

לעילוי נשמת
מרת עקא עדנה
צפורה ע"ה וסרטל
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל



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ALAI DESHE

Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"a of Gur

Eyes That Saw More Than Moshe: The Vision of Bnos Tzelafchad

למה יגרע שם אבינו מתוך משפחתו כי אין לו בן
תנה לנו ארצה בתוך אחי אבינו.

Why should our father's name be diminished from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among the brothers of our father (Bamidbar 27:4).

The daughters of Tzelafchad

The first two Batei Mikdash were built with physical materials, while their inner fire remained hidden within. But the third Mikdash will be composed entirely of that fire, the revealed yearning of the Jewish soul.

requested an inheritance in Eretz Yisrael; Rashi explains that their request reflects a deep love for Eretz Yisrael. The Imrei Emes related that his mother asked him: how did Chazal know this was due

to love of Eretz Yisrael? Perhaps they were simply asking for their rightful inheritance, as anyone would. The Imrei Emes answered that Tzelafchad died at the beginning of the forty years in the wilderness. If their concern had been merely to receive an inheritance, they could have made a claim for money much earlier. The fact that they waited until the nation was preparing to enter Eretz Yisrael shows that what they truly longed for was a portion in *Eretz Yisrael* itself, not mere assets.

Rashi quotes Chazal saying that Hashem responded to the daughters of Tzelafchad: "They have spoken correctly; this *parshah* is already written in heaven." Chazal conclude: The eyes of the daughters of Tzelafchad saw what even Moshe did not see.

The *Ezor Eliyahu* (a disciple of the *Kotzker*) wonders at this conclusion. They simply brought a request for an inheritance; how does that demonstrate greater vision than Moshe?

He explains that the "vision" Chazal speak of refers to a deep spiritual yearning for Eretz Yisrael. The *bnos Tzelafchad* were righteous women and

Bein HaMetzarim: Seeking Hashem Beneath the Surface

Chazal³ teach that even after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the Shechinah never departed from the Kosel HaMa'aravi. It is perplexing that among the Rishonim who journeyed to Eretz Yisrael, we find no record in their writings of a visit to the Kosel HaMa'aravi. (This includes figures such as R' Ishtori HaParchi, author of *Kaftor VaFerach*, and others from that era.) One would assume that their first destination would have been the holy Kosel HaMa'aravi.

The *sefarim* explain that the Kosel was originally buried beneath layers of earth and refuse. This remained the case until a Turkish sultan erected his palace near the site of the Mikdash. Observing an elderly woman tossing trash at the site, he questioned her actions. She replied that her family had preserved a tradition, passed down since Roman times, to dispose of garbage at this spot. This practice originated as a Roman decree aimed at concealing the Kosel, which they had failed to destroy. The sultan was intrigued and suspected something significant lay beneath. He devised a plan: he scattered gold coins throughout the area and announced that anyone who found a coin

³ *Shemos Rabbah* 2:2; *Zohar Shemos* 5a.

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they would never have desired something that was not aligned with 'Hashem's will. Therefore, when they felt a longing for a portion in Eretz Yisrael, they understood that their desire must reflect a halachic truth — that they were indeed entitled to it. The statement that “their eyes saw more than Moshe” means that their yearning for Eretz Yisrael surpassed even that of Moshe Rabbeinu.

The very essence of Eretz Yisrael lies in the longing for it. As the Gemara teaches (*Kesubos* 75a), anyone who yearns to see Eretz Yisrael will ultimately merit to be brought there in the future. With this in mind, we can better appreciate a profound insight of the Sfas Emes. The Baal HaTurim notes that the word דְּבָרוֹת appears only twice in all of Tanach: once here in the story of *bnos Tzelafchad*, and once in Melachim, where it refers to rafts sent by Chiram king of Tzur for the construction of the Beis Hamikdash. The Sfas Emes explains the connection: both cases were motivated by a pure longing for Eretz Yisrael and the Beis Hamikdash, free of any material concern.

As with Eretz Yisrael, the essence of the Beis Hamikdash is also in the yearning for it. *Tiferes Shlomo* explains why the Beis Hamikdash was not built until 480 years after entering Eretz Yisrael: it was not to be constructed merely of wood and stones, but of the deep, inner longing of the Jewish People, (תוכו רצוף אהבה מבנות ירושלים). Until that desire had fully matured, the Beis Hamikdash could not be built. This sheds light on Chazal's teaching that the third Beis Hamikdash will be built with fire. Fire represents the burning longing of the Jewish people for Hashem. The first two *Batei Mikdash* were built with physical materials, while their inner fire remained hidden within. But the third Mikdash will be composed entirely of that fire, the revealed yearning of the Jewish soul.

Rafts upon the water also symbolize a yearning for Hashem. Chazal¹ say the lower waters cried when Hashem split the waters on the second day of Creation and only the upper waters remained close to Hashem. “*By the rivers of Bavel, there we sat and also wept*” (Tehillim 137:1)—Why “also”? The *sefarim* explain that

Hashem comforted the lower waters with a role in the Beis Hamikdash, in the salt that every korban required and in the *nisuch hamayim* (pouring of the water on Sukkos). In this way they could maintain a connection to Hashem.² But with the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and the end of those offerings, the lower waters wept again. “*Also we wept*”—sitting by the rivers of *Bavel*, we joined the rivers in their ancient cry for closeness to Hashem.

Parshas Pinchas is the *parshah* that outlines the *yamim tovim*, and it awakens the deep yearning that resides in every Jewish heart. Each Yom Tov has its own unique spiritual spark. Just as in the physical world, earlier generations were satisfied with tasting just one flavor in their food, but today we crave many flavors simultaneously—in *ruchniyus* too, *Parshas Pinchas* is our chance to enjoy the spiritual “taste” of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Shavuot, and all the other *yamim tovim*.

(סעודה שלישית, פרשת פינחס תשפ”ג, מאמר א)

1 *Bereishis Rabbah* 5:4.

2 Rashi to Vayikra 2:13.

The Hei and the Yud: Testimony That Begins Below

ראובן בכור ישראל בני ראובן: הנוך משפחת
החנכי, לפלוא משפחת הפלואי

Reuven, firstborn of Yisrael—the sons of Reuven: of Chanoch, the family of the Chanochi; of Pallu, the family of the Pallui. (Bamidbar 26:5)

Chazal⁴ say that because the nations of the world would demean the Jewish

people, questioning their *yichus* and claiming they were not truly descended from their forefathers, therefore Hashem attached His name to the *shevatim*. He did so by adding the name *Kah*, placing a *hei* at the beginning and a *yud* at the end of each *shevet's* name, as a testimony to their legitimate *yichus*. As the pasuk says (Tehillim

122:4) שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *The tribes of Kah, a testimony for Yisrael*, meaning Hashem's name *Kah* gave testimony about Yisrael. Therefore, each *shevet* and each family's name is written with a *hei* before and a *yud* after: החנכי, הפלואי, and so on.

The Ohr HaChaim *hakadosh* asks: Why was the name *Kah* added to their names in

4 Rashi to Bamidbar 26:5.

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could keep it. Masses of poor people came and dug, until the Kosel, the last remnant of the Mikdash, stood revealed once again.

We know there is nothing, no matter how small, that occurs without Hashem's supervision. Certainly then, the Kosel HaMa'aravi, the eternal site of the Shechinah, could not have remained buried simply due to a Roman decree. It could only have remained hidden because Hashem himself willed it so.

This may be understood in light of what *tzaddikim* have taught regarding

Every Jew's mission is to search for the precious 'silver' buried beneath the filth of this world.

the era of the Ibn Ezra, during which some of the Rishonim wrote ideas that seemed to challenge the teachings of Chazal. At that time, there was a rise in philosophical questioning and doubt in matters of *emunah*. *Tzaddikim* explained that the generations immediately following the

destruction of the Beis Hamikdash still drew strength from its lingering spiritual light, while later generations began to be sustained by the light of the future *geulah*. However, there came a time when the light of the Mikdash had already dimmed, and the light of redemption had not yet begun to shine—and therefore, that era was marked by spiritual decline and a weakening in the awareness of Hashem.

Accordingly, we can suggest that the reason the Kosel HaMa'aravi was concealed during that time reflected the spiritual state of the world itself. Just as the light of the Mikdash was dimmed, so too the Kosel lay hidden from sight.

The Haggadah Shel Pesach *Midrash BeChiddush* (by Rabbi Eliezer Nachman of Poya, a disciple of the Rama MiPano) interprets the pasuk, מְקִימֵי מַעַרְךָ דָּל, מֵאֲשָׁפֹת, יְרִים אֲבִיוֹן – *He raises the poor from the dust, from the garbage heaps He lifts the needy* (Tehillim 113:7), as referring to a prophecy of Dovid Hamelech. Dovid saw that the nations of the world would turn the Kosel HaMa'aravi into a garbage heap. Therefore, he davened that Hashem would *lift the needy* by removing the filth and restoring the Kosel to its rightful glory.

Just as the sultan scattered coins to reveal the Kosel, so too the Ribbono Shel Olam has scattered countless precious opportunities for growth in our lives. It is our task to uncover them. As the Sfas Emes explains the pasuk (Mishlei 2:4), אִם תִּבְקֹשֶׁנָּה, כֶּכֶסֶף – *If you will seek it like silver...* Hashem has hidden spiritual treasures in this world. Every Jew's mission is to search for the precious 'silver' buried beneath the filth of this world. The Kosel's concealment beneath garbage, and its eventual uncovering through coins of silver and gold, serve to remind us of this important message. Spiritual opportunities often lie hidden within the distractions of the material world, and it is our task to uncover the holiness that lies beneath.

These days present a unique opportunity for attaining *kedushah*. The phrase *Bein HaMetzarim* (as these three weeks are called) is taken from the pasuk (Eichah 1:3), כָּל רֹדְפֶיהָ הִשִּׁיגוּהָ, בֵּין הַמְּצָרִים – *All her pursuers overtook her between the straits*. The Maggid of Mezritch teaches that רֹדְפֶיהָ should be read רֹדֵף יָהּ: Those who pursue closeness to Hashem, those who seek holiness, can attain it specifically during this period of *Bein HaMetzarim*.

(סעודה שלישית, פרשת פינחס תשפ"ג, מאמר ב)

The Hei and the Yud: Testimony That Begins Below

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reverse order, with a *hei* at the beginning and a *yud* at the end, instead of its proper order, first a *yud* and then a *hei*?

This question can be answered based on an insight of the Sfas Emes, who asks: Why was this testimony to the *yichus* of

Bnei Yisrael only necessary during the census taken at the end of their forty years in the wilderness, and not during the earlier countings, immediately after their departure from Mitzrayim? (One could explain simply that only now, as they prepared to enter Eretz

Yisrael and encounter the nations, it became necessary to preempt their slander.)

The Sfas Emes explains that, in truth, this testimony was not intended to silence the accusations of the nations, for even Hashem's testimony would not prevent

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The Hei and the Yud: Testimony That Begins Below

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preserve their identity as Yisrael, with all the profound significance of the name Yisrael—a name that reflects who they are and the mission they are meant to fulfill on earth.

The Sfas Emes further explains that just as Bnei Yisrael serve as witnesses to Hashem—*‘אתם עדי נאם ה’ – you are My witnesses, says Hashem* (Yeshayahu 43:10)—so too, Hashem testifies on behalf of Bnei Yisrael: *עַד ה’ בְּכֶם – Hashem is your witness* (Shmuel I 12:5). Bnei Yisrael bear testimony to Hashem by revealing that even within the concealment of this world, there is a G-d. Through their commitment to Torah and mitzvos, they proclaim the presence of the Master of the Universe. In turn, Hashem testifies about them and shines His presence upon them.

After the sin at Shittim, it became necessary to count Bnei Yisrael and to emphasize that Bnei Yisrael must remain spiritually strong under all circumstances. It was because of their fall at Shittim that Hashem came to demonstrate that they still had the ability to bear testimony to Him. Precisely in times of spiritual darkness, their ability to testify to Hashem is most powerful—because it reveals the presence of Hashem where He is most hidden. And in that merit, Hashem bears testimony about them. This may explain why the census and testimony appear in *Parshas Pinchas*, not *Parshas Balak*. *Balak* is the *parshah* of sin, while *Pinchas* is the *parshah* of healing and *tikun*.

Why does the *hei* come before the *yud* in the names of Bnei Yisrael? The *hei* represents This World, as the Gemara (*Menachos* 29b) says: Hashem created *Olam Haba* with the *yud*,

and *Olam Haze*h with the *hei*, of the Name *Kah* – כִּי בִי-הָ ה' צוֹר עוֹלָמִים. The *hei* comes first because the cycle of testimony begins down on earth, with Bnei Yisrael proclaiming Hashem's presence through their actions in this world. Only then does Hashem testify about them from above.

The Sfas Emes explains that in the darkness of *galus*, when Bnei Yisrael are surrounded by *resha'im* and Hashem's presence is ever more concealed, our testimony becomes even more precious. Despite the concealment, we testify to His presence daily. The Sfas Emes compares this to the testimony of witnesses in *beis din*: just as the court is obligated to investigate witnesses thoroughly to ensure the truth, so too must each Jew engage in deep introspection, examining his own actions, and the more he searches within, the more clearly Hashem is revealed through him.

To this, we may add a deeper insight. The Gemara (*Sanhedrin* 32a) teaches that Chazal decreed that monetary cases don't require a full investigation and cross-examination. This was enacted to avoid discouraging lenders. Without this leniency, people would hesitate to lend, concerned that their witnesses would become disqualified during the intense questioning and then the borrower wouldn't have to return the money.

Like many of Chazal's enactments made 'for the sake of the economy' (*l'tikkun hashuk*), this *takanah* served a practical purpose in the physical realm, but we must recognize that Chazal's words always reach beyond the physical. While their rulings addressed

worldly needs, they also carried deep spiritual significance in the higher worlds.

This leniency that lightens the burden of investigation on monetary cases, also lightens the spiritual burden upon us. If we had to cross-examine every action in our *avodas Hashem* with absolute precision, down to the smallest detail—the weight of that responsibility would be overwhelming. Just as the fear of loss might deter a person from lending, so too, such fear and spiritual pressure could deter a person

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from striving for growth in *avodas Hashem*. It is in the area of monetary law that this leniency was focused, echoing the words of the *tzaddikim*⁵ that when Chazal destroyed the *yetzer hara* for idolatry, it reappeared clothed in the form of a desire for money.

Even in exile, although we are expected to long for the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*—Chazal still lightened the demand of intense spiritual investigation. This was done to support and uplift the weaker generations.

(סעודה שלישית, פרשת פינחס תשפ"ג, מאמר א)

5 Noam Elimelech, *Iggeres HaKodesh*, 1.