



Moshe Went to the Beis Midrash

Moshe Rabeinu Went to the Beis Midrash to Transform the “Aleph” of אָרוֹר to the “beis” of בְּרוּךְ

In honor of the upcoming Shabbas Kodesh, parshas Vayeilech, we will explore the opening passuk (Devarim 31, 1): **“וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה: וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם בֶּן מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה אֲנֹכִי הַיּוֹם לֹא אוֹכֵל עוֹד לְצֵאת וּלְבוֹא וְהָאֵמֹר אֵלַי לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה.”** Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Yisrael. He said to them, **“I am one hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in, and Hashem has said to me, ‘You shall not cross this Yarden.’”** Rashi comments: **Today my days and years have been filled. On this day I was born; on this day I shall die.**

We will examine why the parsha opens with the words **“Moshe went,”** but does not inform us what his destination was. Now, we could explain simply that he went to speak to the people of Yisrael. However, throughout the Torah, whenever Moshe went to speak with the people, it never says **“Moshe went.”** The Targum YoNasan provides the following clarification: **“וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה לְמִשְׁכַּן בֵּית”**—**Moshe went to the designated house of study.** This, too, requires further clarification. Why did Moshe Rabeinu see fit to go to the Beis Midrash on the day of his passing?

Studying Torah in the Beis Midrash Has the Power to Spare Us from the Tochachos in Parshas Ki Savo

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a wonderful explanation from the holy Admor, our master, Rabbi Yischar Dov of Belz, zy”a. He relies on an explanation of his father’s, the holy master, Rabbi Yehoshua of Belz, zy”a, related to David HaMelech’s statement (Tehillim 94, 12): **“אֲשֶׁרִי הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר תִּיַסְרֵנִי”**—**fortunate is the man whom G-d afflicts, and whom You teach from Your Torah.** He explains that David HaMelech is advising us how to protect ourselves from suffering and affliction. As the Gemara explains (Berachos 5a): **“יְסוּרֵיךָ מִמִּרְקָיִךְ: עוֹזְנוֹתַיִךְ שֶׁל אָדָם”**—**suffering purges man’s iniquities.**

Furthermore, we have learned in the Gemara (Menachos 110a): **“כָּל הַעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרַת חֲטָאת כְּאִילוֹ הַקָּרִיב וְכָל הַעוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרַת אֲשָׁם כְּאִילוֹ הַקָּרִיב”**—**anyone who studies the Torah of the “chatas,” it is considered as if he actually brought a “chatas-offering”; and anyone who studies the Torah of the “asham,” it is considered as if he actually brought an “asham-offering.”** Accordingly, if a Jew who has transgressed the will of the Creator studies the passages of the punishments and “tochachos” in the Torah with fear and reverence of Hashem and understands that he truly deserves these punishments due to his actions, it is considered as if he actually received them and is no longer subject to them.

In this light, let us interpret the words of David HaMelech: **“Fortunate is the man whom G-d afflicts”**—in order to provide atonement for his iniquities. Then, he suggests the best way to receive these afflictions: **“And whom You teach from Your Torah”**—you do not have to actually suffer the afflictions depicted in the “tochachos”; instead, by studying those passages in the Torah, it will be considered as if you actually suffered them and were punished appropriately.

So, after Moshe Rabeinu had frightened the people with the tochachos in parshas Ki Savo and then added the additional tochachos in this week’s parsha and parshas Ha’azinu, he wished to encourage them and comfort them. He did so by informing them that that a less frightening and uncomfortable alternative exists. Hence, **“Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Yisrael.”** As we learned from the Targum YoNasan, Moshe went to the Beis Midrash. Instead of actually enduring the suffering and afflictions, chas v’shalom, he studied the passages of the tochachos with them. Thus, they saw that they could escape the afflictions by learning these passages in the Beis Midrash with due fear and emotion, which would inspire them to perform teshuvah. As a result, it would be considered as if they had actually received their due punishments. This concludes their sacred words.

The “beis” of בראשית versus the “Aleph” of אינכי

Following in my masters’ footsteps, I would like to add a tidbit concerning the comment of the Targum YoNasan: **And Moshe went to the Beis Midrash.** Let us introduce a fascinating passage in the Midrash (B.R. 1, 10):

“עשרים וששה דורות היתה האל”ף קורא תגר לפני כסאו של הקב”ה, אמרה לפניו, רבנו של עולם, אני ראשון של אותיות ולא בראת עולמך בי, אמר לה הקב”ה, העולם ומלואו לא נברא אלא בזכות התורה, שנאמר ה’ בחכמה יסד ארץ וגו’, למחר אני בא ליתן תורה בסיני, ואיני פותח תחלה אלא כך, שנאמר (שמות כ-ב) אנכי ה’ אלקיך.”

For 26 generations, the “aleph” complained before the throne of HKB”H. She said to Him: “Master of the Universe, I am the first of the letters, and You did not create the world with me!” HKB”H said to her: “The world and everything in it were only created in the merit of Torah, as it is states (Mishlei 3, 19): ‘Hashem established the earth with wisdom etc.’ Tomorrow, I will come to give Torah at Sinai, and I will not open except with you, as it states (Shemos 20, 2): ‘I am) Hashem your G-d.’”

The brilliant Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, ztz”l, is puzzled by this passage (Imrei Shefer, Bereishis), because of a teaching in another Midrash (B.R. ibid.): “למה נברא העולם בב’, שהוא לשון ברכה, ולמה לא באל”ף, שהוא לשון ארורה, אמר הקב”ה הרי אני בורא אותו בלשון ברכה והלואי יעמוד.” **Why was the universe created with the letter “beis”? Because it connotes berachah (ברכה). And why not with the letter “aleph”? Because it connotes cursedness (ארורה). So, HKB”H said: Thus, I am creating it with the connotation of berachah; hopefully it will endure.** This Midrash explains quite clearly that HKB”H began creation with the letter “beis” of בראשית and not with the letter “aleph,” because “aleph” is associated with ארור (curse), while “beis” is associated with ברכה (blessing). If so, why did HKB”H begin the Aseres HaDibros at Sinai with the letter “aleph” of אינכי?

He answers that albeit the letter “aleph” is associated with the notion of being cursed--ארור—nevertheless, with the power of the kedushah of the Torah, it is possible to transform even a curse into a berachah. This explains very nicely why at the time of creation, before the giving of the Torah, HKB”H did not wish to begin creation with the letter “aleph,” which alludes to ארור. For, at that point in history, the power of the Torah was not yet available to transform a curse into a berachah. After the Torah was given to Yisrael, however, HKB”H opened with the letter “aleph” of אינכי—alluding to the fact that with the power of the Torah, it would be possible to transform even something that is cursed into something that is blessed. These are his enlightening words.

This agrees very nicely with an elucidation in the Gemara regarding the letters of the “aleph-Beis” (Shabbas 105a): “אל”ף—“aleph-Beis” allude to the two words “אל”ף בינה—“aleph-Beis” allude to the two words “אל”ף בינה. Rashi explains: “למוד תורה”—these first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet allude to the study of Torah. Based on what we have just discussed, the Gemara is teaching us that through the study of Torah, it is possible to transform the letter “aleph” of the word ארור to the letter “beis” of the word ברוך. This is the meaning of the words “אל”ף בינה—recognize the amazing power of the Torah; it enables a person to transform the “aleph” of ארור to the “beis” of ברוך. We can suggest that this is why the Gemara refers to a place of Torah-study as a Beis Midrash. This name teaches us that the Torah that is studied there possesses the power to transform all of the curses to the “beis” of ברוך.

With this introduction, let us interpret the following statement in the Gemara (Succah 52b): “תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל, אם פגע, אם פגע—a Baraisa was taught in the Academy of Rabbi Yishmael: **If this despicable character engages you, draw him into the Beis Midrash. If he is like a stone, he will dissolve; if he is like iron, he will shatter.** This despicable character is none other than the “nachash hakadmoni”—the primeval serpent, the yetzer hara, who persuaded Adam and Chava to sin, and brought death to the world. Consequently, HKB”H cursed it (Bereishis 3, 14): “ארור אתה מכל הבהמה ומכל חית השדה”—**you are more cursed than all the animals and all the beasts of the field.** Now, we have learned in the Mishnah (Keilim 12, 2): “זה הכלל, כל המחובר לטמא: טמא, והמחובר לטהור טהור”—**this is the general rule: Whatever is attached to the impure is impure, and that which is attached to the pure is pure.** It stands to reason, therefore, that anything associated with the yetzer hara—the “nachash hakadmoni”—who is cursed, is also likely, chas v’shalom, to be cursed.

This explains the advice of our blessed sages very nicely: **If this despicable character engages you, draw him into the Beis Midrash.** For, it is a place of Torah-study, where the “aleph” of ארור can be transformed into the “beis” of ברוך. In the words of the Targum, it is a “בית אולפנא”. This propitious quality of the Beis Midrash enables a person to withstand the persuasions of the yetzer hara and detach oneself from it. This is the message conveyed by the statement: **If he is like a stone, he will dissolve; if he is like iron, he will shatter.** The “aleph-Beis” of the Torah--אל”ף בינה—studied in the Beis Midrash destroys the two qualities of the yetzer hara, its “aleph-Beis.” If it is like an אבן, it dissolves it; if it is like ברזל, it shatters it.

This enlightens us with regards to an allusion inherent in the comment of the Targum YoNasan: “ואזל משה למשכן בית אולפנא”.

Moshe went to the Beis Midrash, which is called a **”ואזל משה למושכן”** **”ואזל משה למושכן”** in Aramaic. In keeping with our current discussion, he is alluding to the incredible power of the Beis Midrash, the house of Torah-study. It transforms the **”אולפנא”**, the letter **”aleph,”** to the letter **”beit,”** to mitigate all the harsh judgments (“dinim”) and to access all of the Berachos.

By Studying Torah in the Beis Midrash We Connect with Moshe Rabeinu Even after His Demise

As it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, I would like to propose my own explanation for Moshe going to the Beis Midrash on the day of his passing. He wished to inform us that there is a way to stay connected with him. Although he departed from us and ascended to the heavens, by going to the Beis Midrash to study Hashem’s Torah which was transmitted to us by Moshe, we remain connected with him. Let us refer to a teaching in the Gemara (Yevamos 96b):

”אמר רב יהודה אמר רב מאי דכתיב אגורה באהלך עולמים, וכי אפשר לו לאדם לגור בשני עולמים, אלא אמר דוד לפני הקב”ה, רבונו של עולם יהי רצון שיאמרו דבר שמועה מפיו בעולם הזה, דאמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי, כל תלמיד חכם שאומרים דבר שמועה מפיו בעולם הזה שפתותיו דובכות בקבר.”

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: What is the meaning of that which is written (Tehillim 61, 5): “May I live in Your tent of the worlds”? Is it possible for a person to live in two worlds simultaneously? Rather, David HaMelech was saying to HKB”H: Master of the Universe, May it be Your will that after I die, they will quote a teaching in my name in this world, because, as Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: Any deceased Torah scholar in whose name a teaching is quoted in this world, his lips move in the grave. Rashi explains: So that my lips move in the grave as if I am still alive. Tosafos write: While his neshamah is in the Heavenly Academy, his lips move in the grave as if he were speaking. Thus, he is living in two worlds at the same time.

But what is the great benefit of living in two worlds simultaneously? The commentaries explain that he is rewarded as if he is engaging in Torah-study while still alive. The Toras Chaim writes (Yevamos ibid.): **Reward for Torah and mitzvos is not given in this world. Rather, the neshamah receives its reward in the World of Neshamos. The body buried in Olam HaZeh is not rewarded until “Techiyas HaMeisim.”** However, when a halachic ruling is said in his name in Olam HaZeh, then even the body buried in Olam HaZeh is rewarded by its lips moving. This gives it pleasure, since it is as if he is alive.

The Chiddush of the Chida

Following this line of reasoning, we will explain how studying Torah causes the lips of Moshe Rabeinu to move in the grave, even though he only transmitted to us the Torah he received from HKB”H. In the sefer Pnei David (Chukas), the Chida presents in the name of the Panim Me’irot an interpretation of the passuk (Bamidbar 19, 14): **”זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל”**. **“This is the Torah”**—it provides unique advantages for the one who studies it; **“if a person should die”**—even after a person’s death; **“in a tent”**—it is still considered as if he dwells in the tent of Torah and engages in Torah-study, if a teaching is quoted in his name.

The Chida goes on to interpret the conclusion of the passuk: **“Anyone who enters the tent.”** It is apparent from the Gemara that even if a teaching is repeated in the name of a scholar citing another scholar, and that scholar is citing yet another scholar, all of their lips move in their respective graves. This then is the implication of the passuk: **“Anyone who enters the tent”**—not only is the one who originally taught the teaching, but everyone who entered the tent to repeat the teaching in his name is considered as if he is in the tent.

When the Chida writes that it is apparent from the Gemara, he is referring to what we learned in Pesachim (104b). Rav Yehudah criticized his son, Rav Yitzchak, for not going in person to witness how Ula made Havdalah; he sent Abayei in his stead. For, by not going himself, he lost the distinction of having the teaching repeated in his name; instead, the teaching will always be repeated in the name of Abayei. It is apparent from this incident that even though Abayei only reported what he saw Ula do, he merits having his lips move in the grave.

Notwithstanding, it behooves us to comment on the interpretation of the Panim Me’irot of the passuk: **”זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל”**—that one who studies Torah merits remaining in the tent of Torah even after his demise. After all, the Gemara merely asserts that his lips move in the grave. So, to explain what he means, we will refer to what the great Rabbi YehoNasan Eybeschütz, zy”a, writes in Yearos Devash (Part 2, Drush 7). He addresses the statement that if people repeat a teaching in the name of a deceased, it is as if the deceased is living in two worlds:

When a teaching of his is repeated, the neshamah of the tzaddik envelops those learning and stands there with them. Hence, when we say “halachah l’Moshe miSinai,” the neshamah of Moshe is connected and present there. Thus, it is truly as if he is living in two worlds—in the eternal

world and in this world among those who are learning and repeating his teaching. It is also present with the body in the grave with the deteriorating remains. Therefore, they said that his lips move in the grave, since it is attached to the physical remains in the grave.

Thus, we see that a tzaddik whose teaching is repeated has two distinct qualities. On the one hand, his neshamah comes and joins those who are studying Torah and repeating his teaching. On the other hand, the lips of the body itself in the grave move as if they are uttering this halachah. This clarifies very nicely the interpretation presented above: **“This is the Torah”**—it provides unique advantages for the one who studies it; **“if a person should die”**—even after a person’s death; **“in a tent”**—it is still considered as if he dwells in the tent of Torah, because his neshamah is present in the place of study where his teaching is being repeated.

**The Torah Scholars Said to One Another:
“Moshe, you have spoken well”**

This explains very nicely a practice of the Amoraim mentioned in the Gemara (Shabbas 101b). They used to say to one another, **“Moshe, you have spoken well!”** The Arizal teaches us that every Torah-scholar possesses a spark from the neshamah of Moshe Rabeinu. The source for this notion is found in the Tikunei Zohar (Tikun 69). It states that the neshamah of Moshe expands and is present in every generation, in every scholar that engages in Torah-study. So, in keeping with our current discussion, whenever Torah-scholars learn Torah that was transmitted to us by Moshe in the name of HKB”H, his lips move in his grave, and his neshamah comes to the Beis Midrash to participate with and enter those who are studying Torah. This prompts them to remark to one another: **“Moshe, you have spoken well!”** For, they are sensing via their “ruach hakodesh” that the chiddush that was just presented came from the neshamah of Moshe within them.

This enlightens us as to the significance of the opening words of the parsha: **“וילך משה”**. Recall that the Targum YoNasan explains that **Moshe went to the Beis Midrash**. Moshe did this on the day of his passing, to convey a very important message to the people of Yisrael. Even though his neshamah was departing and ascending to the heavenly yeshivah, he was still accessible to them. By going to the Beis Midrash to study the Torah that he had taught them, they could connect with him as if he was still alive and among them.

Support for this idea can be found in the incredible teachings of the Tiferes Shlomo (Vayakheil), where he focuses on this passuk: **“וילך משה”**:

The Rishonim question the significance of these words. The passuk is informing us that he passed away. Nevertheless, **he spoke these words to all the people of Yisrael**. Even though, he is now in the upper world, he learns Torah with each and every one of us. As we learn from the writings of the Arizal, anyone who learns Torah l’shma is joined by the neshamah of Moshe.

The Gaon Chida writes something similar in Devash L’Fee in the name of the Arizal: **Regarding a renowned Torah-scholar who studies l’shma, the Arizal writes that a spark from the neshamah of Moshe Rabeinu, a”h, shines within him. Perhaps this is alluded to by the letters of לשמה, which are an anagram for למשה**. Therefore, HKB”H beseeches us (Malachi 3, 22): **זכרו תורת משה עבדי אשר צויתי אותו בחורב על כל ישראל חוקים** **“ומשפטים—remember the Torah of Moshe My servant, which I commanded him at Chorev for all of Yisrael, its decrees and its statutes**. For, by doing so, his neshamah will come to the Beis Midrash and assist us to better comprehend the Torah and fulfill its mitzvos.

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