



Due to the Power of Pilpul the Mountains Crushed the Emorim HKB”H Told David to Study Torah and He Would Fight His Battles for Him

In this week’s parsha, parshas Chukas, we wish to focus on an incredible miracle HKB”H performed on behalf of Yisrael after completing their 42 journeys in the midbar, prior to entering Eretz Yisrael. Two mountains—one on the side of Moav and one on the side of the Emorim—came together to crush the Emorim hiding in caves intending to ambush and kill the people of Yisrael passing between them. As we will explain, this miracle was in the merit of Torah-study and service of Hashem.

In this merit, HKB”H rescues Yisrael from its enemies seeking to annihilate them in every, single generation. This is especially true and evident in the turbulent times currently experienced by the inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael. Yisrael’s oppressors, descendants of the wicked Haman living in Persia (Iran), launched hundreds of missiles threatening lives and property throughout Eretz Yisrael. They indiscriminately attacked Hashem’s people, young and old alike, intending to cause the ultimate physical and emotional damage.

Despite the awful sorrow every Jew feels for the loss of sacred lives caused by the Iranian bombs, senseless victims, Hashem will avenge their deaths. Notwithstanding, it is apparent to all of us that we have witnessed amazing miracles and history in the making, in keeping with the passuk (Tehillim 91, 7): **”יפול מצדך אלף ורבבה מימינך אליך לא יגש”—a thousand may fall victim at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come near to you.** And since we are believers descended from believers, we must remember the word of Hashem to Zerubavel (Zechariah 4, 6): **”לא בחיל ולא בכוח כי אם ברוחי אמר ה' צבאות”—not by army and not by strength, but by My spirit, said Hashem, Master of Legions.**

The Gemara explains clearly how the Spirit of Hashem is expressed (Makkos 10a): **אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי מאי דכתיב: עומדות היו רגלינו בשעריך ירושלים, מי גרם לרגלינו שיעמדו במלחמה, שיערי ירושלים שהיו עוסקים בתורה—Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the meaning of that which is written (Tehillim 122, 1): “Our feet were standing at your gates, Yerushalayim”? Who caused our feet to remain standing in battle? The gates of Yerushalayim, where they were engaged in the study of Torah.** This includes the study of Torah by young children, as per the teaching in the Gemara (Shabbas 119b): **”אין העולם מתקיים אלא בשביל הכל תינוקות של בית רבן”—the world continues to exist solely in the merit of the breath of schoolchildren,** i.e., the words of Torah coming out of their mouths. This is because the words of Torah they utter are free of sin.

Furthermore, the following divine, undeniable words of inspiration should echo throughout the world in every Jewish home and every Beis Kenesses and Beis Midrash louder than one thousand alarms. In the Midrash Shochar Tov, they expounded on the tefilah of David HaMelech (ibid. 35, 1): **”לדוד ריבה ה' את יריביו”—by David: O Hashem, fight my adversaries.** The Midrash inquires: May a servant of flesh and blood make such a demand of his Master?! The Midrash answers: **HKB”H said to David, “Study Torah and I will fight your battle.” Similarly, Moshe said: “About**

this it will be said in the sefer of the wars of Hashem”—if you studied the Torah that is written in the sefer, I will battle on your behalf. To this David said, “O Hashem, fight my adversaries.”

The entire world is familiar with the courage of David HaMelech. Not only did he dare to confront Goliath without any conventional weapons and felled him with a slingshot, but he is considered one of the greatest, fiercest warriors of all time, fighting Hashem’s battles against the enemies of Yisrael with the utmost strength and courage. Only the Jewish people, however, are aware of the true key to his success. As Chazal teach us (Berachos 3b): **“כבוד היה תלוי למעלה ממוטתו של דוד, וכיון שהגיע חצות לילה בא רוח צפונית ונושבת בו ומנגן מאליו, מיד היה עומד ועוסק בתורה עד שעלה עמוד השחר.”** **A harp hung above David’s bed. At midnight, the northern wind came and blew on it, and it would play by itself. Immediately, he would rise and engage in Torah-study until the break of day.** Only then, after devoting his entire night to the study of Torah, did David go out to battle guided by the counsel of Achitophel, the Sanhedrin, and the Urim V’Tumim.

It should be evident from all of the above that we are obliged to devote ourselves to the study of Torah. In the words of the Gemara (ibid. 63b): **“מנין שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, שנאמר זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל.”** **From where do we learn that words of Torah can only be retained by someone who is willing to sacrifice himself on its behalf? For, it says (Bamidbar 19, 14): “This is the Torah of a man who dies in a tent.”** It is also important, however, to remember that (Shabbas 10a): **“זמן תפלה לחוד וזמן תורה לחוד.”** **—there is a separate time for tefilah and there is a separate time for Torah.** In addition to studying Torah, it is imperative to address many sincere tefilos and heartfelt pleas to Hashem, in keeping with the words (Eichah 2, 19): **“שפכי כמים לבך נוכח פני ה’”**—**pour out your heart like water before Hashem.**

Since the gates of tears are never locked, we should pray constantly for divine mercy (Shacharis, Tachanun): **“שומר ישראל, שמור שארית ישראל, ואל יאבד ישראל, האומרים שמע ישראל. שומר גוי אחד, שמור שארית עם אחד, ואל יאבד גוי אחד, המיחדים שמך.”** **Guardian of Yisrael, protect the remnant of Yisrael, and let not Yisrael perish, who declare “shema Yisrael.” Guardian of a unique nation, protect the remnant of a unique people, and let not that unique nation perish, who proclaim the oneness of Your name: “ה’ אלקינו ה’ אחד.”** **Guardian of a holy nation, protect the remnant of that holy nation, and let not the holy nation perish, who repeat three times the threefold declaration of holiness to the Holy One.**

The Sefer of the Wars of Hashem

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing the text from this week’s parsha (Bamidbar 21, 14): **“על כן יאמר בספר מלחמות ה’ את זהב בסופה ואת הנחלים ארנון, ואשר הנחלים אשר נטה לשבת ער ונשען לגבול מואב, ומשם בארה היא הבאר אשר אמר ה’ למשה אסוף את העם ואתנה להם מים, אז ישיר ישראל.”** **About this, it will be said in the sefer of the wars of Hashem: “That which was given at the Sea of Reeds and the valleys of Arnon; and the outpouring of the valleys when it veered to dwell at Ar and leaned against the border of Moav. And from there to the well; it is the well of which Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Assemble the people and I shall give them water.’”** Then Yisrael sang this song: **“Come up O well, call out to it.”**

Rashi—**Yisrael’s teacher**—interprets these pesukim based on the Midrash—that these pesukim refer to a great miracle that was performed on Yisrael’s behalf. On their way to enter Eretz Yisrael, they passed through the valley of Arnon, which passes between two mountains—one mountain which is located in Eretz Yisrael in the territory of the Emorim, and the other, opposite it, located in the land of Moav. The Emorim hid in caves in the mountain waiting to ambush Yisrael. Miraculously, the two mountains converged, crushing the Emorim between them. Here is a summary of Rashi’s sacred comments:

When they tell of miracles performed on behalf of our forefathers, they will also relate this event. Just as they tell of the miracles that occurred at Yam Suf, so, too, they

will tell of the miracles of the valleys of Arnon; for here, too, great miracles were performed. The blood of the Emorim—who lay in wait, hiding—was spilled there.

The mountains there were high and the valley deep and narrow; so that the mountains were very close to one another. Yisrael's path passed through this valley. The Emorim's plan was to hide in the caves above and to come out and kill the people of Yisrael with arrows and catapult stones, as they attempted to pass through the valley. The mountains on the side of Moav contained caves; the Emorim hid in these caves. The mountains on the opposite side of the valley contained hornlike projections protruding outwards, aligned opposite the caves. When Yisrael came to pass through the valley, the mountain on the Eretz Yisrael side drew closer to the mountain on the side of Moav; the projections entered the corresponding caves and crushed those hiding inside them.

This miracle is only alluded to in the pesukim. At the time, the people of Yisrael were unaware of what had transpired. Yet, after they passed through the valley, the waters of the well flowed through the valley—bringing up the blood, the arms, and the limbs of the enemy that was killed. When Yisrael saw the evidence of this miracle in their camp, they broke out in a song of praise: “Come up, O well”—bring forth from the valley the evidence of the miracle that took place.

“In the sefer of the wars of Hashem” Refers to the War of Torah

According to the simple, straightforward interpretation of the words: **“את והב בסופה”**—that which was given at the **Sea of Reeds**—the passuk is referring to the crushing of the Emorim by these two mountains. Yet, in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b), Chazal elucidate this passuk as referring to the peaceful and loving relationship that exists between “talmidei-chachamim.” They provide us with a similar elucidation with regards to the passuk (Tehillim 127, 5):

“לא יבושו כי ידברו את אויבים בשער. מאי את אויבים בשער, אמר רבי חייא בר אבא, אפילו האב ובנו, הרב ותלמידו, שעוסקין בתורה בשער אחד, נעשים אויבים זה את זה, ואינם זזים משם עד שנעשים אוהבים זה את זה, שנאמר את והב בסופה, אל תקרי בסופה אלא בסופה.”

“They shall not be shamed when they speak with enemies in public places (literally: at the gate).” Who are the **“enemies at the gate”** referred to by the passuk? Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said: Even a father and his son, a Rav and his pupil, who are engaged in Torah-study at the same gate (in the same place of study); they become each other's adversaries; and they do not move from there until they become devoted friends of one another, as it states (Bamidbar 21, 14): **“That which was given at the Sea of Reeds”—do not read this as “bisooofah”** (on the Yam Suf) **but rather as “bisofah”** (“in the end”).

Now, our sacred sefarim teach us an important principle. Whenever we are presented with both a simple explanation—“pshat”—and an exposition—“drush”—the two explanations are intimately related. This obliges us to find a relationship between these two explanations. The straightforward explanation is that the passuk is chronicling the incredible miracle of the two mountains converging to save Yisrael. The exposition asserts that the passuk refers to the battle in the Beis Midrash between those studying Torah that continues until they arrive at a peaceful, loving resolution.

The matter can be resolved beautifully based on the words of Chazal in the Midrash Shochar Tov cited above: **HKB”H said to David, “Study Torah and I will fight your battle.”** Similarly, Moshe said: **“About this it will be said in the sefer of the wars of Hashem”—if you studied the Torah that is written in the sefer, I will battle on your behalf.** Clearly, when the passuk states: **“על כן יאמר בספר מלחמות ה'—about this it will be said in the sefer of the wars of Hashem—**it is referring to the battles in the study halls related to Torah. If Jews wage this battle, HKB”H promises them, **“I will battle your enemies for you!”** This explains the conclusion of the passuk very nicely: **“את והב בסופה”**—even a father and his son, or a Rav and his pupil, engaged in the battle of Torah, they continue until the matter is resolved with love and respect.

Pilpul Is Analogous to Uprooting Mountains and Grinding Them Together

We can now explain how the “pshat” and the “drush” above go hand in hand. Chazal wanted to show us how

Yisrael merited such an incredible miracle. They did not have to lift a hand at all; HKB”H crushed the Emorim between the two mountains for them. In fact, they were totally unaware initially of what had transpired. Hence, Chazal interpreted the passuk: **על כן יאמר בספר מלחמות ה' את**—as referring to the battles that ensue among talmidei-chachamim—to teach us that in the merit of those Torah-related battles, HKB”H fought and defeated the Emorim for them. So we see that the two explanations go hand in hand magnificently.

We can now embellish this thought. We learn in the Gemara (Berachos 64a) that Rabbah was called **עוקר הרים—uprooter of mountains**—on account of his keen power of “pilpul.” Elsewhere, the Gemara states (Sanhedrin 24a): **הרואה את ריש לקיש בבית המדרש, כאילו עוקר הרים וטוחנן זה בזה... הרואה את רבי מאיר בבית המדרש, כאילו עוקר הרים וטוחנן זה בזה.** **When one saw Reish Lakish studying in the Beis Midrash, it appeared as if he was uprooting mountains and grinding them together . . . When one saw Rabbi Meir in the Beis Midrash, it appeared as if he was uprooting the greatest of mountains and grinding them together.**

This explains fantastically the miracle of a mountain being uprooted and merged with another mountain to crush the Emorim to death. For, as the passuk indicates: **על כן יאמר בספר מלחמות ה'**—Yisrael engage in constant Torah-related battles. The art of “pilpul” employed in these battles is analogous to **“uprooting mountains and grinding them together.”** Thus, in this merit, the uprooted mountains converged to crush and grind the Emorim hiding in them.

Torah Scholars Promote Shalom in the World

With immense pleasure, we will now elaborate on this concept. We will begin by introducing an impeccable teaching from the Derashos of the Chasam Sofer, zy”a. Everything HKB”H created was solely for His kavod—to be used for matters of kedushah. If they are not used for kedushah, they fall into the hands of the forces of tumah, chas v’shalom, that oppose the forces of kedushah. This applies to the matter of wars, as well. A war of kedushah is fought in the halls of Torah—two scholars debating a

point of halachah with each other, taking opposite sides, to clarify the truth of the matter based on the Torah. This is the meaning of the phrase: **תלמידי חכמים מרבים שלום**—**Torah scholars increase shalom in the world.** By fighting these Torah-related battles, they mitigate and abolish the forces of war of Yisrael’s foes.

Based on this concept, the Chasam Sofer explains what they expounded in the Midrash (B.R. 65, 20) on the passuk (Bereishis 27, 2): **הקול קול יעקב והידים ידי עשו, בזמן שקולו של יעקב מצוי בבתי כנסיות אין הידים ידי עשו.** **“The voice is Yaakov’s voice, but the hands are Eisav’s hands.”** When Yaakov’s voice is present in the Batei Kenesses, the hands of Eisav are ineffective; if not, **“the hands are Eisav’s hands”**—i.e., they will prevail. In other words, when Jewish voices are engaged in debates of kedushah, they weaken the nations of the world, preventing them from waging actual wars against Yisrael. Thus, the hands of Eisav are rendered powerless.

This explains beautifully the relationship between the “pshat” and the “drush” regarding the passuk: **על כן יאמר בספר מלחמות ה' את והב בסופה**. Because Yisrael were actively engaged in the study of Torah—the battle of Torah—the power of the Emorim was rendered ineffective. In the merit of Yisrael’s “pilpul”—analogous to **“uprooting mountains and grinding them together”**—the Emorim were crushed by the convergence of the two mountains.

The Classic Dispute between the Generation of the Midbar and the Generation Entering the Land

Continuing on this sacred, enlightening journey, we will endeavor to explain why HKB”H orchestrated the deaths of the Emorim in this manner. As explained, two mountains converged—one within the territory of Moav and one within the territory of Eretz Yisrael. Additionally, why did HKB”H—the Giver of the Torah—opt to teach the vital lesson of **את והב בסופה** specifically at the conclusion of the 42 journeys in the midbar, prior to the entry into the promised land? Here is what was expounded on those words: **Even a father and his son, a Rav and his pupil, who are engaged in Torah-study . . . they become each other’s adversaries; and they do not move from there until they become devoted friends of one another, as it states: “That which was given at the Sea of Reeds.”** What

exactly was the Torah-related battle being fought by the people of Yisrael at that time? And how was it resolved?

I believe that we can answer these questions by introducing a teaching from the Maharid of Belz, zy" a, in the name of our early scholars. They discuss the error of the meraglim who were reluctant to enter Eretz Yisrael. They were of the opinion that they could only serve Hashem properly in the midbar. After all, they were unencumbered by the mundane concerns of Olam HaZeh—they had the “mahn” to eat, water from Miriam’s well, and the divine protection of the clouds. They figured that in Eretz Yisrael, they would no longer have these things and would have to provide these necessities of Olam HaZeh for themselves. This would limit their ability to study Torah and serve Hashem properly. Therefore, they conspired to stop Yisrael from entering Eretz Yisrael.

They made a fatal mistake, however. In truth, it is the will of Hashem that Jews engage in the mundane activities of Olam HaZeh and dedicate everything they do exclusively to Him. Here is the pertinent halachah in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 231): **Whatever a person derives pleasure from in Olam HaZeh, he should not do so for his own pleasure but rather for the service of the blessed Creator, as it is written** (Mishlei 3, 6): **“In all your endeavors know (emulate) Him.”** And our sages said (Avos 2, 12): **“Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven.”** Even optional matters, such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, rising, talking, and all bodily needs, they should all be for the sake of serving your Creator or for something related to His service. For this reason, HKB”H brought Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael—a land flowing with milk and honey—so that they would deal with the necessities of Olam HaZeh and do everything exclusively l’shem shamayim. This concludes his sacred remarks.

Understood in this light, it is apparent that the leadership of Moshe Rabeinu was tailored to the generation of the midbar, whereas the leadership of Yehoshua was tailored to the generation that entered Eretz Yisrael. After all, the lives of the generation of the midbar were unencumbered by the concerns of Olam HaZeh. To lead the people in this manner, HKB”H chose Moshe Rabeinu, who also separated himself from the mundane pursuits of Olam HaZeh. As we learn in the Gemara (Shabbas 87a), at the time of Matan Torah, Moshe

separated from his wife, and HKB”H concurred with his decision. Furthermore, the Gemara (Ta’anis 9a) also teaches us that the “mahn” fell for Yisrael in the merit of Moshe. All these facts attest to the fact that the life and existence of Yisrael in the midbar were characterized by a significant degree of separation from matters of Olam HaZeh, which was emblematic of their leader, Moshe Rabeinu.

On the other hand, the leadership and existence of the generation that entered Eretz Yisrael was characterized by serving Hashem through matters of Olam HaZeh, in keeping with the notion of: **“In all your endeavors know (emulate) Him.”** To lead them in this manner, Yehoshua was chosen. That this was consistent with his personality and nature can be alluded to by the name יהושע. Its gematria is 391; this is also the gematria of בכ”ל דרכיך דעה”ו—in all your endeavors know Him. Therefore, when the time arrived for the people of Yisrael to enter the land, the leadership changed hands from Moshe Rabeinu to Yehoshua, in keeping with the statement (Yoma 38b): **אין מלכות נוגעת בחברתה אפילו—כמלוא נימא—the reign of one king cannot encroach on the reign of another by even a hairsbreadth.**

Now, we are familiar with the teaching of Chazal concerning the disputes between Beis Shamai and Beis Hillel (Eiruvim 13b): **יצאה בת קול ואמרה אלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים הן והלכה כבית הלל—a heavenly voice went forth and declared: “Both are the words of the living G-d; yet the halachah follows Beis Hillel.”** We can suggest that this truism also applies to the dispute between the generation of the midbar and the generation that entered the land. Indeed, the halachah accords with the viewpoint of the generation that entered Eretz Yisrael—we must also serve Hashem through matters of Olam HaZeh—**“endeavoring to emulate Him”**—nevertheless, both viewpoints are equally valid.

The Way of Torah Is Moderation

We will now introduce a teaching in the Mishnah (Avos 6, 4): **כך היא דרכה של תורה פת במלח תאכל ומים במשורה תשתה, ועל הארץ תישן וחיי צער תחיה, ובתורה אתה עמל, ואם אתה עושה כן אשריך וטוב לך, אשריך בעולם הזה וטוב לך לעולם הבא.”** This is the way of the Torah: **To eat bread with salt, to drink water in small amounts, to sleep upon the ground, to live a life of hardship, and to toil in the Torah. If you do so, you are praiseworthy, and it will bode well for you. You will be**

praiseworthy in Olam HaZeh, and it will bode well for you in Olam HaBa. The commentaries are perplexed by the fact that the Mishnah lauds this ascetic lifestyle saying: **“You will be praiseworthy in Olam HaZeh.”** After all, this is a life of deprivation and suffering.

In the sefer Beis Shmuel Acharon (Toldos), the author interprets the meaning of the Tanna as follows: **This is the way of the Torah**—initially, when you want to acquire the knowledge and wisdom of the Torah, he advises: **To eat bread with salt, to drink water in small amounts, to sleep upon the ground, to live a life of hardship, and to toil in the Torah**—because this is the only way to attain these goals. The Tanna continues, however: **If you do so**—if you refrained from indulging in matters of Olam HaZeh and succeeded in acquiring the treasures of the Torah: **You are praiseworthy, and it will bode well for you. You will be praiseworthy in Olam HaZeh**—i.e., you will be able to enjoy the pleasures of Olam HaZeh l’shem shamayim—**and it will bode well for you in Olam HaBa**—you will be rewarded for having started your Torah-related journey by sufficing with the minimum necessities of Olam HaZeh.

In this manner, we can compare the viewpoint of the generation of the midbar with the viewpoint of the generation that entered Eretz Yisrael. The generation of the midbar believed that it is necessary to withdraw from all matters related to Olam HaZeh; the generation entering the land believed that it is also necessary to serve Hashem with matters related to Olam HaZeh. Both ideologies are correct! Initially, it is advisable to serve Hashem as the generation of the midbar did. In the words of the Mishnah: **This is the way of the Torah: To eat bread with salt, to**

drink water in small amount—but **if you do so**—then the halachah will follow the viewpoint of the generation that entered Eretz Yisrael—**you will be praiseworthy in Olam HaZeh**—you will need to go on to enjoy the pleasures of Olam HaZeh exclusively for the sake of Hashem.

We can now better comprehend the wondrous ways of Hashem. When Yisrael concluded their 42 journeys in the midbar, and the new generation was about to enter Eretz Yisrael, the elucidation of Chazal became a reality: **“אפילו האב ובנו הרב ותלמידו שעוסקין בתורה בשער אחד נעשים אויבים זה את זה, ואינם זזים משם עד שנעשים אוהבים זה את זה, שנאמר את והב בסופה.”** Alas, they understood what HKB”H had orchestrated: Initially, they travelled 42 journeys in the midbar serving Hashem in a manner that was withdrawn from the realities of Olam HaZeh; subsequently, they were going to enter the land and serve Hashem in keeping with the notion of **“in all your endeavors, know Him.”**

Thus, there was a harmonious, loving convergence between the generation of the midbar and the generation entering Eretz Yisrael, in keeping with the elucidation of **“את והב בסופה”**. Hence, HKB”H performed a miracle for them **“midah k’neged midah”**—measure for measure—the two mountains converged—one on the border of Moav and one on the border of Eretz Yisrael. As a result, the Emorim were crushed between them in the merit of the power of the Torah and the love shared by these two generations. This merit is present in every generation attributable to our in-depth Torah-study—the war of the Torah we fight. Thus, the power of war of Yisrael’s enemies is eliminated, and HKB”H tells us what He told David HaMelech, **“Engage in the study of Torah, and I will fight your battle.”**

Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

Reb Yitzchock and Mirel Forster, N'Y
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