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Foreword

Rabbi Jeremy Kagan

With great excitement we launch our Torah journal *Derashot Tehillah*. The idea for the journal has been tossed around for many years. The effort required both from students and teachers to produce a work with a level of quality that would reflect the standards of learning characteristic of Midreshet Tehillah made it a daunting task. In Mrs. Tannenbaum and Mrs. Muschel we had faculty eminently capable of achieving this, but would the students step up? I am so pleased that we decided to do it. This, our first volume, is one of remarkable quality and a fitting testament to the talent and commitment of our students, the depth of learning found at Midreshet Tehillah, and the ability to create original and insightful Torah that students develop over the course of their year with us. It is also a fascinating read!

There is great diversity of topics, source material, and approach found here. Close analysis of *pasukim* – language, structure, and context – combine with careful reading of Chazal, Rishonim, Achronim, and modern commentators. The students challenged themselves to understand the complex development of Dovid's relationship with Michal, to analyze the character of Shimshon, to uncover the parallels between the lives of Esther and Yosef, to probe the subtle meaning added by cantilations, to identify the purpose of humanity's need for artistic expression, and to gain some grasp of the complex phenomenon of *yeridat hadorot*. This is a rich mix that reflects the diverse interests of our students. The book's unity lies in the consistent effort to push understanding deeper.

Rabbi Manning and Mrs. Tannenbaum round out the volume. Rabbi Manning's article has a fittingly educational focus, asking about

asking. Do we pose questions that we cannot answer satisfactorily? Rabbi Manning brings his prodigious skills to the topic through the running argument between Rambam and Ravad. Mrs. Tannenbaum uses her grasp of the full sweep of Tanach to give historical perspective to the shifting role of clear vision in a world that becomes increasingly opaque over time and how that changes how we integrate God into our lives.

All in all, a great and satisfying read and a worthy representation of Midreshet Tehillah. We owe great *hakarat hatov* to Mrs. Tannenbaum, Mrs. Muschel, Rabbi Manning, and all the students who contributed to this first volume of Derashot Tehillah for the strenuous efforts they invested to produce a work of real quality.

A Literary Approach to Dovid HaMelech

Chana Lyubich

Goal: Analyze Dovid's complex/dynamic relationships within the context of upheaval as revealed through the expressive language of Sefer Shmuel.

Defining the Literary Approach to Tanach and Evaluating its Legitimacy

Traditionally, learning Tanach involves battling one's way through the *pshat*, asking relevant questions and attempting to come up with answers. Then, the student checks various meforshim to learn their approaches and see if any of their ideas agree. Every meforesh has his own unique approach to the text, often with vastly contrasting strategies and interpretations. One strategy for studying Tanach can be a close literary analysis on specific choices of diction, syntax, and other literary devices. However, the literary approach to Tanach is criticized by some. Professor Yonatan Grossman summarizes two overarching criticisms of this approach as well as responses to both in his article, "Introduction (II) On the Legitimacy of a Literary Reading of the Bible."

The first criticism states that Tanach is not written as literature, but rather, is meant to be didactic: its purpose is to teach us how to live as G-d-fearing Jews, and it includes specific episodes of our history used to illustrate the lessons. This is reflected in Ibn Ezra's comment regarding differences in diction across repeating episodes in Torah: "know that the words are like the body and the meaning is like the soul, and the body is a vessel for the soul" (R. Grossman, "Literary Reading"). In other words, the precise word which is used is irrelevant, as compared to the meaning it intends to convey.

But this comment of the Ibn Ezra comes on the Ten Commandments, a section of Torah particularly rich in Talmudic and Midrashic interpretation and central to well established halachic tradition. As Professor Grossman himself points out the Ibn Ezra is not generally opposed to a literary approach to Tanach as in his commentary on other portions of Tanach he relies on literary elements for his interpretation. And there is no shortage of traditional commentators who are extremely sensitive to specific word choice in Tanach and the precise differences in nuance conveyed by different words – the Malbim would be an obvious example of such linguistic precision.

This is in line with the central premise of the literary approach – that the content of the text and the precise manner of its communication cannot be disconnected from each other. Professor Yonatan Grossman emphasizes that “the moment the narrator opens his mouth and begins his narrative he is using literary elements, whether he intends to or not. He has no choice but to select one word out of several words with different connotations” (R. Grossman, “Literary Reading”). How much more so with Biblical narrative, which is either directly from Hashem or divinely inspired, must each choice be deliberate. While the literary style is not the primary method of conveying the message, it certainly adds layers and depth to the lessons.

The second criticism holds that given the divinity of Tanach, it is impossible for human intellect to grasp Tanach with human tools of literary analysis used on human texts. Rather, one must rely on “bigger glasses” provided by Chazal (R. Grossman, “Literary Reading”). Rabbi Grossman cites Rav Kook's criticism in this regard, which is really being directed at academic study done in isolation from the tradition. There is no reason to understand it as a blanket criticism of literary sensitivity when reading Tanach. So,

while it is certainly the case that Chazal were much closer to the prophecy of Tanach than we are their insight should not be exclusive. Professor Grossman cites Rabbi Tzadok Ha-Kohen of Lublin, saying: “every experienced student has a new insight that only he can bring” (“Literary Reading”).

As Professor Grossman explains, Torah was given to humanity so that we actively study and try to understand it (“Literary Reading”). When a student, with proper guidance from mentors and Chazal, tackles the text he still necessarily brings his own unique personality and intellect to the task of interpretation enabling him to become an active participant in the understanding of Torah. In other words, the guidance of Chazal was not meant to preclude the importance and relevance of vital personal engagement of the text. Here the literary element of the text and its effects upon us the reader become significant to uncovering deeper layers of meaning that the text has to communicate to us today.

Having provided a brief overview of the literary approach, it is important to point out that the depth of a literary approach to Tanach, or in this case specifically Shmuel Alef and Bet, is far beyond the scope of this article. Rather, this piece hopes to provide a few brief glimpses at certain instances within Shmuel where the text is uniquely expressive and emphasizes certain depths to Dovid HaMelech and his relationships with selected individuals.

Selected Readings

1. *Michal*

The relationship between Dovid and Michal is both dynamic and complex, and despite its seemingly hopeful beginning, the text consistently hints towards its ultimately tragic conclusion.

Michal is introduced in I Shmuel 18.20 with the words:

ותאהב מיכל בת שאול את דוד . . . (שמואל א יח:כ)
“*And Michal, Shaul’s daughter, loved Dovid . . .*”

It is important to note that Michal is the only woman in Tanach who is described as loving a man, a fact which becomes all the more stark when one looks at the wording of Dovid’s response (R. Bazak, “David’s Marriage”). Originally, Dovid refuses, justifying:

ויאמר דוד הנקלה בעיניכם התחתן במלך (שמואל א יח:כג)
“*And Dovid said, ‘Does it seem to you to be a light thing to be the king’s son-in-law?’*” (I Shmuel 18.23)

And, when Dovid finally concedes, it’s with the words:

“*And the matter was right in Dovid’s eyes to be the king’s son-in-law.*” (I Shmuel 18.26).

Each time Dovid’s perspective is expressed, it is strictly in terms of the political consequences and potential advantages of the marriage—whether or not he should become the king’s son-in-law—rather than about Michal herself. Thus, by juxtaposing the uniqueness of Michal’s love for Dovid being explicitly stated, with the implicit political maneuvers Dovid is considering, the *pshat* subtly stresses the problematic imbalance rooted in the foundation of their marriage (R. Bazak, “David’s Marriage”).^[1]

By the next *perek*, Shaul’s attempts on Dovid’s life escalate and Dovid successfully flees for his life, largely thanks to Michal’s efforts on behalf of her husband. When Michal hears that Shaul intends to have Dovid killed, she urges Dovid to escape and deceives her father (I Shmuel 19.11-17). Unlike the previous *perek* in which Michal is referred to as Shaul’s daughter, at the climax of her loyalty

and sacrifice for Dovid, she is referred to as Dovid's wife: "*and Michal, Dovid's wife, told him . . .*"

—ותגד לדוד מיכל אשתו (שמואל א יט:יא)

This contrasts with her title throughout Shmuel Bet, by which point her relationship with Dovid has deteriorated and where she is again referred to as Shaul's daughter (R. Bazak, "David's Flight").² The turning point seems to be Dovid's escape, after which he takes two more wives, and Michal is given to Palti, the son of Layish. When Dovid is lowered from the window, the *pasuk* states:

ותרד מיכל את דוד בעד החלון וילך ויברח וימלט (שמואל א יט:יב)

"*And Michal lowered Dovid through the window and he left, and he fled, and he escaped*" (I Shmuel 19.12).

The triple language of Dovid's leaving is classically linked with the urgency in which he was forced to leave. However, the dramatic emphasis on the escape also implies a growing distance in their relationship. After Dovid flees, the strength of Michal's devotion to him gradually dissipates as physical distance eventually leads to an emotional distance between them which remains unresolved: in later *perakim* Michal is primarily referred to not as Dovid's wife, but rather as Shaul's daughter (R. Bazak, "Naval the Carmelite").³

Furthermore, there is a parallel between this *perek* (19) and II Shmuel 6, where Dovid celebrates the return of the *Aron* to the city while Michal observes him from the window and scorns his jubilation. In I Shmuel 19.12 the *pasuk* states:

ותרד מיכל את דוד בעד החלון. . . (שמואל א יט:יב)

"*And Michal lowered Dovid through the window [b'ad ha-chalon].*"

Then, in II Shmuel 6:16, the *pasuk* says:

... ומיכל בת שאול נשקפה בעד החלון ותרא את המלך דוד מפזז ומכרכר לפני ה'
ותבו לו בלבה (שמואל ב ו:טז)

“... and Michal, the daughter of Shaul, looked out the window [b’ad ha-chalon] and saw King Dovid leaping and dancing before Hashem; and she despised him in her heart.”

The expression, *b’ad ha-chalon*—through the window—is used both at the pinnacle of Michal’s devotion to Dovid and the point which sealed the rift between them. Rav Amnon Bazak explains:

Mikhal's entire life moved between these two windows: between the window that she had opened for David, based on her absolute commitment to save her beloved husband, and the window through which she now looks down upon David with a sense of alienation, and thus effectively closes the last window of opportunity to create a meaningful relationship between them. (R. Bazak, “The Transfer of the Ark”)

Thus, the relational epithets, the parallels between Michal’s and Dovid’s attitudes, and the mirrored structure of Michal’s changing feelings all indicate complexity in Michal and Dovid’s marriage within the tragic context of their families’ conflict and the nation’s political reality.

2. *Avshalom*

Dovid’s love for his son Avshalom is both incredibly humanizing in its illustration of unconditional parental love and highly problematic given Dovid’s duty as the divinely anointed king and Avshalom’s disgraceful rebellion. Indeed, Dovid’s incredible concern for

Avshalom's welfare comes at the startling expense of the welfare of Dovid's loyal men given the fact that Dovid himself acknowledges that Avshalom would not spare them (II Shmuel 18.5; II Shmuel 15.14). Dovid's intensely personal feelings for Avshalom climax when Dovid hears that Avshalom was killed,⁴ and he reacts with "cries of grief that are unparalleled in scripture" (R. Bazak, "David's Reaction):

וירגז המלך ויעל על עלית השער ויבך וכה אמר בלכתו בני אבשלום בני בני אבשלום
מי יתן מותי אני תחתיך אבשלום בני בני . . . והמלך לאט את פניו ויזעק המלך קול
גדול בני אבשלום אבשלום בני בני (שמואל ב יט:א-ה)

"The king trembled. He ascended to the upper chamber of the gateway and wept; and thus he said as he went: 'My son, Avshalom! My son, my son, Avshalom! If only I could have died in your place! Avshalom, my son, my son!' . . . The king wrapped his face, and the king cried out in a loud voice, 'My son, Avshalom! Abshalom, my son, my son!'" (II Shmuel 19:1-5).

Yoav forcefully criticizes Dovid for his public expression of grief, accusing him of "expressing love for those who hate you and hatred for those who love you" (II Shmuel 19:7). Yoav's censure is piercing and it is implicitly validated by the text. In the *pasukim* describing Dovid's lamentation, Dovid is never referred to by name: rather, he is consistently called "the king." This alludes to the fact that Dovid's grief is inappropriate given his duty as king (R. Bazak, "David's Reaction"). While a private individual may mourn for his son, the king, as a public figure, cannot mourn over the death of traitors, else he dishonors those who were loyal to him and destabilizes the country. Even before Yoav explicitly criticizes Dovid, the usage of deliberate epithets in *pshat* illustrates the importance of balancing the king's individual life and his public role: the king's duty is to

“rise above his personal feelings” in order to do what is best for his people (R. Bazak, “David’s Reaction”).

3. *Shaul*⁵

Dovid’s relationship with Shaul is a conglomerate of contradicting emotions: Shaul’s initial love is tainted with fear and jealousy, giving way to a deadly enmity; while Dovid’s respect for the divine endorsement of *malchus* makes it impossible for him to take decisive action. Nevertheless, when Dovid hears of Shaul’s and Yehonatan’s deaths, his reaction for both is equally poignant in its grief.

The *pasuk* introduces the mourning with a powerful polysyndeton:

ויספדו ויבכו ויצמו עד הערב על שאול ועל יהונתן בנו ועל עם ה' ועל בית ישראל כי נפלו בחרב (שמואל ב א:יב)

“They lamented and wept and fasted until evening, over Shaul, and over Yehonatan his son, and over the nation of Hashem, and over the House of Israel, for they had fallen by the sword” (2 Shmuel 1:12).

Radak, in his commentary on this *pasuk*, writes: והכל אחד כפל הענין לרוב הצרה—the double language is to emphasize the idea and maximize the suffering. The repetition of the conjunction “and” creates a spiraling effect as each previous element builds on the other. This conveys a sense of compounding grief and, thus, magnifies the extent of the tragedy.

Furthermore, Dovid’s lamentation is divided into five sections with a chiasitic framework, the structure of which addresses the many facets of the tragedy, both personal and national (II Shmuel 1:19-27; R. Bazak, “David’s Lamentation”). In the first and fifth section, Dovid’s grief is deeply personal. He repeats “how the mighty have

fallen” (איך נפלו גבורים) three times—once in the opening *pasuk* and twice in the final section (II Shmuel 1:19, 25, 27).

Additionally, Shaul is not mentioned at all and Yehonatan is mentioned twice with respect to his intimate relationship with Dovid. On the other hand, the three inner sections address the political reality and national tragedy. The second and fourth sections mirror each other, contrasting Dovid’s distress over the rejoicing of “the daughters of the Plishtim” in the second with the appropriate grief of “the daughters of Israel” in the fourth (II Shmuel 1:20, 24; R. Bazak, “David’s Lamentation”). In the context of the national tragedy, Shaul’s death is mentioned twice, whereas Yehonatan is not mentioned. Finally, in the central section, Dovid mentions both Shaul and Yehonatan twice (reversing the order of their names by the second mention). Here, he speaks about both their national role—“. . . the bow of Yehonatan would not recoil, the sword of Shaul would not return empty”—and their personalities—“beloved and pleasant in their lives”—emphasizing their valor, their personal greatness, and intensifying the sense of loss for the entire nation (II *Shmuel* 1:22-23; R. Bazak, “David’s Lamentation”).

The mirrored structure of the lamentation enables Dovid to equally express his grief for the national tragedy and his own personal loss. The fact that Dovid mentions both Shaul and Yehonatan an equal number of times (and reverses the order of their names in the fifth section) equates the two and negates the painful past of Shaul’s attitude, instead focusing on both their greatness. In giving equal honor to both, in this moment Dovid achieves a balance between his personal connections and his role as the national leader, setting the stage for him to become the greatest king Am Yisroel has ever had.

Conclusion

When Dovid becomes the next divinely anointed king, he is thrust into a complex reality in which he must unite Am Yisroel, contend with both external and internal political strife, and balance these national considerations with his personal ones. Sometimes, Dovid errs on the side of the political (as by Michal), whereas other times, he is too much entrenched in the personal and fails to consider the national repercussions (as by his grief over Avshalom). However, at certain key points (eg. his lamentation for Shaul and Yehonatan), Dovid not only strikes the balance, but merges both aspects into one inseparable whole. By careful attention to the text itself, certain subtleties are revealed about the nuanced maneuvering of incredibly holy, but also incredibly complex, individuals with their own faults, passions, mistakes, and successes. These insights add to our understanding of Tanach personalities and, by extension, to our understanding of our own human nature.

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¹ In II Shmuel 3.5, the pasuk mentions Dovid’s [main] wife Eglah and Rashi comments שהיתה חביבה עליו, זו מיכל, Eglah refers to “Michal, Dovid’s most beloved wife.” Many other meforshim, including Radak, agree with Rashi. This article does *not* intend to contradict the meforshim by implying that Dovid did not love Michal. Rather, the goal is to explore the text on a pshat level and what the language implies.

² II Shmuel 3.13; 6.16, 20, 23 (R. Bazak, “David’s Flight”)

³ II Shmuel 3.13; 6.16, 20, 23 (R. Bazak, “David’s Flight”)

⁴ In the moment leading up to Avshalom's death, Avshalom's head gets entangled in a tree and "he [is] suspended between the heavens and the earth"—*ויתן בין השמים ובין הארץ*—while Yoav and a soldier debate his fate (II *Shmuel* 18:9). This physical state between the heavens and the earth parallels the metaphorical reality, and the imagery powerfully conveys the extreme tension of the moment in limbo between life and death.

⁵ Although Shaul's section is mentioned last in this article, chronologically, his death took place before Avshalom and before certain scenes with Michal.

Judaism and Art

Avigail Sokol

When a spider weaves a web, it can create a beautiful structure, yet it is not comparable to the beautiful art mankind can produce. A spider only makes a web for the purpose of catching flies; its work is practical. Human art is different. According to the English dictionary, art is the expression or application of human creative skill and imagination, typically in a visual form such as painting or sculpture, producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power. For thousands of years, man has been creating art exclusively for art's sake. There is no practical reason for art. It will not make any item more useful or functional. Instead, as the definition before states, it is something to be appreciated primarily for its beauty and emotional power. Man creates art that tells a story and conveys a meaning. Yet how can we do this? Where did the ability to create and inspire come from? Why is human art so integrally different from the spider's web?

To answer this question, we'd have to start with the first record of creation in Tanach- creation itself. King Shlomo describes the creation of the world using three descriptions (Mishlei 3.19-20):

יְהוָה-נִהְיָה בְּחָכְמָה יְסֻד־אָרֶץ כּוֹנֵן שָׁמַיִם בְּתַבּוּנָה: בְּדַעְתּוֹ תְּהוֹמוֹת נִבְקָעוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּקֵּם יַרְעֵפּוּ-טָל .

The Lord founded the earth by wisdom; he established the heavens by understanding; by His knowledge, the depths burst apart, and the skies distilled dew.

Rav Kook explains that the three traits used to describe the creation, *chochma*, *tevuna* and *daat*, or *chochma*, *bina*, and *daat*, had a

prominent role in forming the world. *Chochma* is how God created the physical structure and laws of nature that govern the earth. Every day passes like clockwork; every plant grows with a proper recipe of sunlight and water. The world was created with complete intelligence and precision.

Next is *bina*. *Bina* translates to insight. *Bina* is the future vision and ultimate goal. When God created the physical world in *chochma*, the spiritual world was created with *binah*; the ultimate purpose of the physical is only ever to manifest God. Hashem used *binah* to form the heavens, where God is clearest. Finally, *daat*. *Daat* is attention to even the most minor details. This plays a role in one of the most fundamental beliefs we hold as religious Jews; God did not create the world and leave it to run on nature. Instead, he has constant involvement in its workings and his creations' well-being. In Hebrew, this involvement would be called *hashgacha pratit*. King Shlomo explicitly says that God created dew and rain with *daat* because these are things only God controls. Rain is the ultimate entity representing God's constant intervention in this world.

When the Jews were in the desert, ready to finally build the *mishkan*, they knew its purpose would be to strengthen the connection between God and the Jewish people who would eventually spread that light out to the world. That is why the *Daat Zekenim* on Shemot 38:25 describes the building of the *mishkan* as a mirror of the seven days of creation. There are examples of this all over the text; the skins spread over the *mishkan* are connected to God's spreading of the sky over the earth: "*Shamayim rokea al haaretz*." *Daat Zekenim* further compares the curtain separating the *mishkan* into parts to the waters split into upper and lower waters. The *mishkan* was built to be a little world to project onto the real world.

Rav Kook takes these two concepts, the *mishkan* and *briyat haOlom*, and draws another interesting parallel. We can see it in the pasuk where Hashem chose someone to build his *mishkan* (Shemot 35:30-31):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רְאוּ קָרָא יְ-הוָה בְּשֵׁם בְּצַלְאֵל בֶּן־אֲוִרִי בֶן־חֹרִי לְמַטֵּה יְהוּדָה.

And Moses said to the Israelites: See, Hashem has singled out by name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.

וַיִּמְלֵא אֹתוֹ רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בְּחָכְמָה בְּתַבּוּנָה וּבְדַעַת וּבְכָל־מְלָכָה

And He endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every craft.

Hashem took the three traits of creation, *chochma*, *bina*, and *daat*, and gave them to Betzalel to create the *mishkan*. How did these Godly divine traits of creation look in the hands of a human being, Betzalel?

Rav Kook explains that *chochma*, the wisdom of the natural laws of the universe, allowed Betzalel to understand how to create the practical structure of the *mishkan*. When a man possesses *chochma*, he can better understand lights, shadows, and proportions. *Bina*, or insight, the future vision and ultimate goal, gave Betzalel the ability to inspire through his work. All those who walked into the *mishkan* not only saw its physical grandeur but also felt moved to serve God through its beauty. And the last, *daat*, the attention to detail. *Daat* granted Betzalel the ability to not only oversee the general building but also to pay close attention to each part and make sure everything was perfect.

Betzalel was able to create a *mishkan* that was not only practical but also beautiful and inspirational. He was able to do this by connecting to Hashem, the creator of both the physical worlds of practicality and the spiritual worlds of purpose. No other *briya* (creation) has a *tzelem Elokim* inside them to be able to connect to this ability that usually only God would possess; the only being that can do that is man. But before we can say we understand the difference between how a spider makes a web and how a human artist paints an artwork, we have to begin to unpack what real beauty is.

When Sara Imeinu passes, there are two praiseworthy qualities ascribed to her by the Medrash based on how the pasuk writes about her age. One of these qualities is her beauty. But why is her beauty so important? If anything, isn't it a little vain?

Beauty, according to the Greeks, is something symmetrical. If your eyes are in the right place, if your nose is perfectly centered, all these things determine how beautiful you are. Sara did have a symmetry that made her beautiful, but it wasn't the Greek kind. Sara was beautiful because her externals perfectly reflected her internals. Sara had a complete integration of her *tzelem Elokim* and her physical self. This made her literally look to the eye as someone extremely beautiful. We can't understand what this means today, but when the Torah talks about beauty, it doesn't mean the symmetrical, shallow form the Greeks discuss, rather the complete integration of spiritual and physical. Something that is really and truly beautiful is something inherently meaningful and connected to its spiritual purpose because that is the symmetry of true beauty.

In Shemot 38:22, Rashi tells a story of Moshe and Betzalel discussing how they would build the *mishkan*. Moshe said they

should make the *kelim*, and then after create the structure of the *mishkan*; Betzalel said, no, we make the *mishkan* first so that we have a place to put the *kelim*. Moshe understood that he was telling the truth and then said, you must be *b'tzel Kel*, in the shadow of God.

The Medrash explains what was happening. Moshe saw the spiritual reason for the *mishkan*. He understood that the purpose of the *mishkan* was servitude through the *kelim*; therefore, in Moshe's eyes, the *kelim* should have been built first. Betzalel was different. He was someone who not only saw the spiritual purpose of what was, but he knew how to bring it into reality. He said, no, we must build the structure of the *mishkan* first so that we have a place to put the *kelim* after. Betzalel was practical. At this moment, Moshe turned around and said, you are right. You must know something I don't. You must have been in *betzel Kel*, the shadow of God.

What is a shadow? A shadow is the exact inverse of the thing it is shadowing. A car's shadow is all dark, silhouetting the car's actually vibrant colors. What Betzalel knew how to do was shadow God. He understood how to invert something from the spiritual realms and manifest it into the physical realms. Entities which originate in the spiritual realms cannot come down to earth exactly as they looked in the heavens. When they come down, they will manifest as a shadow, something completely inverted. An example of this can be the way that even though we are pure *neshamot* in heaven, when we come down to the physical world, we can confuse ourselves into thinking that we don't need to serve our greater soul but rather please our bodies. Similarly, the spiritual purpose of the *mishkan*, in heaven, was to serve through the *kelim*, yet Betzalel understood that if the *mishkan* was to be built on earth he would have to shadow the spiritual purpose of it. Therefore, instead of building the *kelim* first,

he decided to build the structure first. Betzalel knew that that was the only way to really bring its purpose into fruition.

Betzalel was not only a man of great spiritual understanding like Moshe; he was an artist. He could take the spiritual purpose of things and bring it one step further than even Moshe could see. He could build it into the physical world. This is the true artistic ability of making something beautiful. Betzalel had both components. He had the *chochma* of creating the physical structure, together with the *binah*, to make that physical structure wholly integrated with its higher purpose. That integration of physical and spiritual is what made his work, the *mishkan*, so beautiful.

So now, what is the difference between our little spider and the human being? A spider creates a web purely on the physical level of the universe. It does not intend to relay a more profound message or tell its onlookers a story. A spider does not touch the deeper levels that human beings can. Humans alone possess a *tzelem Elokim* and, through that, can reach a lot farther than the spider ever could. The human being can go into the world of spirituality and build something in the physical world that genuinely reflects something real and meaningful. When an artist comes forth and displays a painting that moves people to be inspired or to develop a love for the Jewish people or Hashem, they have created something inherently beautiful. There is a symmetry between the physical painting and the meaning and inspiration it gives off. Mankind's ability to create beauty in the world is the true meaning of art simply for art's sake.

Every single Jew has a *tzelem Elokim*, and because of that, they can create things that are truly meaningful and therefore beautiful. For me, it was art, and I, as Betzalel did, will work to build physical

things that are truly beautiful in look and meaning. For you, it may be a song that inspires or a book that makes readers feel. In *Tehillim*, we say כל הנשמה תהלל קה - every *neshama* must praise Hashem in their way. Find the creator in yourself and understand the power you hold to inspire and bring people closer to Hashem. Not even a spider can make something more beautiful than the potential you have to tell a story and convey something much deeper than what's visible on the surface.

Was Shimshon Really Heroic? A Deeper Look

Rebecca Chabbat

Throughout Sefer Shoftim we see a repeated cycle of the Jews living in peace, the people sinning, G-d sending enemies to the Jews, the Jews praying to G-d, G-d sending a savior, and then the cycle replaying. The sefer highlights the many great leaders that Hashem has provided to come in to save the people and restore them to the path of peace and Torah. I will be exploring the leadership of Shimshon and his journey in becoming a savior of the Jewish people. I will be analyzing the challenges that Shimshon faced in his position of being a Nazir and how it led him towards becoming a hero to the Jewish people. I specifically would like to address the following topics and questions: his actions with women—was he being morally correct? The episode with the lion and honey— what were the deeper implications of Shimshon’s actions here? And, most broadly, what can we learn from Shimshon and his leadership?

We are first introduced to Shimshon in *ג' פרק יג* when an angel appears to Manoach and his wife, who was a barren woman, and told them that they will conceive a child who will be a Nazir and become a great hero to the Jewish people. We see already from the start, before Shimshon was born, that Shimshon will have predestined superhuman powers and is divinely chosen by Hashem to be the leader of the people; at the outset, we have an indication that he will be a great person in Jewish history. However, when Shimshon grew up, it is debatable whether his actions align with the role he was destined to follow, and that brings a lot of challenging confusion to his heroism. *י' פרק יד* recalls Shimshon going down to *Timnah* to find a wife; he comes down and sees a woman and immediately wants to marry her.

The *pasuk* describes this very quick decision that Shimshon made: as it says in פסוק ב, “and he came up to his father and mother and I said I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Pelishtim so now take her for me as a wife.” There is a lot of confusion in the single *pasuk* of how Shimshon found his wife: how could it be that Shimshon, the person who is the pioneer of the Jewish people, someone the people will turn to, who seems moral, wise and knowledgeable and chosen by Hashem, is marrying one of the first women he sees who is also a *Pelishti*? How can Shimshon be praised as one of the greatest leaders if one of his first actions in *Sefer Shoftim* is seemingly not morally correct?

His parents’ reaction to his proposal was a combination of shock and disappointment that their child is choosing, out of all women, a *Pelishti* woman. They ask if there are no other women, to be sure that Shimshon is not making a mistake, as they know whoever he is marrying would be directed by Hashem, but Shimshon responds, “take her for me because she is pleasing in my eyes.” After his parents attempt to discourage him, he insists and responds with that statement.

The *Gemara* in *Sotah* 9b-11 asks, did Shimshon find a *Pelishti* wife due to Divine providence? The *Gemara* answers that although Shimshon’s punishment in the end was planned by Hashem and מדה מדה כנגד מדה, he followed his physical desires and, as a result, was punished with his eyes being gouged out by the *Pelishtim*. In any event, we see that Shimshon still followed his inclinations and physical desires and did not act wholeheartedly for the sake of Hashem. Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi explains that Shimshon’s wrongdoing was actually in Gaza and therefore he was smitten in Gaza:

‘Shimshon went to Gaza and saw a harlot and went unto her... therefore his eyes were gouged there’. This shows clear מדה כנגד מדה by Hashem. However, we see that Shimshon’s wrongdoing is much earlier; the *Gemara* asks that since he first saw the *Pelishiti* woman in *Timnah*, wasn’t his initial wrongdoing there? Why is he only getting punished later on when one of his first actions seems wrong? The *Gemara* answers that although his inclination was for the wrong reasons, he was led there by Hashem and Divine guidance and did marry the woman he met in *Timnah halachically*.

But the woman he met in Gaza was a harlot and was someone that he only had relations with and that’s why his main wrongdoing was in Gaza and therefore the מדה כנגד מדה punishment took place there as well. Moreover, when Shimshon says ‘take her for me’ in פסוק ג according to the Malbim this meant that she would be properly converted. The Alshich also further adds that after a conversion the person is like a brand new person and therefore she is fully dissociated from her former nation: the *Pelishtim*. This shows that technically Shimshon didn’t do anything wrong *halachically* as he did marry someone that converted to Judaism, and only his moral decision was arguable.

Although we have begun discussing Shimshon’s weakness of physical desire, this event does highlight Shimshon’s strength. After Shimshon marries his wife, we come across the well-known incident of Shimshon and the dead carcass of the lion swarming with bees and honey. Shimshon tore the lion apart with his bare hands and killed it; after a few days, he returned, ate the honey from the carcass and also brought some back for his mother and father, but refrained from telling them where the honey came from.

There are many questions asked on this episode as it is somewhat bizarre at first glance, and the significance of this event taking place is not immediately clear. Shimshon ate the honey and moved on; why is this part so important? And what is it trying to indicate about the lion, bees and honey in these *pasukim*? Why did he not want to tell his parents about the killing of the lion and about where the honey came from? What was he trying to hide from them? How could Shimshon be eating from a dead corpse; isn't Shimshon a Nazir and one of his three conditions is not to come into contact with the dead?

This is our first encounter of seeing Shimshon's superhuman strength by ripping a lion apart with only his hands. The Malbim explains that this act was a message from Hashem that Shimshon is now ready to battle with the *Pelishtim* and that Hashem will protect Shimshon even without the use of weapons and physical protection. Since he killed the lion with his bare hands, this was a sign to show that Hashem will be with Shimshon in his battles against the *Pelishtim*.

The Abarbanel and Metzudat David explain that Shimshon didn't tell his parents about the killing of the lion as he did not want to boast about his strength to them or to anyone. Typically, a person who has been blessed with a gift, especially strength, would normally flaunt it, brag to others about it, and be proud of their achievements from their gift. However, Shimshon did not. He kept the incident that happened to himself. This is an indication of Shimshon's character—that he maintained his humility to not flaunt about the extent of his strength and kept it to himself. But how could Shimshon transgress one of the three conditions to his Nazirite status by eating honey from a corpse?

According to the Talmud, Shimshon was a unique type of Nazir, because he was predetermined before birth to become a Nazir and didn't make the promise himself. Since he was a Nazir from birth, he in essence didn't have a choice in the matter. Hashem chose him. The three conditions the *Malach* told Shimshon's parents that he had to keep were not cutting his hair, not drinking wine or grapes and not coming into contact with the dead. However, coming into contact with dead animals is not an issue for any type of Nazir. The condition only applies to a human dead soul and not animal souls (*Nazir* 48a), because animals do not have a *neshamah*. This is how Shimshon was permitted to eat the honey from the carcass of a dead lion.

Although we have a greater understanding of Shimshon's character in this event, what is the significance of the bees and honey over here? This confrontation seems somewhat unusual, Shimshon ate honey and... what is it trying to tell us? Surely there must be some deeper implication to this scene! The Kli Yakar explains that the swarm of bees attached with the honey was designed as a personal warning addressed to Shimshon by Hashem. It conveyed that if he doesn't refrain from marrying the woman at *Timnah*, the 'sweetness' that he may derive from this woman who may seem 'pleasing in his eyes' at first glance would certainly be offset by her 'sting,' and this was a warning to Shimshon. This can also be a message to us to not look only at the physical appearance or surface level of a person and that's all we see to them, but rather we should delve into the real depth of a person, their personality, traits, and really know them as a person rather than just going with whatever our eyes see first.

Following on the topic of physicality, in פסוק ו it says 'He went down... and she was pleasing in Shimshon's eyes'. But the text has

already said that she was pleasing in his eyes when he acquired her as a wife, so why is there a repetition of this statement? The Lekutei Yekarim explains that this means she now consented to converting fully; Shimshon actually gave her a year when it says 'מִיָּמִים - a few days' to prepare herself for marriage. Hence the repetition actually has a lot of technical and *halachic* significance regarding the validity of the marriage between Shimshon and his wife.

Another interesting incident happens after the event with the lion and honey: the riddle of Shimshon. One of the most famous lines appears in this פרק and is also one of the most dangerous and risky moments for Shimshon and his superman strength. Shimshon and his companions have seven days of feasting prior to the wedding of Shimshon and his wife which was customary at the time according to the Malbim. Shimshon said to them 'if you figure out this riddle within the seven days of feasting then I will give you thirty sheets and thirty pieces of clothes' and if they can't answer it, then vice versa. The companions struggled to figure out the riddle for three days, so they approached Shimshon's wife and tried to persuade her to ask Shimshon to then tell her and reveal it to the companions, and they even threatened they would burn her and her parents' house with fire if she didn't find out. רשי טו says that it wasn't the seventh day but was the fourth day of feasting and Rav Yosef Cairo ב:א explains further that Shimshon married her on the fourth day of the week as that was the מנהג in Israel at the time. And, because Shimshon would not spend *Shabbat* with the *Pelishtim*, he left the feasting for the fourth day, and the Metzudat David explains that this also gave the companions even more of an opportunity to pressure his wife into revealing the riddle.

This also further explains in *pasuk* 17 the translation of שבעת הימים - the seven days that **their** feast lasted. This is in contrast to Shimshon, who only took part six days out of seven. After she tormented Shimshon on the seventh day, Shimshon revealed the riddle, and the companions said to Shimshon מתוק מדבש - what is sweeter than honey and what is stronger than a lion. Shimshon responded with לולא חרשתם בעגלתי לא מצאתם הידתי - had you not ploughed with my heifer you would not have found out my riddle. Shimshon knew that they had tormented his wife. He then goes and kills thirty men, takes their clothes and gives them to those who answer the riddle. He was angry and went to his father's house and his wife was given to his companion.

But how could Shimshon give in to the persuasion of his wife and later on surrender his biggest gift of strength given to him by Hashem, and tell Delilah his hidden secret? The *Gemara* in *Sotah 9b* explains that Delilah's name derived from the word דילדלה which means to make weak: she made Shimshon weak and uprooted his heart and uprooted his actions which then resulted in the Divine presence leaving him when his hair was cut. Delilah attempted three times to find out the secret to Shimshon's strength but the third time instead of asking how he could be bound she tried to emotionally torment him so he would be made weak and then give in to telling her.

As it states in פסוק טו 'How can you say I love you while your heart is not with me;' it then follows in פסוק טז 'It was that she nagged him with her words everyday... his soul was vexed to death'. The Metzudat David explains that Shimshon's enduring of Delilah's torment drove him to near death. That's how much she was harassing Shimshon—to the point where he could no longer tolerate

her. Furthermore, the Daat Sofrim explains that Shimshon did eventually sense by the third time of Delilah tormenting him that Shimshon was being punished by Hashem and letting him fall before the *Pelishtim*, and this thought of being defeated by the *Pelishtim* did distress him immensely and could have also contributed to his surrender to Delilah.

Once the *Pelishtim* had cut off Shimshon's hair, his strength departed from him and he was taken down to Gaza where he had initially sinned earlier on with the harlot. There, the *Pelishtim* gouged out his eyes because he sinned using his eyes for physical impulses. This shows that Hashem works with *מדה כנגד מדה* punishment. The *Pelishtim* tortured Shimshon. The Talmud explains that the *Pelishtim* bought their wives before Shimshon so their wives could conceive from him and produce offspring like Shimshon—and all whilst he was blind.

Shimshon was bound in chains, blind, tortured, surrounded by *Pelishti* enemies, no strength in him to fight them, and all men and women were watching him as they brought Shimshon out of the prison house between two pillars so he can be ridiculed and killed. As it portrays in *פרק כב*, Shimshon said to the lad that held him by hand, 'let me feel the pillars where the house rests so I may lean upon them'. The next *פסוק* describes the number of spectators that came to watch Shimshon: the house was full of women and men and there were three thousand upon the roof. This puts into perspective the sheer number of people who came to watch Shimshon's downfall. As Shimshon was standing between the pillars, he cries out to Hashem. As it states in *פסוק כה* 'Oh Lord remember me, strengthen me now only this once, that I may be avenged the vengeance for one of my two eyes from the *Pelishtim*'. The Daat

Sofrim explains that Shimshon called upon Hashem at three points in this *pasuk*.

First, he asked Hashem to have mercy on him to assist him by saying ‘Remember me,’ he also is crying out saying to Hashem ‘Remember the twenty years that I judged Israel, I did not tell one of them to move a stick from one place to the other’. According to Rashi (*Sotah 10a*), this indicates that Shimshon never took advantage of his position as judge and leader over Israel. Then, Shimshon directed himself towards the attributes of mercy and justice; he is saying, have mercy by remembering me but also give me justice by giving me strength in this moment, as he says in the פסוק ‘only this once’ so I can fulfill my last mission on this earth of *Avodat Hashem* and wipe out the enemy, the *Pelishtim*. Finally, he directs himself to the attribute of justice alone by asking Hashem for assistance to take revenge on the *Pelishtim*, as he says, ‘that I may be avenged the vengeance for one of my two eyes from the *Pelishtim*’. Shimshon begs Hashem to save him a place in הַבַּיִת עוֹלָם as a “reward” for his second eye.

After Shimshon cries out to Hashem, He grants Shimshon the strength and Shimshon grasps the two pillars of the center, leans on them and bends them with all his strength, and everybody in the center including Shimshon dies. The last פסוק concludes with Shimshon’s brothers coming down and burying him. However, how were the brothers able to locate Shimshon so quickly under all the dead *Pelishtim*? In *Bereshit* 49:17, Yaakov prayed for Shimshon that he should be like a snake that bites the horses’ heels so that his rider falls backward. This implies that, without even laying a finger on the *Pelishtim*, Shimshon was able to wipe out everybody in the whole

room; he bent the pillars and the whole place came crashing down without Shimshon having to come into contact with any of them.

To conclude, Shimshon's leadership and heroism was filled with humility, trust, loyalty and incredible *emunah* in Hashem that he would save the Jewish people. Despite Shimson's flaws and the mistakes that he did make throughout his life, Shimshon was a strong and humble leader and at the end of his life; even when he was bound, blind, helpless, weak and embarrassed by the *Pelishtim*, he still trusted in Hashem that He would help him. He cried out to Hashem to save the Jewish people, which is a tremendous act of heroism considering the state that he was in during the final פרק. Shimshon had humility about his strength and the gift that Hashem gave him. He used his strength for the good, to protect the people, fight the enemies that Hashem instructed him and ultimately tried to lead the Jewish people to true salvation.

Similarities in the Story of Yosef and Megillat Esther

Sara Landau

There are many parallels between Bereshit 37-45, which chronicles Yosef's journey from slave to Egyptian ruler, and Megillat Esther, which is found in Ketuvim (a group of writings in Tanach that do not follow a singular chronological story) and details Esther's ascension to queenship. Yosef and Esther both act as an intermediary between a king and the Jewish people (in Yosef's case, the future Jewish people) and both are instrumental to the people's salvation in the context of the story. However, in Bereshit the danger of famine extends to the entire Egypt, whereas in Megillat Esther, the threat hangs over the Jewish nation alone.

The story of Yosef is essentially a factual retelling of events, whereas Megillat Esther is written in an explanatory style which contextualizes various parts of the story. The book's placement (ie. as part of Ketuvim) means that context is not necessarily present. The story of Yosef has sufficient context because the preceding Torah chapters detail Yosef's ancestry as well as the events leading up to his story. Nevertheless, the overarching trajectories of the two stories are remarkably similar to each other. This piece will discuss several of these similarities, focusing on the parallels between the characters of Yosef and Esther.

In terms of family setting, it is fascinating that Esther and Yosef are both orphans. The Megillah says with reference to Esther ¹ "כי אין לה" ² "אב ואם". Similarly, Yosef is orphaned of his mother² at a young age, and essentially loses his father when he is sold into slavery. Indeed,

¹ Megillat Esther, 2:7

² Bereshit, 35:14

immediately after revealing his identity to his brothers, telling them, ³”אני יוסף” Yosef asks: “Is my father still alive?”⁴. Therefore, although Yosef is not orphaned of both parents in the way that Esther is, he spends significant time unsure whether his father is alive. Whilst Yosef has a big family, he has no contact with them during his years in Egypt, whereas Mordechai is described as ⁵”ישב במלך”, with the present tense of ”ישב” implying a constant and ongoing “sitting”, and by extension, a constant and ongoing supportive presence for Esther.

Yosef and Esther are both placed into the role of saviour by others. The פסוק says ⁶”וימכרו את יוסף”, Yosef is sold - he is the subject of the action; it is being done to him - and Megillat Esther says ”ותלקח אסתר”⁷ “Esther was taken”, with the passive form similarly - ⁷ demonstrating that the action is being done to her. Despite this similarity, Esther’s path to her position is far more direct than Yosef’s path to his position: Esther is taken to Achashverosh and from that point onwards she is essentially in the position to save her people. In contrast, Yosef is sold by his brothers and traded between groups of people⁸, ending up as a subordinate to Potiphar⁹. This in turn leads to his imprisonment¹⁰, where his interpretation of dreams brings him before Pharaoh¹¹, at which point he is in the position that will eventually allow him to save his brothers. Thus, although Yosef

³ Ibid, 5:3

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Megillat Esther, 2:18

⁶ Bereshit, 37:28

⁷ Megillat Esther, 2:8

⁸ Bereshit, 37:28-36

⁹ Ibid, 37:36

¹⁰ Ibid, 39:20

¹¹ Ibid, 41:14

and Esther are led to their positions by force, the ways in which they reach their positions are strikingly different. Nevertheless, the respective heroes of the stories are both cast into a foreign royal world, devoid of normal family life: from the outset there is a clear similarity between the circumstances of Yosef and the circumstances of Esther.

It is notable that the power given to Yosef in Egypt is limited, much like the offer for power that Achashverosh gives to Esther. Yosef is granted authority over all of Potiphar's household "כי אם הלהם אשר" ¹³ הוא אוכל, aside from "the bread that he would eat", which Rashi¹² interprets as a euphemism for Potiphar's wife. Yosef rides ¹⁴ "במרקבת" ¹⁵ "המשנה", which Rashi¹⁵ says refers to the chariot that is second-in-command to the king. Thus, although Yosef holds significant power, the ultimate power lies with someone else - Potiphar in his household and Pharaoh in Egypt as a whole.

Similarly, Achashverosh tells Esther, "Up to half the kingdom I will give you"¹⁶ showing that he is prepared to grant Esther what she desires only as long as it remains clear that he is the one who truly holds the power. Inasmuch as both Esther and Yosef are granted the potential for power, neither of the two is permitted to hold absolute power. However, once Pharaoh gives Yosef leadership, he holds authority over the whole of Egypt¹⁷. Conversely, Esther is never actually granted power - it appears to lie with Achashverosh and

¹² Bereshit, 39:6

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid, 41:43

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Megillat Esther, 5:3

¹⁷ Bereshit, 41:40

Haman; Esther's actions to save her people centre on her requests to Achashverosh and Haman. This, coupled with the fact that the story of Yosef revolves around Yosef's immediate family (which could suggest that Yosef's actions take place on a smaller scale than Esther's), does not preclude the essence of Yosef's actions being almost identical to the essence of Esther's. Esther is saving a nation; Yosef is saving the future nation - the nation that, in time, Esther will save.

Esther and Yosef's names also highlight the differences between the nature of their actions. Esther's name is rooted in the Hebrew word meaning "hidden" and is often linked to her *tzniut*. As noted above, Esther's role is in the context of others' power, meaning that its nature is hidden. Even within her own actions, Esther follows Mordechai's instructions. She is clearly aware of the risk of appearing before Achashverosh unsummoned¹⁸, yet ultimately heeds Mordechai's warning¹⁹ that if she does not act, salvation will come from another source. In contrast, Pharaoh names Yosef "*Tzofnat Paneiach*"²⁰, which roughly translates as "the revealer of the hidden". Yosef reveals the hidden, interpreting Pharaoh's dreams and advising him how to act during the famine²¹. The name that Pharaoh gives him reflects his role as saviour being clear and obvious. Esther's role, like her name, is less clear because she does not hold significant power and she is an agent of others rather than an independent decision-maker.

¹⁸ Megillat Esther, 4:11

¹⁹ Ibid, 4:14

²⁰ Bereshit, 41:45

²¹ Ibid, 41:33-6

There is also an interesting exegetical similarity. The Talmud²² says that Esther's name was Hadasa because her skin was green. Medrash Tanchuma²³ says that Yosef's skin turned green when he was in the pit²⁴; for this reason, he was sold for such a small sum.

There are also subtle similarities in several aspects of the two stories. When Pharaoh wants to honour Yosef, he dresses him in " בגדי זָרָא and parades him in a chariot, and when Achashverosh wants to ²⁵ honour Mordechai, he likewise dresses him in fine garments and parades him on his horse²⁶. This paralleling imagery creates a striking similarity between the two stories. Additionally, Yosef and Esther both make use of a meal as a means to convey a specific piece of information. Esther makes two feasts²⁷ which enable her to accuse Haman in the presence of Achashverosh, revealing the extent of Haman's wickedness. Yosef's feast is a means to accuse his brothers of stealing his goblet, leading them to return to him and allowing for the subsequent revelation that "I am Yosef"²⁸. Additionally, in Megillat Esther, Achashverosh's accusation of Haman attempting to have relations with Esther²⁹ leads to Haman's hanging³⁰ and the Jews being saved. Similarly, in the story of Yosef, Potiphar's wife accuses Yosef of attempted rape³¹, leading to his imprisonment which, as outlined above, leads to him saving his brothers. Thus, in a

²² Megillah, 13a:12

²³ Midrash Tanchuma, Veyeshev 2

²⁴ Bereshit, 37:24

²⁵ Ibid, 41:42-3

²⁶ Megillat Esther, 7:11

²⁷ Ibid, 5:5 and 6:14

²⁸ Bereshit, 45:3

²⁹ Megillat Esther, 7:8

³⁰ Ibid, 7:10

³¹ Bereshit, 39:17-8

similar context, albeit in inverted roles, Esther and Yosef move closer to their saving of others.

Finally, it is worth noting several linguistic similarities that hold significance given the strong parallel of the two stories. In the Torah, Yosef is described as ³²יפה תאר whilst in Megillat Esther, Esther is described as ³³יפה תאר. Esther's beauty is likely what draws Achashverosh to her, whilst Yosef's handsomeness attracts Potiphar's wife to him³⁴ - leading to his imprisonment and ultimately to his appearing before Pharaoh. Thus, in both stories, the protagonists' beauty indirectly leads to their positions as saviours. Furthermore, in the story of Yosef, the *pasuk* says ³⁵ויסר פרעה את טבעתו when Pharaoh is giving Yosef authority, and in Megillat Esther the *pasuk* says ³⁶ויסר המלך את טבעתו when Achashverosh is giving Mordechai authority. Whilst it is true that the king giving his ring to another person would have been the conventional way for a king to transfer power to a subject (as evidenced in the case of Haman³⁷), it is fascinating that the same language is used in both of these cases. In the same vein, both Mordechai and Yosef are referred to using the term ³⁸איש which denotes nobility and importance despite neither of them being so initially - again, significant because of the many other parallels between the two texts. Likewise, the word ³⁹חסד, a word which generally means "kindness" is used in both texts to denote "favour", creating an additional intertextual

³² Ibid, 39:6

³³ Megillat Esther, 2:7

³⁴ Bereshit, 39:6-7

³⁵ Ibid, 41:42

³⁶ Megillat Esther, 8:2

³⁷ Ibid, 3:10

³⁸ For example, Bereshit, 41:38; Megillat Esther, 2:5

³⁹ Bereshit, 39:21; Megillat Esther, 2:9

similarity. Whilst these examples of linguistic similarities do not necessarily demonstrate a parallel between the two texts, they underscore the strength of such a parallel which itself is already evident in the conceptual similarities between the two texts.

In conclusion, the parallels between the story of Yosef and the story of Esther are exceedingly clear. Any elements of these parallels which initially appear tenuous are strengthened when presented in conjunction with clear parallels. These include the actual circumstances of Yosef and Esther, elements of the stories, and various linguistic similarities. The differences between the stories—for example, in terms of the way that Yosef and Esther each hold power—allow for some fascinating comparisons between the two narratives.

These two stories are just one example of many paralleling passages in Tanach. As I am naturally drawn to literature, writing this piece made it so clear to me that the flawlessness of Tanach is something unique. The Hebrew language is built conceptually; every letter has a meaning; thus, each combination of letters - each word - expresses a unique idea. Within a singular passage of Tanach, there is room for endless analysis of its language and structure. That we have access to such a gift is not something that we can take for granted, and we should utilise our abilities and opportunities to study it!

The Music of Torah

Orli Richman

Words are a human tool to express meaning. And while they can be extremely useful, they can also be limiting in some ways. When telling a story, there is a lot that can be conveyed without using words. Yes, the storyline is based on what is actually said, but the emotions one feels when hearing a story often come from the way in which the words are said. Specifically, the tones used when speaking influence the way in which one understands and interprets what is truly going on. Imagine the word “great.” First, read it in an excited tone. Next, read it in a sarcastic tone. The meaning significantly changes from one where you can take the phrase literally to one where the understanding is the exact opposite of what the word alone conveys.

The Torah has a way of using tones to convey different messages, and it is through the cantillation notes that appear above and below every word. Whichever musical note appears above or below a particular word always carries meaning that can clue us into what is really happening. And the relationship between the two is never random. According to the Vilna Gaon, if one were to just hear the music and not know any words or letters of the Torah, they could theoretically reconstruct the actual words of the Torah.

The *shalshelet* is one of the rarest musical notes in the Tanach. Appearing only four times in the Torah and three times in Nach, it prompts questions as to its meaning and purpose. The four times it appears are with Lot leaving *Sdom*, with Eliezer looking for a wife for Yitzchak, with Yosef alone with Potiphar’s wife, and with Moshe

anointing Aharon and his sons as *Kohanim*⁴⁰. All of these instances have something in common. One classic approach by Rabbi Yosef Ibn Kasbi is that in all these situations the *shalsholet* represents a hesitation surrounding a decision which the individual is making. Just like it looks and sounds like a back and forth, it also actually indicates a back and forth within the person, making them briefly unable to move forward.

This explanation fits most perfectly with Lot where the *shalsholet* is over the word “*vayitmamah*,” which actually means hesitation. The angels that Hashem sent to destroy *Sdom* come to warn and rescue Lot and his family before the city is burned. And as they are leaving, Lot hesitates. He senses that the angels are correct in their telling him that the city will be destroyed, but at the same time, this is the place he chose to live, where he built himself up and the place in which he invested his future, so as he is leaving, he hesitates.

But the *shalsholet* indicating hesitation not only fits where it is most obvious with Lot but also with the three other times it appears in the Torah. With Eliezer, as he embarks on a journey to find a wife for Yitzchak, he has a brief moment of internal hesitation. On the one hand, he has a strong loyalty to Avraham and wants what is right for him and for his family. However, he knows that in finding a wife for Yitzchak he loses all chance of one day inheriting Avraham’s inheritance because it means Yitzchak will continue Avraham’s family line. So Eliezer hesitates. With Yosef, giving into Potiphar’s wife was a great temptation. He was in a high position and no one would ever find out, but at the same time Yosef knows he is a Jew

⁴⁰ Bereishit 19:16, Bereishit 24:12, Bereishit 39:8, and Vayikra 8:23

and that succumbing to his desire would be morally wrong⁴¹. And finally with Moshe, his anointing Aharon is the first time that his brother would not be behind him in terms of leading the Jewish people. Aharon would have his own position and would no longer be just an assistant to Moshe, and perhaps Moshe is not quite ready to accept that Aharon will have this position that he will never have. So he hesitates.

However, what I would like to focus on is something different. Not only does the *shalsholet* indicate a commonality of hesitation among these events but it also indicates a loss of status. Every time the *shalsholet* appears in the Torah, it surrounds a situation in which a person loses some type of position because of a decision that they make even though it is the right decision. For Lot, it meant losing his position as judge in *Sdom*⁴², for Eliezer it meant losing a place in Avraham's family, for Yosef it meant going from Potiphar's highest advisor to being a prisoner, and finally for Moshe it meant losing his position as *Kohen*.

When Lot left Avraham, he chose to go to *Sdom* because he saw how rich and fertile it was and he wanted that for himself⁴³. However, *Sdom* was not such a nice city and while Lot did not fully integrate into the wickedness of the city,⁴⁴ he rose in the ranks within the city

⁴¹ According to the Gemara in Sotah 36b, Yosef managed to refuse only because his father appeared to him in the window asking him if he wanted to be included in the ephod with his brothers or sleep with this woman, because he couldn't do both.

⁴² According to Rashi commenting on Bereishit 19:1, the fact that Lot was sitting on the gate of the city meant that he had just been appointed a judge of the city on that day

⁴³ Bereishit 13:10

⁴⁴ Rashi on Bereishit 19:1 says that Lot invited the guests in because he had the ways of Avraham's house instilled in him despite living in *Sdom*.

and became appointed as a judge there. He built his life there, invested in his future, and gained status as a person of respect. As such, when the angels arrived telling him and his family to leave his home it meant that he would lose his status as a respected judge of the city of *Sdom*. And therefore, it was only natural that this was difficult for him. This is why, as mentioned before, he hesitated. Lot did not want to lose what he had worked so hard to build up, especially because it meant that the status which he had just gained would now be lost.

Moving onto the scenario with Eliezer, when Avraham asks him to go find a wife for Yitzchak, Eliezer asks Hashem for help, and above the word “*vayomer*” of that verse, a *shalsholet* appears. Rashi tells us that Eliezer had hoped that Yitzchak could marry his daughter⁴⁵. When Lot left Avraham, Eliezer essentially became first in line to receive Avraham’s inheritance but when Yitzchak was born Eliezer was moved down in his position in relation to the inheritance. So, when it was time for Yitzchak to get married, this became Eliezer’s last chance to gain back the inheritance through his daughter but ultimately Avraham said that this would not happen,⁴⁶ and Eliezer lost all chance of inheritance and therefore lost his status as the inheritor of Avraham’s estate.

Next, in the story of Yosef and Potiphar’s wife, Yosef went from being a top advising servant of Potiphar⁴⁷, one of Pharaoh’s right-hand men, to being a prisoner in jail. The *shalsholet* in this narrative appears above the word “*vayimaen*” meaning “he refused;” Potiphar’s wife offered herself to Yosef and he could have so easily

⁴⁵ Rashi on Bereishit 24:39

⁴⁶ Ibid

⁴⁷ Bereishit 39:4

said yes. There was nothing stopping him and there was almost no chance of anyone finding out. After all, he was in Egypt, away from a family who rejected him, so why not say yes. But he didn't. Yosef made the choice to say no despite the temptation and the risk of refusing his master's wife. And that choice resulted in him being blamed by Potiphar's wife and then being thrown in jail because of that.

And finally with Moshe, he lost the position of being *Kohen* to his brother Aharon. When Hashem asked Moshe to be the leader of the Jewish people at the *sneh* (burning bush), Moshe refused for seven days, saying he wasn't fit enough to be the leader and in doing so he lost the future position of being *Kohen Gadol*⁴⁸. Because he argued for seven days, he actually got to serve as *Kohen* for seven days and that's why the induction of Aharon and his sons happened on the eighth day⁴⁹. However, this was still a loss for Moshe.

In all four of these cases, a Torah personality was tested. And whether or not they hesitated, each of them came to the conclusion that it was better to lose status (or potential status) than to try and get benefit for themselves. Lot, Eliezer, Yosef, and Moshe, a group that would seem to have nothing in common, all come together in showing their strength of character when it comes to the important decisions in life. They put others before themselves and chose to do what was better for the society as a whole rather than doing what was best for themselves.

Music affects us all whether we listen to it regularly or only once in a while. It can change how we feel and how we understand the world

⁴⁸ Zevachim 102a

⁴⁹ Vayikra 9:1

around us. Music's ability to do this is recognized in the Torah; that is why scattered all over the Torah there are words paired with various musical notes, so that we don't just have a *mitzvah* of studying the Torah but we also have a *mitzvah* of *Kriyat HaTorah*. Not only must we understand the literal meaning of the text, but through reading it, we get to understand the musical meaning of the text. Our masoretic *ta'amei hamikra* allow us to delve into the different layers of the Torah and appreciate the story being told and the feelings that are behind that story. Through this, we can develop our own connection to the Torah.

Yeridat Hadorot

Chava Len

There are many fundamental concepts and questions which occupy the thoughts of humanity throughout all generations, both past and present. However, some have become notably more examined, based on relevance to our current day and age, especially one in particular: the topic of *Yeridat Hadorot*. Before delving into the discussion of this essay, it is imperative to define the aforementioned idea. The literal definition is: “The decline of the generations.” This is a vague translation and requires further analysis and questioning. First of all, where does this idea stem from? In what context are we talking about a decline and what is the exact nature of this decline? Is it something negative, and if so, what does this imply for our ultimate mission of bringing about *משיח* and achieving connection to G-d?

These essential questions about *Yeridat Hadorot* are addressed by different Chachamim with a variety of approaches. According to some, *Yeridat Hadorot* can be traced back to the sixth day of creation, with the origination of Adam Harishon and his ultimate *אטא*. After violating the only prohibition he was given, Adam was expelled from *גן עדן*, thus altering the entire course of human history and changing the once spiritual and clear world he knew into a physical place of utter chaos and confusion.⁵⁰ Many Meforshim discuss this *yerida* from after the *אטא* including Rashi, who mentions

⁵⁰ I heard the following from a shiur and read something similar in an article written by Efraim Palvanov, but am not sure exactly where the source comes from. Adam was created with the potential to fulfill the purpose of the world and bring it to completion. However, after he fails, bringing the world to completion becomes possible only through multiple people and not a single person. As time passes and more people are brought into this world, this purpose branches further into it only being possible to be fulfilled through more people and nations.

this idea in the context of Adam's חטא in ג:כב בראשית. He states that Man was supposed to be singular in the lower world just as Hashem was one in the upper realms. This oneness referred to knowing the difference between good and bad—an almost divine clarity that animals do not possess. This all changed once Adam and Chava sinned with the הדעת עץ. They were consequently punished for their actions, as well as their descendants—i.e. humanity—and exiled from גן עדן. Ergo, they lost that sense of comprehension and ability to differentiate between what is good and what is evil. By definition, our ancestors descended from a tremendous level of understanding to a lower one, catalyzing this continuity of generational descent of the human race.

According to other sources, the decline did not start with Adam, but rather from the events at *Ma'amad Har Sinai*, and as time goes on, this distance increases. In turn, this affects a myriad of elements: intelligence, knowledge about the truth of the Torah, and the generational transmission (*Mesorah*) which comes with confusion about accurate *halacha* and Torah due to the large span of time which can result in human error. This is what happened immediately after Moshe passed away. In the first פרקי אבות משנה in this direct transmission of Torah is written out, starting with Hashem at Har Sinai who passes the Torah to Moshe Rabbeinu, who conveys it to Yehoshua, who becomes the leader once Moshe passes away, and so on and so forth.⁵¹ Moshe received the Torah directly from the mouth of Hashem and then passes the mantle of leadership to Yehoshua, his primary student. However, despite Yehoshua's greatness, during the mourning period after Moshe Rabbeinu's death, over 3000 *halachot*

⁵¹ Pirkei Avot 1:1 -

(א) משה קבל תורה מסיני, ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים, ונביאים מסרה לזנשי כנסת הגדולה...

were forgotten (*Terumah* 16a).⁵² This is not supposed to portray Yehoshua in a negative light, but rather, illustrate this fact that as the Torah is transmitted over and over again, certain areas can become unclear or even lost. If this happened just after the first transmission, then how much more so as time progresses will certain concepts, ideas, and even *halachot* be forgotten, misunderstood, or become unclear.

At this point, it is crucial to the discussion of this topic to address the question of whether or not *Yeridat Hadorot* is to be seen as something negative. Obviously, the loss of any Torah knowledge, no matter how minute, is certainly negative. However, there are other aspects to examine. From sources previously mentioned, it seems to happen over time perpetually, but is it truly something that warrants a fatalistic view? The *גמרא קי"ב* in *מסכת שבת* mentions this topic and sheds a vivid and intense light on it.

"אמר רבי זירא אמר רבא בר זימונא אם ראשונים בני מלאכים אנו בני אנשים ואם ראשונים בני אנשים אנו כחמורים ולא כחמורו של רבי חנינא בן דוסא ושל רבי פנחס בן יאיר אלא כשאר חמורים" (שבת קי"ב ב:ח').

"...If the earlier [scholars] were sons of angels, we are sons of men; and if the earlier [scholars] were sons of men, we are like donkeys, and not like the donkeys of Rabbi Chanina the son of Dosa and Rabbi Pinchas the son of Yair, rather like the rest of the donkeys..."

The *גמרא* in *יומא* also describes this decline in a rather harsh way:

"טובה צפרנן של ראשונים מכרסן של אחרונים." (יומא ט:)

"A fingernail of the early sages is worth more than the belly of the later sages." (Yoma, 9b)

⁵² *Terumah* 16a -

גופא אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל שלשת אלפים הלכות נשתכחו בימי אבלו של משה

Notably, both *Gemaras* negatively portray the decline in generations; however, this makes logical sense, as there is physically nothing we can do to stop the flow of time. As history goes on, the generations get further and further away from Adam Harishon, as well as from the episode at Har Sinai. This decline is only relative in conjunction to the span of time between us and Adam, or according to others, Matan Torah, so it is only natural for the deterioration to take place.

While all of these sources are valid, for the purpose of giving a more expansive view of this intricate topic, there are opposing opinions which must be mentioned.⁵³ Rav Kook, in *Iggerot haReayah*, writes the following:

We should not immediately feel obliged to refute any idea that comes to contradict something in the Torah, but rather we should build the palace of Torah above it. In so doing we reach a more exalted level, and... the ideas are clarified. And thereafter, when we are not pressured by anything, we can confidently also fight on the Torah's behalf. (I, 163-164)

Furthering his thought he writes:

"An evolution marked by constant progress provides solid grounds for optimism" (I, 369).

Rav Kook seems to be indicating that, in fact, as time goes on, more knowledge is accumulated and more science is studied, and the Torah is not hurt nor is our understanding of it, even if this knowledge or science seemingly contradicts ideas clearly stated. In

⁵³ The Baal Shem Tov discusses how the spiritual atmosphere has grown over the generations and become purer from the time of the philosophers (approximately 1000 years ago), such as Aristotle. People no longer believe in the eternity of the world, that it has existed forever, which is not a Jewish belief. And their understanding falls more in line with Jewish beliefs than in times before.

fact, it can strengthen what's written in the Torah when we apply the Torah to these new ideas that are apparent contradictions and can ultimately expand our thoughts and minds to new heights of perception and cognizance.⁵⁴

Evidently, according to some, *Yeridat Hadorot* may seem disheartening and demoralizing; however, it must be understood that this does not mean Hashem does not care about each individual immensely nor does it discredit the fact that everyone has a *tafkid* or role in this world that needs to be fulfilled. We were deliberately not created as one of the Avot or Imahot, or even Moshe Rabbeinu. Every single individual needs to realize that they are part of a bigger picture of fulfilling the ultimate goal, which is connecting to Hashem and bringing about the days of *Geula*. Just because the generations deteriorate, it does not mean the chance or ability to bring *Mashiach* does as well. In each generation there is a definite possibility to bring *Mashiach* and everyone must have full *emunah* in that. That is why it is stated as one of our *Ani Ma'amins*:

אני מאמין באמונה שלימה בביאת המשיח אני מאמין ואף על פי שיתמהמה אחכה לו
No matter how long it takes, we must be willing to wait and continue to believe that Mashiach will come eventually. Nevertheless, it is not enough to just to believe in it as the Mishna in Pirkei Avot states:

"ולא המדרש הוא העקר, אלא המעשה" (א:יז)

"And the exposition is not what's essential, but rather the action"
(*Avot Mishna 1:17*).

⁵⁴ An example of this would be the theory that the world has been around for billions of years. This seems to completely contradict what the Torah states that the world has only existed for 5082 years. However, when applying the Torah to this theory, many Rabbis who discuss this mention that perhaps our current understanding of the length of a day might not have been the same during the six days of creation. A day could have been a longer span of time than what we have today.

Every single man, woman, and child is obligated to do their part in bringing *Mashiach*. Each one must put in time and effort to study Torah and follow Hashem's *Mitzvot* to the best of their ability. And if this is truly desired by mankind, Hashem will assist and hasten along the days of *Geula*, as Chazal say:

"בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך בה מוליכים אותו"
- "*A man is led along the path he wishes to follow.*"

As long as each individual is putting in consistent effort to better themselves through learning Torah and doing *Mitzvot*, eventually the days of *Geula* will shine upon us. This understanding does not have to be debilitating, and as Rav Dessler states in מכתב מאליהו in his section about our *Avoda* after *Techiat Hameitim*,

"וישוב האדם בזמן ההוא לאשר היה קודם חטאו של אדה"ר"
"*Man in those days (the days of Mashiach) will return as it was, before the sin of Adam Harishon.*"

Even though it may seem difficult now and demoralizing that the generations are declining, we have to know that there is a silver lining, it is not just stand-still, and maybe we can get back to that pinnacle of spirituality one day. We each have to put in the effort, work on ourselves, and do our part to work toward bringing the ultimate *Geula*, במהרה ובימינו.

To Ask or Not to Ask?

Dealing with Difficult Questions in Hashkafa

Rabbi Anthony Manning

Most educators, especially in the world of Torah, face a challenging and unenviable dilemma. Real development in any field of learning or personal growth can only be achieved through robust and honest questioning. Every line of Biblical or Talmudic commentary is prompted by a question, often implicit but no less central to an understanding of the text. Indeed, God's first direct communication to man is a life-defining question - 'ayeka' - 'Where are you!?' Only by challenging our previous understandings can we hope to achieve real improvement.

Yet the process of questioning can also be deeply unsettling. It takes us out of familiar comfort zones, forcing us to revisit issues that we thought, and hoped, were resolved. Put bluntly, if ignorance is bliss, where does that leave the alternative? Is it possible to ask the questions and yet still remain happy through the process?

Classic Torah thought addresses this fundamental chinuch question and, characteristically, presents us with more than one legitimate approach. More unexpected, however, is the context of the debate, which unfolds as a disagreement between two great *Rishonim* - the Rambam and the Ravad - on an entirely different issue.

The Rambam composed his great work of *halacha*, the Mishne Torah, with the widest possible perspective. Unlike the Shulchan Aruch, which was written around 350 years later as a practical *halachic* guide to Jewish living, the Mishne Torah includes every aspect of Jewish law, as it applies at all times and in all

places. Unsurprisingly, given Maimonides' emphasis on achieving a deeper understanding of, and proper intention when performing, every *mitzvah*, he also includes the philosophical underpinnings of Jewish law. Building on his 13 Principles of Faith, the Rambam included two books in his Mishne Torah - Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah and Hilchot Teshuva - which set out the key *halachic* requirements for proper belief in, and service of, God. In these, he revisits the 13 Principles, adding more depth and detail.

For our purposes, we are focused on the 10th Principle – God's Omniscience. Fundamental to Jewish thought is the understanding that God is all-knowing and acutely aware of every detail in the universe on the most particular level. In this, the Rambam breaks from the Aristotelian conception of God as the transcendent 'Unmoved Mover' who manages creation from a distance without awareness of or interest in the details. From the Greek perspective, God is comparable to the CEO of a global corporation who has no direct knowledge of (and frankly does not care) who refills the paper in the printers. The CEO is at the center of a chain of employment and command which ultimately ensures that this is done. So too, argued the Greeks, God runs a very large universe and is uninterested in the thoughts and acts of man.

The Rambam negates this position in his 10th Ikar as follows⁵⁵:

The 10th Principle – that He, may He be elevated, knows the actions of mankind and does not abandon them. Not like the view of those who say⁵⁶: “God has abandoned the world”.

⁵⁵ Rambam's Commentary to the Mishna, Introduction to Sanhedrin Chapter 10 ('Perek Chelek').

⁵⁶ Yechezkel 8:12

Rather as it says⁵⁷: “Who is great in counsel and mighty in carrying it out, for Your eyes are open to all the ways of mankind”. So too⁵⁸: “And God saw that the evil of man was great on the earth” and⁵⁹: “The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah has become great”. This teaches the 10th Principle.

Logically, God’s total knowledge of all details in the universe must also include a complete awareness of all human choices⁶⁰. Add to this God’s multi-dimensional existence beyond the limits of time, and we are presented with a well-known moral and philosophical problem - the incompatibility of God’s Omniscience and human free will. If God knows the reality of our choices before we make them, then those choices are pre-determined; there is no way that we could have chosen differently. Conversely, if we do carve out a space for real human free will, this undermines God’s Knowledge and implies an element of Divine imperfection. This itself would be in breach of the Rambam’s 2nd Principle - God’s complete Oneness.

The Rambam presents the dilemma in the following words⁶¹:

One might ask: Since the Holy One, blessed be He, knows everything that will occur before it comes to pass, does He or does He not know whether a person will be righteous or wicked? If He knows that he will be righteous, [it appears] impossible for him not to be righteous. However, if one would say that, despite His knowledge that he would be righteous, it is still possible for him to be wicked, then His knowledge would be

⁵⁷ Yirmiyahu 32:19

⁵⁸ Bereishit 6:5

⁵⁹ Bereishit 18:20

⁶⁰ Actually, some Rishonim, such as the Raibag, challenge this logic.

⁶¹ Hilchot Teshuva 5:5

incomplete. Know that the resolution to this question [can be described as]⁶²: ‘Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.’ Many great and fundamental principles and lofty concepts are dependent upon it. However, the statements that I will make must be known and understood.

For the Rambam, God’s total and unlimited Knowledge is non-negotiable. So can he accept the reality of human free will⁶³? In fact he does, and presents a ‘compatibilist’ philosophical position, arguing that the reality of God’s Omniscience can exist alongside the reality of human free will. In this, the Rambam follows the position presented in Pirkei Avot⁶⁴: “*All is foreseen, yet freewill is given*”.

The Rabbis do not explain how these two apparently inconsistent concepts can indeed exist, but the Rambam, having presented the question, feels that he must offer a resolution:

As explained in the second chapter of Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah, The Holy One, blessed be He, does not know with a knowledge that is external from Him as do men, whose knowledge and selves are two [different entities]. Rather, He, may His name be praised, and His knowledge are one. Human knowledge cannot comprehend this concept in its entirety, for just as it is beyond the potential of man to comprehend and conceive the essential nature of the Creator, as is stated⁶⁵: “No man will perceive Me

⁶² Iyov 11:9

⁶³ Many commentators have noted that free will is not explicitly included in the 13 Ikarim. Some have called it ‘the 14th Ikar’, although that approach seems to further reinforce its absence! Rabbi Meir Triebitz understands that human freewill is included in the 4th Ikar which underscores God’s own freewill – see <http://www.hashkafacircle.com/category/ikarim/>

⁶⁴ Pirkei Avot 3:15

⁶⁵ Shemot 33:20

and live". So too, it is beyond man's potential to comprehend and conceive the Creator's knowledge. This was the intent of the prophet's statements⁶⁶: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways, My ways." Accordingly, we do not have the potential to conceive how The Holy One, blessed be He, knows all the creations and their deeds. However, the following is known without any doubt: That man's actions are in his [own] hands and The Holy One, blessed be He, does not lead him [in a particular direction] or decree that he do anything. This matter is known, not only as a tradition of faith, but also, through clear proofs from the words of wisdom. Consequently, the prophets taught that a person is judged for his deeds, according to his deeds - whether good or bad. This is a fundamental principle on which is dependent all the words of prophecy.

God 'knows' in ways that we can never fathom, not just because God's understanding is so much greater and more complex than ours, but because God's knowledge is inseparable from the essence of God Himself, rendering it totally unknowable by us. The difference between our knowledge and that of an earthworm is massive, but still finite. God's knowledge is infinite; we could never fathom how it operates or how it is actually compatible with human free will.

Has the Rambam answered the question? Well, not really. The Rambam's resolution is not actually an 'answer'. He has effectively 'dealt with' the problem by demonstrating that the question is itself invalid. By analogy, imagine that I presented a student with the question: 'Is your brother out of jail yet', and demanded a yes/no answer. In most cases, no such answer is possible. Maybe the student

⁶⁶ Yeshayahu 55:8

has no brother, or has a brother who was never in jail. In such situations, the only way to ‘deal with’ the question is to invalidate it; the question has been built upon false assumptions and must implode when those flaws are exposed. So too, argues the Rambam, the question ‘How can I have free will when God knows what I am about to do’ is meaningless since we cannot possibly understand what God’s knowledge is. How can we claim that one thing is incompatible with another when we cannot know what that first thing is!?

So, maybe we can say ‘problem solved’, and move on to a new question. But are we happy? Logically and intellectually, the Rambam’s resolution is solid. But it’s not an ‘answer’ and most questioners are not satisfied by the response that their question is invalid! On the other hand, is the Rambam responsible for our happiness? Maybe we should accept his implicit rebuke and try to find better questions in the future!

The Ravad⁶⁷ wrote a response to the Mishne Torah, not as a line-by-line running commentary, but as occasional (and often strongly worded) glosses, interjecting on a point on which he disagrees. Ninety percent of the Mishne Torah bears no comment at all from the Ravad, presumably indicating that he was in full agreement. This issue, however, attracts the Ravad’s critical eye:

This writer did not act the way intelligent writers should! For a person should never start something if he does not know how to complete it. Yet he opened with difficult questions and then left the matter unresolved and told [the reader] to trust him. It would have been better for him to have left the matter to people in their innocence [temimut hatemimim], rather than building

⁶⁷ R. Avraham ben David, 12th century Provence.

*them up and then leaving them in doubt. What if they start to doubt other things in their minds!?*⁶⁸

This is a remarkable statement. The Ravad may indeed be intellectually satisfied by the Rambam's philosophical resolution but he objects in the strongest manner to the Rambam's pedagogical approach. For the Ravad, it is irresponsible to raise difficult questions without having an answer that will leave people satisfied. Better not to raise such issues at all, especially with people that have not even thought of the problem!

The Ravad then feels compelled to engage in 'damage limitation', giving his own philosophical response that he feels will be more palatable. Essentially, his answer is what is often known as 'soft determinism'. God's infinite awareness means that He knows in advance the outcome of every human choice but He does not decree that choice, so free will is preserved. By analogy, if you offer a toddler a choice between cabbage or chocolate, you can predict with almost perfect accuracy that the toddler will always choose the chocolate. The child has free will, but you have almost perfect knowledge of the outcome. Divine knowledge, by extension, is 100% perfect. God knows every possible variable in the choice - nature, nurture, context etc.- so He will always know the outcome, even though the person still made the choice⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ Hasagot HaRavad – Hilchot Teshuva 5:5.

⁶⁹ The Ravad ultimately rejects his own resolution as 'worthless', presumably since it still leaves human choice locked into an inevitable outcome. In the case of the toddler, there always remains the slight possibility that they will unpredictably choose the cabbage, retaining their unfettered free will. However, since God's foreknowledge is infinite and could never be incorrect, there appears no remaining lacuna for independent human choice.

Where does that leave us? Apparently the Rambam would rather raise difficult questions, even if some people are left unhappy and without closure. The Ravad is more inclined to avoid questions which will disturb people and leave them unsatisfied.

Of course, it's a balance. The Rambam feels compelled to raise fundamental questions of belief that cannot and should not be avoided. However, he agrees that more peripheral and potentially unsettling questions should not be raised with students until they are intellectually and emotionally prepared to deal with them⁷⁰. Similarly, the Ravad is not advocating an unquestioning approach to Judaism. His own commentaries are deeply analytical and, despite his inclination towards mysticism, he is not unsympathetic to philosophical questioning. He nevertheless urges us to consider the potential negative impact on less experienced students.

All educators grapple with this balance. Clearly, to stun unprepared students with deeply troubling questions is irresponsible. By analogy, a teacher who presents post-doctorate physics to a 7th grade science class will leave the children shocked, distressed and unlikely to ever study science again. On the other hand, teachers, especially in Torah, must engage their students with nuanced ideas that push them, gently and constructively, beyond their comfort zone. Failure to do so leads to bored *talmidim* who, understandably, assume that Torah is simplistic and childish. This will quickly push them to seek satisfaction in secular studies which they perceive as more advanced and sophisticated.

So how do we find the correct balance? Usually this will be a

⁷⁰ He expresses this approach clearly in his Introduction to the Guide to the Perplexed.

combination of a number of factors, including the background and maturity of the students, the personality and educational philosophy of the teacher and, sometimes, the ideology of the institution. We also need to bear in mind the broader societal context. In our information-rich world many students will eventually be exposed to a far wider range of ideas than in the pre-internet age and, given this reality, the sheltered innocence of the Ravad's *temimim* is increasingly rare. If we don't raise the difficult issues with our students while they are still immersed in an environment of learning and growth, they are likely to confront them later in life when authentic educational guidance is far less accessible.

When a student faces a bombshell question (especially in *hashkafa* and *emuna*) many years after Seminary or Yeshiva, their natural response is often 'Why did no one ever tell me about this!?', quickly followed by 'What else did they not tell me about?' Personally, I would rather they had some recollection of having discussed the issue with their Torah educators, even if the details are now blurred. In addition to creating the 'intellectual antibodies' to tackle difficult issues as they arise, this 'inoculation' approach may even encourage people to reconnect with former teachers for renewed clarification and guidance. Again, it's a balance and, like the Ravad, we should not underestimate the dangers of overexposure to challenging ideas before a student has the ability to properly process them.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's famous metaphor is very apposite. The path of Torah education is a very narrow bridge which must be crossed with great caution. But teachers and students alike need not be afraid to engage in a robust and honest conversation which, be'ezrat Hashem, will lead to fulfillment and enlightenment over a lifetime of growth.

The Eyes of Redemption

Miriam Tannenbaum

*“Judaism is the supreme example of a culture not of the eye but of the ear” (R’ Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation*, 5767).*

It would be difficult to overstate the impact the world of Tanach and the thought of R’ Sacks have had upon me. Beyond the learning and teaching of these subjects, I have found that the learning and teaching of the former has complemented and engendered a deeper appreciation of the latter, and vice versa. At times the words of a *Navi* helped me appreciate a concept that Rabbi Sacks had developed and often Rabbi Sacks’ thought helped me reexamine a section of Torah that had until that point left me less inspired.

One idea that is pervasive in the writings of R’ Sacks⁷¹ is the distinction that he draws between Ancient Greece and Ancient Israel. He takes note of the contrast between cultures, one of fate and despair and the other of destiny and hope. R’ Sacks takes note of the emphases of each belief system, particularly, the prominence of the visual in Ancient Greece versus the auditory emphasis of Ancient Israel. The domain of Jafeth⁷² was intrinsically linked to external beauty in both body and architecture, and from the arts to mathematics. The philosophical landscape of Shem, by contrast, was focused on the sense that was not linked to space but to the mind. When we accepted the Torah, we uttered the famed line of “*Na’aseh v’nishma*⁷³”, “we will do, and we will hear.” Each day as we submit ourselves before God, we utter our pledge of *Shma Yisrael*⁷⁴, “Hear

⁷¹ The Great Partnership

⁷² Genesis 9:27

⁷³ Exodus 24:7

⁷⁴ Deuteronomy 6:4

O Israel.” Finally, the Talmud is replete with expressions such as “*Ta Shma*”, “Come and hear” or “*Shma mina*”, “we learn (lit. hear) from here.” He notes that the remnants of those differences are evident in our language as well. Expressions of understanding such as “do you see?” reflect the ideology of Greece whereas “do you hear?” is a hallmark of the people of Israel.

For many reasons, this truth speaks to me and to the reality in which we live. As a parent and an educator in the digital age, I continue to observe the effects of visual overstimulation. It has impacted our capacity to listen, to learn deeply, to engage in *Tefillah* and generally to connect to the written word.

Yet with continued learning of Tanach, I felt this truth to be challenged. Themes and motifs of vision are apparent in many sections. When employing the use of *milah manha* or *leitwort* in so many sections, terms relating to eyes, vision, appearance, light and dark are prevalent. It touches on much of our ancient texts. For the first time, I was struck by this tension between sight and sound. How to reconcile these two opposing assessments of Tanach: R’ Sacks’ emphasis on the auditory with my own impression of the importance of the visual?

Although there are many passages in Tanach in which sight plays a prominent role, I would like to focus on a sampling of sight-related moments in Tanach, some of which have national import while others are more particular and personal.

Beginning with the creation of the world, the term וירא, “and He saw”, is used after each creation as the verb to describe God’s stamp

of approval. The Garden of Eden wherein Adam and Chava are created is characterized by the visual, as the verses describe,

*“For God knows that on the day that you eat thereof, **your eyes will be opened**, and you will be like angels, knowing good and evil. And the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the **eyes**, and the tree was desirable to make one wise; so, she took of its fruit, and she ate, and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate. And **the eyes of both were opened**, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves and made themselves girdles.”⁷⁵*

The allure, the transgression and the realization of their wrongdoing are marked by terminology associated with sight.

The initial narratives that the Torah begin with relate to the perspectives of God and of the first people. The positive assessment as well as what is often painted as the idyllic existence are expressed through visual terminology. Moreover, in mystical thought, the language used is “*Istakel b’orayta u’varah almah*”, “*God looked into the Torah and created the world*”⁷⁶

Moving forward several chapters in the book of Genesis, Abraham is instructed with what *Chazal* identify as the ultimate of his ten trials, the *Akeidah*, the binding of Isaac. Throughout this harrowing episode, the *leitworts* and play on words of sight (r.e.h.) and fear (y.r.h) are used. The place that Abraham sees from a distance⁷⁷ is

⁷⁵ Genesis 3:5-8, Translation from Chabad.org/library

⁷⁶ Zohar Terumah Part 2, 161, 1

⁷⁷ Genesis 22:14

called ה' יראה – the place where God will see and it is subsequently changed to ה' יראה, God will be seen⁷⁸.

Rashi comments there:

As it is said to this day: that {future} generations will say about it, “On this mountain, the Holy One, blessed be He, appears to His people.”

In other words, the Rabbis associate that place with the Temple Mount. The episode of the Binding of Isaac reverberates throughout our history as a nation. Both the elements of sight and awe that Abraham and Isaac experienced become part and parcel of our rendezvous with God in the future *Mikdash*.

Is the seeing of Genesis a paradigm of our encounter with God?

A book later, at the epic moments of *Matan Torah*, the verses are heavily focused on the scene. The “light show” is depicted with fire and smoke and sound as well (Exodus 19). The Israelites are then privy to the unusual phenomenon of רואים את הקולות, “*seeing the sounds*”⁷⁹ What does that mean? Why that order, with the sense of sight as the initial one?

One of the messages given to the Israelites as they receive the Ten Commandments (*statements*) is the acceptance of a monotheistic faith in an invisible God. In the Second Commandment, they are warned against the formation of any graven image⁸⁰. Moshe, in his final speech to the Israelites, re-emphasizes the need to eliminate any

⁷⁸ A theme associated with the Temple both in Deuteronomy and then expanded in the Talmud Chagigah.

⁷⁹ Exodus 20:15. The phraseology of “seeing the sounds” as opposed to “hearing the sights” is curious.

⁸⁰ Exodus 20:4

images as he recalls this moment⁸¹ that is heavily laden with imagery.

Are there different types of seeing? What about the encounter with God, which both behooves us to see and yet to distance from much that is visible?

A year later or so, at what should have been the cusp of entering the Land of Israel, scouts are instructed by Moshe to enter and scope out the land. At the base of the instruction is, וראיתם את הארץ מה הוא, “You shall see what [kind of] land it is”.⁸² With the specific directives to look at the fertility of the land, the security of the cities and the strength of the inhabitants, twelve princes embark on their journey. The scouts see the land and its largesse and are struck by fear, self-doubt, and negativity. Upon their return, they initially report to the Israelites according to their instructions. However, they then express their opinion as well. Their fears are used to intimidate and discourage the nation from entering the land. They express the smallness they feel relative to the people there. Over and again, the words they utter bespeak a harmful perspective. The language throughout the episode points to their jaded outlook.

Rashi, based on the Talmud, remarks as follows: *They went, and they came: What is meant by “They went”?* [It says already that they returned.] *To compare their going with their coming. Just as their return was with evil intent, so was their departure [on the journey] with evil intent. (Sotah 35a)* In other words, they saw what they wanted to see.

⁸¹ *The Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of the words, but saw no image, just a voice. (Deuteronomy 4:12)*

⁸² Number 13:18

The chapter (Numbers 15) that follows the episode of the *Spies*⁸³ is chock-full of mitzvot, each of which can be seen as a *tikkun*, a repair for the sin of the scouts. Perhaps the most well-known is the final *mitzvah* in that section- the *Parshia* of *Tzizit*. The commandment of wearing fringes on a four-cornered garment is centered around the injunction to *see* the *tzizit*⁸⁴. This is in direct correlation with the sin of the spies. The perspective which accompanied them as they trekked the land was ultimately the cause of the slander. Getting to the root of their wrongdoing was giving them the opportunity to learn to see properly again. They were learning to lead a life wherein seeing can propel one towards mitzvah observance.

Is there a visual component that is particularly relevant to the Land of Israel? Is perspective particularly integral to Israel?

It is worth noting that Moshe's plea to God at the end of his life is to see land, as he states:

Pray let me cross over and see the good land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon."⁸⁵

The verdict given to him is that he will not enter the land but he will in fact *see* the land.

*Go up to the top of the hill and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward and see with your eyes, for you shall not cross this Jordan.*⁸⁶

⁸³ Only later referred as such

⁸⁴ אָתוֹ – And you shall see it (Bemidbar 15). Also mentioned in this section is the injunction to be wary of roving eyes : לֹא תִתּוֹר אַחֲרֵי עֵינַיִם :

⁸⁵ Deuteronomy 3:25

⁸⁶ Ibid 27

Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel, is typified as a land wherein the “eyes of God are in it from the beginning of the year until its end”⁸⁷. God’s supervision over the land is further manifested in Jerusalem and as was mentioned earlier, in the Temple. The *mitzvah* of *Aliyah l’regel* in the Torah is described as follows:

*Three times in the year, every one of your males shall appear before the Lord, your God, in the place He will choose: on the Festival of Matzoth and on the Festival of Weeks, and on the Festival of Sukkoth, and he shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed*⁸⁸

The place of the encounter with God is a place where God sees and is seen.⁸⁹ The theme of seeing and being seen by God runs through the tractate of *Chagigah*. It begins with the statement that “all see”, alluding to the entirety of Israel having this encounter (termed *re’ayon*) with God.

Vision & Leadership

Several hundred years after the Israelites enter the Land of Israel, the period of Judges nears its end with Samson at the helm of leadership. The language (*milah manha*) of sight is once again prevalent. His rationale for marrying a Philistine woman is “she is fitting in *my eyes*”⁹⁰. The Talmud in *Masechet Sotah* taps into this motif and states, “*Samson sinned with his eyes and was therefore struck with his eyes*”⁹¹. Leadership requires the ability to be a visionary. Samson’s unique destiny reflected the needs of his time. It required a

⁸⁷ Ibid 11:12

⁸⁸ Ibid 16:16

⁸⁹ Chagigah 5b

⁹⁰ Judges 14

⁹¹ Sotah 9b

specific type of vision. His ultimate downfall came about through his failure to see properly.

The link between vision to leadership was highlighted in an episode a short while later. In the beginning of Samuel I, Eli the High Priest is at the end of his tenure, and the “baton” of leadership is being passed on to a young Samuel. In the exposition of Chapter 3, the depiction is of both an era in general and a particular scene. At the outset, we are told that prophecy is rare, that vision is not widespread⁹². The scene opens late at night or in the early morning hours with a flickering flame in the background of the Tabernacle.

The correspondence of the verses describing the flickering of a flame not yet extinguished to the young Samuel having not yet received prophecy is deliberate. He is juxtaposed with Eli, who is portrayed as one whose eyes have darkened and who is unable to see. Radak in this verse explains the repetitive language relating to Eli’s failure of eyesight and prophetic ability.⁹³ Over the course of this chapter, Eli recognizes Samuel’s initiation as a prophet and instructs him on how to receive God’s message. It is *not* ironic that Samuel’s first prophetic experience is regarding the collapse of Eli’s house. This is after all a story of the transmission of leadership. The culminating verses describe Samuel as a trusted *Navi* throughout Israel. A world which had little to no prophecy and lacked visionary leadership is now marked by a *Navi*-par-excellence.

Throughout his tenure as leader, Samuel operates with both prophecy and visionary leadership. The book even utilizes the term *Ro’eh*, seer, as a descriptor for his role as *Navi*, and the redactor

⁹² Samuel I:3:1- Based on ideas of R’ Amnon Bazak in “Samuel I: A King in Israel”

⁹³ Although we do see Eli’s ability to see the other in that chapter. He relates to Shmuel as a fatherly figure in a reassuring manner.

explains its definition!⁹⁴ It is at the juncture of coronating the next leader that Samuel is critiqued by some⁹⁵ for acknowledging his role as visionary.

The full thrust of this critique is articulated at the coronation of David. At that point, Samuel sees Saul as *the* king and has a difficult time moving onward. God, in fact, critiques his mourning over Saul's loss of kingship. Although he responds and sets out to anoint the future king, he is enamored by Eliav- whose appearance is like Saul's. God rebukes Samuel's 'seeing' then with a reminder that humans are limited by their physicality/eyes whereas God can see through and beyond the external⁹⁶. As Hannah had prophesied in her song long before⁹⁷, Samuel ultimately anoints David. It is no longer surprising that when David is introduced, we meet an individual who is "of nice eyes"⁹⁸ for he too should be a visionary--who can see well and deeply, beyond externals.

Redemption, Returning to Zion & Leaders as Visionaries. Is this not reflected in the Torah's "name" for the Sanhedrin as "Einei ha'edah", the eyes of the congregation⁹⁹?

With the permission granted by Cyrus and then Darius, a remnant of the Jewish people returns to Israel. As they are met with challenging circumstances on all levels, Haggai and Zechariah both encourage and chide their generation to return and build the Second Temple. The image of the makeshift structure disturbs the older generation

⁹⁴ Samuel 1: 9: 9

⁹⁵ Radak on Samuel 1 9:19 quoting the opinion of the Sages

⁹⁶ Samuel 1:16:7

⁹⁷ Ibid 2:10

⁹⁸ Ibid 16:12

⁹⁹ Numbers 15:24

who can recall the magnificence of the first Temple. This sense of despair impacts all the returnees. Zechariah encourages the leadership and the people through his visions (referred to as מראות). He too is encumbered by a lack of clarity as to what he is seeing. This is reflected in the guiding angel's constant refrain of "What do you see?". Zechariah too needs these images to be clearer and explained. It speaks to the clarity needed when there are murky times. Despite it all, he speaks of a seven-eyed stone¹⁰⁰ and the eyes of God as wandering throughout the land¹⁰¹. When mentioning the sins of those who have not returned, the term used is עינים and not עונם.¹⁰²

The seven-eyed stone can be interpreted in the following chapter as the wandering eyes of God. Based on earlier reference, the eyes of God play a significant role in protecting the Land of Israel. The seven-eyed stone is a reference to redemption. The return of God's Presence in and direct supervision of the Land of Israel is indeed evidence of redemption.

We in fact invoke this throughout our liturgy. In our daily desire for the return to the world of *Mikdash* and Zion in its fullest sense, we implore God to let our eyes see (חזה) Your return to Zion.¹⁰³ In the *Kedusha* of Shabbat (morning and *Mussaf*), we speak of awaiting the era of God's reign. We utter in our prayers time and again "Let our eyes see"¹⁰⁴. Each holiday when we talk of our wish to rendezvous with God, we utter "Ya'aleh v'Yavoh... V'yara'eh".

¹⁰⁰ Zechariah 3

¹⁰¹ Zechariah 4

¹⁰² Da'at Mikrah, Zechariah 5

ותחזינה עינינו בשובך לציון ברחמים ¹⁰³
ועינינו תראינו מלכותך ¹⁰⁴

What does this mean for us? Can the primacy of both hearing and sight be reconciled for the future?

As learners of Tanach, we are tasked with both learning it and allowing it to inform how we function as individuals and as a society. When we speak of prayers for the future, we all believe that we have an active role to play in bringing about that future.¹⁰⁵

The sense of vision is clearly associated with the future.

Perhaps, when our nation was in its formative years, it had to learn how to see. In a pagan world, where we wanted to ‘see’ God, we had to learn to understand that God is invisible in a physical sense but can be seen when we learn to perceive. The years of exile were years we had to break away again from the encounter of ‘seeing God’ in the Temple. In that time, we had to learn to hear God through the written word, through the pages of words of the Talmud.

The prayers for us to both see God again and to be seen can be translated in our lives through rebuilding our personal and national connection with God. One way to learn to see God deeply is through seeing the other¹⁰⁶. Our times are indeed overloaded with visual stimuli. We must recognize that there is something to tap into but at a deep level. If we learn to see past surface and superficiality and can translate our seeing into one that is deep and penetrating, perhaps we too will experience a time of רואים את הקולות, of seeing the sounds.

In exile, we were forced to focus on our ability to hear for we did not have our own spaces to see. The time of redemption is the time to

¹⁰⁵ Although there may be debate as to what that active role is.

¹⁰⁶ R’ J.B. Soloveitchik, **Family Redeemed**

synthesize these millennia of hearing into a deep seeing of the other. The ability to see the other beyond the surface necessitates meeting the other and yes, hearing the other so that we can truly learn and understand their perspective. Perhaps that is what Isaiah means when he says, “The eyes of the blind shall be clear sighted, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened... the lame shall leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb shall sing...”¹⁰⁷. The Midrash Rabbah¹⁰⁸ invokes this verse to explain that all disabilities will be cured in Messianic times. Perhaps this Midrash can be interpreted figuratively: in Messianic times, the disability of spiritual blindness will be cured, replaced by a deep seeing of both the other and of God.

When we can do so as individuals and as a people, it is then that וראו יחד כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך, “*And all the nations of the land shall see that the Name of God is upon you*”¹⁰⁹ and we can fulfill who we are meant to be.

May we merit to *see* it in our day.

¹⁰⁷ Isaiah 35:5-6

¹⁰⁸ Bereishit Rabbah 20:46

¹⁰⁹ Deuteronomy 28:10