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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Seeker

“And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Take to yourself Yehoshua ben Nun, a man in whom there is spirit...’ ” (27:18)

What is the essential ingredient of greatness?

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, *zatzal*, one of the great Torah scholars of the previous generation, was once visiting his uncle, Rabbi Avraham Yafin, *zatzal*, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Nevardok Yeshiva. As they entered the Beit Midrash (study hall), Rabbi Shmuelevitz asked Rabbi Yafin, “Who is your sharpest student?” Discreetly, Rabbi Yafin pointed out a certain pupil. “And who is the most studious?” Rabbi Yafin showed him another. “And who has the greatest breadth of knowledge?” Rabbi Yafin indicated yet a third. “And who,” said Rabbi Shmuelevitz finally, “is the best student?” Rabbi Shmuelevitz was surprised when Rabbi Yafin indicated none of the previously mentioned students, but another one entirely.

“He is my best bachur (young man),” said Rabbi Yafin.

“But until now you didn’t mention him,” said Rabbi Shmuelevitz. “What makes him the best?”

Rabbi Yafin looked at Rabbi Shmuelevitz and said, *“This one is a seeker.”*

In the ascent to greatness, the most precious quality that a person can have is the desire to seek, to pursue truth with ceaseless and tireless longing.

“And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Take to yourself Yehoshua ben Nun, a man in whom there is spirit...’ ”

The Sforno explains the phrase, *“a man in whom there is spirit,”* to mean *“prepared to receive the Light of the Face of the Living Hashem.”* The Sforno compares Yehoshua to the artisans who crafted the Mishkan and its vessels in the desert. About them, Hashem said, *“And into the heart of all wise of heart, I have placed wisdom.”* (Shmot 31:6)

The closest those artisans had come to the extremely skilled work needed to construct the Mishkan was carrying cement to build Egyptian treasure-cities. How were they able, with no previous experience, to fabricate something as beautiful, delicate and spiritually precise as the Mishkan?

To be “wise of heart” means to be prepared to receive *“the Light of the Face of the Living Hashem.”* It means being dissatisfied with the knowledge that one has already. It means to want more. It means to want Hashem’s radiance to illuminate our minds. Whatever those craftsmen lacked in experience was more than made up for by their overwhelming enthusiasm to build the Mishkan.

When the Torah lists the heads of the Jewish People who were sent to spy out the Land of Israel, it lists them according to their importance. Yehoshua appears fifth in that list. Hashem chose him to be the leader of the Jewish People precisely because he was a seeker and wanted more.

When Moshe ascended to the supernal realms, Yehoshua waited for him at the foot of Mount Sinai for forty days. Yehoshua took no tea breaks, no days off. Even though he could have rushed out to meet Moshe and resumed his learning as soon as Moshe returned, Yehoshua was not prepared to waste those few precious extra moments between the camp and the foot of the mountain.

Such is the nature of a seeker.

Oh, by the way, I almost forgot. That student who Rabbi Avraham Yafin described as his “*best bachur*” became better known as the Steipler Gaon, one of the greatest halachic arbiters of his generation.

- *Source: Rabbi Chaim Shmuelewitz in Sichot Mussar, with thanks to Rabbi Mordechai Perlman and Rabbi Reuven Lauffer*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Hashem tells Moshe to inform Pinchas that he will receive Hashem’s “covenant of peace” in reward for his bold action – executing Zimri and the Midianite princess Kozbi. Hashem commands Moshe to maintain a state of enmity with the Midianites, who lured the Jewish People into sin. Moshe and Elazar are told to count the Jewish People. The Torah lists the names of the families in each tribe. The total number of males eligible to serve in the army is 601,730. Hashem instructs Moshe how to allot the Land of Israel to the *Bnei Yisrael*. The number of the Levites' families is recorded.

Tzlofchad's daughters file a claim with Moshe. In the absence of a brother, they request their late father's portion in the Land. Moshe asks Hashem for the ruling, and Hashem tells Moshe that their claim is just. The Torah teaches the laws and priorities which determine the order of inheritance.

Hashem tells Moshe that he will ascend a mountain and view the Land that the Jewish People will soon enter, although Moshe himself will not enter it. Moshe asks Hashem to designate the subsequent leader, and Hashem selects Yehoshua bin Nun. Moshe ordains Yehoshua as his successor in the presence of the entire nation.

This Torah portion concludes with special teachings of the service in the Beit Hamikdash.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why was Pinchas not originally a kohen?
2. Why was Moav spared the fate of Midian?
3. What does the yud and hey added to the family names testify?
4. Korach and his congregation became a "sign." What do they signify?
5. Why did Korach's children survive?
6. Name six families in this Parsha whose names are changed.
7. Who was Yaakov's only living granddaughter at the time of the census?
8. How many years did it take to conquer the Land? How many to divide the Land?
9. Two brothers leave Egypt and die in the midbar. One brother has three sons. The other brother has only one son. When these four cousins enter the Land, how many portions will the one son get?
10. What do Yocheved, Ard and Na'aman have in common?
11. Why did the decree to die in the desert not apply to the women?
12. What trait did Tzlofchad's daughters exhibit that their ancestor Yosef also exhibited?
13. Why does the Torah change the order of Tzlofchad's daughters' names?
14. Tzlofchad died for what transgression?
15. Why did Moshe use the phrase "G-d of the spirits of all flesh"?
16. Moshe "put some of his glory" upon Yehoshua. What does this mean?
17. Where were the daily offerings slaughtered?
18. Goats are brought as musaf sin-offerings. For what sin do they atone?
19. Why is Shavuot called Yom Habikkurim?
20. What do the 70 bulls offered on Succot symbolize?

Answers

1. 25:13 - Kehuna (priesthood) was given to Aharon and his sons (not grandsons), and to any of their descendants born after they were anointed. Pinchas, Aharon's grandson, was born prior to the anointing.
2. 25:18 - For the sake of Ruth, a future descendant of Moav.
3. 26:5 - That the families were truly children of their tribe.
4. 26:10 - That kehuna was given forever to Aharon and his sons, and that no one should ever dispute this.
5. 26:11 - Because they repented.
6. 26:13,16,24,38,39,42 - Zerach, Ozni, Yashuv, Achiram, Shfufam, Shucham.
7. 26:46 - Serach bat Asher
8. 26:53 - Seven years. Seven years.
9. 26:55 - Two portions. That is, the four cousins merit four portions among them. These four portions are then split among them as if their fathers were inheriting them; i.e. two portions to one father and two portions to the other father.
10. 26:24,56 - They came down to Mitzrayim in their mothers' wombs.
11. 26:64 - In the incident of the meraglim, only the men wished to return to Egypt. The women wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael.
12. 27:1 - Love for Eretz Yisrael.
13. 27:1 - To teach that they were equal in greatness.
14. 27:3 - Rabbi Akiva says that Tzlofchad gathered sticks on Shabbat. Rabbi Shimon says that Tzlofchad was one who tried to enter Eretz Yisrael after the sin of the meraglim.
15. 27:16 - He was asking G-d, who knows the multitude of dispositions among the Jewish People, to appoint a leader who can deal with each person on that person's level.
16. 27:20 - That Yehoshua's face beamed like the moon.
17. 28:3 - At a spot opposite the sun. The morning offering was slaughtered on the west side of the slaughtering area and the afternoon offering on the east side.
18. 28:15 - For unnoticed ritual impurity of the Sanctuary or its vessels.
19. 28:26 - The Shavuot double-bread offering was the first wheat-offering made from the new crop.
20. 29:18 - The seventy nations.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 18) – BLESSING OF THE REBUILDING OF JERUSALEM

“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 fourteenth blessing reads: “And to Jerusalem, Your city, may You return in compassion, and may You rest within it, as You have spoken. May You rebuild it soon in our days as an eternal structure, and may You speedily establish the throne of David within it. Blessed are You, Hashem, the Builder of Jerusalem.”

Rabbi Shlomo HaKohen (1828-1905) was the *Av Bet Din* (head of the Rabbinical court) in Vilna and one of the foremost experts in Jewish law of his era. Many of his rulings were published under the title of *Binyan Shlomo*. In *Binyan Shlomo* he wonders why our blessing describes Jerusalem as being “Your [Hashem’s] city” and not “our city.” He cites the Talmud (*Ta’anit* 5a), which explains there are two Jerusalems – one here in the physical realms and another one in the Heavenly realms. Our Sages teach us that Hashem declares that He will not enter the *Yerushalayim Shel Ma’aleh* – the Heavenly Jerusalem – until He has entered the *Yerushalayim Shel Matah* – the physical Jerusalem (see *Hoshea* 11:9). The *Iyun Yaakov* clarifies that Hashem is stating that He will not reside in His Heavenly abode until the exile of His chosen nation comes to an end, and the *Shechina* – the Divine Presence – once again resides in the *Yerushalayim Shel Matah*. Rabbi Shlomo HaKohen writes that this is the reason why the blessing is written as it is. It is our heartfelt request that Hashem can return to His Heavenly abode because, when He does so it means that the earthly Jerusalem will have been rebuilt both spiritually and physically. Rabbi Shlomo HaKohen’s interpretation is based on a verse in *Zechariah* (8:3), “Thus said Hashem: ‘I will return to Zion and I will dwell within Jerusalem...’” And when that glorious moment occurs, Jews from all over the globe will come pouring into the holy

city. And yet, as the Midrash describes (*Kohelet Rabbah* 1), “Jerusalem will never be filled,” because its holiness will keep expanding to make room for everyone.

The *Eitz Yosef* points out that when Hashem destroyed His Holy Temple and forsook Jerusalem, He did so with a terrible fury that reverberated around the world. Now, we ask that Hashem’s return to His rebuilt holy city be done in the inverse way – that it will occur with great compassion.

According to the Midrash (*Pesikta Rabbati* 28), the third and final Temple will descend from the Heavens in a state of perfection, ready and waiting for the Temple Service to be renewed. Its holiness will be so intense that it will never be destroyed. It is in regard to the Third Temple that our blessing is referring when it uses the description of an “eternal structure.” And we ask that it be built “soon in our days” – soon according to our perception of time and not according to Hashem’s, when one of His days is comparable to a thousand years, as in *Tehillim* 90:4.

Our blessing concludes with a description of Hashem as being “Builder of Jerusalem.” It does not say “Who *will* build Jerusalem” in the future, but rather it is stated in the present tense because Jerusalem is continuously in a state of being built. Even when the Holy Temple was lying in ruins and

Jerusalem was being overrun by enemies, the foundations for the final, everlasting city were being put into place. In *Tehillim* (147:2) it states, "The Builder of Jerusalem is Hashem." As Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer eloquently writes in his indispensable commentary on *Tehillim*, "Moreover, even while the city was actually being destroyed and its walls shattered, Hashem was merely clearing out the decayed old structures to make way for the new edifices that would better serve the needs of the eternal sacred city."

Modern day Jerusalem is truly a sight to behold! The city is a precious jewel and its innate beauty is enhanced by the exquisite, incomparable sound of Torah being learned day and night without respite. But the Holy Temple - the heart of the city and the heart of the Jewish nation - has not yet been returned to us. Only when it is will we finally understand what we have been missing for the last two thousand years.

What can we do in order to experience the rebuilding of the Holy Temple? In *Birkat Hamazon*, which is said after eating bread, we recite the words, "Rebuild Jerusalem soon in our days." Rabbi Naftali Zvi Horowitz of Ropshitz in Galicia (1760-1827) was a Chassidic Rebbe whose followers numbered in the tens of thousands and whose influence was felt far and wide. After his passing, many of his closest Chassidim established their own Chassidic courts throughout Eastern Europe. He would explain that the prefix *bet* in the word *beyameinu*, "in our days," can either mean "in" or "with," depending on the context of the sentence. If so, the sentence can now read "Rebuild Jerusalem soon *with* our days." The Third and final Temple will be built - may it be very, very soon - with all of the days that we have maximized to the fullest in the pursuit of spiritual development.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

In the Middle

In Hebrew, there are several different words that can be translated to mean "middle." Each word has its own distinct definition and usage, often based on the historical context in which it appears. From a writer's perspective, this can make choosing the right word for a particular situation somewhat tricky. However, once you understand the different nuances of each word, you will be able to select the best option for your needs. The main two words we will discuss in this essay are *emtza* (the standard word for "middle" in the Mishna) and *merkaz*, but - oddly enough - we will talk about the words *lev* and *tabur* as well.

Even though the word *emtza* ("center/middle") appears countless times in the Mishnah, it does not appear in the Bible. Nonetheless, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) in *Sefer Tishbi* (his lexicon of

Rabbinic Hebrew) traces the root to the trilateral root MEM-TZADI-LAYIN.

According to the classical lexicographers like Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-70), Yonah Ibn Janach (990-050), Shlomo Ibn Parchon (the 12th century author of *Machberet HeAruch*), and Radak (1160-1235), there is no such thing as the root (ALEPH)-MEM-TZADI-LAYIN in Biblical Hebrew at all. They all see the word *matza*, "mat" (Isa. 28:20) - which is the only possible word in the Bible derived from the root HaBachur listed - as derived from the root (YOD)-TZADI-LAYIN, which refers to the act of "spreading/presenting" (as in "spreading out" a cloth, or bedding, or mats). Perhaps HaBachur understood that *emtza* relates to the verb of "spreading out" a mat/bedding because when once unfurl such sheets of fabric, one essentially reveals

the inside or "middle" of the folded/rolled-up material.

As an aside, Avraham Even-Shoshan (1906-1984) in his concordance of Biblical Hebrew does trace *matza* to the root MEM-TZADI-AYIN, even though he has a different way of understanding the etymology of *emtza* (see below).

In Talmudic and Targumic Aramaic, the letter ALEPH of the word *emtza* is dropped, so that the word for "middle" is actually *metzia* or *metziyata* (for examples, see Targum to Gen. 1:6, 2:9, Ex. 26:28, Judges 16:29, Iyov 20:13, Ps. 45:10, 135:9). The most famous example of this occurrence is in the name of the Mishnaic tractate *Bava Metzia*, which means "the Middle Gate" (as opposed to *Bava Kamma*, "the First Gate" and *Bava Batra*, "the Last Gate"), which is not called *Bava Emtzai*.

Avraham Even Shoshan, in his famous "new dictionary" of Hebrew, argues that the post-Biblical word *emtza* derives from the Greek word *mesos* ("middle"). This Greek word is also used in the English term *Mesopotamia*, the area between ("in the middle") of the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. It also appears in the scientific term *meson*, a subatomic particle found in the "middle" of a nucleus. Linguists maintain that the Greek *mesos* is derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *medhyo*, which also gives us the Germanic *midja* and the Latin *medius*. These terms, of course, are the ultimate etyma of such English words as *middle*, *medium*, *mediocre*, *mediate*, *midwife*, *medieval*, *Mediterranean*, and *meridian*.

The Hebrew word *merkaz* ("center") seemingly derives from the trilateral root REISH-KAF-ZAYIN ("to concentrate"). In Modern Hebrew, the words for both "juice concentrate" and the neurological ability to "concentrate" on one's studies are derived from the root REISH-KAF-ZAYIN (*rikuz*). Like in English, where the word *central* (derived from *center*) came to mean anything that is "especially important," the Hebrew *merkaz* also refers to something that is important. For example, the "central bus station" is called *Tachanah HaMerkazit*, not because it is in the geographic "middle" of the city, *per se*, but because it is the "main" bus terminal. Similarly, the Modern Hebrew phrase *Merkaz Ha'ir* ("Center of the City") refers to the center of town where all the happenings are concentrated, whether or not it is geometrically in the exact "middle."

Nonetheless, neither the word *merkaz* nor any other cognate of REISH-KAF-ZAYIN appear in Biblical Hebrew or Mishnaic Hebrew. In fact, the word *merkaz* first appears in Medieval Hebrew in works that were translated from Judeo-Arabic by the Ibn Tibbon family. Rabbi Shmuel Ibn Tibbon (1150-1230), who translated Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed* into Hebrew, writes in his *Peirush HaMilot HaZarot* ("Explanation of Bizarre Words") that he borrowed the word *merkaz* from Arabic in order to denote "the point inside a circle from which all lines to the circle are congruent." Of course, that's just a fancy way of saying the "middle" of the circle (because that point is equidistant to all points along the circle). Indeed, the great etymologist Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) agrees that the Hebrew *merkaz* derives from the Arabic *markaz* ("foothold, center, station"), which, in turn, is borrowed from the Akkadian *markasu* ("a spot for tying"), which is ultimately derived from the Akkadian *rakasu* ("to fasten").

Despite Ibn Tibbon's admission that *merkaz* comes from Arabic, there is still room to see this word as having something of a Hebraic origin. Rabbi Dovid Golumb (1861-1935) in *Targumna* conjectures that the Late Hebrew root REISH-KAF-ZAYIN actually comes from the earlier Hebrew root REISH-KAF-SAMECH (via the interchangeability of ZAYIN and SAMECH). Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein in his *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* similarly insinuates a connection between REISH-KAF-ZAYIN and REISH-KAF-SAMECH, and Rabbi Yehoshua (Jeremy) Steinberg of the Veromemanu Foundation independently arrived at the same conclusion. In order to better appreciate this supposition, we must first discuss the root REISH-KAF-SAMECH.

The root REISH-KAF-SAMECH appears four times in the Bible. It appears twice as a verb in the context of "fastening" the *choshen* to the *ephod* (Ex. 28:28, 39:21), and appears twice as a noun: once in the word *rachasim*, "mountain-range(s)" (Isa. 40:4) and once in a word that describes man's "difficulties" (Ps. 31:21). Most commentators see the core meaning of REISH-KAF-SAMECH as something "strong" or "hard," but have slightly different ways of explaining how these examples fit that idea. Ibn Janach (in *Sefer HaShorashim*) and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 12:5) see the "fastening" meaning of this root

to refer to creating a “strong” and “unbreakable” bond by means of tying. Ibn Janach further explains that this root refers to a “mountain-range” because of the tough and difficult terrain. Ibn Parchon (in *Machberet HaAruch*) similarly writes that a “mountain-range” is called *rachasim* because one must exert much strength and effort in order to traverse it. Finally, the “difficulties” and “hardships” that a person endures are “strong” obstacles that stand in the way of life.

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (*Keset HaSofer* to Gen. 12:5) similarly writes that the core meaning of REISH-KAF-SAMECH is “gathering, attaching.” The connection to “fastening” is obvious, because by tying two items together, one “attaches” and thereby “gathers” them into a single entity. He further explains that “mountain-range” can be viewed as a series of mountains that are “attached” geographically. Interestingly, Rabbi Marcus avers that several other Hebrew roots are derived from REISH-KAF-SAMECH through a series of interchangeable letters: *rechush* (“property,” the total accrual of one’s belongings), through the interchangeability of SIN/SAMECH and SHIN; *neches/nechasim* (“property,” again the accumulation of possessions and wealth), through the interchangeability of REISH and NUN, and *rochel* (“merchant,” who gathers up various commodities to sell), through the interchangeability of SIN/SAMECH and LAMMED (attested to in various ancient languages, most notably Egyptian).

In light of all this, it seems that the principle meaning of the root REISH-KAF-SAMECH is “to tie together.” Consequently, when things are tied together, the nexus of the knot is the point where their connection is strongest and most-highly concentrated. In general, the “middle” of something is also usually the place with the highest concentration (as opposed to the extremities, which are typically thinner). Thus, the semantic jump from “tying” (REISH-KAF-SAMECH) to “middle” (REISH-KAF-ZAYIN) is not so far, and there is ample reason to argue for a connection between these roots.

If *emtza* is only an Aramaic or Mishnaic Hebrew word, and *merkaz* is essentially a Late Hebrew or Modern Hebrew word, then how do you say “middle” in Biblical Hebrew? There are two words that primarily have anatomical meanings that were borrowed in Biblical Hebrew to mean “middle:” *lev*

and *tabur*. In the remainder of this essay, we will explore these two words.

The word *lev* (“heart”) primarily refers to that life-giving organ that pumps blood, but the heart’s location as roughly in the middle of one’s body allowed this word to be borrowed to refer to the “middle” of anything. As a result, the Bible speaks of the “*lev* of the elm tree” (II Shmuel 18:14), “the *lev* of the seas” (Ex. 15:8, Yechezkel 27:4, 27:25-27, 28:2, 28:8, Ps. 46:3), and “the *lev* of the Heavens” (Deut. 4:10) – even though trees, waters, and Heavens do not have literal “hearts.”

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) sees the word *lev* as reflective of the core meaning of the biliteral root LAMMED-BET (“heart”). In line with what we wrote above, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that in a borrowed sense, *lev* can refer to anything that is located in the “center” or otherwise plays a “central” role in some process.

He sees the word *lavi* (“lion”) as related to *lev*, explaining that fear stems from the amassing of blood within one’s heart, but because lions apparently have small hearts, they are less prone to fear. Rabbi Pappenheim also writes that a *levivah* (“wafer,” although in Modern Hebrew this word refers to a fried potato patty known in Yiddish as a *latke*) is called such either because it is a foodstuff that sustains the “heart” of a person, or because it was a heart-shaped delicacy.

Other words that Rabbi Pappenheim explains as derived from this root include: *lahav/lehavah* (“flame,” which comes from the *middle* of a fire), *leveinah* (“brick,” made by being placed in a kiln fire), *lavan* (“white,” the color that things put into a fire often turn), *levanah* (“moon,” because it is white, as opposed to the reddish sun), *livneh* (“Populus alba,” a white tree), *Levanon* (“Lebanon,” a region where the *livneh* commonly grows), and *levonah* (“frankincense,” a whitish resin).

In rabbinic parlance, the word *aliba* (“according to”) is also derived from the Hebrew word *lev*. This Aramaic term literally means “on the heart of.” If you are still reading this far, you will definitely appreciate this amazing discovery that I recently made: the Rabbinic Aramaic term *aliba* actually parallels the etymological origins of the English word *according!*

Let me explain what I mean: The English word *heart* and its Germanic cognates (like *herz*) are related to the Latin word *cord* and Greek *kardia*. For reasons too complicated to explain here, some Indo-European languages use the letter *h* where other Indo-European languages would use the letters *c* or *k* (examples of this can be seen in the first letters of the words *cent/hundred* and *cap/head*). Thus, the English words *core* (“the middle of something”), *crux* (“the gist or most important point of an idea”), *cardinal* (“the principle item within a group”), and *cardiology* (“the study of the heart”) are all related to the English word *heart*. If you’ve ever been to the Old City of Jerusalem and seen the so-called *Cardo*, the name of that ancient thoroughfare comes from the fact that it runs through the “heart/middle” of the Holy City. With all of this in mind, it’s no surprise that the English word *according* derives from the French word *accord*, which colloquially means “agree,” but literally means “to be of one *heart*.” Thus, the rabbinic term *aliba* and the English word *according* share this etymological association with the word for “heart” in their respective languages.

Finally, the word *tabur* appears multiple times in the Mishna (*Shabbat* 18:3, *Sotah* 9:4, and *Bechorot* 7:5) in the sense of “navel, belly-button, umbilicus.” In addition to this anatomical meaning (which seems to be the original sense of *tabur*), the word *tabur* appearstwice and only twice in the Bible, both times in the phrase “the *tabur* of the land” (*Judges* 9:37,

Yechezkel 38:12). In these cases, the word *tabur* refers to the “center/middle” of the land. Just like the *lev* is roughly situated in the “middle” of the body and came to mean the “middle,” the same seems to be true of the word *tabur*. Moreover, just as the *lev* is an essential organ for life, so does *tabur* refer to that which is essential for sustaining a fetus in its mother’s womb. Although I have not yet seen any examples of this, if *lev* can be expanded to also refer to the essential or chief principal within a greater range of discourse, then perhaps *tabur* can also mean the same. (For more about the connection between the name Tiberias and the Hebrew word *tabur*, see my essay “The Shining Sea of Galilee” from Aug. 2019.)

Postscript: The monoliteral prefix BET, as well as the words *b’toch/tichon*, *b’kerev/kerev*, and *gav/go* can all mean “middle,” as well. However, the more accurate meaning of those terms is actually “inside.” It’s easy to confuse the two meanings because the “middle” is just the “innermost point” of a circle or regular polygon. Thus, for example, despite Targum and Rashi (to *Gen.* 2:9) translating the word *b’toch* as *emtza*, the word *b’toch* does not typically mean the exact middle, but just somewhere that is not necessarily along the edge (see Nachmanides to *Gen.* 2:9 and responsa *Maharit* vol. 2 *Even HaEzer* 8). So, we’ll leave discussion of those terms for a future essay.

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POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. info@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe Newman, Rabbi Shlomo Simon, Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair, Rabbi Yehuda Spitz,
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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yevamot 107-113

A Righteous Convert

Rabbi Yitzchak explained, “This refers to the tragedy upon tragedy which results from accepting converts to Judaism.”

This is one concept, among others, which Rabbi Yitzchak derives in our *sugya* while interpreting a verse from Sefer Mishlei (11:15). The verse states, “He who is *arev zar* will cause disaster after disaster.” While Rashi’s commentary to Mishlei explains *arev zar* as being one who worships idols, Rabbi Yitzchak also connects this verse to the disastrous consequences of accepting converts. Rashi in our *gemara* explains *arev zar* as meaning “mixing foreigners into Judaism.” He understands the word *arev* as meaning “mixing,” similar to the use of *erev* as a word for “early evening” since it is a time of mixture of day and night. Likewise, the word *eiruv*, the method for permitting carrying in a shared courtyard or alley on Shabbat, conveys the idea of “mixing together various domains,” in a sense. The Maharsha offers an additional interpretation to connect the phrase *arev zar* to accepting the converts. He writes that it comes from the root that means “guarantor,” and ties in with the principle that “All of the Jewish People are guarantors for each other (i.e. to ensure that each person is faithful to Hashem and His Torah).” If converts are accepted, each current member of the Jewish nation would be responsible to prevent the converts from transgression and would be held accountable for their shortcomings. In this manner, a person’s ledger of punishment might keep growing larger on account of converts without any actual personal wrongdoing.

One who learns our *daf* might have the mistaken impression that Rabbi Yitzchak is teaching – based on the verse in Sefer Mishlei – that conversion should never be allowed. However, we clearly know, today and historically, that Judaism accepts converts who wish to become part of the Jewish People to accept the Torah and take refuge under the wings of Hashem’s Divine Presence.

In Tanach, there are numerous well-known *gerei tzeddek* – righteous converts. A partial list: Ruth (in Megillat Ruth, often referred to as the “mother of royalty”) and Rachav (in Sefer Yehoshua) who risked her life to save the spies and who later became the wife of Yehoshua ben Nun.

Tosefot on our *daf* cites the view of one the most oft-quoted *ba’alei Tosefot* – the RI (Rabbi Yitzchak, a maternal descendant of Rashi) – who distinguishes between *undesirable* and *desirable* converts. He explains that the former category includes potential converts who are persuaded and encouraged to convert rather than be motivated by internal, pure desire for righteous conversion. This undesirable category also includes immediate acceptance of converts without proper “background checks” to determine the potential convert’s sincerity and motivation. However, he explains, it is not only okay but also correct to accept a potential convert who demonstrates a genuine desire to become part of the Jewish People and live according to the Torah.

Tosefot offers a powerful argument for the concept of accepting converts, in general. He cites a *gemara* in which he writes that the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov endured great suffering meted out by Amalek, a descendant of the non-Jewish princess named Timna, as punishment for the forefathers’ rejecting Timna’s attempt to convert.

It is important to note that there is an exception to each of these two “categorical rules” in determining whether to convert a person or not. Exception one: despite normally accepting proper candidates, converts were not accepted during the time of King Shlomo in the glory days of the First Beit Hamikdash; and they were also not accepted following the downfall of the wicked Haman of Purim fame. At those times, the Jewish People were

seen by the other nations as being “on top of the world” and the sincerity of potential converts could not fairly be determined.

Another exception to the rule expressed in Tosefot is the case in *masechet Shabbat* (31a) of a person who came to Hillel and demanded to be converted immediately, on condition that he would be taught

the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel agreed and accepted the convert as a righteous convert. The commentaries explain that Hillel had sufficient Torah wisdom and insight to be able to determine on the spot that the person would be a genuinely righteous convert.

▪ *Yevamot 109b*

PEREK SHIRA

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE DOVE

The dove says, “Like the swallow and the crane I shall chirp, I coo like a dove with my eyes raised to the heights. Hashem, take me! Secure me!” (Yeshayah 38:14)

The dove says to Hashem, “Master of the world, let my sustenance be as bitter as an olive from Your hand, rather than as sweet as honey from the hands of flesh and blood.”

The gentle dove is the most victimized of birds, and yet possesses the least ability for defending itself. Unlike other birds, which fight with their beaks and talons, the dove uses only its wings, either to fend off its attackers or to fly away. It is a symbol of the Jewish nation, since we are similarly defenseless in exile, taken advantage of by pagan nations. We possess only our wing-like mitzvahs to protect us and lift us out of harm’s reach. Thus, with its constant pitiful coo, and open-eyed, trusting gaze, the dove sings of our constant prayer to Hashem, and our unwavering trust in Him. Our very weakness compels us to rely upon Hashem – which is our greatest strength, by which we have outlived all the mighty nations of antiquity.

The dove also symbolizes our dependency upon Hashem for sustenance. When the dove brought a leaf from the bitter tasting olive tree to Noach, it was communicating that it would rather be fed the bitterest meal by Hashem’s hand, and not be forced any longer to be sustained with sickly sweet dependency from the hands of man. The choice of the olive as a symbol of bitterness also contains a deeper message. Just like the olive is hard and bitter, and when it is crushed, its bitterness is sweetened and it emits edible oil, so too, Hashem disciplines us with suffering to bring out the best from us.

On a deeper level of understanding, the dove symbolizes not only our dependency upon Hashem but also our mutual loving relationship with Him. In the same way that a pair of doves mate for life and never abandon each other, we are bonded with Hashem in an eternal wedlock.

- Sources: Rashi to *Berachos 53b*; *Menachos 53b*; *Siach Yitzchak*; *Likutei HaGra (Ohalei Shem, Korban §13)*; *Yalkut Shimoni (Shir HaShirim §985)*; see also *Perek B’Shir*

**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

Authentic Peace

Last week, we read about the fiasco of *Baal Pe'or*, where many Jews were seduced by Midianite women, and then persuaded to worship the idol *Pe'or* in the most detestable ways.

As the leaders of the nation assembled to sit in judgment over the guilty, the brazen Zimri paraded a Midianite princess around, in full view of the whole community, encouraging continuation of the reprehensible crime. The sight of such impudence, at the entrance to the Sanctuary – the sight of such heinous degeneracy at the site that was to safeguard the holiness of the people – reduced the nation, including its leaders, to helpless tears.

Only one man – Pinchas – summoned the strength for manly action. As a young man, he saw the tears of helplessness as a sign that Israel's leaders had lost faith in their nation's future. He took a spear in hand and slew the Jewish man and the Midianite woman in an act that spared the people the wrath of Hashem. The plague that already had claimed 24,000 lives, and would have claimed the lives of many more, ceased immediately.

Pinchas demonstrated that as long as there is even one person left on earth to champion the cause of Hashem and Torah, then Hashem's cause – the survival and education of humanity – is not lost. Our Torah portion opens with Pinchas being rewarded with the covenant called peace. The supreme harmony of peace is entrusted here to that spirit and activism which thoughtless people – anxious to mask their passivity and neglect of duty as “love of peace” – like to brand and condemn as “disturbances of the peace.” But in reality, one who dares to struggle against the enemies of what is good and true in the eyes of Hashem is a fighter for the covenant of peace

on earth. Authentic peace is harmony with the Will of Hashem.

The converse is also true. One who does not stand up for truth, one who will not struggle to attain it, is called “a hater of peace” in Psalms 120:6. Only if people will respect truth, and endeavor to have their actions, desires, speech and actions correspond to that truth, will they be able to work together in harmony.

When it comes to our personal sphere of desires, rights and possessions, we are encouraged to pursue peace, at almost any price. If it is only our personal interest, property rights, or honor that is at stake, we should avoid even the most justified quarrel. But when the price for peace includes the values of humanity, in general, and of the Torah in particular, it is too high a price.

In Scripture, when truth and peace are juxtaposed, truth ordinarily precedes peace. (Zechariah 8:19; 8:16) Truth comes first and peace only second. Peace, as Pinchas has taught us, is a *product* of truth. And this is why peace cannot be pursued at the expense of the truth.

Eternal priesthood is promised to Pinchas and to the loyal heirs among his sons because he was zealous on behalf of Hashem, and took bold action to atone for all those who remained silent around him. In acting for the sake of Hashem's truth, he is rewarded with eternal peace.

- *Source: Commentary, Bamidbar, 25:12, Mishlei page 196, Tehillim 120:6*