

30 Tishrei 5778
Oct. 20, 2017



Sanhedrin Daf 96

Produced by Rabbi Avrohom Adler, Kollel Boker Beachwood

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Sancheirev, Nevuchadnezzar and Nevuzaradan

The *Gemora* describes how Sancheirev died: Rabbi Avahu said: If the following were not actually written in Scripture, it would be impossible to say it, for it is written: *On that day, the Lord will shave with a hired razor those who dwell on the other side of the river, namely the king of Assyria, his head and the hair on his legs; his beard, too, shall also be destroyed.*

After Sancheirev’s defeat, the Holy One, Blessed be He, came and appeared to him in the guise of an elderly man. He said to Sancheirev: “When you go back to your friends, the kings of the East and of the West, whose children you brought to Jerusalem and then caused their death, what will you say to them?” Sancheirev replied to Him: “I myself live in constant fear of this!” Sancheirev continued: “What shall I do?” Hashem replied to Sancheirev: “Go and disguise yourself so that they will not recognize you.” Sancheirev asked: “How shall I disguise myself?” He replied to Sancheirev: “Go and bring me a pair of scissors, and I will shave you.” Sancheirev asked: “From where shall I bring these scissors?” He replied to Sancheirev: “Go to that house, find scissors there and bring them to me.” Sancheirev went to the house and found a pair of scissors. Before Sancheirev entered the house, some ministering angels came there, and when Sancheirev arrived, they appeared to him as men. Now, the angels had been grinding palm kernels, and Sancheirev, thinking they were humans, said to them: “Give me a scissors.” They replied to him: “First, you must grind for us a measure of date kernels; and afterwards we will give you the scissors.” Sancheirev ground a measure of date kernels, and the angels gave him the scissors. Sancheirev had spent so much time in the house, that by the time he came back with the scissors, it was already dark outside. Hashem, disguised as the elderly man, said to Sancheirev: “It is too dark to see now; go bring a fire, and then

I will be able to cut your hair.” So Sancheirev went and brought a fire. As he was blowing on the fire to make it bigger, the flame caught hold of his beard; thus, in the end, he went and shaved both his head and his beard, even though he had not originally planned on cutting the latter. And this, they say, is the meaning of that which is written in Scripture: *his beard too shall be destroyed.* Rav Pappa said: This story expresses the idea behind that which people say: “If you singe an Aramean and he likes it, then you may even set fire to his beard, and still not exhaust your amusement from him.” After this embarrassing incident, Sancheirev went and found a plank from the remains of Noach’s Ark. Looking at the plank, he said to himself: “This plank must be the great god that saved Noach from the flood!” He then spoke to the plank, saying to it: “I hereby promise that if I go to war and win, I will offer my two sons as a sacrifice before you!” This brought about Sancheirev’s death, for his sons overheard what he had said, and they killed him. And this, indeed, is the incident recorded in the verse: *And it came to pass, as Sancheirev was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adarmelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword, etc.*

With reference to Avraham’s war against the four kings, it is written: *And at night (lailah), he and his servants deployed against them and struck them etc.* Rabbi Yochanan said: The angel who was appointed to assist Avraham in this war against the kings was named *lailah* (“night”), for it is written: *O that the day I was born had perished, along with lailah, who said, “A male child has been conceived.”*

Rabbi Yitzchak Nafcha offers an alternative explanation: When the verse mentions *lailah*, the implication is that “night acts” were performed on behalf of Avraham (*i.e. the stars in the sky fought for him*), as it is written elsewhere: *They fought*

from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. Rish Lakish said: The explanation of the blacksmith, i.e. Rabbi Yitzchak Nafcha, is better than the son of the blacksmith, i.e. Rabbi Yochanan.

In reference to Avraham's war against the four kings, it is written: *Avraham pursued them as far as Dan*. Concerning this, Rabbi Yochanan said: When that righteous man (*Avraham*) reached the territory of Dan, his strength diminished, for he prophetically foresaw that his descendants would eventually worship idols in the territory of Dan. As it is written: *Yarovam placed one of the golden calves in Beis El, and the other he placed in Dan*. And, as a matter of fact, even that wicked man (*Nevuchadnezzar*) did not become so strong until he reached the territory of Dan, for it is written: *The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan*.

Rabbi Zeira said: Although Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseirah sent a message from Nisibis, saying: Be careful with the respect due to a scholar who has involuntarily forgotten his learning; and be careful to cut the jugular veins, in accordance with Rabbi Yehudah's ruling (*when a fowl is slaughtered, the jugular vein, which contain the main blood vessels, must be cut too; otherwise, the fowl may not be roasted whole*); and be careful of the respect due to the children of the ignorant, for from them the Torah shall go forth - yet, such a thing as the following is made known to them. It is written: *Righteous are You, O Lord, when I plead with You: Yet let me talk to You of Your judgments: Why do the wicked prosper? Why are they happy although they deal very treacherously? You have planted them, they have taken root: they grow, they bring forth fruit*. What was he (*Yirmiah*) answered? *If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with the horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein you trusty, they wearied you, then how will you do in the swelling of the Jordan?* This may be compared to a man who boasted, "I can run three *parsaas* in front of horses on marshy land." But upon meeting a pedestrian, he ran three *mils* before him on dry land, and was exhausted. Thereupon he said to him: "If you feel like this before a pedestrian, how much more so before horses; and if three *mils* have exhausted

you, how much more so three *parsaas*; and if on dry land it is like this, how much more so on marshy swamps!" Hashem said to Yirmiah: It is even so with you: if you are astonished at the reward received by that wicked man for the four steps which he ran in my honor, how much more so when I give their due reward to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, who ran before me like horses! Therefore it is written: *My heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome; because of the Lord, and because of the words of his holiness*.

The *Gemora* asks: To what do the "four steps" refer? It is as it is written: *At that time, Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a present to Chizkiah (for he had heard that he had been sick, and recovered)*. The *Gemora* asks: Just because Chizkiah had fallen sick and recovered, he sent him letters and a present!? Indeed – it was to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land. For Rabbi Yochanan said: The day on which (*the wicked king*) Achaz died consisted of only two hours (*so he would not be buried in a respectful manner*) and when Chizkiah fell ill and recovered, the Holy One, Blessed be He, restored those ten hours, as it is written: *Behold, I will bring again the shadow of the degrees, which is gone down in the sun dial of Achaz, ten degrees backward. So the sun returned ten degrees, by which degrees it was gone down*. Thereupon Merodach-baladan inquired of them, "What is this?" They replied, "Chizkiah became ill and recovered." He exclaimed, "There is such a great man, and shall I not send him a greeting! Write to him as follows: Peace to King Chizkiah, peace to the city of Jerusalem, and peace to the great God!" Now Nevuchadnezzar was Baladan's scribe, but at that time he was not present. When he came, he asked them, "How did you write it?" And they told him, "We wrote it like thus." He said, "You called Him the great God, yet you mentioned Him last!? You should have written: peace to the great God, peace to the city of Jerusalem, and peace to King Chizkiah." They responded, "Let the reader of the letter become the messenger." So he ran after him, but when he had taken four steps, Gavriel came and made him stop. Rabbi Yochanan



observed: Had not Gavriel come and stopped him, nothing could have saved the enemies of Israel.

The *Gemora* asks: Why was he called Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan? It is told: Baladan was a king whose face turned into that of a dog, so that his son sat upon his throne instead. In his documents he wrote his own name, and the name of his father, King Baladan. This is the meaning of the verse: A son honors his father, and a servant his master.

Now, the *Gemora* notes that “a son honors his father” refers to what has just been said. “And a servant his master” refers to that which is written: Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of Nevuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came Nevuzaradan, captain of the guard, executioners, and stood before the king of Babylon in Jerusalem, and he burned the house of the Lord, and the house of the king.

The *Gemora* asks: But had Nevuchadnezzar gone up to Jerusalem? Surely it is written: They carried him up unto the King of Babylon to Rivlah, and Rabbi Avahu said that this was Antakya?

Rav Chisda and Rabbi Yitzchak ben Avudimi replied in different ways: One answered: Nevuchadnezzar’s portrait was engraved on Nevuzaradan’s chariot; and the other explained: He stood in such awe before him that it is as though he were in his presence.

Rava said: Nevuchadnezzar sent Nevuzaradan three hundred mules laden with iron axes that could break iron, but they were all shattered on a single gate of Jerusalem. He desired to withdraw, but said, “I am afraid lest I meet the same fate which befell Sancheirev.” Thereupon a Heavenly voice cried out, “You leaper, son of a leaper, leap, Nevuzaradan, for the time has come for the Sanctuary to be destroyed and the Temple burned.” He had but one axe left, so he went and struck the gate with the blunt end, and it opened. He killed many Jews as he proceeded, until he reached the Temple. Upon his setting fire to it, it sought to rise up, but was trodden

down from Heaven. He became arrogant with his triumph, when a Heavenly voice came forth saying to him, “You have killed a dead people, you have burned a Temple already burned, you hast ground flour already ground.”

After that he saw the blood of Zechariah seething. He asked the *Kohanim*, “What is this?” they answered, “It is the blood of sacrifices, which has been spilled.” So he slaughtered animals and compared the blood, but they were dissimilar. “Disclose the secret to me, or if not, I will tear your flesh with iron combs,” he threatened. They replied, “This is the blood of a *Kohen* and a prophet, who foretold the destruction of Jerusalem to the Israelites, and they killed him.” He said, “I will appease him.” So he brought the scholars and killed them over him, yet it did not cease to boil. He brought schoolchildren and killed them over him, still it did not rest; he brought the young *Kohanim* and killed them over him, and still it did not rest, until he had killed ninety-four myriads, and still it did not rest. He then approached him and cried out, “Zechariah, Zechariah, I have destroyed the best of them: do you desire me to massacre them all?” Immediately it rested. Thoughts of repentance came into his mind: if they, who killed only one person, have been so severely punished, what will be my fate? So he fled, sent his will to his house, and became a convert.

The Rabbis taught in a *braisa*: Naaman was a resident convert. Nevuzaradan was a righteous convert. Descendants of Sisera learned Torah in Jerusalem. Descendants of Sancheirev taught Torah in public. And who were they? Shemayah and Avtalyon.

Descendants of Haman learned Torah in Bnei Brak. And there were even descendants of that wicked man, Nevuchadnezzar, whom the Holy One, Blessed be He, wished to bring under the wings of the Divine Presence. The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: “Master of the universe! The one who destroyed Your house and burned Your sanctuary, will You bring him under the wings of the Divine Presence?”



Ulla said: Ammon and Moab were evil neighbors of Jerusalem. As soon as they heard the prophets predicting the destruction of Jerusalem, they sent to Nevuchadnezzar, "Leave your country and come here to conquer it." He replied, "I am afraid lest I be treated as my predecessors." Thereupon they sent word, "For the man is not at home; and "man" refers only to the Holy One, Blessed be He, as it is written: *The Lord is a man of war*. He responded, "But he may be near," to which they returned, "He has gone a long journey." He again sent word, "They have among them righteous men who may pray to Him and bring Him back." They answered, "He has taken a bag of money with him," and "money" refers to the righteous, as it is written: *So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an chomer of barley, and an half chomer of barley*. He sent back: "The wicked may repent, pray for mercy, and bring Him back." They answered, "He has already fixed a time for them," as it is written: *And will come home at the day appointed (hakese)* and "kese" can only refer to time, as it is written: *in the time appointed [ba-kese] on our solemn feast day*. He then sent word, "It is winter, and I cannot come on account of the approaching snows and rains." They replied, "Come by way of the mountains. He sent back, "If I come, I have no place for encamping." They replied, "Their graveyards are better than your palaces." (95b – 96b)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Noach's Plank

After this embarrassing incident, Sancheirev went and found a plank from the remains of Noach's Ark. Looking at the plank, he said to himself: "This plank must be the great god that saved Noach from the flood!" He then spoke to the plank, saying to it: "I hereby promise that if I go to war and win, I will offer my two sons as a sacrifice before you!" This brought about Sancheirev's death, for his sons overheard what he had said, and they killed him.

There is a Medrash¹ that states that Haman sought a beam that was fifty Amos in length, with which he planned on hanging Mordechai. His son Parshandasah was a governor in

the land where the Ark had come to rest, and Parshandasah brought Haman a beam from Noach's Ark, which was fifty Amos long. The Maharal² explains that there is a parallel between the actions of Haman and the actions of Sancheirev. Haman desired to demonstrate a strength that is reflected in fifty, which is a level above this world. Similarly, Sancheirev felt that he could only be successful if he reached the fiftieth level, which is reflected in the salvation of Noach from the Flood.

Although the words of the Maharal are beyond our comprehension, there is a very practical lesson to be gained from the actions of Haman and Sancheirev. Sancheirev attributed greatness to the plank from the remains of Noach's Ark, and this led him to offer his two sons as a sacrifice. Haman also believed that there was significance in the plank, and this led him to attempt the hanging of Mordechai. Both Sancheirev and Haman both ended up forfeiting their life because of their madness. We must examine our own actions and wonder if at times we are willing to sacrifice our welfare for a mere "plank", whether it is another luxury or a new ideology. What is even more profound is that there is a Medrash³ that states that Charvona told Achashveirosh that Haman had in his house a beam from the Holy of Holies. Certainly Haman had no respect for anything holy, but apparently he recognized the significance of the Bais HaMikdash, as he was determined that Mordechai not succeed in rebuilding the Bais HaMikdash. Nonetheless, Haman was willing to utilize the most holy object to achieve his aim of ridding the world of his sworn enemy. This bears a strong message, as we know that needless hatred is what destroyed the Bais HaMikdash⁴. Haman sought to destroy the Bais HaMikdash and anything that was holy. Our mission must be to consecrate the physical world and attain an elevated level of holiness, and this will negate the forces that Haman and his ancestor Amalek brought into the world. May Hashem let us merit to reach the fiftieth level of understanding and holiness, and may we witness the downfall of our enemies with the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days.

¹ Medrash Panim Achairim Nusach Beis to Esther 5:14

² Ohr Chodosh page 175. See also Yaaros Devash II Drush 9, Sfas Emes Purim 5661

³ Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer 49

⁴ Yoma 9b



Night

With reference to Avraham's war against the four kings, it is written: *And at night (lailah), he and his servants deployed against them and struck them etc.* Rabbi Yochanan said: The angel who was appointed to assist Avraham in this war against the kings was named *lailah* ("night"), for it is written: *O that the day I was born had perished, along with lailah, who said, "A male child has been conceived."* Rabbi Yitzchak Nafcha offers an alternative explanation: When the verse mentions *lailah*, the implication is that "night acts" were performed on behalf of Avraham (i.e. the stars in the sky fought for him), as it is written elsewhere: *They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.*

Why was it necessary for the angel who was assigned to aid Avraham in the war to be named *lailah*? The Maharal writes that this angel annihilated the nations like the night. Avraham is compared to day, because until the appearance of Avraham, the world was likened to night, and Avraham illuminated the world. Night and day are connected, so the angel of night aided Avraham, who symbolized day.

The *Gemora*⁵ states: *Rabbi Yochanan said: What is the meaning of that which is written in the prophecy of Zechariah:⁶ I saw in the night and behold a man was riding on a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtles that were in the pool etc.? Rabbi Yochanan proceeded to expound the verse phrase by phrase: What is the meaning of I saw in the night? The Holy One, blessed is He, was ready to turn the entire world into "night", i.e. to destroy it, because the Jews were submitting to Nevuchadnezzar's command to bow to the idol. And behold a man was riding—"a man" here alludes to none other than the Holy One, blessed is He, as it is stated elsewhere:⁷ Hashem is "a man" of war, Hashem is His name. And he was riding on a red horse, which indicates that the Holy One, blessed is He, was ready to turn the entire world into blood, i.e. to destroy it. But once He looked upon Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah, who were willing to die rather than worship the idol, He was appeased and refrained from*

destroying the world, as it is stated further in the verse: and He was standing among the myrtles (hadassim) that were in the pool (metzulah). Now the word hadassim in this verse refers to nothing other than the righteous, as it is stated elsewhere: and Mordechai raised Hadassah. And the word metzulah in this verse means nothing other than Babylon, as it is stated elsewhere: I am G-d who says to the deep (tzulah): be dry! And I will dry up your rivers." Immediately, those full of anger, which had become colored and red, became white. Rav Pappa said: Learn from this that a white horse is a favorable omen in a dream.

The *Gemora* mentioned here states: *The Holy One, blessed is He, was ready to turn the entire world into "night", i.e. to destroy it, because the Jews were submitting to Nevuchadnezzar's command to bow to the idol. What night is the Gemora referring to? It would appear that this night is the same night that is mentioned regarding the battle that Avraham fought. When the Jewish People worship idols, they are reverting back to the path that Avraham's contemporaries followed. This is not merely a deviation from the correct path, but it is like night, which is absolute darkness.*

The *Gemora*⁸ states that the Jewish People in the times of Mordechai and Esther were faced with annihilation because they had bowed down to the idol of Nevuchadnezzar. The salvation came about through Esther, also known as Hadassah, which is a reference to the righteous. The wicked attempt to transform the world into night, and the righteous illuminate the world. This is the meaning of the *Gemora*⁹ that states: *why is Esther likened to dawn? Just like dawn is the end of the night, so too Esther is the end of all the miracles.* Although this statement may seem to have negative connotations, the *Gemora* is teaching us that Esther and Mordechai illuminated the world with their righteousness, and this illumination is perpetuated throughout the generations. It is said:¹⁰ *The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor.* This light refers to the light of the righteous, as

⁵ Sanhedrin 93a

⁶ Zechariah 1:8

⁷ Shemos 15:3

⁸ Megillah 12a

⁹ Yoma 29a

¹⁰ Esther 8:16



it is said:¹¹ *Light is sown for the righteous.* Through the light of the righteous, we celebrate the miracle that Hashem does not allow our enemies to destroy us. This is the reason why the Medrash¹² states that all the festivals will cease to be celebrated, except for Purim. The light of the miracle of Purim will continue to shine in our lives, even after all the evil in the world is destroyed. May we merit this year to see the downfall of all modern-day Haman's and merit the light of the righteous.

DAILY MASHAL

Dan

In reference to Avraham's war against the four kings, it is written: *Avraham pursued them as far as Dan.* Concerning this, Rabbi Yochanan said: When that righteous man (*Avraham*) reached the territory of Dan, his strength diminished, for he prophetically foresaw that his descendants would eventually worship idols in the territory of Dan. As it is written: *Yarovam placed one of the golden calves in Beis El, and the other he placed in Dan.* And, as a matter of fact, even that wicked man (*Nevuchadnezzar*) did not become so strong until he reached the territory of Dan, for it is written: *The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan.*

One may wonder why Avraham's strength faded when he reached Dan. Although Avraham's descendants were destined to worship idols in the territory of Dan, it would not seem justified that their future sins should affect his endeavors. In order to gain insight into this phenomenon of future actions affecting the present, it is important to examine a statement in the *Gemora* concerning Haman, the archenemy of the Jewish People. The *Gemora* states:¹³ [*Haman said to Achashveirosh*] *if it pleases the king let it be recorded that they be destroyed; I and I will pay ten thousand silver talents [into the hands of those who perform the duties, for deposit in the kings treasuries]*¹⁴. *Reish Lakish said, it was revealed before He Who said and the world came into being that Haman would offer silver talents to destroy the Jewish*

People; therefore Hashem instructed the Jewish People to offer their shekalim, silver talents, to negate the silver talents of Haman.

This *Gemora* reveals to us the power of our present actions to affect future generations. What would have been the outcome had the Jewish People not been instructed to offer their shekalim for the Bais HaMikdash? The ability to negate Haman's silver talents would have been seriously mitigated. Further demonstration of this concept can be found in the Medrash¹⁵ that states: *Hashem said to the Shevatim, "you sold your brother [Yosef] through food and drink, as it is said:¹⁶ they sat to eat food. Therefore, your descendants will be sold in Shushan through food, as it is said:¹⁷ the king and Haman sat down to drink.*

The *Gemora* and Medrash both offer a valuable lesson to us. When one commits a sin or feels that matters are not proceeding according to plan, it is not sufficient to examine his own actions. He must contemplate the result of his actions and how the future generations will be affected. Avraham was acutely aware of how his actions affected those who existed in his present world and how the actions of future generations affected him. Certainly, Avraham was aware of how his actions influenced future generations.

It is important to keep in mind that we are commanded to remember the evil that Amalek perpetrated, and how Amalek's brazenness affected the Jewish People for all generations. The Sfas Emes posits that Amalek was the ultimate catalyst for the Jewish People fashioning the Golden Calf. If this statement can be said regarding Amalek, then certainly we have to be cognizant of our actions and how they affect the world we live in. Understanding this message will allow us to be delivered from our enemies and merit the Final Redemption.

¹¹ Tehillim 97:11

¹² Medrash Mishlei 9

¹³ Megillah 13b

¹⁴ Esther 3:9

¹⁵ Medrash Tehillim 10

¹⁶ Breishis 37:25

¹⁷ Esther 3:15