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DAF KESHER

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DVAR TORAH WHEN LOW, REACH HIGH

After Aharon passed away, the Torah tells us, the king of Arad went to war against Israel and took a captive. Israel reacted by taking an oath: If they'd win the war they vowed to donate all of the spoils of battle to Hashem. What inspired Israel to take this oath? We do not find any open parallel in any of Israel's other wars – except for in this week's Haftarah where Yiftach takes an oath that if victorious in battle he will offer a sacrifice. Once again – why the oath?

The author of the Shem Mishmuel (Harav Shmuel Bornshtein, דצ"ל, 1855-1926, Poland), suggests the following (Shem Mishmuel on Parshat Chukat 5675): At that point in time the People of Israel were in an extremely difficult position. Aharon had just passed away, and the protective Clouds of Glory that accompanied Israel in his merit had not yet returned. A hostile nation (Midrash Tanchuma cites proofs identifying it with Amalek) took advantage of their weakness and attacked. Israel lost the battle and a captive was taken. Israel was without its beloved leader Aharon, and left without Divine protection in war. Something was terribly wrong, for they lost a war even though the People was led by Moshe Rabbeinu, the same Moshe who Hashem sent to destroy Egypt at the Yam Suf and who sent Yehoshua to wage war against Amalek (and who would later bring down the great kings Sichon and Og). The People were broken hearted and extremely depressed.

The Nation's reaction, says the Shem Mishmuel, was to overcome their low position by reaching extremely high. The mystical literature teaches us that an oath opens up high levels. The word for oath is נדר, which can be read as an acronym for נד"ך – it dwells in the fiftieth (highest) level. The Midrash (Breishit Rabbah 70:2) notes that even though all of Israel took the oath, the verse uses the singular verb in the expression “וידר ישראל – Israel took an oath” (Bamidbar 21:2). Says the Midrash: וידר ישראל refers to “Yisrael the ancestor, ישראל סבא,” who also took an oath at a low point in his life, leaving the Land of Israel and his parents' home, pursued by his brother Esav. Similarly, after Aharon's death and the loss in the war, the People of Israel reached high towards the level associated with Yaakov Avinu, Yisrael Saba.

“This teaches us,” said the Shem Mishmuel, “that if a person feels that his situation is low he should do the opposite and grasp specifically at a level that is higher than his with added strength and energy.”

This is expressed, says the Shem Mishmuel, by what the author of the Chidushei Harim (Harav Yitzchak Meir דצ"ל, the first Gerrer Rebbe, 1798–1866) would say (in Yiddish): “העולם אומרים אז מ'קען נישט אריבער מוז מען העולם אומרים אז מ'קען נישט אריבער מוז מען אריבער – ארונטער ואני אומר להיפוך אז מ'קען נישט ארונטער מוז מען אריבער – People say that if you can't go over, you have to go under. I say the opposite, if you can't go under, you have to go over.”

Moshe and Israel's strategy of dealing with a low position was to catapult out of the depths by reaching for a level higher than their own.

SOURCE GUIDE: PEACE IS NOT OF THIS WORLD

Moshe's overtures of peace towards King Sichon are the opening point of an essay about peace by the author of the Sfat Emet. His essay, that forms the basis of this source guide, deals with why peace is so elusive in our world and how it still can be attained.

A. Moshe's Message to Sichon

Moshe sent messengers to Sichon requesting that Israel peacefully pass through his land:

<p>1. Bamidbar 21:21-22 (21) Israel (see Rashi, who points out that "Israel" here must refer to Moshe) sent messengers to Sichon the king of the Emorites, saying: (22) I will pass through your land. We will not stray into a field or vineyard; we will not drink the water of a well. We will go on the king's road (the main highway) until we pass your border.</p>	<p>במדבר כא:כא-כב (כא) וישלח ישראל מלאכים אל סיחון מלך האמורי לאמר: (כב) אעברה בארצך לא נטשה בשדה ובכרם לא נשתה מי באר בדרך המלך גלף עד אשר נעבר גבלך.</p>
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Sichon did not take up the offer, leading to his own death and the destruction of his entire nation:

<p>2. Bamidbar 21:23 Sichon did not allow Israel to pass through its border. And Sichon gathered his entire nation and went out to meet Israel in the desert. They came to Yahatz and waged war against Israel.</p>	<p>במדבר כא:כג ולא נתן סיחון את ישראל עבר בגבלו ויאסף סיחון את כל עמו ויצא לקראת ישראל המדברה ויבא יהצה וילחם בישראל.</p>
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B. Pursuing Peace

The Midrash praises Moshe's peace mission to Sichon:

<p>3. Bamidbar Rabbah 19:27 "Israel sent messengers" – This is what the verse refers to when it says, "Trust in Hashem and do good, dwell in the land and 'graze on' trust" (Tehillim 37:3). And it says, "Veer from evil and do good, seek out peace and pursue it" (Tehillim 34:15). The Torah was not particular about requiring us to pursue the mitzvot. Rather [we are obligated when we encounter them]: "When you chance upon a bird's nest" (Devarim 22:6), "When you encounter" (Devarim 23:3), "When you see a donkey" (Devarim 23:4), "When you harvest your olives" (Devarim 24:20), "When you harvest your vineyard" (Devarim 24:21), "When you enter your friend's vineyard" (Devarim 23:25). If it comes into your hands you are commanded to do them – but [you are] not [commanded] to pursue them. But as for peace – "Seek out peace" – in your own place "and pursue it" in another place. Thus did Israel. Even though the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, "Begin to inherit it and create friction with them leading to war" (Devarim 2:24). Pursue peace – "Israel sent messengers to Sichon ... We will pass through" (Bamidbar 21:21)</p>	<p>במדבר רבה יט:כז "וישלח ישראל מלאכים" – זה שאמר הכתוב: "בטח בה' ועשה טוב שכן ארץ ורעה אמונה" (תהלים לו:ג). ואומר: "סור מרע ועשה טוב בקש שלום ורדפהו" (תהלים לד:טו). ולא הקפידה התורה לרדוף אחר המצות אלא: "כי יקרא קן צפור" (דברים כב:ו), "כי תפגע" (דברים כג:ג), "כי תראה חמור" (דברים כג:ד), "כי תחבוט זיתך" (דברים כד:כ), "כי תבצור כרמך" (דברים כד:כא), "כי תבא בכרם רעידך" (דברים כג:כה). אם באו לידך את מצווה עליהם ולא לרדוף אחריהם. אבל השלום – "בקש שלום" במקומך "ורדפהו" במקום אחר. וכן עשו ישראל. אע"פ שאמר להם הקדוש ב"ה "החל רש והתגר בו מלחמה" (דברים כ:כד), רדפו את השלום – "וישלח ישראל מלאכים אל סיחון נעברה נא" (במדבר כא:כא).</p>
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Why did Moshe send them a message of peace if Hashem told them that they will go to war? Rashi (on Devarim 2:26) answers that Moshe learned from Hashem – either a) from Hashem offering the Torah to the nations of the world; or b) from Hashem warning Pharaoh and the Egyptians many times even though He could have destroyed them instantaneously.

C. Peace and the Creation of Man

Why must peace be pursued? The author of the Sfat Emet answers by citing the following Midrash:

<p>5. Bereishit Rabbah 8:5 Said Rabbi Simon: When the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to create the First Man, the angels divided up into different factions, different groups. There were those who said that He should not create him and others who said that He should create him. This is referred to in the following verse: "Lovingkindness and truth met (the root פגש can indicate war, as in II Shmuel 2:4); righteousness and peace met (the root נשק is sometimes associated with war, as in II Melachim 10:2)" (Tehillim 85:11). Lovingkindness said He should create him, for he does acts of lovingkindness; truth said He should not, for he is full of lies. Righteousness said He should create, for he does tzedakah; peace said He should not, because he is totally quarrelsome. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He took truth and cast him down to earth – as the verse says: "He cast truth to the earth" (Daniel 8:12) ...</p>	<p>בראשית רבה ח:ה א"ר סימון בשעה שבא הקב"ה לבראות את אדם הראשון נעשו מלאכי השרת כיתים כיתים וחבורות חבורות מהם אומרים אל יברא ומהם אומרים יברא. הה"ד "חסד ואמת נפגשו צדק ושלוה נשקו" (תהלים פה:יא). חסד אומר יברא שהוא גומל חסדים, ואמת אומר אל יברא שכולו שקרים. צדק אומר יברא שהוא עושה צדקות, שלום אומר אל יברא דכוליה קטטה. מה עשה הקב"ה? נטל אמת והשליכו לארץ – הה"ד "ותשלך אמת ארצה" (דניאל ח:יב) ...</p>
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Peace is not of this world. Man in this world, this Midrash implies, is naturally quarrelsome and contentious, so Peace objected to his creation. Peace comes only from Above and therefore must be pursued. Israel pursued peace and received it as a Divine blessing:

<p>6. Tehillim 29:11 ... Hashem blesses His Nation with peace.</p>	<p>תהילים כט:יא ... ה' יברך את עמו בשלום.</p>
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Peace typifies Israel. We are called the Shulamit (see Shir Hashirim Rabbah 7:1):

<p>7. Shir Hashirim 7:1 Return, return, the Shulamit ...</p>	<p>שיר השירים ז:א שובי שובי השולמית ...</p>
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David Hamelech says this about us in Tehillim:

<p>8. Tehillim 120:7 I am peace; and as I speak they are to war.</p>	<p>תהילים קכ:ז אני שלום וכי אדבר הפה למלחמה.</p>
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D. Peace and Truth, Moshe and Aharon

Moshe and Aharon, says the Sfat Emet, each brought Israel one of the two other-worldly traits: peace and truth. Aharon the Kohen brought peace to Israel:

<p>9. Avot 1:12 Hillel says: Be of the disciples of Aharon. Love peace and pursue peace; love people and bring them close to Torah.</p>	<p>אבות א:יב הלל אומר, הוי מתלמידי של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הקריות ומקרבן לתורה.</p>
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Moshe was the man of truth who brought the truth of Torah to Israel. The Midrash describes the encounter of Moshe and Aharon as the encounter of truth and lovingkindness, of righteousness and peace:

<p>10. Shmot Rabbah 5:10 "He (Aharon) went and met him (Moshe)" (Shemot 4:27) – This is referred to in the verse: "Lovingkindness and truth met; righteousness and peace kissed" (Tehillim 85:11) ... "Truth" refers to Moshe ... "Peace" refers to Aharon ...</p>	<p>שמות רבה ה:י "וילך ויפגשו" – הה"ד "חסד ואמת נפגשו צדק ושלוה נשקו" (תהלים פה:יא) ... "ואמת" זה משה ... "ושלוה" זה אהרן ...</p>
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Unfortunately, the Sfat Emet concludes, Sichon missed a great opportunity. At that moment, because Israel was blessed with peace, the nations of the world could have come close to Israel. Sichon missed that opportunity – but it will be open to the nations in the end of days – במהרה בימינו.

LIFE AND DEATH BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

A person dies and the consequences are dire. The corpse becomes אבי אבות הטומאה - the most severe state of spiritual impurity that exists. But, why? What happened? Isn't death natural? Doesn't everything and everyone die sooner or later? Why the extreme reaction?

The answer is: No, death is not natural. Body and soul were meant to be forever united. However, Adam Harishon sinned, and death was decreed upon him and his descendants. With death, the body is emptied of its connection to the Source of Life. Its spiritual state of tumah reflects the magnitude of that loss.

Enter the purification process of the Parah Adumah, the Red Heifer. We are commanded to burn its carcass into ash and then mix that ash with מים חיים - water from a living spring. Harav Moshe Shapiro זצ"ל points out that the Hebrew word for ash is "אפר", and yet the Torah (Bamidbar 19:17) refers to this ash as "עפר" - which really means "dirt", as in the earth from which plants grow. (True, all the translations I have at home translate this עפר as "ash", but they ignore the nuances.)

אפר and עפר are polar opposites. Ash symbolizes the extinction of life. From ash nothing can grow, whereas dirt is the source from which all life sprouts. Ash cannot be mixed with water to create new vessels whereas earth can be mixed with water to create pottery. The transformation from ash to earth, from dead matter to life potential, via the admixture of מים חיים is a cardinal point of the Parah Adumah purification process.

Rashi on pasuk 22 in the name of Rebbe Moshe HaDarshan explains that the Parah Adumah is burnt as an atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf; let the "mother cow" come and clean up the mess her "baby calf" made.

The Parah Adumah is a paradigm for the way we relate to our sins and the mechanics of Teshuvah. When we sin we are actually experiencing a minor form of death as we erect a barrier between our spiritual and physical selves. This condition tends to demoralize us, and can send us down the slippery slope of עבירה עבירה, one sin leading to another. We may feel helpless, bereft of the life force so necessary to wrench us off the downward spiral and back to our lives as they were pre-sin, full of spiritual vigor and vitality. We feel like lifeless ash.

The antidote is to mix that ash with the living waters of Torah. We cannot understand how it works, but the Torah teaches us what happens - yes, from the lifeless ash will emerge vibrant life-giving earth, as we become reconnected to the Source of All Life.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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DBS - Hataklitor Hatorani, Otzar Hachochmah, the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, and Hebrewbooks.org.

We pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.