YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Ein Yaakov- The World of Talmudic Aggada**

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**Lecture 39: Daf 12a-13a**

**True *Brit***

The Gemara now presents a series of statements of Raba b. Chinena the elder in the name of Rav. The first of these deals with the requirement to say the proper blessing following the *Shema:*

Raba b. Chinena the elder said in the name of Rav:

If one omits to say

‘True and firm' in the morning and

'True and trustworthy' in the evening,

he has not performed his obligation;

for it is said,

‘To declare Thy lovingkindness in the morning

and Thy faithfulness in the night’ (*Tehillim* 92:3).

The form of the blessing following the *Shema* differs in the morning and in the evening. The morning blessing opens with the words, “True and firm” (*Emet ve-yatziv),* while the evening version opens with the phrase, “True and trustworthy” (*Emet ve-emuna*).

For us, the crucial question is: what is the role of the verse from *Tehillim* that is cited following this teaching? The first thing we notice is that the phrase, “Thy faithfulness (*emunatcha*) in the night” refers to the blessing “True and trustworthy” (*Emet* ***ve-emuna***) recited at night. If so, we would expect to find some connection between the first half of the phrase, “To declare Thy lovingkindness (*chasdekha*) in the morning,” and the morning blessing of ‘True and firm.' However, this blessing does not contain the word *chesed* at all.

Rashi argues that the connection between the blessings and the verse is thematic rather than linguistic, asserting that the theme of the morning blessing is *chesed*, “kindness,” while the theme of the evening blessing is *emuna,* “faithfulness.” This argument seems somewhat forced. Benovitz, therefore, suggests that the attendant verse is just meant to teach us the need to recite the blessing after the *Shema*, but not to fix the exact wording of that blessing. This suggestion is also problematic. Is it merely coincidental that the verse refers to God’s *emuna* in the evenings just like the evening blessing?

I would suggest that this passage can be best understood in light of another fact that Benovitz notes. In the land of Israel, there were not two different blessings for the morning and the night. Rather, they said “True and firm” (*Emet ve-yatziv)* both morning and night. Saying “True and trustworthy” (*Emet ve-emuna*) was a Babylonian innovation. Raba b. Chinena does not need to bring a proof for saying *Emet ve-yatziv* in the morning, since this was the established practice. He only needs to bring a verse that supports saying *Emet ve-emuna* at night. As such, he cites the verse from *Tehillim* which clearly connects praising God’s *emuna* with the nighttime. This verse may have inspired the authors of this blessing to use the phrase *emuna* in their nighttime prayer.

**To Pray Like a Snake**

The next statement deals with the proper way to bow down in prayer:

Raba b. Chinena the elder also said in the name of Rav:

In saying the *Tefilla*,

when one bows,

one should bow at [the word] 'Blessed'

and when returning to the upright position

one should return at [the mention of] the Divine Name.

Shmuel said:

What is Rav's reason for this?

Because it is written:

‘The Lord raiseth up them that are bowed down’ (*Tehillim* 146:8).

An objection was raised from the verse,

‘And was bowed before My name’ (*Malakhi* 2:5)?

Is it written, 'At My name'?

It is written, 'Before My Name.'

Shmuel said to Chiya the son of Rav:

O, son of the law,

come and I will tell you a fine saying enunciated by your father.

Thus said your father:

When one bows,

one should bow at 'Blessed,'

and when returning to the upright position,

one should return at [the mention of] the Divine Name.

This passage outlines the basic procedure for bowing during the *Shemone Esrei.* One bows down while saying the first word of the blessing, *Barukh,* and returns to a standing position before reaching God’s name in the blessing. The Halakha thus requires both bowing and standing straight during prayer. The two actions must be carefully balanced. This law reflects one of the fundamental tensions in the prayer experience that we have noted several times in the past. On the one hand, a person must completely submit himself before God and feel as if he is nothing before Him. Bowing down represents this feeling of submission. On the other hand, in order to come before God and make demands of Him, a person needs tremendous self-confidence. We could even argue that prayer has an aspect that is fundamentally “chutzpadik!" Standing straight and tall represents this aspect of prayer.

Such an understanding of the symbolic significance of bowing and standing up might help us understand the final line in this passage:

R. Sheshet,

when he bowed,

used to bend like a reed (others translate, “thorn,”)

and when he raised himself,

used to raise himself like a serpent.

R. Sheshet’s movements in prayer are compared to a reed and a snake. The commentators, both ancient and modern, debate the meaning of these similes. However, they all assume that the similes serve to instruct us as to R. Sheshet’s exact positions and motions in prayer.

I would argue that these images are not meant to communicate the technical mechanics of prayer positioning, but rather to express R. Sheshet’s changing inner states as he prayed. When he bowed down, he was humble as a lowly reed, which bows to every breeze. The Gemara famously uses the reed as a symbol of modesty when it declares that “One should be soft like a reed and not hard like a cedar” (*Taanit* 20a). When he stood straight, R. Sheshet was as bold and fearless as a snake, standing fearless, ready to attack. This is not the only time R. Sheshet is compared to a snake. Later on in *Berakhot* (49b), R. Zeira tells how he once said *Birkat* *Ha-mazon* in front of R. Sheshet, and R. Sheshet “stretched out his neck at [him] like a serpent,” in order to express his displeasure at the way in which R. Zeira recited the prayer. Here too, the comparison to a snake reflects strength, confidence and aggressiveness. R. Sheshet thus mastered the complex range of emotions and thoughts necessary for true prayer.

**Sickening Prayers**

The next statement cited by the *Ein Yaakov* discusses another aspect of prayer that has not been emphasized thus far in our chapter:

Raba b. Chinena the elder said further in the name of Rav:

If one is in a position to pray on behalf of his fellow

and does not do so,

he is called a sinner,

as it says,

‘Moreover as for me, far be it from me

that I should sin against the Lord

in ceasing to pray for you.’(I *Shmuel* 12:23)

Raba said:

If [his fellow] is a *talmid chakham*,

he must pray for him

even to the point of making himself ill.

What is the source for this?

Shall I say, because it is written,

‘There is none of you that is sick for me

or discloseth unto me?’ (I *Shmuel* 22:8).

Perhaps the case of a king is different.

It is in fact derived from here:

‘But as for me, when theywere sick,

my clothing was sackcloth,

I afflicted my soul with fasting’ (*Tehillim* 35:13).

Prayer is not simply a way in which a person communicates with God; it is also a way of showing concern for one’s neighbor. Failure to pray for someone is considered a sin. The Gemara goes further and states that in the case of a *talmid chakham* who is in distress, a person must go so far as to make himself sick with prayers and self-mortification. The idea of praying extra hard for a *talmid chakham* might seem self-serving on the part of the rabbis. However, the term *talmid chakham* here may mean, not a great scholar, but quite literally anyone who is a “student of the Sages,” the equivalent of a modern term like “Torah Jew.” The phrase may refer to the entire community of people who are committed to the study and practice of Torah. While one has an obligation to pray for all people, one has a special obligation to members of one’s faith community to go above and beyond the normal practices of prayer.

This passage cites the words of the three main characters of the book of *Shmuel* --Shmuel, Shaul and David. Interestingly, in the first verse, Shmuel speaks of praying for others. In the last verse, David does likewise. However, Shaul, in the middle verse, complains that others are not praying for him! This passage appears to have a secondary agenda of contrasting Shaul with Shmuel and David. Whereas Shmuel and David were generous leaders who always had the interests of others in mind, Shaul was a selfish individual who as king expected everyone to place him at the top of their priorities.

**Saving Shaul**

The next section portrays Shaul in a more positive light.

Raba b. Chinena the elder further said in the name of Rav:

If one commits a sin and is ashamed of it,

all his sins are forgiven him,

as it says,

‘That thou mayest remember and be confounded,

and never open thy mouth anymore,

because of thy shame;

when I have forgiven thee all that thou hast done,

saith the Lord God’ (*Yechezkel* 16:63).

Perhaps with a whole congregation the case is different?

Rather [we derive it] from here:

‘And Shmuel said to Shaul,

Why hast thou disquieted me to bring me up?

And Shaul answered,

I am sorely distressed;

for the Philistines make war against me,

and God is departed from me,

and answereth me no more,

neither by prophets nor by dreams;

therefore I called thee

that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do’ (I *Shmuel* 28:15) .

But he does not mention the Urim and Tumim

because he had killed all [the people of] Nov, the city of the priests.

And how do we know that Heaven had forgiven him?

Because it says,

‘And Shmuel said …

Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me’ (ibid 19).

and R. Yochanan said:

'With me’ means, in my compartment [in Paradise].

The Rabbis say [we learn it] from here:

‘We will hang them up unto the Lord

in Giva of Shaul, the chosen of the Lord’ (II *Shmuel* 21:6).

A Divine voice came forth and proclaimed:

‘The chosen of the Lord.’

At first, this passage appears to move on to a new topic, the forgiveness of sins. The Gemara cites a verse from *Yechezkel* in order to demonstrate that those who are ashamed of their sins will be forgiven for their deeds. The Gemara then rejects this verse, because it deals only with the entire people of Israel and not with individuals.

Next, the Gemara turns back to Shmuel and the figure of Shaul. Now, however, the Gemara seeks to paint Shaul in as good a light as possible. He becomes the exemplar of one who is embarrassed by his deeds and is forgiven. The Gemara cites the scene in which Shaul calls Shmuel’s ghost from the underworld. Shmuel chastises Shaul for bothering him, and Shaul responds, “I am sorely distressed…” According to the simple reading of the verse, Shaul is not distressed because of his misdeed, but because of all his troubles, which he enumerates to Shaul. Yet the Gemara takes this verse as an expression of regret, not only for this misdeed, but for his many sins over the course of his life. The Gemara makes it clear that he merited a share in the world to come with the greatest of prophets, and that God Himself declared Shaul to be His chosen one. Clearly, Shaul has been forgiven for all his sins. However, the Gemara goes further, calling our attention to what was perhaps Shaul’s greatest sin, the massacre of the priestly city of Nov, emphasizing that even this sin was forgiven. The Gemara thus rehabilitates Shaul, who in the Bible is at best a tragic failure, making him into the greatest of penitents.

**Sleeping Lions**

The Gemara returns to its discussion of the *Shema* and its contents:

R. Abahu b. Zutrati said in the name of R. Yehuda b. Zebida:

They wanted to include

the *parasha* of Balak in the *Shema,*

but they did not do so

because it would have meant

too great a burden for the congregation.

The Jerusalem Talmud records a similar statement also in the name of R. Yehuda b. Zebida. The term *parasha* of Balak seems to include all but the last nine verses of what we know today as *parashat Balak* (*Bamidbar* 22:2-24:25)*.*  These verses contain the entire story of Bilaam and Balak. In Torah scrolls, these chapters are presented as a single unit, without any breaks in the text.

As noted, this text is clearly much too long to be included in daily prayers. But why would one even consider saying this text daily? Perhaps, R. Yehuda thought that this text contains something fundamentally important, like the Ten Commandments, another text that the Gemara discussed possibly reciting daily. Presumably, the significant part of *parashat Balak* for these purposes is Bilaam’s blessing of the people of Israel. If this is correct, then this passage was meant to complement the *Shema*’s discussion of God’s relationship with Israel, by focusing specifically on Israel and its greatness. This passage recalls the discussion of God’s *tefillin,* which similarly contain passages in praise of Israel, back on *daf* 6a. Furthermore, Bilaam’s blessings were commonly understood to refer to the messianic age. The messianic age is the ultimate culmination of Israel’s relationship with God, which began at the Exodus.

The editors of the Gemara did not share this understanding:

Why [did they want to insert it]?

Because it contains the words,

‘God who brought them forth out of Egypt’ (*Bamidbar* 23:22).

Then let us say the section of usury or of weights(*Vayikra* 25:35-38 & 19:33-37),

in which the going forth from Egypt is mentioned?

Rather, said R. Yosi b. Avin, [the reason is]

because it contains the verse,

‘He couched, he lay down as a lion,

and as a lioness; who shall rouse him up?’ (*Bamidbar* 24:9).

Let us then say this one verse and no more?

We have a tradition that every section

which our master, Moshe, has divided off

we may divide off,

but that which our master, Moshe, has not divided off,

we may not divide off.

The Gemara assumes that this passage was considered for inclusion, not because it supplemented texts already recited daily, but because it imitated them. The Gemara suggests that this passage was worthy of inclusion because of its reference to the Exodus, just like the reference in the third paragraph of the *Shema*. However, if this were the case, we would need to include all the numerous passages in the Torah which mention the Exodus, including those which discuss the laws of usury and fair weights and measures. Rather, the Gemara cites R. Yosi bar Avin as saying that the key verse is “He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a lioness; who shall rouse him up?” The commentators generally understand the significance of this verse as being that it refers to “rising up” and “laying down,” just as the first two passages in the *Shema* describe these two actions. The Sages understood these references in the *Shema* to establish a twice daily requirement to say the *Shema*. However, it is worth noting that in several post-Talmudic *midrashim* (rabbinic homilies), this verse is interpreted as referring to the Messiah. R. Yosi may mean to say that this passage is significant because of its reference to the Messiah, which like the Exodus should be mentioned daily.

**Forgetting the Exodus**

The Gemara now cites the last *mishna* in our chapter:

The Exodus from Egypt is to be mentioned

[in the *Shema*] at nighttime.

Said R. Elazar b. Azarya:

Behold I am about seventy years old,

and I have never been worthy to [find a reason]

why the Exodus from Egypt

should be mentioned at nighttime

until Ben Zoma expounded it:

For it says:

‘That thou mayest remember the day

when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt

all the days of thy life’ (*Devarim* 16:3).

[Had the text said] 'the days of thy life'

it would have meant [only] the days;

but 'all the days of thy life'

includes the nights as well.

The sages, however, say:

'the days of thy life’ refers to this world;

‘all the days of thy life'

is to add the days of the Messiah.

This is among the best known passages in the entire Mishna, due to its appearance in the Passover *Haggada*. This passage also may be the most misunderstood. This *mishna* does not refer to the requirement to remember the Exodus on the *Seder* night, but rather to remember it daily in the *Shema* through reciting the *tzitzit* passage. In its presentation of this issue, the Mishna raises another question of much greater theological implications: Will we still need to remember the Exodus in the Messianic era? Since the entire Torah and its laws are rooted in the Exodus, arguably this question can be reformulated as: Will we still observe the Torah in the Messianic era, or will it be replaced by a new Torah rooted in the final redemption?

The Gemara further explicates the debate on this question:

It has been taught:

Ben Zoma said to the Sages:

Will the Exodus from Egypt be mentioned

in the days of the Messiah?

Was it not long ago said:

‘Therefore behold the days come,

saith the Lord,

that they shall no more say:

As the Lord liveth

that brought up the children of Israel

out of the land of Egypt;

but,

As the Lord liveth

that brought up and that led the seed of the house of Israel

out of the north country

and from all the countries whither I had driven them?’(*Yirmiyahu* 23:7-8).

They replied:

This does not mean that the mention of

the Exodus from Egypt shall be obliterated,

but that the [deliverance from] subjection to the other kingdoms

shall take the first place

and the Exodus from Egypt shall become secondary.

The debate over whether we will still remember the Exodus after the final redemption hinges around a passage in *Yirmiyahu* in which God declares that the day will come when people will cease to swear by the God of the Exodus but will rather refer to him as the God of the final redemption. Ben Zoma understands these verses to mean that in the future, the memory of the Exodus will be completely replaced by the memory of the final redemption. The other rabbis understand the verses as merely saying that the Exodus will lose its position of prominence in the Jewish consciousness to the final redemption, but it will not disappear altogether. The rabbis defend this reading by citing a similar instance:

Similarly you read:

‘Thy name shall not be called any more Yaakov,

but Yisrael shall be thy name’ (*Genesis* 35:10).

This does not mean that the name Yaakov shall be obliterated,

but that Yisrael shall be the principal name

and Yaakov a secondary one.

Though God changes Yaakov’s name to Yisrael, the Torah continues to call him Yaakov. The new name was not meant to replace the old name, but to be the more prominent of the two. So too, in *Yirmiyahu,* God speaks not of entirely replacing the Exodus with the final redemption, but merely of making it the more prominent of the two.

The Gemara now cites yet another reference to forgetting about earlier redemptions, which presumably we are also meant to understand as making these events less prominent:

And so it says:

‘Remember ye not the former things,

neither consider the things of old’ (*Yishayahu* 43:13).

'Remember ye not the former things’:

this refers to the subjections to the other nations;

'Neither consider the things of old':

this refers to the Exodus from Egypt.

‘Behold I shall do a new thing;

now shall it spring forth’ (ibid 19).

R. Yosef learnt:

This refers to the war of Gog and Magog.

In this passage, the Exodus and “subjugation to the other nations” that the Messiah will end are grouped together. They will both be overshadowed by yet another eschatological event, the war of Gog and Magog. There is a series of historical events, each of which displaces the previous one. The Gemara explains this through a parable:

A parable:

To what is this like?

To a man who was travelling on the road

when he encountered a wolf

and escaped from it,

and he went along relating the affair of the wolf.

He then encountered a lion

and escaped from it,

and went along relating the affair of the lion.

He then encountered a snake

and escaped from it,

whereupon he forgot the two previous incidents

and went along relating the affair of the snake.

So with Israel:

the later troubles make them forget the earlier ones.

This parable makes two important contributions to the conversation. First of all, it clearly sides with Ben Zoma in that it suggests that previous instances of salvation are completely forgotten when new salvations occur. Furthermore, unlike the verse in *Yirmiyahu,* this parable does not see the final redemption as any greater than the Exodus, just as being saved from a snake is no greater than being saved from a lion.

**Formerly Known as Avram**

Following the reference to Yaakov receiving a new name, the Gemara takes up the matter of Avraham’s name changes as well.

‘Avram the same is Avraham’ (I *Divre Hayamim* 1:27).

At first he became a father to Aram [Av-Aram] only,

but in the end he became a father to the whole world.

[Similarly] Sarai is the same as Sara.

At first she became a princess to her own people,

but later she became a princess to all the world.

Bar Kapara taught:

Whoever calls Avraham, ‘Avram’

transgresses a positive precept,

since it says,

‘Thy name shall be Avraham’ (*Bereishit* 17:5).

R. Eliezer says:

He transgresses a negative command,

since it says,

‘Neither shall thy name any more be called Avram’ (ibid.).

But if that is so,

then the same should apply to one who calls Sara ‘Sarai’?

In her case the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Avraham,

‘As for Sarai thy wife,

thou shalt not call her Sarai,

but Sara shall her name be’ (*Bereishit* 17:5).

But if that is so,

the same should apply to one who calls Yaakov ‘Yaakov’?

There is a difference in his case,

because Scripture restored it [the name Yaakov] to him,

as it is written:

‘And God spoke unto Yisrael in the visions of the night,

and said, Yaakov, Yaakov’(*Bereishit* 46:2).

R. Yosi b. Abin

(or, as some say, R. Yosi b. Zebida)

cited in objection the following:

‘Thou art the Lord, the God

who didst choose Avram!’(*Nechemia* 9:7).

The answer was given:

There the prophet is recounting

the noble deeds of the All Merciful [and relates]

that that was the case originally.

This passage establishes three different levels of name change: Avraham, in which the name change is total and there is a prohibition against using the old name; Sara, in which the name change is total, but there is no prohibition against using the old name; and Yaakov, in which the name change is only partial and both the old and the new names are used. It is curious that the Gemara chose to end the chapter with this passage. The Gemara could have ended with the previous discussion and concluded with a reference to the ultimate redemption. Why end, instead, with a discussion of name changes? The Vilna Goan explains that Yaakov’s name change was not meant to take effect immediately. Rather, the name Yisrael is only his true name when the Jews are in a state of redemption. In light of this, Yaakov’s partial name change is an indicator of our unredeemed state, whereas Avraham’s change signifies the potential for complete redemption.

***Hadran Alakh Perek Mei-eimatai***

I would like to thank all of you who have read this series on a regular basis. Once again, I would like to tell you that I welcome feedback on this series. I can be contacted through the VBM office.