

28 Tishrei 5778
Oct. 18, 2017



Sanhedrin Daf 94

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Chizkiah and Sancheirev

To the one who increases the rule of Hashem and peace without end etc. Rabbi Tanchum says that Bar Kappara taught the following lesson in Tzipori. Why is the letter “mem” in the middle of a word always open, while the one in this word is closed? This is because Hashem wanted to establish Chizkiah as the *Mashiach*, and make Sancheiriv into Gog u’Magog (the armies of Magog, led by their king, Gog, will invade Eretz Yisroel at the time of *Mashiach*). The attribute of judgment said to Hashem: Master of the Universe! If King David, who said numerous songs and praises before You, was not made *Mashiach*, certainly Chizkiah, who You have made many miracles for, and who has not sang any songs of gratitude to You, should not be made *Mashiach*! This is why the “mem” is closed.

Immediately, the land said before Hashem: Master of the Universe! I will sing to You instead of this righteous person, and You should make him the *Mashiach*. The land started singing before Hashem, as the verse states: *From the edge of the earth we have heard singing, do the wish of the righteous*. The minister of the world was saying to Hashem: Fulfill the wishes of this righteous man! A Heavenly Voice rang out and said: It is My secret, It is My secret (as to why I am not doing so). The prophet (Yeshayah) said: Woe is me, woe is me, when will *Mashiach* come? A Heavenly Voice rang out and said: *The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously*. Rava says, and some say Rabbi Yitzchak says: This means until the plunderers, and plunderers of the plunderers come (until Israel’s enemies and their enemies’ enemies are destroyed).

It is written: *The harsh prophecy of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?* Rabbi Yochanan says that the angel appointed over the souls is named Domeh. When the souls gather around Domeh they say, “*Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?*” (when will the redemption be, when will the redemption be?) Domeh answers: *The watchman answered, “The morning comes, and also the night: if you will seek (the coming of Mashiach), seek (Hashem’s) mercy, repent, and you will be redeemed.*

It is taught in the name of Rabbi Papyas: It was denigrating that Chizkiah and his group did not sing a song to Hashem until the land sang such a song on his behalf. This is as the verse states, *From the edge of the earth we have heard singing, do the wish of the righteous*. Similarly, the verse states: *And Yisro said, Blessed is God, Who saved you (from the hands of Egypt etc.)*. It is taught in the name of Rabbi Papyas: It is denigrating that Moshe and six hundred thousand Jews did not bless Hashem until Yisro (who was not even born a Jew) came and said, “*Blessed is God.*”

Va’yichad Yisro. Rav and Shmuel argue regarding the meaning of this verse. Rav says: This means that he passed a sharp sword over his body (i.e. he circumcised himself and converted). Shmuel says: He got goose bumps all over his body (as he was saddened that Egypt was destroyed). Rav says: This (Shmuel’s statement) is akin to the saying that one



should not insult a gentile in front of a convert for ten generations.

Therefore the Lord God of Hosts should send among his fat ones leanness. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Chizkiah, who has eight names, should punish Sancheirev who also has eight names. This is as the verse says: *For a child (Chizkiah) was born to us, a son was given to us, and God's authority is on his shoulder, and his name will be called Pele Yoetz Kel Gibor Avi Ad Sar Shalom.*

The *Gemora* asks: What about the name Chizkiah?

The *Gemora* answers: This means that Hashem strengthened him. Alternatively, he is called Chizkiah because he strengthened the Jewish people towards Hashem.

Regarding Sancheirev, the verse says: *Tiglas Pileser...Palneser...Shalmeneser, Pul, Sargon, Asnapar Raba Vayakira.*

The *Gemora* asks: What about the name Sancheirev?

The *Gemora* answers: This means that his conversation was strife. Alternatively, it means he spoke and was defiant against Hashem.

Rabbi Yochanan says: Why did that evildoer merit to be called Asnapar, the Great and Venerated? This is because he did not talk badly about *Eretz Yisroel*. This is as the verse says: *Until I come and take you to a land like your land.*

Rav and Shmuel argue about the nature of Sancheirev. One says he was a clever king, and one says he was a foolish king. The one who says he was clever says that if he would have told them (*the Jews*) that there was a better land (*where they would be exiled to*) than *Eretz Yisroel*, they would have said he was lying. [*He therefore said that it was equal to Eretz Yisroel.*] The one who says he was foolish says that if so (*it was equal*), what was he including as an incentive for them?

The *Gemora* asks: Where did he exile them (*the Ten Tribes*) to? Mar Zutra says: Africa. Rabbi Chanina says: The Mountains of Selug.

However, *Bnei Yisroel (the Ten Tribes)* did talk badly about *Eretz Yisroel*. When they come to a land called Shosh, they said that this land is equal to *Eretz Yisroel*. When they got to Almin, they said this is equal to the "house of worlds" (*Yerushalayim*). When they got to Shosh Trei, they said that it was doubly as beautiful as *Eretz Yisroel*.

And underneath his honor there shall be kindled a flame like the burning of a fire. Rabbi Yochanan says: Under his honor, but not his honor. [*The bodies of the Assyrian soldiers were burned, but not their clothing.*] This is like Rabbi Yochanan's statement: "My clothes are my honor." Rabbi Elozar says: This literally means under his honor, and is like the burning of the sons of Aharon. Just as there the soul was burned and the body remained intact, so too here, their souls (*Sancheirev's army*) were burned and their body remained intact.

It was taught in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Korchah: Pharaoh, who cursed on his own, had Hashem Himself collect Pharaoh's punishment. Sancheirev, who cursed through a messenger, was punished from through a

messenger. Pharaoh said: *Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice?* Hashem punished him by Himself, as the verse says: *And Hashem churned Egypt in the sea.* It also says: *You stepped in the sea with Your horses.* Regarding Sancheirev the verse says: *By the hands of your messengers you have cursed Hashem.* Hashem punished him through a messenger, as the verse says: *And the angel of Hashem went out and slew in the camp of Ashur one hundred and eighty-five thousand etc.*

Rabbi Chanina bar Papi asks that the verse says: *Above is His dwelling,* while another verse says: *On high (higher than above) is His dwelling.* He answers that the wicked Sancheirev said, "First I will destroy His lower dwelling (*on earth*), and afterwards I will destroy His higher dwelling (*in Heaven*).

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: What does the verse mean when it says: *Now, is it without Hashem that I came up to this land to destroy it? Hashem said to me to come up to this land to destroy it!* What does this mean? Sancheirev heard a prophet saying, *Being that this nation had rejected the waters of the Shiloach that go slowly, and they instead rejoice about Ratzin and ben Remalyahu etc.* Rav Yosef says: If it would not be for the *Targum (Aramaic translation)* on this verse, we would not know what it means. (*The Targum explains*) Being that this nation has rejected the kingdom of David who talked to them gently like the waters of the Shiloach that flow slowly, and they would rather have Ratzin and ben Remalyahu be their leaders.

Rabbi Yochanan says: What does the verse mean when it says: *The curses of Hashem are on the house of the wicked, and the house of the righteous will be blessed. The curses of Hashem are on the house of the wicked* refers to Pekach ben Remalyahu, who would eat forty *se'ah* of birds for dessert. *And the house of the righteous will be blessed* refers to Chizkiah, who would eat a *litra* of vegetables for his entire meal.

And therefore, behold Hashem will raise up on them the mighty and massive waters of the river, the king of Ashur. The verse also states: *And the river will pass through Yehudah, overflowing as it passes through, and it will reach until the neck.* Why, then, did he get punished (*if he heard a prophet say this*)? This is because the prophet was only talking about the Ten Tribes, whereas he interpreted this as for all of Yerushalayim as well. The prophet told him: *For the one who is tired (Chizkiah) was not given into the hands of the one who pained him (Sancheirev).* Rabbi Elazar the son of Berachyah says: A nation that is tired because it constantly studies Torah is not given into the hands of its oppressor.

What does the verse mean when it says: *When the land of Zevulun and the land of Naphtali were exiled, he did so lightly, but in later times, it was made heavy by the way of the sea, in the Transjordan, and in the "attraction of the nations."* The verse means that they (*the generation of Chizkiah*) were not like the first ones who lightened themselves from Torah. Rather, the later ones did carry the burden of Torah, and it was befitting that a miracle should happen to them like those who crossed the sea and the Jordan. (*Hashem therefore said*) If Sancheirev retreats, that is fine. If not, I will make him into a disgrace in the eyes of the world.

After these matters and truth, Sancheirev, king of Assyria, came to Yehudah and camped by the fortified cities, saying that he will destroy them. The *Gemora* asks: Is this a fitting gift for this officer (*because Chizkiah was truthful, Sancheirev came*)?!

Ravina answers: What does the verse mean when it says, *After these matters and truth?* After Hashem resolutely swore, "If I would tell Chizkiah that I am bringing Sancheirev and I will put him in your hands, he will reply that he does not want Sancheirev or the fright that it will cause." Hashem



resolutely swore that He is bringing Sancheirev. This is as the verse states, *Hashem, the Lord of Hosts, swore saying that like I thought, so it will be. As I have planned, so it will come true, to break Assyria in My land and on My mountains I will trample him. And his yoke will be removed from upon them, and his burden from his shoulder will be taken off.* Rabbi Yochanan says: Hashem said: Let Sancheirev and his followers come, and become a trough for Chizkiah and his followers.

And it will be on that day his burden will be taken off your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed because of the oil. Rabbi Yitzchak Nafcha says: The yoke of Sancheirev was destroyed due to the oil of Chizkiah which burned in the synagogues and study halls. What did he do? He thrust a sword by the entrance of the study hall, and said, "Whoever does not learn Torah will be stabbed with this sword." They checked from Dan until Beersheva, and they did not find even one uneducated person. They checked from Geves until Antifras and did not find a boy, girl, man, or woman who was not an expert on the laws of purity and impurity. Regarding that generation the verse says: *And it will come to pass on that day a man will raise a calf and two sheep...And it shall come to pass that in any place where there will be one thousand grapevines for one thousand silver pieces, there will be briars and thorns.* Even though one thousand grapevines will cost one thousand silver pieces, they will become thorny and rot (*for everyone will be occupied with the study of Torah*).

And your spoils will be collected by the grasshopper. The prophets told *Bnei Yisroel*: Gather your spoils from the Assyrian camp. They asked: Should we take for ourselves, or gather in order to divide it later? He said: It should be like the gathering of the grasshopper. Just like a grasshopper takes for itself, so too, every man should take for himself. They asked: Isn't the money of the Ten Tribes mixed with their money? He answered: *Like the roar of water running through it.* Just like the water running through transforms a person to change from impure to pure (*through the mikvah*), so too regarding

this money of the Ten Tribes, once it fell into the hands of the idolaters, it became pure.

Rav Huna says: Ten marches were taken by that wicked person on that day. This is as the verse says: *He came to Ayis, passed through Migron, to Michmash he will put his vessels, he crossed the Jordan, he came to sleep in Geva, the dwellers of Ramah were frightened, and the dwellers in Givas Shaul fled. Raise your voice Bas Galim, Listen dwellers of Lishah and the poor of Anasos, Madmonah moved, and the dwellers of Gabim were brazen.*

The *Gemora* asks: All these places are more than ten!?

The *Gemora* answers: *Raise your voice Bas Galim* was the prophet telling *Bnei Yisroel*: Raise your voice daughter of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov who performs *mitzvos* like the waves of the sea. (94a – 94b)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

By: Rabbi Binyomin Adler

Song and Blessing

It is taught in the name of Rabbi Papyas: It was denigrating that Chizkiah and his group did not sing a song to Hashem until the land sang such a song on his behalf. This is as the verse states, *From the edge of the earth we have heard singing, do the wish of the righteous.* Similarly, the verse states: *And Yisro said, Blessed is God, Who saved you (from the hands of Egypt etc.).* It is taught in the name of Rabbi Papyas: It is denigrating



that Moshe and six hundred thousand Jews did not bless Hashem until Yisro (*who was not even born a Jew*) came and said, “Blessed is God.”

This *Gemora* is astounding. Moshe and the Jews sang praise to Hashem immediately upon their salvation from the Egyptians, and it is considered to their discredit that they did not say, “Blessed [is G-d] upon being saved from the Egyptians! What more was expected of them? Furthermore, we state explicitly in our morning prayers, “From Egypt You redeemed us, Hashem, our G-d, and from the house of slavery You liberated us. All their firstborn You slew, but Your firstborn, [Israel¹], You redeemed; You split the Sea of Reeds [for them]; the wanton sinners You drowned: the dear ones you brought across; and the water covered their foes-not one of them was left. For this, the beloved offered praise and exaltation to G-d: the dear ones offered hymns, songs, praises and blessings and thanksgivings to the King, the living and enduring G-d....” It is clear from this passage that they offered a blessing to Hashem.

A Talmudic scholar responded to this question with the following resolutions. Although it is true that in our prayers we mention the blessings that the Jewish Nation offered to Hashem, there are different levels of blessings, and the *Gemora* is referring to a higher level of blessing. This answer lacks contextual proof, as both the prayer text and the *Gemora* use the simple term blessing.

The Maharal² points out that the Jews at that time sang to Hashem, but did not bless him. Maharal goes on to distinguish between the concepts of song and blessing, asserting that one who blesses Hashem has achieved a higher level of spirituality than one who praises him in song.

Perhaps there is an alternative explanation that would allow the prayer text to be in tandem with the statement of the *Gemora*. There were two miracles concerning the Splitting of the Red Sea. One was the fact that the Jewish People went on dry land in the midst of the sea.³ The second dimension was that the wanton sinners You drowned: the dear ones you brought across; and the water covered their foes-not one of them was left. Hashem drowned Pharaoh and his chariots in the midst of the sea. It would appear that the first miracle was much more profound than the second one. The drowning of the Egyptians was an obvious climax to this extraordinary event. In the prayer text, it is said, “You split the Sea of Reeds [for them]; the wanton sinners You drowned: the dear ones you brought across; and the water covered their foes-not one of them was left. For this, the beloved offered praise and exaltation to G-d: the dear ones offered hymns, songs, praises and blessings and thanksgivings to the King, the living and enduring G-d....”

The words “for this” may be referring merely to the fact that “the wanton sinners You drowned... and the water covered their foes-not one of them was left”. The Jewish People were more focused on their salvation from the Egyptians than the miracle that Hashem performed for them, allowing them to walk on dry land in the midst of the sea. The *Gemora*⁴ expresses this perspective with the statement, “the recipient of the miracle is not cognizant of his miracle”. It was to the discredit of Moshe and the six hundred thousand Jews that they were only expressive of the salvation, and not focused on the miracle wrought for them. Hashem could easily have caused the Egyptians to lose track of the Jews, thus avoiding the necessity of splitting the Red Sea. This miracle, however, was inherent in the statutes of creation. The Medrash⁵ comments on the verse,⁶ “and toward morning the water went back to its power”, that the word *l’aisanu* (to its power) can be read alternatively, *litnao* (to its condition). Hashem

¹ Nusach Sefard version is in brackets

² Chiddushei Agados Ibid

³ Shemos 14:22; 29; 15:19

⁴ Niddah 31a

⁵ Breishis Rabbah 5:5

⁶ Shemos 14:27



had preordained that the waters of the Red Sea would have to split in order for the waters to maintain their existence⁷. Splitting the Red Sea was no “ordinary” miracle. The Maharal explains that just as nature was a byproduct of creation, the same is true concerning miracles. Hashem did not just decide to split the sea because the Jewish People required salvation. Splitting of the Red Sea in a sense predicated the salvation.

Moshe related to Yisro all the travail that had befallen them on the way, and that Hashem had rescued them.⁸ It appears from the *Gemora* that Moshe did not convey to Yisro the miracle of the Splitting of the sea. Yisro’s declaration, “Blessed [is G-d]”, was in addition to recognizing the salvation of the Jewish People. This explanation would also justify the conversion of Yisro. The *Gemora*⁹ states that throughout the reign of *Dovid Hamelech* and *Shlomo Hamelech*, no gentiles were allowed to convert to Judaism. The reason for this was because if a gentile would seek to convert, he would be suspect of converting out of fear for his life. This rationale would seem to have applied to Yisro as well, as is said,¹⁰ Peoples heard-they were agitated; terror gripped the dwellers of Philistia. Then the chieftains of Edom were confounded, trembling gripped the powers of Moav, all the dwellers of Canaan dissolved.

Yisro, however, converted because he transcended the fear that gripped the gentile world. He declared,¹¹ now I know that Hashem is greater than all the G-ds... Yisro’s belief system was based on a G-d who preceded all other G-ds, and was almighty and omnipotent. When we “bless” Hashem, we are not “wishing Him well”. Rather, we are acknowledging His supremacy over the entire world. The Jewish People only merited this knowledge after they received the Torah at Sinai. Yisro merited comprehending it earlier. May Hashem allow us

to realize that our entire existence has ben preordained from the time of creation, and that we can utter the words, “blessed is Hashem”, with true conviction.

Yourselves or through a Messenger

It was taught in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua the son of Korchah: Pharaoh, who cursed on his own, had Hashem Himself collect Pharaoh’s punishment. Sancheirev, who cursed through a messenger, was punished from through a messenger. Pharaoh said: *Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice?* Hashem punished him by Himself, as the verse says: *And Hashem churned Egypt in the sea.* It also says: *You stepped in the sea with Your horses.* Regarding Sancheirev the verse says: *By the hands of your messengers you have cursed Hashem.* Hashem punished him through a messenger, as the verse says: *And the angel of Hashem went out and slew in the camp of Ashur one hundred and eighty-five thousand etc.*

There is a parallel *Gemora*¹² that states: Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Whatever Avraham performed by himself for the visiting angels, Hashem performed for Avraham’s descendants by Himself. Anything that Avraham performed for the visiting angels through a messenger, Hashem performed for Avraham’s descendants through a messenger. It is said:¹³ *Then Avraham ran to the cattle* [so it is said¹⁴] *a wind went forth from Hashem.* [It is said¹⁵] *He took cream and milk* [so it is said¹⁶] *I shall rain down for you food from heaven.* [It is said¹⁷] *He stood over them beneath the tree* [so it is said¹⁸] *Behold-I shall stand before you by the rock.* [It is said¹⁹] *while Avraham walked with them to escort them* [so it is

⁷ See further in the Medrash (ibid) that states that all of creation was preconditioned to perform miracles. See Yefe Toar ibid for explanation of this idea.

⁸ Shemos 18:8

⁹ Yevamos 24b

¹⁰ Shemos 15:14-15

¹¹ Shemos 18:11

¹² Bava Metziah 86b

¹³ Breishis 18:7

¹⁴ Bamidbar 11:31

¹⁵ Breishis 18:8

¹⁶ Shemos 16:4

¹⁷ Breishis Ibid

¹⁸ Shemos 17:6

¹⁹ Breishis 18:16

said²⁰ Hashem went before them by day. It is said:²¹ Let some water be brought [so it is said²²] you shall strike the rock.

It would appear that Avraham was faulted for performing certain actions through a messenger. This is difficult to understand, because a person has only so many hands. How could Avraham be expected to perform everything simultaneously²³?

Rabbeinu Bachye²⁴ writes, “we have heard with our own ears and many have related to us regarding great people in France and leaders and hosts who had a very distinguished custom. It was the custom in earlier generations that the table upon which they would feed the poor was used as the boards for the casket they were buried in.”

Why is it important for one to perform a mitzvah by himself? There is certainly the element of²⁵ *mitzvah bo yoser m’bshlucho*, the mitzvah is greater when performed by oneself than by his messenger. There is another aspect, however, which is significant. When one performs a mitzvah on his own, he is demonstrating that he wants to be close to Hashem. Indeed, the word mitzvah is derived from the word *tzavsa*, which means connection.²⁶

Although Avraham occupied himself with preparing food for the visiting angels, he chose to have the water brought through a messenger. This act by itself was not negative, but it had repercussions for his descendants. The Shelah²⁷ writes that the Smag²⁸ (Sefer Mitzvos Gedolos) lists acts of kindness as inclusive in the mitzvah of *v’halachta b’drochov*, and you go in His ways.²⁹ The mitzvah of *hachnasas orchim* is greater

than accepting the Divine Presence³⁰, and everything that Avraham did for his guests, Hashem did for the Jewish People. This mitzvah is profound, because Hashem himself hosts all of creation as His guests. If Hashem were to stop sustaining the world even for a split second, the world would cease to exist.

Based on the words of the Shelah, it is clear why Avraham was faulted for offering the water through a messenger. Avraham was performing a mitzvah of the greatest magnitude, and this was akin to sustaining the world. When one sustains the world, there can be no deficiency whatsoever. Furthermore, through the performance of a mitzvah, one is attached to Hashem, and the mitzvah has to be performed with zealously and perfection.

This same idea can be applied to the blasphemy of Pharaoh. Pharaoh, who personally blasphemed against G-d, merited to have the Holy One, blessed is He, personally punish him. Pharaoh was the antithesis of Avraham. Whereas Avraham expended all his efforts to bring people close to Hashem, Pharaoh proclaimed, “who is Hashem that I should heed His voice? Hashem Himself had to punish this utter denial of Hashem.

Our daily actions should be performed within the framework of this perspective. If we perform mitzvos with the intention of coming closer to Hashem, then Hashem will merit us that our descendants achieve the same level of closeness to him.

²⁰ Shemos 17:21

²¹ Breishis 18:4

²² Shemos 17:6

²³ See Gur Aryeh Breishis 18:4

²⁴ Shulchan Shel Arba Shaar Rishon page 474 (Mosad HaRav Kook edition)

²⁵ Kiddushin 41a

²⁶ Shelah Asarah Maamaros Maamar Shlishi Maamar Revii; Maseches Yoma Perek Derech Chaim Tochachas Mussar (16). Sfas Emes Tetzaveh 5631; Ki Seitzei 5651

²⁷ Parashas Vayera Ner Mitzvah

²⁸ Mitzvas Esin 7

²⁹ Devarim 28:9

³⁰ Shabbos 127a