



A collection of Torah thoughts produced by the Maor Centre, Melbourne

המאור

Light reading
HaMaor

ISSUE 5

Parshas Balak, Tammuz 5784

TIFERES SHLOMO ON THE PARSHA

Who can count the dust of Yaakov and number of the copulations of Yisrael

The greatest preparation we can make before Davening, is to humble ourselves, by focusing on the greatness of Hashem and how we are lowly like the dust in comparison.

But once we begin Davening, we should cast aside these feelings of lowliness and strengthen ourselves with joy and elation. Instead of feeling lowly like the dust, we should soar up to the Heavens.

This alluded to in the teaching of the sages that the Jewish people descend all the way down to the dust and rise all the way up to the Heavens—that through our humility before Davening, we rise up with joy and strength in our prayers to the Heavens.

When Bilaam said the words “Who can count the dust of Yaakov,” he understood that the success of the Jewish people through their prayers, is because they make themselves like the dust of the earth.

But once they start to pray, the verse says “He perceived no iniquity in Yaakov and no perversity in Yisrael. Hashem his G-d is with him and the friendship of the King is in him.

Before Davening we humble ourselves by reflecting on our sins and misdeeds, but when we come to Daven and serve Hashem, we must be joyous. So we must cast away any sense of lowliness and worry on account of our sins, perceiving no iniquity or perversity in Yisrael.

This is because when we Daven or fulfil a Mitzvah, “Hashem his G-d is with him” and we are attached to the King. In the presence of Hashem, there is only joy and gladness and no place for sadness and lowliness like the dust.

In the penultimate chapter of his Mishneh Torah, the Rambam rules that one who does not believe in Moshiach and await his coming, not only do they deny the Messianic prophesies of the Neviim, they also deny the Torah of Moshe. This is because the Chumash itself testifies about the coming of Moshiach. One such place is in the prophesies of Bilaam in this week’s Parsha.

After failing to curse the Jewish people, Bilaam delivers a prophesy concerning the end of days;

“I see it but not now, I behold it but not soon. A star has gone forth from Yaakov and a staff will arise from Yisrael. He will crush the princes of Moav and uproot all the sons of Sheis. Edom will be possessed... and Yisrael will triumph... A ruler shall come from Yaakov”

According to some of the Meforshim, part of this prophesy refers to the rule of King David. Still, there is consensus that at least some of these Pesukim refer to Moshiach, who will arise as king over the Jewish people and subdue the nations of the world. This is the understanding of the Rambam, Rashi, Rashbam, Ralbag and Ramban.

The Ohr Hachaim writes that the entire prophesy refers to Moshiach. The different verses allude to the two possible ways in which Moshiach can come, as described by Yishayahu and interpreted by the sages in Mesechta Sanhedrin; swiftly and miraculously - if we are deserving, or in its time and in a natural way if we are not.

In his commentry, the Ramban explains that the verse *דרך כוכב מיעקב* “a star will shoot forth from Yaakov”, alludes to Moshiach gathering in the Exiles from across the globe, just as a shooting star travels across the sky from one end to the other.

Ralbag explains that this verse alludes to the greatness of Moshiach; that he will be lofty like the stars and that his deeds will be known throughout the world like the stars, which can be seen by all of the dwellers on earth.

Chaza”l also understood this verse as referring to Moshiach. Fifty two years after the destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash, a general by the name of Bar Koziva led a rebellion against the Romans. Initially he met great success and it appears that he re-established a form of Jewish kingdom. In fact, the Rambam refers to him as Bar Koziva the king.

The great sage Rabbi Akiva believed that Bar Koziva was Moshiach and proclaimed him as such. He expounded the aforementioned verse, reading it as *דרך*

כוכב מיעקב, Koziva will shoot forth from Yaakov, playing on the similarity of the word *כוכב* (star) and *כזבא* (Koziva). This is why he became known as Bar Kochba, literally the son of a star.

At the same time as the sages and commentators teach that this Pasuk refers to Moshiach, the Talmud Yerushalmi teaches that the same verse refers to every single Jew.

In Mesechta Maaser Sheni, the Talmud relates that a certain non-Jew came to Rabbi Yishmael bar Rabbi Yossi and told him that in his dream, he saw himself swallowing a star. On hearing this, Rabbi Yishmael cursed the man, saying that his dream indicated that he had killed a Jew, who is likened to a star.

How can these teachings be reconciled? Moshiach will be the most lofty, exalted and holy soul from amongst the Jewish people. How can the same verse that describes Moshiach be employed to refer to every single Jew, down to the spiritually lowest amongst them.

In his work Meor Einaim, the great Chassidic master Rabbi Nochum of Chernobyl quotes a teaching of the Baal Shem Tov, that every Jewish person has a part of the soul of Moshiach within them. Each one of us must prepare and perfect that part of Moshiach within us. When we each do this, we perfect the macro-soul of Moshiach, that will then be revealed to bring Redemption to the world.

Based on this, we can reconcile the different teachings. The same verse describing Moshiach, also refers to every Jew by dint of the spark of the soul of Moshiach within them.

Each one of us has a “star” inside of us, a spark of the soul of Moshiach, This is the incorruptible core of our Jewish identity and our essential, unbreakable connection to Hashem. It is the pure goodness and holiness that we each possess; our potential to be the best person and Jew that we can be.

This “star” can be swallowed up, hidden beneath our spiritual struggles and material existence, and we fail to live in congruence with its purity. Our job is to reveal it and actualise its potential in our lives.

Part of the belief in Moshiach is to believe in the Moshiach inside of ourselves. When we do this, the ultimate star will shoot forth, the enemies of the Jewish people will be crushed and uprooted and the Jewish people will triumph - sparkling like the stars that we are, so that all the world will be illuminated and navigate by our light.

Books with Stamped Edges and Scrabble on Shabbos

Rabbi Yonason Johnson

Two of the forbidden Melachos on Shabbos are Koseiv and Mocheik, writing and erasing¹. In the construction of the Mishkan, they would write letters on adjacent wall beams, so that they could be matched up easily and correctly. If a letter was written incorrectly or mistakenly, it would have to be erased in order to rewrite it².

Stamped Page Edges

One of the questions addressed by the Poskim, is about using books that have stamps or writing on the side edges of the pages. Does it constitute erasing when the book is opened and the letters are broken up? Similarly, is closing the book considered writing as the letters are re-formed?

This question applies not only to writing on the edges of a book but to pictures as well³.

The Levush⁴ rules that one may not open or close such books on Shabbos and that one who does so may even be violating Shabbos on a Biblical level. This is because it is inevitable that the writing will be broken or completed when opening and closing the book⁵.

Many Acharonim argue with the stringent ruling of the Levush. They offer two different grounds for leniency.

The Ram"o⁶ suggests multiple reasons to be lenient. His primary reason is that the letters are essentially written already. When the book is opened, the letters are there in full, but are just "lacking being brought together" – Mechusar Kreiva. In Halacha, they are theoretically viewed as remaining together and so nothing is being written or erased. This is also the basis for the lenient ruling of the Ta"z⁷.

The Perisha⁸ likens the opening and closing of a book to the opening and closing of a door. Opening and closing a door is not considered to be building or destroying the wall, because the door is made to be opened and closed. Likewise, the pages of a book are made to be opened and closed regularly. Since the breaking and forming of the letters will be constantly occurring, without any lasting permanence, it is not considered to be writing or erasing. This is also the basis for the ruling of the Magen Avraham⁹.

Whilst the Ta"z and Magen Avraham agree that one may open and close the books, they differ in their reasoning. The Ta"z, following the view of the Ram"o, writes that the Heter is because the letters are just "lacking being brought together". The Magen Avraham bases his leniency on the reasoning of the Perisha, that it is made to open and close regularly.

Their different reasonings give rise a number of practical differences in how they would rule in other cases that involve joining and separating letters, some of which are discussed below.

The Alter Rebbe¹⁰ rules that opening and closing these books is permitted. His ruling is based on the rationale of the Ram"o and Ta"z, that the letters are merely "lacking being brought together".

The Mishna Berura¹¹ however, is concerned for the stringent view of the Levush and rules that ideally such books should not be used. If no other Seforim are available and it will lead to one not learning Torah, one may rely on the lenient opinion.

The Avnei Nezer¹² is also stringent. He distinguishes between placing fully formed letters next to one another which is permissible and the opening or closing of a book which is effectively "creating" the letters and therefore forbidden.

Paroches with Writing

The Poskim discuss the case of a Paroches which opens in the middle and has embroidered writing that becomes separated when it is opened and re-joined when it is closed.

According to the Alter Rebbe and Ta"z, the Paroches may be opened and closed, since in this case too, the letters are fully formed and are just 'lacking being brought close together'. The Magen Avraham would agree that one may use the Paroches on Shabbos, because it is made to be opened and closed and this is how it is used.

Torn Pages

Often, the pages of a Siddur or Sefer become torn. Is one allowed to push the sides of the torn page together in order to decipher and read the words?

According to the Ta"z and Alter Rebbe, this is also a case where the letters are 'lacking being brought close together' and it is therefore permissible.

Even though he is lenient and permits opening Seforim with words on the side, in this case the Magen Avraham would rule stringently. Unlike the stamp on the side of a book, the torn page is not made to be opened and closed like a door and would thus remain forbidden.

Scrabble

According to the view of the Mishna Berura who rules stringently on opening books with stamped edges, one may not play Scrabble or similar games on Shabbos. In his view, the forming of words by placing the letters next to one another constitutes writing. Dismantling the words would be erasing.

However, according to the reason of the Ram"o, the Ta"z and the ruling of the Alter Rebbe, since the letters are already formed and one is merely placing them together, it does not constitute writing. The Avnei Nezer would concur. (Some Poskim raise a separate reason to avoid playing these games, because one may come to write down the score. This is in addition to the general position of the Acharonim that playing games on Shabbos (at least for adults) is forbidden as a mundane activity).

Puzzles

Assembling or dismantling picture-puzzles on Shabbos would be subject to the same dispute. According to the Alter Rebbe, the picture is already formed, but is just "lacking being brought close together". Therefore, one may assemble the puzzle or break it up on Shabbos. According to the Mishna Berura who rules stringently in relation to books with stamped edges, puzzles should be avoided, although one could be lenient for young children¹³.

A Fundamental Exception

In the same section of the Shulchan Aruch¹⁴, the Alter Rebbe brings the ruling of the Magen Avraham¹⁵ that if one hooks silver letters onto a garment, it is considered as writing.

At first glance, this seems to contradict his ruling concerning books with stamped edges, which he allows because the letters are already formed and are just "lacking being brought close together". So why does the Alter Rebbe rule stringently with the silver letters?

The difference in this case is that the letters become firmly attached when they are hooked to the garment. It is forbidden because attaching and separating the letters in this scenario is more difficult and requires a more significant action¹⁶. This is unlike the letters stamped on the edges of the book which are loosely joined and easily separated. As such, they cannot be simply described as Mechusar Kreiva, just "lacking being brought together".

Based on this distinction, magnetic Scrabble boards or boards which have a frame around the squares to secure the pieces in place, should not be used on Shabbos. Similarly, a puzzle base that has an inset border which holds the pieces together or a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces lock firmly together, should not be used, even according to the lenient opinion of the Alter Rebbe.

1. Shabbos 73a
2. Shabbos 73b
3. Magen Avraham 340:6 and 7. The Acharonim include meaningful pictures in the Melacha of Koseiv.
4. Orach Chaim 340:4
5. Ta"z 340:2 challenges the Levush, since the Melacha is unintended (אינו מתכוין) and should not be Biblical prohibition. See Avnei Nezer that the Melacha is inevitable (פסיק רישא) and therefore Biblically forbidden. The Levush follows the position of the Rambam that מלאכה שאינה צריכה לגופה is Biblically forbidden.
6. Teshuvos Siman 119
7. Orach Chaim 340:2
8. Beginning of Orach Chaim Siman 340
9. Orach Chaim 340:6
10. Orach Chaim 340:4. This is also the view of the Elya Rabbah, Chok Yaakov and Tosefes Shabbos.
11. Orach Chaim 340:17
12. Siman 210
13. According to the Avnei Nezer, since the letters or pictures themselves are being completed, this would be forbidden.
14. Orach Chaim 340:9
15. Orach Chaim 340:10
16. See Magen Avraham Orach Chaim 340:10 with Machatzis Hashekel. See also Igros Moshe Orach Chaim 1:135