

A Matter of Mesirus Nefesh

The son of the Rizhner Rebbe, R' Avraham Yaakov of Sadigora once told this story.

One *Erev Shabbos* the Baal Shem Tov appeared in a town unexpectedly. Declining invitations from all the locals, he elected to remain alone in the *Shul* after *Shabbos* evening davening. The wonder of the residents turned to alarm when they saw his fervent *Tefilla* and *Tehillim* continue the whole night long. Something was surely the matter. However, in the morning the Baal Shem Tov was relaxed and joyful and he accepted the invitation of one of the locals for the morning *Shabbos* meal.

Naturally, all of the townspeople crowded into the house of the host to see the Holy Baal Shem Tov. As they were sitting at the table, a local peasant came around looking for a drink of vodka. They were about to drive him away when the Baal Shem Tov called out that he should be brought in and provided with a generous glass of vodka. He asked him to tell what he had seen in the mansion of the Poritz (wealthy Polish estate owner) the previous night.

The peasant's tongue, loosened by the vodka, related that the Poritz, believing that he had been cheated in a business deal by a Jewish merchant, assembled his peasants and armed them with knives and hatchets telling them to be on the ready to avenge themselves on the Jews at his command. They would then all be able to liberate their stolen riches from the Jews.

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"The whole night we waited for the command," he continued, "But the Poritz had closed himself in his office with an unexpected visitor, an old friend that he hadn't seen for 40 years! Finally, he emerged and told us all to go home, that the Jews were upright and honest people and nobody should dare lay a hand on them. We all went home and that's the whole story!"

"This old friend", explained the Sadigorer Rebbe, "Had been dead for decades. The Baal Shem Tov had dragged him from the grave to influence his friend the Poritz."

"But I always wondered," queried the Rebbe, "Why did the Baal Shem Tov have to travel all the way to that town for *Shabbos* to avert the decree? Couldn't he just as well have remained in his hometown of Medzibuz?"

"But I understand now. The Baal Shem Tov said to himself, if I can succeed in saving the town, fine...but if not, then I will perish together with them!"

Adapted from Chassidic Archives

This past year has been a wonderful experience in working with the Hasmonean Living Torah. I would like to give a special thank you to all the editors and contributors for their hard work this past year. A special thank you to my father for all his help. Wishing you all, happy reading and a Good Shabbos,
Daniel Lefkowitz

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Devorim 5769 - דברים תשס"ט

מס' ש"יג

From these key episodes we see the three elements that are fundamental to our entry into ארץ ישראל and עם ישראל, תורת ישראל. The sin of the spies was that he spoke negatively about עם ישראל. The King's desire to send spies showed a lack of belief in תורת ישראל and ה'. The spies sinned by speaking against לשון הרע. It is interesting to note that ספר דברים is always started on שבת, the שבת before תשעה באב. Though today is a time of sadness we are told that one day it will be a festival. This is the very conundrum that is held within ספר דברים. It testifies to the sins of the past, whilst holding the promise of celebration in the future.

For ספר דברים heralded a mixture of feelings. The joy of celebration, as they were finally entering into ארץ ישראל, was dampened by the fact that משה רבינו and all his generation were not to enter.

The generation of the מדבר did not enter into ארץ ישראל due to the sin of the מרגלים (the Spies). תשעה באב tell us that this occurred on ארץ ישראל was not allowed to enter into ארץ ישראל due to the sin of מריבה, where he hit the rock, instead of speaking to it. On face value it seems that משה's punishment for this act was disproportionate as he would now not realise his life's ambition and lead בני ישראל into ארץ ישראל. Furthermore, it is strange that no matter how much משה beseeched ה', He did not forgive him.

The רמב"ם (4 פרקים פרק 4) explains that משה's sin was in fact that he exhorted the בני ישראל and described them as rebels. As this is a sin between man and man it was not possible for משה to daven for תשובה.

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The sins of משה רבינו and the המדבר are the same reasons why we are lacking a בית המקדש today, namely our failure to support עם ישראל, ארץ ישראל and תורת ישראל.

However, this very same ספר has the potential of heralding one of the greatest celebrations. The laws of שמטה, perhaps above all other מצוות, underpin the concepts of ארץ ישראל and תורת ישראל. At the conclusion of the שמטה when we all gather as עם ישראל, the King will read תורת משה, ספר דברים.

May we all be זוכה to participate in the reading of ספר דברים in such a celebration בימינו. As this is the final edition of the Living Torah before the summer break, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the editorial team for their השתדלות and hard work in ensuring the weekly production of such a high quality Torah publication.

By Rabbi D. Meyer

The 3 Bees

The Emorites went out...and pursued you as bees do; they struck you in Se'ir, until Chormah (1:44)

Rashi explains the "bee" analogy: "Just as a bee, when it attacks a person dies immediately, so too they, the Emorites, as soon as they brushed against you, also died immediately." Rashi's comment is somewhat surprising. The point of the verse is clearly to illustrate the *severity* of the Emorites' attack, yet Rashi's interpretation actually *mitigates* the intensity of the assault by pointing out the suffering of the Emorite attackers.

In order to explain Rashi's comment, let us imagine two different scenarios. In one case a person strikes another man, knowing that his victim is lacking in resolve to return the blow. In the other instance someone assaults a strong person, knowing well that retaliation will surely follow. Which act of violence demonstrates a greater degree of hatred on the part of the attacker? In the first case, the aggressor is able to perpetrate his violence without any risk to himself. This does not require any greater motivation than a spiteful personality. In the second scenario, however, where the attacker knows full well that he will be struck in return – perhaps with even greater severity than his own attack – the only possible motivation behind such aggression is pure, unadulterated hatred.

Having established this point, we can now understand the verse's analogy to bees. The Emorites came forth and pursued the Israelites. They knew that the attack was futile; they realized that they would meet with certain death, just as a bee's sting is always its last. However they never the less still attacked Am Yisrael. Their hatred for the Israelites was so extraordinarily intense that

they struck them despite the impossibility of victory. Thus, the imagery of the bee sting does indeed describe the severity and fury of the Emorite attack against Israel.

Based on this explanation, we can gain understanding of a passage in *Tehillim* (118:10-12): "All the nations surround me; in the name of Hashem I cut them down. They surround me and surround me; in the name of Hashem I cut them down. They surround me like bees...in the name of Hashem I cut them down" These three verses seem to be quite repetitive. What is the need for three virtually identical expressions? The Vilna Ga'on explained the idea as follows. When a city is under siege, completely surrounded by soldiers, the commander of the attacking army may sense a particular weak spot in his own ranks, prone to a breach through which the beleaguered inhabitants of the city could attempt a counterattack. In such a case, the officer will organize a second ring to be made around the city.

We can now relate this idea to the three identical pesukim; first all the nations surround me i.e the author of the psalm, but not only do they surround me with a simple ring of cohabitants, they were boosted with reinforcements! *They surrounded me and surrounded me again!* Yet I still manage to "cut them down in the name of Hashem." Then, not only do they plan their attack against me, but like bees, they are driven by mindless, relentless hatred, bent at destroying me at any cost.

By Steven Kaye

Learning by Being Challenged

והדבר אשר יקשה מכם תקרבוני אלי ושמעתי (א':י"ז)

And whatever will be too difficult for you, you shall bring to me and I will hear it... (1:17)

Rashi explains that as a result of this statement, Moshe was unable to make a decision when the daughters of Tzelafchad pressed for their rights of inheritance. Most often this inability is understood as being a punishment: because Moshe had stressed his superiority in claiming that he could resolve any problems that were to much for lesser judges, therefore he was shown a problem that he could not resolve and he would have to admit that he had limitations and turn to Hashem for an answer to the problem. There are glaring difficulties within this widely accepted interpretation. Firstly, it would have been distinctly uncharacteristic of Moshe to assert his superiority. The Torah states that Moshe was "the most humble of all men on the face of the earth" (Bamidbar 12:3) – past, present, and future. Secondly, in what way can Moshe's turning to Hashem for an answer be considered as a reflection on his wisdom? All of the laws of the Torah were told to Moshe by Hashem, and he did not arrive at any of them by his power of reasoning. Why, then, would it be an indication of humiliation if he did not know the laws of inheritance until they were revealed to him by Hashem?

Rabbi Twerski explains this issue in another light. We know that learning is enhanced when it is achieved through questioning. As the Gemarah says, "I have learned much from my teachers, more from my colleagues and most of all from my students" (Taanis 7a). As the student raises questions to which the teacher must find answers, the subject at hand becomes much clearer to the teacher, and he is able to achieve a depth of understanding unattainable in any other way. The Gemarah says that after Rabbi Yochanan's disciple, Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, died, whenever other students would find authoritative sources that supported Rabbi Yochanan's teachings, Rabbi Yochanan would weep bitterly, "When Ben

Lakish constantly challenged everything I said, I would have to rethink and explain my position, until it became crystal clear to me. I do not need anyone to support my statements. I need Ben Lakish, to question and challenge them". The Gemarah states that Rabbi Yochanan could not be consoled, and that he died of grief over his favourite disciple's death (Bava Metzia 84a).

Moshe, too, wished to be questioned and challenged so that he would be able to analyze each halachah, and thereby achieve a maximum understanding of it. The Hebrew word ושמעתי, usually translated as "I will hear it," can also be translated as "I will understand it." Moshe was saying that he was inviting difficult problems in halachah so that he might understand halachah better by being forced to clarify it.

The laws of inheritance would have been revealed to Moshe just as all the other laws were, but because Moshe had craved a depth of understanding that could come only through questioning, Hashem granted his wish by having the daughters of Tzelafchad pose a question to which he did not have an immediate answer. When Moshe's immense reasoning powers could not yield an answer, he brought the issue to Hashem and received the answer through a Divine revelation. The Gemara teaches us that the attitude of a student must always be to seek greater understanding by questioning his teachers, and the teacher's attitude should be to welcome challenges. In this way, both the student and the teacher are stimulated to achieve the ultimate heights in scholarship.

Adapted from Living Each Week, Rabbi Twerski by Asher Weisz

Riddle for the Week

Who will be next years editors for the Living Torah?

(Answer in next years Living Torah)

Answer to Last Weeks Riddles

When is one allowed to mourn on Shabbos?

Answer:

A person mourns for a baby boy on his first Shabbos. The mourning is done for the Torah which he has forgotten upon being born.