

Daily Teaching
17 Kislev 5768
Tuesday, November 27, 2007

Vayeishev #3

from Harav Yitzchak Ginsburgh

Moshe's process of sweetening

The point we ended with yesterday prompts us to ask: when did Moshe Rabbeinu go through all three stages? The answer to this question lies in our earlier observation that the word צר, which we translated as "cliff" and which also means a flint stone used to circumcise. The first example in the Torah of such a stone used to perform a circumcision is found in regard to Moshe Rabbeinu. When Moshe was on his way back to Egypt to speak with Pharaoh on behalf of God, a very mysterious event occurs:

He [Moshe] was in a lodging place on the way [to Egypt]; God accosted Moshe, and He sought to kill him. But, Tziporah took a flint rock, cut off her son's foreskin and cast it to his feet. Then she said: "For you are a bridegroom of blood to me." So He released him. Then she said: "bridegroom of blood."¹

These verses are indeed very difficult to understand, but they are the key to understanding Moshe's attainment of the state of sweetening in the cleft in the rock.

First, let us recall the background of these verses. Moshe has been appointed as God's emissary to Pharaoh, entrusted with the mission of speaking with Pharaoh on God's behalf. The reason for God's sudden anger with Moshe is clear: If your own son has not been circumcised, how can you, Moshe, speak on God's behalf?² This is a beautiful example of the relationship between circumcision and rectified speech. Tziporah, his wife, thanks to her feminine intellect, which was given more powers of analysis than the male intellect, realized that this was the case. She immediately circumcised her son. By doing so, Tziporah vicariously rectified Moshe's otherwise limited³ power of speech, making it possible for him to perform his mission.⁴ In other words, Moshe Rabbeinu experienced the first two stages of submission⁵ and separation thanks to his wife, Tziporah. It seems that without her intervention and keen insight into what needed to be done, Moshe would have remained in a state of hindered speech.

Awe of God for all mankind

Let us look further into the two verses from Isaiah. In the first verse the words: "in earthy tunnels" are a beautiful linguistic allusion to the custom to bury the foreskin in sand and earth.⁶ The word for "tunnels," מחלות, in Hebrew is related to the word for absolution, indicating that the placing of the foreskin in the earth is a *segulah* for



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forgiveness of one's improper conduct, especially in terms of the blemish of the covenant, and anything else that extends from the earth element of the animal soul. This includes laziness, depression, etc., as enumerated in the Tanya (chapter 1).

As we have seen, the first and third verses are very similar; all of the differences lie in the first five words of each (the remaining words are identical). Though the description in each is the same, the wording is a little different. If we take these ten words, **עפר**, **ובאו במערות צרים ובמחלות עפר... לבוא בנקרות הצרים ובסעפי הסלעים**, we find that their total numerical value is 3500, exactly 10 times the value of "earth" **עפר**, strengthening the connection of these verses to the element of earth, which when rectified completely culminates with the resurrection of the dead, who are called "dwellers of the earth."⁷

The middle verse describes the condition for all of humanity to experience higher fear: When "men will cast away to the moles and the bats, their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship." In other words, people still veil the absolute oneness of God with metaphoric idols of silver and gold—which in practice refer to any love or fear in a person's heart that is not love or fear of God alone.⁸ When this changes, God alone will remain as the object of our heart's desire; a state described a few verses earlier in Isaiah: "And God alone will be exalted on that day."⁹ The phrase "God alone" **יִהוּה לְבַדוֹ** equals 68, the same numerical value as "life" **חַיִּים**, implying that when God alone is recognized as the sole power guiding the universe that will be the time of "life," i.e., the eternal life following the resurrection of the dead, as explained above.

The value of the entire phrase: "And God alone will be exalted on that day." **וְנִשְׁגַּב יִהוּה לְבַדוֹ בְּיוֹם הַהוּא** is 504, which is equal to both $7 \cdot 72$ and $8 \cdot 63$. 72 and 63 are the two of the four most important fillings of the essential Name of God, *Havayah*,¹⁰ and correspond to the father and mother principles. It turns out that 504 is not only a product of both 72 and 63, but also the smallest number that divides by both; it is their first point of intersection. Thus, this verse "God alone will be exalted on that day" alludes to the consummate union of the father and mother principles, which gives birth to rectified emotions of the heart that can take the place of the false silver and gold idols, the false emotional attachments.

A missed opportunity

In the Book of Samuel,¹¹ we find a description that sounds similar to our own. After having won a relatively minor battle against the Philistines, Saul was faced with the greatest force that the Philistines could muster. This cast tremendous fear into the hearts of Saul's soldiers:

When the men of Israel saw that he [they] were in a strait, for the people were under pressure, they hid themselves in caverns, in thickets, in cliffs, in cellars, and in pits.

The word for “strait” צר is the same as the word for “cliff” and “flint” that we saw above. Clearly this is the same allusion to circumcision. But, though there was an initial movement towards transformation, Saul did not have the determination of faith needed to guide the people in completing the process. Instead of encouraging the fear of God, which would have culminated in a state of nullification of being, King Saul preferred to have the people lean on the rituals of war.¹² At that time, the people only attained the level of lower fear of God, which causes nullification of self, although from Samuel’s words it is clear that this was a missed opportunity for Saul to become the Mashiach.¹³

Though there are two words that are exactly the same in the verse in Judges and the verse in Isaiah (צרים-צר and במערות) the two verses cannot be textually linked, which would imply that they are both speaking about nullification of being. The sages say that a textual link, called a *gzeirah shavah* (גזירה שווה) is valid only if it has been passed down from Moshe Rabbeinu, or when the person who discovered it is comparable to Rabbi Meir of the Mishnah, a person who can open the eyes of the wise men of the generation.

¹. Exodus 4:24-26.

². Halachically, it is the father’s responsibility to circumcise his male children, thus creating a spiritual bond between the father’s power of procreation and speech and the child’s circumcision. However, if the child reaches halachic maturity and his father has not performed the *mitzvah* for him, then he is responsible himself for having it done.

¹⁴. The word צר, which is pronounced *tzor*, meaning “rock,” can also be pronounced *tzar*, meaning “narrow.”

⁴. In Hebrew, Tziporah is written צפרה, which contains the two words צר פה, alluding to Moshe Rabbeinu’s speech impediment. By performing the circumcision on their son, Tziporah vicariously freed her husband of his speech impediment (though Moshe continued to stutter, he was no longer inhibited by this shortcoming).

⁵. See *Rashi* there (Exodus 4:24). He quotes the sages’ graphic description of how terrible this whole incident was.

⁶. *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De’ah* 265:10.

⁷. Isaiah 26:19.

⁸. When the Ba’al Shem Tov was five years old, his father passed away. His last words to his only child were: “My son, fear only God and love every Jew with no discrimination.” As explained elsewhere, the love of God translates in daily life into the love of a fellow Jew, which according to Rabbi Akiva is the great principle of the Torah.

⁹. Isaiah 2:11.

¹⁰. See *What You Need to Know About Kabbalah*, pp. 141-3.

¹¹ 1 Samuel 13.

¹². See verses 8 and 9. See God’s reaction to the people’s failure at winning the just war seemingly sanctioned by God against the tribe of Benjamin in Judges 20 and the discussion in *Rucho shel Mashi’ach*, pp. 51-92.

¹³. Samuel says: “For God would have established your kingdom for Israel for all eternity” (verse 13).