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Sotah Daf 47

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Bears Attack

It is written: *And two bears came out of the forest, and they tore apart forty-two children.* Rav and Shmuel argue about this matter: One said that it was one miracle, while the other said it was a miracle within a miracle. He who said that it was but one miracle did so because there was a forest, but there were no bears (*Elisha’s curse brought about the bears*). He who said that it was a miracle within a miracle did so because there was no forest, nor were there any bears.

The *Gemora* asks: What was the need for a forest? It was required because otherwise, the bears would have been frightened (*and they would not have attacked the children; bears only attack if they have a safe place to run to afterwards*).

Rabbi Chanina said: As a result of the forty-two sacrifices which Balak, king of Moav, offered (*to Hashem, since he wanted Bilaam’s curses against the Jewish people to work*), forty-two children were torn apart from Israel.

The *Gemora* asks: But it is not so? For Rav Yehudah has said in the name of Rav: A man should always occupy himself with Torah and the commandments even though it is not for their own sake, for this will lead him to eventually do them for their own sake. Proof to this is from the following: As a reward for the forty-two sacrifices which Balak, king of Moav, offered, he merited that Rus should descend from him, and from her, Shlomo descended, of whom it is written: *A thousand burnt*

offerings did Shlomo offer! And Rabbi Yosi ben Choni said: Rus was the daughter of Eglon the son of Balak! [*Evidently, this was Balak’s reward; not the deaths of the forty-two children!*]

The *Gemora* answers: Nevertheless, his desire was to curse Israel (*and this was fulfilled with the children’s death*). (46b – 47a)

The Pleasantness of a City

It is written: *And the men of the city (Yericho) said to Elisha, “Behold, the city is pleasant, as my master sees etc.* The *Gemora* asks: But since the water was bad and the land caused death, what then, was its pleasantness?

Rabbi Chanin said: A place appears pleasant to its inhabitants.

Rabbi Yochanan said: There are three kinds of favor: The favor of a locality to its inhabitants; the favor of a wife to her husband; and the favor of an object bought to its purchaser. (47a)

Elisha, Geichazi and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachyah

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Elisha was afflicted with three illnesses: One was because he stirred up the bears against the children; one because he pushed Geichazi away with both of his hands; and one of which he died; as it is

written: *Now Elisha became sick with the sickness from which he would die.*

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: One should always let the left hand push away and the right hand should draw near. Not like Elisha who pushed Geichazi away with both his hands and not like Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachyah who pushed away one of his disciples with both his hands. (*The Gemora will elaborate on this incident. There are some editions of the Gemora, where this incident is not mentioned at all. The censors removed it, thinking that the student was Jesus from Nazareth. The Tosfos HaRosh writes that this cannot be the same disciple who the Rabbis ruled should be killed, for he lived in the days of Queen Helena at the end of the second Beis HaMikdash, and here we are discussing King Yannai, who lived much beforehand.*)

What transpired with Elisha and Geichazi? As it is written: *And Naaman said (to Geichazi): Please take two talents of silver (Elisha cured Naaman from tzaraas; Elisha refused to accept a reward; Geichazi told Naaman that Elisha changed his mind and he would take silver and clothing for two students; Geichazi kept the gifts for himself).* And it is written: *And he (Elisha) said to him (Geichazi), "Did not my spirit go with you when the man (Naaman) turned from his chariot to meet you? Is it now a time to receive money, and to purchase garments, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, slaves and maidservants?"*

The *Gemora* asks: But did he receive all these things? He only took silver and garments!

Rabbi Yitzchak said: At that time Elisha was engaged in the study concerning the eight creeping creatures. He said to Geichazi, You wicked person! The time has arrived for you to receive your reward (*prematurely*) for studying the law of the eight creeping creatures. [*The eight items that Elisha mentioned was an elusion to this chapter of Torah.*] The *tzaraas* of Naaman shall cleave to you and your

offspring forever. It is written: *Now there were four metzoraim.* Rabbi Yochanan said: This refers to Geichazi and his three sons.

And Elisha went to Damascus. Why did he go there? Rabbi Yochanan said: He went to convince Geichazi to repent, but he refused. He said to him, "Repent," but he replied, "I received a tradition from you that whoever sinned and caused others to sin is deprived of the opportunity to repent."

The *Gemora* asks: What had Geichazi done? Some say: He applied a magnet (*in a hidden manner*) to the idolatrous image of Yeravam and suspended it between heaven and earth (*intending to fool the people into thinking that it had its own power to stand in mid-air*). Others say: He engraved God's Name upon its mouth, so that it used to exclaim, 'I am Hashem your God and You shall not have other Gods beside me. And others say: He drove the students away from Elisha, as it is written: *And the students of the prophet said to Elisha, "Behold now, the place where we are dwelling before you is too cramped for us."* It may be inferred from there that up until then (*when Geichazi was still there*), it had not been too cramped.

The *Gemora* asks: What was the incident with Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachyah? When King Yannai put the Rabbis to death, Shimon ben Shetach was hidden by his sister (*Yannai's wife*), and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachyah fled to Alexandria in Egypt. When there was peace, Shimon ben Shetach sent this message to him: From me, Yerushalayim, the Holy City, to you, Alexandria in Egypt. My sister city, my teacher lives in your midst and I am sitting desolate. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachyah said: It seems from here that there is peace there. On his journey back, he found himself in a certain inn, where they showed him great honor. He said, "How nice is this hostess (*her actions*)." One of his disciples said to him, "My master, her eyes are narrow (*she is not beautiful; the student mistakenly thought that this was his intention*)."

He replied to him, “Wicked person! Do you occupy yourself with such thoughts?” He took out four hundred horns and excommunicated him. The student came before him every day to ask for forgiveness, but he refused. One day, while he was reciting the *Shema*, he came before him. Rabbi Yehoshua’s intention was to receive him and he made a sign to him with his hand (*indicating that he should wait until he finished the Shema*), but the disciple thought he was pushing him away once again. So he went and set up a brick, and worshipped it. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachyah said to him, “Repent,” but he replied, “I received a tradition from you that whoever sinned and caused others to sin is deprived of the opportunity to repent.” A Master has said: The student practiced magic and led Israel astray, and caused them to sin.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: Rabbi Shimon ben Elozar said: Also with respect of the inclination towards procreation, or with a child or a woman, push away with the left hand and draw them near with the right hand. (47a)

Mishna

If the murderer was found before the calf’s neck was decapitated, it should go out and graze with the herd (*we are allowed to derive benefit from it*). However, once the calf’s neck has been decapitated (*and then the murderer was found*), it must be buried in that site, for it was brought in the first place for a matter of doubt. It has made atonement for that which was in doubt and served its purpose. If the calf’s neck was decapitated, and then the murderer was discovered, he must be executed.

If one witness said, “I saw the murderer (*and can identify him*),” and another witness said, “You did not see,” or if a woman said, “I saw,” and another woman said, “You did not see,” they would decapitate a calf. If one witness said, “I saw,” and two witnesses said, “You did not see,” they would decapitate a calf. If two witnesses said, “We saw,”

and one said to them, “You did not see,” they would not decapitate a calf.

When the amount of murderers increased, the rite of the *eglah arufah* was abolished. This happened in the times of Eliezer ben Dinai (*a famous murderer*), who was called Techinah ben Perisha. They eventually began to call him the murderous son.

When the amount of adulterers increased, the bitter water of the *sotah* was discontinued. It was Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai who abolished it, as it is said: *I will not examine your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, for they themselves fornicate with harlots.*

When Yosi ben Yoezer, the head of the city of Tzereidah and Yosi ben Yehudah, head of the city of Yerushalayim died, the “clusters” (*the Torah scholars*) ceased, as it is said: *There is no cluster to eat; my soul desires the first ripe fig.*

Yochanan, the *Kohen Gadol*, abolished the recitation of the tithes. He also abolished the “wakers” and the “strikers.” Until his days the hammer used to strike in Yerushalayim. And in his days, none needed to inquire about *demai*. (47a – 47b)

One Witness

The *Mishna* had stated: If one witness said, “I saw the murderer (*and can identify him*),” and another witness said, “You did not see,” they would decapitate a calf.

The *Gemora* notes: If the other witness would not have contradicted him, the one witness would be believed (*and there would be no halacha of eglah arufah in such a case*). The *Gemora* asks: How is this known? The *Gemora* answers: It is written: *And it is not known who hit him*. It can be inferred from there that if it was known who hit

him, even if that person is at the other end of the world, they would not decapitate a calf.

Rabbi Akiva says: How do we know that if the *Sanhedrin* saw a person commit murder, but they cannot identify him, they do not decapitate a calf? It is because it is written: *Neither have our eyes seen the murder.* However, in this case, they had seen it.

The *Gemora* asks: Being that one witness is believed according to Torah law, how can another witness come later to contradict the first witness? Doesn't Ula say that wherever the Torah believed one witness for something, the witness is considered to have the status of two witnesses? Accordingly, the second witness is in fact contradicting someone with the status of two witnesses! [How does he have the power to do that?]

The *Gemora* answers: According to Ula, the *Mishna* should be emended to say that they do not decapitate a calf. And Rabbi Yitzchak said that the *Mishna* should be taught like that.

Rabbi Chiya said: The *Mishna* should say that they do decapitate a calf.

The *Gemora* challenges Rabbi Chiya from Ula's principle.

The *Gemora* answers that our *Mishna* is discussing a case where the two individual witnesses came to *Beis Din* simultaneously (*the testimony of the first witness was not accepted yet, and therefore, it is not regarded as having the strength of two witnesses*), whereas Ula was discussing a case where one witness testified after the other.

The *Gemora* asks on Rabbi Chiya from our *Mishna*: If one witness said, "I saw," and two witnesses said, "You did not see," they would decapitate a calf. We may infer from there that if only one witness contradicted the other

witness, they would not decapitate a calf. This is seemingly a refutation of Rabbi Chiya!

The *Gemora* answers: And according to you, let us analyze the *Mishna's* last ruling: If two witnesses said, "We saw," and one said to them, "You did not see," they would not decapitate a calf. We may infer from there that if one witness said, "I saw," and one witness contradicted him, they would decapitate a calf. [*The two implications contradict one another!?*]

The *Gemora* answers: It is obvious that the end of our *Mishna* is dealing with a case where witnesses who are generally disqualified from offering testimony testified (*one witness is canceled out by two disqualified witnesses*). This is like the opinion of Rabbi Nechemyah. Rabbi Nechemyah said that wherever the Torah believed one person, go after the majority of opinions on the matter. This means that the Torah equated in such a case the testimony of two women who contradict one man to the testimony of two men who contradict one man (*in both cases two beats one*).

Alternatively, the *Gemora* answers that it is possible that whenever one generally valid witness testifies first, even one hundred women who would contradict him are viewed as one witness. The *Mishna* is speaking about a case where the first witness was a woman (*and two women later contradicted her testimony*). According to this explanation, you should explain Rabbi Nechemyah's law in the following manner. Wherever the Torah believed one person, go after the majority of opinions on the matter. This means that the Torah equated in such a case the testimony of two women who contradict one woman to the testimony of two men who contradict one man. However, Rabbi Nechemyah would agree that two women who contradict one (*valid*) man is akin to half (*of the total witnesses*) versus half. (47b)

Murderers Rampant



The *Mishna* stated: When the amount of murderers increased, the rite of the *eglah arufah* was abolished.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: When the amount of murderers increased, the rite of the *eglah arufah* was abolished, because it is only performed in a case of doubt; but when murderers increased openly, the rite of the *eglah arufah* was discontinued (*because we probably know who committed the murder*). (47b)

Negative Behavior Increasing

The *Mishna* had stated: When the amount of adulterers increased, the bitter water of the *sotah* was discontinued.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: The bitter waters of the *sotah* will only examine her if the husband is free from any sin (*involving illicit relations*); however, if he is not free of sin, the waters will not examine her.

When pleasure seeking Torah scholars increased, justice became perverted, and conduct deteriorated and there is no satisfaction to Hashem in the world. When they who displayed partiality in judgment increased, the command of *You shall not be afraid before any man* became void and *You shall not show favoritism in judgment* ceased. And people removed the yoke of heaven and placed upon themselves the yoke of human beings. When the amount of people engaged in whisperings in judgment increased, Divine anger increased against Israel and the *Shechinah* departed. When the amount of people who call evil good and good evil increased, the cry of woes increased in the world. When the amount of people who spit far increased, the arrogant people increased, Torah disciples diminished, and the Torah went about looking for those who would study it. When the amount of arrogant people increased, the daughters of Israel began to marry only arrogant men, because our generation looks only to the outward appearance.

The *Gemora* asks: But that is not so; for a Master has declared: An arrogant person is not acceptable even to the members of his household!?

The *Gemora* answers: At first they jump to marry him, but in the end, he becomes despised to them.

The *braisa* continues: When the amount of judges who gave their goods to householders to sell increased, bribery and a miscarriage of justice increased, and happiness ceased. When the amount of judges who said “I accept your favor” and “I shall appreciate your favor” increased, there was an increase in what the Torah states as *every man did that which was right in his own eyes*. Common people were raised to eminence and the eminent were brought low, and the Jewish kingdom deteriorated more and more. When the amount of envious men and plunderers of the poor increased, there increased those who hardened their hearts and closed their hands from lending to the needy, and they transgressed what is written in the Torah, *Beware that there be not* etc. When the amount of women who had stretched forth necks and winking eyes increased, the necessity for the bitter waters should have increased, but it ceased. When the amount of people receiving gifts increased, the days of human life became fewer and years were shortened; as it is written: *But he who hates gifts shall live*. When the amount of haughty Torah scholars increased, disagreements increased in Israel. When the disciples of Shamai and Hillel who had not served their teachers sufficiently increased, disagreements increased in Israel and the Torah became like two Torahs. When the number of Jews who accepted charity from idolaters increased, the idolaters were on top and Israel was on bottom. (47b)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

The Murderer's Testimony



The *Mishna* states that an *eglah arufah* is only brought in a matter of uncertainty; however, if the murderer was discovered, we do not bring an *eglah arufah*.

The *Minchas Chinuch* (§ 530) writes that if a person comes and says, "I killed him," if he said that he did it inadvertently, he would be believed and we would not bring an *eglah arufah*. However, if he said that he killed him intentionally, he is not believed, because there is a principle that a person is not believed to render himself into a wicked person. In that case, we would bring an *eglah arufah*.

Rav Shach in *Avi Ezri* disagrees because the reason why a person is not believed when his testimony will render him an evil person is because based upon his testimony, he is a *rasha*, and a *rasha* cannot offer testimony. However, with respect to *eglah arufah*, one who is disqualified from testifying is allowed to testify that he can identify the murderer. Even a thief is allowed to offer such testimony. Accordingly, a person should be able to say and be believed that he himself killed him!

Rav Shach explains that the reason a *rasha* is believed regarding an *eglah arufah* is because his testimony is not affecting the murderer whatsoever. He is merely stating that he can identify the murderer. Every other place where one witness or a woman is believed, and nevertheless, we do not believe a thief, that is only because he is accomplishing something. Through his testimony (*that a woman's husband died*), we will be permitting a woman to get married, and if he is a *rasha*, he is not believed, for we suspect that he is lying. By *eglah arufah*, where there is nothing being accomplished (*with respect to the murderer*), there is no reason for the *rasha* to lie and he can therefore be believed.

Accepting Charity from an Idolater

The *Gemora* states: When there increased the number of Jews who accepted charity from idolaters, the idolaters were on top and Israel was on bottom.

The *Gemora* (*Nazir 62a*) cites a Scriptural source to teach us that an idolater can vow vowed-offerings and freewill-offerings just like Jews.

The *Haga'os Ashri* (*in Bava Basra*) brings the following question in the name of the *Maharich*: Why are we not allowed to accept charity from an idolater, but we are permitted to accept his *korbanos*?

He answers in the name of his *Rebbe*: A voluntary *korban* is not brought to serve as atonement, and therefore, we are not concerned if they offer a sacrifice, for those do not bring about forgiveness and they will not serve as a protection for them. However, one who gives charity receives atonement for his sins, and merits protection for his good deed. It is not in our best interests to assist them in this matter.

DAILY MASHAL

THE BEARS AND THE FOREST

The *Gemara* relates the story of the young sinners who cursed *Elisha the Navi* and how *Hashem* punished them. *Hashem* caused two bears to emerge from a forest and attack the sinners. The *Gemara* says that according to one opinion, *Hashem* created at that moment both the bears and the forest. It was a "Nes b'Toch Nes," a miracle within a miracle. The *Gemara* asks why *Hashem* needed to make a forest as part of the miracle to punish the sinners. The *Gemara* answers that He made the forest so that the bears would not be afraid to attack (since bears are afraid to attack in the open).



Why did Hashem not simply create bears that were not afraid to attack in the open?

RAV CHAIM KANIEVSKY shlit'a (in SEFER TA'AMA D'KRA) quotes his father, the STEIPLER GA'ON zt'l, who explains that Hashem created a forest -- and did not simply create bears that were unafraid to attack in the open -- because He wanted to teach the sinners a lesson. The reason why the sinners cursed Elisha was that they claimed that he had deprived them of their livelihood. They thought that it was their own hard work that provided them with their sustenance. When Elisha made the waters become sweet and it was no longer necessary for the water-carriers to draw water for the nearby town, they viewed Elisha as the one who caused them to lose their livelihood.

They failed to acknowledge that the truth is that whenever a person earns a livelihood, it is a miracle. It is a decree from heaven and is not a natural occurrence. It is merely disguised within the natural world and gives the appearance of natural cause and effect. The sinners in the time of Elisha did not recognize that it was Hashem who gave them their sustenance. In order to show them their error, Hashem made one obvious miracle and created bears to attack them, and He made a second miracle -- a forest into which the bears could flee and thus be able to attack in a natural way. Hashem clothed the obvious miracle (the bears) in a natural environment (the forest) so that the sinners would realize that every person's livelihood is also a "Nes b'Toch Nes," a miracle within nature (nature itself being a miracle). Hashem showed them that they were unjustified in condemning Elisha for depriving them of their livelihood, because it is Hashem Who provides, and withholds, man's sustenance.

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Acting according to one's Actions

By: Reb Ben

The Gemara states that Avraham demonstrated an extraordinary amount of love to fulfill the will of Hashem. This was reflected in the fact that Avraham arose early in the morning to carry out the command of Hashem to offer Yitzchak as a sacrifice. Bilam, however, displayed his hatred for the Jewish People by arising early so that he could curse the Jewish People as soon as possible. Both Avraham and Bilam were focused on their mission to fulfill the will of Hashem. Balak, on the other hand, was solely bent on annihilating the Jewish People, and to accomplish this he offered forty-two sacrifices.

One person can act with full intention and be rewarded like Avraham, and another person like Balak will have only his interests in mind, and still merit a reward such as Balak received.

The lesson is powerful. One should always perform good deeds, even if not for its own sake, because eventually there will be a result that is for its own sake, i.e. the will of Hashem will be carried out. Although this does not appear to reflect well on those who have no intentions in their actions, we learn that no action is overlooked. In the words of the Chinuch, a person will act according to his actions. If one is constantly engaged in Torah study and mitzvah performance, he automatically will begin to act in a manner that befits a Torah scholar and pious Jew.