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Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshiyot Netzavim-Vayelech

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Fail, But Not By Choice

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Hashem predicted to Moshe, "Behold, you will lie with your ancestors, and this nation will rise and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the land [alternatively: gods who are foreign to the land]. (Devarim 31:16)" But the Divine prediction – not just Divine awareness, but actually communicating that knowledge, **making it known and tangible** – is painfully problematic. Were the Jews then guaranteed to fall into idolatry? And if so, how could Hashem promise punishment for that guaranteed straying, saying, "I will abandon them and I will hide My face from them (ibid. 31:17)?"

This philosophical problem may have been a factor behind a strained talmudic re-writing of the sentence, to say: "Behold, you will lie with your ancestors, and you will rise." This reading, proposed in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 90b) as supporting evidence of the ultimate resurrection of the dead, makes the second half of the sentence less forceful: "**If** this nation should stray after the gods of the foreigners, etc." [There are other reasons for this read, see Yoma 52b and commentaries there, and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Torah Temimah to Devarim 31:16.]

However, the midrashic re-write does not change the fact that Hashem chose to word the sentence as a guarantee of Jewish sin, forcing us to ask: Were we doomed from the start? And if so, how could Hashem punish us for that failure?

Rabbi Tzaddok haKohen of Lublin, a Lithuanian talmid chacham who

became one of the greatest *Admorim* [chasidic masters] of the 19th century, proposed an idea to address this and similar problems. He was troubled by Egypt and Assyria's liability for harming the Jews even though Hashem had foretold it. In response, he explained (Pri Tzaddik, Parshat Vayeshev 11):

Hashem created the *yetzer hara* to seduce people... but one is required to overpower it. And sometimes a person is compelled, and cannot overpower the *yetzer hara*... And so it was when it said, "And the nation will rise and stray," that Hashem knows that there will be someone who cannot overpower his *yetzer hara*, for Hashem created it with this strength, as it says, "And this nation will rise and stray, etc." This is compulsion, that he will not be able to overpower his *yetzer hara* and conquer it.

And yet, afterward a punishment is recorded for this: "And My anger will burn, etc." [Because] it was foreseen before Him that someone would [transgress] out of desire and for pleasure – not like a fly or frog which acts only to fulfill the decree of Hashem, acting as Hashem's agent. One who does it without any pleasure or desire, but only as a creature fulfilling its Creator's mission, doing it only due to compulsion for so decreed Hashem's foreknowledge, is not punished at all.

At first, Rabbi Tzaddok HaKohen seems to say that there are people who simply cannot overpower their *yetzer hara* in a particular situation; we may be given a test we cannot pass. But in his second paragraph he adds an important

element: Sometimes Hashem's plan **requires** that someone sin. Effectively, the sinner – like Assyria and Egypt – is fulfilling a Divine plan.

The Torah offers substantive support for this idea. Yosef declared that his own sale was Hashem's plan. (Bereishit 45:5, 50:20) G-d required that Kayin marry his sister in order to propagate the world. (Sanhedrin 58b) The act of Yehudah and Tamar led to Mashiach. (Horiyot 10b) Hashem set up Lot with his daughters, to produce Amon and Moav. (Rashi to Bereishit 19:33)

Nonetheless, Rabbi Tzaddok continues to explain that the Jews are not free to say that their idolatry is foreordained, and then do as they wish. Devarim 31:17 says that Hashem will punish those who go to the idol willingly; only one who fights the sin and loses will not be held responsible.

The practical implications are clear for our pre-Rosh Hashanah thoughts. There are sins which have appeared on my annual *cheshbon hanefesh* (spiritual accounting) for decades; I have not yet grown to the point where I can expect to overpower my *yetzer hara* for a full year in these areas. Rabbi Tzaddok acknowledges that I may be unable to win, so far; perhaps this even serves a Purpose. Nonetheless, the question is **how** I will fail. Will it be willingly, desiring to do wrong? Or will it be after a fight, against my will? Our failures may be many, but may they always be unwilling.

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Summary

The chapter opens with a list of King David's children who were born in Chevron. (3:1-5)

After this interlude we are brought back to the story of the civil war between King David and Shaul's son, Ishboshet. Ishboshet confronts Avner about consorting with one of Shaul's concubines (which would have been considered an affront to the king's authority). Avner responds angrily. He decides to finally overthrow Shaul's dynasty and work to fulfill G-d's promise of David becoming king over all of the tribes. (3:6-11)

Avner sends messengers to David regarding this plan. David accepts Avner's help, but only on condition that he be reunited with his wife Michal, whom Shaul had remarried to Palti son of Layish. After this is done, Avner visits the elders of the various tribes, including Shaul's tribe of Binyanim, and gets their approval to accept David as king. He emphasizes the fact that this is, after all, G-d's will. Avner visits David in Chevron, and is greeted with a banquet.

Avner leaves Chevron to continue

consolidating plans for David's coronation. (3:12-21)

Shortly after, Yoav and Avishai, sons of Tzeruyah, return to Chevron from the war against Ishboshet. When they find out that Avner, the enemy general and murderer of their brother Asahel, has visited David and left with his life, they are angry. Yoav advises David that Avner was obviously spying. When Yoav does not get the expected reaction from David, he takes action. Yoav sends a messenger to Avner, calling him back to Chevron. When Avner arrives, Yoav takes him aside and kills him, in a way that matches the murder of Asahel. (3:22-27)

King David's reaction to Avner's murder is extreme. He instructs all of his soldiers to tear their clothing and wear sackcloth, clear signs of mourning. David eulogizes Avner, cries over his grave, and refuses to eat until the end of the day. The text emphasizes that it was clear to everyone that David had no intention of killing Avner. As for Yoav and Avishai, David publicly chastises them and asks G-d to punish them for their actions. (3:28-39)

Analysis

Avner and David both demonstrate the importance of loyalty in political alliances. Avner remained faithful to Shaul even after his death, until he was insulted by Ishboshet, whom he had risked his life to protect. David had just made peace with Avner, and was relying on him to cement ties with the other tribes when he was murdered. This is what elicited David's elaborate demonstration of mourning.

At the same time, this chapter repeatedly emphasizes G-d's promise to make David king. Both David and Avner knew this, so why did they take the steps they did? Apparently, a promise from G-d demands belief, but it does not absolve us from acting both morally and practically. The faithful Jew has to feel the pressure of proper moral actions even as he is inspired by G-d's promise of a greater future.

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The Israeli Farmer: What Happens to Terumah today?

Separation of tithes from produce grown in Eretz Yisrael is a well-known obligation. Much less known is the current destination of the separated produce. Regarding *maaser* tithes, there are minimal halachic concerns, as they may be eaten even by non-kohanim, and in a ritually impure (*tamei*) state. However, *Terumah* and *Terumat Maaser* pose a much greater halachic problem. These may be eaten only by ritually pure (*tahor*) kohanim, which is not possible in our current time, because we lack the ashes of the Red Heifer.

Tahor terumah, when it cannot be eaten by *tahor* kohanim, should be buried. (Tur YD 331) *Tamei terumah* should not be eaten, even by *tahor* kohanim, and must be burned. (Shulchan Aruch YD 331:19) Both instructions are feasible as long as we are discussing a consumer, or an individual growing a small amount of produce. However, this is very difficult to apply to farmers and large markets and groceries. According to popular estimates, the amount of *terumah* separated annually is more than sixty thousand tons of fruits and vegetables. Burial or burning of such an amount is awfully expensive and highly polluting. These problems, in turn, unfortunately cause some farmers to sell their *terumah* fruits on the "black market", and this forbidden produce may end up in the commercial market. In addition, putting such a large amount of produce to waste appears to many Israelis as highly insensitive, considering the existence of poverty and deprivation. This results in disdain of Halachah and Torah, Heaven forbid.

A solution has been found based on a mishnah (Terumot 1:19), which seems to allow giving *terumah* vegetables to animals which belong to kohanim. However, halachic

authorities disagree regarding the type of vegetables included in this leniency. According to Rashi (Shabbat 127b) and Rambam (Terumot 9:7), all *terumah* vegetables may be given to animals.

Other authorities, such as Tosafot and Ritva (Bava Metzia 90a), limit this allowance to vegetables planted for animal food. Nonetheless, recent authorities, such as Rabbi Zvi Pesach Frank and the Chazon Ish, held that the problem of giving *terumah* to animals exists only when the produce could have been eaten by a kohen. In our days, when the eating is impossible, there is no loss by giving the produce to a kohen's animals. Some authorities have even extended this leniency to *tamei terumah* (Maadanei Eretz, Terumot II 15:4).

Based on this allowance, many zoos and similar institutions (such as The Organization for Raising Bats) sell their animals to kohanim. This way, the animals are fed from an estimated 90% of *terumah* separated every day, with no cost except for transportation. This is an excellent arrangement for all sides. May G-d speedily enable us to see *tahor* kohanim eating *tahor terumah*!

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Biography
Rabbi Bahya ben Asher
Rabbi David Ely Grundland

Rabbi Bahya ben Asher, known colloquially as Rabbeinu Bechaye, was one of the eminent biblical scholars in Spain of the 13th and 14th centuries. Rabbeinu Bechaye was a student of Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet (Rashba). He served as a preacher in his native Saragossa, earning a meagre salary. Regardless of his personal suffering, which he references in the introduction to his commentary on the Torah, he remained steadfast in his commitment to Torah.

Unlike his teacher, who focussed his published efforts on talmudic and halachic commentary, Rabbeinu Bechaye's principal work was his own commentary on the Torah. He modeled his style after Ramban (who had been the Rashba's teacher), including Ramban's use of Kabbalistic writings in his interpretation. Rabbeinu Bechaye strove to incorporate all levels of Torah exegesis into his commentary, weaving the simple meaning, homiletic interpretations, hints and kabbalistic interpretations together. He also incorporated contemporary logic and philosophy into his commentary, showing that Torah incorporates philosophical truths.

Unique to Rabbeinu Bechaye's commentary is his introduction to each parshah, in which he often underscores the fundamental ideas and questions that will be discussed. Each introduction begins with a verse from Mishlei, and serves as a guide throughout the commentary, illuminating his thought processes and enabling the reader to follow along.

Other works of Rabbeinu Bechaye include his *Kad HaKemach*, a book of sixty chapters covering a wide range of philosophical, ethical, moral and religious teachings, written as a means of promoting the value of living a religious life and connecting to the Divine. He also wrote *Shulchan Shel Arba*, which details proper conduct during different meals, and includes a section on the "banquet" of the next world.

Rabbeinu Bechaye died in 1340. Some say that he died in Saragossa, but others report that he came to Israel after persecution in Spain, and he is buried in Chakuk, in Northern Israel.

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Torah and Translation
Why Teshuvah Preceded the World
R' Bahya, Kad haKemach on Rosh Hashanah 1
Translated by Rabbi Sammy Bergman

מחסי השי"ת על ברואיו שברא התשובה קודם שברא העולם לפי שהאדם מוטבע מיצר הרע והיה גלוי וידוע לפניו שעתיד לחטוא, והנה הוא חסר מצד התולדה עד שיתחזק שכלו ויתגבר וימשול על יצרו, והנה דוד המלך ע"ה אף על פי שהיה בתכלית החסידות והשלימות מצינו בו שהתנצל מצד התולדה בענין בת שבע שאמר (תהלים נא) הן בעון חוללתי ובחטא יחמתני אמי, יאמר כי כל מה שקרהו היה מצד התולדה, וכן הוא אומר (בראשית ח) כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעוריו וכתוב (שם ו) וכל יצר מחשבות לבו רק רע כל היום. על כן גבר חסד השי"ת על נבראיו והקדים להם רפואה למכה וברא להם התשובה.

ושבעה דברים הן שנבראו קודם שנברא העולם ואלו הן, תורה תשובה גן עדן גיהנם כסא הכבוד בית המקדש שמו של משיח, וזהו הסדר המסודר והנכון וסדורם למעלה כן וליודעים חן. וקשור הענין התורה שישראל נזהרין בה מחייבת התשובה ומחייבת גן עדן וגיהנם, שאם ישוב הרי גן עדן ואם לא ישוב הרי גיהנם, וקיום התורה צריך מקום העולם השפל שנברא בשבילה המתקיים בתנועת השמים שהם כסא הכבוד, ובכלל העולם צריך מקום פרטי והוא בית המקדש ולכך נתחייבה מחשבת בית המקדש, ולפי שעתיד ליחרב יתחייב שיבא משיח, ותכלית הדברים להשגת ידיעת השי"ת ולמתן שכרן של מצות...

From the kindness of the Lord, may He be blessed, upon his creatures, He created repentance before he created the world, because man was minted with the evil instinct, and it was revealed and known before Him that he would sin. Behold, he is lacking due to his nature at birth until his mind is strengthened and he overcomes his instinct. Behold, with King David, peace be upon him, even though he was at the pinnacle of piety and perfection, we find that he blamed his nature at birth in the matter of Batsheva when he said (Psalms 51): "I have been defiled by sin and with sin my mother was warmed with me." He meant to say that everything that happened resulted from his nature at birth. And it also says (Genesis 8): "Man's instinct is evil from his youth." And it is written (ibid. 6): "And the desire of the thoughts of his heart are only evil all day." Therefore, the kindness of the Lord, may He be blessed, prevailed over his creatures and He brought the remedy before the wound, and created for them repentance.

And seven things were created before the world was created and they are Torah, Repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehennom ("Hell"), the Throne of Glory, the Temple and the name of Messiah. This is the organized and appropriate order, and their order above is the same, as is known to [the mystics]. These concepts are connected in that the Torah which Israel is mandated [to observe] necessitates restoration and necessitates the Garden of Eden and Gehennom, for if he repents - that [results in] the Garden of Eden, and if he doesn't repent - that [results in] Gehennom. And the fulfillment of the Torah requires the place of the lowly world which was created for it which is maintained by the movement of the heavens which are the Throne of Glory, and in the general world [the Torah requires] a specific place which is the Temple, and therefore the conception of the Temple is necessitated. And since it is destined to be destroyed it follows that the Messiah must come, and the ultimate purpose is for the attainment of the knowledge of the Lord, may He be blessed, and the payment of reward for the commandments...

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SPECIAL PROGRAMMING

10:00 PM Motzaei Shabbat (Saturday Night) September 12

Pre-Selichot Learnathon

10:00 PM Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, "Wearing a Mask Taught Me How to Speak"

10:30 PM Rabbi Chaim Metzger, "Yehudah: The First to Return"

11:00 PM Rabbi Sammy Bergman, "The World After Sin"

8:00 PM Sunday September 13—In Person!

Halachah in Modern Israel: Israel and the Ethiopians

Rabbi Alex Hecht, at 21 Marwill (outside)

Email ahecht@torontotorah.com to RSVP and for updates

Audio available by Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/israel5781>

7:30 PM Wednesday September 16

The Book of Jonah, Week 4 of 5

Rabbi Alex Hecht, with Shaarei Tefillah

DAILY

7:30 AM Sun-Fri Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Daf Yomi with BAYT (men), via ZOOM

Adult Seder Boker, Mon-Thu 10 AM to Noon, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres, via ZOOM (men)

Mondays and Wednesdays: Gemara Taanit, Orot haTeshuvah

Tuesdays and Thursdays: Parshah, Tanach: Shoftim

WEEKLY

Shabbat Sept. 12

IN PERSON! 8:00 PM "The Prayer of a Broken Heart"

at Shaarei Shomayim with Rabbi Bergman, between Minchah and Maariv

Sunday Sept. 13

9:15 AM, Contemporary Halachah with Netanel Klein (not this week)

10:00 AM, Gemara Shabbat, with Rabbi Aaron Greenberg (University, pwd 613613)

8:00 PM Gemara Ketuvot with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) - Note Special Time This Week

Monday Sept. 14

8:30 PM Gemara Shabbat, Chap. 15, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres

Tuesday September 15

8:00 PM Shoftim, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) Note Special Time This Week

Thursday September 17

11:30 AM Shemitah!, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

1:30 PM, Shemuel, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (women) (not this week)

8:00 PM Should Rosh Hashanah Taste Bitter?

Rabbi Sammy Bergman, with Shaarei Shomayim

8:30 PM Gemara Beitzah, with Ezer Dena (men)

Friday September 18 (Erev Rosh Hashanah)

9:00 AM, Parshah, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman (university) (not this week)

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