

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 ACHAREI

DVAR TORAH: WHAT IS “CHILUTZ ATZAMOT”?

This Shabbat is Shabbat Mevarchin, when we announce the upcoming month amidst a collection of prayers called Birkat Hachodesh. In the opening prayer of Birkat Hachodesh, sandwiched between a prayer for parnassah, sustenance, and for yirat Shamayim, fear of Heaven, is a request for a life of *חילוי עצמות*. What is *חילוי עצמות* and why do we want it?

עצמות are bones, but what is *חילוי*? The root *חלץ*, points out Harav Baruch Epstein, זצ"ל (1860–1941, Lithuania), in his Baruch She'amar commentary on the Siddur, has multiple and diverse meanings: *לחלץ* means to release stones from a wall; a *חלוץ* is the first soldier to go into battle; *יוצאי חלציד* refers to offspring, those who come out of your loins; and *חלצני* is a call for Divine salvation. What is *חילוי עצמות*?

The source of the expression *חילוי עצמות* is the blessing "וְעִצְמוֹתַי יִחַלְיִן", “Your bones will be strengthened” (Yishayahu 58:11, see Rashi, Metzudot, and the Malbim). Because our skeletons are the framework of our bodies, they represent the entire person. When we pray for a life of *חילוי עצמות* we ask for a life totally full of vitality, strength, vigor, and energy.

Energy is necessary in order to serve G-d with joy. G-d’s mitzvot are to be done joyfully and energetically, with *זריזות*, not only at the proper time, but zestfully. We pray for the joy, energy, and excitement that accompanies *אהבת ה'*, love of G-d.

The Amora Rabbi Elazar calls "וְעִצְמוֹתַי יִחַלְיִן", “Your bones will be strong” (“You will be full of energy”), the “greatest of the blessings” (Yevamot 102b). Explains the Maharal (Chidushei Agadot on that passage): In order to be open to receive blessings, a person must first have a strong infrastructure; he must be a complete and sturdy vessel that can hold onto them. The blessing of energy is so great because it enables all other blessings to take hold. The last Mishnah of the Talmud expresses a similar idea: "לא מצא הקדוש ברוך ה' "הוא כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל אלא השלום", “The Holy One, blessed be He, found no better vessel than peace to contain Israel’s blessing” (Okatzin 3:12). Peace, *שלום*, is *שָׁלֵם*, whole and complete. If there are no cracks or holes in Israel’s vessel, blessings will not slip out.

The blessing of energy opens us up to the blessings of health, wisdom, wealth, and prosperity; but what opens us up to the blessing of energy? Perhaps we can prime ourselves for the blessing of energy by avoiding those things that sap our energy – by making sure we get enough sleep, eat healthy, stay active, and cultivate a positive mindset. An analogy from a totally different realm: the Rambam says that receiving prophecy was a Divine gift. But saintly and wise people would still prepare themselves for prophecy. They’d elevate themselves through wisdom, character development, and meditation to the degree that they were open to prophecy. We can similarly open ourselves up to the blessing of Divine energy.

As we usher in the month of Iyar, we pray for all of us as individuals, and for the People of Israel as a whole, to be blessed with lives of *חילוי עצמות*. According to Harav Epstein, this prayer alludes to the vision of the dry bones: We pray that the dry bones of Israel will once again be full of life and spirit, vitality and energy.

SOURCE GUIDE: DIVINE CRYING

This week's source guide draws on an essay that appears in Aish Kodesh, a collection of drashot and divrei Torah given in the Warsaw Ghetto by Harav Kalonymous Kalman Shapiro, the Piasezna Rebbe, זצ"ל הי"ד. It is dedicated to his blessed memory, along with all of the kedoshim who perished in the Holocaust, הי"ד.

A. After the Death

Our parshah begins with Hashem speaking to Moshe, "After the death of Aharon's two sons ..." (Vayikra 16:1). The death of Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu of course carries with it a number of important lessons, but it was first and foremost a terrible tragedy. All of Israel cried over their death (Vayikra 10:6), and the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 502:2) lists the day of their death, the 1st of Nisan, as one of the תעניות צדיקים, days when pious people would fast.

B. Suffering Below, Suffering Above

Says the Piasezna Rebbe: The Jew who is suffering thinks that only he suffers – but he doesn't realize that more powerful than our distress is the Divine distress on high. This idea is rooted both in a verse in Tanach and a comment by the Tanna Rabbi Meir, quoted in the Gemara:

<p>1. Yishayahu 63:9 In all of their distress, He is distressed ... (see the Radak and Metzudot David, and Malbim, who explain the verse according to the Kri, the way the verse is read – לו – as opposed to the Ktiv, the way it is written – לא).</p> <p>Sanhedrin 46a Rabbi Meir said: When a person is in pain what does the Shechinah, the Divine Presence, say? "My head hurts, my arm hurts."</p>	<p>ישעיה סג:ט בְּכֹל צָרָתָם לוֹ (לֹא) צָר ...</p> <p>סנהדרין מו. אמר רבי מאיר: בשעה שאדם מצטער שכינה מה לשון אומרת? "קלני מראשי, קלני מזרועי."</p>
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With this in mind, he addresses an anecdote the Talmud tells about Rabbi Yossi:

<p>2. Berachot 3a Rabbi Yossi said: One time I was travelling and I entered one of the ruins of Jerusalem to pray. Eliahu, of blessed memory, came and waited for me at the opening until I finished praying ... He said to me, "My son, what voice did you hear in this ruin?" I replied, "I heard a Heavenly Voice that was cooing like a dove and said, 'Woe to the sons, who, because of their sins I destroyed My house and burnt My Temple and exiled them among the nations.'" He said to me, "By your life, it is not only now, but every day, three times a day it says that. And not only that, but when Israel enters synagogues and houses of study and answer 'May His great Name be blessed,' the Holy One, blessed be He, nods His head and says, 'Fortunate is the King whom they praise in His house thus. What of the Father who exiled His children! Woe to the children who were exiled from their Father's table!'"</p>	<p>ברכות ג. אמר רבי יוסי: פעם אחת הייתי מהלך בדרך ונכנסתי לחורבה אחת מחורבות ירושלים להתפלל. בא אליהו זכור לטוב ושמר לי על הפתח (והמתין לי) עד שסיימתי תפילתי ... ואמר לי, "בני, מה קול שמעת בחורבה זו?" ואמרת לו, "שמעתי בת קול שמנהמת כיונה ואומרת, 'אוי לבנים שבעונותיהם החרבתי את ביתי ושרפתי את היכלי והגליתים לבין האומות.'" ואמר לי, "חייך וחיי ראשך לא שעה זו בלבד אומרת כך אלא בכל יום ויום שלש פעמים אומרת כך. ולא זו בלבד אלא בשעה שישראל נכנסין לבתי כנסיות ולבתי מדרשות ועונין 'יהא שמיא הגדול מבורך' הקדוש ברוך הוא מנענע ראשו ואומר 'אשרי המלך שמקלסין אותו בביתו. כך מה לו לאב שהגלה את בניו ואוי להם לבנים שגלו מעל שולחן אביהם.'" </p>
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Why, asks the Piasezna Rebbe, did Rabbi Yossi only hear this Bat Kol, this Heavenly Voice, when he prayed in a ruin? Wasn't this declaration made three times a day? He answers that there is a difference between the Divine pain and distress, so to speak, and that of humans. People are limited, but Hashem is infinite, and so is the Divine pain. Rabbi Yossi would not be able to appreciate the pain of the Divine Presence; the sound would be too powerful for him. Only because Rabbi Yossi entered a ruin and chipped away at his own limitations and humbled himself, was he able to hear a bit of the Divine Voice. Even then, he only heard a voice like a dove. The voice is in reality much more powerful – like a lion's roar:

<p>6. Berachot 3a Rabbi Yitzchak son of Shmuel said, quoting Rav: There are three watches (three shifts of angels) to the night. Over each watch the Holy One, blessed be He, sits and roars like a lion and says, "Woe to the children who because of their sins I destroyed My house and burnt My Temple and exiled them among the nations of the world."</p>	<p>ברכות ג. אמר רב יצחק בר שמואל משמיה דרב: שלש משמרות הוי הלילה. ועל כל משמר ומשמר יושב הקדוש ברוך הוא ושואג כארי ואומר, "אוי לבנים שבעוונותיהם הזרבתני את ביתי ושרפתי את היכלי והגליתים לבין אומות העולם."</p>
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C. Crying Secretly

The Midrash and Gemara (Tanna Devei Eliahu Rabbah Chapter 17 and Chagigah 5b) tell us that Hashem, so to speak, cries secretly. Another Midrash records a dispute – so to speak - between Hashem and an Angel:

<p>5. Opening of Midrash Eichah Section 24 At that time the Holy One, blessed be He, cries and says, "Woe is to me. What have I done? I rested My Divine Presence below for Israel, and now that they sinned I have returned to My original place. G-d forbid, I have become a laughingstock for the nations and a mockery for people." At that time the angel Metatron came and fell on his face and said before Him, "Master of the Universe, I will cry and not You." He replied, "If you do not let me cry now I will enter a place that you have no permission to enter and I'll cry, as it says, "If you will not listen, My Soul will cry in secret ..." (Yirmiyahu 13:17).</p>	<p>מדרש רבה איכה הקדמה פסקה כד באותה שעה היה הקב"ה בוכה ואומר "אוי לי! מה עשיתי? השריתי שכינתי למטה בשביל ישראל, ועכשיו שחטאו חזרתי למקומי הראשון. ח"ו שהייתי שחוק לגוים ולעג לבריות." באותה שעה בא מטטרון ונפל על פניו ואמר לפניו "רבש"ע אני אבכה ואתה לא תבכה." אמר לו "אם אין אתה מניח לי לבכות עכשיו אכנס למקום שאין לך רשות ליכנס ואבכה, שנאמר (ירמיה י"ג) 'ואם לא תשמעוהו במסתרים תבכה נפשי ...'"</p>
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Why does He cry secretly and why did the angel want to bring G-d's crying to the world?

<p>6. Eish Kodesh Parshat Mishpatim 5742 (1942) The reason is that if the sound of the Divine cry – so to speak – would be heard, the world would hear and explode. A spark of that pain would enter the world and all of His enemies would burn up. At the Sea the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the angels, "My creatures are drowning in the Sea and you are singing a song?" Now that Israel is drowning in blood could the world continue to exist?</p>	<p>אש קודש פרשת משפטים שנת תש"ב כיון שכבר ישמע בעולם קול בכיתו של הכביכול, ישמע העולם ויתפוצץ. ניצוץ צערו כביכול יכנס בעולם ואת כל שונאיו ישרוף. בים אמר הקב"ה "מעשי ידי טובעים בים ואתם אומרים שירה?" עכשיו שישראל טובעים בדם העולם יתקיים!?</p>
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D. Revealing the Divine Cry

There is, though, a way to reveal the Divine cry, says the Rebbe. That is through Torah, where we can even access His innermost places, places kept even from the angels. The Zohar (Part III p. 71) says that in difficult times the rabbis would take out the Torah scroll itself because, explains the Rebbe, through Torah all hidden things can be revealed, including the Divine pain. Revealing the Divine pain can bring on salvation. He reads these verses in Tehillim in light of this idea:

<p>6. Tehillim 22:2-4 (2) My G-d, my G-d, why have You deserted me? You are distant from my salvation and from the words of my roar. (3) My G-d, I cry by day and You do not answer, and by night and I am not silent. (4) And You are holy, the One who sits among the praises of Israel.</p>	<p>תהילים כב:ב-ד (ב) קלי קלי למה עזבתני רחוק מישועתי דברי שאגתי. (ג) אלקי אקרא יומם ולא תענה ולילה ולא תמיה לי. (ד) ואתה קדוש יושב תהלות ישראל.</p>
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Hashem is totally above the world – holy – and seems to have deserted Israel. His cry for their pain is so powerful He must separate. But He is still the One who is found in Torah and Tefillah, "the praises of Israel." We must, said the Piasezna Rebbe in the ghetto, hold on to Torah and Tefillah and Mitzvot to reveal His cry. Then evil can dissipate like smoke. We must never desert the Torah even in the darkest of times.

“BE HOLY”: HOW? BY RABBI ELIE SILVERBERG

The end of Parshat Acharei Mot and the beginning of Parshat Kedoshim are strongly related. Parshat Acharei Mot ends with a list of forbidden intimate relationships, and Parshat Kedoshim starts off with the command "קדושים תהיו", "You shall be holy" (Vayikra 19:2). Rashi explains that we fulfill "קדושים תהיו" by distancing ourselves from the relationships listed at the end of Acharei Mot and from any immoral behavior.

The Torah defines for us the “what”: what is considered immoral and what our obligation to be holy entails. What seems to be missing in this section is the “how.” How does one avoid immoral acts – and, even more difficult, immoral thoughts? How can we fulfill "קדושים תהיו"? In today's world this is especially challenging, as the values of the world around us degenerate on an exponential level; while our ability to shield ourselves and our families in an era of internet and smartphones becomes more and more difficult.

To try to provide an answer let us start with a passage from the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 17b) which tells the story of two Amoraim. They allowed themselves to walk by a brothel and felt confident that they would be protected from any errant thoughts because they were continually involved in a Torah discussion. The Gemara supports this thesis by quoting a verse (Mishlei 2:11): “Thoughts shall watch over you; understanding will protect you.” Filling one's mind with the wisdom of Torah acts as a shield from immoral thoughts. Similarly, a baraita teaches, “Anyone who places Torah thoughts in his heart will have immoral thoughts taken away from him” (Avot DeRabbi Natan Chapter 25). Finally, the Rambam, at the very end of Hilchot Issurei Biah, writes, “A person should direct his thoughts to words of Torah because impure thoughts only overpower a mind that is devoid of wisdom.”

The Netziv of Volozhin (Haamek Davar Vayikra 18:5) tells us that this sage advice can actually be found in the Torah itself – in the verse immediately preceding the list of forbidden relations. Let us examine the two verses that precede the forbidden relations (Vayikra 18:4-5). One verse says, "אַתְּ מִשְׁפָּטֵי תַעֲשֶׂוּ וְאֵת חֻקֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ" while the next verse says, "וְיִשְׁמְרֶתֶם אֶת חֻקֵי וְאֵת מִשְׁפָּטֵי": both seem to just say “Keep the Torah's rules and laws,” and many commentaries address this seemingly glaring redundancy. But the Netziv claims there is no redundancy, because of a fascinating chiddush, a new insight. He says that the standard interpretation of a משפט as a law that makes sense to us, and a חוק as a law that is beyond our logic, is only true where משפט precedes חוק, as in verse 4. However, where חוק precedes משפט, as in verse 5, a different interpretation applies, that of a baraita quoted on Kedushin 37a. "אלה החוקים – אלו המדרשות, 'המשפטים' – אלו הדינים". – “These are the ‘chukim’ – refers to the derivations, and the ‘mishpatim’ – refers to the laws.”

Explains the Netziv: the חוקים refer to the מדות שהתורה נדרשת בהן, the rules we are instructed to use to expound and develop the Torah. The משפטים are the results of this application, the laws that come about by applying those rules to the Torah. Says the Netziv: Even though the process of expounding Torah law via these principles is always a lofty endeavor; the Torah places this lesson right before the forbidden relations. This teaches us that it is this very mental process that which you should engage that will save you from immorality, not only in action but also in thought. One who does so will receive a double blessing – he will avoid sin and it will also uplift his soul. Hence, verse 5 concludes with the phrase "וְחַי בְּהֵם" – “You will live by them.” This is the key to a full Torah life.

*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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