

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT RE'EH

DVAR TORAH: PIOUS BUT NON-KOSHER

The very name of the *חסידה*, the stork, presents us with a difficulty. *חסידה* seems to be related to the very positive word *חסד*, lovingkindness. It is therefore surprising that even though it has such a pious sounding name, it is listed among the non-kosher birds. Because of this dissonance the stork got mixed reviews in Torah sources over the ages.

Some of the comments were very positive: Rav Yehudah, quoted in the Gemara (Chullin 63a), understood that *חסידה* is really a nick name: "שעושה חסידות עם חברותיה" – "because it does acts of piety with its friends" – but the bird's true identity is the white *דיה*. Rav Huna and Rav Simon quoted in the Midrash similarly praise her, and add that she does acts of piety with her neighbors, is self-effacing, and is symbolic of the pious tribe of Levi (Midrash Tehillim 114:14). According to the Vilna Gaon (Aderet Eliahu Devarim 14:18, quoted in Nitzotzei Or on Chullin 63a), the pious chasidah immerses itself in water after mating. Finally, the Tosefet Berachah (by Harav Baruch Epstein, זצ"ל) mentions a point corroborated by some nature books, that even after a long migration the stork often stays with its original mate. The chasidah is truly a pious bird.

But the nagging question remains: If she is so pious why is she still non-kosher? This inspired a backlash of critique against the chasidah (providing an opportunity to chide people who acted chasidah-like):

1. She only does acts of piety with her friends; the chasidah is nice to the members of her clique, but cruel to those outside (Chiddushei Harim, quoted in Leket Peirushei Aggadah).
2. She gives 'Chassidus' to her friends – and not what they really need. Rav Naftali of Ropshitz, זצ"ל, (quoted in Meiotzareinu Hayashan) would quip that wealthy Chassidim who hang around the shtiebel and share lofty ideas with the poor people – instead of giving them the food, clothing, and money they need – remind him of the non-kosher chasidah.
3. She only appears at certain times during the year (Ibn Ezra, possibly referring to the stork's visit to the Land of Israel during its southern migration). They say that, based on this comment of the Ibn Ezra, the Kotzker Rebbe, זצ"ל, (quoted in Min Hamaayan Ha'atik) gave the nickname 'Chassidos Yidden' to those who only came for a holiday Chassidic experience but didn't put in the day-to-day hard work of Avodat Hashem.
4. She distributes food to her friends (Rashi on Vayikra 11:19) – but it is food that doesn't belong to her (!). Harav Naftali Trop, זצ"ל, would thus describe the Bolsheviks who distributed that which they took from others (quoted in Hanoten Imrei Shefer).

Harav Chaim Elazari, זצ"ל (a talmid of the Slabodka Yeshivah who became a rof in Canton, Ohio, and made aliyah in his later years – in Netivei Chaim on Vayikra 11:19), spins this in a different direction. The stork, he says, like the other non-kosher birds, is cruel and aggressive. And, says the Ramban, the reason the Torah prohibited eating them is to protect our hearts from being tainted by their cruelty. But the Torah calls the stork a chasidah and acknowledges those acts of piety it does do. It thus teaches us to always strive to recognize everything's positive qualities. The non-kosher chasidah still has some piety and we should not ignore it.

SOURCE GUIDE: ABBA YUDAN HIDES FROM THE TANNAIM

The midrash on this week's parshah weaves a series of tzedakah anecdotes into comments on two verses, one about the expansion of the borders of the Land of Israel and the other from Mishlei. The most prominent story is that of the philanthropist Abba Yudan and his wife. This source guide builds on that passage in Midrash Rabbah.

A. Two Verses

The passage is built on part of a verse from our parshah and one from the book of Mishlei. The first appears in the middle of a discussion of eating sacrificial and non-sacrificial meat:

<p>1. Devarim 12:20 When Hashem will expand your borders as He told you ...</p>	<p>דברים יב:כ כִּי יִרְחִיב ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֶת גְּבוּלְךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לְךָ ...</p>
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The second discusses gifts:

<p>2. Mishlei 18:16 A man's gift will cause him expansion, and it will lead him before great ones.</p>	<p>משלי יח:טז מִתֵּן אָדָם יִרְחִיב לוֹ וְלִפְנֵי גְדֹלִים יִנְחֲנוּ.</p>
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According to Ibn Ezra, the verse is about bribery:

<p>3. Ibn Ezra on Mishlei 18:16 'Gift' alludes to a bribe that he gives to be released him from his trouble and go out expansively.</p>	<p>אבן עזרא על משלי יח:טז ומתן רמז לשחד שיתן יוציאהו למרחב מצרתו:</p>
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The Ralbag takes a similar direction (as does the Metzudot David):

<p>4. Ralbag on Mishlei 18:16 "A man's gift" – If a man in his business affairs needs to meet high level people, he gives a gift and it can open up the way for him. This gift will lead the way for him to have those high level people do what he needs.</p>	<p>רלב"ג על משלי יח: טז מתן אדם - הנה האד' שיצטר' לו בעסקיו ללכ' לפני גדולי' הנה אם יתן להם מתן ירחי' לו הדר' וינחנו זה המתן לפני גדולי' לעשות חפציו.</p>
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B. The Story of Abba Yudan

The midrash takes a very different direction (so do Rashi and the Gra). This verse does not speak about a bribe or a social gift, but about tzedakah:

<p>5. Midrash Rabbah 4:8 "When Hashem will expand your borders" – This is what is meant by the verse, "A man's gift will cause him expansion, and it will lead him before great ones." What is meant by "A man's gift will cause him expansion"?</p> <p>There was a story about Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua who left to collect money for mitzvah activities. They went to the sands of Antochia. There was a man there called Abba Yudan who would donate with an open hand. That same Abba Yudan then became poor. He saw that Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua were going to collect and he hid from them. He went up to his house, and for a day or two did not go down to the marketplace. His wife asked him, "Why did you not go down to the marketplace? It is two days already." He said to her, "Our rabbis came to collect for mitzvah activities, to support those who toil in Torah. And I'm not able to give to them and am embarrassed to go down to the marketplace.</p>	<p>מדרש רבה דברים ד:ח "כי ירחיב ה' אלהיך את גבולך" – זה שאמר הכתוב "מתן אדם ירחיב לו ולפני גדולים ינחנו". מהו מתן אדם ירחיב לו?</p> <p>מעשה בר"א ור' יהושע שיצאו לגבות לעסק מצות רבותינו הלכו לחילתה של אנטוכיא והיה שם אדם אחד והיה נקרא אבא יודן והיה למוד ליתן לרבותינו ביד רחבה נעשה אותו אבא יודן עני ראה ר' אלעזר ור' יהושע שהלכו לגבות שם והטמין עצמו מפניהם ועלה לביתו ועשה יום ושנים ולא ירד לשוק אמרה לו אשתו מפני מה לא ירדת לשוק הרי שני ימים אמר לה רבותינו באו לגבות לעסק מצות עמילי תורה ואין סיפק בידי ליתן להם ואני מתבייש לירד לשוק.</p>
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His wife encouraged him to take a different position:

6. Midrash Rabbah 4:8

His wife, who loved mitzvot, said to him, "Do we not still have one field? Sell half of it and give it to them." He went and sold half of his field for five gold pieces, gave it to the rabbis, and said to them, "Pray for me." They prayed for him and said, "The All-Present One should fill your loss."

The rabbis went to collect in another place. That same Abba Yudan plowed half the field and found there a great treasure. He became wealthier than he was beforehand.

Before the rabbis returned [home] they passed through that place (Antochia) and said to someone, "By your life, arrange for us to meet Abba Yudan." The man said, "It's easier to meet with the king than to meet with him." They said, "We just don't want to have passed through without inquiring about his welfare." Abba Yudan found out that they were there, came to them, and gave them one-thousand gold pieces, saying, "Your prayers bore fruit." They said to him, "We also knew about your good deeds and we put you at the top of the list [of donors]." Our rabbis said that the following verse applies to him: "A man's gift will cause him expansion, and it will lead him before great ones."

מדרש רבה דברים ד:ח

אשתו שהיתה אוהבת את המצות אמרה לו לא נשתייר לנו שדה אחת מכור חציה ותן אותה להן הלך ועשה כן מכר אותה חצי שדה בחמשה זהובים ונתן אותן לרבתינו ואמר להן התפללו עלי התפללו עליו ואמרו לו המקום ימלא חסרונוך

הלכו להן רבותינו לגבות במקום אחר אותו אבא יודן חרש בחצי שדה ומצא שם סימא גדולה ונעשה עשיר יותר ממה שהיה קודם

עד שרבתינו חוזרין עברו באותו מקום אמרו לאחד הייך העמידנו עם אבא יודן אמר להם אותה האיש ומי יכול לעמוד עם המלך ולא עמו אמרו לו אין אנו מבקשין אלא שלא ידע שעברנו כאן ולא שאלנו את שלומו ידע אבא יודן ובא אצלם ונתן להם אלף זהובים אמר להם עשתה תפלתכם פירות אמרו לו אף אנו היינו יודעים במעשיך הטובים ועשינו אותך ראש פרק קראו עליו רבותינו מתן אדם ירחיב לו ולפני גדולים ינחנו.

C. Questions to Think About

- Why does Abba Yudan hide from the Tannaim?
- What is the difference between his and his wife's approaches?
- Why did this donation – **half** of his one remaining field – merit him finding this treasure (whereas despite his previous donations he became poor)?
- Why did the Tannaim come back to visit Abba Yudan?
- How does the verse in Mishlei apply to Abba Yudan – the gift, the expansion, leading him before great ones?
- How is the blessing that comes out of this verse in Mishlei different than Chazal's statement: "aser kedei shetitasher" – "take off tithes so you will become wealthy" (Taanit 9a)?

D. Further Learning

- See Rabbeinu Yonah's commentary on Mishlei 18:16 – he speaks about the connection between giving gifts and expansiveness – and the positive ramifications it brings about.
- After the Abba Yudan story our midrash follows with related stories, as well as a proof from our parshah that generosity brings about expansiveness. This story appears in a number of other places - Tanchuma Re'ei 5, Vayikra Rabbah 5:4, Yerushalmi Horyot 3:4. Here are some of the variations: In one version his wife is considered greater than him, in one his cow breaking a leg leads him to find the treasure, and one midrash gives a long list of Abba Yudan's new possessions.

BLESSING, LIFE, AND GOOD BY RABBI MENDEL FARBER

Our parshah begins with "ראה אנכי ביום ברכה וקללה" – "See that I place before you today a blessing and a curse" (Devarim 11:26). The first thing we have to do upon our entrance into Eretz Yisrael is to declare that Eretz Yisrael is not necessarily a Garden of Eden. It is not exclusively a paradise. True, it could be a paradise, a place of brachah, a place where one could have all his needs and devote his life to achieving the goal for which he was created. However, on the other hand, we must acknowledge immediately that the curse can also be found in our beloved land. In fact it is only because the curse can be found in this land that it affords us the possibility and opportunity to create our destiny. It is our effort that creates our future, and the danger of the potential curse is what makes the effort necessary. The greater the risk the greater the gain.

Hashem created the world to bestow upon us His good. Eretz Yisrael, the place where that good will be given to us, is called ארצות החיים, lands of life. He calls that good by three names. In our parshah He calls it ברכה, blessing. In Parshat Nitzavim Hashem calls it by two other names, חיים, life and טוב, good, as the verse says, "ראה נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הרע ואת המות ואת הטוב" – "See that I have placed before you today life and good, death and evil" (Devarim 30:15). The contra to the good Hashem wants to bestow upon us also has three names. In our parshah it is called a curse, קללה, and in Parshat Nitzavim it is called רע, evil, and מות, death.

There are three aspects to the good that Hashem wants to give to us: first, what it essentially is; second, how it expresses itself; and third, what results from it. טוב is its essence, and that is the conceptual Torah we internalize through learning, as the Gemara (Berachot 5a) says: "ואין טוב אלא תורה שנאמר 'כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתי אל תעזבו'" – "Good refers to Torah, as it says, 'For I gave you a good acquisition, My Torah, do not desert it'" (Mishlei 4:2). This concept expresses itself in our world through ברכה, being blessed with having a lot – not only having great prosperity but also having many mitzvot from which that prosperity grows. Every aspect of our lives is part of the Divine ideal we are implementing. Hashem gave us the opportunity to sanctify every part of His world and therefore we receive in exchange a large portion of the world we sanctify. The blessing we receive is for the mitzvot, as it says in our parshah: "את הברכה אשר תשמעו אל מצוות ה'" – "The blessing is that you will listen to Hashem's commandments" (Devarim 11:27). Another verse compares the Torah to light and the mitzvot to lamps. "כי נר מצוה ותורה אור" – "For a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light ..." (Mishlei 6:23). Many lamps give off a single light. In the mitzvot there is multiplicity; in the learning of Torah there is unity.

However the ultimate good is life itself. In Parshat Nitzavim Hashem ends off by saying "ובחרת בחיים" – "Choose life" (Devarim 30:19). It is the eternal life of being close to Hashem that affords us the ultimate pleasure. May we all enter Elul with the זכות, the merit of doing a proper teshuvah and merit a year of true eternal life. "העדתי בכם היום את השמים ואת הארץ" – "I call as witnesses today the Heavens and the Earth. Life and death I have placed before you, the blessing and the curse. You should choose life, so that you should live, you and your children" (Devarim 30:19).

Dedicated in memory of
Chana bat Avraham, ז"ל

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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