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SUGYA OF RABBAH BAR BAR CHANAH
מסכת בבא בתרא / TRACTATE BAVA BASRA

דפים עג.-עה. / FOLIOS 73A-75A

(סוגיא דרבה בר בר חנה)

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EIN YAAKOV

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Dedication of **THIS VOLUME**

A great rosh yeshivah of the last generation said,
“From my father זצ”ל I learned *Mesechta Shabbos*.
From my mother ע”ה I learned — **and saw** — what *Shabbos* is!”

We are doubly blessed. Our mothers imbued us and our children with the beauty of Yiddishkeit, the love of Torah, and respect for the *talmidei chachamim* who guide us through the maze of history and the challenges of modernity.

We are honored to dedicate this *sefer* to them, as a small gesture of our enormous love and gratitude.

Liebe Devorah Rechnitz תחי'

ליבא דבורה בת רבקה תחי'

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מרים בת רחל לאה תחי'

In the *zechus* of the infinite hours of learning that this *sefer* will bring, may Hashem grant them both a *refuah sheleimah*, and may He bless our family with their inspirational presence for many healthy, productive years.

Shlomo Yehudah and Tamar Rechnitz

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We proudly dedicate this edition of Ein Yaakov
In honor of our beloved children

**Joseph Aaron and Lindsay Brooke
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Words cannot convey our joy that our children continue our family tradition of generosity, kindness, and participation in the Jewish community — local, national, and international. Most of all, we are proud of their commitment to Torah education, for Torah institutions are synonymous with Jewish survival.

Ein Yaakov comprises the Talmud's teachings of morals and ethics, as lived and taught by the great and holy Sages of the Talmud. The Oral Torah, of which Ein Yaakov is part, was transmitted from generation to generation. Our children are symbolic of that ideal. The first generation of our family in Columbus delivered food packages to the needy. Synagogues, Torah Academy, charity, great yeshivos, Talmud, *tefillah* — all of these and more engage the energies, devotion, and resources of our family. And they engage our children. As the years go by, these ideals will engage their children as well.

We could not be more proud of them. May Hashem shower His blessings upon them, and through them upon the entire Jewish nation.

Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein

סוגיא דרבה בר בר חנה

**SUGYA OF RABBAH
BAR BAR CHANAH**

פרק חמישי

משנה [דף עג.] המוכר את הספינה — מכר את התורן, ואת הנס, ואת העוגין, ואת כל המנהיגין אותה וכו'.

גמרא תורן — איסקריא, וכן הוא אומר (יחזקאל כז, ה) "אָרְזוּ מִלְבָּנוֹן לְקָחוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת תּוֹרָן עֲלֶיהָ". נס — אדרא, וכן הוא אומר (שם, ז) "שֵׁשׁ בָּרָקְמָה מִמִּצְרַיִם הָיָה מִפְּרֶשֶׁף לְהִיּוֹת לָהּ לְנֶס". עוגין — תני רבי חיא: אלו עוגינין שלה, וכן הוא אומר (רות א, יג) "הֲלֹהֶן תִּשְׁבְּרָנָה עַד אֲשֶׁר יִגְדְּלוּ, הֲלֹהֶן תַּעֲגֹנָה לְבִלְתִּי הִיּוֹת לְאִישׁ". מנהיגין — אמר רבי אבא: [אלו]

Chapter Five

DAF 73A

Misfinafi The fifth chapter continues the discussion begun in the previous chapter about which subsidiary items are included in standard sales of various properties. Our Mishnah discusses which items are included in the standard sale of a ship:

המוכר את הספינה וכו' — **One who sells a ship** without specifying exactly what is included in the sale **has sold the *toren* and the *neis* and the *ogin* and all the items that drive [the ship], etc.**^[1] All of these items are included in the sale even if they are not mentioned specifically by the seller, because they are all necessary for the proper operation of the ship and have no other function.^[2]

Gemara The Gemara defines the unfamiliar terms used by the Mishnah:

תורן איסקריא וכו' — "***Toren***" is the mast on which they would hang the boat's sail, and so Scripture states (*Yechezkel* 27:5): ***They took cedar from Lebanon to make a "toren" upon you.*** The prophet discusses the destruction of Tzor, which was built on the shore, and whose people were seafaring. Yechezkel uses the imagery of a mighty ship, laden with heavy wares, that sinks at sea (*Rashi* to the verse). Since the verse speaks of using the tall cedar to make the ship's *toren*, it follows that *toren* is the mast, for the mast is that part of a ship that would be made from a tall cedar pole.^[3]

"***Neis***" is the sail. And so Scripture states, when it continues the description of the ship of Tzor: (*ibid.* v. 7): ***Embroidered linen from Egypt was your spread, to be for you a "neis."***^[4] Thus, *neis* refers to the sail, which is the part of the ship fashioned from strong fabric such as linen.

As regards the meaning of "***ogin***," **R' Chiya taught a Baraisa: THESE ARE [THE SHIP'S] ANCHORS**, which restrain the ship from drifting away; **AND SO SCRIPTURE STATES** (*Rus* 1:13): ***WILL YOU WAIT FOR THEM UNTIL THEY ARE GROWN? WILL YOU HOLD YOURSELVES BACK (tei'ageinah) FROM MARRYING BECAUSE OF THEM?*** In this verse, Naomi tries to dissuade her widowed daughters-in-law, Rus and Orpah, from accompanying her back to Eretz Yisrael, by arguing: What do you gain by staying with me? Even if I were to have more sons, would you remain unmarried until they grew old enough to marry? From the context of this verse, it is evident that *tei'ageinah* refers to a "holding back." Similarly, the related word *ogin* used by the Mishnah refers to that which "holds back" the ship from drifting, viz. the anchor.

What is meant by the Mishnah's phrase "all the items **that drive**" the ship? **R' Abba said: These are**

NOTES

DAF 73A

1. The Gemara will explain what these items are.

2. *Raavad*, cited in *Shitah Mekubetzes*; *Meiri*. [Thus, although the Mishnah mentions only the mast and the sail, all the other components of the ship's rigging

are sold as well.]

3. *Rashbam*.

4. Translation follows *Radak* and *Metzudas David*; cf. *Rashi* there.

הַמְשׁוֹטִין שְׁלָהּ, וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר (יחזקאל כז, ו) "אֲלוֹנִים מִבֶּשֶׁן עָשׂוּ מְשׁוֹטִין",
וְאִי בְעֵית אֵימָא מִהֲכָא: (שם, כט) "וַיִּרְדּוּ מֵאֲנִיּוֹתֵיהֶם כָּל תּוֹפְשֵׁי מְשׁוֹט".

the [ship's] oars. And so Scripture states (*Yechezkel* 27:6): [*Of*] oaks from Bashan they made your oars. The prophet, describing the ship of Tzor, lists all the essential parts of the ship. Since he includes the oars among those parts, it follows that the oars, too, are considered an integral part of the ship and would thus be included in its sale. Accordingly, it is the oars that the Mishnah meant to include by its expression "all the items that drive" the ship.^[5] In Talmudic times, ships were often driven by people walking along the shore pulling ropes attached to the ship. Since one might think that the ropes are the primary drivers of the ship, it is necessary to teach that the oars, too, are considered essential to the ship and are sold along with it.^[6] Or, if you prefer, adduce proof that oars are considered essential to the ship from the following verse (*ibid.* v. 29): *And from their boats will descend all who grasp an oar*. The prophet speaks of the destruction of the ship of Tzor, and states that "all who grasp an oar" (i.e., even the crews of other ships) will flee, fearing that their fate will be the same as that of the ship of Tzor.^[7] Since these crew members are called those "who grasp an oar," it is thus evident that oars are considered the primary drivers of the ship.

§49 From here until *Siman* 62, the Gemara will relate a series of twenty-one stories that Rabbah bar Chanah and other Sages witnessed or were told by seafarers.^[1]

The first story:

NOTES

5. *Rashbam*; see *Rashash*.

6. *Rashbam* ד"ה כל תופשי משוט; see *Rosh*, cited in *Shitah Mekubetzes*.

7. *Metzudas David* to the verse.

1. The stories related here that tell of astonishing events are known as "the Aggadata of Rabbah bar Chanah," and are among the most cryptic in the entire Talmud. The commentators differ as to whether or not these events are to be taken literally. Some maintain that one should not dismiss the literal understanding of these stories (see *Rashbam* ד"ה אמר רבה, and *Ma-harsha* ד"ה אשתעו לי; see also, for example, §51 note 3). *Ritva* here writes that although some of these events actually happened, others were visions that were seen in meaningful dreams by the Sages traveling by sea, where they had witnessed great wonders of Creation and had meditated upon awesome and wondrous matters. [*Ritva's* commentary to these Aggados is cited in its entirety by *HaKoseiv*. We will reference that

commentary as "*Ritva* (cited in *HaKoseiv*)."] *Ben Yehoyada* ד"ה האי גלא explains that even if some elements of these events *did* occur, all agree that the main intent of the Gemara in recording these events is to — by way of allusion — teach moral lessons and convey deeper ideas.

In the notes and Insights that follow, we will provide some basic explanations of the metaphors intended by various elements of the stories, as suggested by the commentators, and then weave those elements together to present a unified explanation of the story. [Our explanation will sometimes be an amalgam of various commentaries. However, in the interest of readability, we will in those cases often not attribute each particular to its original source; the interested reader will, though, be able to find any given particular in one of the sources provided in the notes or at the end of the Insight.]

See Insight A.

❧ **Insight A: The Hidden Treasures of Aggadah** *Rambam* writes in his *Introduction to the Mishnah* (pp. 531-535 in *ArtScroll Introduction to the Talmud*) that Aggadic passages often contain many sublime ideas that most people are unable to fathom. Were these ideas to be openly expounded, most people would misinterpret and distort them. The Sages therefore veiled these ideas in allegories that hide their true, profound meanings, which were revealed only to those few capable of understanding them properly. [See also *R' Moshe Chaim Luzzatto's Maamar al HaAggados*, which appears in slightly abridged translation in the Introduction to Volume 1 of our edition of *Ein Yaakov*. See that Introduction for a general introduction to Aggadah, which we will expand here somewhat before presenting the particularly well-known Aggadata of Rabbah bar Chanah.]

Teshuvos Radvaz (4:232) writes that part of the Sages' method of hiding the true meaning of Aggadah from those who would misunderstand it was to spread it throughout the Talmud instead of concentrating

it in one place. In that way, the untrained reader will fail to realize that before him lie pieces of a precious treasure, and instead he will be content with the short break the Aggadic narrative affords him from the rigorous *pilpul* of Gemara (see similarly in the Commentary to *Shir HaShirim* attributed to *Ramban*, p. 479 [Chavel ed.]). Nevertheless, as *R' Simchah Bunim of Peshis'cha* (*Kol Simchah*, *Likkutim* אבן עזר פ"ה"א ע"ה) maintains, every tractate, every chapter, and every passage of Talmud was carefully laid out by the Sages with precise intent (see Insight A to Ein Yaakov, *Gittin* §16, "The Aggadah of the Destruction"), and thus every Aggadah has a connection to the tractate in which it was placed (*R' Tzadok HaKohen*, *Pri Tzaddik*, *Erev Yom HaKippurim* §1 [end] and §5). When a person will merit to understand the deeper messages embedded in the Aggadata of Rabbah bar bar Chanah, he will perhaps merit to appreciate as well the deeper reason that the Sages placed these Aggados particularly at this juncture. [A number of commentators are of the opinion that the sublime ideas hidden in the Aggados of the Talmud are the secrets of Kabbalah (*Shelah*, *Torah SheBe'al Peh*, *Kevod Hashem Hasteir Davar*; *Maharal*, *Be'er HaGolah* §5; *R' Moshe Chaim Luzatto*, *Maamar al HaAggados*, and *Vilna Gaon* on *Mishlei* 24:30). *Kikayon D'Yonah* (here) and *Vilna Gaon* in *Yahel Or* (to *Zohar*, *Pekudei* 254b), maintain that this is particularly true of the Aggados of Rabbah bar bar Chanah.]

The Aggadata of Rabbah bar bar Chanah seem particularly mystifying — when understood literally — to many people, because of the astonishing nature of the narratives they relate. Some of these narratives might be understood as metaphoric descriptions of actual phenomena, in accordance with the following explanation told by *R' Yisrael Salanter* to a professor who had scoffed at the narratives related by our Gemara. This was at the time that the German empire had consolidated its power over portions of Europe that had previously been held by the French. *R' Yisrael* recalled reading how one writer had praised the power and reach of the New Germany as "a gigantic two-headed eagle [the symbol of Germany] whose right wing extended to Memel, whose left wing reached to Metz, whose one talon gripped Cologne and whose other talon curled around Baden." Contemporaries immediately understood the meaning. But with the passage of generations, the political realities that underlay that description would fade from memory, and all that would be left would be a fantastic description of a monstrous creature of mythical proportions (cited by *R' Chaim Zaitchyk* in *HaMeoros HaGedolim*, p. 38).

Many of these narratives, however, would seem to embrace loftier concepts, and *R' Chaim Elazar Shapira*, the *Munkaczer Rebbe* and author of *Minchas Elazar* (*Divrei Torah*, Vol. 1, 5780 ed., pp. 141-143), cites the following parable told to him by his father, the author of *Darchei Teshuvah*, in the name of one of the great *tzaddikim*, who explained to a government minister why the Sages *deliberately* conveyed their ideas using such astonishing narratives:

An elderly king had amassed great treasures, which he wished to bequeath to his young son. But the king feared that the boy would come into possession of that great wealth before he was mature enough to use it wisely, and would fritter it away or be swayed by advisors who would misuse it for their own enrichment. So the king devised a plan to hide those treasures in a way that the son would not discover them until he was old and wise enough to use them properly. To this end, the king trained his son to love and appreciate art, and then commanded the kingdom's greatest artist to paint the walls of a special room in the palace with the most beautiful and lifelike murals — except for specific places on the walls, where the king instructed him to paint small sections amateurishly. The artist did as he was commanded, though he had no idea why the king wished those parts of the walls to be painted in such a way. What the king had done, though, was to hide the precious gems he had amassed in precisely those places of the wall that he had instructed the artist to paint differently. The day came when the son succeeded his father to the throne. The palace was now his, but where the precious gems had been hidden nobody knew. The years went by. The new king, trained to appreciate art at an early age, would often gaze admiringly at the murals in that special room his father had commanded to be decorated so long before. The son had always noticed that certain parts of the mural had been painted differently, but he was so used to it from an early age that it did not arouse his curiosity. One day, however, he stared at that anomaly with a more mature eye and mind. *Why* were those parts painted amateurishly? There must have been a compelling reason, and he was resolved to find it. Finally, it dawned on him: his father must have wanted him to direct his attention particularly to those places, to discover something hidden there! And so he summoned masons to excavate the walls in those places — and the gems that had lain hidden there for so long were now found.

It is the same with startling Aggados. Hashem knew that the treasured secrets of the Torah might be misunderstood or misused by those incapable of appreciating their true meaning and value. And so, He instructed the Sages — the great artisans of teaching His Torah — to secrete those treasures behind the veil of deliberately astounding statements scattered across the stunning rigor and reason of the Talmudic tapestry. Most will allow such anomalies to pass unnoticed. But mature and deep thinkers will realize that something must be hidden behind those anomalies. And they will dig deep into those statements and reveal the vast

{מט} אָמַר רַבָּה: אֲשַׁתְּעוּ לִי נַחוּתִי יָמָא: הָאִי גֵלָא דְמַטְבַּע לְסַפִּינְתָא —
מַתְחִזִּי כִּי צוּצִיתָא דְנוּרָא חִיּוּרְתִי בְּרִישָׁא, וּמַחֲנִין לָהּ בְּאַלְתָּא
דְּחִיקָא עֲלֶיהָ: "אֶהְיָ אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיָ, יְה (יה) ה' צְבָאוֹת, אָמֵן אָמֵן סְלָה", וְנִיחַ.

Rabbah bar bar Chanah said: Seafarers have told me that the wave that threatens to sink a ship appears to have a fringe of white fire at its tip.^[2] But when one strikes [the wave] with a club upon which is engraved the following three Names of Hashem: (a) *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*, [אֶהְיָ אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיָ], *I Shall Be As I Shall Be*,^[3] (b) *Yah*, [יְה]; (c) *Hashem Tzeva'os*, [ה' צְבָאוֹת], *God of Legions*; and the following words: *Amen, Amen. Selah*, [אָמֵן אָמֵן סְלָה], [the wave] subsides.^[4]

NOTES

2. *Rabbeinu Gershom*. [The white fire is a destructive angel (*Rashbam*).]

3. This Name occurs only once in Scripture (*Shemos* 3:14), when Hashem urged Moshe to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt. The first half of the Name (*I Shall Be*) expresses Hashem's promise to be with the Children of Israel even when they are under Egyptian domination. The second half of the Name (*As I Shall Be*) expresses Hashem's promise to be with them even when they are under the domination of other oppressors (*Rashi*, *Shemos* 3:14, from *Berachos* 9b).

4. "Waves" are often a metaphor for trials and tribulations [*Tehillim* 42:8], especially those of the exile,

as taught in the Midrash [*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Bamidbar* §768, *Yeshayah* §490]. The ship is a metaphor for the Jewish nation, tossed upon the tempestuous seas of exile. The "seafarers" are the Sages, who teach us how to let the waves of exile wash over us without drowning us [*Yevamos* 121a]. *Ehyeh* is the Name by which Hashem promises to be with us in every time of oppression; *Yah* is the "incomplete" Name of the exile in which His control of the world is not manifest; and the Name *Hashem Tzeva'os*, the God of Legions, is the Name of redemption (*Maharsha*; see also *Olelos Ephraim*, *Peirush Aggados Shel Rabbah bar bar Chanah*, and *Ir Gibborim*, *Shaar HaTeshuvah* §1; *Yad Yosef* [*Tzarfati*], *Derush* 4, second

treasures that have lain concealed there, hidden from shallow view, waiting to be discovered by mature minds who can, and will, appreciate their inestimable value.*

There are dozens of published works — ranging from those focused on simple meaning to those focused on mystical ideas — dedicated to explaining the Rabbah bar bar Chanah narratives. The various approaches are not mutually exclusive. As *Olelos Ephraim* (by the author of *Kli Yakar*) writes at the beginning of his commentary on these narratives (*Cheilek* 4, *Amud* 6), just as the words of the Torah itself admit a variety of true interpretations, so too did the Sages intend a variety of true meanings — mystical, homiletical, or ethical — in their formulation of Aggadah. Similarly, *Chasam Sofer* explains the comment of *Mechilta* comparing the manna eaten by the Jews in the Wilderness to Aggadah "that draws the heart" to mean that just as each person tasted in the manna whatever flavor he had in mind, so too will people find meaning in Aggadah in accordance with the level of their hearts and minds (*Toras Moshe* on *Shemos* 16:31). [The *Gra's* interpretation of the first six stories in our Gemara are superbly expounded in English by R' Aharon Feldman in *The Juggler and the King*, from which we have drawn much material.]

The esoteric and mystical approaches to the Aggados that follow are beyond the scope of this work. We will restrict our comments and elaborations to the literal meaning of each story and to a sampling of the metaphorical, homiletical, or ethical interpretations culled from the major commentaries. Thus, for example, when the first few narratives that follow speak of the powerful forces encountered at sea, the commentators, in the main, explain them as alluding to either to the nations of the world that subjugate the Jews in exile, or to man's powerful evil inclination that threatens to subjugate his soul — both of which conspire to alienate the Jew from his Father in Heaven as he sails upon the sea of life. As the Gemara elsewhere (*Berachos* 17a) states: "Master of the world! It is clearly known before You that our deepest desire is to do Your will. What then prevents us? The yeast in the dough [i.e., the *yetzer hara*] and our subjugation by the nations."

This work does not presume to be anything remotely like the final word on interpreting these Aggados. We aim only to open before the reader the gates to the vast and majestic world that lies concealed beyond them.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Tzlach* (Introduction to *Berachos*) gives a beautiful parable to explain the purpose of studying those Aggados, whose true meaning we cannot comprehend (see the end of the General Introduction in Vol. 1 of our edition of *Ein Yaakov*, where this parable is presented at length).

אָמַר רַבָּה [בַּר בַּר חֲנָה]: אֲשַׁתְּעוּ לִי נַחוּתֵי יָמָא: בֵּין גִּלָּא לְגִלָּא — תִּלְתָּ
מָאָה פְּרָסִי, וְרוּמָא דְגִלָּא — תִּלְתָּ מָאָה פְּרָסִי. וְיִמְנָא חֲדָא הוּא אֲזֻלִּינָּ
בְּאוּרְחָא, וְדִלִּינָּ גִלָּא עַד דְּחֻזִּינָּא בִּי מִרְבַּעַתָּא דְּכוּכְבָּא זוּטָא — דְּהוּיָא

The second story:

אָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה — Rabbah bar bar Chanah said: Seafarers have told me that there are three hundred *parsaos*^[5] between one wave and another, and the height of each wave is three hundred *parsaos*. Once we were going on the way and a wave lifted us up so high that we could see the resting place of the smallest star; and it [appeared] to me like an area large enough

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approach; *Derashos Maharam Schick*, *Derush* 2 and 3; *Maaseh Rav* [R' Moshe Binyamin], *Maamar* 1). See Insight B.

The stormy sea can also be a metaphor for the passions of the *yetzer hara* [evil inclination] and the ship represents the human body as it goes through this world on its life's journey (the *Gra* in *Peirush al Kamma Agados*, *Maamar* §1; *Kikayon D'Yonah*; *Yaaros Devash*, Vol. 2, *Derush* 5, cited in *Likkutim*; *Yad Yosef* [Tzarfati], first approach; *Yismach Moshe*, *Yein HaRekach*; *Ein Eliyahu*). See Insight C.

5. A land *parsah* is 4 *mil*; a *mil* is 2,000 *amos*. Thus, a *parsah* is 8,000 *amos*, or approximately 2.5 miles. 300 *parsaos*, then, are approximately 750 miles. However,

Ritva (cited in *HaKoseiv*) writes that the reference is to a nautical *parsah*, which is $\frac{1}{20}$ of a land *parsah*. Thus, 300 *parsaos* would be approximately 37 miles. In any event, *Ritva* adds that the report did not refer to a measured distance, but rather that it seemed to the eye to be so great a distance. [*Maharal* (*Chiddushai Agados* here), however, writes that the Sages often give measurements not in the sense of actual physical size, but rather in reference to potential size based on the deeper spiritual dimensions of things, which are their true essence. See *Sifsei Chaim*, *Emunah U'Bechirah*, Vol. 2, p. 409ff, for an extensive treatment of *Maharal's* approach to understanding Aggadah.]

❧ Insight B: The Towering Waves of Exile The Jewish nation travels across the wide and often stormy seas of exile, on which successive waves of oppressive nations seek to engulf and sink the battered ship. In every generation, these towering waves “rise up against us to destroy us” [*Haggadah shel Pesach*] through persecution or pressures of assimilation. Riding high on the crest of these waves is a fringe of white — the offers of prestige and prosperity if only we abandon the sinking ship. “But the Holy One, blessed is He, saves us from their hand” — as indicated by His three Names mentioned in our Gemara, which promise that He will be with us in every phase of our history. This is the narrative told to us by the great seafarers — the Torah Sages who are wise to the ways and waves of the sea, who know how to navigate the treacherous waters of exile.

❧ Insight C: The Journey of Life [The story, primarily as explained by the *Gra* loc. cit.]

The soul of man passes through this world in a body like a ship sailing across an angry sea. The voyage is purposeful — to acquire and transport the precious cargo of Torah and mitzvos to our final destination. But the stormy waves of the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, threaten to engulf the ship, and the most dangerous waves are those with a fire-like fringe of white at the crest — a raging fire of physical passion that masquerades as the white herald of pure intentions. The ship might still successfully navigate the perilous straits, were it not for the additional threat it faces — the oppressive alien influences of the nations among whom we are exiled, which act in concert with the evil inclination to overwhelm our desire to do the will of our Father in Heaven. What can save us from being spiritually drowned by these towering waves? Only the Divine promises never to forsake us — that Hashem will be with us in every exile, no matter how dark. These promises and our unwavering affirmations of Amen are the weapons that will beat down the frightening waves of the towering sea, and allow the ship to proceed safely to the wide and welcoming port on the other side with its precious cargo intact.*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Pele Yoeitz* (Vol. 1, *Peirush Shelishi*) based on *Baal HaTanya* — The “club” by which we beat back the waves of the *yetzer hara* is prayer; the Divine Names inscribed on the club indicate that our prayers must be motivated primarily by the desire to increase His glory in the world.

במבזר ארבעין גרייז ביזרא דחרדלא, ואי דלינן טפי, הוה מקלינן מהבלא. ורמיא לה גלא קלא לחברתה [ואמרה לה]: חברתי, מי שבקת מידי בעלמא דלא שטפתיה — (וניתי אנן ונחריביה) [דניתי אנא ונאבדיה]! אמר לה: פוק חזי גבורתיה דמריה, [דאפילו] במלא חוטא דחלא לית דעבר, שנאמר (ירמיה ה, כב) "האותי לא תיראו נאם ה', אם מפני לא תחילו, אשר שמתי חול גבול לים, חק עולם ולא יעברנהו".

to sow forty measures (i.e., *se'ah*)^[6] of mustard seed. If [the wave] had lifted us up a bit higher, we would have been burned by the heat.^[7] We heard the second wave call to [the first] and say to it:^[8] "My friend! When you flooded the world before me, did you spare anything for me to destroy?"^[9] [The first wave] replied: "Go and see the power of your Master (Hashem). Without His permission, I cannot even cross a hairsbreadth of sand." The first wave's statement is supported by Scripture, as it says (Yirmiyah 5:22): *Will you not fear Me? — the word of HASHEM — Will you not tremble before Me? For I have set sand as boundary against the sea, as a permanent law that cannot be broken. Its waves rage forth, but cannot succeed; they roar, but cannot cross it.*^[10]

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6. *Gra*; cf. *Rashbam*.

7. The Gemara does not specify the source of this heat; the commentators offer various explanations (see Insights D and E). According to the reading in the Vilna *Bavli* [מהבליה, from "its" heat], however, the reference is apparently to the heat of the *star*.

8. Perhaps it was the guardian angel of the wave that spoke (*Rashbam*).

9. Upon seeing how large the first wave was, the second wave assumed that it had overrun the seashore and flooded the entire world (*Rashbam*).

10. With regard to this story, the commentators are divided, in the main, between those who understand the waves as a metaphor from the nations that oppress the Jewish nation in exile (see Insight D), and those who understand it as a metaphor for the *yetzer hara* that seeks to engulf the individual (see Insight E).

🔗 **Insight D: The Waves of Jewish History** The oppressive nations among whom we are exiled bear down on us like colossal waves of destruction that seek to obliterate the name of Israel — some seek to eradicate our bodies and some seek to poison our souls. But as high as these waves are, Hashem places a great distance between them, allowing His people to regain its bearings before the next wave strikes. There are waves of oppression that seek to overwhelm us. But there are also times on this voyage through history when the wave lifts us exceedingly high, attempting to induce us to abandon our Jewish ways by offering us positions of prominence in the economy, culture, and academies of the alien civilization, until we begin to view our own star as exceedingly small. Its place is sown with great stretches of the bitter seeds of mustard; we find our own heritage distasteful compared to what we now perceive to be the great accomplishments of the host culture that has welcomed us. But the higher we rise in that world that is not ours, the closer we come to being consumed by its searing heat. Thus our father Yaakov prayed desperately, *Save me, please, from the hand of my brother from the hand of Eisav!* (Bereishis 32:12) — in that order. Eisav the brother is a greater danger than Eisav the oppressor! (see *Beis HaLevi* on *Parashas Vayishlach*). History is sad witness to the bitter truth that our rise to the highest levels of the alien world threatens our survival as Jews far more than does cruel oppression.

The coming wave calls to the one that has passed, "Have you left anything of the Jews for us to destroy?" To which the first wave replies with chagrin: Try as we may, it is an impossible task. The Master of the universe has set limits we cannot trespass. He preserves the Jewish people! We can crash against their shores with fury and might. But ultimately, we will fail, and recede, unsuccessful, back into the sea. [See sources cited in note 4].*

🔗 **Insight E: Waves of Deceit, Waves of Conceit** We pass through this world as seafarers contending with wave

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* R' Yitzchak Eizik Chaver (*Afikey Yam* on our Gemara; based on the *Gra*; see also *Siach Yitzchak*, 5760 ed., p. 145) — The two waves portray Eisav and Yishmael and the metaphysical forces of impurity they represent. These nations seek to join forces, which would destroy us and the sanctity we bring to the world. Thus,

{נ} אָמַר רַבָּה [בַּר בַּר חֲנָה]: לְדִידִי חָזִי לִי הוֹרְמִין בֶּר לִילִיתָא, (דְּהוּה) [בִּי] קָא
רְהִיט אַקוּפִּיָּה דְּשׁוּרָא דְּמַחוּזָא, וְרְהִיט פֶּרֶשָׁא, בִּי רַכִּיב (סוּסִיא) [חֵיוָתָא]

§50 The third story:

אָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה וכו' — Rabbah [bar bar Chanah] said: I saw^[1] Hormin the son of Lilith^[2] running along the battlements of the wall of Mechoza. A cavalryman was riding on an animal

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1. *Ritva* quotes the Geonim who say that the expression “I saw” means that Rabbah bar bar Chanah saw this in a dream, as opposed to the previous stories, which he had heard from seafarers. See above, §49 note 1.
2. Hormin is the name of a demon. Some have the reading דוֹרְמִי, *Hormiz* (*Rashbam*; see *Sanhedrin* 39a and *Tosafos* there). Lilith is the mother of demons (see *Rashi* with *Metzudas Tzion* on *Yeshayah* 34:14; see, though, *Shabbos* 151b, and *Zohar*, *Vayikra* 19a). Alternatively, Hormin was the name of a man who was expert in demonology and sleight of hand (*Ritva*, cited in *HaKoseiv*, second explanation).

after wave of the *yetzer hara*, each wave presenting its own attraction and challenge. “Once we were going on the way ...” We were traveling the path of self-improvement and service of Hashem. “And a wave lifted us up ...” This was the wave of arrogance. This was not a wave that towered over us to push us deep into the sea. It was a wave that came under us and lifted us up, higher and higher. We had tasted success in the path of righteousness, and then the insidious swell of exaggerated pride in our righteous accomplishments made us haughty. “We saw the resting place of the smallest star ...” Though we had only begun our journey toward greatness, we thought ourselves to be *tzaddikim* (who are compared to the stars — *Daniel* 12:3). Perhaps not yet stars of great magnitude, but at least smaller stars in the firmament above. “We saw the place of the small star sown with forty *se’ah* of mustard seed ...” Mustard seed is pounded into powder, and forty *se’ah* is the volume of a *mikveh* — the amount needed to envelop completely the body of a man. The *yetzer hara* can be defeated, but only if pounded into proper form by *tzaddikim* completely immersed in that effort. We imagined ourselves to have been such *tzaddikim*. And had our hubris lifted us any higher, we would have been filled with fiery anger, that most extreme expression of arrogance, and the searing heat of that anger would have reduced us to ashes.

The waves of the *yetzer hara* know their power — and our weakness. Each successive wave calls to the previous one, wondering if the old one has left anything over for the new one to destroy. But the old one, its best efforts spent, is forced to inform the new one about to attack: By nature — without Divine assistance — man would indeed be unable to resist our assaults (see *Kiddushin* 30b). But Hashem does assist. He has *set the sand as a boundary against the sea*! *Tzaddikim* are compared to sand (above, 7b [§5]). And just as the waves, no matter how high they tower, cannot overrun the sand, so too will the *yetzer hara* ultimately be unable to overcome the *tzaddikim* who, with Divine assistance, will not yield to the sea of sinful passion even a hairsbreadth.

The dangers of the *yetzer hara* abound on the path to righteousness, especially as one begins to experience success on that journey. But with Hashem’s assistance — assistance of which He has assured us — we can resist and overcome those dangers of the *yetzer hara*: *Its waves rage forth, but cannot succeed*. [Based on the *Gra*, cited in *Eitz Yosef*. For a fuller treatment of the *Gra*’s approach here, see *The Juggler and the King*, pp. 33-45.]**

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Eisav went to marry Yishmael’s daughter, but was able to do so only after Yishmael had already died (see *Bereishis* 28:9, with *Rashi* [beginning]), thus preventing their full joining. Eisav and Yishmael are the two towering waves of our Gemara, which call to each other as “friends,” which seek to unite, but which Hashem keeps separate, so that they cannot destroy us. [Accordingly, in this second story Rabbah bar bar Chanah metaphorically portrays the three-pronged strategy that Eisav utilizes throughout history in his battle against the Jewish nation: oppression (the crashing waves), assimilation (the uplifting waves), and alliance with Yishmael (the adjoining waves).]

** Other commentators explain this Gemara as a metaphor to the life and tribulations of a person who blindly pursues physical pleasure, wealth, and prestige. See *Gevulas Binyamin* (*Maamar* 2); *Arvei Nachal* (*Haftarah to Parashas Ki Setzei*); *Alter of Kelm* (*Kisvei HaSaba M’Kelm*, *Yamim Noraim*, p. 122); *Divrei Shaul*. For additional explanations of the Gemara, see *R’ Yaakov Lorberbaum* (*Emes LeYaakov*) and *Maasei Hashem* (*Maasei Bereishis* Ch. 18).

מתתאי, ולא יכיל ליה. זמנא חדא הוה מסרגאן ליה תרתי (חיותא)
 [בודנתי], וקנימן [דף עג:] אתרי גשרי [דרונג] [דרוגנג], ושור מהאי להאי
 ומהאי להאי, ונקיט תרי (כסי) [מזגי] דחמרא בידיה, ומוריק מהאי להאי
 [ומהאי להאי], ולא נטפא (מינייהו ניטפא) [נטופתא] לארעא, ואותו היום
 (תהלים קז, כו) "יעלו שמים ירדו תהומות" הוה, (ושמעת מלכותא) [עד
 דשמעו בי מלכותא], וקטליה.

below, but he could not catch up to him.^[3] Once, two mules were saddled for [Hormin], and they stood

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by the two bridges of the river Donag. [Hormin] jumped from one mule to the other while holding two cups of wine in his hands, pouring from one to the other without even a drop falling to the ground even though it was a stormy day when “they rise heavenward and they descend to the depths” (*Tehillim* 107:26).^[4] Eventually, reports of Hormin’s doings reached the royal palace, and they killed him.^[5]

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3. I.e., Hormin could not catch up to the cavalryman (*Rashbam*, as emended by *Hagahos HaBach*; *Maharsha*), even though the cavalryman was riding at a leisurely pace, not realizing that a demon was in pursuit. This story teaches us that Hashem has mercy on people and protects them from demons (*Rashbam*). Alternatively, the Gemara means that the cavalryman could not keep pace with the demon (*Rabbeinu Gershom*; *Gra*).

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4. [The Gemara uses these words in the verse in *Tehillim* to say that] the day was so stormy that the ships at sea were raised by the waves to great heights and then sent plummeting down to great depths, and even so not a drop spilled from the cups being poured one to the other (*Rashbam*).

The *Gra* (*Peirush al Kamma Aggados*, *Maamar* §1) makes the fascinating observation that this verse (*Tehillim* 107:26) used by the Gemara in this third story

follows verses in *Tehillim* that are suggestive of the first two stories, and that the Sages in our Gemara thus arranged the stories according to the sequence of these verses. The previous verses (*ibid.* vv. 23-25) read: *Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do their work in great waters. They have seen the deeds of Hashem, and His wonders in the watery deep. He spoke and raised the stormy wind and lifted its waves.*

5. [Translation follows the reading in *Bavli*: וקטלוהו, and “they” killed him.]

[According to the simple sense of the narrative, the meaning is that] the king of the demons had Hormin put to death for performing his antics in public and divulging the secrets of the demons. Alternatively, the human king had Hormin put to death for fear he would try to usurp the throne (see *Rashbam*).

See Insights A and B for various interpretations of this story.

🔗 **Insight A: A Struggle to the End** *Maharsha* presents the following treatment of this story: The demonic *yetzer hara*, who is also the Satan, strives to overcome the “wall” — a metaphor for the Torah or for the Jewish people (see above, 7b-8a [§5]). It runs along the “battlements,” the top of the wall that is built with gaps at regular intervals (for defensive purposes). The many gaps at the top make the wall at that point structurally weaker than the solid wall below. Thus, the *yetzer hara* “runs along the battlements” seeking to undermine our allegiance to the Torah at what some perceive to be the “weak” points — those mitzvos that are difficult to understand — or it preys upon those of our people weakest in faith. But the *yetzer hara* cannot keep pace with the righteous of Israel, whose pursuit of Torah and mitzvos shield not only themselves but the entire nation from the designs of the *yetzer hara*. And so, the Satan/*yetzer hara* turns its sights to incite the nations of the world against each other [in the hope that the Jews will be swept up in the wars and upheavals]. It now dances back and forth across “two mules,” representing the wicked and illegitimate empires of the North and of the South (see *Daniel* 11:40) that alternate in victory. These empires are saddled at opposite bridges across a river of “wax” [דוּגָן], for they will ultimately sink into oblivion, as the verse (*Tehillim* 68:3) states, *as wax melts before fire, so may the wicked perish from before God*. But the Satan will actually be pouring two cups “of bewilderment and fury” that Hashem will pour on the tormentors of His people (*Yeshayah* 51:22-23) from one cup into the other without spilling a drop, for in the end both “mules” will drink every last drop of retribution when

they are destroyed in the times of Mashiach — the time of “rising heavenward and descending to the depths,” when Hashem will create *new heavens and a new earth* (ibid. 65:17). And at that time, the Supreme King will “hear” and take note of the ceaseless efforts of the Satan/*yetzer hara* to corrupt His people, and He will “kill” the *yetzer hara*, in that it will no longer have any dominion over them, as the verse says, *And the “tzephoni” — the yetzer hara, who “hides” in the heart of man — I will distance from you* (Yoel 2:20; see *Succah* 52a).

❧ **Insight B: The Duel of Dual Nature** A second approach is given by the *Gra* (cited in *Eitz Yosef*): Man has a dual nature; he is both a creature of heaven and of earth, a body and a spirit. The spirit occupies, in the main, the upper part of his body, the part containing the organs of speech, feeling, and thought. The lower half of the body is primarily the region of the purely physical, containing the organs of digestion and reproduction. A man who subordinates his entire being to the gratification of his own desires is the Hormin of our Gemara (see *Sanhedrin* 39a, *Siman* 65).

Then there is the cavalryman. He rides *atop* the animal. He is the one whose spiritual side dominates the animal side, which does his bidding and carries him to where *he* wishes to go.

Often the contrast is obvious: Hormin behaves profligately and the cavalryman lives virtuously. But sometimes the difference is more subtle. Hormin, too, devotes himself to Torah and mitzvos. But his devotion is powered by selfish motives, a searing desire for prestige and honor. He runs across the battlements atop of the “wall” of Mechoza — a reference to the city’s Torah scholars (see above, 7b [§5]). In fact, Hormin can outrun the cavalryman studying for the sake of Heaven, who finds it difficult to match the diligence of a Hormin driven to succeed by the unbridled power of his lust for glory. The cavalryman is hindered by the *yetzer hara* he seeks to overcome, while Hormin is propelled by it. It is of such a Hormin that the Gemara in *Rosh Hashanah* (17a [§9]) speaks when it says that “some of the best looking of the Mechozans” are destined for Gehinnom. These are the Mechozan scholars who study not for the sake of Heaven but are rather motivated by their desire to “look good,” to glory in the honor they are accorded by others.

Hormin is obsessed not only with a desire for honor, but also by his desire for physical gratification (תַּאֲוָה). These twin obsessions, which lead him nowhere, are sterile like mules. Hormin jumps back and forth between the mule of physical gratification and the mule of glory-seeking, which stand on a “river of wax” — nothing of value will come of them, for they will melt *as wax melts before fire* (*Tehillim* 68:3). Hormin alternates between those two futile obsessions with intense focus — like a juggler pouring two cups of wine back and forth without spilling a drop — so that he remains completely oblivious to the larger reality surrounding him: that the time he has to perfect himself in this world is not endless. There comes a day when “they rise heavenward and they descend to the depths” — when the soul rises to Heaven and the body is buried deep in the earth. The king will eventually “kill Hormin,” at which time Hormin’s futile career will come to a sad end; he will have spent his life on physical gratification and seeking honor, without achieving anything of true value in this world.

Olelos Ephraim (*Maamar* 17) sees a different allusion in “the walls of Mechoza.” Mechoza was a commercial city, whose inhabitants were exceedingly wealthy and materialistic. Such people feel they are invincible, surrounded by the unassailable wall of their wealth. But a demon prances on top of that wall — the sickness that makes them hoard their wealth and thus robs them of its best use. It is the son of Lilith (לִילִית), “the demon of the night” [from the word לַיְלָה, *night*], for their hoarded wealth has value only in this world of darkness. And this demon makes the people he has possessed chase him in a frantic race to amass more and more, a race that never ends, for “a man does not leave this world with even half his desire attained, for he who has a hundred desires two hundred” (*Koheles Rabbah* 1 §32; 3 §13). To these people, money serves no spiritual purpose. Rather, they jump between “two mules” — the offspring of donkeys and horses — using money for the “donkey” of their physical needs, or viewing it as an object of pursuit. They pour money from one cup to the other without a drop “falling to the ground” as seeds of charity that would grow in the fertile soil and produce for them eternal yields, as the verse (*Hoshea* 10:12) says, *Sow for yourselves righteousness and you will reap according to kindness*.

And while this infatuation with money might be somewhat understandable when such people are young and times are good, it is shocking how these attitudes persist even as these people enter old age and approach the end of their lives, “when the soul will rise heavenward and the body will descend to the depths.” When the King finally takes them from this world, they will die creatures of their old habits. If only they had used their wealth to invest in eternity, they would reap eternal dividends, instead of leaving all their wealth behind as they leave this world as empty-handed and bare as they entered it.*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Emes LeYaakov* [R’ Yaakov Lorberbaum] (here) presents a moving and detailed exposition of this story, somewhat along the lines of *Olelos Ephraim*, but with many significant differences and variations. *Minchas Ani* (*Parashas Vayakhel* [end]) — “The wall of Mechoza” is the association of sinful people that have

{נא} אָמַר רַבָּה [בַּר בַּר חֲנָה]: לְדִידִי חָזִי לִי אוֹרְזִילָא בַּר יוֹמִיָּה דִּהּוּה בְּהָר
תְּבוֹר. וְהָר תְּבוֹר כְּמָה הָוִי? (אֶרְבַּעִין) [אַרְבַּע] פָּרְסִי, (וּבִי מִשְׁכָּא)
(וּמִשְׁאֲכָה) דְּצוֹאֲרִיָּה תִלְתָּא פָּרְסִי, וּבִי מַרְבַּעַתָּא דְּרִישִׁיָּה פָּרְסָא וּפְלָגָא,
רָמָא בּוֹפְתָא וְסַכְרִיָּה לִירְדְנָא.

§51 The fourth story:

Rabbah [bar bar Chanah] said: I saw a one-day-old *re'eim*-calf^[1] that was like the height of Mount Tabor. How high is Mount Tabor? Forty *parsaas*.^[2] The length of its neck was three *parsaas*; the resting place for its head was a *parsah* and a half. It expelled dung that stopped up the Yarden River.^[3]

NOTES

1. *Re'eim*, רֵאִם, is an animal mentioned several times in Scripture (for example, *Bamidbar* 23:22 and *Devarim* 33:17). As is evident from our Gemara, it is a huge beast, but its exact identification is not known. See *Raddak*, *Sefer HaShorashim* ערך רֵאִם אוֹרְזִילָא. An Aramaic word for a young sheep (*Tosafos* here [not printed in Ein Yaakov] from *Targum* to *Shir HaShirim* 2:17).

Some texts have here “בַּר רֵאִיָּה” אוֹרְזִילָא or אוֹרְזִילָא “בַּר רֵאִיָּה”, the calf of a *re'eim* (*Tosafos* here [not printed in Ein Yaakov] and *R' Hagi Guri* and *Tosafos* to *Zevachim* 113b (ד"ה אוֹרְזִילָא). The meaning of these variants is substantively the same as the reading in Ein Yaakov. *Tosafos* (in both places) reject the reading and explanation of *Rashbam* on our Gemara [not found in our editions of *Rashbam*] — אוֹרְזִילָא “רֵאִיָּה”, a calf “of the sea,” meaning a type of fish, because it is evident from the Gemara in *Zevachim* 113b that the reference is to a land creature. It should be noted, however, that *Rashi* to *Zevachim* there (ד"ה אוֹרְזִילָא) apparently had this reading as well and he explains that the reference is to a [land] creature that lives on the shore of the sea.

2. Some texts have אֶרְבַּע פָּרְסִי, “four” *parsaas*.

3. Its dung temporarily blocked the flow of the river's water until the blockage slowly dissolved (*Rashbam*).

The Gemara in *Zevachim* (113b) cites this story of the *re'eim* as proof that the waters of the Great Flood (*Mabul*) inundated the entire world with the exception of the Land of Israel. For if the Flood did inundate the

Land of Israel as well, how did a creature as large as the *re'eim* of our story survive if it was too large to fit into Noah's Ark? The Gemara there rejects the proof, suggesting that the *re'eim*'s snout alone lay within the Ark, enabling it to breathe. Some commentators prove from that Gemara that this story of the *re'eim*, along with the other stories here, are intended literally (*R' Binyamin Vitali* in *Gevul Binyamin*, Vol. 2, *Derush* 10, *LePesach Yom Rishon*, citing his teacher, *R' Moshe Zacuto*). *Ben Yehoyada* on the Gemara there in *Zevachim*, however, writes that the Gemara knew that this story and others like them were not meant literally, but were rather visions that the Sages had seen alluding to esoteric or ethical ideas. Nevertheless, the Gemara debates the literal implications of this story in the manner of Talmudic give-and-take, to bring out various ideas to sharpen the students' minds (see also *R' Yaakov Ettlinger*, *Minchas Ani*, *Parashas Bechukosai* ד"ה וְטָרַם נָבֵא לְבִיאֹר הָעֵנִין who considers essentially the same approach). *R' Eliyahu Guttmacher* (Introduction to *Tzafnas Pane'ach*, *Klal* 2) explains that even if the Sages exaggerated the figures in this story for homiletic purposes, they were exaggerating an actual phenomenon — the existence of the gigantic *re'eim* — and the Gemara in *Zevachim* is drawing its proof from the actual phenomenon that formed the basis of the story.

See Insight A for homiletic interpretations of this story.

❧ **Insight A: The Giant Newborn** *Ritva* explains that in this vision Rabbah bar bar Chanah beheld the meteoric rise of the Moslem empire that would transpire hundreds of years in the future. As is well known historically, the Moslems emerged in the early part of the Seventh Century, and in little more than a

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banded together like a wall, allowing Hormin — the *yetzer hara* — to seize control of the “top of the wall,” i.e. the leaders of the community, and unite them in sin. The cavalryman below represents the loyal Rabbis of the city who go round and round the city to shore up its breaches in loyalty to the Torah. But the situation deteriorates so that the townspeople fall into two camps of defectors — those who are willing to compromise their religious observance in order to accommodate the “realities” of the new era, and those who go even farther and reject the Torah way of life altogether. And Hormin jumps back and forth atop the two camps, dominating both.

hundred years, their empire extended from the Iberian Peninsula in the west to the Indus River in the east. It emerged like a young *re'eim*, with vast and nearly instantaneous reach, and it sought to block “the waters of the Yarden.” For unlike the Christians, who accepted the authenticity of the Jewish Bible and its narratives, the Moslems claimed that the Jews had corrupted the Bible’s narratives (see *Teshuvos HaRambam* [Mekitzei Nirdamim ed.] §149; [Mechoh Yerushalayim ed.] §50 note 5). Thus, they sought to “pollute the Yarden’s waters,” the waters of Israel’s pure Torah. *Rabbeinu Chananel* (cited by *Rabbeinu Bachya* on *Bereishis* 17:20) notes that this rise of Yishmael to global prominence in the Seventh Century was the fulfillment of Hashem’s promise to his father Avraham, who had prayed (*Bereishis* 17:18): “O that Yishmael might live before You!” to which Hashem had replied (ibid. v. 20): *As for Yishmael I have heard you: I have blessed him, will make him fruitful, and will increase him most exceedingly; he will beget twelve princes and I will make him into a great nation.* It would take more than 2,000 years to fulfill that promise. But when the time to fulfill it came, it was fulfilled in a great and sudden eruption.

Olelos Ephraim sees this vision of the gigantic *re'eim* as referring to the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination that fills a person from the time he is one day old (*Yerushalmi Berachos* 3:5 [40a]). It is an אור זיץא — a “demeaning light.” It purports to illuminate the path to obtaining all the gladness this world has to offer, painting physical enticements in attractive hues. But in the end, following its glowing allure without restraint will only demean the person, reducing him from the noble heights he was meant to reach to the depths of indignity — his body having been master of his mind and soul rather than their servant. Its neck is immensely large, seeking to cause the righteous to cast off the yoke of Heaven from their necks. And “it towers like Mount Tabor” — indeed, the Gemara elsewhere (*Succah* 52a) tells us that the righteous see the *yetzer hara* as a high, forbidding mountain, and wonder how they were able to surmount it!*

This is “how I saw it,” said Rabbah bar bar Chanah. For it is the *righteous* who, from the onset, see the *yetzer hara* as a looming mountain, realizing that following it in small ways will only cause it to grow progressively until it is nearly impossible to overcome. The sinful, however, see it only as it appears at the time, as a slender hair, each of its small demands seemingly inconsequential. But in the end, the sinful will look back with profound regret on their misspent lives, realizing painfully that the great mountain they failed to surmount had actually been woven from the many slender hairs (see *Succah* ibid.) that they might have stepped over one at a time, had they only appreciated the accumulating power of the *yetzer hara* and its little victories (based on second approach of *Rapduni BaTapuchim* [R’ Elyakim Getz on the Aggados of Rabbah bar bar Chanah]).**

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* *Maasei Rav* [R’ Moshe Binyamin of Baghdad] (on this story) understands the theme of this story to be the *yetzer hatov* — the good inclination — that enters the person upon his becoming bar mitzvah.

** *Maharsha* — The story refers to the conquest of the land of Canaan by Yehoshua, whose “horns are the horns of a *re'eim*” (*Devarim* 33:17 with *Rashi*), whose great power was evident at the beginning of his reign, and for whom the waters of the Yarden stopped so that the Jews could cross into the Land (see *Yehoshua* Ch. 3). [See *Maharsha* for his explanation of the story’s many other details.] See also R’ Yaakov Lorberbaum in *Emes LeYaakov*.

Gra (cited in *Eitz Yosef*) — This story refers to the budding Torah student who vainly imagines himself to be a great scholar at the beginning of his studies, like Mount Tabor, which was rejected from the Torah being given upon it because of its vanity (see *Megillah* 29a). [See there for the exposition of all the story’s details; see Schottenstein edition of *Bavli* here, note 7, where this approach is presented at length.]

Minchas Ani (*Parashas Bechukosai* ד"ה וכל זה נרמז) — The four *parsah re'eim* in this story (see note 2) alludes to the four stages of a man’s life — childhood, youth, manhood, and old age — and his involvement in Torah and mitzvos in those stages. He is born “like Mount Tabor” that came to study Torah (see *Megillah* 29a) — his childhood years the ideal time for studying and mastering Torah. That mountain is “four *parsaos* high,” alluding to the four stages of life. Its neck, the part that bears the yoke of mitzvos, is only three *parsaos* — youth (from bar mitzvah), manhood, and old age. The place of its “head” — most suited for studying Torah — however, is only a *parsah* and a half: childhood and half of youth; from the latter part of youth and onward, he is married and must support his family, which diminishes this ability to study Torah. And if he utilizes these times properly, he will expel from himself all that is unseemly, and will “stop up the flooding waters,” of which it is written (*Tehillim* 32:6): *For this let every devout one pray to You at a time when [misfortune] befalls: Only that the flooding, mighty waters not overtake him.*

{נב} ואמר רבה בר בר חנה: לדידי חזי לי ההוא אקרוקתא דהוה בי אקרא דהגרוניא. ואקרא דהגרוניא כמה הוי? שיתין בתני. אתא תנינא בלעה, אתא פושקנצא ובלעה לתנינא, וסליק יתיב באילנא. תא חזי כמה נפיש חיליה דאילנא. אמר רב פפא בר שמואל: אי לאו דהואי התם לא הימני.

§52 The fifth story:

And Rabbah bar bar Chanah also said: I saw a frog the size of the town of Akra of Hagrunia. And how large is Akra of Hagrunia? Sixty houses. A sea serpent came and swallowed [the frog]. A female raven came and swallowed the sea serpent. It then flew up and sat on the branch of a tree.

The Gemara comments:

Just imagine the strength of that tree if could support the weight of such a huge bird! Rav Pappa bar Shmuel said: Had I not been there myself, I would not have believed it.^[1]

NOTES

1. The Gemara here does not criticize Rav Pappa bar Shmuel for saying that had he not seen the matter himself he would not have believed Rabbah's report. In the Gemara below, 75a [§65], however, R' Yochanan severely castigates a student as one who ridicules the

words of the Sages for expressing nearly the same sentiment. See there, Insight "Questioning the Words of the Sages", for various explanations of the difference.

See Insight A for three approaches to understanding the metaphor of this story.

☞ Insight A: The Parade of Nations [First approach: Based on Maharsha.]

In this vision, Rabbah bar bar Chanah saw the successive ascendancies of the nations of the world, from the time of the Second Beis HaMikdash onward, in the form of various creatures. The "frog" represents Greece, the Hebrew word צפרדע serving as an acronym for צפור שיש בו דעה, a bird that has intelligence (see Yalkut Shimoni, Va'eira 7:25). Greece filled the world with its wisdom and splendor. It was the size of "sixty houses" — it assembled sixty kings from the offspring of Eisav (*Targum to Shir HaShirim* 6:8) — representing the vast empire of Alexander the Great. [Alternatively, the number sixty in the vision is because of the sixty Athenian philosophers mentioned in *Bechoros* 8b (R' Chaim Knoller in *Ben Chaled* [on the stories of Rabbah bar bar Chanah] here).] Ultimately, though, the Greeks were overrun and absorbed — "swallowed" — by the Roman Empire, the "serpent," which symbolizes Eisav/Edom. Much of the eastern Roman Empire, however, was later conquered by Yishmael, who is compared to a raven in *Bava Kamma* 92b, and here in the Gemara specifically to a "female" raven, for Yishmael's antipathy to the Jews derives from his mother, Hagar, rather than from his father, Avraham. And the ravenous Yishmael will fly up and come to rest over the Land of Israel [סליק, going up, often refers to going to Eretz Yisrael (R' Yaakov Lorberbaum in *Emes LeYaakov* here] on the strength of the merit of the great tree of kindness planted by his progenitor Avraham (*Bereishis* 21:33), who prayed for Yishmael and who was promised: As for Yishmael, I have heard you: I have blessed him, will make him fruitful, and will increase him most exceedingly; he will beget twelve princes and I will make him into a great nation (*Bereishis* 17:20). How great, says the Gemara in amazement, is the strength of that extraordinary tree, whose merit endures for Yishmael until the advent of Mashiach, when sovereignty will be restored to his brother, Yitzchak.*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Ritva* — The Gemara's "amazement" at the strength of the tree is the wonder that it is possible for Jews to survive and perform mitzvos while under the dominion of Yishmael.

R' Alexander Moshe Lapidus [disciple of R' Yisrael Salanter] (*Toras HaGaon R' Alexander Moshe* §10) discusses extensively how this story alludes to the wanderings of the Jewish nation in exile.

Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe, Likkutim B'Shas* on our Gemara) — The word צפרדע (frog) has the numerical value of, and thus alludes to, שלמה בן דוד (Shlomo the son of David. *Shlomo* equals 444 and *דוד* equals 441, and when the three words of the name are added, it also equals 444), whose kingdom was "swallowed" by the "serpent" — the secessionist, idolatrous kings of the Ten Tribes, until the "raven" — the Prophet Eliyahu, who was sustained by the ravens (*I Melachim* 17:4) — came and returned the people to Hashem.

☞§ **The Strength of the Tree of Life** [Second approach: Based on the *Gra*, cited in *Eitz Yosef*.]

The true Torah scholar, whose sounds of study are heard day and night, is like a frog, whose voice is heard above the tumult of the day and in the stillness of night (see *Zohar* II:30a). The Torah scholar who masters all sixty tractates of the Mishnah and Talmud [the numerical value of גאון] is the frog that is as large as sixty houses. How does the yetzer *hara* contend with such a master? There is a special yetzer *hara* — “a sea serpent” — that threatens him. It is the serpent of financial worries (see *Yeshayah* 27:1 as explained by *Gra* here). “How will my family survive if I continue to study without distraction? Who will feed my wife and children?” The wily serpent seeks to swallow up the scholar in a sea of uneasiness and uncertainty, of gnawing doubts and fears, and thereby block the scholar’s unobstructed vision of his lustrous goal.

But the female raven comes and swallows the serpent! The raven is different from other birds. The raven abandons its young to the mercies of their Creator, *Who gives to an animal its food, to young ravens that cry out* (*Tehillim* 147:9; see *Eruvin* 22a [top] with *Rashi*). Hashem does not leave His faithful to the vagaries of the world. He heeds the cries of the young ravens. And having swallowed her fears and doubts, the female raven — the raven that has surmounted the maternal instinct common to all creatures, and continues to study Torah with clear mind and purpose — rises ever higher and comes to rest on the incredibly strong branches of the Tree of Life. This is the tree that has become a *tree of life to those who support it* (*Mishlei* 3:18), the supporters of Torah who display incredible strength in overcoming their yetzer *hara* and generously give of their wealth to ensure that those who toil in Torah are supplied with their physical needs.*

Rav Pappa bar Shmuel was from Babylonia, whose wealthy were not as accustomed to support Torah scholars as were their counterparts in Eretz Yisrael (see *Beitzah* 32b with *Rashi*). He was amazed when he saw how the wealthy of Eretz Yisrael supported Torah. How great is the devotion of those who overcome the widespread desire to amass wealth, who gladly part with their hard-earned money to make Torah flourish! “Had I not seen it, I would not have believed it!”

☞§ **Wise From the Beasts of the Land** [Third approach: Based on *Malbim* to *Bereishis* 2:19-20.]

The Torah tells us, *HASHEM God had formed out of the ground every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call each one* (*Bereishis* 2:19). Why did Hashem task man with naming the animals? One purpose, explains *Malbim* (ad loc.), was for man to study the animals and see their instincts. For man is a microcosm of Creation. All the various instincts and abilities embedded in the animal kingdom were embedded in man as well. Do you wish to know what you are capable of? Look carefully at the animals. If that ability exists in an animal, it exists in you as well.**

That is why our Sages encourage us to exhibit the noble qualities of the animals in our service of Hashem. “Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and strong as a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven!” (*Avos* 5:20). With regard to the creation of the animals, the Torah writes (*Bereishis* 2:19): וַיִּצֶר, *He formed*, with only one *yud*, whereas in the creation of man the Torah writes (ibid. v. 7): וַיַּצְרֵם, *He formed*, with two *yuds*. Each animal was formed with its *particular* quality. You were formed with them *all*. You must know this, and thereby discover the potential for greatness that lies within you.

That is the theme of our Gemara’s story. “I saw a frog,” said Rabbah bar bar Chanah. Do you know what a frog can do? The Gemara elsewhere (*Pesachim* 53b [§22]) tells us what inspired Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to let themselves be cast by Nevuchadnezzar into the fiery furnace in sanctification of Hashem’s Name. It was the example of the frogs in Egypt that did Hashem’s bidding and jumped into the ovens of the Egyptians (see *Shemos* 7:28). All animals have a powerful instinct for self-preservation. All animals will recoil fiercely from burning ovens. Frogs have that instinct as well. But the frogs in Egypt exhibited an even stronger

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* *Techeiles Mordechai* (from *R’ Shalom Mordechai Schwadron*, author of *Daas Torah*) also explains this story as encouraging true Torah scholars not to abandon their studies because of imagined financial pressures.

Rapduni BaTapuchim (from *R’ Elyakim Getz*) — The “tree” that supports the Torah scholar who comes to rest on its branches is the official position as Rosh Yeshivah that the scholar accepts (see there at length).

R’ Shlomo Algazi (*Ahavas Olam, Amud Avodah*, p. 97b) — It is only the “frog,” the scholar who is not completely immersed in his learning, that can be swallowed by the serpent. The נָעִר, *raven*, who is totally devoted to his studies, day and night [עֵרָב, *night* — see *Eruvin* 22a], however, will swallow the serpent.

** See Insight, “Our Animal Instructors,” on Ein Yaakov, *Eruvin* 100b [§39], which expands on this theme.

Akeidas Yitzchak (*Toldos, Shaar* 24, וְהָאֵלֹהִים בְּטוֹב הַחֶשֶׁקָה, ד”ה אִמְנֵם וְהָעוֹרֵר, ד”ה הֵנָּה בְּאֵמֶת הָעוֹרֵר) — The story emphasizes the futility of craving worldly possessions. The frog sings the happy song of the world, only to be swallowed by the serpent, which in turn is swallowed by the black raven.

{נג} וְאָמַר רַבֵּה בֵּר בֵּר חֲנָה: זִמְנָא חָדָא הֵיךָ [קא] אָזְלִינָא בְּסִפְיִתָא, וְחֻזְינָא הֵהוּא פֻּרָא דִּיתְבָּא לִיָּה אַבְלָא טִינָא בְּאוּסִיָּה, וְאַדְחוּהי מִיָּא וְשִׁדְוִיהָ לְגוּדָא, וְחֻרֹב מִיָּיִה שִׁיתִּין מְחוּזִי, [וְאַבְלוּ מִיָּיִה שִׁיתִּין מְחוּזִי], וּמַלְחוּ מִיָּיִה שִׁיתִּין מְחוּזִי, (וּקְרִיבֹ) [וּמַלְאוּ] מַחַד גְּלָגְלָא דְעֵינִיָּה תִּלַּת מָאָה גְּרָבִי מִשְׁחָא. וְכִי הִדְרִן לְבַתֵּר תְּרִיסֵר יֶרְחֵי שְׁתָּא, חֻזְינֵן דִּיהֶּה קָא מְנַסְרִי מִגְרָמִיָּה מִטְּלַלְתָּא, וְיִתְבִּי לְמַבְנִיָּה הֵנָּה מְחוּזִי.

§53 The sixth story:^[1]

וַאֲמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה וכו' — And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: Once, we were traveling on a ship and I saw a huge fish in whose nostril a tiny mud-eater had settled,^[2] causing the fish to die, and the water washed its huge carcass onto the shore. Sixty cities were destroyed by it coming to rest on top of them, sixty nearby cities ate from it while its meat was fresh, and sixty farther cities salted it and took the preserved meat home.^[3] From one of its eyeballs, they were able to fill three hundred barrels of oil. When we returned to the area after twelve months, we saw that they were sawing boards from the [fish's] gigantic bones to make huts to live in while rebuilding these sixty cities that had been destroyed.^[4]

NOTES

1. The following four stories involve sights Rabbah bar bar Chanah witnessed while traveling on a ship.
2. This would seem to be the small creeping-creature known as the *kilbis*, *כילביס*, which can kill a huge fish and which (as stated in *Shabbos* 77b) even the Levitian fears (*Rashbam*).
3. The number “sixty” is often used by the Sages to represent “a large amount” (*Toras Chaim* here). [*Toras Chaim* explains why the Sages chose specifically this number; see Insights, “The Significance of Sixty,” to *Pesachim* §45 and to *Taanis* §33, where this is elaborated upon.]
4. [*Rashbam* (perhaps based on a different text of the Gemara) explains that they were using the bones of the

instinct: To enter fire to do the will of Hashem. And if the frog has it within him to do that, reasoned the three Jewish heroes in Bavel, then we certainly have it within us to do the same!

“The frog was the size of the sixty houses of the town of Akra.” Scripture likens man’s body to “a small town” (*Nedarim* 32b). And just as every resident of a town has his own house, so too does every human faculty have its own particular place in the human body. And the main human faculties are sixty in number (see *Malbim, Shirei HaNefesh* on *Shir HaShirim* 6:8). “I saw this myself,” said Rabbah bar bar Chanah. I looked deeply into the sixty compartments of my own self, and saw that one of them contained the frog’s capacity to sacrifice oneself for the glory of Hashem. Not only that, but this faculty was the “size” of all the sixty compartments combined, for it is able to overpower all the other faculties of a person, and impel him to sacrifice his entirety for Hashem.

Every human being has this capacity as well. So why do people quail and waver in their loyalty to Hashem when put to the test? It is because the "serpent," the primeval serpent of physical desire and comfort, swallows and suppresses the frog within. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is ever so weak. And while on some level we can long for the spirit to rise and prevail, we can also feel that such longing is illusory: we are creatures of the flesh; the serpent has swallowed all.

But we can be “cruel” like the raven to our physical comforts and swallow the serpent! We can leave our physical fate to the mercies of Hashem (see preceding Insight) and fly the path of the spirit! And having swallowed the serpent, whose wiles at the dawn of human history banished us from Eden and its Tree of Life, we can rise and come to rest on its strong and supportive branches and live the life of eternity.

Rav Pappa bar Shmuel commented on this story because he too had faced these internal battles — and prevailed. And he declared: Had I not experienced the victory myself, I would not have believed it possible.

The verse says: *יְלַמֵּנוּ מִבְּהֵמֹת אֶרֶץ וּמִעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם יְחַכְּמֵנוּ*, *He teaches us through the beasts of the land, and makes us wise through the birds of the sky* (Iyov 35:11, as expounded in *Eruvin* 100b [§39]). There are times of darkness, challenge, and despair. Listen closely to the sound of the frog shattering the suffocating quiet of such nights. Look up at the raven perched firmly on the branches overhead. The frog can summon forth great resources of noble devotion. The raven can swallow the crushing serpent. And so can we.

NOTES

fish to rebuild the sixty cities themselves.] See Insight A regarding the meaning of this story.

☞§ **Insight A: The Rise and Fall of Our Enemies** [The story as explained by *Maharsha*.]

Once, we were traveling on a “ship” through stormy seas. They were dangerous times — the days of Achashveirosh. [The power of Haman the wicked had grown to gargantuan proportions.] He had cast lots to determine the optimum time to annihilate the Jews, and the lots had fallen on the month of Adar, whose zodiacal sign is Pisces (“the Fish”), and Haman wished to swallow the Jews as a large fish swallows its prey. Haman appeared invincible but for the one he saw as a lowly creature — Mordechai — who lodged in his nostril and, through his prayers, brought about his downfall and death. “Sixty cities were crushed” under the weight of Haman’s carcass — the armies and people of those provinces that insisted on attacking the Jews despite the turning tide, and were in turn routed and decimated by the Jews on the thirteenth of Adar. Thus, the victorious Jews “devoured” their enemies, as the verse says, *You will devour all the peoples that HASHEM, your God, will deliver to you* (Devarim 7:16). And from the one “circle” of the eye — from the circle of the ecliptic, in which Haman had seen a constellation as portending the misfortune of the Jews (see *Targum Sheni* on *Esther* 3:7, and *Esther Rabbah* 7 §11) — the Jews reversed those fortunes and filled three hundred barrels of gladness and joy. And after a year had passed, as well as on every anniversary of their victory, the Jews continue to build themselves “from the bones” of their fallen enemy — from the miracle he “caused” (the word נָרְמִיָּה can be rendered “its bone” or “its cause”).

☞§ **Life in a World of Death** [The story as explained by *Olelos Ephraim* §547.]

As mentioned in the earlier stories, a person’s passage through this world is like a ship sailing across a stormy sea. On the voyage of life, Rabbah bar bar Chanah saw a huge fish — a great *tzaddik* who seemed to glide effortlessly through the churning waters — but for a small creeping-thing that lodged in his nostril, a slight sin that caused his breath of life to be taken from this world by Hashem, Who is exceedingly exacting with the exceedingly righteous (see *Yevamos* 121b). How did people react to the taking of this *tzaddik*? There were three groups of people. Many were crushed, overwhelmed by the apparent futility of this world, of Hashem’s retribution delivered even against the greatest *tzaddik* in his prime. What is the point of living an active life — of marrying, of raising a family, or earning a livelihood? All is vanity. All is hopeless. It is best just to withdraw, to fast, to engage in penance, and await our own joining the deceased *tzaddik* in the world beyond. An understandable reaction? Perhaps. But Hashem did not create His world for it to go to ruin. As the verse states: *He did not create it for desolation; He fashioned it to be inhabited* (Yeshayah 45:18).

Others had the opposite reaction to the apparently equal fates of the righteous and the wicked. They were not crushed by the *tzaddik*’s death. However, the specter of death still loomed large in front of them. And so they concluded: Nothing is to be gained by being righteous! Let us simply *eat and drink, for tomorrow we die* (ibid. 22:13)! Their contemplation of their own inevitable death drove them to indulgence. These are the sixty cities who feasted frantically on the meat of the dead fish.

But then there were others who were able to maintain a greater emotional distance from the crushing death of the *tzaddik*. They were neither thoroughly broken by his passing nor cynical about the value of a righteous life. The *tzaddik*’s death indeed instilled fear of Heaven in their hearts, but the result of that fear was not hopelessness but repentance and good deeds, which “salt” and preserve the “meat” of this world for the World to Come.

The bounty of this world is not meant for indiscriminate gorging, but neither is it an empty mirage. It enables us to live Godly lives and to share our blessings with others. “And they filled from one of its eyes three hundred barrels of oil.” With a clear eye, they saw even in the death of the *tzaddik* that *the eye of HASHEM is toward those who fear Him* (*Tehillim* 33:18). “One hundred” is a number that signifies completeness. From this world we can fill three hundred barrels of oil: one hundred of Torah, one hundred of Divine service, and one hundred of kindness to others — the three pillars on which this world rests (*Avos* 1:2). It is a world of opportunity, not futility. And we can fill ourselves in this world with every good thing of lasting value.

The *tzaddik* was taken from us to teach us this life lesson: You, who are still alive — “salt” and preserve the “meat” of this world for the World to Come. As for the *tzaddik* himself, after twelve months Rabbah sees that he is rebuilt, as the verse states regarding the *tzaddik* (*Tehillim* 34:21): *HASHEM guards all his bones, even one of them was not broken*. Even though he dies, his body will be completely restored upon the Resurrection of the Dead.*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Gevulas Binyamin*; *Darchei Noam*, *Derech HaDerush*; *Maaseh Rav*, first approach; *Ein Eliyahu* — The story pertains not to *tzaddikim* in general, but to Moshe Rabbeinu in particular. The small creature in his “nostril” was the minor sin of anger [אָר] that he displayed at the *Mei Merivah* (Waters of Strife).

וַאֲמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חַנָּה: זִמְנָא חָדָא הוּא קְאָזְלִינָן בְּסַפִּינְתָא, וְחֻזְיָנָן
הָהוּא פּוֹרָא דִּיתְבָּא לִיה חֲלֵתָא אַגְבִּיָּה, וְקָדַח אַגְמָא עֵילֻיָּה. סְבָרִינָן —
יִבְשָׁתָא הִיא, וְסֻלְקִינָן, וְאַפִּינָן וּבִשְׁלִינָן אַגְבִּיָּה, וְכֵר חֶם גְּבִיָּה — אִיתְהַפִּיךְ,
וְאִי לֹא דִהוּ מְקַרְבָּא סַפִּינְתָא הוּא טְבָעִינָן.

The seventh story:

And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: Once, we were traveling on a ship and we saw a certain fish on whose back sand had gathered, and grasses sprouted on it. We thought it was an island of dry land, so we disembarked and went up onto it and baked and cooked on its back. When its back got hot from the fire, [the fish] turned over, and had the ship not been close by, we would have drowned.^[5]

NOTES

5. See Insight B regarding the meaning of this story.

🔗 **Insight B: Beware of False Hopes** [First approach to this story, based on *Derashos Maharam Brisk*, on *Shabbos HaGadol* ד"ה ויהו נרמז; *Damesek Eliezer*, *Parashas Kedoshim*, note to §28; *Orach Yescharim*, Vol. 2, p. 58; and *R' Shlomo Arieli in Rapduni BaTapuchim*, *Belnyanei HaMoadim*, *Tishah B'Av*, p. 80; see also *Ritva* here.]

The Jewish nation sails the stormy seas of exile, buffeted by the waves of nations but sheltered on the ship of Hashem's grace and Torah, which rises and falls with the seas beneath it. And then the ship comes upon a huge fish — upon what seems to be a benevolent host nation floating calmly on the surface of the sea of exile. Sand has gathered on the back of this fish and verdant sprouts of hope and security reach upward. The passengers on the ship, thinking that they have finally reached dry land, leave the ship and take up residence on the broad and welcoming land they have found. Eventually, many begin to feel that they no longer need the ship that has dropped anchor nearby — the ship of Torah they have left for what they think are greener pastures. And they cook and bake and become settled on the illusory and superficial land that is not really land at all.

But Hashem wants His children back. He does not want them to assimilate and be absorbed into the alien nation among whom they live. And so, He makes the fires His children have kindled on the thin layer of sand penetrate the veneer of tolerance and acceptance that the new land of promise has extended, and that land suddenly overturns and casts its unwelcome visitors back into the sea of oppression and uncertainty! And were it not for the ship of Torah that lies anchored close by, the castaways would soon drown and be forever lost. But the patient ship is still there, welcoming its errant passengers back on board, battered but alive, ready to continue and sail their historic voyage to destiny with the Torah and Providence alone as their guide.*

[The general theme of this approach (though not its application to the story of our Gemara) is elaborated upon by *Beis HaLevi*, beginning of *Parashas Shemos*; *Netziv* in *She'ar Yisrael* (printed at the end of his commentary on *Shir HaShirim*); *Meshech Chochmah*, *Parashas Bechukosai*; see Insight to Ein Yaakov, *Pesachim* §60, "The Roots of Anti-Semitism."]**

🔗 **Mariner's Mirage** [The story as explained by *Maaseh Rav* (on these stories). For similar explanations, see *R' Emanuel Chai Riki* (*Choshev Machashavos*), *Gevulas Binyamin*, and *Ben Yehoyada*.]

The Creator has placed man's soul in a body and sent him like a ship sailing across the sea of life, to amass mitzvos and good deeds. To do this, man must always bear in mind that he is on a journey — he is only passing through. But the ship of man encounters the huge fish of the yetzer hara, that paints its surface with an mirage of stability — an illusory layer of dry land with all manner of appealing sprouts that lure a person off his journey and beckon him to come and settle on the broad back of the fish, to eat and drink and make this

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Maharsha* explains similarly, but specifically with reference to the story of Purim.

Rapduni BaTapuchim (*Belnyanei HaMoadim*, *Tishah B'Av*, p. 80) — Alternatively, the ship's passengers who seek to take up residence on the back of the fish refers not to those who abandon the Torah, but to those who have become entrenched in the lands of the exile and no longer yearn to return to Eretz Yisrael.

** *Emes LeYaakov* [*R' Yaakov Lorberbaum*] — The story is a vision of the time just before the arrival of Mashiach, when the Jews will attempt to become dominant over a humbled nation only to have the nation overturn and cast them into the sea, to be rescued by Mashiach who lies anchored nearby.

וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חַנָּה: זִימְנָא חָדָא הוּא אֲזִילִינָן בְּסַפִּינְתָא, וְסָגִיא סַפִּינְתָא
 בֵּין שְׂוִיעָא לְשְׂוִיעָא דְכוֹרָא תַלְתָּא יוֹמָא וְתַלְתָּא לַיְלָתָא, אִיהוּ בּוֹקִיפָא וְאַנָּן
 בְּשַׁפּוּלָא. וְכִי תִימָא — לָא מְסַגִּיא סַפִּינְתָא טוּבָא, כִּי אֲתָא רַב דִּימִי אֲמַר:
 בְּמִיחָם קוּמְקוּמְסָא דְמִיָּא, מְסַגִּיא שִׁיתִין פְּרָסִי, וְשָׂדִי פֶרֶשָׁא גִירָא, וְקִדְמָא
 לִיה (אִיהוּ). וְאָמַר רַב אֲשִׁי: הָהוּא גִילְדְנָא דִימָא הוּאִי דְאִית לִיה תְּרִי שְׂוִיעִי.

The eighth story:

וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חַנָּה וכו' — And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: Once, we were traveling on a ship, and we came upon a fish so large that the ship took three days and nights to sail between the fish's two fins!^[6] [The fish] was swimming against the wind and we were sailing with the wind.^[7]

The Gemara discusses the ship's speed:

And if you say that the ship did not travel quickly, I will tell you that when Rav Dimi came to Babylonia from Eretz Yisrael he said, regarding this incident, that [the ship] traveled sixty *parsaos* in the time it takes to heat a kettle of water.^[8] And furthermore, when a cavalryman shot an arrow (which travels extremely fast), [the ship] overtook [the arrow]. Rav Ashi said regarding this incident: That fish was a small species of fish, known as *gildena-of-the-sea*, which has two fins.^[9]

NOTES

6. Whereas most fish have only one fin, in the middle, this fish had one fin near the head and the other near the tail (*Rashbam* here and below — see note 9).

7. *Rashbam*. Literally, *It was upward and we were downward*. Although the fish was swimming toward us, and although we were sailing with the wind (which increased our speed), it still took us three full days

to travel the length of the fish.

8. A *parsah* is between 2.5 and 3 miles. Thus, 60 *parsaos* is between 150 and 180 miles [see §49 note 5]. A kettle boils in a matter of minutes. Thus, the ship was traveling at an extremely quick pace.

9. Most fish have only one fin on their back. The fish in

place his home. Man persuades himself that he is doing no wrong. After all, food and drink are essential for life. What harm is there in going up onto this island, this oasis of calm in the turbulent sea?

But as the person bakes and cooks on this island, the heat of his fire grows. His physical wants become greater and deeper, and he becomes more and more entrenched in life on this island of illusion. Satisfying his legitimate needs has given way to indulging even in forbidden pursuits. And the perceptive person will realize that what he had thought was the proper involvement in physical necessities was really the allure of the *yetzer hara*, whose wily bait he has taken. To this person, the deceptive “fish turns over” and reveals to him its true intent — to lure him away from Hashem’s will and drown him in the murky depths of sin. The ship, however, is nearby. The sight of the ship causes him to contemplate that this world is not a place of permanence, but like the ship, which stays nowhere permanently, but moves to an ultimate destination. And this contemplation — without which he would surely have drowned — causes him to abandon the path the *yetzer hara* has laid before him, and resume his voyage through life, focused on the true permanence that lies ahead.*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Choshev Machashavos* — The ship anchored nearby represents the refuge of repentance, which is always at hand.

Minchas Ani (*Parashas Vayakheli*, 5772 ed., p. 228 ועל פי זה) — The “ship” is the pure faith embedded in a person, the “sea” is the *yetzer hara*, and the large “fish” is a person’s physical desires, which at times appear to be perfectly permissible and a safe haven from the *yetzer hara*. With time, the fish “overturns” and sends a person into the hands of the *yetzer hara*.

Ben Yehoyada — The “fire” in this story is the fire of Torah, which burns and gives a person the strength to overcome the attractions of the *yetzer hara*, and converts the *yetzer hara* into an ally for good rather than a force for evil, but only if “the ship is nearby” — if the Torah study is coupled with fear of Heaven.

R’ Yerucham Levovitz (*Daas Torah, Bereishis*, p. 144) — True existence is permanent. The fish overturning and casting off all who had settled upon it indicates that what had been built there had been false all along. This impermanence and falseness is a defining quality of this transitory world.

{נדר} וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חַנָּה: זִימְנָא חָדָא אֲזִילִין בְּסַפִּינְתָא, (וּחֲזִיא)
[וְחִינִין] הֵיא צִיפְרָתָא (דְּהוּה קֵאִי) [דְּקֵאִים] עַד קְרִסוּלִיָּה בְּמֵיא, וְרִישִׁיָּה

§54 The ninth story:

וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חַנָּה וכו' — And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: Once, we were traveling on a ship over a river^[1] and we saw a bird standing up to its ankles in water, with its head

NOTES

the story had two. Rav Ashi therefore concluded that it must have been the *gildena* type, which has two fins on its back. [Although] *gildena* fish are normally small,

[this one was exceedingly large] (*Rashbam*).

See Insight C regarding the meaning of this story.

1. See *Rashbam* below, ד"ה ולא משום.

❧ **Insight C: The Inversion of High and Low** [The story, as explained by *Maharsha*. See also in this vein *Darchei Noam*, *Derech HaDerush*; *Maaseh Rav*; *Megillas Sesarim* [R' David ben R' Aryeh Leib of Amsterdam]; and *Ben Yehoyada*.]

In the time of Purim “we were traveling the stormy seas” of our exile in the vast Persian Empire, ruled by Achashveirosh, controlled by Haman. “We came upon a great fish.” It was to be a fateful month of Adar, whose zodiacal sign is Pisces, the Fish. That month, there loomed two towering “fins” — שְׂפִינָא in the words of the Gemara, which means literally “destruction.” “Two fins.” It was to be either the month of our destruction — or the destruction of our Amalekite enemy and his numerous cohorts.* Only one of us would survive. “It took us three days and three nights to travel between the fins.” Our fate would be decided by the three days and three nights of fasting and repentance that Queen Esther had decreed upon herself and upon her people (*Esther* 4:15-16) when the Adar decree became known. “The ship moved very swiftly.” Events moved and unfolded with incredible rapidity.** “It was upward.” Haman’s star had risen to dizzying heights. “And we were downward.” Our lives and legacy hung in the balance. And Hashem accepted our repentance and prayers, and all that our enemies had hoped was turned against them. Haman and his sons were “upward” — hoisted high on the gallows he had made for Mordechai, and we vanquished the tens of thousands of our mortal enemies on the very day they had sought to vanquish us. And we remained standing “downward” — saved from those gallows, looking up at the corpses of our enemies that were hanging high above, and beyond at the even higher Hand of Hashem that had orchestrated it all.***

This story is an old one. But Rabbah bar bar Chanah is telling us that it is a story of the present and future as well. The history of our oppression in exile repeats itself; and so does the history of Hashem’s salvation. Our ship still navigates the seas and sails on, long after the frightening fins of monstrous fish after monstrous fish have slipped beneath the waves to the watery depths below. We must never despair (see *Darchei Noam* loc. cit.).

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Darchei Noam*, *Maaseh Rav*, and *Megillas Sesarim* — The two fins of destruction are Haman and Achashveirosh, each of whom wished to destroy the Jews in his own way (see *Megillah* 14a [§19]). [See Insight in Ein Yaakov there, “Two Anti-Semites; One Goal.”]

R' Avraham Saba (*Eshkol HaKofer* on *Megillas Esther* 3:8) explains how Haman and Achashveirosh represent the alliance between Eisav and Yishmael. [See also Insight to the Kleinman ed. of *Bereishis Rabbah* 75 §6, “The Alliance of Eisav and Ishmael.”]

** *Darchei Noam* — The great speed of the ship symbolizes that Hashem not only accepts our sincere repentance, but that He does so with gladness.

*** *Kerem Binyamin* [R' Binyamin Meir, Maggid of Kremenchuk] (on the stories of Rabbah bar bar Chanah) — The ship represents the people who sail the seas of this world. The “fish” represents the Jewish people, who are like fish, as they cannot survive outside the waters of Torah. And the two fins are the two inclinations in every person — the *yetzer hatov* and the *yetzer hara*, which can raise him to great heights or take him down to great depths.

See also *Be'er Rechovos* [R' Aharon Elazar Pashkus], in the section entitled *Be'er Yitzchak*, on our Gemara.

Olelos Ephraim — The ship represents the righteous who sail the stormy seas of exile with great speed and alacrity, despite the waves of difficulty they encounter, between the tall fins of the wicked, who rise high to rebel against Hashem.

בְּרִיקָעָא. וְאִמְרִינָן: לֵית מֵיא, (נִיחוֹת) [וּבְעִינָן לְמִיחוֹת] לְאִקּוּרֵי נֶפֶשִׁין, וְנִפְקַבְתִּי קְלָא וְאִמַר לָן: לֹא תִיחוֹתוּ לְהֶבָא, דְּנִפְלָה לִיה [חֲצִינָא] [חֲצִיצָא] לְבָר נִגְרָא (הִבָּא) הָא שְׁבַע שָׁנִין, וְלֹא מְטִיא לְאַרְעָא. וְלֹא מְשׁוּם דְּנִפְשִׁי מֵיא, אֶלָּא מְשׁוּם דְּרִדִּיפִי מֵיא. אִמַר רַב אֲשִׁי: הָהוּא יָוִי שְׂדֵי הוּא, דְּכֹתִיב (תְּהִלִּים ג, יא) "וְיָוִי שְׂדֵי עֲמֻדֵי".

in the sky. We said to ourselves: "The water is not deep if it reaches only the bird's ankles; let us go down into the water and cool ourselves off." Whereupon a Heavenly voice [בַּת קֹלָא] went forth^[2] and told us: "Do not go down here! An axe dropped here by a carpenter seven years ago has still not reached the bottom! And this is not because the water is so deep^[3] but because it is so rapid."^[4] Rav Ashi said: That bird was the ziz of the field [וְיָוִי שְׂדֵי], as it is written (Tehillim 50:11): I know every bird of the mountains, and the ziz of the field is with Me.^[5]

NOTES

2. This refers to a *bas kol* [בַּת קֹל], which is a voice by which Hashem sometimes communicates with righteous people (*Tos. Yom Tov, Yevamos* 16:6). One does not hear the actual Heavenly voice, but rather an echo of it. Thus, it is called *the daughter* (or echo) of a voice.

Although Rabbah bar bar Chanah lived well after the close of the era of prophecy, in his time, righteous people still sometimes received Divine communication through a *bas kol* (see *Yoma* 9b).

3. Literally, *plentiful*.

4. The powerful current [beneath the surface] does not allow the axe to sink (*Rashbam*). [*Rashbam* writes that it is not "only" because the water is deep. I.e., the water is indeed deep, but that is not the only reason the axe has not yet reached the bottom.]

5. Since its head reaches the heavens, Hashem says:

[It] is with Me (*Rashbam*). This verse appears in a passage in which Hashem tells the Jewish people that He does not require their animal sacrifices since the entire animal kingdom belongs to Him. Among other examples, He notes that the ziz of the field is with Him. Rav Ashi understands the ziz of the field to be the huge bird described by Rabbah bar bar Chanah. In *Vayikra Rabbah* 22 §10, we are told that the ziz of the field is so large that when it stretches its wings, it obscures the sun. See *Targum* and *Radak* (second explanation) to the verse. For different identifications of the ziz of the field, see *Rashi* and *Radak* (first explanation) to the verse. [For a lengthy and wide-ranging article on the ziz of the field, see Volume 25 of the Torah Journal *Nezer HaTorah*, Tammuz 5772, p. 336ff.]

For various interpretations of this story, see Insight A.

☞ Insight A: The Hidden Depths [The story, as explained by Eitz Yosef, based largely on Maharsha.]

We were in a ship traversing the waters of the Talmud and we came upon a towering Torah personality, holy and pure like the *tzippor* [צִפּוֹרָא] which is "pure," whose feet were submerged in the mighty waters of the revealed Torah, but whose head reached into the lofty realms of the esoteric, mystical Torah. And we thought: There is no real depth to the water here below; we can easily master the revealed Torah. Let us leave the ship of Talmudic study carrying us across these waters below and refresh our souls in the profound mysteries of the hidden Torah. Whereupon a Heavenly voice called out to warn us against our rash resolve: Do not venture into the upper realms of the esoteric if you have not filled yourselves sufficiently with the revealed Torah. That revealed Torah is not as easy to master as you imagine. Why, there was a "carpenter" — a Torah Sage (see *Avodah Zarah* 50b) — who "dropped his axe," which dissects the concepts of Torah, into these waters seven years ago and it has still not reached the bottom! He raised halachic questions and difficulties that have not yet been resolved these seven years. And not only because the subject matter is so vast, but because it requires brilliance and profundity! Remain on the ship of Talmudic study. Stay the course of your travels across these waters. You have much revealed Torah yet to learn and to master, without which you cannot soar into the mystical realms.*

And do you know who that "towering bird" was, whose head was able to reach into the heavens? Rav Ashi

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Einei Shmuel* (*Ein HaBedolach* here) and *Mishnas Yosef* (*Derashos U'Maamarim* Vol. 1, Maamar 25) — The symbolism of the bird standing in the water below with its head reaching into the heavens is that even the revealed part of the Torah is rooted in the mystical realms and produces cosmic effects.

said it was “the *ziz* of the field” — someone who had “removed himself” [זיז, *zaz*] from the field of earthy desires and preoccupation. *And the ziz of the field is with Me.* It is the one so removed who can truly be with Hashem.



Whereas the preceding approach understands the thrust of this story to be emphasizing the true depths of the *revealed* Torah, *Olelos Ephraim* understands that it means to emphasize the exceedingly profound nature of the *hidden* Torah. The “towering bird” that Rabbah bar bar Chanah came upon on his travels was the haughty scholar who rashly but mistakenly believes that he can easily lift his head into the Heavenly realms and master and understand the hidden Torah. He believes that nothing is too profound for him. He is brilliant enough to master the depths of the hidden Torah; in fact, those depths do not rise beyond his ankles, so intellectually capable is he. And those who come upon this haughty scholar think that it is not too deep for them either. They, too, are ready to leave the ship and immerse themselves in the refreshing waters of the hidden Torah. But a cautionary voice calls out to them from Heaven: You are not ready to go down into these esoteric waters! There was a great scholar who sent the axe of his brilliant reason plummeting into them seven years ago and it has still not reached the bottom! And do not think that this is simply because these waters are too vast for a person to encompass and master in all their breadth, but he *is* capable of focusing on a *portion* of them and understanding that portion profoundly. Know that it is not so! The currents of that wisdom are extraordinarily swift. Even a portion of it is so profound and difficult to comprehend that [for most people] it is best not to delve at all into the parts of the Torah that have been concealed.*

❧ **Shallow, Dangerous Waters** The *Malbim* (*Eretz Chemdah* on *Aggados Chazal*) has a completely different

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Olelos Ephraim* (there) — Rav Ashi adds that *the ziz of the field is with Me* [is not identifying the bird of the story, but] means that understanding the true nature of Hashem, which is the profound inquiry discouraged by this story, is with Him alone. He alone knows how to reconcile His unlimited nature with the limiting expressions of “movement” [זיז] ascribed to Him in Scripture.

R' *Eliyahu Guttmacher* (*Tzafnas Pane'ach* on these stories) — This story cautions against those who are unworthy yet involve themselves in “practical Kabbalah,” by which they seek to produce various supernatural effects through Kabbalistic knowledge and practices.

Ben Yehoyada — The bird is the Kabbalistic master who humbly conceals his great stature; to the eye he seems no more than ankle-deep in the waters of Torah, but in truth his head reaches into the highest realms of esoteric wisdom. When we realized how great he was, we sought to refresh ourselves in the waters of his Kabbalistic knowledge, but were warned by a Heavenly voice that it is too far beyond us.

R' *Yaakov Lorberbaum* (*Emes LeYaakov* here) — This story cautions against “going down into the water” to debate the heretic who fancies himself a great scholar, his head reaching to heaven, but who in fact is only ankle-deep in Torah wisdom. You think you will convince him because he really has “no water.” Do not go down to there. It is an exercise in futility. Great scholars have tried, but have not changed his mind — not because he has “much water,” but because his mind is like a racing current, that twists things and flits from one thing to the next without proper understanding.

Akeidas Yitzchak (*Toldos, Shaar 24*, העורב, ד"ה הנה באמת העורב) based on slightly different reading in the Gemara — We came upon birds standing in the waters of worldly and financial pursuits with their heads reaching toward the heights of success, and we wished to go into those waters as well. Until the Godly voice of human intelligence called out to us: You will never be satisfied! Many have dropped their axes into these waters and “seventy years later” — after a lifetime of labor — they still have not reached the end of their desires. And not because the waters are too vast, but because they churn too quickly — i.e., people become frantic and unsettled when pursuing them.

R' *Yaakov Ettlinger* (*Minchas Ani, Parashas Nasso*) — We sailed across the waters of this world and saw a great Torah sage whose head reached the heights of Torah scholarship and who engaged as well in worldly wisdom, but only so that his feet were ankle-deep in them. And we thought that we, too, would immerse and refresh ourselves in worldly philosophy — albeit only up to our ankles — until the Godly voice of the *yetzer hatov* cautioned us: There was a בַּרְּבָּר — a scholar’s “apprentice,” a scholar who had not yet gained a mastery of Torah, who had dipped the axe of his reason into these waters, and after “seven” decades — a lifetime later, he still has not found in them a firm foundation. Those waters pose a grave danger for you! And not because the waters of secular philosophy are so deep — for indeed the wisdom of Torah is far deeper. But because the waters “chase each other” — each philosopher criticizing the other, because in fact there is no firm foundation in them. Not so in Torah wisdom. For although there are indeed many debates between Torah scholars, all their opinions are rooted in the Torah. And the great sage you saw with his feet in the water and his head in the heavens is not the model for you; for he is the rare *ziz of the field*, whom Hashem declares to be His.

{נַה} וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה: זִימְנָא חֲדָא הוּא [קָא] אֲזִילִין בְּמִדְבָּרָא,
 וְחֻזִּין הֵי אֲנִי דְשְׁמִיטָן גְּדַפְיָהּ מִשְׁמִינְיָהּ, וְקָא נִגְדִי נְחָלִי דְּמִשְׁחָא
 מִתּוֹתֵיהּ. וְאִמְנָא לָהּ: אֵית (לִי מְנִיכּוֹ) [לָן מְגַבִּיכּוֹ] חֲלָקָא לְעֵלְמָא
 דְּאִתִּי. חֲדָא דְלִיא לִי אֶטְמָא, וְחֲדָא דְלִיא לִי גְדָפָא. בִּי אֲתָאִי לְקַמֵּיהּ דְּרַבִּי
 אֶלְעָזָר, אָמַר לִי: עֲתִידִין יִשְׂרָאֵל לִיתֵן עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת הַדִּין.

§55 The tenth story:

וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה וכו' — And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: Once, we were traveling in the desert and we saw these two geese whose feathers had fallen out because of their excessive fat, and streams of oil flowed beneath them.^[1] I asked them: “Will we have a portion of you in the Future Era?”^[2] In reply, one goose raised its thigh and the other its wing.^[3] When I came before R' Elazar, he said to me: Israel will be held to account for them.^[4]

NOTES

1. That is, they had so much fat that it flowed out of them like a river.
2. I.e., will we be rewarded by eating your fatty meat when Mashiach comes? (see *Rashbam* below, דִּיה לִיתֵן, עליהם).
3. By doing so, the geese were indicating that their thighs and wings would be eaten by the righteous when Mashiach comes (see *Rashbam*).
4. I.e., for the suffering they have caused the geese. The excessively fatty geese, who are waiting to be eaten by

the righteous when Mashiach comes, will continue to suffer from their excessive fat until then. Only when Mashiach comes and they will be slaughtered to feed the righteous will their suffering cease. The sinners delay Mashiach's arrival and thus prolong the suffering of the geese. The sinners will therefore be punished for the prolonging of an animal's suffering (*Rashbam*; *Maharsha* [cited in *Insight* below], however, explains differently).

See Insight A for various interpretations of this story.

understanding of this story and its lesson: We were traveling across the waters of this world, with all its attractions and desires, and came upon one of the ancient ascetics, a hermit leading a monastic existence — shunning marriage, family life, and all manner of physical desires, barely subsisting on wild herbs. His feet were hardly in the water — there was really little more to his existence in this world other than the fact that he was standing in it. Otherwise, his head was in the heavens, consumed with other-worldly thoughts. And something drew us to that way of living. We said: There is no “water” here — no physical temptation whatsoever, no attraction to sin. This holy recluse has successfully overcome all the allures of this world and lives in a completely spiritual world where the physical holds no attraction and poses no challenge. Let us, too, adopt that way of life and restore our souls with the purely spiritual. But the heavenly voice of our true Sages called out its warning: That is not the way Hashem wants us to live. On the contrary, it will lead you straight to the perils of temptation you wish to avoid! Whoever abstains too much will fall prey to the very physical desires he shuns. Having lived a life of extreme deprivation, the smallest physical temptation that comes his way will penetrate to the deepest recesses of his heart, churn inside of him without respite, and eventually erupt into a great flame of uncontrollable passion! There has already been a “carpenter” here, an idealist like you, who was intent on shaping and smoothing all facets of his character and soul, and he tried to perfect himself here, with ascetism, but who “dropped his axe” here — he lost the very tool with which he sought to empower himself when he was eventually confronted by a physical desire that consumed him and which pulled him into the depths of the water, whose bottom he has not yet reached! Because the truth is, there is nowhere in this world that will be absolutely free of physical desire. There is “water” even here. And while that water is not a lot, the little that there is will be exceedingly powerful and turbulent, and almost impossible to overcome. And Rav Ashi identifies for us the “bird” of this story: It is the *ziz of the field* — the hermit who seeks to find refuge by “moving” to the empty “field” of seclusion.

✎ **Insight A: The Great Reward of the Righteous** [The story as explained by *Maharsha*.]

Rabbah bar bar Chanah was traveling and came upon the great “desert” of the Future Era, where Hashem will punish the sinners in the *Desert of the Nations* (see *Yechezkel* 20:35ff). There he saw “extraordinarily fat geese” — the great outpouring of wisdom (see *Berachos* 57a) with which the righteous will be rewarded at that time. Rabbah asked them if he, too, as a great Torah scholar, would merit that reward? “One goose lifted its thigh and the other lifted its wing.” “Yes,” they indicated. “You will merit this reward. But only if in addition to your Torah study you ‘walk’ in the righteous path, and you ‘lift’ your arm to do righteous deeds in caring

for those in need.” For “it is not the study that is primary, but the deeds that it brings” (*Avos* 1:17). Your Torah alone will not be enough if you remain entirely immersed in study but not in deeds. And when Rabbah came before R’ Elazar, the latter told him: Those who will indulge in those fat geese in the Future Era without having performed the necessary deeds and kindnesses will be punished, for their eating of the geese will be no more than a selfish indulgence in their own desires.

“The feathers of the geese had fallen out.” Indeed, it is hard for the dedicated Torah scholar to take time from his studies to assist others. But they must lift their wings and feet nonetheless, and crown their studies with deeds of goodness and kindness (*Mishnas Yosef, Derashos U’Maamarim, Maamar* 28).

It is told that the great Gaon and *tzaddik* R’ Eliyahu Chaim Meisel, Rav of Lodz, was asked how he could take so much time from his Torah study to help so many widows and orphans and people in need. To which he replied: If a Torah scholar cannot close his Gemara to help others, then his Gemara is really closed even when it is open. But if a scholar closes his Gemara to help others, then his Gemara is really open even when it is closed.

✚ Soaring Without Wings [The story as explained somewhat differently by R’ Eliezer Zussman Sofer in the introduction to his *Yalkut Eliezer*.]

Rabbah was “traveling in the desert.” He had gone in his mind to a place of quiet and solitude to contemplate “the fat geese” — the truly wise scholars (see *Berachos* 57a). And he found that true wisdom lies primarily with those scholars who had “wings” that would have enabled them to soar to the heights of profound understanding, but whose wings had shed their feathers and the capacity for such flight because of “the streams of oil that flowed beneath them” — because they had devoted so much of their time and energy to share their Torah with so many others, whom they taught with dedication and devotion. And Rabbah asked the Sages whether he, too, who had not done as much in that regard, had so great a portion in the World to Come? One goose (i.e., sage) raised its leg, signifying “going” to teach others. And the other lifted its wing, signifying “soaring” in personal understanding. Were both necessary for the ultimate reward, or were “wings” alone sufficient? He asked this question to R’ Elazar, who told him that indeed those Torah scholars who have “wings” alone were going to be taken to account for their lack of “legs.” For it is the mission of every Torah scholar to help others learn Torah and not focus exclusively on his own Torah.

Rav Zussman adds that his own father, who was an exceptional Torah scholar, was completely generous with his time, and devoted all his days to teaching hundreds of young students for free, rich and poor alike. At one point, his father was offered a prestigious Rabbinic position, about which he consulted his great teacher, the Chasam Sofer. And the great sage advised him to turn down the offer. Can there be anything greater than what you now do, teaching Torah so devotedly to the young? Indeed, our Sages (*Vayikra Rabbah* 30 §2) say that those who teach the young devotedly will merit to stand at the right hand of the Holy One, Blessed is He.

Sometimes, a person clips his own wings, but soars even higher as a result.

✚ The Legs, the Wings, and the Rivers of Fat [The story as explained by *Malbim* (*Eretz Chemdah, Beurim al Aggados Chazal* here, second approach.)]

A person comes to this world to perfect himself. He can do this by the intellectual perfection he attains through Torah study and the comprehension and internalization of its concepts, or through the deeds of charity and kindness that he does. Rabbah bar bar Chanah came across people who were extraordinarily wealthy. But their wealth had caused “the feathers of their wings to fall out.” They did not soar intellectually because their excessive wealth had kept them grounded in lives of comfort and opulence. Nor did they utilize their wealth to perform great deeds of charity; the “rivers of fat flowed beneath them.” These rivers of fat were not funneled into containers that would be filled with eternal blessing. They emptied, rather, onto the barren sands of the desert, wasted on the fruitless vanities of this world, devoid of lasting value.*

Rabbah wondered whether he himself would be able to secure a share in the World to Come if he would be blessed with such wealth. [What follows was added in a gloss by the publisher of *Eretz Chemdah*.] In response “one goose lifted it leg and the other its wing.” Great wealth can indeed bring a person to the World to Come. One can use his wealth to walk the path of doing great deeds of kindness and charity. And one can use his wealth to soar in his own Torah study, freed from the worries and pressures of financial need. And R’ Elazar remarked that Israel will be held to account for them: Hashem has blessed many among Israel with great wealth. And they will have to account for how they utilized that blessing.**

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* See *Akeidas Yitzchak, Mattos, Shaar* 85, for a similar interpretation.

** *Rabbeinu Bachya* (Commentary on *Devarim* 30:7; *Kad HaKemach, Geulah*); *Ritva* here (cited in *HaKoseiv*) — The two fat geese represent the empires of Eisav and Yishmael, the remnants of which will ultimately repent and accept the sovereignty of Hashem when Mashiach comes. And we will be held to account for delaying that time of their repentance, because our sins are what delay the coming of Mashiach. [See *Rabbeinu Bachya* (loc. cit.) for his interpretation of the details of this story.]

{נו} וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה: זֵימְנָא חֲדָא הוּא קְאָזְלִינָן בְּמִדְבָּרָא, וְאֵתְלִינָן
 בְּהֶדֶן הַהוּא טִייעָא דִּיהוּא שְׁקִיל עֲפָרָא וּמוֹרַח לִיה. וְאָמַר: הָא
 אוֹרְחָא — לְדוֹכְתָא פֻּלָן, וְהָא אוֹרְחָא — לְדוֹכְתָא פֻּלָן. אֲמַרִינָן לִיה: כִּמָּה
 מִרְחָקִינָן מִמֵּיָא? וְאָמַר לָן: הָבוּ לִי עֲפָרָא. יְהִינָן לִיה, וְאָמַר לָן: תִּמְנֵי
 פָּרְסִי. תִּנְיָן וְיִהְיִינָן לִיה, אָמַר לָן: דְּמִרְחָקִינָן תֵּלְתָא פָּרְסִי. אֲפֻכִית לִיה,
 וְלֹא יָכִילִית לִיה.

§56 The eleventh story.^[1]

וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה וכו' — And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: Once, we were traveling in the desert and we were joined by an Arab merchant, who would take earth from the ground, sniff it, and declare: “The path from which this clod of earth was taken goes to this place, and the path from which that clod of earth was taken goes to that place.” We asked him: “How far are we from water?” He replied: “Bring me a clod of earth.” We brought him. He sniffed it, and told us that we were eight *parsaos* from water. Later, we again gave him a clod of earth to sniff. This time he said to us that we were three *parsaos* away. To test him, I switched the clods and gave them to him again, but I was not able to confuse him. He knew which clod was taken at what distance from the water.^[2]

NOTES

1. The following five stories involve Rabbah bar bar Chanah's travels in the desert with an Arab merchant.
2. *Ben Yehoyada* notes that the earlier generations had a very acute sense of smell (see *Rashi to Shabbos* 85a (ד"ה לזית). Thus, he concludes, this story can be entirely literal, and sees no need to provide a homiletic interpretation.

Ritva (cited in *HaKoseiv*), too, writes that the power of smell exhibited by the merchant in this story is a natural phenomenon. But he adds that the story also contains the lesson that someone who carefully assesses his path in this world will merit to see the Presence of the *Shechinah*.

See Insight A.

🔗 **Insight A: A Scent of Direction** [The meaning of the story based on the explanation of *R' Yitzchak Shmulevitz* in *Pele Yoeitz* (on these stories). (*Ein Eliyahu* here explains similarly.)]

The merchant of this story is the Torah scholar who possesses the keen ability to understand the “earth” — the fundamental makeup of a person (who was created from “earth”) — and thereby discern that person's mission in life and the path he should follow (see *Maharsha* and *Olelos Ephraim* on this story). As *R' Moshe Alshich* writes, every Jewish soul stood at Sinai and received its own unique portion of Torah. As a result, each person has his own special mitzvah or area of Torah that he alone can do best, and that constitutes a person's special mission to the world, and his personal gateway to the World to Come. Thus, the Mishnah (*Sanhedrin* 10:1 [90a]) says that “every Jew has a share to the World to Come.” The Mishnah does not say *in* the World to Come, but *to* the World to Come. Each has a special path to get there, and each must find that aspect of the Torah that most speaks to his soul and make that his unique life-mission, to achieve fulfillment in both this world and the next (*Toras Moshe, Vayikra* 9:5-6). [See also *Haamek Davar* to end of *Parashas Shelach* (15:41). See also *Derashos Nachalas David, Derush* 1 §54, who relates this to the concept that each soul stems from a different letter of the Torah.]

The Kabbalists make a similar point from a more esoteric perspective. As *R' Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin* explains, no two Jews are alike; each has been given a soul made in the image of Hashem, yet different from all of the others. Each of us contains a unique reflection of Hashem's wisdom and exaltedness, and each shines rays of Godliness upon the world in a way that literally no other soul can. The Mishnah teaches us that every Jew should say, “For me was the world created” (*Sanhedrin* 4:5 [37a]). There is something unique I bring to creation that no one else, no matter how great, can duplicate. There is a mission only I can fulfill (*Pri Tzaddik, Parashas Shekalim* §1).

Not every person, though, is able to discern what his purpose and mission are. Sometimes the only way to find them is by consulting a great Torah personality who, with keen perception and deep Torah knowledge, can penetrate to the person's core and correctly assess his purpose in life and the path he should pursue in this world, in order to reach the next. Not every Torah scholar has this ability. But there are some who do. And this is what Rabbah bar bar Chanah taught us in this story.

“We were traveling in the desert,” contemplating the various paths in Torah, in which a person can truly

[וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חַנָּה:] אָמַר לִי [הֵהוּא טִייעָא]: תָּא וְאֲחֹוֵי
 לָךְ מַתִּי מַדְבָּר. אֲנֹלִי וְחַיְתִּינְהוּ וְדָמוּ בְּמֵאן דְּמִיבְסָמִי, [דף עד].
 וְגַנּוּ אַפְרָקִיד, וְהָוָה זְקִיפָא בִּירְכִיָּה דְּחַד מִינֵיהּ, וְעִייל טִייעָא
 תּוֹתִי בִּירְכִיָּה — כִּי רָכִיב גַּמְלָא וְזָקִיפָא רּוּמְחִיָּה, וְלֹא נָגַע בִּיהּ.

The twelfth story:

And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: The Arab merchant said to me: “Come, I will show you those who died during the forty years of wandering in the Wilderness.” I went to see them, and their faces were shining as if they were drunk.^[3]

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They were lying on their backs,^[4] and the knee of one of them was raised. The Arab merchant passed under the bent knee while riding on a camel with his spear held in an upright position, and still, it did not touch [the bent knee] as it passed underneath.^[5]

NOTES

3. That is, although they had been dead for more than fifteen centuries, their complexions were still fresh (see *Ritva*; cf. *Rabbeinu Gershom*).

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4. This is the source that a dead person is buried facing upward (*Kesef Mishneh*, *Hil. Eivel* 4:4; see *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah* 362:2). [*Toras Chaim* here writes

that these dead were not lying on the open desert sand. Rather, they had been buried in a cave, and Rabbah bar bar Chana had entered that cave (see, however, *Oznayim LaTorah* on *Bamidbar* 14:29 פגריכם [ד"ה יפלו פגריכם].)

5. *Rashbam*. [*Ritva* (cited in *HaKoseiv*), however, explains that the dead of the Wilderness were lying on a hill so high that the upright spear of the Arab riding on

succeed “only if he makes himself like a desert” (see *Eruvin* 54a and *Nedarim* 55a) — humble and forbearing. How were we to pursue *our* portion in Torah? And we encountered “a merchant” — an exceptional Torah scholar, who was able to “sniff a clod of earth” and judge its distance from the destination. He “sniffed” one of us and said one thing, and then another one of us and said something else. We tested him and we could not confuse him. He knew us, and how far each one of us had to go.*

As related in *MiKisvei HaRav Chafetz Chaim* (*Dugma MeSichos Avi* §18) the *Chafetz Chaim* once consulted a doctor, who asked him how a Jew like him, in his profession, could merit the World to Come. The *Chafetz Chaim* answered him that the Torah describes the Tree of Life as standing in the center of Gan Eden (*Bereishis* 2:9 with *Onkelos*). Why was it relevant for the Torah to tell us that the tree was in the center, rather than someplace else in the garden? It is relevant, explained the *Chafetz Chaim*, because something in the center is equally accessible from all sides. The Torah is teaching us that the Tree of Life stands at the *center*, and can be reached no matter what a person's lot in life is. We should never imagine that there is only one way to achieve eternity. Whether a person studies Torah all day or honestly works his profession, the path to Heaven is before him as long as he lives his life in the manner of *In all your ways know Him* (*Mishlei* 3:6). It is not enough to learn this lesson; it must be internalized.

We must be careful not to expend our efforts attempting to achieve someone *else's* life goal. Looking over our shoulders at how someone else is doing and wishing we could be like him will result in achieving neither the other fellow's mission nor our own (*R' Yaakov Meir Schechter, Leket Amarim*, Vol. 1, pp. 15-17). Closeness to Hashem is not confined to the famous, the distinguished, or the accomplished Torah scholar. Everyone has his role to fulfill, whether great or small, lighting up the world with his own special light. And if we each fulfill our role properly, each one of us will crown Hashem in a way no one else can (*ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 46-47).

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Olelos Ephraim* (on this story) — The “merchant” of our story is the Torah scholar, for Torah is the most valuable merchandise (*Mishlei* 3:14). We asked him how far “we were from the water” of Redemption (see *Zechariah* 14:8). He told us to “bring him earth” — humility (see *Bereishis* 18:27) will bring the Redemption (see *Tehillim* 37:9). He told us we were “eight *parsaas* distant” — we had eight things to master: the five Books of the Torah, and the three pillars (truth, justice, and peace) on which the world stands (*Avos* 1:18). After we had mastered the Five Books, he told me we had only three *parsaas* to go.

פסקי חדא קרנא דתכלתא דחד מינייהו, ולא הוה מסתגי לן, אמר לי:
 דילמא שקלת מידי מינייהו, אהדריה! דגמירי דמאן דשקיל מידי מינייהו
 — לא מסתגי ליה. אולי אהדרתיהו, והדר מסתגי לן. בי אתאי לקמיה
 דרבנן אמרו לי: כל אבא — חמרא, וכל בר בר חנה — סיבסא. למאי
 הלכתא [עבדית הכי? למידע] אי בבית שמיאי איבעי לך למימני חוטין, אי
 בבית הלל איבעי לך למימני חוליות.

Rabbah bar bar Chanah continues:

I cut a corner off the *tallis*^[6] of one of them, to bring back to the Rabbis to show how they tied their *tzitzis* in the times of Moshe, **but we were unable to continue on** our journey, for our animals were unable to move. [The Arab merchant] said to me: “Did you perhaps take something from one of them lying here? If so, **return it!** For we have a tradition that whoever takes something from them will be unable to continue on.”^[7] I took the corner I had cut off and returned it, and then we were able to continue on. When I came before the Rabbis, they said to me: Every Abba^[8] is as stupid as a donkey, and every bar bar Chanah is a fool! Why did you [cut off the corner of the *tallis*]? Surely because you wanted to know whether the halachah is in accordance with Beis Shammai or Beis Hillel.^[9] In that case, **you should have counted the number of threads** [חוטין]^[10] and the length of the braided section [חוליות]^[11] before returning the corner to its place, and reported to us what you saw!^[12]

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his camel below did not reach the dead man's knee. And Rabbah's point is that despite the distance between them, the faces of the dead above still seemed glowing to those below.]

6. Literally, “the *techeiles*.” The Gemara often uses the word *techeiles* to refer to *tzitzis* in general (*Rashi* to *Menachos* 39a ד”ה תכלה).

Tosafos here, however, maintain that this story cannot serve as a precedent for burying a person with *tzitzis*, because according to the Midrash the Jews in the Wilderness entered into their graves alive and passed away there. [Presumably, then, they entered fully clothed, wearing their *tzitzis*.]

7. Hashem swore that the entire generation should remain in the Wilderness, as it says (*Bamidbar* 14:35): *In this Wilderness shall they cease to be and there shall they die!* Not only their bodies were required to remain, but also their clothing. Their clothing, which miraculously grew together with their bodies (see *Rashi* to *Devarim* 8:4), was considered part of their bodies (*Maharsha*).

8. Rabbah bar bar Chanah's real name was “Rav Abba,” which was condensed into “Rabbah” (*Rashbam*).

9. [The Hebrew text of Ein Yaakov here, which translates literally as “if like Beis Shammai, you should have counted the threads; if like Beis Hillel, you should have counted the braided section” does not admit any ready explanation. We have therefore followed the reading in the Gemara, *אי בבית שמיאי אי בבית הלל איבעי לך למימני חוטין*, and rendered the text accordingly.]

The Rabbis are referring to two disputes between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel brought in a Baraisa in *Menachos* 41b. These two disputes will be discussed in the next two notes.

10. *Tzitzis* are placed on each corner of a four-cornered garment. Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel disagree regarding the number of threads on each corner. Beis Shammai hold that four threads are doubled over to make a total of eight, but Beis Hillel hold that three threads are doubled over to make a total of six (*Rashbam*). Rabbah bar bar Chanah should have counted to see whether the *tzitzis* contained three or four threads.

[The halachah, in this case, follows Beis Shammai. It is one of six exceptions to the general rule that the halachah always follows Beis Hillel (*Tosafos*, *Succah* 3a ד”ה דאמר; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chaim* 11:12).]

11. A fringe of *tzitzis* is divided into two sections: (1) a braided section and (2) a section of loose hanging strings. According to Beis Shammai, the braided section must be four fingerbreadths long; according to Beis Hillel it need be only three fingerbreadths long (*Tosafos Menachos* 41b (ב) ד”ה בית שמיאי; cf. *Rashi* there ארבע ד”ה). Rabbah bar bar Chanah should have measured the braided section.

[Here, too, the halachah follows Beis Shammai (see *Shulchan Aruch* *ibid.* §4).]

12. Rabbah bar bar Chanah had wished to conclusively resolve the two disputes by bringing his colleagues the actual *tzitzis* they wore in the time of Moshe. As it turned out, he was unable to bring them. His colleagues told him that he should at least have brought them back a report of what they looked like (*Riaf*).

[*R' Chaim Kanievsky* (*Taama DeKra*, *Shelach* ד”ה (בב”ב ע”ד א) writes that it would seem that Rabbah bar bar Chanah was prevented by Heaven from thinking of the obvious idea of simply counting the threads and braids. Apparently, Hashem wants us to clarify and

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decide halachic disputes solely from within the bounds of the Torah tradition itself.]

Ben Yehoyada here is greatly puzzled by how the Rabbis could have so disparaged Rabbah bar bar Chanah. After suggesting an alternative understanding of what they said to him, *Ben Yehoyada* writes that it seems more likely that the entire story of

Rabbah bar bar Chana seeing those who had died in the Wilderness with their *tzitzis* and what the Rabbis said to him all occurred to him in a dream. [*Ben Yehoyada* then goes on to suggest another explanation of what might actually have happened; see there.]

See Insight B regarding the meaning of this story.

❧ **Insight B: The Height of Those Who Died in the Wilderness** There is a dispute between the Tannaim R' Eliezer and R' Akiva (*Sanhedrin* 110b, based on how they expound certain verses) whether or not those who died in the Wilderness [because they joined in the sin of the Spies] have a share in the World to Come. Our Gemara here apparently follows the view of R' Eliezer that they *do* have a share (*Tosafos* printed in Ein Yaakov here). That is why the faces of those who died in the Wilderness glowed like the face of a drunkard — their sin was like a sin committed while a person is drunk, which cannot be punished so severely because he did not commit it with a sound mind. Their minds were not yet sound; they had been exposed to the Torah for barely a year when they joined in the sin of the Spies, which was not enough time for them to internalize its truths and understand deeply what their teacher Moshe had taught them. “And they were lying facing up” — even when they sinned, they had been looking upward toward Heaven and had not abandoned their belief in Hashem. Indeed the Gemara there in *Sanhedrin* quotes Rabbah bar bar Chanah as saying in the name of his teacher, R' Yochanan, that in this instance, R' Akiva “abandoned his [usual] generosity of spirit” by expounding the verses as denying a share in the World to Come to those who had died in the Wilderness. And the merchant who came to Rabbah bar bar Chanah to show him the glowing faces of the dead of the Wilderness lying facing upward might represent none other than his teacher, R' Yochanan, who had not accepted R' Akiva's denying them a share in the World to Come (*Maharsha*).

Do you know what the Generation of the Wilderness was? Do you know who they were?! Do you think they were but a rabble of common slaves, coarse laborers in the thrall of base desires, sunken in the vulgar pursuits of common men? Do you think they were simply not able to rise above their humble origins to become devoted and exalted servants of Hashem, and to follow Him wherever He would lead? “Come, I will show you those who died in the Wilderness!” declared the merchant. “I will show you who they truly were!”

“They were lying face-up in the Wilderness, their faces aglow as if drunk with wine. And they had one leg raised in a bent position with the knee so high that a rider atop a camel with his spear held high could pass underneath and still not reach it.” They lay on the ground with their faces up. They were not looking at the earth and at earthly desires. Their gaze was fixed Heavenward, toward Hashem Who had redeemed them from Egypt and Who had brought them to Sinai, “the house of wine” (*Shir HaShirim* 2:4, as explained in *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 2 §13), where He had given them the glorious wine of His Torah. And their faces were aglow from the intoxicating wine they had imbibed!*

“One leg was raised.” The world stands on three legs: Torah, the service of Hashem, and acts of charity (*Avos* 1:2). During the sojourn in the Wilderness, the sacrificial service was the province of the Leviim (*Sifri, Beha'aloscha* §9 based on *Amos* 5:25; see *Radak* there). Acts of charity were unnecessary since no Jew lacked anything (*Devarim* 2:7), and the poorest Jew had taken ninety donkey-loads of the Egyptian spoils (*Bechoros* 5b). The sole leg left for the people of that generation to focus on was Torah. And that leg was lifted so high that a rider atop a camel with his spear raised upward could pass underneath without obstruction. This was the exalted level of that glorious generation.**

Yes, they sinned, and sinned grievously — so much so that they were consigned to die in the Wilderness and not see the Promised Land. But theirs was not the sin of yielding to the earthly tug of base desires, but rather the sin of so yearning for the heights of Divine closeness that they climbed too high too fast! It was like the sin of Adam and Chavah who ate from the Tree of Knowledge to be like the angels (*Bereishis* 3:5). It was

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Gevulas Binyamin* (cited in *Eitz Yosef* here) — Seeing the glory of their great reward in the World to Come as they died caused their faces to glow.

See Insight to *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* *ibid.*, “To Sinai With an Open Heart,” regarding the intoxicating vapors of the wine of Sinai.

** *Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* §41 (end) — R' Pinchas said: The entire generation who heard Hashem's voice at Sinai merited to be like the angels, and their bodies did not disintegrate after death. “Happy are they in this world and in the World to Come.”

[נז] [וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה:] אָמַר לִי [הֵהוּא טִייעָא]: תָּא אַחֵיו לָךְ טוֹרָא
 דְּסִינֵי. אֲזַלִּי וְחִזְאוֹי דְּהֶדְרִין לִיהַ עֲקֻרְבִּי, וְקִימִן כִּי חֲמֵרִי חִיּוּרְתִּי. שְׁמַעְתִּי
 בֵּת קוֹל שְׂאוּמֶרֶת: אוֹי לִי שְׁנִשְׁבַּעְתִּי, וְעַכְשָׁיו שְׁנִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מִי מִפְּרָ לִי?

§57 The thirteenth story:

וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה וכו' — And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: The Arab merchant said to me: “Come, I will show you Mount Sinai.” I went and saw that it was surrounded by scorpions, and they stood as tall as^[1] white donkeys. I heard a Heavenly voice saying: Woe is to Me that I have sworn to exile My people!^[2] But now that I have sworn, who can annul My oath for Me?^[3]

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1. See *Maharal, Chiddushei Aggados*.

2. Hashem’s oath to punish the Jewish people with exile is mentioned in the Prophets many times [see, for example, *Yechezkel* 5:11-13] (*Rashbam*).

3. An oath that is regretted can be annulled either by a panel of three judges or by a single expert judge (see *Nedarim* 21b, 22a, and 78a-78b). In our Gemara, Hashem bemoans, as it were, the oath that He made to exile His people and the absence of a competent authority to annul that oath for Him.

[A sage’s release of a vow is based on his finding a circumstance that was not fully considered by the vower at the time he made the vow, and that had the vower considered that circumstance, he would never have made the vow. Obviously, such a notion is completely inapplicable to a vow made by the All-Knowing God. Rather, the concept of “releasing Hashem’s vow” is used here by the Gemara in a non-literal sense; see *Chinuch* §30 (pp. 258ff in the ArtScroll ed.) at length.]

Tosafos (*Bechoros* 37a ד”ה מפירין את הנדר) note that the technically precise term for a sage’s removal of a vow is הַפְּרָה, *release*, rather than הַפְּרָה, *annulment*, which the Gemara uses here. Nevertheless, the Gemara here uses the less-precise expression הַפְּרָה, *annulment*, with regard to the sage’s removal of the vow, because that is the term used by the Torah with regard to a father’s or husband’s cancellation of his daughter’s or wife’s vow. [See Schottenstein ed. of *Bechoros* 37a, note 1 for the legal distinction between הַפְּרָה and הַפְּרָה.] See, however, *Toras Chaim* here (cited in *Eitz Yosef*), who explains how the Gemara here might be using the term הַפְּרָה in its precise sense. *Shitah Mekubetzes* here (from *Gilyon Tosafos*) suggests that our Gemara uses the expression הַפְּרָה because it refers not to the method of a sage releasing a vow, but rather to the power of a *tzaddik* to “annul” the decree of Hashem. See also *Chida* in *Pesach Einayim* here at length.

like the sin of Nadav and Avihu who died trying to draw near to Hashem (*Vayikra* 16:1). And like Adam and Chavah and Nadav and Avihu, they were punished severely, for Hashem is exceedingly exact with those who are closest to Him (see *Tehillim* 50:2).

One *must* strive to rise higher, to draw nearer, but there are no shortcuts. One must grow through a process of incremental achievement, and to attempt too much too soon is to be doomed to failure. A mountain must be climbed a little at a time; one cannot simply leap to the summit. (*R’Yehonasan Eibenschutz* in *Yaaros Devash*, Vol. 1, *Derush* 2, cited here in *Anaf Yosef*).*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Malbim* (*Torah Or, Bamidbar* 19:2) — “Those who died in the Wilderness” is a metaphor for those who have suppressed their physical desires to live ascetic lives, intoxicated with spiritual ecstasy. They lie on their backs gazing at the heavenly world. Their bent knees cannot be touched by the uplifted spear of a camel rider — they rush to perform mitzvos with such alacrity that even a *tzaddik* riding a fast camel ready to wage war against the *yetzer hara*, cannot keep up with them. Rabbah bar bar Chanah sought to take a corner of their *tzitzis* for himself, to adopt their form of Divine service. He was restrained, however, from doing so because extreme asceticism goes beyond the 613 mitzvos prescribed by the Torah, symbolized by the *tzitzis*, their knots and strings (see *Rashi* to *Menachos* 43b ד”ה שקולה כס).

Olelos Ephraim (on this story) — The merchant showed Rabbah bar bar Chana a graphic depiction of those who speak *lashon hara* — the sin of which those who had died in the Wilderness had been guilty. They are like drunkards, who cannot keep secrets, cannot control what they say, lie on their backs shamefully exposed, [and thirst for more wine, which no longer gives them any joy]. Their leg is raised to trample underfoot one and all. [See Hebrew Schottenstein ed. here, note 9, where the explanation of *Olelos Ephraim* is detailed.]

בִּי אֶתְּאִי לְקַמְיִיהוּ דְּרַבְנָן, אָמְרוּ לִי: כָּל אַבָּא — חֲמָרָא, וְכָל בַּר
בַּר חֲנָה — סִיבָסָא. הִנֵּה לָךְ לְמִימַר: מוֹפֵר לָךְ [מוֹפֵר לָךְ]. וְרַבָּה
בַּר בַּר חֲנָה? (וְהוּא) סָבַר: דְּלָמָא מְשִׁבוּעָתָא דִּמְבוּל קָאֲמַר.

Rabbah bar bar Chanah continues:

When I came before the Rabbis, they said to me: Every Abba is as stupid as a donkey and every bar bar Chanah is a fool.^[4] You ought to have declared: “It is annulled for You. It is annulled for You.”^[5]

The Gemara defends Rabbah bar bar Chanah’s failure to do so:

But Rabbah bar bar Chanah thought that perhaps [the Heavenly voice] was referring to Hashem’s oath never to bring another Flood.^[6]

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4. See previous *siman*, with notes 8 and 12.

5. Rabbah bar bar Chanah’s colleagues reprimanded him for acting foolishly. He was certainly qualified to annul oaths. Therefore, as soon as he heard the Heavenly voice bemoaning that there was no one available to annul the oath, he should have annulled it then and there. [*Ritva* (cited in *HaKoseiv*), explains that the annulment of Hashem’s oath is not to be taken literally. Rather, the meaning is that Hashem’s oath to exile His people is in effect only as long as they do not repent. Once they repent, however, the oath will no longer be in effect and this will bring about the Final Redemption. Thus, Hashem bemoans the fact that they have

not repented, leaving His oath in effect. The Rabbis criticized Rabbah bar bar Chanah for not praying that Hashem should influence the Jewish people to return to Him in perfect repentance.]

See Insight A.

6. After the Flood that destroyed the world in Noah’s time, Hashem promised never again to bring a flood upon the entire world, as it is written (*Bereishis* 8:21): *I will not continue to smite every living being as I have done*. This promise was guaranteed with an oath, as it is written (*Yeshayah* 54:9): *As I swore that the waters of Noah would never again pass over the earth*. The Heavenly voice that Rabbah bar bar Chanah heard did

❧ **Insight A: The Selfless Sage** In our Gemara, the Rabbis take Rabbah bar bar Chanah to task for not having annulled Hashem’s oath to exile the Jewish people. And the Gemara says that Rabbah himself would have done so had he not thought that the oath Hashem “wished” to have annulled was a different one, which was to the detriment of mankind. *Mishneh LaMelech* on *Rambam, Hil. Nedarim* 7:9, however, wonders how Rabbah would have been permitted to annul the oath of exile at all? Why, the law (as stated in *Rambam* there, based on *Yerushalmi*) is that a sage may not annul a vow that forbids some benefit to the people of his town, for he, too, would then be the beneficiary of that annulment. In the case of our Gemara as well, how would Rabbah have been permitted to annul Hashem’s oath to exile His people, if he too would have been the beneficiary of that annulment!

R’ Yoel Teitelbaum, the *Satmar Rav* (*Aggados Maharit* here) answers this question with a story he heard about his saintly ancestor, the *Yismach Moshe*, from someone who was present when it happened. It was Hoshanah Rabbah and the shul had reached the stanza in the *Hoshanos* of: הוֹשַׁעֲנָה לְמַעַנְךָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ הוֹשַׁעֲנָה, *Save us! For Your sake, O our God, save us!* Whereupon the *Yismach Moshe* pleaded before the open *Aron*: I beg You, Master of the universe! Save us for *Your* sake! I mean it solely and completely for *Your* sake! Redeem Your people so that Your great Name will be exalted! Even if I will have no share in that redemption of Your people, I beg You to redeem them. And I am not talking only about my share in their redemption in *this* world. I declare before the open holy *Aron* of your Torah that even if I will, Heaven forbid, have no share in their redemption in the *next* world, even if I am destined to descend to the nethermost realms for eternity and never see the light of Your Countenance, I still beg You to glorify Your Name and redeem Your people!

What unimaginable selflessness! As hard as it is to believe, there are some rare people so entirely selfless, so entirely devoted to Hashem, that their most fervent prayer is for His glory to be revealed in the world — even if they themselves will have no share in it at all!

This is what the Heavenly voice meant when it said to Rabbah bar bar Chanah, “Who can annul for Me?” My oath to exile My people? Where is there a person so entirely devoted to Me that he can divest himself of any and all selfish interest in their redemption so that he would be qualified to annul that oath for Me? And the Rabbis said to Rabbah bar Chanah: Foolish one! *You* are that person! *You* are the one who could rise so high above any self-interest that *you* could have annulled the oath of exile! Had you only realized how selfless you are, how devoted to Hashem you are, *you* could have annulled the oath whose removal we have all been waiting for.

וְרַבָּנִן? אִם בֵּן — 'אֵי לִי לְמָה?

{נח} וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה: אָמַר לִי [הֵהוּא טִייעָא]: תָּא אַחֵי לָךְ בְּלוּעֵי דְקָרַח.

The Gemara now explains the opinion of the Rabbis:

But the Rabbis, who reprimanded Rabbah, held that if [the oath concerned the Flood], why did the Heavenly voice say: **Woe is to Me?**^[7]

§58 The fourteenth story:

וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה וכו' — **And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: The Arab merchant said to me: "Come, I will show you the place of those followers of Korach who were swallowed up."**^[1]

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not specify which oath Hashem regretted. The Rabbis were convinced that it was the oath to exile the Jewish people, which Rabbah bar bar Chanah should have annulled. But he himself was concerned that the oath meant might have been the one never again to destroy the world in a flood, which, for the good of mankind, he did not want to annul.

7. Hashem would not have *lamented* having made an oath that is for mankind's benefit.

See Insight B for the meaning of this story.

1. Korach gathered a following to join him in a revolt against Moshe, accusing him of taking the positions of prominence for himself and his brother Aharon on his own, without being commanded by Hashem to do so (*Bamidbar* Ch. 16). In the end the ground miraculously opened up and swallowed up Korach's followers (ibid. v. 33). [See *Sanhedrin* 110a regarding how Korach himself died.]

🔗 Insight B: White Fences [The story as explained by *Maharsha*:]

The "merchant" took Rabbah bar bar Chanah to see Mount Sinai, the place where Hashem revealed Himself to His people and gave them His Torah. Rabbah saw that august place "surrounded by scorpions like white donkeys." These are the Rabbinic laws enacted to "make a fence around the Torah" (*Avos* 1:1), which distance and thereby protect the people from violating the Torah's laws (see *Rambam Commentary* and *Rav* on that Mishnah). A classic illustration of this is the fence enacted around the Torah's prohibition of "meat and milk," which is the prohibition to cook meat and milk together, or to eat or benefit from them if they were *cooked* together. The Rabbis enacted a "fence" around that law: Keep your distance from violating that Biblical law! Do not eat meat and milk at the same time even if they were *not* cooked together. That Rabbinic fence has stood for thousands of years, embraced and cherished by the Jewish people every day of their lives. The hallmark of the kitchen in an observant Jewish home today is the clear separation between meat and milk — separate eating, separate pots, and separate utensils. That fence has stood the test of time, and has faithfully protected our people from violating the Biblical prohibition of "meat and milk."

These fences are the fences of the "scorpions" — the Sages of the Torah, of whom the Mishnah (*Avos* 2:10) declares: *Warm yourself by the fire of the Sages but beware of their glowing coal lest you be burned . . . for their sting is a sting of a "scorpion."* These are the scorpions who surround the mountain of Sinai like a fence and safeguard the Torah that was given upon it.

And these scorpions are "like white donkeys" — like the Sages *who ride white donkeys, those who sit in judgment* (*Shoftim* 5:10, as explained by the Gemara, *Eruvin* 54b), who, because of their unquenchable thirst for Torah, ride on donkeys, traveling from city to city and country to country in order to study Torah under various masters (see *Avos* 4:14). These donkeys are "white" because as a result of their intensive study of Torah, they keep the Torah given at Sinai intact, unblemished, white and pure.*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Olelos Ephraim* and *Maaseh Rav*, second approach (on these stories) — The "scorpions" and "donkeys" represent the two great forces that conspire to draw the Jewish people away from Torah — the hatred of the nations of the world, and the *yetzer hara*. See also *Ein Eliyahu* and *Yad Yosef* here.

Maaseh Rav (first approach) — "Sinai" is the scholar who studies amid deprivation (surrounded by "scorpions" [difficulties] the size of "donkeys"). The Rabbis faulted Rabbah, thinking that he did not annul the vow because he himself was able to endure those difficulties; nevertheless, he should have annulled the vow to make it easier for others.

[אֲזָלוּ] וְחָזְאוּ תְּרֵי בִּיזְעֵי דְהוּהָ נָפִיק מִיַּנְיֵיהוּ קוּטְרָא, (שָׁקַל) [שְׁקָלִי] גָּבְבָא דְעֶמְרָא, (וּמְשִׁינָה) [וּמְשִׁינָה] בְּמִיא, (וְאַנְחִיה) [וְדַעֲצִיתָה] בְּרִישָׁא דְרוּמָחָא, וְעִיִּלְיָה הָתָם. וְכִי אָפִיק, הוּהָ אִיחָרָךְ אִיחָרוּכִי. אָמַר לִי: אֲצִית, מַאי שְׁמַעֲתָ? וְשָׁמַעֲתָ דְהוּ אָמְרִין: 'מֹשֶׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת, וְהֵן בְּדַאֲיִן. אָמַר לִי: כָּל תְּלָתִין יוֹמֵי מִהֲדָרָא לָהּ גִּיהֶנָם לְהָכָא בְּבֶשֶׁר בְּקַלְחָת, וְאַמְרִי הָכִי: 'מֹשֶׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת וְהֵן בְּדַאֲיִן.

I went and saw two cracks in the ground from which smoke from the fires of Gehinnom was coming out.^[2] [The Arab] took a wad of sheared wool, dipped it in water, put it on the tip of a spear, and stuck it there into one of the cracks. When he withdrew it, it was singed.^[3] He then told me: "Listen! What do you hear?" I heard voices saying: "Moshe and his Torah are true and they (i.e., we) are liars."^[4] [The Arab] then said to me: "Every thirty days,^[5] Gehinnom returns them here, like meat stirred in a pot, and they say the following: "Moshe and his Torah are true and they are liars."^[6]

NOTES

2. These cracks were the [residual] cracks of the ground that had broken open to swallow them (*Rashbam*).

3. Despite the wad's being wet, it was singed by the intense heat of Gehinnom (*Rashbam*). [*Hagahos Yaavetz* suggests emending the Gemara to mean that it was Rabbah bar bar Chanah himself who inserted and withdrew the wad.]

4. These were the voices of Korach's followers, who continually declare that they were wrong and Moshe and his Torah are true (see *Rashbam* שְׁמַעֲתָ דְהוּ אָמְרִין; *Targum Yonasan* on *Bamidbar* 16:34; see, however, note 6 below).

5. On Rosh Chodesh (*Rashbam*).

Perhaps, because they had claimed that *the entire congregation is holy* (*Bamidbar* 16:3) and all are thus equally entitled to serve in the capacity of Kohen and Kohen Gadol, they proposed that a representative of each of the twelve tribes should serve as Kohen Gadol every month on a rotating basis. Their declaration of repentance, therefore, had to be repeated on a monthly basis (*Maharsha*). Alternatively, *Darchei Noam*, *Cheilek HaDerush* (on this story) seeks to demonstrate that Korach's rebellion occurred on Rosh Chodesh, and this would explain why his followers are punished every Rosh Chodesh.

Others explain as follows: The command to bring a special *chatas* on Rosh Chodesh resulted from the moon's correct assertion that "two kings cannot use the same crown" — there are positions of prominence that

require one leader and cannot be shared (see *Chullin* 60b). Those who followed Korach's sinful assertion that all should share in the High Priesthood were therefore punished every Rosh Chodesh (*Iyun Yaakov* here in the name of his son; *R' Dovid Lida* in *Ir David* on *Parashas Korach*; *Meir Nesivim* on *Parashas Korach*). [See *Iyun Yaakov* here for additional explanations; see also *Be'er Yosef*, *Parashas Korach* at great length.]

[*R' Yehudah HaChassid* writes (*Sefer Chassidim* §241) that one should pray for the soul of a *rasha* every Rosh Chodesh, even after twelve months have elapsed since his death, for the fires of Gehinnom are stirred on Rosh Chodesh. See the lengthy discussion about the fires of Gehinnom on Rosh Chodesh by *R' Yaakov Chaim Sofer* in *Toras Yaakov*, *Parashas Beha'aloscha* [בענין הגיהנום אם שובת בראש חודש].

6. That is, every thirty days they are judged again in Gehinnom for their sin (see *Ritva* cited in *HaKoseiv*).

[In some early editions of *Rashi* to *Sanhedrin* 110a, where this story is repeated, *Rashi* explains that this declaration is made every thirty days by the sons of Korach, who did not die (*Bamidbar* 26:11), but repented at the very end. This comment of *Rashi* there does not appear in our editions; it was deleted by *Maharshal*, who points to the fact that it does not appear in the *Rashi* printed in the first edition of *Ein Yaakov* (*Sanhedrin* there).]

See Insight A.

☞ **Insight A: Confessions of Gehinnom** This story of how in the times of Rabbah bar bar Chanah the followers of Korach continued to be judged in Gehinnom, where they continued to declare the error of their ways, raises some intriguing questions. Is their declaration of error a form of sincere repentance? If so, when did they first repent their evil ways? Was it before they died or was it only after? If it was only after, then how could they repent in Gehinnom itself? Can a person repent once he has died?

Toras Chaim (to *Sanhedrin* 111a, and in his lengthy comments to *Eruvin* 19a) asserts that whereas the most egregious sinners are consumed in Gehinnom (see *Rosh Hashanah* 17a) for other sinners not only is repentance possible in Gehinnom, it is the very purpose of Gehinnom. Yes, it is a place of punishment and retribution, but its purpose is to make the sinner remorseful and purify his soul through the punishment he

receives and the repentance that he undergoes, and thereby allow it to eventually enter Gan Eden. [See also the Insight, “A Final Offering, a Final Atonement,” in Ein Yaakov, *Eruvin* §6.]

Beis HaLevi (*Derush* 13), too, explains that Gehinnom can be both punitive and corrective, depending on the nature of the sinner. There are those who have sinned, but have done much good as well. The fires of Gehinnom serve to punish them for their sins and purge their souls of the stains their sins have left, much the same as hot water and detergents will cleanse a fabric of its stains. Once the stains are removed, however, the purity of their souls and the good deeds they have done remain unblemished, like a fabric that has been laundered and whitened, and such people enter the realm of Gan Eden.

Some sinners, however, are so thoroughly wicked that they have corrupted the very fabric of their souls, so that there is nothing left to cleanse. For them, Gehinnom is entirely punitive, and it is regarding them that the last verse in *Yeshayah* (66:24) says: *And they will go out and see the corpses of the men who rebelled against Me, for their decay will not cease and their fire will not be extinguished, and they will lie in disgrace before all mankind.*

Beis HaLevi uses the foregoing to explain in detail the story of our Gemara. Rabbah bar bar Chanah went to see the followers of Korach who were swallowed up. He saw “smoke rising from two cracks” of Gehinnom. Was this the smoke of the corrective fires of Gehinnom or the smoke of purely punitive flames? Rabbah bar bar Chanah (see note 3 above) took a tuft of wool dipped in water and inserted into the crack, and when he pulled it out, it was singed; singed, but not incinerated. The followers of Korach were burned, but not consumed. Their souls were being purified. And Rabbah listened to what these souls being purified were saying. “Moshe and his Torah is true!” And “Gehinnom churned them every thirty days like meat in a pot.” Meat being cooked in a pot is not being punished. It is being softened. Its toughness is being removed until it is fit to be served on the table of kings. And so it was with these sinners. Their souls were being softened and cleansed so that they would be fit to come before the throne of the King. “Thirty days” is the time it takes to see whether a repentant person has really removed the taint of sin from his soul, or whether there still lurks some residue which, though quiescent, might erupt into sin again. (That is why the Rabbis instituted a full month of repentance — the month of Elul — before the Ten Days of Repentance that begin with Rosh Hashanah.) Every thirty days, the repentant followers of Korach were closely examined to see if some residue of sin remained in their souls. And when they were found still not completely pure, they were subjected to the fires of Gehinnom again — fires which, the *Zohar* teaches, are generated by the very heat of sin with which the wicked inflamed themselves. But one day, they will finally be purified completely, and enter the eternal joy of Gan Eden.

Some explain, though, that the declaration of the followers of Korach in Gehinnom was *not* meant as full and complete recognition of the truth and a sincere repentance. For their character and souls that they had so warped in this world became their twisted state forever. Having denied the Torah and the truth of the prophecy of Moshe in this world, they were incapable of having a clear perception of them in the next. And this twisted perception was not something the fires of Gehinnom could correct [although it might still have a purgative and purifying effect]. Yes, on some level, they did sense their error in the next world, the world of truth, and declared their dim awareness with the words, “Moshe and his Torah are true,” thereby acknowledging the justness of the punishment to which they were being subjected. But at the same time they declared, “and we are liars” — we are saying that Moshe and his Torah are true, but we really lie when we say that because we are incapable of perceiving that clearly (see *Mei HaShilo’ach*, *Parashas Bereishis* 4:7; *Michtav MeEliyahu*, Vol. 1, pp. 299-300, and Vol. 2, pp. 62-63, as presented at length in the Insight, “Wickedness: In This World and the Next,” to Ein Yaakov, *Gittin* §23; see also the Insight, “Falsehood in the World of Truth,” to Ein Yaakov, *Eruvin* §6).*

❧ **The Sons of Korach Still Live** [The story based on the homiletic explanation given by *Olelos Ephraim* here

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *The Rebbe of Ruzhin* (cited in *Ner Yisrael*, Vol. 2, on our Gemara, and in *Irin Kaddishin* on *Parashas Korach*) — The concluding words “and they are liars” were not said by the followers of Korach regarding themselves, but rather are the *Gemara*’s comment on what they said. They said only, “Moshe and his Torah are true,” on which the *Gemara* is saying, “But they are liars” — they do not really mean what they say.

Hagahos R’ Gedaliah Lifschitz (here) — Their conclusion “but we are liars” was meant to impugn the truth of what they first said, “Moshe and his Torah are true.” *R’ Eizik Charif* (cited in *BeMishnas Rashi*, in a footnote to *Parashas Korach*) explains similarly and gives a parable: A man is pressured into promising to give only positive information about a *shidduch*. So he tells the inquiring party only glowing things about the *shidduch*, but concludes, “You should know that I am known to lie.”

R’ Yoel Teitelbaum (*Divrei Yoel*, Vol. 8, *Parashas Korach* §8 יקר ד"ה והנה הכלי יקר) — The swallowed followers of Korach declare, “Moshe and his Torah are true, but they are liars.” In the next world of truth, we realize that we were wrong. But “they” — those we have influenced and have left behind in the earthly world of falsehood — remain liars. The damage of our influence remains even though we ourselves have realized that we were wrong.

{נט} [וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חַנָּה:] אָמַר לִי [הֵהוּא טַיִיעָא]: תָּא וְאֲחֹוֵי לָךְ
הֵיכָא דְנִשְׁקִי אֶרְעָא וְרִקִיעָא אֶהְדְּדִי. [אֲזִילִי וְחֲזִאי דְעֵבִיד בְּוִי בְּוִי]
שְׁקִלְתָּא לְסִלְתָּאִי, וְאֶנְחַתָּה בְּכוּוּתָא דְרִקִיעַ. אֲדַמְצִילֵנָּא — בְּעִיתִיהּ, וְלֹא
אֲשַׁבְּחָתָהּ. (אָמַרִי) [אֲמִינָא] לֵיהּ: אֵיכָא גִנְבִי הָכָא? אָמַר לִי: [הֵאִין] גִּלְגָּלָא
דְרִקִיעָא הוּא דְהֵדֵר. נָטַר עַד לְמַחֵר בִּי הִשְׁתָּא [הֵכָא], וּמִשְׁבַּחַת לָהּ.

§59 The fifteenth story:

וְאָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חַנָּה וכו' — And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further: The Arab merchant said to me: "Come, I will show you the place where earth and heaven meet." I went there and saw [that heaven] is composed of many windows. I took my bread basket and placed it in one of the heavenly windows. After I prayed, I searched for [the basket], but could not find it. I asked him: "Are there thieves here?" He answered me: "No. This disappearance of the basket is due to the heavenly sphere that is rotating.^[1] Wait here until tomorrow at the same time, when the daily rotation will be complete, and you will find [the basket] in the same window when it returns here."^[2]

NOTES

1. You put your basket in the window of the rotating sphere. While you were praying, the sphere continued to rotate, moving the window and the basket in it away from here.

2. *Ritva* writes that it is recorded that the king of Alexandria built a large model of the constellations and heavenly bodies to demonstrate their movements and revolutions, and it is this model that the Arab merchant showed Rabbah bar bar Chanah, and this is also found in one of *Rambam's* letters (cited in *HaKoseiv*). This is also found in a responsum from *Rav Hai Gaon* (*Shaarei Teshuvah* §228, and elsewhere), in *Teshuvos HaRif* 1:314, and in *Shitah Mekubetzes* here citing *Ri Migash*.

R' Yosef Chaim (author of *Ben Yehoyada*) writes (*Imrei Binah, Chikrei Lev* §7 [end]) that even though *Rav Hai Gaon* certainly had a tradition regarding the existence of such a model, his explanation that this story of Rabbah bar bar Chanah was referring to that model was intended only to satisfy the needs of the one to whom his responsum was sent, but he agrees that this story contains a deeper meaning. [In *Ben Yehoyada* here, he writes that the story is certainly not meant literally, because there is no one place that the earth meets the heaven more than any other, as the earth is not flat, but a sphere suspended in outer space.]

See Insight A.

on these stories, and by the same author in his *Ir Gibborim* on *Parashas Korach*.]

The Torah in *Bamidbar* 26: 9-11 briefly summarizes the rebellion of Korach and his followers against Moshe and Aharon, and concludes with the words: *But the sons of Korach did not die*. In *Sanhedrin* 110a, the Gemara presents this story of Rabbah bar bar Chanah immediately after its exposition of those words, which suggests that these words can be understood homiletically: "The children of Korach" are the lingering legacy of Korach, the evils of strife and disunity that have remained with us until today. Those evils have not died! They continue to thrive! In every generation, we find people whose jealousy and desire for honor lead them to instigate disputes and foment discord. "Come, let me show you those of Korach who were swallowed up!" [This fits well with the reading found in some versions of *Rashi* to *Sanhedrin* 110a, according to which the reference is to "the sons of Korach who did not die" — see note 6 above.] The followers of Korach were completely swallowed up by the ground. But there remain two cracks in the ground that have still not been sealed and these continue to spew forth their poisonous smoke — from one crack rises the smoke of jealousy, and from the other that of the desire for honor. These ignite the fires of dispute in the Jewish people and make "cracks in it," dividing it into warring factions. "A wad of wet wool was singed after being placed into the cracks." Even a righteous person who is as pure as bleached wool and saturated with the water of Torah will be singed if he steps into the abyss of jealousy and honor, from which no one is completely immune! And once he is singed, he will not stop. He will continue the dispute even when his inner voice of conscience declares, "Moshe and his Torah are true, and we are liars" — I am *fighting* the truth, not *for* it! I am a liar! For what motivates me to persist in this dispute is not the pursuit of truth but the pursuit of victory, the uncontrolled human desire to win at all costs, to which I have succumbed and from which I have not been able to break free.

❧ **Insight A: Where Earth and Heaven Meet** [The story as explained by *Maharsha*.]

Rabbah bar bar Chanah was wont to cross deserts and travel the seas to obtain his sustenance. He thought

this was his unalterable fate in life. But at some point, he realized that this was not the only way. Had not his teacher, R' Yochanan, taught that *אֲנִי מְנַלְל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל*, the [celestial] signs hold no sway over Israel (Shabbos 156a)? A Jew's material fate in this world is not unalterably fixed at birth. Prayer and merit can overcome "the astrological decrees of the stars." And when Rava says (Moed Katan 28a) that *the length of a person's life, the number of his children, and the extent of his sustenance is dependent not on his merit but on the [celestial] signs*, he does not mean this in absolute terms. These things *can* change through great merit (Tosafos ad loc.). So Rabbah went to see "the place where earth meets heaven" — where the merits of his prayers and good deeds on earth would cause the heavens to kiss his *mazal* and change it for the better. And he placed his basket "in the window of heaven," through which heavenly bounty would descend, i.e., he prayed for his sustenance, knowing that his *mazal* could change. But even after he prayed, he found that his basket had not been filled. His sustenance was still limited. And he thought that perhaps the ample sustenance that had been sent to him had been "stolen" and diverted to someone else. Or perhaps that his prayers had been "stolen" and been held back from entering before Hashem. How else to account for his prayers not being answered? But he was told: No, nothing was stolen. Rather, it is not yet the time for your *mazal* to change. Be patient. Come back tomorrow. Wait until the abundance of your merits and prayers will eventually effect the beneficial change in *mazal* that you seek.*

🪟 **Windows of Opportunity** [The story as explained by the *Gra*, cited in *Eitz Yosef*.]

The *yetzer hara* is a very savvy merchant who knows how to market his wares. He adjusts his sales pitch to the needs of each potential customer. He knows he cannot persuade a committed Torah scholar to abandon his studies entirely, and so he proposes instead, "Come, let me show you where earth meets heaven." I will show you that you can balance the demands of heaven and earth so that you will provide for both. Continue to study Torah. But involve yourself as well in earning a respectable living and you will have the best of both worlds! You will enjoy the comforts of this world and still earn the rewards of the next! And Rabbah bar bar Chanah "went" and followed the merchant's advice, and took the time from his studies to see if this was indeed the place for him.

Rabbah came to that place of intersection, and he saw that the heavens were filled with many windows — openings between heaven and earth. Man's efforts at earning a living were no guarantee of material success. There were many who had worked and became wealthy, and many who had worked equally hard and came up short. He saw that the windows of heaven were not only the portals through which Divine bounty descends to earth, but also the gateways through which our prayers for success had to ascend heavenward. Human effort alone will not bring down the heavenly bounty; one must pray that Hashem bless his efforts. And so, he "placed his bread basket in one of the windows," praying for his sustenance. And when he finished his prayer, he saw to his chagrin that his basket was gone! Despite his best efforts and his prayers, his material needs were still not adequately supplied. "Perhaps there are thieves here," he said. Perhaps it is because of my sins that the bounty I have worked for has been taken from me and given to others. "No," he was assured. "It is not because of thieves." Your lack of material success despite your efforts is due to "the rotating sphere of the heavens" — the astrological forces that set a person's natural conditions and limitations in this world. As the Gemara in *Moed Katan* (28a) teaches: *The length of a person's life, the number of his children, and the extent of his sustenance is dependent not on his merit but on mazal*. It may be that you were never destined to enjoy material prosperity in this world, and you never will. Return completely to your studies and accept your lot in life. And as for your missing basket? Wait until tomorrow. All the bounty of your ample reward will be showered upon you tomorrow in the next world.**

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Yaaros Devash* (Vol. 2, *Derush* 14) — R' Yochanan's teaching that "the [celestial] signs hold no sway over Israel" applies only in the *Land* of Israel. Rabbah bar bar Chanah thought that it applies as well "where earth and heaven meet" — in the synagogues and study halls, which share the holiness of Eretz Yisrael. But he was told that today, in the absence of the Beis HaMikdash, it does not apply in Eretz Yisrael either. See also *Malbim* in his commentary on *Bereishis* 28:17.

Olelos Ephraim (*Maamar Shelishi*, *Amud* 6 §335) — "Where earth meets heaven" symbolizes man, the crown of Creation who, as a composite of body and soul, ties together the upper and lower realms. Do not think that only Providence affects a person; because of his body, he is subject, to a certain extent, to *mazal* as well.

** *Ein Eliyahu* — Rabbah bar bar Chanah was shown "where earth meets heaven" — how the merit of those who study Torah for its own sake bring blessing upon a person in this world and the next. He saw there "many windows" — each *tzaddik* merits this in accordance with the level of his righteousness. He prayed for this to be his lot as well, but he found his basket empty, because of the "rotating sphere" of *mazal*; it was

{ס} רבי יוחנן משתעי: זימנא חדא הוה קאזלינן בספינתא, וחיזינא הווא
 כנרא דאפיק רישיה (ממיא) [מימא], ודמיא עיניה בתרי סיהרי, ונפוז
 מיא מתרתיה (אוסיה) [זימיה] בתרי מברי דסורא.

§60 The sixteenth story:

R' Yochanan told the following story:^[1] Once, we were traveling on a ship and we saw a fish that raised its head out of the water. Its eyes were like two moons, and water streamed from its two nostrils as it streams from the two rivers of Sura.^[2]

NOTES

1. [This is the first of the last six stories, told by Sages to the previous fifteen stories related by him.] other than Rabbah bar bar Chanah, but similar in style
2. See Insight A.

☞ Insight A: The Fountains Above the Water [The story as explained by *Einei Yitzchak* here.]

R' Yochanan was sailing the great sea of Torah and came upon someone whose head had long been raised out of the water — a man whose mind had not been steeped in the waters of Torah, for he had not studied it in his youth — and now in, his later years, wished to make up for lost time and immerse himself in Torah study. His two eyes were “like two moons.” Now, dedicating himself to Torah study, he looked with great intensity toward his teachers, whose light of wisdom became reflected in his, like the moon reflecting the light of the sun. Not only did this latecomer to Torah study succeed in his learning and become an accomplished Torah scholar, but his two nostrils shot forth great streams of water — now, he had himself become a great fountain of Torah wisdom, which he shared with many others, influencing and teaching many students. These shot forth “from his nostrils” — the gateways through which his soul had been blown into his body (see *Bereishis* 2:7). The soul that had lain dormant in him for so long had now become a greatly elevated soul — a wellspring of Torah, like the “two rivers of Sura” — the great academies of Sura, from which Torah went forth to the masses (see *Olelos Ephraim* on this story).*

It is never too late to study Torah with dedication. The results can be profound and far-reaching, not only for oneself but for countless others as well.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

his misfortune to be born into a generation that was largely unrighteous. He could not therefore enjoy the bounty due to him in this world, but would have to wait for the next.

Toldos Yaakov Yosef (on *Parashas Noach* 6:9 ד"ה ולפי תל"ל יבאר) — “Where earth meets heaven” refers to the symbiosis between those who enjoy material success and those of great Torah learning, the former supporting the latter, and the latter influencing the former with Torah and righteousness.

Minchas Ani (*Parashas Behar* מאמר יבואר) — “There is no reward for mitzvos in this world.” [Although Hashem does indeed bestow good upon those who fulfill His mitzvos, that reward is a separate gift from on High, and does not correlate to the mitzvah.] There is, however, one exception: the mitzvah of charity, of which it is written: *Bring all the tithes into the storage house, and let it be sustenance in My Temple. Test Me, if you will, with this, says HASHEM, Master of Legions, [see] if I do not open up for you the windows of the heavens and pour out upon you blessing without end (Malachi 3:10).* Here, the Heavenly reward is reciprocal. Rabbah bar bar Chanah sought to see where “earth meets heaven” — where the charity done on earth evokes the reciprocal flow of bounty from the windows of Heaven upon the one who gives to the poor. “And he placed his bread basket” in one of the windows, giving his own bread to the poor, and prayed for sustenance with complete confidence in the verse’s assurance that Heaven would reciprocate and fill his basket with bounty. When he finished praying, he did not find his basket full. But he was assured that there was no “theft” here. Material wealth in this world is cyclical: Some rise to wealth and some fall into poverty; and sometimes the wheels of fortune turn, and the positions are reversed. But rest assured that all your reward will be given to you tomorrow — perhaps to you personally, perhaps to your children.

Derashos Maharam Schick (*Derush* 21) — The theme of this story is how life in this world dovetails with the Torah, unlike those who say that it is antithetical to Torah.

* *Maharsha* — The “fish” is the *mazal* (constellation) of the month of Adar (which provides that month with its spiritual power; see *Maharsha* above on the sixth and seventh stories), and it lifts its head out of “the water,” because it is the end of the rainy season. And yet, “its two eyes were like the moon” — just as the

רַב סַפְרָא מִשְׁתַּעִי: זִימְנָא חָדָא הָוָה קָא אֲזַלִּינָא בְּסַפִּינְתָא, וְחֻזִּינָא הָוָה
בְּרָא דֶאֱפִיק רִישֵׁיהּ [מִמְיָא, וְאִיתִּי] [מִימָא, וְהוּהוּ] לִיה קֶרְנִי, וְחָקִיק עֲלֵיהּ:
אֲנָא בְרִיָּה קְלָה שְׂבִיבִים, וְהוּיָא תַּלְת מָאָה פְּרָסִי, וְאֲזַלִּינָא לְפֻמִּיָּה דְלִוְתָן.
אָמַר רַב אֲשִׁי: הָהוּא עֵינָא דִּימָא הוּא, דְּבַחִישָׁא וְאִיתִּי לָהּ קֶרְנִי.
{סא} רַבִּי [יוֹנָתָן] [יוֹחָנָן] מִשְׁתַּעִי: זִימְנָא חָדָא הָוָה קָאֲזַלִּינָא בְּסַפִּינְתָא,

The seventeenth story:

Rav Safra told the following, similar story: Once, we were traveling on a ship and we saw a fish that raised its head out of the water. It had horns, upon which were engraved the words: “I am one of the small creatures of the sea. I am three hundred *parsaos*^[3] long, and I am entering the mouth of the Leviathan to be devoured by him.”^[4] Rav Ashi said: This fish that was about to be devoured is the sea-goat,^[5] which searches for its food by digging in the seabed with its horns.^[6]

§61 The eighteenth story:

R’ Yochanan told the following story: Once, we were traveling on a ship,

NOTES

3. See above, §49 note 5.

4. The Leviathan, or *Livyasan* (לִיָּוִתָן), is a gigantic fish described at length in the book of *Iyov*, Chs. 40-41. It was created on the fifth day of Creation, and will be eaten by the righteous in the Future to Come (see below, §62-63).

5. Every creature on dry land has its counterpart in the sea (*Chullin* 127a; *Rashbam*).

6. This story can be taken largely literally. Nevertheless, the story also contains an allusion. The “sea-goat” alludes to some kingdom that would arise, but would subsequently be swallowed up by the *Livyasan*. The word לִיָּוִתָן (from the root לִוָּה, *to join*) alludes to Edom [the Roman Empire], into which many other kingdoms were “joined” and absorbed, and whose beliefs most nations joined and embraced (see *Ritva*, cited in *HaKoseiv*).

See Insight B.

Insight B: Contending With the Giants of the Sea [The story as explained by *Einei Yitzchak* here.]

As in the previous story, the fish with its head raised above the water refers to someone who has not learned Torah. Here, however, this person has not changed his ways. Rather, he has “horns on his head” — he attacks and ridicules Torah scholars, ultimately because he is jealous of them. Rav Ashi identifies this man’s tactics: he digs with his demonic, “goat-like” horns (see *Vayikra* 17:7, with *Targum* and *Rashi*) to find some fault in the Torah scholars that will justify his opposition to them. In fact, those horns bear the inscription, “I am one of the small creatures of the sea” — for despite his best efforts, everything he does or says declares to those with open eyes and ears, “I am really one of the smallest creatures in the sea!” I have little Torah and few mitzvos. Nevertheless, I conduct myself with great arrogance, as if I were “three hundred *parsaos* long”!

Deep down, however, he senses that “the great Leviathan of the sea will swallow him up.” The giants immersed in the sea of Torah whom he has opposed will ultimately prevail and inherit even *his* portion in the World to Come.*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

moon adds water [its pull causing the rising tides], so too, during this very month, waters are added from the melting snows.

Gevulas Binyamin (cited in *Eitz Yosef*) — This story explains why the month of Adar was the month chosen to be doubled in a leap year — “its head above the water” (above the other months) “its eyes like two moons” (its influence extending to two months).

* *Maharsha* — As in the previous story, the “fish” is the *mazal* month of Adar, which “lifts its head out of the water” at the end of the rainy season. It is said to have “horns,” for the enemies of the Jewish people were “gored” (i.e., destroyed) in Adar in the days of Haman. It is “the smallest of the creatures of the sea,” for it comes at the tail end of all the signs of the Zodiac. “It enters the mouth of the Leviathan,” as it is followed by the first and foremost sign of the Zodiac — Aries (the “ram” or “sheep”), the *mazal* of Nissan.

וְחִזְנָן הָיָא קַרְטְלִיתָא דְהוּ מְקַבְּעֵי בֵּה אַבְנִים טוֹבוֹת וּמַרְגְּלוֹת, וְהָדְרִי לָהּ מִיְנֵי דְכוּרֵי דְמַקְרִי (בִּירְשָׁא) [פְּרָשָׁא]. נְחִית; [דף עד:] בְּרַ אַמּוּרָאִי לְאַתּוּי, וּרְגַשׁ וּבְעֵי דְנִשְׁמָטִיָּה לְאַטְמִיָּה, (וּדְרָא) [וּשְׂדָא] זִיקָא דְחָלָא, וּנְחָת. נֶפֶק בַּת קָלָא וְאָמַר [לָן]: מָאִי אֵית לָכוּ בְּהָדִי קַרְטְלִיתָא דְרַבִּיתָהּ דְרַבִּי חֲנִינָא בֶּן דּוּסָא, דְעֵתִידָא דְשְׂדָא תְּכַלְתָּא בֵּה לְעִדִּיקֵי לְעֻלְמָא דְאַתִּי.

and we saw a chest in which were set precious stones and pearls. It was surrounded by a school of predator fish.^[1]

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A diver went down into the water to bring up the chest, and one of the fish sensed his presence^[2] and tried to bite off his thigh, but he threw a bottle of vinegar at it and the smell of the vinegar caused it to go down into the depths. A Heavenly voice came forth and said to us: What business do you have with the chest of R' Chanina ben Dosa's wife,^[3] which will be used to store the *techeiles*^[4] for the righteous in the World to Come?^[5]

NOTES

1. Possibly “sharks.”

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2. Alternatively, this can be rendered: “And he [the diver] stirred [the water].”

3. R' Chanina ben Dosa and his wife were extraordinarily pious, The Gemara elsewhere tells us that after suffering from dire poverty and hunger, she asked her husband to pray for adequate sustenance, and miraculously the image of a hand appeared and handed them a golden table leg. Afterward, R' Chanina dreamt of the righteous in the World to Come dining on tables with three legs, while he and his wife sat at a table with only two. Upon hearing about this dream, she understood that their newly acquired wealth would detract from

their reward in the World to Come, and she begged her husband to pray that the golden leg be taken back, which it was (*Taanis* 25a; *Maharsha* here).

4. “*Techeiles*” in its strict sense refers to the blue strings of the *tzitzis* bundle, but the term is often used to refer to *tzitzis* in general; see above, §56 note 6.

5. [*Rosh*, *Gittin* 5:46 renders this line: “What do you have with the chest of R' Chanina ben Dosa's wife, which she will use to insert *techeiles* [into garments] for the righteous in the World to Come,” and brings a proof from this that women, although not obligated in the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, are qualified to make them for men, who are obligated.]

See Insight A.

❧ **Insight A: The Secret of the Jeweled Chest** [The story as explained by R' Yaakov Ettlinger in *Minchas Ani* on *Parashas Masei*; see also *Maaseh Rav* (on this story), first approach.]

R' Yochanan was traversing in his mind the seas of this world, whose ultimate destination is the World to Come. And he saw this world as a chest filled with material good. The outside of the chest is studded with precious stones and pearls, signifying the superficial appeal of worldly riches, the glittering attraction of great wealth, and the happiness we think it holds in its grasp. And people swarm around this coveted chest, eager to swallow up the imagined happiness of wealth like fish that gulp water all the time, never satisfied with what they have already swallowed, for *he who loves money will not be satisfied with money* (*Koheles* 5:9) and will constantly seek more to possess, always pursuing and never really enjoying.

R' Yochanan then saw a Torah scholar who dove into the water with both legs intact — the two foundational aspects of Divine service, which are *turn away from evil, and do good* (*Tehillim* 34:15), the careful avoidance of anything sinful and the energetic embrace of all that is good. With the best of intentions, he wished to retrieve the treasure chest for himself, striving to obtain material wealth while avoiding the dangers that it might pose to his spiritual standing, reasoning that wealth might enhance rather than hinder his service of Hashem. But “he had stirred the waters.” The material passions that so often accompany accumulation of great wealth began to stir in him as well, and sought “to sever one of his two legs” — the “turn away from evil” — for the desires aroused by great wealth can easily deceive a person to stray from the will of his Creator and lead him down the path of sin. Fortunately, the diver was able to sense these unwanted appetites developing within him, and wisely changed his course, “scattering vinegar across the waters” of his life, recognizing the error of his approach and adopting practices of self-denial to curb the dangerous passions that had welled up inside him.

Having returned to his senses and abandoning the dangerous pursuits he thought he could control, a

רַב יְהוּדָה הַיְּהוּדָא מִשְׁתַּעִי: זִימְנָא חָדָא הוּא אֲזִלְיָנָא בְּסַפִּינְתָא, וְחִזְיָנָא
הָהוּא אֲבָן טָבָא [דְּהוּא הָדִיר] לִיה תְּנִינָא, וְנַחַת בַּר אַמּוּרָאִי לְאַתּוּיָהּ. אֲתָא
תְּנִינָא, קָא [בִּלְע לָהּ] [בְּעִי לְמִיבְלַע] לְסַפִּינְתָא. אֲתָא [צִיפְרָא] [פּוֹשְׁקִנְצָא],
פְּסָקִיָּה לְרִישִׁיָּה, אֲתַהֲפִיכוּ מִיָּא וְהוּוּ דָמָא. אֲתָא תְּנִינָא חֲבֵרִיָּה, שְׁקָלִיָּה
וְתַלְיָיָה, [וְאַחֲיָיָה] [וְחִיָּה]. הָדָר אֲתָא קָא [בְּעִי] בִּלְעָה לְסַפִּינְתָא,
הָדָר אֲתָא צִיפְרָא, פְּסָקִיָּה לְרִישִׁיָּה, שְׁקָלָה לְהֵיכָא אֲבָן טָבָא, שְׂדִיּוּהָ
לְסַפִּינְתָא. הוּא הָנִי צִיפְרֵי מְלִיחֵי בִּהְדָן, אוֹתְבִינְהוּ (בְּהִדְיָהוּ) [עֲלִיּהוּ].

The nineteenth story:

Rav Yehudah the Ethiopian^[6] told the following story: Once, we were traveling on a ship, and we saw in the water a precious stone that was encircled by a giant sea-serpent. A diver went down to bring up [the stone]. The giant sea-serpent tried to swallow the boat. A female raven came and cut off [the sea-serpent's] head. So much of the sea-serpent's blood gushed into the sea that the water turned into the color of blood. Another giant sea-serpent came and took [the stone], hung it on the first sea-serpent and brought it back to life. Having come back to life, it again tried to swallow the boat, and a bird came again and cut off its head. [The diver] snatched the precious stone and threw it into the ship. In the ship, we had some salted birds with us which we intended to eat.^[7] We placed [the stone and the birds] together to see if the stone would have the

NOTES

6. Based on *Rashi* to *Yoma* 34b ד"ה הנדון and to *Kid-* India" (see *Rashi* to *Avodah Zarah* 16a ד"ה בפרולא).
dushin 22b ד"ה הנדון. [Alternatively, it means "from 7. Salting preserves meat and prevents it from spoiling.

Heavenly voice rang out and reinforced his newfound embrace of frugal contentment. The voice reminded him that the superficial riches of this world cannot compare to the treasures of the World to Come, that the glimmer and shine of the jewels on the outside of the chest pale in comparison to its inner contents — the great opportunities of this world to weave the great reward of the World to Come. This is what the righteous wife of R' Chanina ben Dosa taught us when she refused the wealth and comfort in this world that would have detracted from the great table of gold that awaited her and her husband in the World to Come.

There are indeed those who merit "two tables" in this world — the table of Torah and the table of material wealth. But this is deemed a blessing only if Hashem grants the wealth without the inordinate lengths to which people go to procure it. It is a blessing only if it comes as a blessing of Torah study, as the Gemara teaches "if a person occupies himself with Torah study, his possessions prosper" (*Avodah Zarah* 19b). This is the blessing of wealth spoken of in the first chapter of *Tehillim*, which says (vv. 2-3): *Only in the Torah of HASHEM is his desire, and in His Torah he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree deeply rooted alongside brooks of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and whose leaf never withers; and everything that he does will succeed.**

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

- * *Ritva* (cited in *HaKoseiv* here) — This story, as well as the next one, is a metaphor for wisdom, which is acquired only through great abstinence, and whose true reward is in the World to Come.
Olelos Ephraim (on this story) — The chest is a metaphor for the wonderful reward that awaits the God-fearing in the World to Come. [In this world, we can see only the superficial, gem-studded outside of the chest. But the true nature of that reward is completely beyond our ken, as it says: *No eye ever beheld it, only You God, Yourself* (*Yeshayah* 64:3, as explained by *Berachos* 34b).]
Eitz Yosef (here, taken partially from *Rapduni BaTapuchim*) — The studded chest is the Torah, which contains the vast wealth of laws and mitzvos. The jeweled outside signifies that in the Torah's right hand is length of days, in its left is wealth and honor (*Mishlei* 3:16). The "diver" is a Torah scholar who wished to use mystical knowledge to bring wealth to those who study Torah, but he thereby nearly "severed the leg" — the merit of those who do not study Torah themselves, but support those who do.

שְׁקִלוּהָ וּפָּרְחוּ [לָהּ בְּהִרְיָה].

same reviving effect on the slaughtered and salted birds, **and they came alive, took [the stone] and flew off with it.**^[8]

NOTES

8. Translation based on *Rashbam*. See Insight B.

🔗 **Insight B: The Serpents, the Raven, and the Precious Stone** [The explanation of this story, based on *Maharsha*.]

Rav Yehudah surveyed the vast sea of exile — past, present, and future — and saw the precious stone — the holy Torah, which is *more precious than pearls* (*Mishlei* 3:15) — encircled by the cruel and mighty serpent of Edomite Rome. The Torah of the Jews is anathema to Edom. They sought to “encircle it,” enacting many decrees forbidding the study of Torah (see, for example, *Berachos* 61b). “Divers” — the Torah scholars who delve into the vast sea of Torah — dove into the swirling waters to rescue the precious stone of Torah from the Roman overlords, but the monstrous serpent sought to swallow all, decreeing agonizing death on those who would study Torah!

But the salvation of Hashem can come from many quarters; He manipulates world affairs to accomplish His will. Where the historian’s eye sees only imperial ambitions and the struggle for power as the animating forces behind the upheavals of world events, the keener eye of the Jew sees the guidance of the Divine hand. Hashem rescued the Torah from the iron fist of Edom by sending the ravenous descendants of Yishmael (see above, §52, with Insight, “The Parade of Nations”) to contend with Edom for imperial domination, “to cut off its head,” and their many wars shed rivers of blood. Edomite Rome became preoccupied with those many battles, which drew their attention away from their battle against the Torah. And other Roman emperors arose, more benign than their predecessors, and actually took and embraced the precious stone of Torah, reviving the beheaded serpent of Rome. But such reprieve was short-lived, as new emperors arose and once again sought to “swallow the ship” with cruel decrees of persecution. Once again, however, the salvation came in the form of the Ishmaelite bird that swooped in and severed the Roman head, “taking the precious stone of Torah and placing it on the ship” — for on the whole, the Ishmaelite conquerors were far more benevolent than their Edomite counterparts, allowing — for the most part — the Jews in their countries to study and practice Torah freely. These victories over Rome helped revive “the birds” — the Torah scholars who constantly “chirp” words of Torah (see above, §54) — who had been “salted,” who had preserved their piety under the Roman oppression, and had not succumbed to the decay of transgression and apostasy. And these revived “birds” then took the precious stone of Torah and carried it throughout the lands of Islam, where they caused Torah study and practice to flourish and prosper.

[*Maharsha*’s observation that Ishmaelite rule was far more benign than that of Rome and the medieval Church is consistent with our reading in the Gemara in *Shabbos* (11a) that teaches, “[Better] under Yishmael and not under Edom” (see *Rashi* there). Numerous authorities, however, have the opposite reading in the Gemara there: “[Better] under Rome and not under Yishmael” (see, for example, *Rabbeinu Chananel* ad loc.; *Rabbeinu Bachya* on *Devarim* 30:7; *Mabit* in *Beis Elokim*, *Shaar HaYesodos*, Ch. 47; and *Megaleh Amukos* on *Shemos* 22:4). Indeed, there were periods in which Jews endured terrible persecutions under Ishmaelite rule in various localities; see, especially, *Rambam’s Iggeres Teiman* ד"ה ואתם אחינו ידוע. For varying historical accounts comparing the relative severities of exile under Yishmael and under Edom, see *Rabbeinu Bachya* loc. cit.; see also *R’ Chaim Vital* in *Eitz HaDaas Tov* on *Tehillim* 124; cf. his comments on the beginning of *Parashas Vayishlach*.]

R’ Eliezer Zussman-Sofer (*Yalkut Eliezer*, *Hisnatzlus* ד"ה וזה כוונת suggests a variation of *Maharsha*’s approach. The precious stone is indeed the Torah, which was encircled by our enemies who sought to restrict us from the study of Torah. But the scholars of Torah, with the iron will of a female raven, which can overcome even the most deep-seated of human instincts (see *Tehillim* 147:9 with *Rashi*; see §52 above, with Insight, “The Strength of the Tree of Life”), risked their lives to continue studying during the blackest, most ravenlike nights of persecution. And they succeeded heroically. But our enemies shed much innocent blood in their murderous efforts to distance us from the Torah.

When our enemies realized that we would not relent, they resorted to different tactics. This “second serpent” took the precious stone of Torah itself — the very Torah that they had previously sought to destroy — and they embraced it, distorting it to fit *their* ideas, to promote *their* religion. Jewish heretics, too, twisted the Torah and sought to rob it of its authentic meaning. Once again, the fearless ravens of Jewish tradition rescued the precious stone and placed it on the ship of the Jewish nation. They did not always convince our

{סב} תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן: מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ שֶׁהָיוּ בָּאִין בִּסְפִינָה, וְהָיָה רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר יָשֵׁן וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ נֶעוֹר. נִדְרְעָה רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיִּנָּעַר רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר. אָמַר לוֹ: מַה זֶה יְהוֹשֻׁעַ? מִפְּנֵי מַה נִּדְרְעָתָה? אָמַר לוֹ: מֵאוֹר גָּדוֹל רָאִיתִי בַּיָּם. אָמַר לוֹ: שָׁמָּה עֵינָיו שָׁל לֵיתָן רָאִיתָ? דְּכַתִּיב (איוב מא, י) "עֵינָיו כְּעַפְעָפִי שָׁחַר".

§62 The twentieth story:

תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן וכו' — The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: R' ELIEZER AND R' YEHOSHUA WERE TRAVELING BY SHIP. R' ELIEZER WAS SLEEPING AND R' YEHOSHUA WAS AWAKE.^[1] R' YEHOSHUA GAVE A sudden SHUDDER, which WOKE R' ELIEZER from his sleep. [R' ELIEZER] SAID TO [R' YEHOSHUA]: "WHAT IS [THE MATTER], YEHOSHUA? WHY DID YOU SHUDDER?" [R' YEHOSHUA] ANSWERED HIM: "I SAW A GREAT, sun-like LUMINARY IN THE SEA."^[2] [R' ELIEZER] SAID TO HIM: "PERHAPS YOU SAW THE EYES OF THE LEVIATHAN, which shine like the sun at dawn. FOR IT IS WRITTEN regarding the Leviathan (*Iyov* 41:10): *HIS EYES ARE LIKE THE GLIMMER OF DAWN*."^[3]

NOTES

1. This Baraisa teaches us proper behavior; when two travel on a perilous sea voyage, they should not sleep at the same time. Rather, while one sleeps, the other should remain awake, to be on guard for whatever dangers might arise. In this way, each protects the other (*Iyun Yaakov*).

2. Perhaps R' Yehoshua shuddered because he thought he had seen the wave of the first story that appears to have a fringe of white fire at its tip, which sinks

ships (*Iyun Yaakov*).

3. In the book of *Iyov* (Chs. 40-41), Hashem describes to *Iyov* a number of the wonderous creatures that He created. The last one to be described is an enormous fish called the *Livyasan* (Leviathan) (40:25-41:26). The verse quoted by R' Eliezer comes from this description. [The *Livyasan* is mentioned in other places in Scripture, some of which will be quoted by the Gemara below.]

See Insight A.

enemies of the falseness of their distortions, but they did revive those on board the ship who had preserved their faith and not succumbed to the arguments or blandishments of the enemy. And they flew off with the Torah they had saved to kinder borders and shores, where the remnants of the Torah nation could study and practice Torah freely and undisturbed.*

☞ **Insight A: The Light of the Leviathan** [The story as explained by *Rapduni BaTapuchim* (R' Elyakim Getz) on these stories.]

The Gemara in *Bava Metzia* (59b) tells of a great halachic dispute between R' Eliezer and his colleagues, in which R' Eliezer refused to submit to the opinion of the majority. And despite the Heavenly signs that R' Eliezer's position was the correct one, his colleagues placed him in *cherem*, under a ban of excommunication, for refusing to accept the ruling of the majority. "The Torah is no longer in heaven." It was given to the Sages, and it is they who must decide its questions. And this *cherem* remained in effect for the rest of R' Eliezer's life. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (68a) describes R' Eliezer's final moments. His colleagues came to visit him on his deathbed, and he bemoaned the fact that so much of his vast Torah erudition would die with him, as so many had not availed themselves of the opportunity to learn Torah from him. And when he closed his eyes for the last time, R' Yehoshua rose to his feet and declared, "The ban is annulled! The ban is annulled!" The *Zohar* (*Bereishis* 98b-99a) adds that before he died, R' Eliezer revealed secrets of the Torah to R' Akiva, and that when he did so, fire shot forth from R' Eliezer's mouth, surrounding R' Eliezer and R' Akiva, but not the

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Malbim* (*Torah Or* on *Bereishis* 2:19) — The ship is the human body and the precious stone is the intellect. The diver wished to bring this stone into the ship — to be guided by his intellect, but the two evil serpents of the *yetzer hara* barred the way: the drive for wealth and the drive for physical pleasure. They can be overcome with the iron will of a female raven, but these two drives tend to revive each other. If one beheads these two serpents, he can rescue the precious stone of intellect and it will guide the ship; it will revive in him the dormant noble qualities that he had long given up for dead, and allow him to soar heavenward.

אָמַר רַב אֲשִׁי: אָמַר לִי הוּנָא בַר נָתָן: זְמַנָּא חָדָא הוּא אֲזֵלִינָן בְּמִדְבָּרָא, וְהוּאֵי אֲטָמָא דְּבִשְׂרָא בְּהָדָן, פְּתַחְנָא וְנִקְרִנָּא, וְאַנְחָנָא אֲעִישְׁבִּי. אֲדַמִּיטִינָן צִיבִי, חֶלֶם [אֲטָמָא], וְטוּיְנִיָּה. בִּי הִדְרָן לְבָתֵּר תְּרִיסָר יָרְחֵי שְׁתָּא, חֲזִינְהוּ לְהִנְהוּ גּוּמְרֵי דְּהוּוּ קָא (מַחֲמָמִי) [מִלְּחָשִׁי]. בִּי אֲתָאֵי לְקַמֵּיָּה דְּאַמֵּימָר, אָמַר לִי: הֵהוּא עִישָׁבָא (סַפִּינְתָא) סַמְתֵּרֵי הוּא, הִנְהוּ גּוּמְרֵי דְּרִיתָמָא הוּוּ.

The twenty-first and final story:

אָמַר רַב אֲשִׁי וכו' — Rav Ashi said: Rav Huna bar Nassan told me the following story: Once we were traveling in the desert, and we had shank meat with us. We cut it open, removed its forbidden portions,^[4] and placed it on herbs, ready to roast. While we were fetching wood, the shank meat healed,^[5] and we roasted it whole. When we returned after a year, we saw that those same coals were still smoldering. When I told this to Ameimar, he said to me: "The herb that reconnected the pieces of meat was *samtereī*;^[6] those coals that continued to smolder were coals of *rosem* wood."^[7]

NOTES

4. Shank meat contains *cheilev* (forbidden fats) and *gid hanasheh* (the sciatic nerve), which may not be eaten.

5. [I.e., the incisions we had made to remove the forbidden parts healed, and the shank once again was whole.]

6. The herb *samtereī* has the power to reconnect cut-up flesh (*Rashbam*).

[Based on the text of *Bavli* and other editions of Ein Yaakov, we have deleted the word סְפִינְתָא that appears here in the Mefoar ed.]

7. Coals of *rosem* wood continue to smolder long after the fire is no longer visible on the surface (see *Bereishis Rabbah* 98 §19). See Insight B.

other Sages present. The rest of R' Akiva's colleagues [including R' Yehoshua] took this as a sign that these words were not meant for them, and they left the room.

Which brings us to the meaning of our Gemara's story: R' Eliezer and R' Yehoshua were both traveling across the sea of life. "R' Eliezer was sleeping" — he was about to die. R' Yehoshua was very much alive, but when he saw fire coming out of R' Eliezer's lips, he shuddered and fled from the room. When R' Eliezer saw this, he called after R' Yehoshua and asked him, "Why do you shudder so?" R' Yehoshua answered, "I saw a great light" — I saw the brilliance of your Torah learning and now it is too late; I deeply regret not having come to learn from you. In his modesty, R' Eliezer replied, "No. It is not the brilliance of my learning that you saw. What you saw is the eye of the Leviathan — the reward, the portion of the Leviathan's meat, that will be allotted to me at the end of days. But in that, I am no different from you or any other righteous person, all of whom will be allotted portions of the Leviathan's meat at the end of days. I am no greater than you!"

R' Yehoshua, however, was not deceived. He saw with absolute clarity R' Eliezer's supreme humility. And as the holy sage closed his eyes, R' Yehoshua rose and declared, "The ban is annulled! The ban is annulled!"*

❧ Insight B: The Healing Herb of *Samtereī* [The story as explained by *Maaseh Rav*.]

Rav Huna bar Nassan and his colleagues embarked on a journey to the desert, to see the ways of those who

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* R' Avraham Yaakov of Sadigura (*Avir Yaakov on Parashas Va'eira* ב"ב ד"ה וזה דאיתא בגמרא) — While sailing the seas of exile that beset the Jewish people, R' Eliezer "was sleeping" — he withdrew from temporal needs, and devoted himself exclusively to Divine service. But R' Yehoshua "was awake" — he remained involved with the people and their needs. And "he shuddered" from the great pain of his people. And this "awoke R' Eliezer" — for even the *tzaddik* who has withdrawn into the inner realms comes out of them in times of suffering to help his people who are in need.

R' Yisrael Rabinovitch (*Yismach Yisrael on Parashas Chayei Sarah* 23:1 כוונת) — Contemplating the vast sea of exile, R' Eliezer "was asleep" — focused on the dark bitterness of the exile, whereas R' Yehoshua "was awake" — focused on the great redemption that would eventually come. Still, R' Yehoshua shuddered when he saw how bleak the exile would be, but was reassured when he saw the great light Hashem would shine on His people — the great *tzaddikim* and sages He would send to illuminate the way of His people in every generation of their exile. And this "shudder" and awareness roused R' Eliezer as well, from focusing only on the blackness ahead.

הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדֹלִים. הָכָא תַּרְגִּימוֹ:
 אֲרִיִּלֵּי דִימָא. רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר: זֶה לְוִיתָן נָחֵשׁ בְּרִיחַ, וְלְוִיתָן נָחֵשׁ עֶקְלָתוֹן.
 דְּכָתִיב (ישעיה כו, א) "בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִפְקֹד ה' בַּחֲרָבוֹ הַקָּשָׁה וְגו'" ["עַל לְוִיתָן"
 וְגו'].

Having mentioned the Leviathan above in the seventeenth and twentieth stories, the Gemara will now discuss the subject of the Leviathan at length, over the course of the rest of this *siman* and the next two. The Gemara begins by quoting a verse regarding the fifth day of creation:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים וכו' — Scripture says (*Bereishis* 1:21): **And God created the great sea monsters** הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדֹלִים. To which sea creatures does this refer? **Here**, in Bavel, they translated as *arzilei deyama* [אֲרִיִּלֵּי דִימָא], *the re'eimim of the sea*.^[8] **R' Yochanan**, who lived in Eretz Yisrael, interpreted the verse differently. He said that this mention of the great sea monsters in the verse refers to the two sea creatures mentioned in *Yeshayah* (27:1): **Leviathan, the straight snake** [לְוִיתָן נָחֵשׁ בְּרִיחַ],^[9] and **Leviathan, the curled snake** [לְוִיתָן נָחֵשׁ עֶקְלָתוֹן].^[10] As it says: **On that day, HASHEM will bring punishment with His harsh, great, mighty sword upon Leviathan, the straight snake, and upon Leviathan, the curled snake, and kill the monster that is in the sea** [הַתַּנִּינִים אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּם].^[11]

NOTES

8. *Re'eim* [רְאִים] is a very large animal mentioned several times in Scripture (for example, *Devarim* 33:17). See above, §51 note 1 at length.

The Babylonian translators assumed that since for every creature on dry land there is a counterpart in the sea [see *Chullin* 127a], and the great sea monsters are the largest sea creatures mentioned in the Torah, they must be the counterpart of the *re'eim*, which is the largest animal on land (*Maharsha*).

9. Literally, *Leviathan, the bar-like snake*. This snake is straight like a bar across the entire sea (see *Rashbam*).

10. This is the female Leviathan, which encircles the entire world (*Rashbam*).

11. According to its plain meaning, the verse discusses three types of sea creatures: (1) *Leviathan, the straight snake*, (2) *Leviathan, the curled snake*, and (3) *the monster that is in the sea*. These three creatures represent three nations that oppressed the Jewish people. At the end of days, they will be destroyed (see the commentators to the verse). In the next *siman*, the Gemara will interpret the verse differently.

had made themselves like the desert — open to one and all in need of their care and concern, and humble and forbearing like the desert floor that yields to all who would trample upon it. Surely these men of the desert — dispensers of kindness and paragons of humility — were the ones who were people of the World to Come.

Rav Huna and his colleagues encountered such men of the desert, and wished to know whether they were indeed genuine, happy with their lot and as righteous on the inside as they appeared on the outside. Or perhaps they had adopted this righteous behavior but it had not penetrated to their core, which did not have the full light of righteousness that reflected off the surface. If the latter, then Rav Huna and his colleagues would teach them the way to internalize the life that they lived and thereby earn the life of the World to Come.

And they found a person who was indeed kind and humble, but had in him the sin of *lashon hara* that he spoke in concealed ways, in private and hidden from casual view. But even such *lashon hara* is a grave sin, for it, too, becomes public knowledge and defames the person about whom it is spoken. This man of the desert was like “shank meat” — the leg of the animal, whose meat is indeed soft and kind but which contains the forbidden sciatic nerve — the *yetzer hara*, the Angel of Death, the primordial serpent that had spoken *lashon hara* (see *Zohar*, Vol. 1, 170b). And Rav Huna and his colleagues “cut open” his mind and his heart to realize the gravity of his sin. And they taught him how to uproot this sin from inside himself and make his cuts whole again, by placing him on the *samterei* herb — the healing herb of Torah study. For the word *סמטרי* is really *סם תר״י* — the *healing potion* of תר״י, whose numerical value (610) when added to the number of its letters (3) is 613, all the mitzvos of the Torah. And while they went “looking for firewood to roast him” — to see whether their cure for his ills had been effective and he would thus be fit to be served, as it were, upon Hashem’s table — they found that he was indeed whole. Through Torah study, he had uprooted the hidden sin from within himself, and made himself whole — a man whose inside was as pure as the kind humility of his exterior, a man truly worthy of the World to Come.

{סג} אָמַר רַבִּי (י) יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: כָּל מֵה שֶׁבְּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
בְּעוֹלָמוֹ — זָכַר וְנִקְבָּה בְּרָאָם. וְאַף לְוִיתָן [נָחַשׁ בָּרִיחַ וְלְוִיתָן נָחַשׁ
עֲקֻלָּתוֹן] — זָכַר וְנִקְבָּה בְּרָאָם. וְאַלְמָלָא נִזְקָקִין זֶה לָזֶה — מַחְרִיבִין
(אֵת) כָּל הָעוֹלָם [כּוֹלֵן]. מֵה עָשָׂה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא? סִירַס אֶת הַזָּכָר,
וְהִרְגָּ [אֵת] הַנִּקְבָּה, וּמִלַּחָה לְצִדִּיקִים לַעֲתִיד לָבֵא, שְׁנֵאֲמַר (יִשְׁעִיָּה כו, א)

§63 The Gemara continues the discussion of the Leviathan begun in the previous *siman*:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: All that the Holy One, Blessed is He, created in His world, He created both male and female.^[1] And also “Leviathan, the straight snake, and Leviathan, the curled snake”^[2] He created male and female.^[3] However, were they to mate with each other, their numerous and immensely large offspring would destroy the entire world. What did the Holy One, Blessed is He, do, to prevent them from mating? He emasculated the male by weakening his drive,^[4] killed the female,^[5] and salted her meat for the righteous to eat in the Future Era.^[6] We know that Hashem killed the female, for it says (*Yeshayah 27:1*): On that day, HASHEM will

NOTES

1. In the animal kingdom, the male impregnates the female, who produces the offspring. Thus, in a broader sense, “male” represents that which influences others, and “female” that which is influenced. Rav is teaching that everything in Creation is, in a sense, both “male and female” — it both influences others and is influenced by others. This is fundamentally different than the Creator, Who influences His creations but is not influenced by them (*Kli Yakar* on *Bereishis* 1:31-2:1).

2. Mentioned at the end of the last *siman*.

3. [That is, “Leviathan, the straight snake” is the male of the species, and “Leviathan, the curled snake” is the female.]

According to *Ritva* (cited here in *HaKoseiv*), the Leviathans represent successive world empires, the earlier one being swallowed up by the later one. Hashem made it that only one empire at a time should

have dominion over Israel.

4. *Eitz Yosef*.

5. [Once Hashem killed the female, the male would be unable to mate with her. Why, then, did He also emasculate the male?] It was so that the male would not mate with other species of fish; alternatively, so it would not suffer pain from its inability to find a mate (*Rashbam*; see also *Eitz Yosef*).

Below, on §64, *Ritva* (cited there by *HaKoseiv*) explains the slaying of the Leviathan as alluding to the downfall of the guardian angel of Eisav.

6. The Gemara below (75a [§64]) says that in the Future Era, Hashem will make a meal for the righteous from the meat of the Leviathan. Our Gemara says that it will be from the meat of the *female* Leviathan, which was killed and salted at the time of Creation.

See Insight A.

🔗 **Insight A: The Feasts of the Leviathan and the Behemoth** The commentators differ as to whether the Gemara refers to an actual feast at which the righteous will physically eat of the meat of the Leviathan and the Behemoth [see below] (*Maharsha* here) or only to a figurative banquet (*Maharal*, *Chiddushei Aggados* here). [See also *Rambam*, *Hil. Teshuvah* 8:4, with *Raavad* there, and Insight to *Ein Yaakov*, *Pesachim* §65, “The Cup of Blessing, Figurative or Actual.”] *Maharsha* follows the approach of *Rashba* (*Perushei HaHaggados* here, cited in *HaKoseiv* [but printed as a separate section]) and *Rabbeinu Bachya* (on *Bereishis* 1:21 and in *Shulchan Shel Arba* §4), who explain that at some point during or following the Messianic era (see end of Insight), the righteous will literally eat the meat of the Leviathan and the Behemoth. The purpose of this feast, however, is not to delight their palates, something that would be at odds with the spiritual essence of the World to Come. Rather, the meat of these creatures contains special properties so that the bodies that eat it add vitality to their souls. In our own experience, we know that food and beverage can be a powerful means to remove worry and anxiety and to gladden the heart, making it more receptive to attain wisdom. Similarly, we find that the Prophet Elisha listened to music to gladden his mood so that he could reach the prophetic state (see *II Melachim* 3:15). Moreover, it is quite possible that the Leviathan and the Behemoth, created specifically in the beginning of time for the sustenance of the righteous in the World to Come, are a source of intellectual benefit, much like the Tree of Knowledge in Gan Eden (see *Bereishis* 3:6). These foods resemble the ethereal manna that the Israelites ate in the Wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. They physically ate the manna, which contained special properties that enabled them to attain the Divine knowledge of the Torah they received at Sinai. The manna supplied energy and contained no impurities. It was completely absorbed by the limbs of the body; no

וְהָרַג אֶת הַתַּנִּין אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּם.”

bring punishment with His harsh, great, mighty sword upon Leviathan, the straight snake, and upon Leviathan, the curled snake, **and kill the monster that is in the sea.**^[7]

The Gemara discusses a different animal, the Behemoth,^[8] which was treated in a similar way:

NOTES

7. We have noted in the previous *siman* (note 11) that according to its plain meaning, the verse discusses *three* types of sea creatures. According to the Gemara’s exposition, however, the verse discusses only *two* types of sea creatures: *Leviathan, the straight snake, and Leviathan, the curled snake*. The latter is the female, and is identical with the *monster that is in the sea* (mentioned next in the verse), which was killed at the time of Creation and salted for the righteous in the Future Era. According to this exposition, the verse is to be rendered: *On that day, HASHEM will bring punishment with His*

harsh, great, mighty sword upon Leviathan, the straight snake, “as [He had] upon” Leviathan, the curled snake, “for He killed” the monster that is in the sea [at the time of Creation]. This exposition is suggested by the verse’s use of וְהָרַג, which can mean past tense, instead of וַיְהָרַג (the same grammatical form used in the first part of the verse), which can mean only future tense (*Rashbam*, as explained by *Rashash*; see also *Mekor Baruch*, Introduction volume, p. 182a-b).

8. The Behemoth is another wondrous creature described in *Iyov* (40:15-24; see above, §62 note 3). Unlike

waste was produced to be eliminated from the body (see *Yoma* 75b). So too, the Leviathan and the Behemoth contain spiritual nourishment enabling the righteous in the future to gain Divine knowledge.

[*Rashba* and *Rabbeinu Bachya* explain that this does not contradict the famous dictum of Rav, “In the World to Come there is no eating or drinking . . . rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence” (*Berachos* 17a). That teaching and the teaching of our Gemara refer to different stages. At some point in the future, there will be the culmination of the body’s need for physical nourishment; the final physical feast of the Leviathan and the Behemoth will take place, supplying the righteous with spiritual sustenance and enrichment, serving to prepare their souls for the ultimate eternal bliss in the World to Come. The body will then become purified and elevated to a state in which it will live forever without any physical source of nourishment at all — as Moshe lived on Mount Sinai for forty days and nights without eating or drinking (*Devarim* 9:9, 18) — with the righteous delighting in the radiance of the Divine Presence.]

Maharal (*Chiddushei Aggados* here), however, insists that the righteous will not eat a physical feast in the Future Era, nor are the Leviathan and the Behemoth actual creatures of the sea and land. Rather, our Gemara is to be understood figuratively. Just as the term “food” describes that which nourishes the body, so too the term is used to describe that which nourishes the soul. Hence, R’ Akiva (*Yoma* 75b) described the manna as the “food” of angels, who do not eat in the physical sense. R’ Akiva understands that although angels do not need physical food, they do require a flow of Divine will and Divine illumination to sustain them, which R’ Akiva refers to figuratively as “food.” Thus, when the Gemara refers to a banquet in the Future Era of the meat of the Leviathan and the Behemoth, it refers to the spiritual sustenance obtained from these “creatures.” The Leviathan, corresponding to the forces of water, and the Behemoth, corresponding to the forces of land, are representative of all the fine qualities found in this world, which the righteous will acquire in the Future Era. These “creatures” are not physical creatures of the sea and land, but are rather related to the water and land, respectively, each one drawing its power from the sea or land (see also *Maharal, Gur Aryeh, Bereishis* 1:21 and *Derech Chaim* 3:16). In essence, then, all agree that the feast of the Leviathan and the Behemoth is one of spiritual sustenance, whether one actually ingests the meat of the Leviathan or gains this nourishment through a spiritual process.

[According to *Maharal*, it might be said that the metaphorical feast of the Leviathan and Behemoth is not at all at odds with Rav’s teaching. For Rav meant only that there is no *physical* eating in the World to Come; he did not rule out a spiritual form of sustenance. Nonetheless, *Maharal*, too, addresses the issue of how the Feast of the Leviathan and the Behemoth comports with the dictum of Rav, understanding Rav’s dictum to mean that there will be no need for sustenance of *any* sort in the World to Come, just the delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence. *Maharal* presents an answer similar to that of *Rashba* and *Rabbeinu Bachya*, suggesting that there will be two stages: the righteous will first achieve perfection through the spiritual nourishment of the Leviathan and the Behemoth, after which they will delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence.]

[The identities of the stages during which the feast of the Leviathan and the period of delighting in the radiance of the Divine Presence, respectively, will occur depend upon various views concerning the duration and exact nature of bodily life after the Resurrection of the Dead. See Appendix “Olam Haba” to Volume 3 of the Schottenstein edition of *Sanhedrin* for a summary of the various views.]

וְאִם בְּהֵמוֹת בְּהֵרִי אֵלֶּךָ — זָכַר וְנִקְבָּה בְּרָאם, וְאִלְמָלָא נִזְקָקִין זֶה עִם זֶה מִחֲרִיבִין (אֵת) כָּל הָעוֹלָם [כּוֹלֵן]. מָה עָשָׂה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא? סִירַס אֶת הַזָּכָר, וְצִינָן [אֶת] הַנִּקְבָּה, וּשְׁמָרָהּ לְצַדִּיקִים לְעֵתִיד לָבוֹא, שְׁנֵאמַר (אִיּוֹב מ, טז) "הִנֵּה נָא כָחוֹ בְּמַתְנֵי וְאוֹנוֹ בְּשָׁרֵירִי בְטֵנוֹ". "הִנֵּה נָא כָחוֹ בְּמַתְנֵי" — זֶה זָכָר, "וְאוֹנוֹ בְּשָׁרֵירִי בְטֵנוֹ" — זֶה נִקְבָּה. הֵתָם נִמְי לִיסְרָסִיָּה לְזָכָר וְלִיצְנָנָה לְנִקְבָּה? דְּגִים פְּרִיצִי. וְלִיעֲבִיד אִיפְכָּא? אִי בְּעִית אִימָא: [מִלַּחַם דְּנוֹקְבָתָא עֲדִיף] (נִקְבָה מִלַּחַם מַעֲלִי), אִי בְּעִית אִימָא: בִּין דְּכִתִּיב (תְּהִלִּים קד, כו) "לִוְיָתָן זֶה יִצְרֵת לְשַׁחַק בּוֹ",

וְאִם בְּהֵמוֹת וכו' — And *"the Behemoth of a thousand mountains"* (see *Tehillim* 50:10), too,^[9] [Hashem] created male and female. Were they to mate, their numerous and immensely large-sized offspring would destroy the entire world. What did the Holy One, Blessed is He, do to prevent them from mating? He emasculated the male and cooled the female's passion, and saved her for the righteous to eat in the Future Era.^[10] As it says concerning the Behemoth (*Iyov* 40:15-16): Behold now the Behemoth that I have created with you; he eats grass like cattle. Behold, now, its strength is in its loins, and its power in the muscles of its belly.^[11] The Gemara expounds the verse: Behold, now, its strength is in its loins — this refers to the male, whose strength remains in his loins, because he was emasculated and cannot emit semen. And its power in the muscles of its belly — this refers to the female, whose power remains in her womb, for her passion was cooled and she does not mate that she should give birth.

The Gemara asks:

There too, regarding the Leviathan, [Hashem] could have done the same and emasculated the male and cooled the female's passion instead of killing her. Why did he kill the female Leviathan?

The Gemara answers:

Fish are excessively driven to mate; therefore, if the female's passions were simply cooled, the Leviathans would still mate and multiply. Therefore, the female had to be killed.^[12]

Still the Gemara asks:

But even if one of the Leviathans had to be killed **why did [Hashem] not do the opposite**, and kill the male instead of the female?

The Gemara gives two possible answers:

You can answer that **the salted meat of the female is tastier**. Alternatively, **you can answer** that **since it is written** (*Tehillim* 104:26): *This Leviathan that You [Hashem] created to sport with* [לְשַׁחַק בּוֹ].^[13]

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the Leviathan, which is a sea creature, the Behemoth is an enormous land creature.

9. The verses there (9-10) read: *I take not from your household any bull, nor from your pens any goats. For Mine is every beast of the forest, "behemoth" of a thousand mountains.* Now, the word בְּהֵמוֹת, *behemoth*, in that verse can be interpreted in two ways: (1) as the plural of the word בְּהֵמָה, *animal*: or (2) as a singular word referring to the Behemoth, the wondrous animal described in *Iyov*. The first interpretation is the simple meaning of the passage: Hashem says that He has no need for sacrifices, since the beasts of the forest and the animals that graze on a thousand mountains all belong to Him. Our Gemara's exposition, however, follows the second interpretation: Hashem says that the enormous Behemoth, which grazes daily on a thousand lush hills, belongs to Him (see *Rashbam* here, and *Rashi* to the verse).

10. [Unlike the female Leviathan, which was killed and salted to be eaten by the righteous in the Future Era, the female Behemoth was saved alive for that purpose. (*Rashash* here emends the text to read: וְשָׁמְרָם, and saved "them" — i.e., both the male and female Behemoth.)]

11. According to its plain meaning, the verse describes the Behemoth's great strength.

12. See *Rashbam* and *Eitz Yosef*.

13. [The simple meaning of the verse is that *You created the Leviathan to sport within "it,"* i.e., in the sea mentioned earlier in the verse. The giant Leviathan fears no other fish and "sports in the sea," eating whatever fish it desires (*Ibn Ezra* and *Radak* ad loc.). However,] the Gemara in *Avodah Zarah* (3b) expounds this to mean that there is a time of day when Hashem, as it were, "sports with the Leviathan" (*Rashbam*; see *Toras Chaim* here).

בְּהֵדִי נִקְבָּה לָאוּ אֹרַח אֶרְעָא. הָבָא נִמְי לְמַלְחָה לְנִקְבָּה? בּוֹרָא מְלִיחָא
מַעְלִי, בְּשָׂרָא מְלִיחָא לֹא מַעְלִי.

Had He killed the male, only the female would have remained, and **it is not proper** to speak of Hashem sporting **with a female**.^[14]

Still, the Gemara asks why it was necessary to treat the Leviathans and the Behemoths differently: **[Hashem] could have killed and salted the female Behemoth** as He did with the female Leviathan. Why did He keep the female Behemoth alive?

The Gemara answers:

Salted fish is tasty, whereas salted animal **meat is not** as **tasty**.^[15]

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14. See *Rashba*, *Perushei HaHaggados* here (cited in *HaKoseiv* [Mefoar ed., p. 283, second column]); *Ben Yehoyada*.

15. See Insight B for some approaches to the inner meaning of these teachings of the Gemara.

❧ **Insight B: Separating and Preserving the Leviathan and the Behemoth** In his *Perushei HaHaggados* here, *Rashba* (cited in *HaKoseiv* [but printed as a separate section]) elaborates extensively on the meaning of our Gemara, which he understands as dealing with the relation between the intellect and the seat of physical desire (represented by “the male and female Leviathan” respectively) and between the soul and the body (represented by “the male and female Behemoth” respectively). Our Gemara touches upon the question of why man, unlike the angels, was created with the ability to sin, and with a connection to the Resurrection of the Dead and the World to Come. The sweep of *Rashba’s* discussion here is breathtaking; what we present here is only a synopsis of his much larger discussion.

Man’s “appetitive soul” — the seat of his emotions and desires — is receptive to the influence of his intellect, which can act upon that soul and give it direction. In the Gemara’s metaphor, the intellect is the “male” or the one that is active, while the soul is the “female” or the one that is receptive. לְוִיָּתָן (Leviathan) represents the intellect’s “joining with” and “adorning” the soul — as we find the root לוּי referring to “joining” (see *Bereishis* 30:34) and to “adorning” (see *Mishlei* 1:9) — as well as their being joined to the person’s body. Were this “male and female to mate” — were they to be intimately joined so that the intellect would completely inform the soul — they would “destroy the world.” A person would not engage in normal human life, he would not procreate, and the world that Hashem wishes to be populated with people (see *Yeshayah* 45:18) would be desolate. People would all be like Moshe, who separated from his wife because of his constant communion with Hashem (*Shabbos* 87a) and like Ben Azzai, whose immeasurable desire for Torah did not allow him to marry (*Yevamos* 63b). So Hashem put a distance between the intellect and the appetitive soul by “emasculating the male” so that it would not completely dominate the female, and “He killed the female” by depriving it of the overpowering influence of the male, but He “salted her” to be preserved for the righteous in the Future Era, for their appetitive souls will be restored with the Resurrection of the Dead and continue to live in the World to Come.*

The male and female Behemoth are similarly explained. The human body is the “Behemoth” (literally, *animal*), for it is indeed physically similar to that of animals. Its material “substance” is given its specific human “form” by the human soul — the body, which is receptive, is described as “the female,” and the soul, which is active, is described as “the male.” Were these two aspects to “mate” — to be perfectly joined — “the world would be desolate.” That is, the human body would never die and decay, and the cycle of death and birth would not exist. For it is only the decay of the old that makes way for the new. And it is the separation of the “substance” from the “form” that allows the substance to decay. So Hashem “emasculated the male and cooled the female” to cause the substance and form to eventually separate. Since, however, the substance itself never deteriorates completely, its decay is called here only “cooling,” and not “death,” as in the parallel description above with regard to the Leviathan.

But Hashem “saved her to be eaten by the righteous in the Future Era.” That is, when the righteous are resurrected in the Future Era, it will be not be in new bodies, but in the very same bodies in which they originally lived.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE

* *Akeidas Yitzchak* (*Parashas Shemini*, *Shaar* §60 [4775 ed., p. 64]) presents a somewhat similar exposition. See also *R’ Yosef Shaul Natanson* in *Divrei Shaul* on our Gemara. [*Ritva* (cited in *HaKoseiv* here) mentions such an approach, and approves it in concept, but maintains that it does not account for the various details in the Gemara here.]

וְאָמַר רַבִּי (י) יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: בְּשָׁעָה שֶׁבָקַשׁ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא לְבְרָאוֹת אֶת הָעוֹלָם, אָמַר לוֹ לִשְׂרָשׁוֹר שֶׁל יָם: פָּתַח פִּיךָ
וּבָלַע כָּל מַיִמוֹת שֶׁבָּעוֹלָם. אָמַר לְפָנָיו: רַבּוֹנוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, דִּי

Another statement by the same Amora:

וְאָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה וכו' — Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: When the Holy One, Blessed Is He, wished to create the world, He said to the prince of the sea:^[16] “Open your mouth and swallow all of the waters of the world.”^[17] [The prince of the sea] replied: “Master of the universe! It is enough

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16. *Maharsha* allows that this teaching of the Gemara can be taken at face value, and that “the prince of the sea” is a reference to the largest animal in the sea, which (as the Gemara proceeds to relate) Hashem killed and whose rotting carcass would have filled the world with an overpowering stench.

Sefer HaIkkarim (4:8), however, explains that “the

prince of the sea” refers to the essential nature of seawater. [We will explain the Gemara accordingly.]

17. The nature of water is such that it should cover the entire face of the earth. Hashem wished that the land masses be exposed and be inhabited by land creatures. He therefore commanded “the prince of the sea” to “swallow the waters” covering the land masses — that

For in their lifetimes on earth, *all* parts of the righteous served Hashem — soul *and* body. That body, too, deserves its full reward — to be resurrected and rejoined with the holy soul that it housed. Moreover, that body was the one specifically designed and suited for the soul that was breathed into it. And many times, it was that body that suffered pain or privation or even death for the sake of Hashem’s Name and the fulfillment of His mitzvos. It is that body that deserves eventually to be resurrected and see and feel the undiluted good of the World to Come.*

❧ **The Rise and Fall of the Leviathans** In a classic exposition of our Gemara, *R’ Samson Raphael Hirsch* presents the Leviathans, male and female, as fundamental forces behind the rise and fall of great empires. Etymologically, the word לִיָּתָן signifies “joining” — a bond, or an association — more specifically one that arises from mutual dependence or interaction. Hence, a creditor and a debtor are described by this term — they are called מְלִיָּתָא and מְלִיָּתָא respectively. It is the perfect term to describe a relationship in which mutual interests lead to subordination and accommodation. In short, it is the perfect word to describe “human society.” The plural expression “Behe-moth,” too, connotes a “collective of animals,” the company of animals that dwell on the land.

There are two “Leviathan” forces in human society. There is “Leviathan the straight snake,” which shoots straight toward its target with unwavering directness. It identifies its goal and marches inexorably toward it with unstoppable force. It is raw, overwhelming power. This is “the male” — Leviathan the straight snake.

But there is another force in human society that can be as effective as brute strength, or even more effective: it is “Leviathan the curled snake.” It, too, identifies its goal and is relentless in achieving it. But it does so with coiled, serpentine methods, with guile rather than with brute force, with shrewdness rather than coercion. This is “the female” — Leviathan the curled snake.

Empires are built primarily by force, by Leviathan the straight snake. However, were empires built on raw power to rise and never fall, “the world would be desolate” — there would be an effective end to all human independence and development. What did Hashem do to ensure that the enslaving empires of Leviathan the straight snake would eventually crumble? He prevented it from “mating” with Leviathan the curled snake. He does not allow the empires of might to join with the force of cunning to ensure their lasting dominance.

It is an oft-repeated fact of history that empires which have achieved their dominance by force will be so blinded by their illusion of invincibility that they will despise the subtle and labyrinthine skills of diplomacy as signs of weakness. And these great powers will thereby deprive themselves of the sole means by which they might indeed ensure their everlasting dominance. “Emasculated” — without a future — these empires will fall with the passage of time. Human freedom will outlast them, and the world will not be desolate (*Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, pp.112-119).

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE

* The *Gra* (Commentary on *Sifra D’Tzniyusa* Ch. 4) — The male and female Leviathan represent the forces of Eisav and Yishmael; were they to merge, Yaakov would not be able to withstand them. [See *Insight to Bereishis Rabbah* 75 §6, “The Alliance of Esau and Ishmael.”] Throughout history, Hashem has made those two forces battle each other rather than form alliances (*R’ Yitzchak Eizik Chaver in Siach Yitzchok*, 5760 ed., p. 145).

שֶׁאֶעֱמֹד בְּשָׁלִי. [מִיד] בָּעֵט בּוֹ וְהָרְגוּ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (אִיּוֹב כו, יב) "בִּכְחוֹ רָגַע הָיָם וּבִתְבוּנָתוֹ מִחֵץ רָהֵב". אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק: שְׁמַע מִיָּנָה: שֶׁר שֶׁל יָם — 'רָהֵב' שְׁמוֹ. וְאַלְמָלָא מִיָּם מְכַסִּים אוֹתוֹ, אֵין כָּל בְּרִיָּה יוֹכֵלָה לַעֲמֹד מִפְּנֵי רִיחוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (יִשְׁעִיָּה יא, ט) "לֹא יָרְעוּ וְלֹא יִשְׁחִיתוּ בְּכָל הָרָקִיעַ, כִּי מִלְּאָה הָאָרֶץ דָּעָה אֶת ה' בְּמַיִם לַיָּם מְכַסִּים". אֶל תִּקְרִי: "לַיָּם מְכַסִּים", אֲלֵא "לְשָׂרָה שֶׁל יָם מְכַסִּים".

{סד} וְאָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב: יֵרֶדֶן יוֹצֵא מִמַּעַרְתַּת פְּמִיָּאס. תְּנִיָּא נְמִי הָכִי: יֵרֶדֶן יוֹצֵא מִמַּעַרְתַּת פְּמִיָּאס, וּמִהֶלֶךְ בִּימָה שֶׁל סִיבְכִי, וּבִימָה שֶׁל טְבָרְיָה, וּמִתְגַּלְגֵּל וְיוֹרֵד לַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל, וּמִתְגַּלְגֵּל וְיוֹרֵד עַד שְׁמִינִיעַ לְפִיו שֶׁל לוֹיְתָן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר

that I remain with my own."^[18] Immediately, Hashem kicked him and killed him,^[19] as it says (*Iyov* 26:12): *With His strength [HASHEM] divides the ocean, and with His understanding He crushes [its] pride* [רָהֵב].^[20] R' Yitzchak said: From this we derive that the prince of the sea is called *Rahav*. Had not the waters of the sea covered the [prince of the sea's carcass], no creature could have withstood its stench.^[21] We know that it was covered by water, as it says (*Yeshayah* 11:9) regarding the Messianic era: *They* (i.e., poisonous snakes) *will neither injure nor destroy in all of My sacred mountain; for the earth will be filled with knowledge of HASHEM as water covering the [bed of the] sea* [בְּמַיִם לַיָּם מְכַסִּים]. Do not understand the verse literally, as *water covering the [bed of the] sea*, but figuratively, as if it were written, as *water covering the prince of the sea* [לְשָׂרָה שֶׁל יָם מְכַסִּים].^[22] Thus, we see that the prince of the sea is covered by water.

§64 Another teaching regarding the Leviathan:

וְאָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב וְכו' — Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: The Yarden River issues from the cavern of Pamyas.^[1] We have also learned this in a Baraisa: THE YARDEN River ISSUES FROM THE CAVERN OF PAMYAS, PASSES THROUGH THE SEAS OF *SIVCHI*,^[2] AND TEVERIAH,^[3] AND finally ROLLS DOWN INTO THE GREAT SEA (i.e., the Mediterranean)^[4] UNTIL IT REACHES THE MOUTH OF THE LEVIATHAN, AS IT SAYS (*Iyov* 40:23): *Behold he plunders the river and is not anxious;*

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is, he commanded the water to override its nature and withdraw into the sea, and expose the land that it had covered (*Sefer HaIkkarim* *ibid.*; see also *Rashbam* and *Maharsha*).

18. That is, I cannot be expected to override my nature (see *Rashbam* and *Maharsha*).

19. [That is, Hashem "killed" the nature of water, and caused it to withdraw from the land.] *Maharzu*, on a parallel teaching in *Bamidbar Rabbah* 18 §22, explains that water was originally less dense and therefore rose to cover the entire earth. Hashem "kicked" or "stomped" it — that is, He suppressed it, making it more dense, so that it receded from and exposed the land.

20. According to its plain meaning, the verse says as follows: At times, Hashem causes parts of the sea to recede and become dry land (*Ramban* to the verse), thereby subduing the sea's power (*Mahari Kara* to the verse). The Gemara will expound the verse differently.

21. The now-dense waters would have become stagnant and foul smelling. So Hashem "caused the water to cover the carcass." The rivers flow into the sea [and the sea water evaporates, creating a cycle of constantly changing water that is not stagnant] (*R' Yitzchak Dov Bamberger* in *Koreh BeEmes* [Frankfort, 5631(1871)] on our Gemara).

22. Water does not cover the "sea"; it covers the *seabed*. According to the plain meaning of the verse, the word יָם is being used in an unusual sense, to mean the *seabed* rather than the sea itself. This is the basis for the Gemara expounding the verse to mean something else (*Rashbam* and *Maharsha*).

1. Pamyas is the modern Banias, in Upper Galilee on the southern slope of Mount Hermon. The Yarden River emerges as a large brook from a cavern at the foot of the mountain. [Aside from Pamyas, the Yarden has other sources. Nevertheless, the Rabbis considered Pamyas to be the primary source of the river.] See Diagram on p. 263.

2. There is no known sea with this name. Based on *Yerushalmi Kilayim* 9:3 [81b in Schottenstein ed.], *Tevuos HaAretz* (5660 ed., p. 59) emends the text to יָמָא דְסַמְכִי, *the Sea of Samchu*, which he identifies as Lake Hula, a small lake about 10 miles north of the Sea of Teveriah.

3. This is the Kinneret, mentioned in *Bamidbar* 34:11, also known as the Sea of Galilee. The Baraisa refers to it as the Sea of Teveriah, because the city of Teveriah is located on its western shore.

In the parallel discussion in *Bechoros* 55a, the Gemara adds that the Yarden also passes through the Sea of Sodom (i.e., the Dead Sea).

4. The meaning of this is not clear, as the Dead Sea

(איוב מ, כג) "יִבְטַח בִּי יָגִיחַ יַרְדֵּן אֶל פִּיהוּ". מִתְקִיף לָהּ רָבָא בַר עֻלָּא:
הַאי בִּ"בִּהְמוֹת בְּהַרְרֵי אֱלָף" (תהלים נ, י) בְּתִיבָא? אֵלָּא אָמַר רָבָא בַר עֻלָּא:
אֵימַתִּי בְּהְמוֹת בְּהַרְרֵי אֱלָף בְּטוּחוֹת? (בְּשָׁעָה) [בּוֹמֵן] שְׂמִיגִיחַ יַרְדֵּן לְפִי
שֶׁל לְוִיתָן.

בִּי אֶתָּא רַב דִּימִי אָמַר רַבִּי (יונתן) [יוחנן]: מָאי דְכָתִיב (שם כד, ב) "בִּי
הוּא עַל יָמִים יִסְדָּה וְעַל נְהָרוֹת יִכּוֹנְנָה"? אֵלּוּ שְׁבַע יָמִים וְאַרְבַּע נְהָרוֹת
שְׂמִקְפִּין אֶת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאֵלּוּ הֵן שְׁבַע יָמִים: יָמָה שֶׁל טְבַרְיָה, וְיָמָה שֶׁל

HE FEELS SECURE THAT HE CAN GULP THE YARDEN INTO HIS MOUTH.

The Baraisa seems to understand that the above verse refers to the Leviathan. The Gemara notes that this is not so:

Rava bar Ulla objected: This verse refers to the “Behemoth of a thousand hills,” not to the Leviathan!^[5]

Rava bar Ulla reinterprets the verse:

Rather, Rava bar Ulla said: For how long is the Behemoth of a thousand hills confident that it will remain alive? For as long as the Yarden flows into the mouth of the Leviathan.^[6]

Having discussed the flow of the Yarden River, the Gemara will now list the various bodies of water that surround the Land of Israel:

וְכִי אֶתָּא רַב דִּימִי וכו' — **When Rav Dimi came** to Babylonia from Eretz Yisrael, **he said in the name of R' Yochanan:** What is the meaning of that which is written (*Tehillim* 24:1-2): *HASHEM's is the Land of Israel and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it. For He has founded it upon seas and established it upon rivers?*^[7] These seas and rivers are the seven seas and four rivers that surround the Land of Israel.^[8] These are the seven seas: (1) the Sea of Teveriah,^[9] (2) the Sea of

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actually has no visible outlet to the Mediterranean Sea or to anywhere else. As far as is known, the water that flows into the Dead Sea remains there, leaving only through evaporation. For suggested solutions to this difficulty, see Schottenstein ed. of *Bechoros*, 55a note 41.

5. Chapter 40 of *Iyov* discusses two wondrous creatures: the land creature Behemoth (which in *Tehillim* 50:10 is called *Behemoth of a thousand hills*; see §63 note 8) and the sea creature Leviathan. The above verse appears in the passage regarding the Behemoth. According to its plain meaning, the verse says that, due to its great strength, the Behemoth is able to gulp vast amounts of water without fear of attack (*Ibn Ezra* to the verse; but see *Malbim* ad loc.).

6. As long as the Leviathan continues to drink the water

of the Yarden, the Behemoth is confident that he will remain alive (*Rashbam*). This is based on the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 13 §3) which says that in the Future Era, the Leviathan and the Behemoth will battle and kill each other. Thus, as long as the Leviathan is occupied with drinking water and not intent on battle, the Behemoth is confident that he will remain alive (*Maharsha*; see *HaKoseiv* and *Iyun Yaakov* for different explanations). See Insight A.

7. Our translation has followed *Rashi* to the verses. See, however, *Maharsha* here.

8. [Rav Dimi does not necessarily mean that these bodies of water lie at the borders of the Land of Israel, but rather that they are located *close* to those borders.] See Diagram below.

9. See above, note 3.

❧ **Insight A: From Hidden Origins to the Mouth of the Leviathan** *Rashba* (*Perushei HaHaggados* here, cited above in *HaKoseiv* [but printed as a separate section]) explains that our Gemara here traces the origins and destinations of the waters of the Yarden to serve as a metaphor for how the human soul devolves from its source in “the bond of life” until it finally reaches the human body — “the mouth of the Leviathan” — where the soul “joins with” [לוּחַ] the body and the intellect (see there at length). *Rashba* explains our Gemara further: “For how long is the Behemoth (which symbolizes the physical body) confident” that this cycle of generation of humanity following generation of humanity will continue? “As long as the Yarden flows into the mouth of the Leviathan” — that is, until the start of the World to Come, at which point the animalistic, physical lives of human beings will cease, and instead “the righteous will sit with their crowns on their heads and derive joy from the glow of the *Shechinah*” (*Berachos* 17a).

סָדוֹם, וַיִּמָּה שֶׁל חִילָת, וַיִּמָּה שֶׁל חִילְתָּא, וַיִּמָּה שֶׁל סַבְכִּי, וַיִּמָּה אֶסְפָּמְיָא, וַיִּמָּה הַגָּדוֹל. וְאֵלּוּ הֵן אַרְבַּעַה נְהָרוֹת: יַרְדֵּן, וַיִּרְמוֹךְ, וְקִרְמִיּוֹן, וּפּוּגָא.
 בִּי אֲתָא רַב דִּימִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן: עֲתִיד גְּבִרְיָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת [דף עה.]
 קְנִיגְיָא עִם לוֹיָתָן, שְׁנַאֲמַר (אִיּוֹב מ, כה) "תִּמְשֹׁךְ לוֹיָתָן בַּחֲכָה, וּבְחֶבֶל תִּשְׁקִיעַ לְשׁוֹנוֹ". וְאֶלְמָלָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עֲזָרוֹ, אֵינוֹ יָכוֹל לוֹ,

Sodom,^[10] (3) the Sea of Cheilas,^[11] (4) the Sea of Chilsa,^[12] (5) the Sea of Sivchi,^[13] (6) the Sea of Aspamya [אֶסְפָּמְיָא],^[14] (7) and the Great Sea (i.e., the Mediterranean). And these are the four rivers: (1) the Yarden, (2) the Yarmoch,^[15] (3) the Kirmiyon, and (4) the Pigah.^[16]

A second teaching of Rav Dimi:

בִּי אֲתָא רַב דִּימִי וכו' — When Rav Dimi came to Babylonia from Eretz Yisrael he said in the name of R' Yonasan: In the future, the angel Gavriel will arrange

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a hunt for the Leviathan, as it says (*Iyov* 40:25): *Can you pull the Leviathan with a hook, can you embed a line in his tongue?* Hashem says to Iyov: You, since you are human, cannot hunt down the Leviathan. This implies that one who is not human (i.e., the angel Gavriel) will eventually do so. Even so, if the Holy One, Blessed is He, were not to help [Gavriel], he would be incapable of prevailing over

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10. I.e., the Dead Sea. It is called the Sea of Sodom because it is located over the site of the city of Sodom, which was destroyed at the time of the Avraham (see *Bereishis* Ch. 19).

11. There is no known sea with this name. *Tevuos HaAretz* (p. 59) emends חִילָת to אֵילָת, *Eilat*, which is a port town on the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba (see *Devarim* 2:8 and *II Melachim* 14:12). Thus, the Sea of Eilat is the Gemara's name for the Gulf of Aqaba.

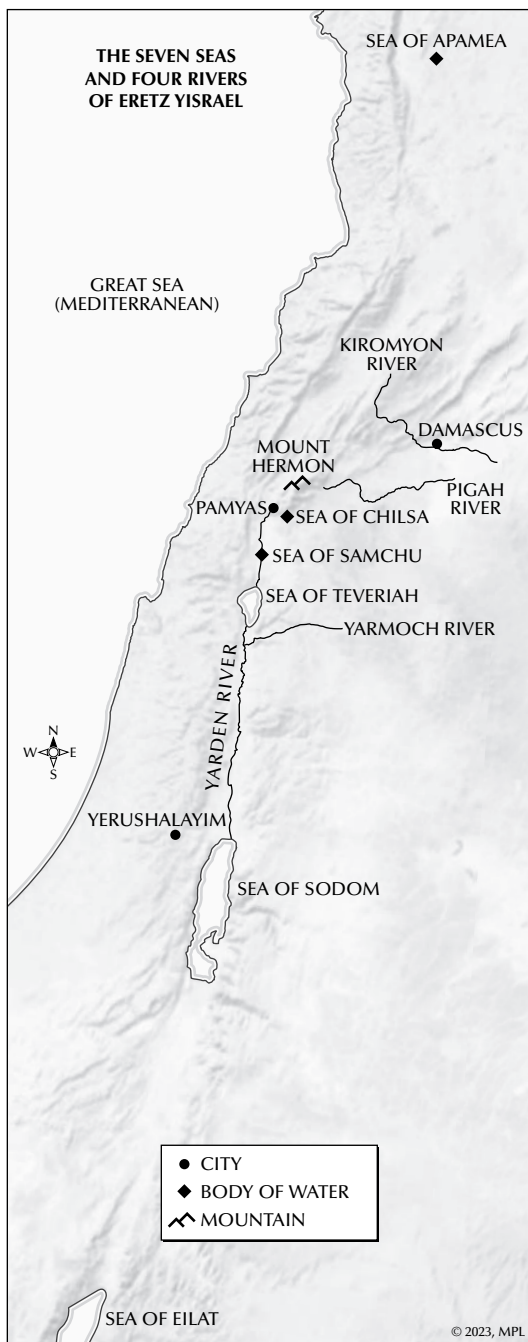
12. *Tevuos HaAretz* (p. 58) identifies this as Bereichat Ram, about 10 miles east of Pamyas.

13. See above, note 2.

14. Aspamya is generally translated as Spain, which is very far from the Land of Israel. Based on *Yerushalmi Kilayim* 9:3 [81b in Schottenstein ed.], *Tevuos HaAretz* (p. 58) emends the text here to read אֶפְמִיָּא, *Apamea*, which is a town in Syria (see Mishnah, *Challah* 4:11). [It sits on the plain of the Orontes River.] In ancient times there seems to have been a lake there as well (*Tevuos HaAretz*, p. 59; cf. *Hagahos Yaavetz*).

15. A river at the southern border of the Golan Heights (south of the Sea of Teveriah), which is a main tributary of the Yarden.

16. The Kirmiyon is the Amanah River and the Pigah the Parpar River, both mentioned in *II Melachim* 5:12 (*Aruch* קרמיון). They are located near Damascus.



שְׁנַאֲמַר (שם, יט) "הָעוֹשׂוֹ יִגֹּשׁ חֲרָבוֹ".

[the Leviathan], as it says (ibid. v. 19): *[Only] his Maker can direct His sword up close*. That is, only Hashem can kill the Leviathan.^[17]

A third teaching of Rav Dimi's, also about the Leviathan:

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17. Although the verse actually refers to the Behemoth, the Gemara assumes that it also applies to the Leviathan

(*Rashbam*). If only Hashem can kill the Behemoth, the smaller of the two beasts, than certainly only He can kill the Leviathan, the larger (*Maharsha*). See Insight B.

❧ **Insight B: The Hunt for the Leviathan** *Rashba* (*Perushei HaHaggados* loc. cit.) explains that this final slaying of the Leviathan by Gavriel, with Hashem's assistance, is a reference to the end of this world, as Rav Ketina teaches (*Rosh Hashanah* 31a; *Sanhedrin* 97a) that the world will last only six thousand years. After that "the Leviathan" — all things joined together in this lower world — will "be killed" and cease to be. "Gavriel" (from the root גבר, *strength*) symbolizes strict justice. "Gavriel will arrange a hunt for the Leviathan" — strict justice will prevail and the world as we know it will cease. But Gavriel will not be able to do it "without Divine assistance." For Hashem created the world so that it should be lasting, and under normal circumstances He preserves it from disintegration. Thus, it is only "with His assistance" — with His will that it should cease at the prescribed time — that the world will cease to be.

❧ **The Final Struggle** *Maharsha* points out that we find in the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Iyov* §927) that in the Future Era, the Leviathan and the Behemoth will kill each other — the Behemoth using its horns and tail, and the Leviathan using its fins. On the surface, this contradicts our Gemara, which says that Gavriel, with Divine assistance, will slay the Leviathan. However, *Maharsha* explains, there is no need to posit any contradiction. Our Gemara might mean only that Hashem will use the horns and tail of the Behemoth as "His sword" to slay the Leviathan.

Vayikra Rabbah 13 §3 also speaks of a final, epic struggle between the Behemoth and the Leviathan in the World to Come, which will be witnessed by the righteous, who did not go to see such brutish spectacles during their lifetimes. *Eshed HaNechalim* (ad loc.) writes that the future battle waged between the Behemoth and the Leviathan that will be witnessed by the righteous cannot be understood on a superficial level. Rather, these creatures and the battle that they will wage represent spiritual concepts (see there). The commentators advance several metaphoric interpretations: According to *Shem MiShmuel* (*Parashas Shemini*, 5671 ידן א"ר במד"ר א"ר ידן), these two titanic creatures represent positive attributes: The Behemoth, specifically the ox, represents יִרְאָה, fear of Hashem, and the Leviathan [from לוח, *to join*] symbolizes אֶהְבֶּה, love of Hashem. The final outcome of the "battle between the Behemoth and the Leviathan" is the integration of what each represents into a single approach. Generally, these traits of fear and love are opposites and tend to detract from each other. However, the Divine light that will be revealed in the World to Come will enable them to unite. Love and fear of Hashem will coexist in perfect harmony. And similarly, at that time all Jews, each with his own special characteristic, will be fused into a single united nation, with the Divine light revealed at that time removing all causes of friction.

Yaaros Devash (Vol. 1, *Derush* 1) suggests that these two battling creatures are representative of different aspects of the evil inclination: The Behemoth corresponds to the desire for food, drink, and physical comforts. For the verse (*Tehillim* 50:10), *the Behemoth of a thousand mountains*, is expounded by the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 22 §10) to mean that the Behemoth grazes upon a thousand lush mountains every day, stripping them bare. The Leviathan (from the root לוח, *to join*) symbolizes carnal desire. The death of these two beasts alludes to the elimination of these desires in the World to Come. [See also the explanation of *Pri Tzaddik*, *Roshei Chodoshim*, *Adar* §2; *Devarim*, *Succos* §11.]*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Ritva* (cited in *HaKoseiv*) — Gavriel's Divinely assisted slaying of the Leviathan is a reference to the final toppling of the ministering angel of Edom at the end of time. This is also the sense of the righteous "feasting on the Leviathan" in the Future Era.

בִּי אֶתָּא רַב דִּימִי אָמַר רַבִּי (יוֹנָתָן) [יוֹחָנָן]: בִּשְׁעָה שְׁלוּיָתָן רַעֲב, מוֹצִיא הֶבֶל מִפִּיו וּמִרְתִּיחַ כָּל מִימּוֹת שְׁבִמְצוּלָה, שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שם מ, כג) "יִרְתִּיחַ פֶּסֶר מִצּוּלָה". וְאַלְמָלָא מְכַנִּיס רֹאשׁוֹ לְגַן עֵדֶן — אֵין כָּל בְּרִיָּה יוֹכֵלָה לַעֲמוֹד בְּרִיחוֹ, שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שם) "יָם יִשִּׁים בְּמִרְקָחָה". וּבִשְׁעָה שְׁצֻמָּא, עוֹשָׂה תִלְמִים תִּלְמִים בָּיָם, שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שם, כד) "אַחֲרֵיו יֵאִיר נְתִיב". וְאָמַר רַב אַחָא בַר יַעֲקֹב: אֵין תְּהוֹם חוֹזֵר לְאִיתָנוּ עַד שְׁבַעִים שָׁנָה, שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שם) "יִחְשׁוּב תְּהוֹם לְשִׁיבָה", וְאֵין שִׁיבָה פְּחוּתָה מִשְׁבָּעִים [שָׁנָה].

אָמַר רַבָּה [בַּר בַּר חֲנָה] אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: עֲתִיד הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לַעֲשׂוֹת סְעוּדָה לְצַדִּיקִים מִבְּשָׁרוֹ שֶׁל לוֹיָתָן, שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שם מ, ל) "יִכְרוּ עָלָיו חֲבָרִים", וְאֵין 'בִּירָה' אֶלָּא סְעוּדָה, שְׁנֹאֲמַר (מ"ב ו, כג) "וַיִּכְרָה לָהֶם בִּירָה גְדוֹלָה, וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׂתּוּ", וְאֵין "חֲבָרִים", אֶלָּא תִלְמִידֵי חֲכָמִים, שְׁנֹאֲמַר (שה"ש ח, יג)

When Rav Dimi came to Babylonia from Eretz Yisrael, he said in the name of R' Yonasan: When the Leviathan is hungry, he exhales vapor from his mouth, which froths the water of the deep, as it says regarding the Leviathan (*Iyov* 41:23): *He froths the deep sea like a kettle*.^[18] Were it not to put its head into the waters underneath Gan Eden,^[19] no creature would be able to withstand the foul odor that it emits into the sea when it exhales,^[20] as it says regarding the Leviathan (*ibid.*): *It makes the sea a perfume compound*. That is, when it enters a sea, it brings with it the fragrance of Gan Eden, which neutralizes the foul odor that it emits. When it is thirsty, it drinks deeply from the seawater, thereby creating furrows in the sea, as it says (*ibid.* v. 24): *Following its drinking, a path* (i.e., furrows) *appears* in the water.^[21] Rav Acha bar Yaakov said: Due to the vast amount of water that Leviathan has swallowed, the deep does not return to its original strength (i.e., its natural form) until after seventy years, as it says (*ibid.*): *He makes the deep seem like an old man* [לְשִׁיבָה], and the term "old man" refers to someone who is no less than seventy years old.^[22]

The Gemara quotes a statement of Rabbah bar bar Chanah in the name of R' Yochanan regarding the Leviathan:

Rabbah bar bar Chanah said in the name of R' Yochanan: In the Future to Come, the Holy One, Blessed is He, will make a meal for the righteous from the meat of the Leviathan, as it says regarding the Leviathan (*Iyov* 40:30): *Can friends make a feast of him* [יִכְרוּ עָלָיו]; *can they divide him among the merchants?*^[23]

The Gemara expounds on the translation of the verse:

Now, the word *keirah* [בִּירָה] must mean a meal,^[24] as it says (*II Melachim* 6:23): *So he prepared a large meal for them* [וַיִּכְרָה לָהֶם בִּירָה גְדוֹלָה], and they ate and drank.^[25] And the word *friends* [חֲבָרִים] used in the verse in *Iyov* must mean Torah scholars,^[26] as it says (*Shir HaShirim* 8:13):

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18. I.e., by exhaling vapor into the sea, the Leviathan causes the sea to froth, just as heating a kettle causes its water to froth (see *Maharsha*).

19. *Ben Yehoyada*; see there.

20. Due to Leviathan's high body temperature and strong breath, it emits a bad odor. The fragrance of Gan Eden neutralizes this odor (*Rashbam*).

21. Our translation of this verse follows *Rashbam* and *Rabbeinu Gershom*.

22. As can be seen from *Avos* 5:21, which states: כֵּן שְׁבַעִים לְשִׁיבָה, *At seventy, a person attains old age*.

23. According to its plain meaning, this verse is asking a rhetorical question: Can the Leviathan be caught in

order for his meat to be eaten or sold? (see *Ibn Ezra* to the verse). The Gemara, however, will interpret both halves of the verse as factual statements.

See above, §63 note 6, and Insight, "The Feasts of the Leviathan and the Behemoth," for a discussion regarding the nature of this "meal of the Leviathan's meat."

24. Both the noun בִּירָה and the verb יִכְרוּ derive from the root בִּירָה. If בִּירָה means a meal, יִכְרוּ must mean to make a meal.

25. The verse describes how, under the Prophet Elisha's instruction, the King of Israel, Yehoram ben Achav, fed an army of captured Aramean soldiers.

26. Torah scholars are called חֲבָרִים, *friends*, because

"הַיּוֹשֵׁבֵת בַּגָּנִים חֲבֵרִים מְקַשִּׁיבִים לְקוֹלָךְ הַשְּׁמִיעֵנִי". וְהַשָּׂאָר — חוֹלְקִין אוֹתוֹ, וְעוֹשִׂין בּוֹ סְחוּרָה [בְּשׁוּקֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם], שְׁנֵאֲמַר (איוב מ, ל) "יִחְצוּהוּ בֵּין בְּנֵעָנִים". וְאֵין "בְּנֵעָנִים" אֶלָּא תַּגְרִים, שְׁנֵאֲמַר (הושע יב, ח) "בְּנֵעַן בְּיָדוֹ מֵאֲזֵנֵי מִרְמָה לַעֲשׂוֹק אֶהְיֶה", וְאֵי בְּעִית אֵימָא מְהֵבָא: (ישעיה כג, ח) "אֲשֶׁר סוֹחֲרִיהָ שָׂרִים, בְּנֵעָנִיהָ נִכְבְּדִי אֶרֶץ".
וְאָמַר רַבָּה אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: עֲתִיד הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לַעֲשׂוֹת סוּכָה לַצַּדִּיקִים מֵעוּרָו שֶׁל לוֹיֹתָן, שְׁנֵאֲמַר (איוב מ, לא) "הִתְמַלֵּא בְּסִכּוֹת עוּרֹו",

You who dwell in the gardens, the friends [חֲבֵרִים] hearken to your voice; let Me hear it.^[27] The remaining meat of the Leviathan will be distributed among merchants, who will trade it in the markets of Yerushalayim,^[28] as it says regarding the Leviathan (*Iyov* ibid.): *Can they divide him among merchants* [בְּנֵעָנִים]?

The Gemara expounds on the translation of this last verse:

Now, the word *kana'anim* [בְּנֵעָנִים] used in this verse must mean merchants, as it says (*Hoshea* 12:8): *The kingdom of Israel is a merchant [בְּנֵעַן] with scales of deceit in his hand, who loves to cheat.*^[29] Or, if you prefer, say that the proof that it means a merchant is from the following verse [*Yeshayah* 23:8]: *Who devised this against Tyre the magnificent, whose traders were princes, and whose merchants [בְּנֵעָנִיהָ] were the elite of the land?*^[30] From both these verses, we see that בְּנֵעַן can mean a merchant.

The Gemara quotes a second statement of Rabbah bar bar Chanah in the name of R' Yochanan regarding the Leviathan:

וְאָמַר רַבָּה אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן וכו' — And Rabbah bar bar Chanah said further in the name of R' Yochanan: In the future, the Holy One, Blessed is He, will make a *succah*-shelter^[31] for the righteous ones out of the hide of the Leviathan,^[32] as it says (*Iyov* 40:31) that Hashem told *Iyov* regarding the Leviathan: *Can you fulfill your desire to make succos with its hide?*^[33] This implies that although *Iyov*

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theirs is a true friendship [based not on any ulterior motive but] purely for the sake of Heaven (*Maharsha*, from *Rambam Commentary*, *Demai* 2:3).

27. The "gardens" are houses of study, the "friends" are Torah scholars, and the "voice" is one of Torah and prayer. The verse is therefore expounded as follows: The Holy One, Blessed is He, says: "When you (the Torah scholars) sit in the houses of study and listen to each other, then I say 'Let Me hear your voice' — i.e., let Me hear your prayers, and I shall answer them" (*Shabbos* 63a).

Based on the Gemara's definitions of the words חֲבֵרִים and יְכָרִי, the verse in *Iyov* is to be understood as follows: In the Future to Come, the righteous (i.e., the Torah scholars) will feast on the flesh of the Leviathan.

28. [Due to its intrinsic holiness,] the meat of the Leviathan, like sacrificial meat, may be eaten only in Yerushalayim (see *Maharsha*).

The main portion of the meat of the Leviathan will be served to Torah scholars, but the merchants who supported Torah study will receive what is left over. The Torah scholar gives some of the reward for his Torah study to the patron who supported him (*Riaf*; see *Toras Chaim* quoted in *Anaf Yosef*).

The Gemara refers to those who gave limited support to a Torah scholar. Their reward will not be equal to that of the Torah scholar whom they supported. But

those who gave a Torah scholar all his needs (such as in the case of Yissachar and Zevulun) will receive a reward equal to that of the Torah scholar himself (*Toras Chaim* ibid. based on *Pesachim* 53b).

29. In the verse before, the Prophet Hoshea advises the people of the kingdom of Israel to observe kindness and justice. But instead of heeding that advice, the kingdom of Israel acts like a cheating merchant.

30. In the passage in which this verse appears, the Prophet Yeshayah foretells the downfall of the city of Tyre. In this verse, he asks who could have devised a plan to destroy such a thriving, distinguished city. The answer follows in the next verse (9): *HASHEM, Master of Legions, devised it ... to suppress all the elite of the land.*

31. Consisting of four walls and a roof (*Rashbam*). The Gemara is not referring to the booth used as a dwelling during the holiday of Succos (*Bikkurei Yaakov*, *Orach Chaim* 667:4; cf. *Maharsha* here).

32. The Gemara in *Avodah Zarah* 3b-4a says that in the Future Era, Hashem will remove the sun from its sheath and allow it to shine at full strength. The wicked, who will be exposed to this sun, will be burned from the intense heat. Our Gemara adds that Hashem will make a *succah*-shelter from the hide of the Leviathan in order to protect the righteous from the sun (*Riaf*).

33. *Rashi* to the verse.

זָכָה — עוֹשִׂין לוֹ סוּכָּה, לֹא זָכָה — עוֹשִׂין לוֹ צִלְצֹל, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שם) "וּבְצִלְצֹל דְּגִים רִאשׁוֹ". זָכָה — עוֹשִׂין לוֹ צִלְצֹל, לֹא זָכָה — עוֹשִׂין לוֹ עֵנָק, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי א, ט) "וְעֵנָקִים לְגִגְרוֹתֶיהָ". זָכָה — עוֹשִׂין לוֹ עֵנָק, לֹא זָכָה — עוֹשִׂין לוֹ קָמִיעַ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (איוב מ, כט) "וְתִקְשְׁרֵנוּ לְנִעְרוֹתֶיהָ". וְהִשָּׂאָר — פּוֹרְסוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל חוֹמוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, וְזִיוו (הוֹלֵךְ) [מִבְּהֵיקָן] מִסּוֹף הָעוֹלָם וְעַד סוּפוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ישעיה ס, ג) "וְהִלְכוּ גוֹיִם לְאוּרֵךְ וּמַלְכִּים לְנוֹגַהּ וְרַחֲךָ".

is unable to do so, Hashem will one day do so. If [the righteous person] is worthy, a *succah* will be made for him. If he is not worthy of this, a mere covering will be made for him.^[34] as it says in the continuation of the verse: *Can a covering of fish hide be made out of its head?*^[35] If he is sufficiently worthy of this, a covering will indeed be made for him, but if he is not worthy of even this, a necklace will be made for him, as it says (*Mishlei* 1:9): *For they are an adornment of grace for your head and a necklace for your neck.*^[36] If he is sufficiently worthy of this, a necklace will indeed be made for him, but if he is not worthy of even this, an amulet will be made for him, as it says regarding the Leviathan (*Iyov* 40:29): *Could you ... tie him to your maidens?*^[37] The Holy One, Blessed is He, will spread the remaining Leviathan hide upon the walls of Yerushalayim and its splendor will shine from one end of the world to the other. As it says (*Yeshayah* 60:3): *Nations will walk by your light* [לְאוּרֵךְ] *and kings by the brilliance of your shine.*^[38]

NOTES

34. A covering is merely a roof, as opposed to a *succah*, which consists of both a roof and four walls (*Rashbam*).

35. *Rashi* to the verse.

36. The verse refers to the words of the Torah. If a person heeds the words of the Torah, they will be an adornment for his head — that is, he will merit a covering in the World to Come. And if he is not quite worthy of this, the words of Torah will be a necklace around his neck. Regarding the connection of this verse to the Leviathan, see *Maharsha*.

37. Hashem asks Iyov whether he can tie the Leviathan around the necks of his maidens in the same way one ties an amulet around one's neck (*Maharshah*; see *Rashi* to the verse).

Thus, R' Yochanan teaches us that a Torah scholar will benefit from the Leviathan's hide in one of four ways, depending on his merit — determined by the purity of his intentions when learning Torah and

performing mitzvot (see *Maharsha*; cf. *Ben Yehoyada*).

In *Yalkut Shimoni* to *Iyov* 40:31, R' Levi teaches that in the Future Era, Hashem will reward those who fulfilled the mitzvah of *succah* in this world by seating them in the *succah* of the Leviathan's hide. Based on this, it is customary upon leaving the *succah* for the last time on the Festival to pray for the privilege of sitting in the *succah* made of the Leviathan's hide (*Rama, Orach Chaim* 667).

38. According to its plain meaning, the verse means that after the Mashiach comes, the nations, who are in spiritual darkness, will walk by the light of the Jewish people. The Gemara, however, expounds the word לְאוּרֵךְ, *by your light*, as if it were written לְעוֹרֵךְ, *by your hide* (*Maharsha*). [Thus, the prophet is talking to the Leviathan: *Nations will walk by the light of your hide and kings by the splendor of your shine.*]

See Insight C.

✎ **Insight C: The Lustrous Hide of the Leviathan** R' Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (*Pri Tzaddik, Chag HaSuccos* §11, *Parshas Toldos* §4, and *L'Erev Yom HaKippurim* §5) ties together our Gemara's description of the mighty Leviathan, his final defeat at the hands of the angel Gavriel, and the feast that will be procured for the righteous from his meat, and the shelter from its hide, whose splendor will shine from one end of the world to the other.

The Leviathan represents the evil inclination associated with physical desire, as alluded to in the Gemara's description (above, §63) that "fish are excessively driven [to mate]." Furthermore, the Leviathan is called a snake (*Yeshayah* 27:1; see above, §63) because it is a manifestation of the primordial serpent that enticed Adam and Chava to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, introducing illicit desire into the human psyche [see also above, Insight, "The Final Struggle," from *Yaaros Devash*].

The angel Gavriel, who arranges a hunt for the Leviathan in the Future Era, represents those who seek to subdue and conquer their passions. Although he must employ all of his strength and cunning in this hunt, he cannot succeed without Hashem's help, for only *His maker can direct His sword*. This parallels the Gemara's

{סח} וְשִׁמְתִי בְּכֶדֶד שְׁמֹשׁוֹתֶיךָ (ישעיה נד, יב). אָמַר רַבִּי שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָנִי: פְּלִיגִי (בִּיה תְּרִי אֲמֹרָאִי בַּמַּעֲרָבָא — יְהוּדָה וְחוּקִיָּה בְּנֵי שֶׁל רַבִּי חִיא, וְתִרִי מִלֵּאכִי בִּרְקִיעָא — מִיכָאֵל וְגַבְרִיאֵל) [תְּרִי מִלֵּאכִי בִּרְקִיעָא — גַּבְרִיאֵל וּמִיכָאֵל, וְאָמְרִי לֵה תְּרִי אֲמֹרָאִי בַּמַּעֲרָבָא, וּמֵאַן אֵינֻן? יְהוּדָה וְחוּקִיָּה]. חַד אָמַר: דְּשׁוּהֵם, וְחַד אָמַר: דְּיִשְׁפָּה. אָמַר לָהֶם הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: לָהּוּי בְּדִין וּבְדִין.

§65 The Gemara expounds on a prophetic description of Messianic times:

The verse states regarding the walls that will surround the city of Yerushalayim in the future (*Yeshayah* 54:12): *I will make your walls out of kadkhod* [כְּדָכֶד] *stone*. What is *kadkhod*? R' Shmuel bar Nachmani said: Two angels in heaven, Gavriel and Michael, have a dispute regarding which stone this means.^[1] And some say that the dispute was between two Amoraim in the West (i.e., in Eretz Yisrael). And who are they? Yehudah and Chizkiyah, the sons of R' Chiya.^[2] What is the dispute? One of them says that this refers to stones of *shoham*. And the other says it refers to stones of *yashfeh*. The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to them: Let it be both “like this one and like that one” [כְּדִין וְכְדִין];^[3] if you dispute what it means, then let the walls be built of both types of stone.^[4]

NOTES

1. R' Shmuel bar Nachmani knew what the angels disputed because Eilyahu HaNavi told him (*Tsafos*).

2. There are two readings in the Gemara here. In the *Bavli* (which we have followed), the dispute between the angels is presented before that of the Amoraim. In the original Ein Yaakov, that of the Amoraim is presented before that of the angels. Some commentators see the order or presentation as significant: Was it the angels who first disputed the matter, or was it the Amoraim? See below, note 4. [Although the *Bavli* reading has words וְאָמְרִי לֵה, and some say, which imply that only the angels or the Amoraim disputed the matter, but not

both, we have adopted the understanding of many commentators that both indeed disputed the matter.]

3. The word כְּדָכֶד is being expounded as an acronym for כְּדִין וְכְדִין, like this one and like that one (*Rashbam*; see *Tsafos* in the name of *Pesikta [Rabbasi]* on the verse]. See next note.

4. By using the word כְּדָכֶד in this verse, *Yeshayah* prophesied in effect that both sides of the Amoraic dispute that would take place centuries later were true: the walls of Yerushalayim would be built with both types of stones (*Rashbam*).

According to the reading that places the debate

teaching elsewhere (*Succah* 52b), that without Divine assistance, it would be impossible to overcome the evil inclination.

Although this inclination for desire and pleasure is dangerous and destructive, at its root it, too, serves a holy purpose, for *if not for the evil inclination, the joy of Torah study would not exist* (*Zohar*, Vol. 1, 138a). In the future, this inclination will be purified, and those righteous people who struggled to overcome it in this world will delight in the purified and rectified version of this inclination in the next, an enjoyment described as “the feast of the Leviathan.” One’s portion in this feast and the benefit that one derives from the Leviathan’s skin will be directly proportional to the effort that he exerted to overcome his physical desires in his lifetime. Thus, the first portions of meat will be distributed to Torah scholars, and those who exerted the most effort will be completely sheltered by the Leviathan’s skin, while those who exerted less effort will receive its shade without being encompassed by its walls. The remaining skin will surround the entire city of Yerushalayim because, at the end of days, the heart of every Jew will be purified, and it will be evident that every single one, in the depths of his heart, battled against the evil inclination. The skin of the Leviathan will become a source of light, its splendor shining from one end of the world to the other, because the evil inclination itself, when subdued and properly channeled, can be a great and lustrous source of light and sanctity.*

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* R' Samson Raphael Hirsch (Collected Writings, Vol. 2, pp. 120ff) — “The *succah* of Leviathan” is the unification of all human society (see Insight above on §63, “The Rise and Fall of the Leviathans”) under the sole protection of Hashem.

NOTES

between the sons of R' Chiya before that of the angels (see above, note 2), we can say that the Amoraim indeed debated the matter first, and only afterward did the angels in Heaven debate the matter as well (*Ben Yehoyada*). Moreover, whatever Torah a sage expounds in this world was already expounded by his soul when

it was created in Heaven, long before it was born and placed on this earth (based on *Menachos* 29b). Thus, the Torah dispute of these Amoraim indeed preceded that of the angels, whose place in Heaven is preceded by that of the righteous souls (*Benayahu*). See Insight A.

Ritva (cited in *HaKoseiv*), however, explains that

❧ **Insight A: A Dispute of Men and Angels** Others adopt a similar approach. *Imrei HaTzvi* (Vol. 1, *Bava Kama* §19) cites *R' Zalman of Volozhin*, who explained that the fiery Torah words of the sons of R' Chiya created a great stir in the higher realms, to the point that their argument inspired a corresponding dispute between the heavenly angels themselves!

This approach takes on even greater significance if we understand the natures of R' Chiya's sons and the root of their disagreement. To begin with the latter: Ultimately, what difference does it make exactly which precious stone will serve as the wall (see Gemara below) surrounding Yerushalayim? The *Baal HaTanya* in *Likkutei Torah* (*Re'eh* 25b) explains that there are two ways in which the future Yerushalayim can become exalted, and these are represented by Yosef and Binyamin, whose stones on the *Choshen*, the Breastplate of the Kohen Gadol, were (according to several sources) *shoham* and *yashfeh*, respectively (see *Targum Yonasan* on *Shemos* 28:20; *Yerushalmi Pe'ah* 5b [3a]). Yosef represents the Attribute of *Chesed*, expansion and outreach, through which the Divine light shines into the world. On this level, Hashem will illuminate, so to speak, the future Yerushalayim, regardless of its own inherent level. Binyamin, however, represents the Attribute of *Gevurah*, judgment and focus. This *middah* will require Yerushalayim to raise itself up to the point that it is, itself, a fitting vessel for the Divine light. Hashem declared that both will come true: Yerushalayim will itself be uplifted, as well as receiving a flow of Divine light beyond its inherent level. [See also *Shem MiShmuel*, *Parashas Re'eh* בַּחֲפִטְרָה ד'ו' בַּחֲפִטְרָה ד'ו'.]

R' Yosef Engel (*Kuntres Shev D'Nechemasah* §1) elaborates on this theme, citing a Gemara in *Bava Metzia* (85b) that compares R' Chiya and his two sons to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. *R' Yosef Engel* posits that Yehudah and Chizkiyah corresponded to Avraham and Yitzchak, respectively, who themselves represent the Attributes of *Chesed* and *Gevurah*. This is why the views of R' Chiya's sons correspond to those of the angels of Michael and Gavriel, who are the angels of *Chesed* and *Gevurah* respectively. The exposition of the sons of R' Chiya linked to their souls' supernal sources, and elicited a response from the angels through whom these two Attributes interact with the world! [See also *Megaleh Amukos* (*Ofen* 238).]*

Nit'ei Eisan (*Derush Daas Hashem*) suggests a different approach. The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 32 §5) teaches that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt on account of their keeping their Jewish names, their Jewish language, refraining from immorality and refraining from talebearing. He explains that the first three represent their adamant refusal to become assimilated into Egyptian society, while the last one indicates the strong bonds that united the Jewish people with each other. Now, Yosef excelled in remaining separate from the nations; despite being cast into slavery among the immoral Egyptians, he retained his identity and purity. Binyamin shone in refraining from gossip and division, as the Gemara (*Megillah* 13b) relates regarding his descendants, Shaul and Esther, who were lauded for guarding their tongues. [*Ginas Chemed* (*Derush* 22), in making the same point, highlights Binyamin's own brotherly love in naming all his children in honor of the brother from whom he was separated – see *Sotah* 36b.] While both of these positive traits were present in the Jews who were redeemed from Egypt, the sons of R' Chiya – and the Heavenly angels – debated which is the primary trait necessary for us to be redeemed from our present exile. Hashem declared that His beloved chosen nation will be *kedein u'chedein* – they will excel both in retaining their national identity and purity apart from the nations, as well as in their internal unity and love for one another. It is from both that the walls of Yerushalayim of the Future will be built.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Maharal* (*Netzach Yisrael*, Ch. 51; *Chiddushei Aggados*) – The walls of a city define its essence. In the future, Yerushalayim, as a Heavenly city, will be surrounded by a wall made of precious stone, whose radiance represents the loftiest of all spiritual traits. Michael, as the angel of *chesed* (kindliness), argues that the wall should be made of *shoham*, the stone whose radiance represents that trait. On the other hand, Gavriel, the angel of *din* (strict justice), maintains that the wall should be made of *yashfeh*, the stone that represents *din*. Hashem declared that the wall will, in fact, be made of both stones, as Yerushalayim will be a city that encompasses both of these traits.

For additional explanations of this dispute, see *Meshech Chochmah* on *Shemos* 28:9, and *Maharam Shick al HaTorah* on *Haftaras Parashas Re'eh* ד"ה ושמתי כדכד ד"ה.

(שם) "וּשְׁעֵרֶיךָ לְאַבְנֵי אֶקְדָּח", כִּי הָא דִּיתִיב רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן וְקָא דְרִישׁ: עֲתִיד הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְהַבִּיא אֲבָנִים טוֹבוֹת וּמִרְגְּלִיּוֹת שֶׁהֵן שְׁלֹשִׁים עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים, וְחֻקֵּק בָּהֶן עֶשֶׂר (בְּרוּם) [עַל] עֶשְׂרִים, וּמַעֲמִידֵם בְּשַׁעְרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם. לְגַלְגַּל עֲלֵיו אוֹתוֹ תִּלְמִיד — הִשְׁתָּא בְּבִיעָתָא (דְּצִלְצֵלָתָא) [דְּצִיּוּצֵלָא] לֹא מִשְׁבְּחִינָן, כּוּלִי הָאִי מִשְׁבְּחִינָן? לְיָמִים הַפְּלִיגָה סְפִינָתוֹ בָּיָם, חֲזָא מִלְּאכֵי הַשָּׁרָת (דְּקָא) [דִּיתְבֵּי וְקָא] מְנַסְרֵי אֲבָנִים טוֹבוֹת וּמִרְגְּלִיּוֹת, שֶׁהֵם שְׁלֹשִׁים עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים, וְחֻקֵּק בָּהֶם עֶשֶׂר בְּרוּם עֶשְׂרִים. אָמַר לְהוּ: הֲנִי לְמָאִי? אָמְרוּ לֵיהּ: שְׁעֵתִיד הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְהַעֲמִידֵן בְּשַׁעְרֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

The Gemara proceeds to expound the next clause of the prophetic description:

וּשְׁעֵרֶיךָ לְאַבְנֵי אֶקְדָּח וכו' — The verse continues: *and I will make your gates from stones of ekdach* [אֶקְדָּח]. According to the simple meaning of the verse, the word *ekdach* refers to a type of stone.^[5] The Gemara, however, now expounds this word to mean *hewn* [from the root קדח, *to cut through*]. The meaning of this verse is like that explanation which R' Yochanan once sat and expounded: In the future, the Holy One, Blessed is He, will bring precious stones and pearls that are thirty *amos* by thirty *amos* in size, and He will cut out of them an opening of ten *amos* by twenty *amos*, and He will place them at the gates of Yerushalayim.^[6] A certain student mocked him: "Nowadays we do not find such precious stones and pearls that are even the size of an egg of a small dove!"^[7] Will such incredibly large stones that you describe ever be found?!" Sometime later, [the student's] ship went far out to sea,^[8] and he saw ministering angels sitting and sawing precious stones and pearls that were thirty *amos* by thirty *amos*, and an opening of ten *amos* by twenty *amos* was cut out of them. [The student] said to [the angels], "What are these for?" They told him, "They are the stones that the Holy One, Blessed is He, will one day place them at the gates of Yerushalayim."^[9]

NOTES

when the prophetic vision came to Yeshayah, the angels disputed which stone would be used for the walls of Yerushalayim and Hashem said, "Let it be like this one and like that one." Yeshayah conveyed this in his prophetic message with the word כְּכֹדֶךָ, which means: "like this one and like that one." Centuries later, the two sons of R' Chiya debated the identity of the stones hinted at in the prophecy.

5. *Rashbam* translates it as carbuncle, a red stone. The word אֶקְדָּח also derives from the root קדח, *burn*, to suggest that the stones are the color of burning coals. Indeed, *Targum Yonasan* calls them גִּמְרָא אֲבָנֵי, *stones like [burning] coals*.

6. That is, the precious stones will be so massive that the whole entrance — the lintel, side posts, and threshold — will be hewn out of a single stone (*Rashi* on the verse). See *Maharsha* here for how R' Yochanan derives these dimensions from the words of the verse, which is cited

more fully in the parallel Gemara in *Sanhedrin* 100a.

7. [The translation *small dove* follows *Aruch* צִלְצֵלָא and ד"ה דִּי צִיּוּפִי.]

8. According to *Ritva* (cited in *HaKoseiv*), the student did not actually witness the above, but saw it in a dream, or in the deep contemplation he engaged in until he fully understood the matter. *Benayahu* (here) wonders, though, why the Gemara would emphasize that this happened at sea. He suggests that the student had this dream *because* he was at sea. On the high seas, a person witnesses wonders of the natural world, such as enormous waves and wondrous sea creatures, so uncommon to his experience that they boggle the mind (see *Tehillim* 107:24). With the sights he had seen that day still whirling in his mind, the student dreamed that night of other wondrous phenomena, namely the precious stones of unimaginable size.

9. See Insight B.

🔗 Insight B: Precious Stones, Precious Deeds R' Yochanan's student saw angels shaping enormous stones and pearls for the gates of Yerushalayim. The student witnessed what was happening, not what *would* happen. Evidently, even at that time in history, a time of great persecution and suffering, a time that would be followed by many, many more centuries of persecution and suffering, Yerushalayim's rebuilding was already underway.

Kli Yakar (on *Bereishis* 4:17) deduces from this incident that the rebuilding of Yerushalayim will not happen

אַתָּא לִקְמִיָּה דְּרַבִּי יוֹחָנָן, אָמַר לִיה: דְּרוּשׁ רַבִּי, וּלָךְ נָאָה לְדְרוּשׁ, בְּאָשֶׁר
אָמַרְתָּ בֵּן רֵאִיתִי. אָמַר לוֹ: רִיקָא, אֲלִמְלָא לֹא רֵאִיתָ — לֹא הָאֲמַנְתָּ?
מִלְגָּלַג עַל דְּבָרֵי חֻכְמִים אַתָּה! נָתַן עֵינָיו בּוֹ, וְנִעְשָׂה גַל שֶׁל עֲצָמוֹת.

[The student] returned and came back in front of R' Yochanan and said to him, "My master! Continue to lecture, and for you it is proper to lecture. Just as you said regarding the large stones, so I saw with my own eyes!" [R' Yochanan] said to him, "Empty one! Had you not seen it yourself would you not have believed it? You are one who mocks the words of the Sages."^[10] [R' Yochanan] set his eyes upon him and he became a heap of bones, because whoever transgresses or mocks the words of the Sages is liable to death at the hands of Heaven for breaching their authority.^[11]

NOTES

10. There is no objection to accepting the words of the Sages and then attempting to confirm them through reason or experimentation. This student's sin was that he refused to accept their words unless they were proven to him by his own senses (*Tosafos, Chullin* 57b ד"ה איזיל and *Maharsha* there מאי ד"ה). See further in Insight below, "Questioning the Words of the Sages."

Ran (*Derashos HaRan, Derush* 5b, pp. 535ff [ArtScroll ed.]) proves from our Gemara that "just as we are commanded to follow after [the Sages'] conclusions in the laws of the Torah, so, too, are we commanded [to accept] everything that they say to us based on tradition in the

realm of ethics and derivations of Scripture." [See notes 254-255 there.]

11. See *Eruvin* 21b. See Insight C.

"He became a heap of bones" means that his flesh became decomposed and only his bones were left, like the body of a person who died long ago (*Rashi to Shabbos* 34a). The student of our story was wicked. The Gemara (*Berachos* 18b) teaches that the wicked are regarded as dead even during their lifetime. Thus, the student had essentially died long ago. To demonstrate this, he became a heap of bones (*Maharsha*; cf. *Or HaChaim* to *Shemos* 11:5).*

all at once; it is rather an ongoing process, one which has already begun. Hence, we recite each day the blessings that conclude: *blessed are You, Hashem, Who "builds" Yerushalayim* (*Shemoneh Esrei* and *Bircas HaMazon*), based on the verse: *HASHEM "builds" Yerushalayim* (*Tehillim* 147:2). Who "builds" — in the present tense. The process began long ago, and it continues.

Arvei Nachal (*Nitzavim, Derush* §8), citing *Alshich* (*Maros HaTzovos* on *Yeshayah* 62:6), explains that the building of Yerushalayim, or more specifically, the Beis HaMikdash, is ongoing because the supply of building materials is delivered continually, in the form of Torah study and good deeds done by the Jewish people. Every mitzvah adds another piece to this holy edifice, and it will materialize here on earth when the building is complete. Although the largest stones are provided by a few especially righteous people, everyone can contribute a brick or stone to this ongoing project. Everyone can bring it closer to completion.

R' Naftali Tzvi of Ropshitz (*Zera Kodesh, Ki Seitzei* כ"ה כי תבנה) sees an allusion to this concept in different words recited daily in the *Shemoneh Esrei* — וְבִנְהָ אֶתְּךָ בְּקֶרֶב בְּיָמֵינוּ, usually translated: *may You rebuild it [Yerushalayim] soon "in" our days*. [Similarly, in *Bircas HaMazon*: וְבִנְהָ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ, *Build Yerushalayim, the holy city, speedily "in" our days*.] But the word בְּיָמֵינוּ can also mean "with" our days. Help us, O God, to use our days to serve You with Torah and mitzvos, so that Yerushalayim will be built with our days, with the precious bricks and stones that our Torah and good deeds will create, which You will place one atop the other until the walls of Yerushalayim and the holy city itself are completely rebuilt — speedily in our days.

Perhaps, observes *R' Michel Zilber* (*BaYam Derech*, Vol. 5 §108), we can use this idea to explain the student's skepticism. Surely, he did not doubt that the Creator of the world could produce such stones! Rather, what was lacking in the student was the belief that our deeds could be powerful enough to bring forth such a magnificent building on so monumental a scale. But he was wrong; terribly wrong. Not only must we believe the words of our Sages, we must also believe that our actions, our Torah and good deeds, can have an enormous impact, and together we can help bring the building of Yerushalayim to its glorious completion.

☞ Insight C: Questioning the Words of the Sages Many commentators point to several other places in the

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

* *Tiferes Shlomo* (*Vayishlach* 32:9 ד"ה אַךְ הֵנָּה) — A wicked person remains alive only because of the spark of

Gemara where someone is described as having expressed incredulity with a teaching of a Sage until he actually saw it with his own eyes, or even as having “mocked” the words of the Sage, without eliciting the severe reaction we find here, where R’ Yochanan reduced the student to a heap of bones. R’ Yosef Engel (*Gilyonei HaShas* here) points to the Gemara above on 73b [§52], where Rabbah bar bar Chanah told of a fantastic occurrence, about which Rav Pappa remarked that, “Had I not been there, I would not have believed [it]!”* And in *Shabbos* 30b [§18] we find that Rabban Gamliel presented three teachings about astonishing things that would happen in the Future Era, and with regard to each one a student “mocked” and said that it cannot be true, for *there is nothing new under the sun* (*Koheles* 1:9). And in each instance, Rabban Gamliel responded only by saying, “Come, I will show you a parallel in this world.”

Ben Yehoyada (to *Shabbos* ad loc., also cited by him in *Benayahu* here) answers that R’ Yochanan’s severe reaction was elicited primarily because the student *mocked* rather than simply objected, as the Gemara relates, and as R’ Yochanan declared, “You are one who mocks the words of the Sages.” Although the Gemara in *Shabbos*, too, relates that the student “mocked,” there it says that “he mocked” and “*he said*” — i.e., he mocked *in his heart*, but what he *said* was not said in a mocking tone. Here, however, the Gemara does not add the critical word *אמר*, *he said*, but only that “he mocked” — i.e., he responded in a mocking tone; and that is why R’ Yochanan reacted so severely.**

Here in *Benayahu*, however, he suggests an additional answer. Even though Rabban Gamliel’s three teachings were said on the basis of tradition, the student objected that the tradition contradicted an explicit verse. And when such a conflict exists, we must accept the verse and regard the tradition as having been corrupted. In our Gemara, however, the student did not reject R’ Yochanan’s teaching on the basis of a verse or a Mishnaic teaching, but on the basis of his own intellect, which found the teaching to be unreasonable because what was taught did not comport with the realm of his experience. Moreover, the stones of which R’ Yochanan spoke were not necessarily stones that exist in our world, but stones that Hashem created and reserves for Yerushalayim of the future. How could the student reject a tradition of the Sages because his own reason differed?! This was nothing but a rejection of the Oral tradition of Torah. And just as he denied this teaching, he could deny every other teaching of the Oral Torah. The student was an “Empty one” — one who was bereft of the entire Torah tradition. And R’ Yochanan responded as befits responding to such a denier.***

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

holiness that he has inside of him. A *tzaddik* has the ability to gaze at a wicked person and extract that holy spark, causing him to die instantly.

Kehillos Yaakov (*Bava Kamma* 45:4) — [Alternatively,] R’ Yochanan did not actively bring about the student’s death. Rather, [his gaze indicated that] he ruled that the student was deserving of death at the hands of Heaven. In Heaven, they assented to R’ Yochanan’s ruling, and the death sentence was carried out.

* *R’ David ben Moshe of Vilna* (*Metzudas David* here) — Above, Rabbah bar bar Chanah was reporting what he saw; the student’s rejection of that report is not a denial of Torah. Here, R’ Yochanan was reporting a Torah tradition he had received; the student’s denial constituted a denial of the Oral Torah.

** *Bnei Yissaschar* (*Maamarei Chodesh Sivan* §19) — It must be that R’ Yochanan was not aware of the student’s original mocking, for if he had been aware, he would have punished the student then and there. See similarly in *Rashash* to *Sanhedrin* 100a.

R’ Chaim Shmulevitz (*Sichos Mussar* §52) — R’ Yochanan did not punish the student immediately, because at that point the student was simply not able to imagine the reality of what R’ Yochanan had taught. R’ Yochanan punished him only after the student saw and was able to perceive that reality, but *still* accepted it only because he had seen it and not because his teacher had taught it.

*** *R’ Yerucham Levovitz* (*Daas Torah* on *Parashas Noach* [pg. 52]) — Our belief in the words of the Sages must be as real as if we had seen it with our own eyes. This student’s failure to do so was a “mockery” of the words of the Sages.

R’ Meir Tzvi Bergman (*Shaarei Orah*, Vol. 1, *Parashas Noach* [pp. 11-12]) — R’ Yochanan was not at all impressed or encouraged by the fact that the student had miraculously witnessed what R’ Yochanan had taught, so certain was R’ Yochanan of the truth of his exposition of the verse. To place a greater faith on the evidence of one’s senses constitutes “mockery of the words of the Sages.”

R’ Yechezkel Abramsky (*Peninei Rabbeinu Yechezkel*, Vol. 2, pp. 37-40, adapted at length in the *Insight to Ein Yaakov*, *Gittin* §20, “Nothing But the Truth”) — It is not enough to bow our heads in submission to what the Torah says; we must realize that it alone is the arbiter of truth.

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