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Chagigah Daf 15

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Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamah of

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May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for his neshamah and may his soul find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

The Gemora cites a braisa: Four men entered (through the use of the divine Name) the Pardeis (literally translated as orchard; it is referring to a spiritual place in the heaven closest to god). They were: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Acher and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva said to them: When you arrive at the stones of pure marble, do not say, “Water, water (how can we continue on?),” for it is said: *He that speaks falsehood shall not abide before My eyes* (and it is not actually water). Ben Azzai cast a look and died. Concerning him, Scripture says: *Difficult in the eyes of Hashem is the death of His devout ones*. Ben Zoma looked and became demented. Concerning him, Scripture says: *When you find honey, eat so much as is sufficient for you, lest you be satiated, and vomit it up*. Acher chopped down the shoots. [He damaged his spiritual stature by observing Ma’aseh Merkavah.] Rabbi Akiva departed in peace.

Ben Zoma was asked (a different time): Is it permitted to castrate a dog (for perhaps the prohibition is applicable only to an animal which can be offered as a sacrifice, and a castrated animal is disqualified from being brought as a sacrifice)? He replied: *Nor shall you do this in your land* - this means that any animal which is in your land, you shall not do so (even to a dog).

Ben Zoma was asked: May a Kohen Gadol marry a virgin (as her hymen is still intact) who has become pregnant? [Do we believe her that she has not had relations with anyone?] Do we in such a case take into consideration Shmuel's statement, for Shmuel said: I can cohabit repeatedly (with a virgin) without (breaking the hymen and) causing blood (to come from it), or is perhaps the case of Shmuel rare? He replied: The case of Shmuel is rare, but rather, we do consider the possibility that she may have conceived in a bathtub (where there was a deposit of semen).

The Gemora asks: But behold Shmuel said: Any semen which does not shoot forth like an arrow cannot cause fertilization.

The Gemora answers: Initially, it had shot forth like an arrow.

The Gemora cites a braisa: Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Chananyah was standing on a step in the Temple Mount and Ben Zoma saw him but did not stand before him. Rabbi Yehoshua queried Ben Zoma as to where he was coming from and where he was headed. Ben Zoma responded that he was gazing into matters regarding creation and he observed that there was only a space of three fingers between the upper waters and the lower waters. This is because it is said, and the Divine Presence hovered upon the



surface of the waters, and this means that the Divine Presence hovered like a dove hovers over its young but does not touch them. Rabbi Yehoshua told his disciples that Ben Zoma was still considered to be on the outside. The reason for this is because the verse that Ben Zoma quoted was said on the first day of creation, whereas the separation of the waters did not occur until the second day of creation.

The Gemora asks: And how much (was the distance between the two bodies of water)?

Rav Acha bar Yaakov posited that the separation of the waters was like a hair's breath. The Chachamim maintain that the separation is like the separation between boards that are used for the construction of a bridge. Mar Zutra, and others say that it was Rav Assi, maintains that the separation was like the separation of two garments that are spread on top of each other. Some say that the separation of the waters is akin to two cups where one is stuck inside the other. (15a)

We learned earlier that Acher entered into Pardes, i.e. heaven, by using the Name of HaShem, and this resulted in Acher cutting off saplings, i.e. he adopted false theological beliefs. Regarding Acher it is said, let not your mouth bring guilt on your flesh. Acher saw that Matatron, an angel, was granted permission once a day to sit in heaven and record the merits of the Jewish People. Acher was bewildered by this sight, because there is a tradition that in heaven there is no sitting, contention, no back, as the angels are all one-dimensional, and no fatigue. Acher thus declared, "Perhaps there are two entities, heaven forbid!" Matatron was subsequently removed from

his position and he was struck with sixty lightning rods. Matatron was told, "When you saw Acher you should have risen." Matatron was then given permission to erase the merits that Acher had accrued. A Heavenly Voice then announced, "Return O wayward sons, except for Acher. When Acher heard this proclamation, he declared, "Since I have been banished from the World to Come, I may as well derive pleasure from this world." Acher then strayed to the ways of bad society, and he requested from a harlot to engage in promiscuity. The harlot asked him, "Are you not Elisha Ben Avuyah, whose name has spread throughout the land?" Acher proceeded to pluck a radish on Shabbos, in violation of the Torah, so the harlot declared, "He is Acher," i.e. he has been transformed into another person. (15a)

After he strayed to the ways of bad society, Acher asked Rabbi Meir a question, saying to him: What is the meaning of the verse: *God has made the one as well as the other?* He replied: It means that for everything that God created He created its counterpart. He created mountains, and created hills; He created seas, and created rivers. Acher said to him: Rabbi Akiva, your teacher did not explain it thus, but as follows: He created righteous people, and created wicked people; He created the Garden of Eden, and created Gehinnom. Each and every person has two portions, one in the Garden of Eden and one in Gehinnom. When a righteous man merits, he takes his own portion and his fellow's portion in the Garden of Eden. When the wicked man becomes guilty, he takes his own portion and his fellow's portion in Gehinnom.

Rav Mesharsheya said: What is the Biblical proof for this? In the case of the righteous, it is written: *Therefore, in their land, they shall inherit a double portion.* In the case of the wicked it is written: *And destroy them with double destruction.*

After he strayed to the ways of bad society, Acher asked Rabbi Meir a question, saying to him: What is the meaning of the verse: *Gold and glass cannot equal it; nor shall its exchange be vessels of fine gold?* He answered: These are the words of the Torah, which are hard to acquire like vessels of gold and vessels of fine gold, but are easily destroyed like vessels of glass. Acher said to him: Rabbi Akiva, your teacher did not explain it thus, but as follows: Just as vessels of gold and vessels of glass, though they be broken, have a remedy, so too a Torah scholar, though he has sinned, has a remedy. Rabbi Meir questioned him: Why don't you repent as well? Acher responded: I have already heard from behind the barrier in heaven, "Return O wayward sons, except for Acher."

The Gemora cites a braisa: Once Acher was riding on a horse on the Shabbos, and Rabbi Meir was walking behind him to learn Torah from his mouth. Acher said to him: Meir, turn back, for I have already measured by the paces of my horse that until here extends the Shabbos boundary. He replied: You, too, go back! Acher answered: Have I not already told you that I have already heard from behind the barrier in heaven, "Return O wayward sons, except for Acher." Rabbi Meir prevailed upon him and took him, to a study hall. Acher said to a child: Recite for me your verse! The child answered: *There is no peace, Hashem said, to the wicked.* He then took him to

another synagogue. Acher said to a child: Recite for me your verse! He answered: *For although you wash yourself with niter and use much soap, yet your iniquity is stained before Me.* He took him to yet another synagogue, and Acher said to a child: Recite for me your verse! He answered: *And you, O spoiled one, what will you do? If you clothe yourself with scarlet, if you don an ornament of gold, if you paint your eyes with mascara - in vain will you be beautifying yourself.* He took him to yet another synagogue until he took him to thirteen synagogues; all of them quoted in similar vein. When he said to the last one, recite for me your verse, he answered: *But to the wicked [v'larasha] God said: What purpose do you declare My statutes etc.?* That child mumbled his words, so it sounded as though he answered: *But to Elisha [v'la'Elisha] God said. Some say that Acher had a knife with him, and he cut him (the child) up and sent him to the thirteen synagogues, and some say that he said: Had I a knife in my hand I would have cut him up.*

When Acher died, heaven did not wish to judge him to Gehinnom because he had engaged in Torah, yet he was not granted entry to the World to Come because he had sinned. Rabbi Meir then said, "Better that heaven judge Acher to Gehinnom and ultimately he will be granted entry into the World to Come. When I will die, I will cause smoke to rise from his grave (to show that he is being punished in Gehinnom)." When Rabbi Meir died, smoke rose from the grave of Acher. Rabbi Yochanan said: Is it a mighty deed to burn one's teacher! There was one amongst us (who strayed), and we cannot save him; if I were to take him by the hand, who would snatch him from me! He said: When I die, I shall extinguish

the smoke from his grave. When Rabbi Yochanan died, the smoke ceased from Acher's grave. The public eulogizer began his oration concerning him (R' Yochanan) thus: Even the watchman (of Gehinnom) could not stand before you, our teacher (when you entered to withdraw Acher from there).

Acher's daughter once came before Rebbe and said to him: My teacher, support me (for I am poor)! He asked her: Whose daughter are you? She replied: I am Acher's daughter. He said to her: Are any of his children left in the world? Behold it is written: *He shall have neither child nor grandchild among his people, nor any remaining in his dwellings.* She answered: Remember his Torah learning and not his deeds. Immediately, a fire came down and singed Rebbe's bench. Rebbe wept and said: If it be so on account of those who disgrace her (the Torah), how much more so on account of those who compliment her! (15b)

The Gemora asks: How was Rabbi Meir allowed to learn Torah from Acher, as it is said: *for the lips of the Kohen shall safeguard knowledge, and people should seek teaching from his mouth; for he is an agent of HaShem, Master of Legions.* This verse is understood as follows: If the master is akin to an angel of God, then one should seek Torah from his mouth, but if the master is not like an angel of God, then one should not seek Torah from his mouth.

Rish Lakish answers that Rabbi Meir merely learned from Acher's teachings but not from his devious acts.

The Gemora explains the verses as follows: one who is grown can study from a teacher who is not akin to

an angel of God (for he will not learn from his deeds), but one who is young should not study from such a teacher.

When Rav Dimi came to Bavel, he said: In the west they said that Rabbi Meir ate the outer part of the date (whatever was worthwhile), but discarded the inner pit. (15b)

Rava expounded: What is the meaning of the verse: *I went down to the garden of nut trees, to look at the green plants of the stream,* etc.? Why are Torah scholars likened to the nut tree? It is to tell you that just as in the case of the nut, though it becomes dirty with mud and dung, yet its contents do not become repulsive, so too in the case of a scholar, although he may have sinned, his Torah does not become repulsive. (15b)

Rabbah bar Shila met Eliyahu the Prophet and asked him what HaShem was doing at that moment. Eliyahu responded that HaShem was repeating words of Torah from the mouths of all the sages except for Rabbi Meir, because Rabbi Meir had studied Torah from Acher. Rabbah bar Shila wondered about this, because Rabbi Meir was akin to one who ate the inner part of a pomegranate and discarded the rind. Eliyahu responded that now HaShem was declaring, Meir my son says thus. When a man suffers, to what expression does the Divine Presence give utterance? "My head is heavy, my arm is heavy." If the Holy One, Blessed be He, is thus pained over the blood of the wicked, how much more so over the spilled blood of the righteous.

Shmuel found Rav Yehudah leaning on the bolt of a doorway, and he was weeping. He said to him: Sharp one, why do you weep? He replied: Is it a small thing that is written concerning the Rabbis? *Where is he that counts, where is he that weighs? Where is he that counts the towers? Where is he that counts?* — for they counted all the letters in the Torah. *Where is he that weighs?* — for they weighed all the kal vachomers in the Torah. *Where is he that counts the towers?* — for they taught three hundred halachos concerning a ‘tower which floats in the air.’ And Rabbi Ammi said: Doeg and Achitofel had three hundred unresolved questions about a suspended tower; but yet we have learned in a Mishna: Three kings and four commoners have no share in the World to Come. [The three kings are: Yarovam, Achav, and Menasheh. The four commoners are: Bilam, Doeg, Achitofel, and Geichazi. ] What then shall become of us? Shmuel said to him: Sharp one, there was impurity in their hearts (but your heart is pure).

The Gemora asks: But what of Acher? [What impure thoughts did he have?]

The Gemora answers: Greek song did not cease from his mouth (even before he went astray).

The Gemora offers another answer: It is told of Acher that when he used to rise (from his seat) in the study hall, many heretical books used to fall from his lap.

The Gemora relates: Nimos the weaver asked Rabbi Meir: Isn’t it true that all wool that goes down into the dyeing kettle come up properly dyed? [Does the study of the Torah under a Sage serve to protect all

students from sin?] He replied: All that was clean from its mother (when it was initially shorn) comes up properly dyed, all that was not clean from its mother does not come up properly dyed. [All who begin the study of the Torah when they are free from sin will be properly protected.] (15b)

## INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

### *Floating Towers*

The *Gemora* states that Doeg learned 300 halachos about “a floating tower”. Rashi offers a number of explanations of this term:

1. Reasons that the top stroke of the Lamed is pointed down.
2. The *halachos* of one who enters lands outside of Eretz Yisrael, which render one impure, enclosed in a container.
3. Ways to magically make a tower hover in midair.
4. *Halachos* of impurity of a corpse (*tumas mais*) relating to a tower that is not under a roof, as discussed in *Ahalos* (4:1).
5. Rashi here suggests that this refers to the tower built by the *dor haflagah* – *the generation of separation*.

The Maharsha explains that this refers to the question of the exact placement of the Bais Hamikdash, known as David’s tower. This tower had to be somewhat suspended, in terms of its elevation, and is therefore referred to as the “hovering” tower.

## DAILY MASHAL

### REPENTANCE IS ALWAYS ACCEPTED

The Gemora records various incidents where Rabbi Meir discussed Torah subjects with Acher, his teacher. When Rabbi Meir questioned why Acher would not repent, Acher responded that he had already heard from behind the barrier in heaven, "Return O wayward sons, except for Acher."

The commentators ask: Isn't it true that there is nothing that stands in the way of repentance?

It is brought in the sefer Zichron Eliezer from Rabbi Shlomo from Sassav as follows: The heavenly voice that calls out has the capabilities to inspire all who hear it towards repentance except for Acher. He can hear the voice, but he will not become motivated because of it. If he would have decided to repent by himself, it would have been accepted.

A parable is given: A son was constantly rebelling against his father and the father's rebuke was not resulting in any positive change at all. It came to a point, where the father simply gave up and informed his son, "From now on, I will not be reprimanding you anymore – you are on your own." If the son would reflect upon the words of his father in a serious manner, he would become brokenhearted that his father has become so disgusted with him that he will not even be admonishing him; this will propel him to regret his past actions and beg his father for forgiveness, which he knows will be accepted.

The Shalah explains in a very similar manner: The Gemora Pesachim (86b) states: One should listen to everything that the host tells him except to leave. Even if the Holy One, Blessed is He notifies a person that he will not be assisting him any longer and it is as if he is being chased out of this world, it is incumbent upon that person to gird himself and harness all of his strength to repent and ask forgiveness; if he accomplishes this, there is no doubt that his repentance will be accepted.

### POMEGRANATES

The Gemora states: Rabbah bar Shila met Eliyahu the Prophet and asked him what HaShem was doing at that moment. Eliyahu responded that HaShem was repeating words of Torah from the mouths of all the sages except for Rabbi Meir because Rabbi Meir had studied Torah from Acher. Rabbah bar Shila wondered about this, because Rabbi Meir was akin to one who ate the inner part of a pomegranate and discarded the rind. Eliyahu responded that now HaShem was declaring, Meir my son says thus.

The commentators ask: What novelty did Rabbah bar Shila state that wasn't known before? Why did the parable with the pomegranate result in Hashem repeating statements from Rabbi Meir?

The Gemora in Chagigah (27) states: The transgressors of Israel are full of mitzvos like a pomegranate.

A question is posed: Generally, transgressions are considered to be the most offensive kind of sin. Why,

then, are transgressors deemed so worthy by the Gemora?

Kollel Iyun Hadaf cites from Rabbi Shimon Maryles, the Yoruslaver Rebbe in Toras Shimon as follows: The Midrash (Bereishis Rabah 84:19) says that after Reuven repented for his sin, Hash-m promised him, "No one has ever sinned before me and repented [like you did]. My son, in reward for introducing Teshuvah to the world, I promise that your descendant will introduce Teshuvah as well." The Midrash identifies that descendant as the prophet Hoshea, who issued a prophecy which begins with the words, "Return o' Israel to Hash-m your G-d!" (Hoshea 14:2).

The Midrash's assertion that Reuven was the first person to do Teshuvah is difficult to understand. The very first man, Adam ha'Rishon, as well as his son, Kayin, engaged in Teshuvah long before Reuven! Apparently, the intention of the Midrash is as follows: Reuven was the first to introduce Teshuvah as a necessary prelude to the performance of a Mitzvah (in his case, returning to rescue Yosef from the pit). The importance of doing Teshuvah prior to performing a Mitzvah is derived from the Tikunei Zohar (Tikun 6), which states that any Mitzvah performed wiyout an adequate blend of "fear and love" of Hash-m does not succeed in rising heavenward, for these two qualities serve as the "wings" of the Mitzvah. This is hinted to in the verse, "They shall raise you up in their palms, lest you knock your foot against a stone" (Tehilim 91:12) -- the "palms" allude to the qualities of fear and love of Hash-m aroused through Teshuvah which protect

one's performance of a Mitzvah from the dangers of the Yetzer ha'Ra, often symbolized by a stone.

Thus, when a person performs a Mitzvah it is necessary that other elements be present -- besides the actual execution of the Mitzvah -- in order for the Mitzvah to be credited to that person in Shamayim. Those elements include fear of Hash-m, love of Hash-m, and doing complete Teshuvah before performing the Mitzvah, so that the Mitzvah is performed with the utmost sincerity. When a Mitzvah is performed in that manner, it acquires wings, so to speak, to fly up to Shamayim.

A perpetual transgressor (or "Posh'ei Yisrael") invests none of these elements into the few Mitzvos which he manages to carry out in this world. As a result, his Mitzvos have no means with which to fly heavenward, and instead they settle and accumulate around him, convincing him that he is "full of Mitzvos like a pomegranate." In contrast, the Tzadik -- whose Mitzvos, borne by the thrust of his fear of Hash-m, love of Hash-m, and his Teshuvah, soar immediately heavenward, always appears to himself as bereft of Mitzvos because all of his Mitzvos go straight to Shamayim.

This is also the meaning of the verse (Devarim 30:2), "And you shall return to Hash-m your G-d" -- that is, when you first do Teshuvah, you may "[then] heed His voice" -- proceed with the performance of His Mitzvos, "according to all which I command you this day," so that the Mitzvos can rise heavenward.

This is also the intention of the prayer we recite each morning, "May He place in our hearts love of Him and

fear of Him, and [may those two qualities give us the ability] to do His will and serve Him with a perfect heart." It is the love and fear of Hash-m, aroused through Teshuvah, which elevates one's actions.

This idea explains the Mishnah in Avos (4:21-22): "Rebbi Yakov says: This world is like an anteroom before the World to Come; prepare yourself in the anteroom, so that you might enter the banquet hall." The Mishnah continues, "He would also say: Better one hour of Teshuvah and good deeds in this world than the entire life of the World to Come, and better one hour of contentment in the World to Come than all the life of this world." The connection between these two statements of Rebbi Yakov may be explained as follows: How should one prepare himself in the anteroom of this world for the reward of the World to Come? One should prepare himself in this world by doing Teshuvah before every Mitzvah that he does, so that those Mitzvos will rise heavenward on the strength of the fear and love that is aroused through his Teshuvah.

In this sense, it may be said that Rebbi Yakov was actually offering a defense for his grandfather, Elisha ben Avuyah (Kidushin 39b), the Tana who became a heretic and thereafter was referred to as "Acher." The Gemara (Chagigah 15a) attributes Acher's persistence in maintaining his rebellious lifestyle to a voice he once heard echoing from behind the heavenly curtain, which said, "Return, all you wayward children, except for Acher!" One might ask that, granted, the heavenly voice rejected the possibility of Acher repenting for the sins which he had already committed, but what prevented him, in the event that he did feel remorse, from

accumulating a new store of Mitzvos that would count in his favor for the future? In answer to this question, Rebbi Yakov offers his insight: "Better one hour of Teshuvah and good deeds in this world than the entire life of the World to Come" -- for without the spiritual advantage of Teshuvah, all of the Mitzvos one does in this world have little effect. This might have been Acher's reasoning which caused him to despair of ever correcting his ways.

Based on this, perhaps we can say that this was the meaning behind Rabbah bar Shila's statement. Rabbi Meir understood Acher's flaws but he viewed him as a pomegranate. Acher's sins were all around him, but Rabbi Meir took the rind from the pomegranate and discarded it, demonstrating that Acher's mitzvos were worthless and he should not consider himself righteous because of those deeds.