

תורה מציון Torah MiTzion

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Eve of Renewal

By Rav Dror Brama, former Rosh Kollel, London

This year, the Shabbat on which we read the Torah portion of Bamidbar is also *Erev Rosh Chodesh Sivan* (the day before Rosh Chodesh Sivan). When this happens, instead of reading the regular Shabbat haftarah we read a special haftarah from the Book of *Samuel*, generally referred to by its first few words which are "*Machar Chodesh*" ("Tomorrow is the New Moon").

What is it about Erev Rosh Chodesh that leads us to change the haftarah? After all, when Shabbat occurs on the day before a holiday, we stick with the regular haftarah. Yet on Erev Rosh Chodesh we change the haftarah. Why?

According to rabbinic tradition, King David was born and died on Shavuot. Through exploring the special haftarah of *Machar Chodesh* which deals with David's story, we will attempt to answer our question.

The background of the haftarah is the dysfunctional relationship of Saul and David. Saul is hostile to David and is afraid that David will be the next king instead of his son Jonathan. Jonathan himself loves David dearly. He knows David will rule instead of him and he is happy about it. Jonathan does not wish for sovereignty, only for kindness and friendship from the Davidic dynasty. He attempts to protect David and to mediate between Saul and David. Jonathan's attitude adds fuel to Saul's anger and leads Saul to rebuke him:

Saul flew into a rage against Jonathan. "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!" he shouted. "I know that you side with the son of Jesse - to your shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness. For as long as the son of Jesse lives on earth, neither you

nor your kingship will be secure. Now have him brought to me, for he is marked for death" (*I Samuel* 20:30-31).

Now Jonathan needs to inform David that his attempt at appeasement has failed and that Saul wants David dead, while also conveying his own warm feelings and personal attachment to David and their future together.

In the previous chapter, the two already felt that a historical moment was on the horizon - the replacement of Saul's dynasty with that of David was imminent, and the train of Jewish history was arriving at a junction. How would this transition be achieved - through evolution or revolution? They still did not know whether the downfall of one kingdom and the sprouting up of the other would be a gentle and smooth process or one wracked by terrible pain.

While there's still time, Jonathan sets the scene where he will try to find an answer to these questions for David after returning from a Rosh Chodesh meal with his father Saul.

On Erev Rosh Chodesh, Jonathan composes the different parts of the production, combining words and deeds, actors and scenery. The play is set to open on the third day, when he and David will enact the answer through their performance.

[Jonathan told David,] "*Veshilashta*, and go down all the way to the place where you hid the other time, and stay close to the Even HaEzel. Now I will shoot three arrows to one side of it, as though I were shooting at a mark, and I will order the boy to go and find the arrows. If I call to the boy, 'Hey! The arrows are on this side of you,' be reassured and come, for you are safe and there is no danger - as the Lord lives! But if, instead, I call to the youth, 'Hey! The arrows are beyond you,' then leave, for the Lord has sent you away" (*Ibid.* 20:19-22).

These verses include a number of Hebrew words with multiple meanings. Before exploring the passage, we will comment on these words.

The word "*veshilashta*" (literally, you shall thrice) has a number of definitions. The simplest one is "divide into three," as in the verse, "*Veshilashta et gevul artzekha* - You shall divide your land into three" (*Deuteronomy* 19:3). Here it would seem to mean hiding for three days. It also can mean an aide-de-camp. The aide is the king's right-hand man and Chief of Staff. One might say that the king is the first in the kingdom, the crown prince the second, and the aide-de-camp the third. Jonathan here is requesting permission from David to play the part of the crown prince in front of Saul.

The phrase "Even HaEzel" (literally, stone of proceeding) is the stone of those who come and go. According to the Targum (Aramaic translation) of our Sages, it is the stone of destiny.

Now, Jonathan goes to clarify his father's relationship to David, and sets up a meeting with David on the third day. David will hide near the Even HaEzel and Jonathan will shoot three arrows. They coordinate that the arrows would not be shot straight, but rather off to the side, where the target would be. Jonathan's answer would be conveyed by the way in which the arrows were shot and by his instructions to the youth. If he would tell the youth to collect the closer arrows, in front of the target, it would be a sign that all is well. If he would tell the youth to gather the distant arrows, beyond the target, it would be a sign that David must flee to save himself from Saul.

What is the reason for this elaborate method of communicating? We see afterwards that they can speak to each other directly (*I Samuel* 20:42). Why then are all these signs necessary?

Jonathan and David can see the "target." They are both aware that Saul's dynasty has dead-ended. The history of Jewish monarchy will no longer continue in a straight line, but will shift sideways. Jonathan, the crown prince of Saul's line, is the one who chooses to turn the bow and to choose the target on the side - the Davidic dynasty. David hides near the stone whose name hints at those who come and go, at historical processes and at destiny, and he waits for the signs from his friend. If Jonathan's arrows land in front of the target, Saul's dynasty will end before David's begins, and the transition will be peaceful. If the arrows land beyond the target, the dynasties will overlap. The end of Saul's dynasty will collide with the beginning of David's and there will be crises and wars. David will begin his rule as a refugee.

From here on in, the Book of *Samuel* adds the letter *hey* to Jonathan's name, changing it to Jehonathan. The new name emphasizes the meaning of "God gave" (*hay*, which stands for Hashem, plus *natan*, gave). The three arrows express the idea that it is in accordance with God that Jonathan gives David the kingship. The three ingredients of a dynasty, which are the three things upon which the world stands (*Pirkei Avot* 1:2), go forth from Jonathan's bow to establish David's dynasty.

After Yehonatan shoots these arrows, the next gloomy chapter of history unfolds before the two friends. The prophet relates:

David emerged from his concealment at the Negev. He flung himself face-down on the ground and bowed low three times. They kissed each other and wept together; David wept longer. Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of the Lord: 'May the Lord be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!'" (*I Samuel* 20:41-42)

They understand that they will undergo pain and suffering in the transition period between dynasties. They cry with the pain of friendship which was unable to conquer jealousy and hatred. They promise in the name of God not to pass on the wounds of hatred to future generations.

On Erev Rosh Chodesh, the moon is hiding. The Jewish nation is compared to the moon. The cycles of life - growth and destruction, development and withdrawal - characterize our national life. Before the moon is renewed, we again tell this story, which is still not over.

Messiah son of Joseph will precede Messiah son of David. Even at the time of the redemption, advancing towards the goal will not always be via the most direct route. The downfall of the kingship of Messiah son of Joseph will be followed by the sprouting up of David's kingship.

How will this transition come about? Through evolution or revolution? Through pursuing knowledge or pursuing people in the Judean hills?

We sit beside the Even HaEzel, and with tears in our eyes we read the oath of King David (*I Samuel* 20:42): "May the Lord be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!"

Six are the books of the Mishnah, Shabbat 31a

Howard Jackson

What is implied by the verse¹ in *Isaiah 33:6*: "And He shall be the **stability (*emunat*)** of **your times (*itecha*)**, the **strength (*chosen*)** of **salvation (*yeshuot*)**, **wisdom (*chochmat*)** and **knowledge (*vada'at*)**; the fear of God is His treasure"?

"**Stability**" refers to The Order² of *Zera'im*; "**your times**" to The Order of *Mo'ed*; "**strength**" to The Order of *Nashim*³; "**salvation**" to The Order of *Nezikin*⁴; "**wisdom**" to The Order of *Kodshim*; and "**knowledge**" to The Order of *Taharot*. But even so, "the fear of God is His treasure".⁵

Rava said: When a person is brought to Heavenly judgment they say to him: "Were you honest (***emunah***) in business? Did you set aside fixed times (***itim***) for *Torah* study? Did you engage in procreation⁶ (***yichus***)? Did you wait in hope for the Messianic salvation (***yeshuah***)? Did you delve into wisdom (***chochmah***)? Did you understand *Torah* to the level of inferring one thing from another (***da'at***)? But even so, if "the fear of God is his treasure" then he will be judged favourably, otherwise not." (*Gemara Shabbat 31a*)

Based on the commentary of the *Vilna Gaon*⁷ we can demonstrate that the *Gemara's* two interpretations of the verse in *Isaiah* are most complementary. A person who masters the six orders of the *Mishnah* ought to be able to respond in the affirmative to all six questions of the Heavenly court.

The Order of *Zera'im* concerns agricultural laws. A farmer certainly relies upon God because he knows how dependent he is on rain falling in the right seasons. Such a person will exhibit the virtue of *emunah*, enabling him to reply to the first question of dealing honestly in business.

The Order of *Mo'ed* covers the festivals and times throughout our calendar; hence one who studies it well will answer affirmatively the question about fixing times for *Torah* study.

The Order of *Nashim* contains the regulations about permitted and forbidden relationships, thus one who knows it will answer well the question about raising children.

The Order of *Nezikin* details the laws of damages. *Maharsha* explains that the four categories of damages on earth allude to the four Heavenly-decreed exiles⁸ from which we seek salvation.

The Order of *Kodshim* instructs us in the commandments pertaining to the Temple and offerings. This requires much study and wisdom.

Finally, the Order of *Taharot* expounds the laws of ritual purity, requiring even more profundity than *Kodshim*. Hence, one would also be able to reply that one attained the level of *da'at*.

Footnotes:

- 1) We quote this among the verses of blessing for a successful week in the prayer "*VeYiten Lecha*"
- 2) Following are the six orders of the *Mishnah*
- 3) "***chosen***" relates to the word ***yichus*** (genealogy). Since it is through women that heirs are born, the *Gemara* connects this to *Nashim*. (*Rashi*)
- 4) Much of *Nezikin* deals with saving a victim from his persecutor

- 5) Although one might have studied all six orders of the *Mishnah*, one must also develop the fear of God.
- 6) *Maharsha* teaches that this does not refer to having children oneself, but to facilitating others (especially orphans) to get married.
- 7) Chidushei HaGra
- 8) The present (and last) exile is *Edom*.

**Family Learning: Parshat Bamidbar
Bluma Zalcman**

- 1) How many men were in the tribe of Gad?
- 2) What are the three families of Levi'im?
- 3) To which family did Moshe and Aaron belong?
- 4) What is the family of Kehat responsible for?

Answers follow below

Torah MiTzion establishes Religious Zionist Kollels (centers of Jewish learning and outreach) in Diaspora Jewish communities to strengthen the study of Torah, Jewish identity, the unity of the Jewish people, and the connection between Torah study and Israel.

The Kollels, led by a Rosh Kollel, are comprised of Israeli shlichim (emissaries) - married men and their wives, and single young men, graduates of Yeshivot Hesder in Israel - who serve in the communities for a period of one-three years.

Torah MiTzion is also proud to be a partner of the "**Jewish Learning Initiative**" program on college campuses.

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Answers, Family Learning:

1. 45,650
2. Gershon, Kehat and Merari
3. To the family of Kehat.
4. They were responsible for the keilim, the vessels, of the Mikdash.