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Avodah Zarah Daf 4

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Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamot of

Moshe Raphael ben Yehoshua (Morris Stadtmauer) o”h

Tzvi Gershon ben Yoel (Harvey Felsen) o”h

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

Comparison to Fish

Another explanation: Just as among fish of the sea, the larger fish swallows up the smaller ones, so with men, were it not for fear of the government, the greater man would swallow his fellow alive. This is just as we learned in a *Mishna*: Rabbi Chanina, the Deputy of the *Kohanim*, said: Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of the government, men would devour each other alive. (4a)

Contrasting Verses

Rav Chinana bar Pappa explained contrasting verses: During a time of judgment (*on the Jewish people*), Hashem moderates His strength (*for otherwise, they would be destroyed*); but during a time of war (*when He is defending the Jews*), He uses the full extent of His power (*to crush the enemy*).

Rabbi Chama bar Chanina explained contrasting verses: When Hashem is dealing with the Jewish people, He does not show His wrath; however, with idolaters, he displays His wrath (*to punish them*). Rav Chinana bar Pappa explained differently: They are both dealing with the Jewish people. Hashem is saying, “Although I am full of wrath, I will deal with them as if I have no wrath. This is because I took an oath not to become angry with them.”

And that which we said (*that the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not wish to give excuses when dealing imperiously with His creatures*) is similar to that which Rabbi Alexandri said in

his explanation of a different verse: The Holy One, Blessed be He, says (*before destroying the other nations*): I will search their chronicles, and if that have a merit, I will redeem them; and otherwise, I will destroy them.

And this (*that He judges the other nations precisely*) is like that which Rava said in his explanation of a Scriptural verse: The Holy One, Blessed be He, says to Israel: I do not judge you like I judge the idolaters, for you I punish like the pecking of a hen (*a little bit at a time*).

Another explanation: The Holy One, Blessed be He, says to Israel: Even if you do before Me but few good deeds at a time, like the pecking of a hen in a rubbish heap (*a little bit at a time*), I will combine it to a large sum.

This (*that Israel is punished a little at a time*) is similar to what Rabbi Abba said that the Holy One, Blessed be He, says to Israel: Though I said that I would redeem them by depriving them of monetary possessions in this world, so that they be worthy to merit the World to Come, yet they speak lies against Me.

And this is in agreement with that which Rav Pappi said in the name of Rava: The Holy One, Blessed be He, says: I thought I would punish them with suffering in this world, so that their arm might be strengthened in the World to Come (*that they receive a good portion*), yet they think evil of Me. (4a)

Answering Heretics

Rabbi Avahu praised Rav Safra to the heretics as a learned man, and he was therefore exempted by them from paying taxes for thirteen years. One day, they found him and said to him: It is written: *You only have I loved from all the families of the earth; therefore I will hold you to account for all your iniquities.* They asked: If one is in anger does one turn it against his friend? He was silent and gave them no answer; so they tied a scarf around his neck and tortured him. When Rabbi Avahu came and found him like that, he said to them: Why are you torturing him? They said: Have you not told us that he is a great man? He cannot even explain to us the meaning of this verse! Rabbi Avahu said to them: I told you that he was learned in *Tannaic* teachings; did I tell you he was learned in Scripture? They asked him: Why do you know it? He replied: We, who are frequently with you, take it upon ourselves to study it thoroughly (*so we can respond to your questions*), but they do not study it as carefully. They asked him: Will you then tell us the meaning? He told them: I will explain it by a parable. To what may it be compared? To a man who is the creditor of two people - one of them a friend, and the other is an enemy. From his friend he will accept payment little by little, whereas from his enemy he will exact payment in one time.

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said: What is the meaning of the verse: *Chalilah to You to do such a thing - to slay the righteous along with the wicked?* Avraham said the following: Master of the Universe: it is a desecration to do such a thing!

The *Gemora* asks: And does not God act in such a manner? Is it not written: *And I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked?*

The *Gemora* answers: That refers to one who is not utterly righteous.

The *Gemora* asks: But it does not refer to one who is utterly

righteous? Is it not written: *And begin (the slaying) with My sanctuary,* which, Rav Yosef learned that it should not be read "My sanctuary," but "My sanctified ones," namely the men who fulfilled the Torah from "Alef" to "Tav"?

The *Gemora* answers: There, too, since it was in their power to protest against the wickedness of the sinners, and they did not protest, they are regarded as men who are not utterly righteous. (4a)

Hashem's Anger

Rav Pappi explained contrasting verses: When Hashem is angry with an individual, the person cannot withstand it; however, Hashem is angered every day on a community, but they can withstand it.

The *Gemora* cites a *braisa*: God is angry every day, but how long does His anger last? It lasts only a moment. And how long is a moment? It is one fifty-three thousand eight hundred forty eighth of an hour. No creature could ever precisely calculate this moment, except Bilaam the wicked, of whom it is written: *one who knows the mind of the Supreme One.* Now Bilam did not even know what was on his animal's mind - could he possibly have known what was on the mind of the Supreme One? Of course not!

The *Gemora* explains: What do we mean when we say that he did not know what was on the mind of his animal? The Moabite emissaries said to Bilam: Why did you not ride a horse? He said to them: Usually I ride a horse. However, today I am riding a donkey, because I put my horses in the marshland to graze. Thereupon, the she-donkey said to Bilam in front of the Moabites: "Am I not your she-donkey?" "Merely for carrying burdens," Bilam said, trying to cut her off before she could contradict him further. "That you have ridden on," the donkey continued, contradicting Bilam's contention that she was merely a beast of burden. "Only occasionally," Bilam said, implying that ordinarily he did not ride her. "All your life until this day," the donkey went on,

contradicting Bilam's contention that he had never ridden her except on rare occasions. "And not only that," she continued, "but at night I perform marital acts with you."

[*Bilam was unable to respond to this retort of the donkey.*]

Rather, what is the meaning of Bilam's description of himself as *one who knows the mind of the Supreme One*? It means that he knew how to determine the precise moment at which The Holy One, Blessed be He, becomes angry. If Bilam cursed someone at that exact moment, the curse would be effective. And this is the meaning of what the prophet Michah said to Israel: *My people, remember, please, what Balak king of Moav plotted, and what Bilam the son of Beor answered him; [remember the period] from the Shittim to the Gilgal, so that you may realize the benevolences of Hashem.* What is the meaning of *so that you may realize the benevolences of Hashem*? The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel: Realize, please, how much compassion I carried out for you in that I did not become angry all those days, in the days of the wicked Bilam when he was looking to curse you, for had I become angry during any of those days, no remnant at all would have remained from the enemies of Israel (*referring to the Jewish people*). This is the meaning of that which Bilam said to Balak: *How can I curse? God has not cursed, etc. How can I anger? Hashem has not become angry.* This teaches that throughout all those days God did not become angry.

It is written: *God is angered every day.* And how long does His anger last? It is but a moment, as it is written: *for His anger endures but a moment, life results from His favor* etc. Alternatively, the length of His anger is derived from the following verse: *Go, my people, enter your rooms, and close your doors behind you; hide for a moment till anger passes.* This clearly indicates that Hashem's anger does not last longer than a moment.

The *Gemora* asks: And when exactly does that moment of anger occur? The *Gemora* answers: It is during the first three hours of the day, when the comb of the rooster pales. Although it is always pale, at all other times there are red

streaks inside it; however, at that time, there are no red streaks in it.

The *Gemora* relates an incident: There was a certain heretic who was in the neighborhood of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, who used to annoy Rabbi Yehoshua. One day, Rabbi Yehoshua took a rooster, tied it by its foot, sat it up, and gazed intently at it. He said: When that moment comes that the rooster's comb pales, I will curse the heretic, for then my curse will be effective. When that moment came, however, Rabbi Yehoshua dozed off. Rabbi Yehoshua thereupon said: One may deduce from here that it is not proper to have another punished on one's account, as it is written: *It is also not good for a righteous person to punish,* which implies that one should not pronounce curses even against heretics.

A *Tanna* taught in the name of Rabbi Meir: At the hour the sun shines in the morning, and the pagan kings place their crowns on their heads and bow to their sun in worship, at that moment Hashem immediately becomes angry.

Rav Yosef said: No one should recite the *Mussaf* prayer on the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* during the first three hours of the day, in private, for we are concerned that since judgment is then summoned, his deeds may be scrutinized and his prayer rejected.

The *Gemora* asks: But if that be so, should it not apply to the congregational prayer as well!?

The *Gemora* answers: The merits possessed by the congregation are greater.

The *Gemora* asks: If so, the *Shacharis* prayer, too, should not be recited in private!?

The *Gemora* answers: Since there is probably a congregation praying *Shacharis* at the same time, we are not concerned that the prayer will be rejected.

The *Gemora* asks: But did we not say that during the first three hours of the day, the Holy One, Blessed be He, is occupying Himself with the study of Torah, and it is during the second three hours that He sits in judgment over the entire world?

The *Gemora* answers: Either, you may reverse the order; or, alternatively, you may say that it need not be reversed. During the first three hours, while occupied with the study of Torah, which Scripture designates as “Truth,” as it is written: *Purchase the truth and do not sell it*, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will not go beyond the line of justice; however, during the second three hours, when sitting in judgment, which is not designated by Scripture as “Truth,” the Holy One, Blessed be He, may go beyond the line of justice towards mercy. (4a – 4b)

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi

It was stated above: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: It is written: The *mitzvos* which I command you today to do them? This teaches us that today only (*the present*) is the time to perform them, but they cannot be done tomorrow; today is the time in which to do them, but not in which to be rewarded for them (*for that is reserved for the World to Come*).

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: All of the *mitzvos* that *Bnei Yisroel* perform in this world will testify for them in the World to Come. This is evident from the verse: *They will bring witnesses and be vindicated* - referring to *Bnei Yisroel*, and: *They will hear and say, “It is true,”* refers to the idolaters.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: All the *mitzvos* which *Bnei Yisroel* perform in this world will come and beat the faces of the idolaters in the World to Come.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: The *Bnei Yisroel* made the

Golden Calf only in order to give encouragement to the penitents (*so future sinners will realize that they can repent*).

This statement accords with what Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: David was not the kind of man suited to do that deed (*with Bas-sheva*); nor were *Bnei Yisroel* the kind of people suited to do that deed (*of the Golden Calf*). Why, then, did they act in such a manner? It was in order to teach us that if an individual has sinned (*and is concerned about the effect of repentance*), he should be referred to the individual David, and if a community commits a sin they should be told to reflect on the community (*who worshipped the Golden Calf*). And both these instances are necessary; for if the case of the individual only were mentioned, it might have been thought that his repentance is accepted because his sin is not publicly known, but in the case of a community whose sins are publicly known, it might not be so; and if, on the other hand, only the case of a community were mentioned, it might have been thought that repentance was accepted because they command that good will should be granted towards them, but with an individual, whose merits are not so persuasive, it is not so; therefore, both are necessary. (4b – 5a)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

He who stops learning Torah is fed burning coals

Our Gemara cites Rabbi Levi’s saying: “Anyone who stops learning Torah and engages in conversation is fed glowing coals of furze (*resamim*, a thorny bush), as we are told: “...and the root of furze is their bread” (*Iyov 30:4*). In other words, aside from the commandment “...and you shall study it day and night” (*Yehoshua 1:8*) and the prohibition to speak idle talk (*Yoma 19b*), he who interrupts his learning for mundane conversation is fed “coals of furze”. The Chafetz Chayim zt”l (*Shemiras HaLashon*, I, conclusion of the book, Ch. 2) explains that since coals of furze burn

for 12 months (Bava Basra 74b), Rabbi Levi used them as a parable to hint at the punishment of the evil in Geihinom, which lasts 12 months. Kisei Melech (on Tikunei HaZohar, tikun 18, 33b) says that his Torah is given over to impure powers (chitzonim).

This halachah is explained in the mishnah Avos 3:7: “Rabbi Shimon says: Someone who learns along the way and interrupts his learning to say “How nice is this tree” or “How nice is this field” is regarded by Scripture as though he is liable for his life. The Tashbetz (Magen Avos, ibid) explains that such a person virtually announces that mundane conversation is more important to him than learning Torah and aside from neglecting the mitzvah of Torah study and talking idle speech, he disgraces the Torah. The Maharal of Prague (Derech Chayim, ibid) adds that Hashem is constantly learning with His students who study Torah, so how could a person stop learning to speak mundane talk? (See further in Sefer Chasidim, 944).

HaGaon Rav Yaakov Risher, author of Responsa Shevus Ya’akov, writes in his ‘lyun Ya’akov (on our sugya) that this matter even applies to a talmid chacham who learns profusely, as Rabbi Levi said: “Anyone who stops learning...” And even though the mundane talk of talmidei chachamim requires study – i.e., it is not considered idle speech – nonetheless, since the Torah is compared to bread and water, one mustn’t interrupt its learning. Therefore, someone who stops learning is punished with coals of furze, as we are told: “...and the root of furze is their bread”, measure for measure because he stopped sustaining himself on the bread of Torah.

DAILY MASHAL

What the Yosef Ometz was so distressed about: The author of Yosef Ometz laments (p. 268): “Ever since I began understanding, I have taken great pains to safeguard from this punishment for it is very common for someone who learns in a family room. People also come and go to speak

with him and thus require him to stop learning many times.” Afterwards he mentions with great caution that one may interrupt learning in a place that is not the midst of a topic, such that one doesn’t have to repeat what one has learnt to continue studying. As for the halachah, Mishnah Berurah (in Sha’ar HaTziyun, 285, S.K. 11) rules that someone who is saying the sidrah twice with the Targum is not allowed to interrupt in the middle of a subject.

In conclusion, we mention the practice of Rabbi Efrayim Zalman Margaliyos of Brod zt”l who, when forced to interrupt his learning for mundane talk, would take off the coat that he wore while learning; the Belzer Rebbe zt”l would not speak mundane talk till he returned the book he was learning to its place (Shevet HaKehasi, I, 370; see BeToraso Yehegeh, Ch. 5:3).