

דרשות תהילה

Derashot Tehillah

Midreshet Tehillah Torah Journal

קחו עמכם דברים

Midreshet Tehillah

5783

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Science of the Talmud: Textbook or Out of Date?	
<i>Tali Pinsker</i>	6
Who Am I? The Significance of Names	
<i>Jessica Ghitis</i>	17
Women & Femininity in Tanach	
<i>Chavoh Chayoh Epstein</i>	26
Nevuah- Anyone Listening?	
<i>Leora Schramm</i>	42
Esther: The Undercover Queen	
<i>Rikki Issler</i>	56
Shema: The Greatest Unifier	
<i>Avigail Ahuva Sokol</i>	67
Yehoshua: Transition and Transmission	
<i>Sara Landau</i>	74
Tzniut and Dat Yehudit: Is Tzniut Subjective?	
<i>Rabbi Anthony Manning</i>	91
If I forget you, Jerusalem...	
<i>Mrs. Miriam Tannenbaum</i>	100

Foreword

Rabbi Jeremy Kagan

To write a thoughtful and coherent original essay requires time and hard work. The first effort to express a thought is challenging enough. But to write well requires rethinking and rewriting every word and sentence multiple times. Only that way can our thought become clear as we confront our own words and ask ourselves over and over did I succeed in saying what I mean? Is what I mean really true? Through this process what we assumed was a complete thought turns out to be no more than a seed, one which grows toward ever increasing clarity and from clarity to genuine depth.

Because of this, many meforshim darshin the word "kenei" in the mishna in Pirkei Avot (1:6), "kenei lecha chaver" to mean "reed" in the sense of a reed pen. "Make your pen your chaver" or chevruta. The gemara in Brachot warns against learning alone – if our words go unchallenged, we do not think things through, miss important angles, and slide toward stupidity (63b). But, with the help of our pen we become the strident challenger of our reflection, allowing us to slowly and methodically circle in toward truth.

In an age where we expect things to come quickly the discipline to truly write is becoming increasingly rare. Digital texts have made cutting and pasting standard practice in writing and the standard of writing, with AI threatening an even greater numbness of the mind and heart.

The seriousness of this loss and the significance of training ourselves to truly express ourselves becomes apparent when we realize that the Torah equates life with speech. When HaKadosh Baruch Hu invested His own breath in man to give him life – when God blew *נשמת חיים* into Adam and he became *נפש חיה* – the Targum translates this as *רוח ממללא* – that Adam became a "speaking soul". We were created to speak.

Not just any speech – the mere exchange of symbols can also be accomplished by animals. Definitive of man is specifically the speech which gives expression to the divine soul which gave us the power of speech. This is our purpose, this is life – to convey into the world the depth within us, our distinct perspective on God's revelation in creation. Every human being is unique. We were not created to repeat or parrot the words of others. We are here to clarify our own personal vision and bring it to the world. Disciplined writing is one of the most powerful tools we have for achieving this.

In this our second volume of Derashot Tehillah, students and alumni courageously took pen in hand and, after much hard work, produced these labors of love – original essays on a broad range of Torah topics. The ability that we work so hard to develop at Midreshet Tehillah – to think independently while completely grounded in Torah – is on full display here. Each piece is informative, insightful, and provocative exhibiting both extensive research and thought. We have been given a wonderful gift with this collection of essays.

But it is clear that the primary beneficiaries here are the writers themselves. Each seized the precious opportunity to research, think, write, ask, debate, reread, rethink and rewrite – to clarify her vision under the watchful guidance of Mrs. Tannenbaum until something lucid

and pure was produced. Each one of these writers developed herself in the process, successfully expressing a part of her through making a kinyan on a small plot of the vast landscape of Torah. We give them all a bracha that they should continue!

As a bonus we get an essay from Mrs. Tannenbaum on Yerushalayim and how it becomes sanctified and from Rabbi Manning on tzniut, a tantalizing sample of his remarkable new book *Reclaiming Dignity: A Guide to Tzniut for Men and Women*. These give us the opportunity to see what the discipline of writing can produce in mature and practiced hands.

There is much to gain from reading each one of these essays and for this we owe these writers, young and old(er), a debt of gratitude. Special thanks to Mrs. Tannenbaum for her strenuous efforts guiding the student writers and overseeing the project.

Science of the Talmud: Textbook or Out of Date?

Tali Pinsker

The 38 books of the Talmud are the core of all Halacha and act as the everlasting guide for Jewish values, practices, and beliefs. The Jewish community has built its educational system around the *Gemara*, and many students spend a lifetime uncovering the truth and significance embedded in each line of the Aramaic text.

Although the halachic process and analysis of the *Gemara* demonstrate timeless, unrivaled brilliance, there is another category of information in *Shas* that brings up many issues. Often, the *Gemara* will make claims about science and health that at best defy understanding and in fact, often contradict modern scientific principles and methods. The apparent conflicts leave the modern Torah scholar perplexed as to how both the Talmud and western knowledge should be utilized and interpreted. This question is not a new one. Since the advent of the scientific method, and even earlier, Torah scholars and sages have struggled with the apparent conflicts between the nature and medicine they observed and the same as reported in the Talmud. There are several different opinions and attitudes as to how to reconcile this issue. The various approaches offer insight into methods of understanding how we view *Chazal* and how we evaluate non-halachic statements and advice in the *Gemara*.

Most of the debate surrounds instances where the *Gemara* and modern science contradict, however, there are many fascinating examples in

which the two don't clash at all. In fact, sometimes the *Gemara* explains illnesses and phenomena not discussed elsewhere until a much later point in history. For example, while discussing the range of the *Kohen Gadol's* voice in *Gemara Yoma* (20b), the Talmud notes that his voice could be heard during the day, “אָמַרְתָּ אֶתְּמָרְךָ” even though in other places, “אָמַרְתָּ אֶתְּמָרְךָ לַיְלִי” – the sound is much clearer at night. This concept of greater sound propagation at night, which now is understood to be the result of a temperature inversion, has been observed and studied in the scientific community, proving the advanced knowledge of the Talmud.¹ Another example is in *Bechorot* (45a) where the *Mishnah* notes the conditions that disqualify a *Kohen* from working in the *Beit Hamikdash*. One of the cases discussed is “אֶצְבָּעוֹתָיו מוֹרְכָבוֹת זוֹ עַל זוֹ אוֹ קְלוֹטוֹת” fingers and toes configured upon one another or attached. This condition, known as syndactyly, is not known to be mentioned in any other text until 1013 CE – some eight hundred years after the *Mishnah* was edited.²

These are just two of the many examples that offer insight into the wide ranging scope of knowledge of *Chazal* and offer insight into the broad knowledge base the *Tanaaim* and *Amoraim* possessed. Conversely, what happens when the Talmud's scientific data appears to be wrong? What is the response when the *rabbanim* who are inexorably linked to the vast majority of practices in the Jewish community discuss a salamander born from fire in *Chagiga* (27a)?³ We know that “אֵשׁ תִּלְקַחְתָּ מֵאֵשׁ הַיָּם” is

¹ acs.psu.edu, Refraction of Sound Waves

² Al-Ghazal, S. Kaf. "Al-Zahrawi (Albucasis)-a light in the dark Middle Ages in Europe."

³ All Talmudic sources are from *Talmud Bavli* unless otherwise specified

not biologically possible and, although mentioned in many Christian and Roman texts, likely originates from observations of salamanders living on logs and scurrying away when their homes are used as kindling.⁴ How should one approach this *sugya* and others like it? Is this an unquestionable observation, or can contemporary knowledge dispute this and similar claims?

The first approach to any clash between Talmudic and contemporary views of nature is that *Chazal* are invariably right in every aspect and that in any disagreement between *Chazal* and Science, *Chazal* are right. This understanding is supported by a concept mentioned in *Sota* (10a). In a response to a question as to how Rav Nachman knew precisely how much pain a certain illness caused, the *Gemara* writes:

איכא דאמרי: מיחש הנה קוש ביה. ואיכא דאמרי: מרביה שמע ליה. ואיכא דאמרי: "סוד ה' ליראיו ובריתו להודיעם"

“Some say he felt it himself, some say he heard it from a teacher, and others say he got it from Divine Wisdom.” This concept – that the Rabbis of the *Gemara* were blessed with Divine Inspiration – leads many to reject the notion that modern findings could ever dispute the words of the Talmud. This approach is taken by Rav Yehuda Brill, who writes in a *teshuva*:⁵

⁴ *Talmudology.com*, “Chagiga 27a - The Fireproof Salamander”

⁵ *Teshuvat Rav Yehuda Brill*, צידה האסורה, מובא בפחד יצחק ערך, צידה האסורה

“אכן חסר דעת החוקר ואין שכלו מגיע לעומק חכמת הטבע ומעשה בראשית”
that these [secular] researchers have incomplete understanding, and their
intellect cannot reach the full depth of the wisdom of nature and creation.
The Chida takes a similar approach, and says “וצרכים אנו לכוף ראשינו לקבל”
“האמת מבעלי האמת” – that we need to submit our understanding to receive
truth from masters of truth, and reject anything that disputes Talmudic
claims.⁶

This approach is challenging for many of us growing up in the scientific
age. Is there no space for subsequent enlightenment? Today, when we
can mathematically predict solar eclipses years in advance, are we truly
supposed to view alignment of luminaries through the lens of *Sukkah*
(29a), which states that they are caused by

על אב בית דין שמת ואינו נספד כהלכה, ועל נערה המאורסה שצעקה בעיר ואין מושיע לה,
ועל משכב זכור, ועל שני אחין שנשפך דמן כאחד

an "*Av Beit Din* [that] died and was not properly eulogized, a betrothed
woman who was raped in a city and no one came to rescue her, because
of homosexuality, and because of two brothers who were murdered
together.”

Although there is strength in attributing absolute knowledge to *Chazal* in
all areas – halachic or not – it can still lead to some troubling issues.
Conflating *Chazal*'s absolute and eternal authority in halachic knowledge

חיד"א - שם הגדולים מערכת ספרים אות ה [פב] השגות הראב"ד על הרי"ף⁶

with modern-age scientific knowledge can lead to a loss of faith in an age where scientific claims are tested and verified through extensive research and experimentation. When we hold *Chazal's halachic* understanding and scientific understanding to the same standard, conflicting data in scientific matters can undermine our faith in *Chazal's halachic* and masoretic authority, weakening our commitment to Talmud, the bedrock of halacha. While many would argue that we simply cannot comprehend what these *sugyas* are trying to communicate, others find it nearly impossible to reconcile the chasm between contemporary scientific approaches and those of the Talmud.

The second approach is known as *Nishtaneh Hateva* – that nature itself has changed. This idea is mentioned in *Sanhedrin* (69b) in an argument over the youngest age a male can father a child. Within this conversation, Beit Shammai says “סברי גמרינן מדורות הראשונים,” that we base our answer on the realities of previous generations (like in *Tanach* when people reached parenthood earlier), even if they are different from today. However, Beit Hillel holds, “לא גמרינן מדורות הראשונים,” that we do not learn based on the nature of previous generations. This is one source of the idea that nature itself adapts over time. This is also mentioned in the *Tosafot of Moed Kattan*:⁷

ושמא נשתנו כמו הרפואות שבש"ס שאינן טובות בזמן הזה

⁷ כורא, 11a

This, according to Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach, is the main approach.⁸

This concept that nature changes over time appears to reconcile the problems pretty well – it appreciates the modern scientific findings while also taking all of *Chazal's* statements as true. Sure, they're facts for a specific time period, but facts nonetheless.

However, the idea of *Nishtaneh Hateva* isn't without objection and dispute. Many feel that the medieval Torah authorities wrote about this theory in regard to small scale changes, not fundamental changes in nature.⁹ Rav Tendler *z"l* held that the science didn't change, but our understanding of it did. He felt that *Nishtaneh Hateva* was just a nice way of saying *nishtaneh daas hateva*, that what we **know** about science has changed.¹⁰ This concept, that *Chazal's* science was the best of its time but not eternal fact, leads to a third approach to the topic – that *Chazal's* science was for *Chazal's* time, and is not for contemporary society.

This line of thinking may sound novel, but it is actually well grounded in the Rishonim. The Rambam states in *Moreh Nevuchim*:¹¹

“You must, however, not expect that everything our Sages say respecting astronomical matters should agree with observation, for mathematics were not fully developed in those days: and their statements were not based on the authority of the Prophets, but on the knowledge which they

⁸ מבוא לספר שמירת הגוף והנפש בפרק י

⁹ Rabbi Natan Slifkin *Sacred Monsters*, p. 29

¹⁰ *Jewishlink.news*, “A Student's Memories of Rav Tendler”

¹¹ 3:14

either themselves possessed using the science of their day or derived from contemporary men of science. But I will not on that account denounce what they say correctly in accordance with real fact, as untrue or accidentally true. On the contrary, whenever the words of a person can be interpreted in such a manner that they agree with fully established facts, it is the duty of every educated and honest man to do so.”

Rambam is not alone in this line of thinking. Rav Samson Rafael Hirsch in *Trusting the Torah's Sages*¹² discusses the same issue, noting that *Chazal* were masters of Torah and Halacha, but their scientific knowledge was based on the accepted information of the time. He also mentions concerning scientific knowledge that *Chazal* considered the knowledge of gentile scholars on par with their own. Many others agree, including R' Avraham ben HaRambam,¹³ Maharam Schick,¹⁴ R' Sherira Gaon,¹⁵ and the Chacham Yosef Chaim,¹⁶ who all write in a similar vein.

This acceptance of contemporary outside wisdom goes back further than the Rishonim and Gaonim - it is also found in Chazal. It says in *Eicha Rabbah*¹⁷ that “אם יאמר לך אדם יש חכמה בגוים, תאמן,” if a man tells you there is wisdom amongst the nations, believe him. The *Midrash* proves its point with a quote from *Ovadya*:¹⁸ “והאבדתיו חכמים מאדום ותבונה מהר עשוי.” In this

¹² Ch. 4

¹³ *Ma'amar Al Derashos Chazal, in Milchamot Hashem (ed. R. Margalio, Jerusalem 1953)*

¹⁴ *Teshuvot Maharam Schick* 7

¹⁵ This could have also been written by his son, Rav Hai Gaon, *Teshuvot Ha Geonim*, no. 394:

¹⁶ *Benayahu*, Bava Batra 25b

¹⁷ 2:13

¹⁸ 1:8

passuk, Hashem says He will make the wise men vanish from Edom and understanding vanish from the mountain of Esav. This proves that there is a recognized wisdom outside of Judaism.

This line of thinking is also found in the *Gemara*. In *Pesachim* (94b), the *Chachamim* discuss the shape of the Earth (spoiler alert: not round) and the path of the Sun. The *Gemara* presents the view of the Jewish sages as well as the view of the gentile sages. Rav Yehuda Hanasi concludes that “וְנִרְאֶינָהּ מִדְּבָרֵינוּ מְדַבְּרֵיהֶן” – that it appeared that the gentile opinion made more sense than the Jewish opinion. Rav Yehuda Hanasi was not afraid to accept the scientific views of others and was even willing to accept them over the views of his own sages.

This approach sees *Chazal* as spiritual leaders who had advanced science knowledge for their time. Some find issues in downplaying the infinite wisdom of *Chazal* by placing boundaries on the scope of their knowledge. Others find these boundaries crucial to understanding Torah in a manner that avoids trying to accept unsatisfactory answers that conflict with perceived reality and end up challenging one’s entire view of the Talmud’s validity. This rationalistic line of thinking is followed by Rabbi Dr. Natan Slifkin, who has written extensively on science and Torah.

Many of Slifkin’s works deal with clashes of Torah, science, and zoology. His works,¹⁹ which rejected the notion that the sages of the

¹⁹ *Mysterious Creatures, The Science of Torah and The Camel, the Hare and the Hyrax*, amongst others.

Talmud were always scientifically correct and took certain passages of *Tanach* non-literally, became a huge point of controversy in the Jewish world. Slifkin's books were banned, which led to major disagreements with *Gedolei Torah* on both sides of the issue. This intense debate of the early 2000s made waves in both the Jewish and secular worlds,²⁰ proving just how intense and polarizing this dispute is.

Some choose to ignore the controversy altogether and just focus on the bottom line. After all, the ramifications are mostly in the cognitive areas of Judaism and don't really apply in *Halacha L'maaseh*. For example, the *Gemara* prohibits eating fish and meat, mentioning its correlation with “משום דקשיא לריקא ולדבר אחר,” bad breath and ‘something else,’ often translated as leprosy. There are several questions on this section of *Gemara*, and it's not entirely clear that the warning is only because of the health ramifications. However, there is a language of *issur* in this *Gemara*, and it was eventually codified in the *Shulchan Aruch*²¹ where it says: “צריך לזוהר שלא לאכול בשר ודג ביחד מפני שקשה לצרעת.” And so, we do not eat fish and meat together. The scientific component is irrelevant. If it is a clear *issur*, the modern scientific studies are irrelevant. However, there is a gray area here – suggestive medical advice. There are many instances when the *Gemara* seems to endorse a medical practice, like bloodletting²² and placing a cut hen above the head

²⁰ *The New York Times*, “Religion and the Natural History Clash among the Modern Orthodox”

²¹ *Yoreh De'ah* 116:2

²² *Shabbat* 29a, *Gitten* 67b

to cure a long fever.²³ With no clear language of *assur* or *muttar*, how are these recommendations meant to be approached?

There are many fascinating approaches to how we relate to medical advice in the Talmud. Rabbi Akiva Eger quotes the Maharil²⁴ who writes:

כל הרפואות שבכל התלמוד אסור לנסות אותם משום דאין אדם יכול לעמוד על עיקרן וכי
לא יעלו בידם ילעגו וילגלו על דברי חכמים

that all the medical cures of the Talmud are *assur* because we're not sure how exactly to do them and if we follow them it will lead us to mock the words of the *chachamim*. The Chazon Ish²⁵ believes that today, with regard to medical practice, *Hashem* only reveals Himself to us through science. New scientific knowledge is constantly revealed for our use. *Chazal* were not mistaken; rather, we have improved on medical knowledge since their time. Others, such as the Maharam Schick²⁶ and the Maharsha²⁷ take the opposite approach, that the medicine of the *Gemara* is complete *emet* and should not be mocked, with the Maharam Schick stating that in matters of life and death, one must follow *Chazal*'s teachings.

The way we approach this issue has a massive impact on our entire view of *Chazal* and the breadth of their incredible wisdom. Ignoring *Chazal*'s

²³ *Gitten*, 67b

²⁴ *Yoreh De'ah* 336:1

²⁵ *Yoreh De'ah* 5:3 and *Even Haezer* 27:3

²⁶ *Yoreh De'ah* 244

²⁷ *Gitten* 68b

scientific comments may lead to rejection and disdain towards other areas of *Torah She'baal Peh*, specifically the areas where things aren't so clear cut. However, treating scientifically incorrect information as indisputable can lead to a forced cognitive dissonance or an attitude of disrespect towards the *Gemara*.

When navigating this issue, with so many approaches, each having advocates of significant stature and often diametrically opposed to one another, a person should choose the path that brings the greatest personal appreciation and respect for the *chochma* of *Chazal* and the *Gemara*. For some, that may mean taking every word of *Shas* as an unchallengeable truth that the contemporary world cannot fathom or apply. For others, it may mean treating the non-halachic sections of the Talmud as an expression of the now dated science of its age, to be treated differently from the ageless genius of the halachic areas of the *Shas*. It could mean exploring examples and evaluating each on a case-by-case basis. The perspective we choose to adopt will impact our view of *Chazal* and our attitude towards their teachings. An approach must be chosen with caution and care to preserve and enhance our love, fear, awe, and admiration for *Torah She'baal Peh*, this extraordinary instrument for partnering with God.

Who Am I? The Significance of Names

Jessica Ghitis

Oftentimes an introduction is everything. The way an idea is presented to you can make or break your understanding and interest in the topic. Your elementary school teachers stressed such a focus on using a good ‘hook’ in your writing for a reason – that presentation sets the tone for everything to come. The same rule applies when it comes to public speaking, writing, and even introducing yourself. The way you identify yourself is the key to understanding who you are. In fact, your name holds the key to grasping your soul.

Throughout *Tanach* we see a running theme of the importance of names. Our name is what tells our story and expresses our essence. It's not a coincidence that nowadays the only time one can experience a glimpse of *nevuah* is when a parent names their child, nor is it by chance that the word *שמע* has the word *שם* (‘name’) within it. Furthermore, one of the first tasks *Hashem* gives Adam is to look into the nature of each of his creations to name them¹. All this shows that one’s name is an attachment to their spiritual source. It's the way a person is distinguished; it is their identity. In fact, it's more than how you define yourself. It’s also how others relate to you. However, what does this idea mean for us practically? Does this predetermine our destiny? How can we tap into

¹ Bereishit 2:19

this essence? How can we make that name our own? To better understand the idea that “your name is your essence,” we must explore its origin.

In *Brachot* 7b:10, the *Gemara* raises the question: “From where do we derive that the name affects one’s life?” Rabbi Eliezer quotes “לְכוּ תִּזְוּוּ בְּאֲרָץ מִכַּעֲלֹת הַיְיָ אֱשֶׁר שָׂם שְׁמוֹת שְׁמוֹת” meaning “Go, see the works of the Lord, ²” Who has made **desolations** upon the earth.” However, R' Eliezer says to change the vowels from *patach* to *tzeirei*, so that instead of reading it as *שְׁמוֹת* (**desolations**), it can be read as *שְׁמוֹת* (**names**). Therefore, the *passuk* would translate as “Go, see the works of the G-d (which are man’s destiny to achieve), Who has made **names** upon the earth.” R’Eliezer is saying that the names given to people are the “the works of the Lord upon the earth.”

It seems to be that since the giving of names is referred to as *Hashem's* work, there is Divine intervention in naming a child. Thus, our names have an inherent potential within them. The name a person receives is not random, but is a product of G-d’s choosing and gives insight into that person’s genuine character and potential for success. In fact, in *Masechet Yoma* 83b:12, we see that “רַבִּי מֵאִיר תְּנַחֵם דְּיִיק בְּשֵׁמָא,” meaning that “Rabbi Meir would analyze names and discern one’s nature from his name.” As a great kabbalist, Rabbi Meir was able to perceive a person's essence and nature from his name. Hence, these sources draw direct connections between one’s name and their *neshama*.

² Tehillim 46:9

Additionally, there are countless times in *Tanach* where we see examples of *Hashem* changing the name of an individual to better express their identity and help them to achieve greatness. For instance, in *Bereishit* 17:5, *Hashem* says “ וְלֹא־תִקְרָא עוֹד אֶת־שְׁמֶךָ אַבְרָם וְהָיָה שְׁמֶךָ אַבְרָהָם כִּי אֲבִרְתְּהֶם בְּךָ אֲבִרְתִּיךָ”-“And you shall no longer be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I make you the father of a multitude of nations.” Avram’s name had to be changed because he was about to embark on an entirely new journey in his life, requiring a different *mazal*, which his previous name was not able to provide for him. This name change is what granted him the potential to take on his new mission as the “father of all the nations.” Also, this name-change allowed Avraham and Sarah to have children.³ The *Midrash* explains that *Hashem* said “*Avram could not have children and Sarai could not give birth, but Avraham and Sarah could,*”⁴ further exemplifying how changing a person’s name alters their destiny.

Avraham’s name change was so crucial that the Talmud⁵ says that anyone who refers to Avraham as Avram is violating a positive commandment. Avraham’s new name was a reward for the lengths he had gone to be known as the father of the Jewish people. Thus, failing to address him by his new name would imply that he is partially a gentile, rather than the prestigious leader who introduced gentiles to Judaism. The *Gemara* is highlighting the connection between the name one is called and their

³ Rashi on Bereishit 15:5

⁴ Radak on Bereishit 11:31

⁵ Brachot 13

identity, showing us how much a name represents a person's potential and their legacy.

In *Vayikra Rabbah* 1:3, we see that Moshe had ten names, each given to him by a different person and each highlighting a contribution he made or a certain quality of greatness within him. For example, one of Moshe's names is *Yered*, derived from the word “יָרַד” meaning to descend, referring to when Moshe brought down the Torah and brought spirituality down into this world. However, *Hashem* only refers to him as Moshe, the name given to him by *Bitya*⁶, Pharaoh's daughter, as she pulled him out of the water. In *Sichot Mussar*,⁷ Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz says that the name Moshe instilled an innate kindness and willingness to self-sacrifice within him, in line with what Bitya did for him by risking her life to save and take in a Jewish boy. This quality is demonstrated by Moshe as he prays for *Bnei Yisroel* to be saved from punishment, even after the *cheit ha'egel*, sin of the Golden Calf. It was these traits of kindness and self-sacrifice that allowed Moshe to be the leader that he was.

In *I Shmuel* 25:25, after Nabal disrespects Dovid, Avigail attempts to assuage Dovid, saying “For he is just what his name says: his name means ‘boor’ and he is a boor.” Here, we see Avigail highlights how Nabal's name perfectly describes his essence. Thus, Avigail alludes further to the connection between the names of characters from *Tanach* and their actions.

⁶ Divrei HaYamim 4:18

⁷ Sichot Mussar, Essay 60, Yr. 5732 p.254

Beyond the realm of *Tanach*, in times of life-threatening illness (G-d forbid), we see that the impact of our names is especially important, and can even impact the length of one's life. There is a *segulah* to add a name to the name of someone who is critically ill, to change their fate and hopefully alter their original evil decree, possibly allowing them to recover.⁸ Usually, names that connote healing and long life, such as Chaim or Rafael, are added. Additionally, in *Mishneh Torah*,⁹ the Rambam comments that changing a person's name allows them to be "reborn," giving them an opportunity to do *teshuvah* and begin to use Torah as the compass for their lives. Although it is not the common custom, as part of the path of repentance for a *baal teshuvah*, one may change their name to show that they are a different person than they initially were.

How do our names affect our destiny?

Although names play a role in our stories, this does not mean that our lives are predetermined nor does it limit our free will. Our names are merely indicators of our future prospects in terms of a person's nature and capacity. Just as every *middah* can be used for good or evil, so too, you can choose what you make out of the potential your name carries. Rashi to *Koheles* 7:1:1 comments on "טוב שם משמן טוב" - "better a good name than precious oil," meaning that a good reputation is more valuable than prized wealth. Ideally, after leaving this world, your reputation should be better than it was at birth. Rashi explains further that a good

⁸ Bereishit Rabbah 44:15

⁹ Repentance 2:4

name is compared to oil instead of other liquids because oil rises to the top when added to water, whilst most liquids merely mix with the water. Hence, the name you make for yourself, like the oil, should only continue to *rise* as you continue to grow spiritually. Your name determines how people see you and your reputation is the only thing you leave behind in this world. You should strive to use your name as a tool for your *avodas Hashem*. Your name does not force you into a predetermined destiny. Rather, it may provide you with certain inclinations and innate character traits. Your choices are ultimately what create self.¹⁰ It's up to you to live up to your name.

In fact, your name is more than how you define yourself. It's also how others relate to you. Similarly, the Torah refers to *Hashem* by different Names, to allow us to relate to the different aspects of *Hashem*. For instance, the Name *קוּן* connotes mercy. As such, this is the dominant Name for *Hashem* in the 13 Attributes of Mercy. Also, the Name *אלקים* shows judgment and *צבקות* indicates *Hashem's* dominion over all galaxies and classes. Having these different names to relate to *Hashem*, demonstrates how important names are in our relationship with and understanding of Him. In turn, this shows how vital names are when it comes to the way we identify ourselves and how others identify us.

However, you have to be true to that name in order to be respected by others. In *Pirkei Avot* 4:13:3, Rabbi Shimon said “There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty,

¹⁰ Based on *The Choice to Be* by Rabbi Jeremy Kagan

but the crown of a good name supersedes them all.” These positions represent the three types of leadership in Israel: the prophet or sage, the priest of the temple, and the king, ruler of the people. Still, the reputation of these three leaders can be ruined by sinning, resulting in a disregard for their authority from their followers precisely because of the high expectations for leaders. We see that each of these leaders has a ‘good name,’ ie. their position, but it's what they do with that position that defines their influence on the community and how successful they are in truly fulfilling their role. A leader has a responsibility to their people and to live up to their title with their words and actions. As Rabbi Shimon says, “In all of these cases the crown is meaningless without the crown of a good name.” Meaning, a king may be sitting on a throne and wearing his crown, but if he isn't successful in his role as ‘The King,’ his subjects won't respect him as such. Thus, no matter what position or name you hold, you merit no benefit, if it is not true to who you are. Anyone can wear a crown, but not everyone can be a king.

In *Pirkei Avot* 2:7, Rabban Gamaliel the son of Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi says “*If one acquires a good name, he has **acquired** something for himself.*” *Tosafot* expounds upon this idea and tells us that the *mishnah* explains that part of the responsibility of having a good name is actualizing that essence, so that you may **acquire** who you are truly meant to be. We see that having a good name is important to set yourself up for success, but you still need to actualize the potential that your name brings, to unlock the key to your true self. Also, in this *mishnah* Rabban Gamaliel explains how to do this. He tells us “*...if one acquires for*

himself knowledge of Torah, he has acquired life in the World to Come.” Thus, Torah, our guidebook to life, is what can bring us to fulfilling this potential that our names hold, a potential that impacts our lives both in this world and in the next.

Lastly, not only do we have to live up to our names individually but we also have to do so as a part of *Klal Yisroel*. *Am Yisroel* has a reputation as Hashem’s chosen nation. We see this when Yeshayahu says to Am Yisroel regarding the time of *geulah*:¹¹ וְרָאוּ גוֹיִם צְדָקָתְךָ וְכָל־מַלְכִים כְּבוֹדְךָ וְקָרָא לְךָ שֵׁם חַדָּשׁ אֲשֶׁר פִּי יְהוָה יִקְרָנוּ וְכָל־מַלְכִים יִקְרָנוּ - And the nations shall see your triumph, and all kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name, which the Mouth of *Hashem* shall mark out.” Thus, we have a responsibility to be *ovdei Hashem*, to represent Him through Torah and mitzvot, and to separate ourselves from the other nations. He rewards us by calling us עַם־קְדוֹשׁ, The Holy People”¹² and it's up to us to live up to that. For instance, by demonstrating the middot of *achdus* and *ahavas Yisroel* that “The Holy People” should possess, we show we are worthy of this title.

We see that there is evidently an inherent connection between one’s name, their middot, and their potential. Still, this name does not limit or predetermine our future and can be beneficial if you learn to channel the power and nature of your name. In fact, the goal should be to create a greater reputation for yourself and continue growing by approaching Torah as a lighthouse, directing you towards a brighter future. May we

¹¹ Yeshayahu 62:2
¹² Yeshayahu 62:12

all merit to unlock the key to our names, and *Hashem* should grant us all strength, humility, and *koach* to harness the tools our name provides us with and build up our reputation, as individuals and as *Am Yisroel*.

Women and Femininity in Tanach

Chavoh Chayoh Epstein

This article delves into the narratives of several powerful women found in *Tanach* who, in situations of extreme adversity, demonstrated extraordinary intelligence, wisdom, bravery, self-sacrifice, and leadership. By examining their actions and experiences we can broaden our understanding of the role women have played and can play in Jewish history. We will see that the strengths and traits exhibited by one woman often repeat themselves in the story of another woman brought in *Tanach*, highlighting the relevance of these specific traits to women. Their examples can serve as inspirations to us today as we seek ways to actualize ourselves as Jewish women in the service of the Jewish people.

Avigail (*Shmuel I 25:5-30*) and the Women of Egypt

Avigail is described as beautiful and intelligent. She was the wife of Nabal, who refused to give (the future) king David and his men supplies. Angered, David prepared to kill Nabal. Avigail was told about this and went out to greet David along with asses loaded with food and wine, then used wise words to appease him.¹ David heeded her words, accepted the supplies and praised her.

The Rabbis teach us that Avigail used insightful halachic reasoning to prevent the killing, recognizing an important angle that David had

¹ לא תהיה זאת לך לפוקה ולמכשול לב לאדני ולשפך דם חנם

missed. David saw Nabal as a traitor to the king (himself) who must be killed without trial. Avigail pointed out that Shaul was still alive and seen as king by most of *Bnei Yisrael*, therefore, he was not halachically authorised to deem him a traitor. David accepted her reasoning and blessed her for preventing him from sin.²

We are also taught that Avigail was a prophetess.³ She saw that David might sin with Bathsheba and sought to warn him against it.⁴ The Rabbis relate that in order to convey the message in a compelling way, one that would have the best chance of being successful, she used her sexuality - she exposed her thigh and David seeing it lusted after her. At this point, Avigail told him “לא תהיה זאת לך לפיקה” – “don't let this be a stumbling block for you,” with the implication that this would be a challenge for David in the future. Avigail’s warning was successful; the Sages tell us that David did not actually sin with Bat Sheva, he succeeded in holding himself back.⁵

This highlights the powerful utility of women’s sexuality; but it is a double-edged sword. As a prophetess and a *poseket*, she realised that she had a very narrow opportunity to prevent David from doing a great sin. She harnessed the power of her sexuality even though by doing so she narrowly escaped causing an additional sin. It is a cautionary tale, that

² BT Megillah 14b,1

³ Megillah 14a

⁴ Megillah 14b

⁵ Shabbat 56a

the power women hold over men has to be handled delicately, one cannot over - or under - use it.

Avigail teaches us to use our words wisely and rebuke in a sensitive and thoughtful manner to prevent sin. She is an example of a woman *paskening* complex halachic issues with intelligence, with her opinion overriding even that of a future king. Additionally, she is an example of a woman in a position of power as the leading propheticess of her generation. We see her use her sexuality as a powerful tool to send a message to David that he otherwise may not have taken to heart, thus securing his future in *Bnei Yisrael*.

Between Miriam and the Jewish women in Egypt, we see these same traits that were displayed by Avigail: intelligent reasoning, prophecy, leadership, and sexuality directed to securing the future of the Jewish people.

The *Talmud* explains that Amram, Miriam's father, left Yocheved, Miriam's mother, to avoid bringing into the world children whose only future was to suffer at the hands of the Egyptians. Since Amram was the leader of the Jews the rest of the nation followed suit, putting the future of the Jewish people in question.⁶ Moreover, Miriam prophesied that Amram and Yocheved were destined to bear the redeemer⁷ and if Amram's action stood there would be no redeemer. Therefore, she

⁶ Sotah 12a

⁷ Sotah 13a

challenged her father's reasoning, telling him that he was eliminating all the children of *Bnei Yisrael*. His actions were even worse than those of Pharaoh whose decree was directed solely at the boys. This led Amram to return to his wife, with the rest of the nation again following his lead with their wives.⁸ The women of Israel were then also empowered to entice their husbands working in the fields to cohabit with them to have children. This act was endorsed and celebrated by *Hashem* when He told Moshe when building the *Mishkan* to use the women's mirrors for the *Kiyor*.⁹ This again shows how powerful and holy a woman's sexuality is when used at the right time for the right reasons. In fact, not using it when it is appropriate or needed is a form of misuse!

Chuldah (*Melachim II 22:14*) and Serach Bat Asher

Chuldah was a prophetess who lived in Jerusalem just prior to the destruction of the first *Beit Hamikdash*. King Yoshiyahu sent men to ask her for religious advice after finding scrolls promising the exile of the nation. Chuldah prophesied a coming disaster without mercy, as promised in the scrolls. However, since the king had repented, he would die and not go through the destruction personally.

At the time the leading prophet was Yirmiyahu. Therefore, it is curious that King Yoshiyahu consulted with Chuldah and not Yirmiyahu, as would have been the usual course. One opinion in the Talmud explains that this was done in the hope that the merciful nature of women would

⁸ Shemot Rabbah 1:13

⁹ Midrash Tanchuma Pekudei 9,4

cushion any harsh decrees coming from the prophecy.¹⁰ We see just how fundamental a woman's merciful nature is by the fact that the king sought out Chuldah rather than Yirmiyahu with regard to a matter impacting the course of Jewish history! Some reject this approach, arguing that the prophecy comes from *Hashem*, not Chuldah.¹¹ Yet when a prophet receives a prophecy, he or she interprets it according to his or her way, and that is what is carried through. So, although the prophecy came from *Hashem* (which is why the harsh decree could not be avoided), the king could still hope for a more merciful interpretation.

Chuldah was also a teacher of Oral Law to men and women. Rashi states that she taught *Mishnah* to the elders of the generation.¹² She specialised in the punishments of exile, taking the initiative to educate *Bnei Yisrael* to get them to repent.

Modesty was also an outstanding trait of Chuldah. She had a chamber (a sort of office) in the *Beit Hamikdash*; adjacent to the *Lishkat HaGazit* (a meeting place for the *Sanhedrin* in the *Beit Hamikdash*), so that it was open to the outside but closed toward the *Sanhedrin*.¹³ This also suggests Chuldah was a leader, having political influence, religious oversight of the nation, and judicial power.

¹⁰ Megillah 14b:6

¹¹ Abravanel on Melachim II 22:14. He can argue as there is another opinion in the Gemora.

¹² Rashi on Melachim II 22:14

¹³ Rashi on Divrei HaYamim II 34:22 quoting Tractate Middoth

Not without flaws, Chuldah is criticised by *Chazal*. When relating her prophecy to king Yoshiyahu's men, Chuldah instructed the king's messengers to 'say to the *man*,' rather than to 'say to the *king*.' This shows haughtiness; hence she is given the name Chuldah by *Chazal* – meaning weasel.¹⁴ Perhaps she is judged so harshly as now she is gaining power and responsibility so she has to be extremely careful in her actions and words.

Chuldah is given a strong, long-lasting legacy. Gates on the Temple Mount are named after her with a promise that they will not be destroyed until Hashem restores the Jews to their former glory.¹⁵ These gates symbolise the hope and promise of *Moshiach*. Thus, the one who announces the destruction (Chuldah), is also the reminder of the coming redemption. Linking the two through one person signifies that they are inextricably bound together, such that reality of the destruction proves there will be a redemption and that G-d accompanies us through the suffering. The emotional comfort lent by the promise of eventual forgiveness seems to be a feminine, perhaps even a maternal trait.

The concept of a woman prophetess softening news due to her merciful nature as well as being a long lasting symbol of hope, a teacher, a leader of the Jewish people, and intervening to save other Jews is also shown to us by Serach the daughter of Asher.

¹⁴ Megillah 14b:10

¹⁵ Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:9:4

When needing to inform Yaakov that Yoseph was alive, the *shevatim* turned to Serach to do so in a gentle, calming manner.¹⁶ Her feminine traits of mercy and gentleness gave her the wisdom to notify Yaakov in a way he could accept.

Like Chuldah, Serach was granted a long legacy, living through both the entrance to and the exit from the exile in *Mitzrayim*. This allowed her to show Moshe where Yoseph's bones were buried.¹⁷

She was also able to identify Moshe as the redeemer. After Moshe had performed the miracles and signs, the people came to Serach excited. Yet she said the signs proved nothing as they had no substance. However, when they mentioned that Moshe had said – '*pakod pokaditi*' – Serach understood that Moshe was the true messiah, for there was an oral tradition that the messiah would speak precisely these words.¹⁸ Here also in the person of Serach the redemption is linked to the beginning of the exile, as a symbol of hope that G-d is always with us. It also shows Serach being a teacher of the oral tradition and leader to the Jewish people, just as Chuldah would be in the future.

In *Shmuel II*,¹⁹ a wise woman of Abel-Beth Maccah speaks to Yoav, appeasing him and stopping a war, thus saving the city. *Midrash Mishlei*²⁰ identifies this woman as Serach, and praises her for her

¹⁶ Sefer HaYashar (Midrash), Book of Bereishis, Vayigash 9

¹⁷ Sotah 13a

¹⁸ Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 48:17

¹⁹ Shmuel II 20:17

²⁰ Midrash Mishlei 31:5

wisdom. She shows us the power of taking initiative and intervening to save *Bnei Yisrael*.

Woman of Thebez (*Shoftim* 9:53) and Yael

The Woman of Thebez killed Avimelech, who laid siege to her city. As Avimelech entered the city this woman threw a stone on his head, killing him. Rather than damage his reputation by dying at the hands of a woman, Avimelech got a young lad to finish the task of ending his life. However, he is still recorded as having been killed by a woman.²¹

There is another place where we see shame from being killed by a woman - in this case outside of *Tanach* in the Book of *Yehudis*.²² There, Yehudis announces the death of Holofernes and specifies that he was struck by the hand of a woman. The nation then blesses G-d, thanking Him for humiliating their enemy, hence showing that death at a woman's hand is shameful. The fact that this was so dishonourable suggests that killing is against the nature of women. It makes sense logically since men are generally stronger than women.

The Woman of Thebez who acts as a warrior is praised by *Chazal* as a hero(ine).²³ She exemplifies taking action when no one else will, even if in her case that means temporarily taking on a typically masculine role. This suggests that we should not limit our assessment of suitability for a

²¹ Shmuel II 11:21

²² Book of Yehudis 13:20-25

²³ Midrash Tanhuma Buber Lev 13:1

role based on gender stereotypes, but rather we need to be aware of circumstances and the whole context.

In addition, the Woman of Thebez represents a metaphor for the strength of Hashem.²⁴ “If the weakest of the weak is above, it defeats the warrior below. How much more so does the Warrior of warriors from above have strength!” Hashem is above, so be careful to follow His commandments. The Woman of Thebez provided a particularly apropos message for the Jews at that time. They were in a painful cycle of being rebuked by God in the form of painful wars, then at the urging of the *navi* returning to G-d’s path, sinning again and repeating the pattern. By stepping outside of her gender role and being victorious in her weakness this woman made a great *Kiddush Hashem*, showing that it is God that is in control, providing a much-needed message to the Jews of her generation.

Yael is another example of a woman who represents the strength of Hashem, taking action when no-one else could. She also managed to hold on to femininity even when acting in a stereotypically masculine role.

Yael (*Shoftim* 4:17-21) lived in a time when *Bnei Yisrael* were at war with the Canaanites led by Sisra. In the heat of battle when the tide turned against the Canaanites Sisra fled toward Yael. She invited him inside her tent, gave him drinks to put him to sleep, and then killed him with a tent peg. She did not shy away from a typically masculine course of action, but instead took the opportunity to save *Bnei Yisrael* from a dangerous

²⁴ Midrash Tanhuma Buber Lev Vayikra 13:1

enemy. She did so, however, in a manner that utilised her femininity. According to one opinion Yael gave Sisra to drink from her breast milk, representing motherhood, to put Sisra to sleep.²⁵ According to Talmud *Bavli*,²⁶ she seduced Sisrah to exhaust him, weaponizing her sexuality (somewhat reminiscent of Avigail with David).

We further see preservation of femininity with Yael using a tent peg to kill Sisra instead of a weapon of war. This was to circumvent the prohibition of a *Kli Gever*, and she is praised for this.²⁷ The situation was *pikuach nefesh*, so she was certainly allowed to use a regular weapon. In fact, according to one opinion, she broke other commandments to kill Sisra, for example, having relations with him.²⁸ Perhaps she chose the tent peg to safeguard her inherent femininity even when acting as a warrior.

Metzudat David²⁹ explains that Sisra was killed by a woman to show that the war was won through the hand of G-d, as the weak overpowered the strong, like the Woman of Thebez showing women warriors representing specifically the strength of Hashem.

From Yael and the Woman of Thebez we learn that it is praiseworthy when circumstances warrant it to take initiative to serve Hashem even if it requires us to step outside our typical gender role, especially when the

²⁵ Bt Nid. 55b

²⁶ Nazir 23b:7

²⁷ Midrash Mishlei 31:5

²⁸ Radak on Shoftim 5:27

²⁹ Metzudat David on Shoftim 4:9:1

incongruity leads to a great *Kiddush Hashem*. However, even in these moments - when possible - we should retain our connection with our femininity and the unique power with which it endows us just as Yael chose a tent peg to kill Sisra.

Chana (*Shmuel I 2:21*) and Ruth

Chana was one of Elkanah's two wives. While her co-wife Penina had many children, Chana remained barren, a matter about which Penina goaded her relentlessly. Elkanah tried to comfort Chana, assuring her that she was better to him than ten sons.³⁰ Chana refused to be consoled about it, refusing to eat or drink, praying to Hashem for a son, and promising to dedicate him to Hashem's service. Her prayers were answered and she gave birth to Shmuel. Once weaned, she brought Shmuel to the *Mishkan* to be raised by Eli (the *Kohen Gadol*) and to serve *Hashem*.

Chana's actions are characterised by astonishing commitment. Every year she would go to the *Mishkan*, despite being goaded (and therefore emotionally distraught), and there pray and cry to *Hashem*. She refused to give up her dream despite the reassurances of her husband and was unwavering in her hope of conceiving a child, doing everything she could to achieve her dream.

Elkanah's reply to Chana's distress – that he loved her even more than if she had ten sons³¹ - shows how Elkanah misunderstood Chana. It seems

³⁰ Ralbag *Shmuel I 2:8*

³¹ Metzudat David on *Shmuel I 1:8*

as though Elkanah thought that Chana's worry was due to fear of losing his love to Penina as she had given him children. He did not see that her craving was actually for a child.

Chana was also misunderstood by Eli. When she was praying silently,³² he rebuked her for being drunk at the *Mishkan*. Once she had explained that she was anguished, not drunk, Eli blessed her to have a child.³³ Chana replied, "May your maidservant find favor in your eyes!" This verse can also be read as a surprised question: "Has your maidservant found favour in your eyes?"³⁴ Read this way, Dr Yael Ziegler explains Chana's surprise as stemming from her societal alienation, constantly being teased by her co-wife and misunderstood by her husband.³⁵ However, regardless of all that she endured, she never relinquished hope for a child and remained resolute in her desire.

Despite having had to fight so hard for a child, when she finally bore one she was willing to give him up for the greater good. The generation of her time was lacking proper leadership – Eli, the *Kohain Gadol*, was getting old and his sons, the *Kohanim*, were not worthy of their position.³⁶ This led to Bnei Yisroel not going up to the Mishkan and a general religious degeneration of the people.³⁷ The *milah mancha* of *perek alef* is

³² At the time, praying silently was against the norm.

³³ Shmuel I 1:13-17

³⁴ Shmuel I 1:18

³⁵ <https://www.etzion.org.il/sites/default/files/17Ruth2eRuthandHannah.doc>

³⁶ Shmuel I 2:12

³⁷ Legend of the Jews; Volume 4:3

שׂא – man. Since שׂא tends to signify status or leadership,³⁸ this *mila mancha* is hinting that leadership was missing from *Bnei Yisrael*. By having a child, Chana was hoping to rectify this, and therefore she handed Shmuel to Eli to be brought up in the *Mishkan* and apprenticed to him. This teaches us not to be a cosseting parent, to let our children actualise their potential even if that means that our personal involvement with them will be lessened.

Dr Zeigler compares Chana with Ruth in this regard. Both are supremely dedicated and sacrifice their personal connection to their children to allow the children to actualize their true potential and serve the Jewish nation.³⁹

Ruth had unwavering loyalty to Naomi. She even became a foreigner in a strange land, leaving her sister and lifestyle behind, just to be with Naomi. Ruth's dedication was further shown when she took the initiative to collect grain from the parts of the field left for the poor⁴⁰ to provide for herself and Naomi.

Ruth continued providing for Naomi despite the lads working on Boaz's field dehumanising her. We know this because when Boaz tells her not to gather wheat from another field, he adds that he has put special protection on Ruth – the men are not to molest her,⁴¹ which suggests that

³⁸ Rashi on Bamidbar 13:3

³⁹ <https://www.etzion.org.il/sites/default/files/17Ruth2eRuthandHannah.doc>

⁴⁰ Ruth 2:2

⁴¹ Ruth 2:9

this was their normal course of action. Therefore, before Boaz stopped it, Ruth and the other women in the field were most likely made to feel wretched and disempowered. Despite this, she never gave up her commitment to provide for Naomi.

Ruth also appears to be socially isolated as a foreigner, especially a Moabite one.⁴² When Boaz asks the lads about Ruth, they respond that she is the Moabite girl who came back with Naomi,⁴³ showing that she is constantly perceived as a foreigner. Furthermore, she is linked to Naomi, who is known to be bitter.⁴⁴ Therefore, others would hesitate to befriend Ruth out of fear of being associated with her depressed image. Also, we can see she is used to being abused by her response to Boaz's kindness: "Why are you so kind as to single me out when I am a foreigner?"⁴⁵ The surprise she displays at being treated kindly reveals that she is not usually treated as such, due to being categorised as a lower class than the rest of the people of Beit Lechem.

Following Naomi's instructions, Ruth acts to convince Boaz to marry her, while risking potential further humiliation.⁴⁶ Once they do marry, she has a son, Obed. Ruth immediately gives him over to Naomi to raise, and

⁴² Since Moab had a law against the men intermarrying with Jewish women, due to not helping the Jews out in the Midbar, coming from Moab would have probably meant additional stereotypes and isolation.

⁴³ Ruth 2:6

⁴⁴ Ruth 1:20

⁴⁵ Ruth 2:10

⁴⁶ Ruth 3:1-7 (To convince Boaz to marry Ruth, Naomi instructs Ruth to dress herself up and once he has laid down to sleep, uncover his feet and lay by them.)

Naomi becomes his foster mother.⁴⁷ Through this act, she provides Naomi with financial and social security. Again, this shows the lengths to which she will go to fulfil her commitment to Naomi.

Additionally, Ruth gave up Obed out of her recognition that Obed was a continuation of the lineage of Naomi's family.⁴⁸ Compromising her connection with her child to let Naomi raise him helped Obed achieve his full potential. She willingly weakened her own motherly bond and relationship with her child, prioritising the legacy of her deceased husband and the Jewish people's need of her child. This is similar to Chana giving up her bond with Shmuel to ensure the future of *Bnei Yisrael*.

We can learn determination and dedication from the way in which both Chana and Ruth did not let social isolation deter them from their goal, but rather strengthened their resolve to ensure that it was carried out. Moreover, we see the personal sacrifices these mothers made out of their recognition that their children were not born for them, but rather for the Jewish people as a whole and for a specific divine destiny.

Unswerving commitment and the ability to forgo legitimate personal needs for the sake of the larger whole are both powerful feminine traits *and* fundamental to kingship (which is categorised as a feminine trait). Therefore, both the children of Chana and Naomi bring about the

⁴⁷ Ruth 4:17

⁴⁸ Ruth 2:20

eventual coronation of David as king. Shmuel anoints David,⁴⁹ from whom all future kings come, and David is a direct descendant of Obed.⁵⁰

In conclusion, the narratives of these powerful women in *Tanach* provide us with valuable lessons and insights into the variety of possibilities our femininity uniquely affords to contribute to Jewish destiny. Despite facing obstacles and adversity, these women demonstrate intelligence, wisdom, bravery, leadership, self-sacrifice and the initiative to take action when no one else will.

Avigail, Miriam, the Jewish women of Egypt, Chuldah, Serach, the Woman of Thebez, Yael, Chana, and Ruth serve as role models, showing us the importance of using our words wisely, rebuking with sensitivity, and taking action to prevent sin. They teach us that women can have deep halachic insight, hold positions of power, and be leaders and teachers of both men and women. These women also demonstrate the power and holiness of femininity, even in the midst of acting in roles traditionally associated with masculinity. Through their stories, we learn the importance of not limiting ourselves or others based on gender stereotypes while preserving the unique and powerful qualities inherent in our femininity. The examples set by these women are applicable to our lives today, reminding us of the strength, wisdom, and potential that lies within each of us.

⁴⁹ Shmuel I 16:13

⁵⁰ Ruth 4:22

Nevuah- Anyone Listening?

Leora Schramm

If a person was told a message from *Hashem*, would the person listen and follow the message? The answer would be yes, intuitively. If one was able to clearly understand *Hashem*'s will, then their path in life would be clear. So, if this is true, why do *Bnei Yisroel* in so many cases not listen to the *nevi'im* when they give over a *nevuah* they receive directly from *Hashem*? To understand this, we must get a clear comprehension of *nevuah* and look at different cases where *Bnei Yisroel* received *nevuah*.

Nevuah is a gift that *Hashem* gave our ancestors to be able to communicate with Him and understand His will better. It is ultimately up to *Hashem* to decide whether He will choose to bestow *nevuah* onto a person. The people who receive this *nevuah* are called *nevi'im*. Rambam⁵¹ explains the specific requirements for a person to become a *navi*. A *navi* must be a person who is wise, strong both physically and mentally, and one who acknowledges all comes from *Hashem*. They must train their thoughts to focus on spirituality and *Hashem*'s holiness lest they stray to thoughts of meaninglessness and trivial vanities. At the time of receiving *nevuah*, a *navi* must concentrate on spiritual thoughts, be secluded, and joyous. When a *navi* receives *nevuah*, they are put into a state where they lose control of their senses. Their bodies tremble and they find themselves physically weak, as seen with Daniel, who lost all

⁵¹ Mishneh Torah Yesodei Hatorah 7

of his strength whilst receiving *nevuah*.⁵² This is to ensure that their mind will be able to comprehend what they are about to see. Rambam continues to explain that one becomes a different person when struck with *nevuah*.

There are different levels of *nevuah*, depending on who the *navi* is and the situation the *navi* is in when receiving the *nevuah*. *Nevuah* is given through a vision or a dream using metaphorical imagery and allegories.⁵³ However, even within this, we see the different levels of *nevuah*. We see that even Bilaam, a wicked man who attempted to destroy *Bnei Yisroel*, was granted *nevuah*. Rashi tells us there that *nevuah* that is received by the *nevi'im* of the other nations will only ever be at night through a dream, as was also the case with Lavan.⁵⁴ This shows us that even when *resha'im* do receive communication from *Hashem*, this communication is limited, which in turn shows how there are different levels of *nevuah* for different *nevi'im*. Nevertheless, a *navi* will always know the interpretation of the *nevuah* that they receive; there are some times when they will give over the imagery they witness, and there are others when they will give just the interpretation. However, this doesn't apply in the context of Moshe. *Hashem* specifically mentions that although visions and dreams are the normal way that He will use to communicate with *nevi'im*, Moshe is the

⁵² Daniel 10:8

⁵³ Bamidbar 12:6

⁵⁴ Rashi on Bamidbar 22:8

exception. To Moshe, *Hashem* will speak clearly without riddles, as one does with a friend.⁵⁵

There are many different functions of *nevuah*, mainly having to do with an event in the future. It could be for a warning, for example when Yirmiyahu was warned of a war against *Bnei Yisroel* and was told not to worry, for *Hashem* would be with them.⁵⁶ A *nevuah* can also foretell miracles, such as Yehoshua telling the *Kohanim* to go into the *Yarden* because it will stop for them.⁵⁷ A *navi* may also rebuke, and warn of a punishment that *Hashem* will carry out – such as Shmuel telling Eli that *Hashem* was unhappy with his family, and therefore they will be cursed.⁵⁸ A *navi* may also give a specific message to a king, like when Shmuel told Shaul that *Hashem* commands him to wipe out all of Amalek.⁵⁹ There are also times when a *navi* receives *nevuah* to be given over to other nations, as is the case with Yona who was sent to warn Ninvei.

The first case of *nevuah* is with Adam, the first man alive. *Hashem* speaks with him, giving him *mitzvot* to fulfill. Continuing on through many generations, *Hashem* remains in communication with His creations. As mentioned above, there are many examples in *Tanach* where a *navi* receives a *nevuah* and tells it over, and at times the one receiving the *nevuah* will disregard the message. This is quite serious, since *nevuah* is a message from *Hashem* and by ignoring it one is deciding that the way

⁵⁵ Shemot 33:11/Bamidbar 12:7

⁵⁶ Yirmiyahu Chapter 1

⁵⁷ Yehoshua 3:8

⁵⁸ Shmuel Alef 3:18

⁵⁹ Shmuel Alef 15:2

that they think is the ultimate truth rather than what *Hashem* says. *Bnei Yisroel* appear to have a hard time listening to a *navi*; and it seems that only rarely do they listen to a *nevuah* from *Hashem*.

The question is, why do they struggle to listen? It should seem like the obvious thing to do, especially since the outcome of not listening usually results in conflict and destruction. There are *pesukim* in *Tanach* where *Bnei Yisroel* are rebuked for not listening to a *navi* who had been sent to them by *Hashem* to tell them a message. For example, in *Yirmiyahu* it says, וְשַׁלַּח יְהוָה יְקוּקֵם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עַבְדָּיו הַנְּבִיאִים הַשִּׁבְעִים וְשָׁלַח וְלֹא שָׁמְעֶתֶם וְלֹא־הִשְׁתַּתְּמֶתְם אֵת־וְשַׁלַּח יְהוָה יְקוּקֵם אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עַבְדָּיו הַנְּבִיאִים הַשִּׁבְעִים וְשָׁלַח וְלֹא שָׁמְעֶתֶם וְלֹא־הִשְׁתַּתְּמֶתְם אֵת־ (Yirmiyahu 7:26) – ‘and the Lord constantly sent all His servants the prophets to you, but you would not listen or incline your ears to hear.’⁶⁰ Also, it is important to add that *nevuah* was only around until the beginning of the second *Beit Hamikdash*. Some of the last *nevi'im* were Chaggai, Zecharia and Malachi, and when they departed, *nevuah* left with them.⁶¹ Zecharia rebukes *Bnei Yisroel*, saying that their fathers didn't listen to *nevi'im*,⁶² drawing a contrast between the painful deaths of *Bnei Yisroel's* ancestors and the natural deaths of the *nevi'im* who had prophesied the events of the exile that led to these deaths, thus proving that the words of the *nevi'im* were true.⁶³

There may be different factors involved in the reason why *Bnei Yisroel* don't listen to the *nevi'im*, one being the topic the *nevi'im* speak about,

⁶⁰ Yirmiyahu 25:4

⁶¹ Talmud Yoma 9b:16

⁶² Zecharia 1:5

⁶³ Rashi on Zecharia 1:5

another perhaps being the context of what is going on around them, for example, war. In order to understand the different factors, the examples of *Bnei Yisroel* receiving a *nevuah* and how they dealt with it will be divided into different categories. In category one, we will have when *Bnei Yisroel* doesn't listen outright. In category two, we will have when *Bnei Yisroel* listens at first and looks as if they will do something but ultimately don't, and lastly, we will have when *Bnei Yisroel* actually do listen.

The first set of examples includes different times when *nevi'im* would tell over a *nevuah* but *Bnei Yisroel* don't listen in the slightest. Yirmiyahu tells over many of his *nevuot* to *Bnei Yisroel*; some are warnings of what may happen if *Bnei Yisroel* keep going astray from *Hashem*, and some are pleas for them to come back to *Hashem*. Unfortunately, *Bnei Yisroel* don't listen at all.⁶⁴ There are even cases where they punish Yirmiyahu for relaying his *nevuah*. When Pashur the *Kohen* hears the *nevuah* of Yirmiyahu he has him hit and put into prison.⁶⁵ Another time when Yirmiyahu shares his *nevuah*, *kohanim* and false *nevi'im* want to kill him outright.⁶⁶ Amos also struggled when relaying his *nevuah*. When Amos was giving over his *nevuah* about the destruction that will take place in Israel, no one responded with *teshuvah*. Instead, Amatzya the *Kohen* told him to leave and “make his living” prophesying elsewhere.⁶⁷ The phenomenon of not listening to messages from *Hashem* is seen in the

⁶⁴ Yirmiyahu 25:4-6

⁶⁵ Yirmiyahu 20:2

⁶⁶ Yirmiyahu 26:8

⁶⁷ Amos 7:12

Torah as well, for example in the beginning of *Parshat Vaerah* where Moshe tries to tell *Bnei Yisroel* the message that *Hashem* has sent him with, but no one would lend an ear to listen.⁶⁸

To understand the reasons why *Bnei Yisroel* didn't listen to *nevi'im* at these times, we must understand what was going on at that time and what kind of message the *navi* was trying to convey. Both in times when life was hard and in times when it was pleasant for *Bnei Yisroel*, they didn't listen to *nevuah*. In all of the examples except the one with Moshe, *Bnei Yisroel* were sinning and not following the Torah way. In the times of Yirmiyahu, *Bnei Yisroel* had many immoral kings and false *nevi'im*. These factors made it hard for *Bnei Yisroel* to listen to the *nevuah* of Yirmiyahu which told them to stop sinning. Their king, the person whom they should look up to and follow, was not a model character, and there were also *neviei sheker* who promised that everything was going to be alright for them. Taking this into account, it's not surprising that they wouldn't listen to Yirmiyahu who only foretold a tragic future if they decided to not change. Additionally, in the times of Amos the country was stable and flourishing. Everyone was living a nice life and despite the fact that they served *avodah zarah* and didn't keep Torah values, the destruction of Israel was unfathomable – although there is room to wonder if they ever considered Yirmiyahu or Amos's word to have some truth to them.

⁶⁸ Shemot 6:9

The answer may be that they most likely did entertain the idea. It is clear that they did believe in spiritual beings since they served *avodah zarah*, and *Hashem* had punished them in the past for going astray,⁶⁹ though they didn't care about a future punishment, either because they were having too much fun doing whatever they wanted unconstrained by "the rules" of the Torah, or because they were all in it together – if their neighbors and even their king were doing something wrong, then they wouldn't want to go against the flow. This mob mentality made them not want to change or consider possible consequences.

This is why the Torah teaches us the importance of surrounding yourself with good people, lest you do the opposite and be affected by them (*'oy lrasha v'oy leshechano*⁷⁰). In the case of Moshe, *Bnei Yisroel* couldn't physically listen to him. Many *meforshim*, like the Ramban and the Ibn Ezra, say that a spirit of unrest from being in exile for so long was on *Bnei Yisroel* and it caused them to be unable to listen to what Moshe said. Also, they were tasked so hard with intensified labor that they had no time to listen to Moshe. This is why the Torah tells us that there is a time and place to talk to people, and you should never try to rebuke a person

⁶⁹ As seen in *Shoftim* of the continuous cycle of *Bnei Yisroel* sinning and Hashem sending nations to conquer them.

⁷⁰ *Negaim* 12:6

if they are not going to listen, because your words will just be falling on deaf ears and nothing will change.⁷¹

The next set of examples are times when *Bnei Yisroel* started to listen to the *nevuah* but didn't end up following through. One example is when Moshe told the *Zekanim* that *Hashem* sent him to come and take everyone out of *Mitzrayim*. The *Zekanim* believed Moshe after seeing the signs but along the way to meet Pharaoh they slipped away one by one,⁷² thus not following through with the *nevuah* that was presented. Also, when *Bnei Yisroel* were leaving *Mitzrayim* and encountered the *Yam Suf*, they broke down and stopped believing in what Moshe had told them. Although they cried out to *Hashem*, they questioned Moshe, *Hashem's* messenger, and his purposes in taking them out of *Mitzrayim*.⁷³ They had gone through all the *makkot* and were on their way out, but before they could fully leave, completing the *nevuah* of them leaving *Mitzrayim*, they ignored the *nevuah's* triumphant ending and believed that they would die.

We see a similar occurrence in the example of Devorah's *nevuah* to Barak. She told him that he would be granted victory as long as he marched up against Sisra. Hearing this, Barak said that he would only do this if Devorah came with him. Devorah agreed, but the caveat was that the true victory would come through a woman's hand.⁷⁴ This example fits best under this category; Barak was told a *nevuah* but he didn't listen

⁷¹ Biur Halacha to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 608:2

⁷² Rashi to Shemot 5:1

⁷³ Shemot 14:10-11

⁷⁴ Shoftim 4:8

to it fully. Instead, he added his own conditions to it, changing the *nevuah*. A similar thing is true of Shmuel's *nevuah* for Shaul that we mentioned earlier. Shmuel told Shaul that *Hashem* had commanded him to wipe out all of Amalek: men, women, children, and animals. Despite Shaul winning the war and destroying the majority of Amalek, he left the king of Amalek alive, as well as some of the animals. This is another example of listening to *nevuah* in the beginning but not carrying through with it.

We also see many instances of this in *Sefer Shoftim*. The whole of *Shoftim* is a cycle of *Bnei Yisroel* sinning, getting punished, a *shofet* coming with a message from *Hashem* explaining how to get out of their dire situation, and *Bnei Yisroel* actually getting out of the situation only to sin once again after the *shofet* dies. They pay heed to the warnings for as long as the *shofet* lives; afterwards they go back and sin against *Hashem*.⁷⁵

These examples are quite interesting, because in all of them we see indecision going on. In the first three examples, the ones receiving the *nevuah* stop listening when they are faced with confrontation. Fear of confrontation is a very human characteristic, and it is perhaps an understandable reaction in these situations. When the *Zekanim* were on their way to face Pharaoh they backed out, scared of confronting the ruler of their oppression. Also, seeing the whole army of *Mitzrayim* coming toward them by the *Yam Suf* instilled enough fear in *Bnei Yisroel* that the thought of confronting them was worse than the thought of being

⁷⁵ Shoftim 4-6

oppressed slaves back in *Mitzrayim*. Similarly, Barak feared confrontation with Sisra's army. Abarbanel explains that Barak requested Devorah to come in order to strengthen the hearts of *Bnei Yisroel* because they were frightened of Sisra and his army.⁷⁶ This fear of confrontation stemmed from a lack of *emunah* in *Hashem*. *Hashem* promised something, but fear made them lose their trust in *Hashem* that the promise could actually become reality. Shaul's cause for not listening fully was due to another kind of fear, the fear of what *Bnei Yisroel* would think of him. He fell into the mob mentality described earlier and used it to justify defying *Hashem's* command to wipe out all of Amalek. Lastly, in the case of the whole *Sefer Shoftim*, *Bnei Yisroel* neglected *nevi'im's* warnings because of the passing of time which led to a forgetfulness of the past. Once each *shofet* dies, *Bnei Yisroel* start to sin again because they believe they aren't being held accountable.

This is similar to a child who has been rebuked for doing something wrong only to be found doing it again. The child misbehaves not because he forgets the fact that he got slapped on the wrist, but because he forgets the correlation between the pain and the misbehavior. Also, if the supervisor leaves the room, the representation of consequence also leaves and the child forgets about the threat of punishment entirely and does as he pleases. Likewise, when the *shofet* would die, *Bnei Yisroel* lost that reminder of consequence and would regress into sinful behavior. This is

⁷⁶ Abarbanel to Shoftim 4:8

why it is so important to remember what is right and wrong and act accordingly, lest one has to be reminded in an unpleasant manner.

The last set of examples are times when *Bnei Yisroel* actually do listen to the *navi's* words. One of the few cases where *Bnei Yisroel* as a whole acknowledges a *navi's* words and listens entirely is in the case of Chaggai's *nevuah*. Although many were in exile, when Chaggai got the *nevuah* to rebuild the *Beit Hamikdash*, all of *Bnei Yisroel* who were present, including the *Kohen Gadol*, took heed to complete the task of rebuilding.⁷⁷ Natan the *navi* gave a *nevuah* over to Dovid that told Dovid that although he would not build the *Beit Hamikdash*, his son would⁷⁸. Later when Dovid tells his son Shlomo that *Hashem* commands Shlomo to build it,⁷⁹ Shlomo fulfilled this *nevuah* and built the *Beit Hamikdash* during his rule. Similarly, one of Elisha's *nevuot* was also listened to. When the three kings approached him before their war against *Moav*, they believed they would be defeated, but Elisha's *nevuah* showed victory.⁸⁰ Following the *nevuah* the three kings attacked and were met with success and triumph.

These examples are important to understand, because understanding them can be a key to understanding how to act in a way that ensures that people will listen. What did the *nevi'im* do in these contexts, or, what was the situation that made the people receiving *nevuah* so open to hearing

⁷⁷ Chaggai 1:12

⁷⁸ Shmuel Bet 7:5

⁷⁹ Divrei Hayamim Alef 22:10

⁸⁰ Melachim Bet 3:15

what was being said? In the first two examples, the time period that the *nevi'im* were speaking was a time of rebuilding. Both talked about building the *Beit Hamikdash*, a symbol of holiness and pride for *Bnei Yisroel*. Also, including the last example with Elisha, these *nevuot* told of positive news and not rebuke. They foretold good things to come. In the case of Elisha's *nevuah*, the kings had no choice but to listen to the *nevuah* since the other option was death by *Moav*'s hands. What made this threat different from the previous *nevi'im* who foretold punishment was that this was an immediate tangible threat. Also, here, there were only three people receiving the *nevuah*, so a mob mentality could not be formed as it could when there were so many more people defying one *navi*. They asked for the *nevuah*, putting themselves into a situation where they had no choice but to listen, and the news that they received was of victory, making them want to believe it, even if they had doubts. This is a good tip for getting people to listen to you: focus on the positive and put them in a situation where they need to listen to you and cannot be distracted. Also, when you speak, make them want to hear what you have to say.

Yona was told to give over a *nevuah* to Ninvei warning them to stop sinning or else they would face destruction. Despite Yona's pushback when he tells over his *nevuah* to the people in Ninvei, they discontinued their evil ways. Ninvei weren't *Hashem*'s chosen nation, but they still listened to *Hashem*'s messenger. The question is simple: how did they listen when *Bnei Yisroel* found it so hard to? There is a *midrash* that answers this; it claims that the leader of Ninvei was Pharaoh from the

Yetziat Mitzrayim story.⁸¹ Upon hearing Yona's *nevuah* he knew the consequences right away and decided to change the whole city, lest he be punished. However, this answer has some flaws. *Bnei Yisroel* had gotten punished in the past severely for not heeding the words of a *navi*, and, as mentioned above, are constantly being reminded to listen. Furthermore, *Bnei Yisroel* were also in *Mitzrayim*, so they had witnessed *Hashem's* wrath just as Pharaoh did. The answer may be that the people of Ninvei listened because they did not have the same commandments that *Bnei Yisroel* did. Whilst *Bnei Yisroel* must run their life according to the Torah, the people in Ninvei didn't have the Torah, only the *Sheva Mitzvot Bnei Noach*. With more commandments, it becomes harder to manage them all and stick to each one, and the fact that they are obligatory makes one want to rebel against them more. For this reason, *Bnei Yisroel* struggled on many more ends than Ninvei and therefore, they found it harder to listen to *nevi'im* compared to other nations.

Nevuah was a vital tool in the days of the *nevi'im* in order to communicate with *Hashem* and ensure that His will was done. Although there are many times when *nevuah's* message was not heeded, we can still learn from *nevuah*. We can implement lessons from it into our lives to ensure that we don't fall into the same traps as our past. Although in today's day and age we have lost *nevuah*, we have something similar on a lower scale: *Ruach Hakodesh*. *Ruach Hakodesh* is a way to get spiritual hints as to what *Hashem* wants in this world. Many say that through *Ruach*

⁸¹ Pirke D'Rabbi Eliezer 43

Hakodesh parents name their babies, they are able to glimpse the essence of the child and give a name that can become their identity. In *Yoel*,⁸² Yoel has a *nevuah* for the future that everyone will be gifted with *nevuah*. This could be incredible because then no one will question *nevuah* since everyone will be able to communicate with *Hashem*. *Im Yirtzeh Hashem*, those days shall come soon!

⁸² Yoel 3:1

Esther: The Undercover Queen

Rikki Issler

Esther's position as the wife of King Achashverosh is one that in many ways emphasizes her powerlessness. The *pasuk* tells us that Achashverosh 'loved Esther more than all the [other] women'¹ and for this reason he crowned her, and 'made her queen instead of Vashti.'² These words show us the extent of Esther's lack of agency. All the actions that result in her becoming queen are performed by Achashverosh, implying that Esther is a passive participant in the matter. Yet in spite of this, Esther manages to capitalize on her position to alter history. By astutely using her beauty, charm, political intelligence, and willingness to put herself at risk, Esther saves the Jewish people, brings about the downfall of their enemy, and elevates them to the highest position in the kingdom.

We might think that Esther was fearless from the outset, but this is not the case. When Esther first learned of Haman's plot and its threat to the Jews, her reaction was one of helplessness. On pain of death she could not approach the king without being summoned, and the king had not summoned her in 30 days, opening the possibility that she had fallen out of favor.³ However, upon Mordechai's insistence, she resolved to do what she could to save her people, saying, 'I will go to the king, though

¹ Esther 2:18

² Ibid

³ Esther 4:11

it is against the law.⁴ The formerly passive Esther had become a woman of action and a role model for present day women.

Esther's Spiritual DNA

From where did Esther derive this heroic strength? Above all, Esther drew upon the spiritual inheritance she received from her ancestors. Rav Dessler in *Michtav M'Eliyahu* (אלקט pg 278) discusses the concept of spiritual DNA. He tells us that the Jewish people's innate ability to sacrifice ourselves was imprinted in our spiritual psyche by the actions of Avraham Avinu. We see this in many instances, most powerfully in his willingness to sacrifice his son at the *Akeida*. The *pasuk* reports that Avraham 'arose early in the morning and saddled his donkey,'⁵ actions which, according to Rashi and many commentaries, demonstrate his eagerness to fulfill Hashem's command in spite of the fact that this meant that he would lose the son who had been projected to perpetuate his legacy.⁶

Yitzchak's own willingness to submit to the *Aikeida* shows how Avraham's legacy had already been passed down. Yitzchak ultimately survived and passed on this legacy to his children, who pass it on to theirs, perpetuating a spiritual chain of supreme sacrifice and devotion that continues to our own day. According to Rav Dessler, these are the *zechus avos* that make us who and what we are. They provide the fundamental

⁴ Esther 4:16

⁵ Bereishis 22:3

⁶ Ibid, Rashi

building blocks of our spiritual personality both nationally and individually.

Beyond this general willingness to sacrifice self exhibited by Esther, we see that she also inherited the specific trait of *tznius* from her ancestors - specifically Rachel Imeinu and King Shaul - an understanding of when to reveal, and, most importantly, of when to conceal. It is interesting to note that Rachel is described as “יפת תואר ויפת מראה”⁷ whilst in the description of Shaul (her descendant) we hear that “אין איש מבני ישראל טוב ממנו”.⁸ The *Gemara* explains this to mean that Shaul was extremely handsome to look upon.⁹ Esther herself is also described as beautiful, using almost identical terminology to that used in *Chumash* to describe the beauty of Rachel – יפת תואר וטובת מראה.¹⁰ Perhaps this suggests a symmetry between action and appearance, that in all three of these individuals not only was *tznius* inherited but also a specific form of beauty.

In *Tanach*, Rachel’s sacrifice highlights her *tznius*, and this combination of sacrifice and *tznius* is a combination that we see in Esther as well. The *Gemara* tells us that Rachel knew that her father Lavan was a trickster and therefore she and Yaakov prepared signs for under the *chuppah* to be certain of each other’s identity.¹¹ The signs were supposed to serve as

⁷ Bereishis, 29:17

⁸ Shmuel I 9:2

⁹ Brachos 48b

¹⁰ Esther 2:7

¹¹ Bava Basra 123a

proof for the fact that Yaakov was indeed marrying Rachel. Yet when it came to the event, Rachel gave them to Leah to protect her from embarrassment. The *pasuk* says ‘When morning came, there was Leah,’¹² showing how when Yaakov arose the day after his wedding, he discovered that he was married to Leah and not to Rachel. Clearly, Rachel had not informed Yaakov that she gave the signs away to Leah.

In fact, we see from further on in the *parsha* that Rachel had not even informed Leah of this! Leah said to Rachel, ‘Is it not enough that you took my husband, and now you want to take my son’s *duda'im* as well?’¹³ Leah accuses Rachel of taking her husband, because Rachel had married Yaakov after Leah. She had no idea that it was Rachel that arranged for her to be married to Yaakov. Rachel made the choice not to tell Leah what she had done for her in order to ensure that Leah would not be embarrassed, showing her trait of *tznius*.¹⁴

The *Midrash* comments ‘This one lost and the other one lost, this one was rewarded and the other one was rewarded.’¹⁵ Leah lost the *duda'im* and was rewarded with tribes; Rachel lost burial and was rewarded with the birthright of *Moshiach*. Leah’s ‘loss’ here would not have been considered a loss had she known about Rachel’s sacrifice, showing us once again that Leah had no idea that she was never meant to marry

¹² Bereishis 29:25

¹³ Bereishis 30:15

¹⁴ Bava Basra 123a

¹⁵ Bereishis Rabbah 72:3

Yaakov and therefore she thought that it was Rachel who was taking Yaakov away from her, rather than the other way round.

The *Gemara* tells us that because Rachel sacrificed to save her sister from embarrassment, she merited that Shaul, the first Jewish king, descended from her.¹⁶ Shaul inherited Rachel's trait of *tznius*. This is evident from the outset of his kingship. After Shmuel told Shaul that he would be the next king, he met his uncle. When his uncle questioned him about what Shmuel had said, Shaul responded that Shmuel had told him that his father's missing donkeys had been found.¹⁷ Rashi comments here that this is because Shaul had the innate trait of *tznius*. This trait, which we see in Rachel and in her descendant Shaul, is one that Esther also possessed, because she descended from Rachel and also had this ancestors' spiritual DNA.

Hiddenness in Megillas Esther

Throughout *Megillas Esther*, there seems to be a theme of hiddenness. The root of Esther's name means 'to hide' and despite the fact that we know the Megillah as '*Megillas Esther*,' the name Esther is not mentioned until the second chapter of the text. Even there, Esther is identified as Hadassah - it is only later that she is fully linked to the name Esther.¹⁸ 'Esther' is hidden from the beginning of the Megillah. Hashem's name is also absent, in this case for the entirety of the Megillah. Hashem's presence is only hinted at - the *Gemara* states that

¹⁶ Megillah 13b

¹⁷ Shmuel I 10:16

¹⁸ Esther 2:7

whenever the Megillah uses the word ‘*melech*,’ it is referring to Hashem, who is the King of kings.¹⁹ This shows that Hashem’s involvement in the Purim story is also something that is hidden. It is this hiddenness which is key to the events that the Megillah describes. Had Hashem’s Presence been obvious to the Jews at the time, perhaps they would have felt secure and not done the full *teshuvah* which ultimately saved them from Haman.

In our own lives, Hashem is hidden by the natural functioning of the world, and one of the obligations that we have is to search for Him in the mundane aspects of our lives. The Purim story is described as a *נס נסתר* – a hidden miracle progressing without any obvious violations of the natural order. This idea links back to Esther’s *tznius*. Esther hid her nationality from Achashverosh - the Megillah explicitly states that *לא גילה* *מולדתה*,²⁰ Esther did not reveal her people and her birthplace,²⁰ which was crucial to Esther’s success against Haman. This phrase in the Megillah echoes the statement in *Shmuel I* about Shaul not telling his uncle about his kingship – *ואת דבר המלכות לא הגיד לו*.²¹ Once again the text emphasized how Esther’s *tznius* directly parallels the *tznius* of her ancestors. Esther understands when something should not be revealed, just as Rachel did with Leah, and just as Shaul shows with his uncle.

In her book on Esther, Erica Brown argues that Esther’s secrecy increased her sense of mystique which in turn made her more appealing

¹⁹ Megillah 15b

²⁰ Esther 2:10

²¹ Shmuel I 10:16

to Achashverosh.²² This is another angle on how Esther was able to utilize her hiddenness to serve her when she needed it. Being an orphan, Esther lacked the sense of security that comes with family identity. In any case, Mordechai didn't want Esther to reveal to Achashverosh that she was actually of royal descent,²³ because he was concerned that if Achashverosh knew that she came from royalty he would take her as a wife. But this was exactly what made her appealing! Achashverosh liked the fact that she had no identity, because it made him all the more powerful. Since he didn't know who she really was there was no issue with her being any more wealthy and powerful than he was. It was this which ultimately led to Esther becoming a heroine and savior of the Jewish people.

Brocha Rests Where Things are Hidden

The Purim story revolves around the hidden, and this hiddenness leads to salvation. This can be seen as an example of the *Gemara's* general statement that *brocha* only rests where things are hidden.²⁴ The difference that Esther made to the world took place inside the palace, rather than via protesting against Haman in the streets. The significance of hiddenness can also be seen in the *Kodesh Hakodashim* – a place that could only be entered by the *Kohen Gadol*, and even that only once a year. Even though the Jews knew the order of the *Kohen Gadol's* service and the precise date and time when he was in there, it was all performed

²² Erica Brown, *Esther: Power, Fate and Fragility in Exile*

²³ Esther 2:10

²⁴ Taanis 8b

privately. Only because it was so hidden could this service atone for the entire nation.²⁵ Both with regard to the Yom Kippur service and the efforts of Esther, we see that the privacy of actions only seems to strengthen their public impact. This hiddenness and its power also applies to mitzvos. We might not know the meaning behind every *mitzvah* but we can still appreciate their profound importance to our relationship with Hashem. In fact, the *chukim*, the mitzvot we understand the least are the most powerful.

Esther kept quiet about her lineage when revealing it was without purpose. This knowing the importance of not speaking was also key to her strategy of inviting Haman and Achashverosh to two private feasts. At the first feast she requested only one thing from Achashverosh – that he and Haman return for a second feast.²⁶ Why did she not reveal the threat to her life at the first feast? Esther had a problem. Haman was a useful minister. Esther was a beloved wife. Who would Achashverosh side with when Esther revealed she was a Jew and therefore subject to the plan of slaughter devised by Haman and enthusiastically endorsed by Achashverosh?

By keeping quiet at the first feast, she built up jealousy in Achashverosh toward Haman – this was why Esther also invited Haman to her private party. This helped tip the scales. But there was a moment when it was crucial that she divulge her ancestry. When Achashverosh was at the

²⁵ Peninei Halacha 7:4

²⁶ Esther 5:8

height of his jealousy and she revealed that she was a Jew and therefore under threat from Haman she orchestrated Achashverosh's fury and the salvation of her people.

Public vs. Private

Tznius, remaining private, is a noble trait. But there are times when it is inappropriate and counter productive - when being open or public is called for. The true value of *tznius* can only be realized in someone who knows the difference between the two. Esther was such a person. Esther knew when to put herself out there and when to be private in her interactions with Achashverosh, understanding when to keep quiet and when to speak up, when to be hidden and when to reveal herself.

We see this in Esther's greatest sacrifice. Esther was actually married to Mordechai.²⁷ She could hope to return to Mordechai so long as she never initiated any relationship with Achashverosh – that is, remained *tzanua*. When Mordechai told her to go to Achashverosh to try and save the Jews, not only was she putting her life at risk, if she lived she would forever be forbidden to return to Mordechai, for she approached Achashverosh of her own volition.

Regardless, Esther went against her innate character of *tznius* and privacy in order to save the Jewish people. Edith Eger writes in her book *The Gift* that 'The worst circumstances give you the opportunity to discover inner resources that help you to survive.' This idea is something that Esther

²⁷ Rashi to Esther 2:7

exemplified. She was thrown into a horrible situation from which she chose to risk her life to save her people, moving forward with the declaration, ‘If I will perish, I will perish.’²⁸ She was aware of the risks in her actions and she nevertheless chose to act, even when she was unsure if she would be successful.

Here Esther demonstrated that her adherence to *tznius* was not an obsession or out of weakness of character. She could be public when it was appropriate and had the wisdom to distinguish when it was called for.

Esther and Us

One of the many things we learn from Esther is that ‘Courage... is a choice we make every day, it is present in each breath we take and we can learn this courage from our parents, our mentors, our ancestors, and from our darkest moments in life.’²⁹ Esther’s bravery did not happen in a vacuum. There were times when she was afraid to act, and when she needed Mordechai to remind her of how vital her role was. Yet she accessed her courage and bravery in a way that reflected the actions of her ancestors. Her *tznius* and her understanding of how and when to use information were inherited from Rachel and Shaul; her sacrifices mirror those of Rachel and Avraham. Even with the strengths she inherited, she still needed to make the choice to use it. To relate this to us, it is important to note that when we pull out the ‘*zechus avos* card,’ we are not asking

²⁸ Esther 4:16

²⁹ Dr. Edith Eva Eager, *The Choice: Escaping the Past and Embracing the Possible*

for favoritism or special treatment from G-d. We are reminding Him and ourselves that it is worthwhile for G-d to grant us another chance because who we are and what we are is a combination of the ‘spiritual genetics’ of our *Avos* and *Imahos*. Investing in us is an investment in the basic strengths and goodness that we inherited from our ancestors, ancestors like Esther, who quietly made enormous sacrifices to ensure the continuity of her people.

Shema: The Greatest Unifier

An in-depth analysis of why Shema is so powerful.

Avigail Ahuva Sokol (Shana Bet)

Throughout history, the Jewish people have shared few things in common with each other. Whereas other nations are joined by a shared land, language, or history, the Jewish people fracture all the usual molds. Although Israel has been a desired homeland for millennia, most of the Jewish people's existence has been in exile; never living on common soil. Across this time, we have spoken different languages as well, widening the gaps that our separation has created. Having been scattered across the diaspora of foreign countries we have not experienced the same history.

Excluding all the traditional bindings of a nation, what we do have in common may be transcendent of all other glue. For millennia, the first words of education given to our children have been the words of the *Shema*. In fact, the paragraph of the *Shema* includes the words ‘*v’shinantam l’vanecha,*’¹ the instruction to teach the words that Hashem has commanded to our children. *Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokaynu, Hashem Echad.*² These words are spoken by all Jews twice a day – when our soul is returned to us in the morning and when we think our last thoughts before bed. They are also spoken in finality before one passes away. Clearly, the *Shema* is not a trivial expression of feelings but a

¹ Devarim 6:7

² Devarim 6:4

central and vital backbone of our faith, a prayer that contracts acceptance and commitment to the one God who is undivided. For thousands of years, the Jewish people have wandered the earth as strangers in lands that do not belong to them. Where no other nation could survive under those conditions, the Jews have shared the *Shema*, clinging to their roots as they do so. The power of this foundational *passuk* does not come from the technicalities of its words but rather from the live assertion of the Jewish people's undying devotion to *Hashem*, an assertion which is made anew each time the verse is stated.

We place our right hands over our eyes every morning and recite the *Shema*, a passage in Jewish history which is perhaps paramount to all others. We must first break down the words into their most straightforward translation to understand this sentence. *Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokaynu, Hashem Echad, Listen Israel, Hashem is our God; Hashem is One.* The very beginning of this *passuk* features the command to 'listen', but who is listening? Back in the times of our forefathers, the moment arose when Yaakov gathered his sons³ to share the details of the end of all time.⁴ The Midrash explains that he opened his mouth to profess his knowledge when his words failed him; he had forgotten what he had set out to say.⁵ Yaakov grew tremendously afraid of the possibility that his children did not merit knowing such information; maybe they were not as committed to *Hashem* as he had thought. In line with this

³ Bereishit 49

⁴ Bereishit Rabbah 96:1

⁵ Pesachim 56a

midrash, it would appear that the *shevatim* that waited in his presence understood his doubts and reassured him with the words of Shema. They said to their father, Yaakov, “Listen, Yisroel, Hashem is our God just like He is your God; Hashem is One.” At this point in history, the *shevatim* were making a proclamation. They told their father that they were just as committed to *Hashem* as he was!

The first time we see the prayer of the *Shema* written in the Torah explicitly is later on, in Sefer Devarim,⁶ as part of the speech that forms Moshe’s final address to the Jews. Moshe has led the Jews from slavery to freedom, and the fact that he states these words here is significant. Moshe, leader of the Jews, responsible in many ways for the connection that the Jews have with God, tells them that their God is One. And these words are words that the Jewish people have taken up as a mantra.

Every time we say *Shema*, we restate the words spoken by our ancestors, and in doing so we reclaim them as our own. We are committed to *Hashem* just like our forefathers before us. Every Jew across the globe who whispers these words day and night is united in their commitment to *Hashem* under the names of their parents and grandparents. The Jewish people may be distant and scattered, but they hold the same mantra close to their souls. This shared declaration unites the people in a like-minded worldview. The Jewish people will forever look at the world as

⁶ Devarim 6:4

monotheists who understand that God controls everything that their eyes behold.

But the words of *Shema* are not just an intellectual statement; the *Shema* is not just a concept to know; it is not just an idea that we mouth only at times of prayer and forget as we go about our day. In truth, these words are practical words of our dedication to fulfill *Hashem's* mission on this earth.

When the Jewish people proclaim the statements of *Shema* each day, they commit not only their minds and understandings but also their actions. *Am Yisroel* is a nation that accepts the unique mission of bringing the *Malchut* of *Hashem* down to Earth. This concept is called *Kabbalat Ol Malchut Shamayim*, which means accepting the yoke of God's Kingdom. To fully conceptualize what this means for us, we must glance at the words of the *Shema* themselves for guidance.

In the text of the Torah scroll, the letter *aiyin* at the end of the word '*Shema*' and the letter *daled* at the end of the word '*Echad*' are both larger than the surrounding letters. These two letters together form the word '*eid*' which means 'witness'.⁷ This word is emphasized because we are the only beings on earth that can witness God's Kingdom, with the ability to perform *Hashem's* commandments. When the Jewish people perform God's will on earth, we bind the heavens overhead with the place of blinding physicality below. This action brings God's Kingdom down to

⁷ Avudraham, Seder Tefillot Yemei Chol

the place where it did not exist before. The merging of Heaven and Earth is what we mean when we say we are *mekabel ol Malchut Shamayim*, and it is the promise to do this that we make to God in *Shema*.

The Jewish people wake each morning and proclaim anew that they, too, will take part in the commitment to *Hashem*. They will dedicate their lives, day by day, to accepting the yoke of *Hashem's* Kingdom. It seems that this joint mission ties the Jewish people together in a way that is so much stronger than any shared language. Our people work for one purpose, which we remember daily in *Shema*.

The strength of this prayer goes deeper than just a proclamation of dedication; it reaches past our hands and our minds into an even stronger place. The prayer commands us to love God with all the faculties in our possession, hearts, souls, and abilities.⁸ Herein lies a central part of our commitment to *Hashem*, a promise to love Him in a way that permeates all aspects of our lives. When a husband and wife share a strong love for each other, though they may not always be together, they never forget one another. One may enjoy something and automatically think to share it with their spouse despite not being with them because although they are distant, the thought of their spouse constantly sits below their active consciousness, easily retrievable and forever present. This is the kind of love that the Jews are told to have for God.

⁸ Devarim 6:5

The *Shema* says that we should love God, ‘*b’shivticha b’vatecha uv’lechticha baderech,*’⁹ when you sit at home and when you go on the way. When we are at home, it is easy to remember God; we have our shuls and our places of study that ground us and remind us what our purpose is as *Hashem*'s people. True love is tested when we are not in our comfort zones; how will we act when we don't have God clearly visible? At work or school, we are commanded to keep *Hashem* in a place of our minds that never truly fades. The Jewish people proclaim every day that they will love God in this all-encompassing way. By saying *Shema*, the Jew not only commits his mind and dedicates his actions, but he does so from the love of his heart. Every day the Jewish people across the globe express devotion to *Hashem* through the common source of their immense *ahava*. This unites the Jewish people in a way that penetrates further than the mind – into the heart and soul.

The Jewish people still do not share many things. Our food is diverse, our cultures clash, and customs vary. Despite this, across all sects of Judaism, the *Shema* is said twice a day, every day. *Shema Yisroel, Hashem Elokaynu, Hashem Echad*. These words, professed by Jews across all lands, proclaim the unifying string that is a central part of the Jewish identity, their loving commitment to *Hashem*. A promise to look at the world through the lens of the Almighty. A vow to spend every moment on the mission of God. An assurance to do all the former from a place of love. The Jews have never needed the things that other nations

⁹ Devarim 6:7

live off. A land can never establish its nationality. A language can never define them. Jews do not require a unified history to know their story. The Jews will be the Jews for as long as the people continue to live and die by the words of *Shema*.

Yehoshua: Transition and Transmission

Sara Landau (Alumna 5782)

Moshe's greatness was unique: the Torah tells us that 'never again has there risen a prophet like Moshe.'¹ Rambam's "Thirteen Principles of Faith" includes this principle – that there will never be a prophet like Moshe after him, nor was there one like him before him. Its inclusion as part of the core elements of Judaism shows just how vital Moshe's leadership was to our entire faith, particularly with the implication that he is irreplaceable.

In *Sifrei Bamidbar* we are told that 'The face of Moshe was like the face of the sun, and the face of Yehoshua was like the face of the moon.'² In line with this view, Yehoshua could not have been on the same level as Moshe. Crucially, however, this *midrash* depicts Yehoshua as great – a point which is often missed in its analysis because it is in comparison to Moshe. This piece sets out to show Yehoshua's greatness, and the ways in which he did measure up to Moshe, whilst also showing the ways in which he ultimately fell short.

From the outset, Yehoshua's greatness as a leader is shown in the way in which he leads the people after Moshe's death. This task is one that would have been difficult for any person, leading a nation that would have been reeling from the death of their beloved leader – Rashi says that the Jews

¹ Deuteronomy 34:10

² Sifrei Bamidbar 104:2

had said that if they were to see Moshe ascending the mountain on which he would die, they would prevent him from doing so,³ an idea which shows clearly how indispensable Moshe was to the Jews.

Aside from the pain of Moshe's death, there were two additional losses that occurred at around the same time: the *mann* that had sustained the Jews in the desert ended,⁴ and, according to the Talmud in *Masechet Terumah*, 3,000 *halachot* were forgotten upon his death.⁵ Both of these losses would have accentuated the pain of Moshe's death because of their nature as additional losses, and their potential practical ramifications would also have increased the difficulty of leadership, for any leader.

What makes Yehoshua's leadership even more remarkable is that he would have been mourning the loss of Moshe on a personal level as well, having been Moshe's 'attendant from his youth.'⁶ Yet he tells the people '*chizku v'imtzu*,⁷ meaning 'be strong and resolute,' in an echo of Moshe's words.⁸ This phraseology is invoked from the outset⁹ of *Sefer Yehoshua*, and continues to the extent that it almost becomes a mantra within the text. The context in which Moshe initially says these words is significant – it is as he begins his farewell to the Jews before his death, telling them '*Hashem* has said to me, 'you shall not cross the Jordan'...

³ Deuteronomy 32:48

⁴ Joshua 5:12

⁵ Terumah 16a

⁶ Numbers 11:28

⁷ Joshua 10:25

⁸ Deuteronomy 31:6

⁹ As early as Joshua 1:6

but Yehoshua is the one who crosses before you... be strong and resolute.¹⁰ This is important on two levels. First, Moshe has used these words in conjunction with Yehoshua's leadership, essentially informing the people that he is a worthy leader for them and that he is destined to be leading them, which affirms Yehoshua's position as Moshe's successor. Second, the fact that these words were spoken by Moshe means that when Yehoshua uses them to talk to the people, he is positioning himself as Moshe's successor. Even without the context, the imperative form of the words means that they function as encouragement. Yet with context, they emphasise Yehoshua's own strength and resoluteness, showing how he boosted the morale of the people, exhorting them to continue in the way that Moshe had guided them.

However, there are times in *Sefer Yehoshua* where Yehoshua acts in a way that he is criticised for, suggesting that in spite of his great leadership, he (like any human), had shortcomings. One such instance is in the covenant he makes with the *Givonim*. The *Givonim*, fearing defeat by *Bnei Yisrael*, pre-empt their attack by disguising themselves as sojourners, leading Yehoshua to seal a covenant with them 'to let them live.'¹¹ The Ralbag asserts that the juxtaposition of the mention of 'the word of *Hashem*'¹² with the description of the covenant is an implied rebuke to Yehoshua, who should have inquired of the word of *Hashem* before acting.¹³ However, the *Me'am Loetz* suggests that the phrase 'the

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 31:2-6

¹¹ Joshua 9:15

¹² Joshua 9:14

¹³ Cited in Artscroll, Joshua 9

leaders of the assembly swore to [the *Givonim*],¹⁴ implies that Yehoshua himself did not swear to them because he wanted the leeway to withdraw from the covenant in the event that the *Givonim* were lying.¹⁵ Whilst this does in some ways vindicate Yehoshua from the criticism, it can also become a further criticism of him in line with the Ralbag's assertion, as it suggests that Yehoshua was cognizant of the fact that the *Givonim* may not have been telling the truth, but nevertheless chose not to consult *Hashem*. Moreover, *Midrash Tanchuma* states that the *Givonim* had attempted to join *Bnei Yisrael* in Moshe's days, but Moshe had turned them away,¹⁶ meaning that Yehoshua's flaw here is even more problematic in that he had a precedent of how to act, but did not follow through.

An attempt to argue that Yehoshua holds less blame for his actions because the *Givonim* were disguised and therefore he could not have known the truth is discredited by the source of the *midrash*: the *Midrash* derives the fact that the *Givonim* attempted to trick Moshe as well from the phrase 'they also acted with cunning,'¹⁷ drawing on the fact that the word 'also' implies a previous instance. This equaliser suggests that Yehoshua should have acted in the way that Moshe did, because of the strong similarities between the instances.

¹⁴ Joshua 9:15

¹⁵ Cited in Artscroll, Joshua 9

¹⁶ Midrash Tanchuma, Nitzavim 2

¹⁷ Joshua 9:4

Likewise, there is a phrase in *Sefer Yehoshua* which many commentators extrapolate as a criticism of Yehoshua. The *passuk* says that Yehoshua ‘fought with [Canaanite] kings for a long time.’¹⁸ Taking these words at face value, this seems to be a point in Yehoshua’s favour, demonstrating his determination and persistence in the battles to reclaim the land. However, *Bamidbar Rabbah* explains that *Hashem* had assured Yehoshua that he would not die until after the land had been apportioned, and Yehoshua therefore prolonged the battle in the land in order to live longer.

The *Midrash* draws a sharp contrast between the attitudes of Yehoshua and Moshe. In *Sefer Bamidbar*, Moshe is instructed to ‘Take vengeance for *Bnei Yisrael* on the *Midyanim*; and afterwards you will die [lit. be gathered into your people].’¹⁹ In spite of the explicit association made between battling the *Midyanim* and his death, Moshe immediately took action. Yehoshua, on the other hand, deliberately lengthened his battles in order to lengthen his life. The *Midrash* continues by noting that for this reason, Yehoshua’s life was shortened by ten years, so that instead of dying at 120 years of age like Moshe did, Yehoshua only lived until 110, an idea which both Rashi and Radak cite. What is notable about this criticism is that it is steeped in the context of Moshe.

The *Midrash* specifically notes the problematic nature of Yehoshua’s action here by contrasting it with Moshe’s. This means that just as with

¹⁸ Joshua 11:18

¹⁹ Numbers 31:2

the *Givonim*, where Yehoshua had a precedent from Moshe but did not follow it, the extent of his shortcoming here is highlighted by its contrast with Moshe's actions. However, the Maharzu defends Yehoshua, reconciling the discrepancy between his actions and his concern as the Jewish people's leader by arguing that Yehoshua stretched out the battle because he knew that the Jews would not sin as long as he was alive.²⁰ Nevertheless, he concedes that Yehoshua still needed to be punished, because he did not have the right to substitute his judgement for *Hashem's*.

This idea is echoed in the story of Chizkiyahu, a righteous king of the Kingdom of Yehudah, who is told by Yeshaya, 'You are going to die, for you shall not live.'²¹ The Talmud in *Masechet Brachot* questions the seemingly redundant wording here, and explains that the first part of the phrase refers to his physical death, and the second, to his spiritual death, the reason for which is because he did not have children.²² The Talmud continues by noting that Chizkiyahu's intentions were righteous and he chose not to have children because he knew that they were destined to be wicked. Even so, this was not a reason for him to act in denial of a positive commandment. In both the story of Chizkiyahu and that of Yehoshua, it is clear that the action was being driven by noble intent. Nevertheless, a presumption that one's judgement can override God's, even for the noblest of intentions, merits criticism.

²⁰ Cited in Artscroll, Joshua 11

²¹ Kings II 20:1

²² Berachot 10a

Despite the issues outlined above, there are several similar miraculous instances in both Yehoshua and Moshe's leadership, suggesting that Yehoshua's leadership did hold a similar merit to Moshe's. Perhaps the most striking one is that of the splitting of a body of water. When the water split on the seventh day after *Yetziat Mitzrayim*, the water 'was a wall for them,'²³ and similarly, as Yehoshua assisted *Bnei Yisrael* in their crossing into the Land, the waters of the *Yarden* 'stood still and rose up in one wall,'²⁴ so that 'in the middle of the *Yarden*, all of Israel [were] crossing on dry land,'²⁵ just as with *Kriat Yam Suf*, where the Jews 'went on dry land in the midst of sea.'²⁶ The similarities between the events are unmissable, not just in the nature of the events but in the way they are described. According to *Metzudat David* (and others), the two parts of the *passuk* in Tehillim, '*hayom ra'ah vayonos, hayarden yisov le'ochor*,'²⁷ meaning 'the sea saw and fled, the *Yarden* turned backwards,' refers to both of these events.

The significance of this *passuk* is that its words strengthen the already strong link between the two events, by juxtaposing them. Likewise, the Talmud in *Masechet Brachot* makes a link between the events, noting that the places in which both occurred are places in which a person must make a blessing.²⁸ The connections in both Tehillim and Talmud suggest that the similarity between the events goes deeper than the event itself; it

²³ Exodus 14:29

²⁴ Joshua 3:16

²⁵ Joshua 3:17

²⁶ Exodus 14:29

²⁷ Psalms 114:3

²⁸ Berachot 54a

is the miraculous nature of the events that link them together, highlighting Yehoshua's greatness by showing its similarities to Moshe's. The Talmud also tells us that the hailstones from the Ten Plagues remained suspended until Yehoshua's conquest of Azekah, at which point '*Hashem* cast down great stones... onto Azekah.'²⁹ According to the Talmud, the 'stones' spoken of here are the hailstones from the days of Moshe.³⁰ This opinion is particularly notable because it illustrates Yehoshua's greatness as an extension of Moshe's, showing how Yehoshua's merit was sufficient to bring down an aspect of the miracles performed for Moshe.

Similarly, *Sefer Yehoshua* writes that 'the sun stood still and the moon stopped,'³¹ and the Talmud tells us that Moshe, too, stopped the sun.³² However, this example is different from those outlined above, because this one draws on a miracle stated explicitly regarding Yehoshua and then notes that it happened to Moshe, whereas the other two miracles have explicit biblical descriptions which show that they had happened to Moshe. Nevertheless, the words underscore another similarity between the miracles that occurred in both leaderships.

The description of the sun stopping is followed with a narrative interjection that 'there was no day like that, before or after it,'³³ which echoes the description before the plague of locusts, where *Hashem* tells

²⁹ Joshua 10:11

³⁰ Berachot 54b

³¹ Joshua 10:13

³² Taanit 20a

³³ Joshua 10:14

Moshe that ‘before it, there have never been locusts like it, and after it, there will not be like it.’³⁴ However, this statement is problematic because in *Sefer Yoel*, the *navi* uses almost identical language to describe the locust plague there, noting that ‘nothing like it has ever happened, and nothing like it shall ever happen again.’³⁵ Rashi ultimately reconciles this difficulty by explaining that the verses refer to different species in the respective plagues.³⁶ With this in mind, it is clear that despite the fact that the miracle of the sun stopping was not the first of its kind, and the fact that the plague of locusts was not the last of its kind, both Moshe and Yehoshua were granted miracles with a unique dimension that was specific to the miracle given to them at that time.

Furthermore, there is a clear implication from the outset of *Sefer Yehoshua* that Yehoshua’s leadership brings a dimension of completion to that of Moshe’s by continuing and at times reinstating parts of it. Rabbeinu Bachya notes that there are four expressions pertaining to the Jewish redemption from Egypt – ‘I will take out,’³⁷ ‘I will save,’³⁸ ‘I will redeem,’³⁹ and ‘I will take.’⁴⁰ However, there is an additional opinion that there is another expression of redemption in this set of verses, the expression ‘I will bring,’⁴¹ which refers to the final stage of redemption,

³⁴ Exodus 10:14

³⁵ Joel 2:2

³⁶ Exodus 10:14

³⁷ Exodus 6:6

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Exodus 6:7

⁴¹ Exodus 6:8

bringing the people into *Eretz Yisrael*. In line with this opinion, it can be said that Moshe is the leader during the first four stages of redemption, whilst Yehoshua is responsible for the last stage; *Hashem* tells him at the start of *Sefer Yehoshua* that he is to ‘apportion’⁴² the land to the people. This is in many ways the task that completes Moshe’s leadership, but it is the task that he could not do. Likewise, the Talmud in *Masechet Bava Batra* states the opinion that Yehoshua wrote the last eight *pessukim* of the Torah after Moshe died.⁴³

Moshe’s leadership is almost synonymous with Torah; the idea of Yehoshua completing parts of the Torah suggests that he brings a certain completion to Moshe’s leadership. Similarly, two major national events in the text – national *brit milah*, and the bringing of the *Korban Pesach* – can be seen as a continuation of Moshe’s leadership in the fact that according to most opinions, these events were the first of their kind since the days of Moshe. The Talmud in *Masechet Yevamot* cites an opinion that the Jews had not undergone circumcision during their years in the desert because the healing north wind did not blow for them,⁴⁴ and Radak notes that the fact that they had not performed this *mitzvah* was not held against them.⁴⁵ Rashi translates the word ‘*sheinis*’⁴⁶ that is used here as ‘a second time,’ noting that this was the second national circumcision; the first was in the days of Moshe. This link is strong enough in itself,

⁴² Joshua 1:6

⁴³ Bava Batra 15a

⁴⁴ Yevamot 72a

⁴⁵ Cited in Artscroll, Joshua 5

⁴⁶ Joshua 5:2

but it is strengthened with *Hashem*'s words to Yehoshua after the *milah*: 'Today, I have rolled away the shame of *Mitzrayim* from upon you.'⁴⁷

Rashi explains that the *Eiruv Rav* had been taunting the *Bnei Yisrael* about *Mitzrayim*'s assertion that there were astrological signs suggesting that their blood would be spilled in the desert. This had been a source of shame for the Jews throughout their travels, but the event of *milah* here was in fact that spilling of blood that the signs had alluded to. Thus, with the national circumcision, a national disgrace that had been problematic in Moshe's day was removed. Similarly, Rashi explains that the Jews only offered the *Korban Pesach* once in the desert, and this was in the first year after they left Egypt.⁴⁸ In line with this view, Yehoshua once again leads an event that had its precedents as a national event led by Moshe, years earlier.

Yehoshua's continuation of Moshe's leadership took place not only on a national level, but also on an individual level, shown through two episodes in which Yehoshua acts according to a specific ruling that Moshe has made. The first is in which Calev approaches Yehoshua and reminds him that Moshe had said that Calev would be given 'the land on which he set foot,'⁴⁹ when he had gone to spy out the land. Yehoshua responds with a blessing; the *passuk* tells us that he then 'gave Chevron to Calev... as a heritage.'⁵⁰ The direct narrative style of this exchange

⁴⁷ Joshua 5:9

⁴⁸ Numbers 9:1

⁴⁹ Deuteronomy 1:36

⁵⁰ Joshua 14:13

demonstrates the efficiency with which Yehoshua acted upon Calev's claim. He was dividing the land into a staggering number of allotments, ensuring that each family had a portion, and the story here of Calev shows how within this he made sure that a promise that Moshe had made was fulfilled.

Similarly, the daughters of Tzelafchod approached Yehoshua and told him that '*Hashem* commanded Moshe to give us a heritage among our family.'⁵¹ At the time they had beseeched Moshe to allow them a portion of land, questioning why 'our father's name should be lost because he has no son.'⁵² The *Midrash* comments that Tzelofchad's daughters initially asked the question to their chief of ten (i.e. the 'lowest' rank in Moshe's judgement system, a leader over ten people), but the response was that a judgement regarding inheritance should be made by someone greater; they went to their chief of fifty and the response was the same. This continued until the question reached Moshe, at which point he declared that there is One Who is greater than him, and so he asked *Hashem*, who responded by ruling that Tzelofchad's daughters were indeed deserving of a portion of land.⁵³

The consultation with *Hashem* reflects Moshe's care for the individual, in that according to the view of this *midrash*, Moshe was capable of answering their question, but considered it important enough to bring before *Hashem*. This care for the individual is a part of Moshe's legacy

⁵¹ Joshua 17:4

⁵² Numbers 27:4

⁵³ Bamidbar Rabbah 21:12

that Yehoshua perpetuates. In the same *passuk* that Tzelofchad's daughters bring their claim, we learn that 'Yehoshua gave them... a heritage.'⁵⁴ As was the case with Calev, Yehoshua does not hesitate to act for an individual (here, a small group of individuals) when they approach him with reminders of what Moshe had said. Like Moshe, Yehoshua is a leader both for the nation and for the individual, and he shows this by acting on rulings that Moshe, a leader for the nation and individual, has made.

Throughout *Sefer Yehoshua*, Yehoshua's adherence to Moshe's instruction is evidenced through the language of the text. This is seen in phrases like 'there was not a word in all that Moshe had commanded Yehoshua that Yehoshua did not read'⁵⁵ and 'as Moshe had commanded Yehoshua, so Yehoshua did; he did not miss a thing from all that *Hashem* had commanded Moshe.'⁵⁶ In both of these phrases, the extent of Yehoshua's devotion to Moshe's instruction is emphasised by the exclusionary nature of the negatives in the statements, which makes the statement stronger than it would have been had the *passuk* simply written that Yehoshua followed Moshe's instruction. The negative functions to add specificity to the statement and to make it one that connotes Yehoshua's full obedience here.

Similarly, *Sefer Yehoshua* uses comparatives throughout the narrative to highlight the fact that Yehoshua commanded respect in the same way that

⁵⁴ Joshua 17:4

⁵⁵ Joshua 8:35

⁵⁶ Joshua 11:15

Moshe had. Early in the text, the people tell Yehoshua that ‘just as we listened to Moshe, so we will listen to you.’⁵⁷ The syntax here is significant as it means that the initial emphasis is placed on Moshe even though the sentence is addressed to Yehoshua. This means that the sentence stresses the act of listening rather than the act of listening to Yehoshua, which in turn implies a commitment to Yehoshua’s leadership regardless of its state. Indeed, the *passuk* states that ‘the people revered him as they did Moshe,’⁵⁸ with the comparative illustrating the extent of their reverence for him, as well as showing the fact that he commanded respect in the same way that Moshe had.

Perhaps the ultimate confirmation of Yehoshua being a fitting successor to Moshe is shown near the end of *Sefer Yehoshua*. At the end of *Sefer Devarim*, Moshe is called ‘servant of *Hashem*,’⁵⁹ and at the start of *Sefer Yehoshua*, *Hashem* refers to Moshe as ‘My servant,’⁶⁰ a reference that seems to imply exclusivity and uniqueness by showing that *Hashem* specifically considers Moshe His servant. Throughout the text, there are approximately eighteen references to Moshe as being the servant of *Hashem*, which reinforces the idea that this role is one that is specific to Moshe, because it becomes almost a title attached to his name.

At the end of *Sefer Yehoshua*, the *passuk* says that ‘Yehoshua, **servant of Hashem**, died.’⁶¹ It is not a coincidence that the title bestowed upon

⁵⁷ Joshua 1:17

⁵⁸ Joshua 4:14

⁵⁹ Deuteronomy 34:5

⁶⁰ Joshua 1:2

⁶¹ Joshua 24:29

Yehoshua is the one which has been identified with Moshe throughout the text. Rather, it is a confirmation of how much Yehoshua continually strove to emulate Moshe. Throughout the text, there is a proliferation of the root ‘k.u.m,’ meaning ‘to arise’, and I would suggest that part of the textual significance of the phrase is to create a constant lexis of moving upwards, reflecting the way that Yehoshua rose to the challenge of leadership, ultimately becoming worthy of being called ‘servant of *Hashem*.’

It's hard to write a conclusion to this article when I know that there is so much more to be said. There are so many sources, ideas, and connections that I want to add to this article, and I know that even these are just a minuscule sampling of what exists in the vast world of Scriptural commentary. But perhaps that says it all. At the beginning of *Sefer Yehoshua*, *Hashem* tells Yehoshua that ‘the book of this Torah should not be removed from your mouth’⁶²; ie. it should always be close to you. There are varying opinions about the meaning of the words that are written after this, but one opinion in the Talmud interprets it as ‘you should toil in [the Torah] day and night.’⁶³ Toiling in something implies working hard, putting in consistent effort, exerting oneself and continuing to do so even in the face of difficulty.

Learning Torah is hard, and to be toiling in it means that a person is pushing themselves to focus on understanding it. This does not mean that

⁶² Joshua 1:8

⁶³ Sanhedrin 99b

one should force oneself to learn something that they don't enjoy; the Talmud in *Avodah Zarah* says that a person should learn what they are naturally drawn to.⁶⁴ The word '*Torah*' has a very broad meaning and includes many things beyond the Hebrew text (all of which are encompassed in the text). Yet even within that, it's important to know that, yes, *Torah* learning is hard! But if you learn what you love, finding the thing that makes you come alive, then the toiling becomes a part of the enjoyment.

The *Mishnah* writes that 'Moshe received the *Torah* from *Sinai*, and passed it to Yehoshua; Yehoshua to the *zekainim*, the *zekainim* to the *neviim*, and the *neviim* to the *Anshei Knesses Hagedolah*,⁶⁵ an unbroken chain stretching from *Har Sinai* through both Moshe and Yehoshua and those who came after them. Every word we learn is a part of that chain, and as we learn, we forge another link in that chain, strengthening it so that it can continue forever. But it is not only the words themselves that form the chain. The chain is imbued with lessons from those who came before us.

Yehoshua's greatness, the way in which he continued Moshe's legacy at a time when both he and the nation he was imparting it to were devastated by the loss of Moshe, is a greatness that all of us can learn from, and it is a greatness that was vital in ensuring that there was a link in the chain between Moshe and the future of the Jewish people. It is a greatness that

⁶⁴ *Avodah Zarah* 19a

⁶⁵ *Pirkei Avot* 1:1

seems to reveal itself most clearly in the face of unimaginable pain; a greatness that may have always been present, but which shows most at a time of adversity; it is a greatness characterised by summoning inner fortitude to persevere, even and especially when it is hardest. It is this greatness which we can draw on to shape the way that we learn Torah and the way that we live our lives. It is the greatness contained in what perhaps we may term the ‘rallying call’ of *Sefer Yehoshua*: it is the greatness of *chazak v’ematz*.

Tzniut and Dat Yehudit: Is Tzniut Subjective?

Rabbi Anthony Manning

Over the course of the Talmudic discussion in *Masechet Ketubot*, the principle of *dat Yehudit* was developed into a central platform for the application of *tzniut* in the public domain. Understanding the subtleties and nuances of *dat Yehudit* will therefore be key to understanding *tzniut*, and will help us to counter many of the misconceptions and frustrations with the *halachot* of *tzniut* as they are often incorrectly framed.

Dat Yehudit represents the local customs of *tzniut* of Jewish women in a given community. These may pertain to clothing, behavior, or activities, and they should be communicated by women to other women through role-modeling within a social context. *Dat Yehudit* covers all the myriad questions that people often raise about normative *tzniut*, such as types of head covering, length and styles of sheitels, color and styles of clothing, slits in skirts, the length and styles of arm and leg coverings, tights, socks, closed/open shoes.¹¹ It may include when and whether women should give a lecture in front of men, or in what circumstances it is appropriate for men to teach women. In some communities, especially Chassidic communities with more defined gender roles, it may cover the extent to which men and women are comfortable speaking and interacting with the opposite gender. The comments of Rashi and the Rambam are crucial.

Dat Yehudit is based largely on local norms and customs, *minhag*, and there can be no comprehensive list in any book that sets out every aspect

of *tzniut* in the thousands of diverse Jewish communities over many millennia. This structure reflects the genius of the halachic system and also the roots of its misinterpretation. People tend to look for clear guidelines, lists, pictures, and “kosher signs” for *tzniut* as they would for the kashrut of fish! This is deeply a broad *dat Yehudit*. In other communities, the local *minhagim* are far more rigid. Colors and styles may be strictly limited and sometimes women (and men) are effectively following a dress code. In some communities there is broad tolerance on certain issues (eg. colors and styles), but strict compliance with others (eg. wearing tights). There will almost always be different expressions of *dat Yehudit* in various situations – different norms will often apply in the workplace, at a wedding, in a supermarket, or at the beach.

As with all *minhag*-based systems, it can paint a detailed and varied picture, giving rise to complex social norms. This is both the strength of *dat Yehudit* and the source of its nuance and sophistication.

Most importantly, the norms and sensitivities of *dat Yehudit* should, ultimately, be determined by the women in that community who are halachically committed and mindful of *tzniut*. Clearly, on issues of objective halachic *p’sak*, the rav of the community must always lead and not follow. This will often also be true in terms of halachic guidance, where the rav and/or rebbetzin should be proactive in steering the community and giving them *chizuk* in maintaining their halachic standards.

However, the *dat Yehudit* of the community should not be decided or dictated by some kind of “*va’ad*” (whether appointed or self-appointed), but organically and subtly through the behavior of the women in that community who are conscious of the relevant sensitivities of *tzniut* and the importance of dignity.

Dat Yehudit, Minhag and Change

How does *dat Yehudit* change? The answer to this lies in understanding how any *minhag Yisrael* changes. As we will see below, *dat Yehudit*, as with *minhag* more generally, falls into the category of “*torat imecha*,” the so called “teaching of the mothers.” This expression does not imply that it necessarily comes from women, but it reminds us that in any society, legal system, profession, or practice, there are formal rules legislated by authority figures or institutions, and informal guidance as to how to actually run the society or do the job well. *Mishlei* calls the former “*mussar avicha*”; it should be clear-cut, unambiguous, easily identified, and precisely defined. By contrast, *torat imecha* is often ambiguous, subtle, amorphous, and far more difficult to pin down. It does not follow predictable algorithms. Ultimately, it is this type of subtle and nuanced guidance that imparts the texture and color and determines the effectiveness of any system.

Every experienced lawyer and doctor will confirm, that although they learned an enormous amount of essential information at law/medical school, what made them a better lawyer or doctor was the practical guidance they learned from other professionals; by watching their

reactions and their body-language, and by tuning into their innate sense of how to do the job well.

In Torah, the clear halachic structures of *mussar avicha* are guided and enriched by the softer-textured customs of *minhag* and *torat imecha*. While the former is defined as official *p'sak* by Rabbinic authorities, the latter are developed and gently fashioned by the community. Most Jewish communities still have clear *minhagim*, especially for the running of their synagogue services, although the power and centrality of *minhag* has declined significantly over the last 150 years as communities have dissolved, merged, and converged.

Minhag develops and evolves, but not in a rough or punctuated way. If someone stands up during a prayer service and announces their intention to change the *shul minhag*, they will quickly be shouted down. Communities are defensive of their *minhagim*, which often anchor them to previous generations and preserve a tangible sense of *mesorah* – tradition – or more accurately, transmission. *Minhagim* do change but their growth is usually slow, unselfconscious, organic, and imperceptible. If watched through a time-lapse video, one might see the development of *minhagim* over years and decades, but no one person can be the spontaneous catalyst for sudden change.

Translating this into *dat Yehudit*, it is very clear from the “time-lapse” perspective that styles, fashions, and customs change within communities. Even in highly conformist societies, such as Meah Shearim

and Geulah in Jerusalem, the dress styles and customs of women have changed over time. If one woman chose to wear or do something radically different to the others, this would be rejected as a breach of *dat Yehudit*. Rather, individual women subtly move the boundaries in ways that may raise an eyebrow but would not be considered to be *over al dat*, in breach of *dat Yehudit*. Over time, others follow, style and norms change, and the *minhag* evolves.

In this way, *dat Yehudit* follows the pattern of all *minhag Yisrael*. Each generation of the Jewish People strives to differentiate itself from the last as it yearns for novelty and change. We say in davening “*Chadesh yameinu*” – make our times new. But, as Jews, all novelty must be rooted in authenticity. Our journey to a new life must come through *teshuvah*, return; it must somehow take us back to a time of better connection, “*Chadesh yameinu k'kedem*” – make our times new, as they were before.

Dat Yehudit is no different. As long as it develops within a framework of authenticity – guided by the halachic system and in the context of a community committed to safeguarding that system – its development will be positive.

The expression *minhag* is also sometimes misleading. People often associate it with a lower level of obligation, visualizing a descending scale from *d'Orayta* to *d'Rabbanan* to *minhag*. Such classifications are often misleading. The expression *minhag* can sometimes be used colloquially to refer to non-binding matters of personal choice (“Our

minhag is to daven at Rabbi Cohen's shul"). However, in the halachic system, *minhag* has a special status and often punches above its weight.

First, *minhag* may be simply another formulation of Rabbinic law, which can take the form of *gezeirah*, *takanah*, or *minhag*. For instance, the laws of *Yom Tov Sheni* outside Israel are formulated within the rubric of *minhag*. This does not in any way diminish their status as Rabbinic law, but it does affect their halachic applications. We will see a similar impact for the halachic principles of *dat Yehudit*.

Second, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that if a person, family, or community adopts a certain practice as a *minhag*, this can become directly binding on them (potentially on a Torah level) as a *neder*, a vow. This can even happen where nothing was expressed verbally. The de facto acceptance of a certain practice can constitute a vow, and we are careful to avoid this, even in questionable situations, due to the serious consequences of breaking a *neder*. Once a *minhag* has the status of a vow, it takes on significant halachic weight.

Added to this is the quasi-prophetic status of the collective actions of a committed Jewish community. As the *Gemara* states, "*Im ein neviim hein, b'nei neviim hein*" – even if they are not prophets, they are almost prophets. As such, the collective subconscious and mimetic practice of a Jewish community must always be taken seriously. It becomes the intuitive and organic *Torat imecha*, as contrasted with the more structured and systematic legal system of *mussar avicha*.

This sensitivity to intuitive *halacha*, taken together with the potential halachic status of *minhag* as a *neder*, and also the exhortation of the *Mishnah* in *Avot*, “Do not separate yourself from the community,” gives *dat Yehudit* its significance and status in halacha. It also reinforces what we said above – *dat Yehudit* must come from the collective practice of the women of the community and not from the regulations of a local committee.

***Dat Yehudit* is not a “*Chumra*”**

Dat Yehudit is binding on its community in the same way as any other area of halacha. It is not a *chumra* – a stringency or act of piety – but a baseline halachic requirement for everyone in that community. On the other hand, someone living in a different community, with a different *dat Yehudit*, will have no obligation to dress or act in that way, because it is simply not their *minhag*.

For example, in most Yeshivish communities there is usually a very clear *dat Yehudit* to wear tights. For a woman who identifies with that community, this is a binding halachic requirement, and not a stringency. However, for a woman living in a different community where there is no such *dat Yehudit*, wearing tights may be optional. If she chooses not to wear them, she is not in breach of any *halacha*, and should not be seen in any way as less “religious” or “*frum*.” This dynamic may of course change when she visits other communities and we address this below.

***Dat Yehudit* for Men?**

Although *dat Yehudit* was introduced by *Chazal* in the context of the dress and behavior of women,³³ and how this affects their entitlement to a ketubah, it is quite possible that this concept also applies to men. In fact, we can clearly see the daily application of *dat Yehudit* in the world of men as different communities adopt variant customs (often without written sources) as to how men should dress and behave in the public arena. In the Yeshivish community, this is usually quite visible.

For example, should men wear white shirts, or can they wear blue or pink? Are jackets and hats required in the street? Are short-sleeves considered a lack of *tzniut*? May a man swim in a (men-only) public pool bare-chested or should he wear a t-shirt? Are shorts considered *tzanua* for a man (and does it depend on what type of shorts)? Is it considered *tzanua* for a man, and even the rabbi, to go jogging in sweatpants, or mountain biking in shorts? In some communities it may be a disgrace for the rabbi to act in this way. In others, it would be seen as admirable, and perhaps set a great example for the community!

One interesting historic example of the evolution of *dat Yehudit* for men is the phenomenon of wearing pants and short jackets. Until 150 years ago it was considered inappropriate in most Jewish communities for a man to dress in this way. Instead, Jewish men wore a long gabardine overcoat, buttoned at the front so as to obscure the shape of the body. As Jews began to adopt the Western European style of pants and short jackets, this slowly became the accepted *dat Yehudit* even for Eastern European Jews. Only the Chassidim retained the earlier style of dress and

maintain this as their *dat Yehudit* to this day. In today's world, it is completely standard for non-Chassidic Orthodox men to wear a short jacket and pants, and most people would be surprised to hear that this was ever different. This example is an illustration of three important principles that we have been discussing, (1) that there is *dat Yehudit* for men; (2) that this *dat Yehudit* evolves over time; and (3) that this evolution can sometimes result in a style that is more revealing of the body than in past generations.

The principle of *dat Yehudit* is one that is not only of halachic import, as this article has shown, but also of hashkafic significance, teaching us the centrality of nuance in our observance of Judaism. The recognition of the role that context plays in *dat Yehudit* is one that serves us well in many other areas of Judaism. *Dat Yehudit* reminds us there are different types of halacha. Many halachic details are objective, applying equally in most contexts and circumstances. But some, like *dat Yeudhit*, are more subjective and dependent on local custom and practice. In such cases, rather than assuming that a halachic precept is a clear cut matter, we must take the time to understand the basis of the halacha, and its implications for the day and age in which we are studying it.

This excerpt (with footnotes deleted) is from Chapter 5 of “Reclaiming Dignity – a Guide to Tzniut for Men and Women” by Rabbi Anthony Manning & Bracha Poliakoff (Mosaica, 2023)

www.reclaimingdignity.com

If I forget you, Jerusalem...

Mrs. Miriam Tannenbaum

”פרזות תשב ירושלים מרב אדם ובהמה בתוכה”¹

“{In the future}, Jerusalem will expand to allow for the many people and animals in it”

As a people, our dreams of redemption encompass so many things, but central to them is the return to Jerusalem. We anticipate and long for the complete rebuilding of Jerusalem in the *amidah* prayer three times each day, dedicating the blessing of *v’liYerushalayim* to its rebuilding. It is not only part of fixed prayer but also included in our blessings after a significant meal, namely *Birkat Hamazon* or *Ma’ain Shalosh*. Beyond our regular recitations, we insert it into our prayers at festivals with the recitation of *Ya’aleh v’Yavoh* as well as at our greatest moments of joy, such as a marriage. Moreover, in the moments of our greatest national crises, Tisha B’Av and others, we actively observe mourning over its loss. Clearly, its relevance to Jewish life cannot be understated.

Although there are *midrashim* that inform our understanding from the book of *Bereishit* and onward,² when we attempt to trace Jerusalem back to the original texts wherein *Eretz Yisrael* is promised to our Forefathers, beginning with God’s instruction to Avraham: ³קום התהלך בארץ

¹ Zechariah 2:8

² As will be explored later

³ Bereishit 13:17

- “*arise and journey through the land*”, and continuing throughout the Five Books of the Torah, there is no explicit mention of this sacred city.

In *Sefer Devarim*, Moshe sets out to give his final speech to *Bnei Yisrael*. Much of this book is dedicated to the laws involved in the establishment of a just and ethical society in the Land of Israel. Among the many *mitzvot*, there is mention of ritual services, the court system, and the obligation to perform *aliya l’regel*. In each of those instances, the identity of the site of these rites is unnamed, despite the fact that a central aspect of these rites is their location: they take place in Jerusalem.

The name ‘Jerusalem’ is first mentioned⁴ as *Bnei Yisrael* enter Israel under the leadership of Yehoshua. In spite of the fact that much of the book of *Yehoshua* is about the division of the land of Israel, the name is only mentioned eight times in total.⁵ Jerusalem is only mentioned four times in the subsequent book of *Shoftim*, the narrative of which spans a time period between 300-400 years.⁶ In other words, although the Israelites have been living in the land for several centuries, there is still barely a mention of the name Jerusalem, despite the fact that this city is at the center of their religious worship, and is, for all intents and purposes, their capital city.

The sparse mentions of Jerusalem continue through into the first book of *Shmuel*; it is slipped in in the aftermath of the story of Golyat, where we

⁴ Yehoshua 10:1

⁵ Yehoshua 10:1,3,5,23, 15:8,63, 18:28

⁶ Shoftim 1:7,8,21, 19:10

are told that his head is brought to Jerusalem.⁷ In the fifth chapter of the second book of *Shmuel*, by way of introduction, the calculation of years of David's reign is recorded, numbering his years of reign both in Hebron and Jerusalem.⁸

In that very chapter, when the *Navi* tells of the conquest of Jerusalem, the city's name and identity enters Biblical consciousness.

The *Tanach* reader is beset with the basic question of 'why'? It feels like the antithesis of the declaration that will later become part and parcel of the fiber of the Jewish people; "If I forget you, Jerusalem."⁹ *How could it be that this most significant place isn't clearly named in the Torah itself?*

Before continuing, it is important to delve further into these areas in the Torah, where, despite its lack of explicit mention, Jerusalem is *referenced* both through particular phraseology in the text itself and via general interpretations of the *Midrash*.

Torah

When Moshe Rabbeinu gives his final address to *Am Yisrael* before his passing, he uses the phrase, "אשר יבחר ה' לשכן שמו שם המקום", "the place which *Hashem* chooses to rest His Name there"¹⁰ in several different

⁷ I Shmuel 17:54

⁸ II Shmuel 5:5

⁹ Tehillim 137

¹⁰ Devarim 12: 5,11,21, 14: 23-24, 16:2,6,11, 26:2

forms.¹¹ *Chazal* and later *parshanim* equate this expression with reference to Jerusalem, as proven by the progression of history from this point in time. Although its name is not formally stated, the reference to this location shows clearly a precedent for the fact that there is a site designated by Divine choice for the Divine Presence. It is a place that is associated with the Name of God, as is evidenced in David HaMelech's request to build the *Beit HaMikdash*¹² and Natan HaNavi's prophetic response¹³ to him as well as Shlomo HaMelech's *tefillah* as he dedicates the *Beit HaMikdash* in Jerusalem.¹⁴

Midrash

There are *midrashim* that discuss hints of Jerusalem in earlier parts of the Torah that many *parshanim*, the foremost amongst them Rashi, have made famous. For example, following the war between the four kings and the five kings, Malkizedek, the king of Shalem, comes forth with bread and wine. Based on the stated name 'Shalem,' *Chazal* extrapolate¹⁵ that this is a reference to the place that would come to be known as Jerusalem, shown through the use of its suffix. Similarly, Rashi and others explain that the location referred to as '*Har Yeraeh*' refers to Jerusalem.¹⁶ The *milim manhot* of r.e.h. and y.r.h, sight and awe, are sprinkled throughout the story of *Akeidat Yitzchak*, in line with the idea that this place will become the site of the *Mikdash, Har HaMoriah*. This

¹¹ See earlier footnote

¹² II Shmuel 7:14

¹³ II Shmuel 7:23

¹⁴ I Melachim 8: 16, 18

¹⁵ Ibn Ezra on Bereishit 14:18

¹⁶ Bereishit 22:14

then forms the prefix of *Jerusalem*. The idea that this city will be both a place of awe and rendezvous with God is one that evokes an idyllic sense of completeness, allowing the *Midrash* to highlight the significance of Jerusalem to our relationship with God, a significance that may not have been seen from a literal understanding of the words in the Torah.

The Rambam¹⁷ in his *Guide for the Perplexed* expresses with certainty that this place that Avraham had made unique through prophecy was likewise known to Moshe Rabbeinu and others through prophecy and that Avraham had issued this site as a place of worship, as is evident from the Targum.¹⁸

This makes the initial query stronger; why is Jerusalem not explicitly mentioned in the Torah? Why is it only spoken of in terms of reference? Of what significance does the recurring phrase in Devarim shed on what Jerusalem is or on what it should be?

The Rambam¹⁹ then proceeds to offer several explanations as to why the Torah only refers to Jerusalem as “the place that *Hashem* chose”. Firstly, he suggests that knowing that this is *the place* that is the primary objective of the Torah would prevent other nations from seizing the area and waging a heavy battle against the Jews. Secondly, he posits that this would prevent those who had control over the city at the time from decimating it since they are not fully clear if it is in fact *the* one, meaning

¹⁷ Moreh Nevuchim, Section 3, 45

¹⁸ ופלה וצלי אברהם תמן באתרא ההוא ואמר קדם יי הכא יהון פלחין דריא וגו'

¹⁹ Moreh Nevuchim, Section 3, 45

they would be reticent to engage fully since they are unsure if it is worthwhile to do so, and finally (and he believes that this is the strongest of the three), so that no tribe in Israel should request that it be in their allotment of land, thus preventing controversy as occurred with the “request” of the *kehuna*. That in fact is why the Rambam believes that the *Beit HaMikdash* (also called the *Beit HaBechirah*) was only ordered to be built after the establishment of the monarchy.

From a *Tanach* perspective, I’d like to suggest another possible approach that seems to be embedded in the text itself.

Given that the nine references to Jerusalem in *Sefer Devarim*²⁰ all contain the phrase '*wherein Hashem chooses to rest His Name there,*' perhaps an understanding of the notion of what it means to be chosen in the Torah can help us to gain perspective on what Jerusalem is and what it was meant to be.

At first glance, the idea of *bechira* is something that is designated for a particular purpose, what we might at times refer to as ‘*kedusha,*’ a separateness for a higher purpose. In fact, in modern Hebrew, the term ‘*mukdash*’ is often used to mean ‘dedicated.’ When we look at some of the classic examples of *bechira* in the Torah, such as the tribe of Levi, *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Israel*, we find that chosenness refers to both people and places.

²⁰ Devarim12: 5,11,21, 14: 23-24, 16:2,6,11, 26:2

Perhaps one idea that is less immediately discernible about *bechira* is that it is the first step of a process that depends on humans taking initiative to be completed. In each of the cases cited above there is not merely a feature stuck onto the chosen item for its designation to be recognized. Rather, for the designation to become apparent, there is a potential in the item that requires a human response.

Eretz Yisrael

Let us begin with *Eretz Yisrael*. As a result of the conquest of Yehoshua,²¹ the land was sanctified such that *mitzvot* that are dependent on the holiness of the land, such as *terumot*, *ma'asrot* and *shemittah*, would now go into effect. The Rambam²² explains that this *kedusha* was nullified when *Am Yisrael* was exiled into Babylonia, since by virtue of their being exiled, the conquest became invalid. As a result, the *kedusha* had to be established anew with the return to Zion, under the leadership of Ezra.²³ That sanctification was activated based on the Jewish presence in the land,²⁴ not on the mode of conquest. This sanctification remained for the duration of the second *Beit HaMikdash* as well as for the future.²⁵ In other words, it did not become invalid through the next exile (of Rome). Consequently, the next time that *Am Yisrael* would return to the Land, there would be no need to sanctify it a third time. The Roman conquest did not have an impact regarding *kedushat ha'aretz*, the

²¹ This is often referred to as *bi'ah* or *kedusha rishonah*.

²² Rambam, MT Hilchos Beis Habechira 6:14-16

²³ This is often referred to as *bi'ah* or *kedusha shni'ah*

²⁴ This is referred to as *chazakah*/presumptive status

²⁵ Rambam, MT Hilchos Shemitta V'Yovel 13:15-15

holiness of the land. Those *mitzvot teluyot ba'aretz*, mitzvot that are dependent on residence in the land, that were observed as Torah law in *Eretz Yisrael* in the time of the second *Beit HaMikdash*, are still classified by some as *d'oraita* (Torah law) in modern times.²⁶

We nevertheless learn of a distinction regarding the *mitzvah* of *challah*. In *Parashat Shelach*,²⁷ the Torah states that *בבואכם אל הארץ* “with your coming to the land,” you should separate a section of dough to be given to the *kohen* as one of his twenty-four gifts. Rav Huna, the son of Rav Yehoshua, quotes the Rabbis who understand that the *mitzvah* of *challah* is linked with “**your coming**” to the Land, **prior** to the fourteen years of conquest and inheritance. As opposed to *terumot* and *ma'asrot*, the *mitzvah* of *challah* was classified as *d'oraita* upon the Jewish arrival and remains as such even now, as long as there is a Jewish presence in the land.

However, according to another *Tanna*, we specifically learn the opposite notion from the term “*בבואכם*”, “**with your coming**” – the idea that it isn’t merely **some** of you coming which gives a *mitzvah* the status of *d'oraita* or *d'rabanan* but rather, it is “**your coming**,” that is, **all of you** coming, that creates this. If there is only a minority of Jews in the Land, as was true in the time of Ezra’s return from Babylonia,²⁸ the *mitzvah* of *challah* would then fall to the status of *d'rabanan*.

²⁶ According to the opinion of the Ra'avad following the approach of R' Yochanan (Yevamot 81a)

²⁷ Bemidbar 15:18

²⁸ Ketubot 25a "וכי אסקינהו עזרא לאו כולוהו סלוק"

The *mitzvah* of *challah* is linked with both the arrival to the Land as well as with the size of the population that resides there. In other words, both opinions imply that the completion of the sanctification of the Land of Israel depends on the input of *Am Yisrael!*

Shevet Levi

The selection of the tribe of Levi as those dedicated to *Hashem* was not anticipated initially. The group of those who were projected to serve in the *Mishkan/Mikdash* were the *bechorim*, the firstborns, those who were *mukdash* from the womb.²⁹ Due to their involvement in the *Chet HaEgel*, the sin of the Golden Calf, the status of the firstborns shifted and was conferred instead upon the tribe of Levi, the only ones who did not participate in the sin.³⁰ We see that although there was always a precedent for selection, the specificity of who was ultimately selected was based on the actions of the people involved. The firstborns forfeited their status as chosen ones and at the same time, the Levites obtained this status through *their* actions. Hence, we see an instance in which selection was not absolute, but contingent on human activity.

Yerushalayim

The *Mishna*³¹ depicts how *kedushat Yerushalayim* was bestowed when additions were made to the city. In essence, the *melech, navi, Urim VeTummim* and *Sanhedrin* were followed by the entire nation in

²⁹ Shemot 13:2

³⁰ Bemidbar 3:12

³¹ Shevu'ot (14a): ונביא ואורים ותומים וסנהדרין של שבעים ואחד ובשתי תודות ובשיר

procession, with two *korban todot* and song. This was the process of conferring sanctity onto these extensions. The ceremony for extending the boundaries of the *Beit HaMikdash* was done in a similar fashion. This sanctity had real halachic implications. Becoming *tameh*, ritually impure, limited one's access into the *Beit HaMikdash*. The halacha prohibiting an individual from entering the area that was part of the *original* courtyard similarly prohibited an individual from entering an area that was a later addition, as both were given full sanctity. Thus, in both instances the status of the sanctity of these holy sites was determined by human actions.

The definition, then, of chosenness, seems to be broader than **'the quality of being chosen'** – it also requires a human response to bring the holiness to fruition. Perhaps this was a reason for the city of Jerusalem to not be named until *Am Yisrael* officially conquered and settled in it: it was selected by God for Him to rest His Presence, but could not be named until there was human contribution. The initial conquest of Jerusalem occurred in the time of David.³² It was then that David, Yoav, and their army advanced against the Jebusites who were residing there, successfully conquering the holy city. From that point onward, Jerusalem (of old) was called so as well as being known as the City of David. This whole enterprise – the fact that **they** vanquished it and the receiving of its actual name – demonstrates a proof of the significance of human contribution. Additionally, the **nickname** of City of David, attributes

³² II Shmuel 5

significance to David's role, another, further proof of the weight that human contribution holds.

Even with all its advantages, it is important to note that this phrase of *לשכן שמו שם* didn't come without cost. The *Shomronim* were a thorn in the side of the *Yehudim* over the course of their return to Zion, most significantly in their thwarting of the building of the *Beit HaMikdash*.³³ Their interference with the Persian authorities was motivated by the lack of credence given to their practice. From their perspective, they viewed **Shechem** as the chosen place, for a variety of reasons, among them, the role that Shechem played in the *britot* which *Hashem* made with *Avraham*³⁴ and *Yaakov*³⁵ as well as their continuous residence in the Land while the Judeans were exiled. Shechem and Shalem differ only by one letter in Hebrew as well. Already fraught with challenge, this contention made the rebuilding of the second *Beit HaMikdash* that much more difficult. The vagueness of the phrase becomes something that can work both to our advantage and to our disadvantage, showing that in making space for the human role in matters of sanctity, there is always risk.

To this end, as those returning to Zion were facing a variety of challenges, God reassured the people through the *navi* Zechariah. From the first chapter of Zechariah and onward, there are several versions of the

³³ Ezra 4

³⁴ Genesis 12:6-7

³⁵ Genesis 33:18 Note the *שכם* & *שלם* references

comforting phrase of “שבתי לירושלים”- I have returned to Jerusalem.³⁶ This mantra was reinforced to the minority of Judeans who had to contend with threats from within their ‘camp’ (both in Judea and Babylonia) that were doubting the potential of the moment and threats from without in the form of the *Shomronim*, often referred to as the “enemies of Judea.” The *Navi* refers to God as “בחר בירושלים”, the One Who Chooses Jerusalem, both in the first-person (ie. from God’s perspective) and in the third-person (i.e. from the *navi’s* viewpoint). Perhaps this brings the chosenness full circle. God imbues the place with sanctity but creates space for the full sanctity to be realized via human input. When humans respond to that call to sanctify the city God has chosen, they allow it its identity and it becomes known as Jerusalem. God then comes back, as it were, and chooses the fully sanctified site; this time, God Himself refers to it as Jerusalem.

The “**Chooser of Jerusalem**” is the One who returns and protects and defends the city and its returnees. This is substantiated by God’s defense of Yehoshua ben Yehozadak, *Kohen Gadol*. In one of Zechariah’s murky visions,³⁷ Yehoshua is staged on trial, being prosecuted. God jumps in to defend him, referring to Yehoshua as an “אוד מצל מאש” - ember from the fire. God, as it were, shouts at the prosecutor to desist from his accusation. יגער ה' בכ השטן ויגער ה' בכ הבחר בירושלים, God shouts at you, Prosecutor, and God, shouts at you, the One who chose Jerusalem.³⁸ Malbim points out that God is rebuking the prosecutor for two reasons;

³⁶ Zechariah 1:16, 8:3 etc

³⁷ Zechariah 3

³⁸ Zechariah 3:2

firstly, because He is God, Master of compassion, and secondly, because He is the One Who chooses Jerusalem and will save the *Kohen Gadol* who comes from a family that served in the *Mikdash*, who themselves chose Jerusalem. It seems implied in both the *pshat* and *parshanut* that God is also defending one who, while facing adverse circumstances, chose to return to Jerusalem.

Conclusion

Although not explicit in the Torah itself, we have seen clearly that Jerusalem is alluded to in many ways in *Tanach*, each to different effect. Regardless of the individual meanings of each of these epithets, together they show us that Jerusalem is a place with a sanctity that is imbued by God; it is **the** place where we encounter God most profoundly, and, more than that, it is the place where we can answer the call to our role in contributing to sanctity in this world. We live in a time when, regardless of our place of residence, we can access this city without the kinds of difficulty that our predecessors – even just a few generations back – faced. We have an obligation to remember how much this city means to us, how central it is to our faith, and how lucky we are to be able to walk in its streets. The city is more than just bricks and stones; it is a city that has seen and lived through both unparalleled joy and the deepest misery. It has a history like no other place in the world, because it is more than just a place. Jerusalem is *the* place, the chosen place, the chosen place that God has imbued with sanctity. Those who came before us contributed to bringing this holiness closer, and we too have a part in this, building on the foundations that they have laid. May we see the full completion of the words of Zechariah in our day!