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Sotah Daf 37

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Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamot of

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May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for their neshamot and may their souls find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

### ***Jumping in First***

The *Gemora* had stated that Yehudah sanctified God’s Name in public. The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Rabbi Meir used to say: When the Jewish people stood by the Sea, the tribes were fighting with each other. Each one said that they would be the first one to jump in (*as the Egyptians were behind them, and they had nowhere else to turn*). The Tribe of Binyamin jumped and went down into the Sea first. The officers from the Tribe of Yehudah began to stone them. It was because of this that Binyamin the righteous merited to become the host to the Presence of the Almighty, as it says: *And God rests between Binyamin’s shoulders (the Holy of holies was located in Binyamin’s portion)*.

Rabbi Yehudah told Rabbi Meir: That was not the way the incident occurred; rather, each tribe said that they would not be the first one to jump in. It was at that point that Nachson the son of Aminadav (*the Nasi from Yehudah*) jumped and went down into the Sea first. At that moment, Moshe was praying at length. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, “My dear ones are drowning in the Sea, and you are prolonging in prayer before Me!” Moshe replied to Hashem, “What is there for me to do?” Hashem said to him, “Speak to the Jewish people and they should travel forward. You should lift up your staff and stretch out your arm over the Sea and split it.” It was because of this that Yehudah merited becoming the ruling power in Israel. (36b – 37a)

### ***Where did the Tribes Stand?***

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov said: It cannot be said that the Tribe of Levi were located below (*when the Blessings and the Curses were being announced*), for the Torah already states that they were to stand on Mount Gerizim! It cannot be said that they were to stand above, for the Torah already states that they should stand below! How can this be explained? The elders of the *Kohanim* and the *Levi'im* stood below, and the remainder stood above. Rabbi Yoshiyah said: Whoever was fit to serve (*to carry the Ark; from thirty years old until fifty*) stood below, and the remainder stood above.

Rebbe said: All the Jewish people, including the tribe of Levi stood below (*between the mountains*). They all faced Mount Gerizim and began the Blessings, and then, they all faced Mount Eival and they began the Curses. What did the Torah mean when it stated “on” the mountain? It meant that they stood “near” the mountain. This is similar to that which we learned in the following *braisa*: It is written: *And you shall place pure frankincense “al” each stack (the twelve loaves of bread that were placed on the Table in the Sanctuary)*. Rebbe understands the word “al” to mean that it should be placed (*on the Table*) “near” the stacks. This can be proven from the verse: *And you shall screen “al” the Ark with the partition*. Here, obviously, the word

“al” means “near” (for the partition was a vertical curtain, not a covering). (37a)

### **Covenants**

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: There was a Blessing in general and a Blessing in particular. Likewise, there was a Curse in general and a Curse in particular. [The general one was the verse at the end: Cursed is the one who will not uphold the words of the Torah. This was also pronounced as a blessing: Blessed is the one who will uphold the words of the Torah. The curses in particular are referring to those verses which mentioned specific sins. They were pronounced as Curses and as Blessings.] Every *mitzvah* has four commandments: To learn, to teach, to guard and to perform. Since each *mitzvah* had a general Blessing, a particular Blessing, a general Curse and a particular one, and each *mitzvah* has four commandments, it emerges that there were sixteen covenants associated with each *mitzvah*. And so it was at Sinai, and so it was by the Plains of Moav. It emerges that there were forty-eight covenants related to each and every *mitzvah*. Rabbi Shimon excludes the covenants at Mount Gerizim and Eival (for Yehoshua did not mention all the *mitzvos* there), and includes the Tent of Meeting in the Wilderness.

The difference of opinion here is the same as that of the following Tannaim: Rabbi Yishmael says: General *mitzvos* were told to Moshe at Sinai and the particulars were told to him in the Tent of Meeting. [This is the Tanna Kamma’s opinion as well; there was no new covenants mentioned by the Tent of Meeting.] Rabbi Akiva says: Both the general *mitzvos* and their particulars were told to Moshe at Sinai. They were repeated to him in the Tent of Meeting, and Moshe told

them over to the Jewish people for the third time in the Plains of Moav.

The *braisa* continues: It emerges that there is not a single *mitzvah* written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight covenants were not made. Rabbi Shimon ben Yehudah of Kefar Acco said in the name of Rabbi Shimon: There is not a single *mitzvah* written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty (the amount of male Jews that were in the Wilderness; each person was a guarantor for his fellow) covenants were not made. Rebbe said: According to the reasoning of Rabbi Shimon ben Yehudah of Kefar Acco said in the name of Rabbi Shimon that there is not a single *mitzvah* written in the Torah in connection with which forty-eight times six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty covenants were not made, it follows that for each Jew, this number must again be multiplied by six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty.

What is the issue between them? Rav Mesharshiya said: The difference between them is if a person is only a guarantor for his fellow’s personal *mitzvos*, or is he a guarantor on his fellow’s guarantor responsibility as well. (37a – 37b)

### **Blessings and Curses**

Rabbi Yehudah ben Nachmeini, the interpreter of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish expounded: The whole section (of the Blessings and Curses) refers only to the adulterer and adulteress. The Torah states: Cursed be the man that makes a graven or molten image etc. Would it be sufficient to merely pronounce a curse with such a person (why, he is someone who denies in the existence of God)? Rather, it alludes to a person who cohabits

with an *ervah*, and begets a son (*who is a mamzer, and hence cannot marry a Jewish girl*), who goes to live among idol worshippers and worships idols. Cursed be the father and mother of this man since they caused him to sin in this manner. (*Rashi explains all the other curses in a similar fashion.*)

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: *You shall set the Blessing upon Mount Gerizim and the Curse on Mount Eival*. What is this verse teaching us? If it is to teach us that the Blessings are to be pronounced on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Eival, it has already been said: *These shall stand upon Mount Gerizim to bless the people*, and it is written in the following verse: *And these shall stand upon Mount Eival for the Curse?* But rather, the purpose of the verse is to teach us that the Blessing must precede the Curse. You might think that all the Blessings must precede the Curses; therefore it is written: *Blessing and Curse*. One Blessing precedes a Curse, but all the Blessings do not precede the Curses. A further purpose is to compare the laws of the Blessings to the laws of the Curses. Just as the curses are pronounced by the *Levi'im*, so too, the Blessings must be pronounced by the *Levi'im*. And just as the Curses are uttered in a loud voice, so too, the Blessings must be uttered in a loud voice. And just as the Curses are said in the Holy Tongue, so too, the Blessings must be said in the Holy Tongue. And just as the Curses are said in general and in particular terms, so too, the Blessings must be said in general and in particular terms. And just as after each Curse, all the people respond with Amen, so too, after each Blessing, all the people respond with Amen. (37b)

## DAILY MASHAL

### **CAN'T BE ANSWERED IN MIDDLE OF THE PRAYER**

The *Gemora* had stated that Yehudah sanctified God's Name in public. The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Rabbi Meir used to say: When the Jewish people stood by the Sea, the tribes were fighting with each other. Each one said that they would be the first one to jump in (*as the Egyptians were behind them, and they had nowhere else to turn*). The Tribe of Binyamin jumped and went down into the Sea first. The officers from the Tribe of Yehudah began to stone them. It was because of this that Binyamin the righteous merited to become the host to the Presence of the Almighty, as it says: *And God rests between Binyamin's shoulders (the Holy of Holies was located in Binyamin's portion)*.

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Rashi in Shmos (14:15) notes: Moshe was standing and praying. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him, "This is no time to pray at length, when the Jewish people are in distress." It would seem from Rashi that since they

were distressed, it was not the proper time for a lengthy prayer; however, it was a time for prayer.

The Maharsha explains based upon the *Gemora* in Brochos (28b), which rules that if one finds himself in a dangerous place, he should pray with an abridged version.

The Maharal explains as follows: A person is not answered during his prayer. He is only answered when he concludes his prayer. This is what Hashem was telling Moshe. Now is not the time for lengthy prayers, for the Jewish people are in distress.

This requires clarification. If his prayer was worthy of answering, why couldn't he be answered during his prayer? Why was there a necessity to wait for the conclusion of his prayer?

Rav Hutner in Pachad Yitzchak (*Pesach*; 14) cites a Medrash in Shmos Rabbah (21): Why did the Holy One, Blessed be He, place the Jewish people in such a predicament? It was because He desires to hear their prayers. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi offers the following parable: A king was traveling on the road when he hears the cries of a damsel in distress. "Help me," she calls out, "Bandits are attacking me!" The king hears and comes to her rescue. After some time, the king wishes to marry this girl. He invites her to the palace, but she refuses to come. What does he do? He sends out a group of bandits to threaten her, and once again, she calls out to the king to be protected. The king says, "It is to hear your voice that I desired."

It emerges from here that the prayer is not on account of the Jewish people's distress; but rather, the suffering or anguish is brought about to stir us into prayer. Hashem wishes to hear our prayers. Reb Yeruchem

Levovitz, the Mirrer Mashgiach used to state this principle to explain the following *Gemora* in *Yevamos* (64a): Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous. The Matriarchs were barren only so that they should pray to Hashem for children. Their desire for progeny caused the Matriarchs and the Patriarchs to pray to Hashem at a level that under normal circumstances they would not have done. This is why we cannot be answered in middle of a prayer, for then, the salvation will be interrupting the prayer, and the only reason Hashem brought about this situation is only because He wished to hear us pray.

### Take the Plunge

The Mechilta in Beshalach says that when the Jews jumped into the sea, Mt. Moriah was uprooted from its place. Rabbi Meir Shapiro in Imrei Da'as explains that until then, the peak of self-sacrifice had been demonstrated on Mt. Moriah by Avrohom Avinu. However, that had been the actions of an individual, whereas this was a communal demonstration of sacrifice by the sea, which replaced Mt. Moriah as the prime example of Mesiras Nefesh.

The Chochmas Hamitzpon expounds further on the greatness of this act. Many times we are faced with a dilemma, where we know what the right course of action is, but we are not on the level to actually act upon that knowledge. One option is to muster your willpower and push yourself to overcome the test. The example set by Nachshon and the other righteous tzadikim shows us another approach. They didn't make any calculations or spend time on mental deliberations; they took the plunge and literally jumped right in. Even if they were not necessarily on that level, by taking the plunge, they brought themselves to that level.