachein ra* – an evil neighbor, not to be caught up in his punishment; avoiding *pega ra*, being caught up in current events; *azei panim*, antagonists in court; *azus panim*, from bringing frivolous claims in court; and from *satan mashchis*, all kinds of criminal damage. The Tur² suggests that we add any personal fears of criminal harm at this point.

² Orach Chaim, 46

The progression continues to build: first we thank G-d for existence, then for physical action, and now for personal and interpersonal ability to act, asking His aid in doing so. Next time, we begin to establish our place with respect to G-d, as Jews. But we have been speaking with G-d all along, you may ask. Talking with Him is very different, and much simpler, than contemplating our place in His universe. That takes up much of the rest of davening. But we, as Jews and as creatures, may talk with the Creator, seeking that He aid us as He aided our ancestors in the Tanach.

Editor: Gil Student

Associate Editor: Micha Berger

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