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Gittin Daf 68

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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

Shlomo and Ashmedai

It is written [Koheles 2:8]: *I (Shlomo HaMelech) got for myself masculine and feminine orchestration, with delights of mankind and with shidah and shidos. Masculine and feminine orchestration: These are diverse kinds of musical instruments; with delights of mankind: these are pools (for the summer use) and baths (for the winter); shidah and shidos: Here, in Bavel, they translated this to be referring to male and female demons. In Eretz Yisroel, they said that it means carriages (for women and officers to ride on).*

Rabbi Yochanan said: There were three hundred kinds of demons in Shichin, but what a demon is (*its appearance and its nature*), I do not know.

The *Gemora* had stated: Here, in Bavel, they translated this to be referring to male and female demons.

The *Gemora* asks: For what purpose did Sholmo HaMelech want these demons?

The *Gemora* answers: For it is written: *And the house when it was being built was made of whole, quarried stone (there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was being built).* Shlomo HaMelech asked the Rabbis, “How shall I manage to build it?” They replied, “There is the *shamir* (a creature which could cut through stone) which Moshe brought for the stones of the *Ephod*.” He asked them, “Where can it be found?” They replied, “Bring a male and a female demon

and apply pressure to them; perhaps they know and will tell you.” So he brought a male and a female demon and pressured them. They said to him, “We do not know, but perhaps Ashmedai the king of the demons knows.” He said to them, “Where can he be found?” They answered, “He is in such-and-such a mountain. He has dug a pit there, which he fills with water and covers with a stone, which he then seals with his signet. Every day he goes up to heaven and studies in the Academy of Heaven and then he comes down to earth and studies in the Academy of the earth. He then goes and examines his seal, opens the pit, drinks, closes it and seals it again, and then he goes away.”

Shlomo HaMelech thereupon sent Benayahu son of Yehoyada to get Ashmedai. He gave him a chain on which was Hashem’s Name was engraved and a ring on which was Hashem’s Name was engraved and fleeces of wool and bottles of wine. Benayahu went and dug a pit lower down the hill and let the water from Ashmedai’s pit flow into it and stopped it up with the fleeces of wool. He then dug a pit higher up and poured wine into it, which then flowed into Ashmedai’s pit. He placed earth in the pits (*so it would not be apparent that he was there*). He then went and sat on a tree (*to wait for Ashmedai*). When Ashmedai came, he examined the seal, opened the pit and found it full of wine. He said, “It is written: *Wine is a mocker, strong drink is madness, and whoever blunders in it will not be wise.* And it is also written: *Immorality, wine and new wine take the heart.* I will not drink it.” Growing thirsty, however, he could not resist, and he drank until he became drunk, and fell asleep. Benayahu then came



down, threw the chain over him and fastened it. When he awoke, he began to struggle, whereupon Benayahu said, "The Name of your Master is upon you, the Name of your Master is upon you!"

As Benayahu was bringing him along, they came to a palm tree. Ashmedai rubbed against it and knocked it down. They came to a house and he knocked it down. They came close to the hut of a certain widow. She came out and begged him (*not to knock down her hut*). He moved out of the way so as not to touch it, thereby breaking a bone. He said, "That bears out the verse: *A soft tongue can break a bone*."

He saw a blind man straying from his way and he put him on the right path. He saw a drunken man losing his way and he put him on his path. He saw a wedding procession that was being joyfully celebrated and he wept. He heard a man say to a shoemaker, "Make me a pair of shoes that will last seven years," and he laughed. He saw a sorcerer practicing sorcery and he laughed.

When they reached Yerushalayim, he was not taken to see Shlomo HaMelech for three days. On the first day, he asked, "Why does the king not ask for me?" They replied, "It is because he drank too much." So Ashmedai took a brick and placed it on top of another. When they reported this to the king, he said to them, "This is what he meant to tell you: 'Give him more to drink.'" On the next day, he said to them, "Why does the king not ask for me?" They replied, "It is because he ate too much." He thereupon took one brick off the other and placed it on the ground. When they reported this to the king, he said, "This is what he meant to tell you: 'Keep food away from him.'"

After three days, Ashmedai went in to see the king. Ashmedai took a reed and measured four cubits and threw it in front of him, saying, "See now, when you die, you will have no more than four cubits in this world. Now, however, you have conquered the whole world, yet you

are not satisfied until you conquer me too!?" He replied, "I want nothing of you. What I want is to build the Beis HaMikdash and I require the *shamir*." He replied, "It is not in my hands; it is in the hands of the Master of the Sea, who gives it only to the wild cock, to whom he trusts it on oath. What does the bird do with it? He takes it to a mountain where there is no vegetation and puts it on the top of its peak which thereupon splits. He then takes seeds from trees and brings them and throws them into the opening and vegetation eventually grows there." This is what the *Targum* interprets the *duchifas* bird as *y nagar tura*, a mountain cleaver.

The king's servants went out and found a wild cock's nest with young in it, and they covered it with white glass. When the bird returned, it wanted to get in but could not. It went and brought the *shamir* and placed it on the glass. The servants thereupon gave a shout, and it dropped the *shamir* and he took it. The bird went and committed suicide on account of its oath.

[*The Gemora goes back to the story with Ashmedai.*] Benayahu asked Ashmedai, "Why when you saw that blind man going out of his way did you guide him in the right direction?" He replied, "It has been proclaimed of him in Heaven that he is a completely righteous man, and that whoever assists him will receive a share in the World to Come." Benayahu continued, "And why when you saw the drunken man going out of his way did you guide him in the right direction?" He replied, "It has been proclaimed of him in Heaven that he is totally wicked, and I helped him out in order that he may consume his reward in this world." "Why," Benayahu asked him, "did you weep when you saw the wedding procession?" He replied, "The husband will die within thirty days, and the wife will be forced to wait for the brother-in-law who is still a child of thirteen years (*to perform yibum*)." Benayahu asked him, "Why, when you heard a man say to the shoemaker, 'Make for me shoes that will last seven years,' did you laugh?" He replied, "That man does not



have seven days to live, and he wants shoes for seven years!" Benayahu asked, "Why did you laugh when you saw that sorcerer practicing sorcery?" He answered, "He was sitting on a king's secret treasure room; he should have used his sorcery for what was beneath him."

Shlomo HaMelech kept him with him until he had built the Beis HaMikdash. One day, when he was alone with him, the king said, "It is written: *The lofty and the towering are his*, and we explain the verse to be referring to the ministering angels and the demons. What is your superiority over mankind?" Ashmedai replied, "Take the chain off me and give me your ring, and I will show you how I am superior." So he took the chain off him and gave him the ring. Ashmedai then swallowed him, and placing one wing in heaven and one on the earth, he hurled Shlomo four hundred *parsahs*. In reference to this, Shlomo said, "*What profit is there for a man in all his labor when he toils under the sun?*"

Shlomo used to go around begging from door to door, saying wherever he went, "*I Koheles was king over Israel in Yerushalayim.*" When he came to the *Sanhedrin*, the Rabbis said, "Let us see, a madman does not stick to one statement only. What is the meaning of this?" They asked Benayahu, "Does the king send for you?" He replied, "No." They sent to the queens saying, "Does the king visit you?" They sent back word, "Yes, he does." They then sent to them to say, "Examine his leg (*for a demon's leg is similar to that of a bird*)." They sent back, "He comes in stockings; also, he solicits them while they are a *niddah*; and he also solicits Bas Sheva, his mother." They then sent for Shlomo and gave him the chain and the ring on which Hashem's Name was engraved. When he went in, Ashmedai caught sight of him and flew away. The king, nevertheless, remained in fear of him.

Rav and Shmuel differed about Shlomo. One said that Shlomo was first a king and then a commoner, and the

other said that he was first a king and then a commoner and then a king again. (68a – 68b)

DAILY MASHAL

Shlomo and Yaakov

By: Rabbi Pinchas Winston

<http://www.torah.org/learning/perceptions/5764/vayeitzei.html>

What benefit is there for a man who toils under the sun? (Koheles 1:3)

However, though the rest of Ya'akov's worldly possessions were taken from him, Shlomo HaMelech at least retained his royal clothing (Maharshah, *Sanhedrin* 20b).

In a separate tractate, the Talmud describes the complete descent of Shlomo HaMelech from his height of power to his lowest level. At first, Shlomo was king over both the upper beings (such as demons) and the lower beings, such as humans. Then he lost authority and ruled over humans only, then only over the Jewish people, and then only over Jerusalem. Eventually, the Talmud says, he ruled only over himself, and finally, only over his staff and cloak.

It is always amazing how quickly and dramatically life can change directions. As they say, "Be careful with the people you see on the way up, because you'll see them again on the way down." Such is life in this world of ups and downs. Here was Ya'akov Avinu one day learning Torah in relative peace and free of the hatred of his brother, and the next day he is running for his life away from home to a strange land, and as broke as one could be!

But there was a difference between Ya'akov's fall and Shlomo's fall, as the Talmud discusses. The Talmud explains that it was Shlomo HaMelech's marriage to the daughter of the Pharaoh that precipitated his fall from power (on the very night he finished building the First

Temple! In the case of Ya'akov Avinu, circumstances created his dilemma, and he had responded to the call of duty. However, Shlomo HaMelech created his set of circumstances, and not only did they pave the road for his own descent, but it paved the path to the destruction of the Second Temple.

Thus, in the case of Ya'akov Avinu, he had been put to a test by G-d, and that is why he not only passed, but all the results were only positive. However, Shlomo HaMelech created his own test, and as a result, he almost destroyed himself completely. Indeed, the Talmud argues whether or not he ever regained his former stature, with one opinion saying yes, and the other opinion saying that he never again ruled the upper beings.

The Maharal interprets this account, providing an insight into how to maintain spiritual fortitude and how to learn a Talmudic midrash.

According to the Maharal, the chain with G-d's Name engraved upon it symbolized Shlomo HaMelech's devotion to G-d, and it was this that provided him with both the wisdom and ability to rule over the upper beings as well as the lower ones. When he wanted to understand the greatness of the power of demons, Ashmedai told him that he had no power as long as he was bound by the chain with G-d's Name on it, and also while Shlomo HaMelech wore his ring with G-d's Name on it.

That is, explains the Maharal, as long as Shlomo's devotion to G-d and his clarity of mind did not falter, Ashmedai could have no influence over him. For, as the gematria of Amalek hints (Amalek = 240 = suffek = doubt), evil only has power in areas that men have doubt. When Shlomo complied and gave up the ring and the chain, it symbolized a breaking of his resolve and the loss of his intellectual clarity, and immediately he fell drastically, losing his former stature.

This, in the words of the Leshem, is a perfect example of what happens when a person chooses to be spiritually tested on his own. The basic rule is, G-d can test us, but we can't test ourselves. Only He knows the true limits of our own spiritual strengths, and can custom design a personal test that can challenge us, but which we can also pass as well. We neither know our own spiritual abilities nor what is involved in any test in life, and therefore, we are more likely to fail than to succeed.

This, Shlomo HaMelech learned the long, hard way, and Koheles is his testimony to the Jewish people throughout the generations that he left behind. It says, in essence, "Look how greatly I erred, and how close I came to spiritual oblivion. Learn from my mistake, and don't repeat it. Let G-d give you the test. Don't enter them on your own." No wonder we read Koheles just after Yom Kippur, on Shabbos Chol HaMoed Succos.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM YESTERDAY'S DAF to refresh your memory

Q: Why does the *halachah* follow Rabbi Yosi?

A: It is because he always had reasons for his views.

Q: What is *kurdiakos*?

A: It is when one is overcome (*he becomes delirious*) by drinking new wine from the vat.

Q: Why did Rav Amram the Pious answer the household (*servants*) of the Exilarch that he wanted "Red meat broiled on the coals and highly-diluted wine," after they made him lie down in the snow (*when the truth is that the remedy is fatty meat broiled on the coals and undiluted wine*)?

A: He said, "Whatever I tell them, they will do the reverse."