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PARASHAT BeMidbar

Flags of Division OR Flags of Unity?

by *Rabbi Shaya First*

Watching Machaneh Yisrael travel through the desert must have been quite a sight; over 600,000 grown men, plus scores of women and children, all travelled at the same time. Thinking about all these people, it becomes clear that this was a scene that under normal circumstances would have certainly dissolved into utter chaos. Yet, it does not seem that this occurred. How did Hashem ensure that the joint travel of millions of people did not regress into utter pandemonium?

On a simple level, the division of the Jewish camp into Degalim, flags, was one of the methods used to address this concern. Each Sheivet had a different flag, and while camping and traveling, each member of the Jewish people would take care to stay in formation with all those with whom he shared a flag — “*Ish Al Diglo BeOtot LeVeit Avotam*,” “Each man [camped] by the flag and standard that corresponded to his ancestral house” (BeMidbar 2:2).

But these flags did more than just divide and organize. They also sent powerful messages about the unique qualities and missions of each of the tribes. Rashi writes that each tribe’s flag was a unique color, matching the color of that tribe’s stone on the Choshen (ibid. s.v. BeOtot). Rabbeinu Bachyei (BeMidbar 2:2) elaborates and explains that each of these colors reflected a unique strength, quality, or mission of each particular Sheivet. For example, Yissachar’s flag was blue, reminiscent of the sky, as they were a tribe known for their prowess in astrology. Zevulun’s flag was silver, symbolic of their economic strength. Asher’s flag was bright yellow, symbolizing the rich olive oil they would produce in the future. The flags of the rest of the tribes had similarly symbolic colors. Beyond the colors, each flag also contained an emblem relevant to its Sheivet. Yehudah’s flag, for example, depicted a lion, the animal Ya’akov Avinu compared to Yehudah (BeReishit 49:9). Naftali’s emblem was a deer and

Binyamin’s was a wolf for the same reason (49:21, 49:27), and so too for all the tribes. Each tribe’s symbol reflected something about that tribe, be it a special strength, dedication, mission, or quality.

What is the purpose of a flag? A flag can serve as a powerful reminder of loyalty, a mission, or a personal strength. When the members of each Sheivet of the Jewish people looked at their flag as they camped and traveled, they were reminded of what made them unique, the unique role that they played in the greater Klal Yisrael.

But, in light of a number of other fascinating Midrashim, it seems that the flags carried a shared message as well. A number of Midrashim write that the letters of the names of the Avot, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov, were also written on the flags of the four leading camps, Yehudah, Dan, Re’uvein, and Efrayim. One letter from each of the Avot’s names was written on Yehudah’s flag, another on Dan’s, a third on Re’uvein’s, and a fourth on Efrayim’s. The one remaining letter — the letter Hei from Avraham — was missing from these flags, and was instead written on the Aron HaKodesh. Additionally, Rabbeinu Bachyei (BeMidbar 2:2) writes that the emblems of the four leading flags were a lion (Yehudah), a person (Re’uvein), a vulture (Dan), and an ox (Efrayim), which together comprised the four faces of the Keruvim that hold up the Kisei HaKavod in Yechezkel’s vision (Yechezkel 1:10).

In this sense, the flags of Machaneh Yisrael were different from flags typically seen today. They not only carried a stand-alone message, but also a message that could only be properly understood when all the flags were viewed together. The letters on each flag would look like a random jumbled assortment when seen one flag at a time, but they came together to form the names of the Avot when seen collectively. The figures that adorned each of the leading flags had meaning in and of themselves for their corresponding Shevatim when standing alone, but represented something so much greater — the Kisei HaKavod, G-d’s holy throne of glory — when viewed together with those of the other Shevatim.

The flags of Machanei Yisrael can serve as a powerful reminder of our unique individual strengths and missions as individuals, as families, and as communities. But they also remind us just how much powerful we can be when we combine and come together with other individuals, families, and communities as part of a greater Klal Yisrael.

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PARASHAT NASO

Kabbalah in Sefer BeMidbar

by Moshe Papier ('19)

Sefer BeMidbar is a book of narrative, Halachot, travel records, and other assorted things, but when one looks closely at the different ideas portrayed throughout the Sefer, a unique theme emerges, especially when viewed through the lens of Kabbalah. While it is famously taught that Kabbalah should not be learned unless one has strong physical and spiritual anchors to bind him to reality, even by taking a cursory look at the book using Kabbalah, one can begin to appreciate many ideas in Sefer BeMidbar which would normally seem irrelevant. The theme of Kabbalah is widespread throughout the Torah, but its most fundamental ideas can be seen throughout Sefer BeMidbar.

In his book *Practical Kabbalah*, Rabbi Laibl Wolf emphasizes the importance of Kabbalah and how it affects every individual every day. He explains the nature of the Neshamah, the soul, and teaches the reader how to apply the practice of Kabbalah in his or her life. The book's main purpose is to provide instruction in the application of Kabbalah concepts to the physical world and to the behavior of man, but I believe that it can significantly reconfigure how one perceives the Torah, specifically in Sefer BeMidbar. In the fourth and fifth chapters of Sefer BeMidbar, three fundamental ideas are discussed: Sotah, Nazir, and Birkat Kohanim. Many commentators disagree as to the nature of these ideas and the intent of their laws. Looking at these concepts through the lens of Kabbalah, one can obtain an understanding of the juxtaposition between these ideas, as well as a connection to what the Kabbalists call the Sefirot of the mind.

In total, there are ten Sefirot which transcend down from Hashem into our physical world. These Sefirot are separated into two different categories, but I would like to focus on the first category, which is the Sefirot of the mind, or Seichel (intellect). Seichel contains three characteristics of the mind, Chochmah, Binah, and Da'at. Simply put, Chochmah is the infinite potential of the mind. It is the first spark of imagination and creativity. Chochmah is a very powerful force that initiates every single thought, but it is incomplete and requires something to pull it forward. This is where Binah is necessitated and is subsequently incorporated into Seichel. Binah controls and directs the erratic flow of Chochmah; while Chochmah is very powerful, it does not have a direction or purpose, so Binah directs it and gives it shape.

Chochmah and Binah are clearly complementary to each other, for without one, the other becomes something else entirely. On its own, Chochmah can be the source of misguided judgment, which leads to sin, whereas Binah without Chochmah leads to nothing, for no matter the

amount of structure, without the creative spark, no thought can be formed. What keeps these two Sefirot together and in tandem? The answer is Da'at, which binds the Chochmah and Binah characteristics of the mind together. When in concert, Binah and Chochmah can achieve almost anything, but only Da'at can help achieve that unity. Therefore, Chochmah, Binah, and Da'at are integral aspects of the human mind. However, what do they have to do with Sefer BeMidbar? To answer this question, we must delve deeper into the understanding of Sotah, Nazir, and Birkat Kohanim.

The convicted Sotah committed a great sin against her husband by committing adultery, one of the prohibitions of the Aseret HaDibrot. In doing so, she broke apart one of the most important and sacred institutions in all of Judaism, marriage. This directly correlates to the idea of unrestrained Chochmah – undirected and misplaced thoughts. While the Sotah's actions were inexcusable and wrong, they came about because of a lack of Binah, or in other words, an overpowering sense of Chochmah. Too much desire placed in the wrong direction led the Sotah to commit a terrible sin, and to then pay dearly by drinking the distending potion (BeMidbar 5:27). Our understanding of the connection between the Sotah and the Kabbalistic concept of Chochmah can lay the foundation for a connection between the Nazir and the concept of Binah.

A Nazir is a person who does not shave any hair on his body, avoids drinking any alcoholic beverages, and refrains from consuming anything originating from grapes, among other prohibitions. The goal of a Nazir is to attain a closer relationship with God. When one leaves his personal desires behind, he can attain a greater appreciation for the spiritual world, which should be a positive development. However, at the end of his term of Nezirut, the Nazir is required to bring a sin-offering. The question is, why is this Korban necessary? If the goal of becoming a Nazir is to become closer to God, why apologize for it? What sin was committed here? The Talmud Bavli (Nazir 3a) discusses this question at length, but in accordance with the Yerushalmi (Nazir 1:5), the Gemara concludes that in fact a sin was committed. The Bavli explains that we are meant to enjoy what Hashem has provided us in this world. Obviously, taking advantage of what the world provides would be wrong, but by having too much Binah and completely structuring one's thoughts so as to block out the rest of the world as well as one's innate creativity, as is possible in the case of a Nazir, one can potentially sin without even recognizing it.

Finally, the idea can be extended to Da'at as it pertains to Birkat Kohanim. The Rambam (Hilchot Tefillah U'Nesi'at Kapayim 15:7) explains that the Kohanim, who are meant to bless the Jewish people, are not actually blessing the Jews themselves; rather, they are acting as "translators" for God, meaning that it is truly God who is blessing the Jews. Through the Kohanim as a catalyst of sorts, God blesses His nation. This is clearly the main focus of Da'at; God uses originality in crafting the Birkat Kohanim and structure in using the Kohanim as a conduit, using

Da'at to intertwine the Chochmah and Binah aspects of the Sefirot of Seichel.

It is evident due to the juxtaposition between the ideas discussed in BeMidbar that there is some form of connectivity between those Mitzvot and the Kabbalistic conceptions of Chochmah, Binah, and Da'at. The Sotah's actions clearly indicate an excess of Chochmah according to our analysis, and becoming a Nazir is connected to Binah. Finally, we have proven how close the mechanisms of Birkat Kohanim and Da'at are. By looking closer into the messages that are imbued in every section of the Torah, we can better ourselves in these crucial areas of Avodat Hashem.

MOSHE'S SINGULAR DEDICATION

by *Eli Schloss* ('19)

The end of Sefer Shemot describes the articles of the Mishkan. Sefer VaYikra discusses how to serve in the Mishkan. Parashat Naso is the culmination of this process, and the Mishkan is finally inaugurated.

BeMidbar 7:1 discusses the grand opening of the Mishkan: "*VaYimshach Oto VaYekadeish Oto VeEt Col Keilav, VeEt HaMizbei'ach VeEt Col Keilav, VaYimshachem VaYekadeish Otam,*" "[Moshe] anointed [the Mishkan] and sanctified it and all its vessels, and the altar and all its vessels, and he anointed them and sanctified them." But there is an apparent issue with this Pasuk: why does the Torah give credit only to Moshe for opening the Mishkan, when it obviously was a communal effort that took months of preparation from Klal Yisrael? We know from elsewhere in the Torah that Bnei Yisrael donated vast amounts of wood, leather, and precious metals to the Mishkan; why are they not acknowledged here?

Rashi (ibid.) resolves this challenge, and supports his answer with an analogy. While Moshe had a supporting cast in building the Mishkan, including Betzal'eil, Aholi'av, and many others who helped build or contributed monetarily to the Mishkan, Moshe himself was the one who led the project, as he was assigned by Hashem. Moshe delegated a role in building the Mishkan to anyone who wanted to help, but *he* was the one who made sure that the design was flawless. Moshe was the most dedicated to building the Mishkan. Everyone had his or her role in the Jewish community, and Moshe's role was to build the Mishkan and dedicate his life towards serving Hashem in any way possible.

Rashi then offers a parallel to Moshe Rabbeinu's attitude towards the Mishkan: David HaMelech's attitude towards the Beit HaMikdash. Tehillim Perek 132 discusses David's approach to building the Beit HaMikdash and how afflicted he was by the lack of a house for Hashem. David is vexed by the fact that despite Hashem choosing Yerushalayim as His home, He does not abide there. David declares that he will not sleep until he creates a home for HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Like David, Moshe displays enormous dedication. He sees that Hashem needs to be closer to the people and gives everything he has to serve Hashem. Just as David gets credit for creating the Beit HaMikdash despite

not actually building it, Moshe gets credit for building the Mishkan even though he did not build the whole thing himself.

We discussed how Moshe is able to take credit for the Mishkan, but does he do anything so important that he can be the *only* one to anoint and sanctify the Mishkan? We know that Moshe does this alone because the words "VaYimshach" and "VaYekadeish" in the previously mentioned Pasuk are in singular form, denoting that only one person, Moshe, anointed and sanctified the Mishkan. The reason Moshe deserves this honor is that he is the only person who ever talked to Hashem face to face, and it is his duty to infuse the Mishkan with a higher level of Kedushah than anyone else in Bnei Yisrael had attained. But once Moshe strikes his match and ignites the fire of Kedushah in the Mishkan, the Mishkan lights up with a Kedushah that can benefit all of Am Yisrael. Moshe's role in the Mishkan is so important because without him, we would not have a house for Hashem to rest his Shechinah, nor would we have a way to attract Hashem to the Mishkan.

PARASHAT BEHA'ALOTECHA

THE MACHANEH SHECHINAH

by *Ned Krasnopolsky* ('19)

Throughout Sefer BeMidbar, there is an overlying motif of the incorporation of the Shechinah throughout the camp of Bnei Yisrael. This motif is clearly visible throughout all of the movements and actions of Shivtei Yisrael and its leaders. This can especially be seen in the function of the Chatzotzrot (trumpets), and through the framework of Bnei Yisrael's travels through the Midbar.

The Chatzotzrot

In Parashat BeHa'alotecha (BeMidbar 10:2) Hashem commands Moshe to create for himself two trumpets, beaten out of one solid piece of silver. The Rambam (Hilchot Ta'aniyot 1:1) understands that the various uses of Chatzotzrot all fall underneath the umbrella of one Mitzvah. However, the Rambam's position is a rather perplexing one, as the very uses of the Chatzotzrot seem to be a tripartite dichotomy. First of all, the trumpets were to be blown at times of war, and at times of happiness (BeMidbar 10:9-10). Second, they were to be blown during the suspension and commencement of travel (10:2-6). Lastly, a more subtle point, is the differentiation between the two sounds produced by the trumpets during their use — a Teruah versus a Teki'ah. Certainly, one "blanket" Mitzvah could not possibly encompass all of the uses of the Chatzotzrot! In addition, the very concept that the Chatzotzrot were to be made of one *unified* piece of silver seems to be difficult to comprehend.

A potential resolution is as follows: overall, the Pesukim seem to point out that the Chatzotzrot function in opposing scenarios. However, there is one unifying factor among all the different functions of the Chatzotzrot listed by the Torah. When the Torah introduces the concepts of blowing the Chatzotzrot during times of war and happiness, it includes within each respective Pasuk the concept of the Chatzotzrot serving as a remembrance to remind Bnei Yisrael to turn to Hashem for their salvation and thanksgiving. In fact, the grammar¹ of the Pesukim clarifies this point by stressing the importance of thanking Hashem during times of happiness and success. All in all, the Chatzotzrot represent a rejection of the concept of compartmental belief in Hashem — Bnei Yisrael should look up to Hashem during both troubled and peaceful times.

That is why the Chatzotzrot are linked to Moshe by Hashem's direct command of "*Asei Lecha*," "Make for yourself" (BeMidbar 10:2). Moshe's unwavering Emunah is the paradigm of belief in Hashem during both challenging and serene moments. In fact, when Moshe died, no one else was allowed to use his Chatzotzrot (cf. Rashi *ibid.* s.v. *Lecha*). Overall, Moshe and the Chatzotzrot were a remembrance of the importance of having a consistent and constant approach to *Deveikut LaHashem*, closeness to God. The Chatzotzrot were certainly a representation of the Shechinah's presence within the Machaneh, as they served as an everlasting remembrance to G-d's omnipresence throughout times of difficulty and triumph.

The Travelling Configuration of Machanei Yisrael

In the middle of the tenth Perek of BeMidbar, the Torah describes how Bnei Yisrael travelled through the Midbar. This idea of structure greatly contributed to the camp's description as a Machaneh Shechinah.

The middle of the Perek (10:14-27) begins by re-listing the names of the Nesi'im. The Ramban (10:14 s.v. *VeAl Tzeva'o*) raises the question of why the names of the Nesi'im are re-listed here, as they were already mentioned earlier in the Sefer. The Ramban explains that the reason for doing this was to show how Bnei Yisrael travelled with the Nesi'im in front of them, and he quotes the Pasuk from Parashat Pinechas where Moshe emphasizes the point that the Jewish people should not be like sheep without a shepherd (27:17). The fact that the Nesi'im travelled first was a defining feature in the Machaneh Shechinah, as it gave the camp structure.

In addition, the camp was very organized, both when it settled and during its travels. According to the Pesukim in the 10th Perek, the order of the travel was as follows: first,

Machaneh Yehudah would begin travelling. Then, Aharon and his sons would begin to travel. Shortly after that, the camps of Gershon and Merari would disassemble the Mishkan and begin to travel. Next, the camp of Re'uvein would travel. After that, the sons of Kehat would pick up the Kelei HaKodesh on their shoulders and proceed to travel. Soon after, the camp of Efrayim would begin to travel. Lastly, the camp of Dan began to travel.

This travel procedure enabled the camp to receive the description of a Machaneh Shechinah. First of all, it created an environment of organization; we were not a meandering nation in the desert. Additionally, it produced an environment of *Achdut* and *Areivut*, unity and camaraderie. This was accomplished through the function given to the camp of Dan, the last of the camps. Machaneh Dan received the title of "*Me'aseif LeChol HaMachanot*" (10:25). Rashi (*ibid.*) explains that this means that Sheivet Dan would have the function of fulfilling the Mitzvah of *Hashavat Aveidah*. If someone in a camp ahead of them left something behind, Dan would collect it and return it to that person. This instilled the values of *Achdut* into the nation, and it certainly contributed to the description of Machaneh as a Machaneh Shechinah. Lastly, the travelling order of the Machanot allowed for the proper respect to be given to the Aron HaKodesh. Since the disassembly and handling of the Mishkan, performed by the families of Gershon and Merari, occurred before the family of Kehat picked up the Kelei HaKodesh, the Mishkan was able to be assembled before the Aron arrived at the new encampment. In fact, the "gap period" of Machaneh Reuven beginning to travel allowed for this to take place. It is very clear that Bnei Yisrael emphasized the role of the Aron, and therefore the Shechinah, during their travels. Overall, the structure and procedures of Bnei Yisrael granted them the title of a Machaneh Shechinah.

In conclusion, Sefer BeMidbar certainly is focused on the role of the Shechinah in the camp of Yisrael. Throughout their travels, Bnei Yisrael definitely stressed the importance of the Shechinah, whether through their use of the Chatzotzrot or through the structure of their travels. The overall motif of the incorporation of the Shechinah throughout the Machaneh was certainly aided by the actions and ideals of Bnei Yisrael during their travels. Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael "*VeAsu Li Mikdash VeShachanti BeTocham*," "they will make me a sanctuary and I will dwell among them" (Shemot 25:8). The actions of Bnei Yisrael's community in the Midbar certainly fulfilled that commandment.

PARASHAT CHUKAT

HITTING THE ROCK: A MIRACLE IN TRANSITION

by Tani Greengart ('18)

The story of Moshe hitting the rock in Parashat Chukat (BeMidbar 20:1-13) is one of the most cryptic stories in the entire Torah. When the Jews complain about a lack of water after their well stops working, saying that they'd rather be back in Egypt, God tells Moshe to take his staff and speak to a rock; the rock will then become a well. Moshe takes his staff and goes to the rock,

¹ "*VeHayu Lachem LeZikaron*" implies a more active remembrance, in contrast to initiating Hashem's "remembrance" of Bnei Yisrael during times of hardship, as seen in the language of "*VeNizkartem Lifnei Hashem Elokeichem*."

but instead of speaking to it as God commanded him, he hits the rock. The rock does indeed become a well, but God is furious at Moshe for disobeying Him and punishes Moshe never to enter the land of Israel.

There are so many questions that can be asked about this story. 1) Why does God tell Moshe to speak to the rock? 2) Why does Moshe hit the rock instead? 3) Considering that Moshe's hitting of the rock does produce the desired result, what is so bad about it? 4) How does the punishment of not being able to enter Israel fit the crime of hitting the rock?

In order to answer all of these questions, we must first understand the reason to hit a rock in the first place. As it turns out, Parashat Chukat is not Moshe's first experience with creating a rock-well to silence a complaining Jewish nation; the exact same scenario appears forty years earlier in Parashat BeShallach (Shemot 17:1-7).² However, there, Moshe is commanded to *hit* the rock with his staff, not speak to it.

And the staff he uses is not any old staff. When commanding Moshe to hit the rock in Parashat BeShallach, Hashem specifies "*Matecha Asher Hikita Bo Et HaYe'or Kach BeYadecha*," "Take in your hand your staff that you used to hit the Nile River," (Shemot 17:5) i.e. the staff that Moshe (and his brother Aharon) used to carry out the Ten Plagues in Egypt. But why is this detail mentioned? Why did Moshe need specifically this staff to hit the rock?

I believe that, in Parashat BeShallach, Moshe was required to hit the rock with the exact same staff he used for the Ten Plagues because the Ten Plagues and the hitting of the rock had the same purpose: to display the power of God through a show of force. The Jews had become rebellious — they complained about leaving the land of their servitude and even caused Moshe to fear for his life (Shemot 17:4)! They needed to be reminded that the powerful God who had taken them out of Egypt was still with them, an Almighty God who could perform awesome miracles at any time. Therefore, Moshe was commanded to take the very same staff he used to perform those miracles and to perform another show-of-force miracle. This new miracle was to be done the very same way as Ten Plagues; just as Moshe used the staff to hit the Nile River in Egypt,³ he is commanded to use the staff to hit the rock in Parashat BeShallach. This reminds the people of the Ten Plagues and reaffirms their belief and respect for God.

Moshe's mistake in Parashat Chukat is doing the exact same thing. The situation is the same: the Jews complain that there is no water and that they would be better off in Egypt. Moshe figures that since the complaint is the same as forty years earlier, the miracle should be done the same as well. Moshe thinks that he should once again hit the rock with the staff and perform a show-of-force miracle to remind the Jews of the Ten Plagues.

² In fact, the two situations are so similar that the Bechor Shor writes that the story happened only once but was recorded in two separate places. This is not the simple understanding of the Pesukim, but it is a fascinating idea.

³ Technically, it was Aharon who hit the Nile, but the Pasuk refers to Moshe.

What Moshe fails to understand is that this is the beginning of a new era for the Jews. The entire generation of Jews that left Egypt is gone; they all died in the forty years between the first rock-hitting and the second. This new generation did not witness the Ten Plagues or the Splitting of the Sea. Moreover, they are about to enter the Land of Israel, a place where miracles will not spring up left and right as they had during the Exodus from Egypt. There will still be miracles, but they will exist primarily to help the Jews defeat their enemies, not just to showcase the power of God, and the people who want these miracles will need to play some part themselves. For example, if Yehoshu'a wants the walls of Yericho to fall down, he and the Jews will need to march around the city thirteen times, blowing Shofar, and they will need to promise to consecrate all the city's wealth to God (Yehoshu'a 6:1-25). If Yiftach wants God to help him defeat the Ammonites, he needs to promise to dedicate to God the first thing to come out of his house when he returns victorious. And then actually fight the Ammonites (Shofetim 11:30-33). Miracles in Israel will occur only to fulfill specific needs and only if the beneficiaries of those miracles do something to deserve them. The time of "*Hashem Yilacheim Lachem VeAtem Tacharishun*," "Shut up, God will fight on your behalf" (Shemot 14:14) is over.

The second story of the rock-well in Parashat Chukat is somewhat of a test for Moshe. Can Moshe adapt to the practical, hard-earned miracles of Israel, or will he forever be stuck in the Yetziat Mitzrayim world of effortless show-of-force miracles? The second miracle of the rock-well is a transitional miracle of sorts. As Bnei Yisrael stand on the precipice of Eretz Yisrael, Moshe is commanded to bring the miracle staff to the rock but specifically *not to use it*, instead using his words (effort) to get water (an essential need). If Moshe is able to do this, he will have proven his worth to lead the Jews through the transition into the land of need-based, effort-intensive miracles, Israel.

But Moshe Rabbeinu does not do that. Enraged by the Jews' lack of faith in God, he believes that a show-of-force miracle is required to remind them of the Exodus and reaffirm their belief. Moshe does not change his ways to perform the types of miracles that will be done in Israel. Moshe led the Jews for forty years with the former type of miracle and could not or would not change to acclimate himself to the latter type.

In summation, Moshe fails the test of the rock because he is part of the old guard and is unable or unwilling to change his style. So logically, a younger man from the new generation should be chosen to succeed Moshe and lead the Jews into Israel.

But curiously, this is not what happens. Moshe's successor is Yehoshu'a, who, despite being several decades younger than Moshe Rabbeinu, is definitely part of the old generation. Yehoshu'a was an adult when he left Egypt, and he witnessed the era of the Ten Plagues, the Splitting of the

Sea, and other effortless, power-showcasing miracles just as Moshe did.

So why is Yehoshu'a a better choice than Moshe to lead the Jews into the land of practical miracles? He should experience the same problems as Moshe!

But he does not, because Yehoshu'a has a different personality than Moshe, a personality that makes him more amenable to transitioning to effort-driven miracles than Moshe. Nowhere is this distinction between Moshe and Yehoshu'a more clear than in the story that immediately follows the first story of the rock-well in Parashat BeShallah: the attack of Amalek (Shemot 17:8-16). When Amalek attacks, Moshe takes his miracle staff and raises his hands towards heaven, causing the Jews to win — a classic show-of-might miracle. Yehoshu'a, on the other hand, gathers men and leads the actual sword-to-sword battle against Amalek. *He* is the one who provides the effort necessary to make the miracle work. Moshe is the greatest prophet who ever lived, but Yehoshu'a is the man most fit to lead the Jews into the Land of Israel.

We see from this that everybody has a different role in life, and even someone who remains a subordinate for years or decades will find a time when his or her skills are greatly needed.

PARASHAT PINECHAS

LESSONS OF PEACE FROM PINECHAS

by Eli Schloss ('19)

Parashat Balak ends with bad happenings for Bnei Yisrael. Moabite women are sent into the Jewish camps to seduce Jewish men, attempting to lure them away from Hashem to Ba'al. Part of Bnei Yisrael succumbs to the Moabite women, and Hashem is angry at their actions, so He commands for Moshe to kill the Nesi'im, leaders of the tribes. This, Hashem says, will abate His anger. However, Zimri a Nasi of Shimon, still acts inappropriately with Cozbi of Midian, so Pinechas, the son of Elazar and the grandson of Aharon, takes initiative and kills Zimri and Cozbi with a single spear. In Parshat Pinechas, we are told that Hashem is pleased with Pinechas' action, and decides to reward him with everlasting Kehunah, priesthood, and a Brit Shalom, covenant of peace. But what is a "covenant of peace," and why does Pinechas deserve a reward of peace for a violent action?

Many explanations are given by various Mefarshim. One view states that Pinechas by nature was not a violent person, and was probably hesitant to take a spear and kill two people. Hashem's Brit Shalom was a blessing to Pinechas that he should henceforth be involved in peaceful situations so he will not need to act violently and out of his nature to restore order. The Netziv elaborates on this and says that Pinechas was traumatized from killing two people.

Normally, someone who becomes traumatized from any experience changes as a person for the worse. By bestowing a Brit Shalom upon Pinechas, Hashem assures Pinechas that his life will be peaceful, and that this killing will not negatively affect him in the long run.

The Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni take a different approach. After Pinechas killed a prestigious member of Bnei Yisrael, Sheivet Shimon and Zimri's family became very angry at Pinechas, and wanted to avenge Zimri by killing Pinechas. Hashem's blessing of peace means that Hashem will prevent anyone from hurting Pinechas, and that no one will act violently towards him in revenge.

Rashi explains that Pinechas killed Zimri and Cozbi without gaining permission from Hashem beforehand, doing it because he thought it fell within the lines of what Hashem had told Moshe to do (kill the Nesi'im). Through this "covenant of peace" from Hashem, Pinechas is assured that Hashem approved of the killing, that it was the right thing to do.

Sforno presents an interesting and unique approach to this question. Sforno says that the Brit Shalom means that Pinechas will be protected from the Malach HaMavet, and he will therefore never die. This synthesizes quite well with the view of Chazal that Pinechas and Eliyahu HaNavi are the same person, as Eliyahu, according to most Mefarshim, never died. Chazal derive this connection from the fact that Pinechas and Eliyahu are the only two people in Tanach described as "Kanai," "zealous."

While Pinechas derives his fame from the incident with Zimri and Cozbi, there is another example of Pinechas' desire for peace later in Tanach. Towards the end of Sefer Yehoshu'a, Bnei Yisrael want to attack Reuven, Gad, and part of Menashe for supposedly building a Mizbei'ach on the east bank of the Jordan River for Avodah Zarah. Pinechas leads a peaceful delegation to investigate the matter, and as it turns out, the Mizbei'ach is merely a monument marking the equal standing of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe within Bnei Yisrael. We learn from Pinechas that we need to take action when necessary, but that we also need to act calmly and peacefully.

PARASHAT DEVARIM/TISH'AH BEAV

THE TRUE MEANING OF TISH'AH BEAV

by Tani Greengart ('18)

When listening to Megillat Eichah in shul on Tish'ah BeAv, the ending used to bother me. Yirmiyahu ends his book with a very depressing line, "*Ki Im Me'os Me'astanu, Katzafta Aleinu Ad Me'od,*" "You have utterly rejected us, [God,] raged against us very much" (Eichah 5:22). Yet, when we read the Megillah in shul, we repeat the penultimate line: "*Hashiveinu Hashem Eilecha VeNashuvah, Chadeish Yameinu KiKedem,*" "Bring us back to You, God, and we will return; renew our days as before" (Eichah 5:21). This line is much less sad than the one that succeeds it, much more hopeful.

Why do we repeat the second-to-last line? Reading the saddest book of Tanach, on the saddest day of the year, are we unable to tolerate a sad ending? When we repeat the second-to-last line of Megillat Kohelet on Sukkot to give the book a more hopeful ending, that makes sense; Kohelet is a depressing book that doesn't jive with the jubilant spirit of the Harvest Festival, Sukkot. But Eichah on Tish'ah BeAv? We just read about how mothers cooked and ate their own children! Why do we need to sugarcoat the ending?

And this theme repeats itself throughout Tish'ah BeAv. The morning Torah reading (Devarim 4:25-40) begins by telling us how we will be exiled from Israel, but it ends with how God will bring us back. In the morning Haftarah (Yirmiyahu 8:13-9:23), Yirmiyahu heartrendingly mourns the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash and the subsequent death and exile — until the last two lines, when God tells us what to do to earn back His desire. The Tefillah of Nacheim is added to Shemoneh Esrei only on Tish'ah BeAv, so you'd think it would accurately reflect the spirit of the day, and while it begins by lamenting the destruction of Yerushalayim, it finishes by saying that God will rebuild it again! Why do we *do* this! Isn't this day supposed to be sad?!

Perhaps we can answer this question with a parallel from literature. A book that ends with a purely blissful happily-ever-after scene feels sappy and unrealistic. A book that ends with the protagonist becoming evil or dying is too depressing to teach a lesson. But the best ending (in my opinion) is the kind in which everything is imperfect, but the protagonist learns a valuable lesson that will enable him or her to live a meaningful life. In an ending like this, there is hope.

Tish'ah BeAv is not a completely sad ending. Yes, we lament the destruction of the Batei HaMikdash. Yes, we grieve for all the Jews who were killed in the conquests of the Babylonians and Romans, and all the crusades and pogroms before and since. Yes, we mourn the exile into which the Jews were forced, an exile that splintered our national identity. But all hope is not lost. *We* are still around, and there is a vital lesson that we can still learn; we can understand the single flaw that caused all these things to occur in the first place. If we can fix that, we will have fulfilled the true purpose of Tish'ah BeAv and returned to acting the way God wants us to act. Our takeaway from Tish'ah BeAv should not just be that the Jews were exiled and suffered atrocities. It should be that if we repair our fatal flaw, we can stem the flow of destruction. *Hashiveinu Hashem Eilecha VeNashuva*. We can right the wrong.

This is not a message for the Jews of 2500 years ago. It is a message for everyone, today.

Tish'ah BeAv is a day for Teshuva.

This is all well and good, but it is rather difficult to repent when you don't know for what you are repenting. What is the fatal flaw that caused the destruction of the Batei HaMikdash?

The Gemara (Yoma 9b) tells us that that flaw was Sin'at Chinam, baseless hatred. Now, I don't know about you, but I try not to go around hating on people for no reason. If baseless

hatred is our fatal flaw, all we need to do is purge YouTube of comment-section trolls and we can usher in Messiah, right?

Not exactly (although purging YouTube of comment-section trolls would not be an altogether bad idea). What is true Sin'at Chinam?

There is a famous teaching of the Gemara (Shevu'ot 39b), "*Col Yisrael Areivim Zeh BaZeh*," colloquially translated in a positive way, as "Jews have each other's backs." However, the context of that phrase in the Gemara is not positive. The Gemara asks a question: how is it fair that Jews can be punished for the sins of other Jews? And the answer is *Col Yisrael Areivim Zeh BaZeh*. Jews have each other's backs to the degree that one group of Jews can be punished for the sins of another group, even if the first group did nothing wrong.

To help explain this concept, let us see an interesting Mashal found in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Nedarim 30b) about the futility of taking revenge on another Jew. If a person is cutting meat and accidentally stabs his hand with the knife, would the wounded hand then grab the knife and stab the hand that cut it in revenge? No! That would be ridiculous — both hands belong to a single cohesive unit, a human being, and a fight between the hands would only cause the human more pain. This is what *Col Yisrael Areivim Zeh BaZeh* truly means. We Jews are not only one religion, not only one nation, not only one people — we are as interconnected as a single person, and any infighting between individuals harms the entire Jewish body.

Sin'at Chinam happens when one individual elevates himself over another. We need to realize that not only is this wrong, not only is it sinful, it is *nonsensical*, because we are not separate entities at all. *Col Yisrael Areivim Zeh BaZeh* means that all members of the Jewish world are a singular entity, united in our common purpose of serving God. This is what Tish'ah BeAv teaches us. Our destruction-filled past pounds home the point that to hurt another Jew is to hurt yourself. But *Col Yisrael Areivim Zeh BaZeh* works both ways. By helping another Jew, you are helping yourself, for we are one.⁴

So be a little kinder than you have to, and maybe we can right the wrongs of the past.

PARASHAT EIKEV

OUTSIDE THE BOX

by Mr. Chanan Strassman

What happened after Moshe smashed the first set of Luchot? Those broken stone shards were nothing but a sad reminder of what could have been, so how did Moshe treat them? Did he throw them away in the trash? Did he bury

⁴ A big thank-you to Rabbi Daniel Fridman for teaching me the meaning of Sin'at Chinam, as is related here.



them? What was his reaction toward these harbingers of national failure? Chazal (Bava Batra 14b) teach us that Moshe *saved* those shattered fragments and treated them with the utmost respect by placing them in the Aron Kodesh, right next to the two new tablets that Hashem instructed him to carve.

However, there is an alternate ending to the story of the first two tablets. In Parshat Eikev (Devarim 9:18), Moshe recounts his experience after Hashem forgave the Jews for their sin with the Golden Calf. Hashem commands him to carve a second pair of stone tablets, and Moshe succeeds in bringing them down the mountain unscathed. Then, Hashem makes one more command: "*VeAsita Lecha Aron Eitz*", "And make for yourself a wooden ark" (10:1). Nothing fancy like the decorated golden Aron, just a simple wooden box. Presumably, this humble container would serve as the new tablets' home until the Aron Kodesh was ready, at which point the little wooden ark would have done its job and would be placed in Genizah (hidden away). In fact, this practice is relatively common when dealing with holy objects that no longer serve a functional purpose (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Dei'ah 282). Yet, the Ramban (Devarim 10:1) presents an intriguing idea from the Talmud Yerushalmi (Shekalim 6:1) whereby the plain wooden ark that Moshe built would henceforth be designated as a permanent home for the Shivrei HaLuchot. This teaching is attributed to Rabi Yehudah bar Ila'ai, who apparently believed that each set of tablets required its own separate dwelling. The tablets that Moshe smashed deserved their own special space in the world, so Hashem instructed him to create that space in the plain wooden ark.

Interestingly, the Ramban goes out of his way to point out that Rabi Yehudah bar Ila'ah is a minority opinion, specifically stating that "*Divrei Yachid Heim*," "these are the words of an individual" (ibid.) He clarifies that the majority of the Chachamim disagree with this notion, as they collectively maintain there was one single ark in the desert that contained both pairs of Luchot. Indeed, this version of events is widely accepted and expounded throughout Shas. For example, the previous Gemara (Bava Batra 14a) presents a calculation of the Aron's dimensions which allows for enough space to fit the Shivrei HaLuchot right alongside the second set of Luchot.

Nevertheless, it may yet be worthwhile to contemplate the minority opinion from a mental health standpoint. In his theory of cognitive development, Jean Piaget proposed two models by which we learn to process new information. One model is to "assimilate" the unfamiliar concept, fitting it into the established structure of our minds. Alternatively, we can "accommodate" new information by adjusting the structure itself. One process absorbs the new idea into an already-existing knowledge base, while the other process changes that knowledge base to reflect the new information learned. Along these lines, one might consider which approach to take in processing the Shivrei HaLuchot. How do we cope when confronted by setbacks, disappointment, or failure?

The assimilation approach bears a certain appeal in this case. After all, if we can place the hardships we encounter into a familiar context, or think about difficult subjects in simple terms,

then it might be easier to work through our challenges. Similarly, Moshe placed the broken tablets comfortably alongside the unbroken set within the Aron Kodesh. According to the Gemara, the Aron was designed to carry both. This enabled Moshe to fit the painful reminders of our failure into an already established structure of hope and resolve, thus enabling the Jews to move on from such a harrowing experience in a healthy and functional way.

Yet, some experiences simply will not fit into the established structure. In these moments, the structure itself must change in order to meet new challenges. Coping with adversity often requires a shift in perspective, and perhaps that is one way to understand the minority opinion quoted by the Ramban. The Luchot were supposed to enjoy the majesty and splendor of the Aron Kodesh, but the Jews sinned and now those magnificent stone tablets lay shattered at the foot of the mountain. How do we process such a devastating setback? Rabi Yehuda bar Ila'ai suggested we try to think outside the box. Maybe the Shivrei HaLuchot should have their own space apart from the fancy golden Aron. True, that was not the plan before, but that plan doesn't seem to fit now. A change in structure is in order. Let the glamorous Aron Kodesh be the dwelling place for tablets that are new and whole, bursting with excitement and potential. On the other hand, the fragmented remains of the first tablets do not share that reality and might best be served by the plain wooden Aron. A sturdy, dignified, and reliable structure is an appropriate receptacle for something precious that broke. Let our response to overwhelming failure be the quiet strength of resilience.

The Shivrei HaLuchot compel us to recognize that renewal does not always mean *fixing*. We don't go through life gluing every broken shard back together, and it may even be difficult to fit the pieces back into place. Rather, an appropriate response might be to think outside the box and make for ourselves a wooden Aron. When it comes to meeting challenges, perhaps our focus in finding solutions should include finding them an appropriate space in our lives.

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