

## Blasphemous Battle: Parshat Emor

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein

The verse in Parshat Eikev states that “man does not live on bread alone, but by everything that emanates from the mouth of God does man live.” This concept was the basis for Hashem’s providing us with manna in the desert, and for the continued freshness of the lechem hapanim, the show bread, in the Mishkan. It provides us also with a paradigm for Hashem’s kindness and love for us. This belief or lack thereof lies at the crux of an unusual incident in Parshat Emor.

An unnamed man, the son of a Jewish mother from the tribe of Dan and an Egyptian father, goes out among Bnei Yisrael. He fought with an Israelite man. He then called out the name of God and blasphemed. The people arrested him and approached Moshe to render judgment against him.

There are several puzzling elements to this story. First, from where was this man going out? Who was he fighting? What were they fighting about that led him to curse God? Rashi cites three different explanations. Rabbi Levi says that this man left “his world.” That can be interpreted either as his giving up the eternal world or in more psychological terms, as we will discuss shortly. Rabbi Berachya says that he went out among the people to mock their belief in the showbread’s ability to retain its freshness for nine days. After all he argued, shouldn’t a king be served fresh bread rather than bread that is nine day old? By so doing, he negated the miraculous nature of the show bread. A third version connects the dispute to the lineage of his mother who was from the tribe of Dan. The man went to the camp of Dan to pitch his tent. Since only his mother was from Dan, he had no rights to be among them even though he had converted after the revelation at Sinai. (Prior to Sinai, Jewish lineage was determined through the father; after Sinai, through the mother.) The disputants were just leaving Moshe’s tent where the dispute had been adjudicated against this man, and so he cursed God.

Rabbi Schwab shows the interrelationship between these three interpretations by explaining why the members of Dan were inhospitable to this man. First, this son of an Egyptian father had already shown he was a non-believer by mocking the miraculous nature of the show bread. He was coming from his own world rather than from the world of God. Even seeing the piping hot bread and smelling its aroma would not convince him that this bread stayed fresh because Hashem so willed it. With this attitude, he went into the Dan camp and tried to pitch his tent. The Danites refused him permission, as his father was not a tribe member. After his rant about the show bread, they felt justified in refusing to extend him normal hospitality. When Moshe affirmed the position of the Danites, this man mocked God, and openly cursed Him.

Rabbi Munk and Rabi Wolbe both note that this man left olamo, his world, which contains his essential Godly image. He misused a special gift from God, his speech, a uniquely human characteristic, to blaspheme. He thereby renounced his privilege of participating in the world of human beings.

Rabi Twerski continues this theme. Know your place, find out who you are, for you are a unique world unto yourself. Rabbi Tatz suggests making a circle, and within it writing all your talents, skills and traits. Outside the circle, write all the things you wish you had but do not possess. Study the diagram well. Within the circle are all the tools you need to complete your task on earth. Outside the circle may be all your dreams, the things you wish you had. You must choose your life’s work based on the tools you have. To choose a task based on those elements outside the circle is unrealistic and childish. At some point, potential must yield to pragmatism or nothing will be accomplished, and you will live an unhappy life, envious of those with different tools and different tasks. If you are unhappy and feel you are unsuccessful it is probably time to reevaluate. Study who you are. You may be focusing on the wrong task, one that does not use your unique tools. Make your

choice based on the contents of the circle. Infinite choice leads only to confusion and unhappiness.

This man’s mother was the only Jewess who had relations with an Egyptian during the entire two hundred years in Egypt. He felt rootless, with no connection to the Israelites. They scorned him and felt no connection to Egyptians. Without feeling the blessing of closeness to any human being, he could not feel a closeness to God either. Therefore, says the Ner Uziel, as he felt alienated from people, he also felt alienated from God. He could not acknowledge that the show bread symbolized God’s ever fresh love for Bnei Yisrael, since he himself did not feel part of that reality. The show bread reflected his own emotions. To him, says the Chatam Sofer, the show bread could not be special or holy because he himself was not holy, and neither was any other member of Bnei Yisrael. There was no special love between the Creator and Bnei Yisrael.

Yet we know Hashem always loves us, even when we sin, because within each of us there is that pintele Yid (spark of the Divine presence). But this man felt that a sinner could not retain the love of Hashem. He then transferred this feeling to the show bread, and he refused to believe it would stay fresh. Because he did not feel the connection, he would not affirm that it existed, says Rav Wolfson. This man saw himself as physically part of Bnei Yisrael, but he denied himself the spiritual connection. Therefore, he remained the son of an Egyptian father rather than the son of Hashem, and he felt free to mock Him.

We no longer have the show bread, but we still have the connection to Hashem. Let us invest effort to foster that closeness so that we will merit again to have the physical symbol of that relationship through the show bread in the Beit Hamikdash, speedily, in our day.

## Mesilat Yesharim – G-d's Servant – Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

A person comes to sin when he forgets he is a servant of Hashem. The very first sin in history happened precisely because of that. The snake promised Chava that if she would eat of the fruit, “*V’hiyitem k’Elokim*. You will be like God.” Rashi explains that he told her, “Now you are a creation, you must listen to Hashem. But if you eat, you’ll rise higher and be like the Creator.” Yet Chava didn’t realize that the closest person to the president is his servant. An *Eved Hashem* is a *nishbar lev* (downtrodden heart) and that is how one comes close to the Creator.

People express modesty through action. The Mesilat Yesharim discusses some ways such as how one speaks, carries himself, walks, and greets people. “*Divrei chachamim b’nachat nishmaim*. A wise person speaks softly and respectfully.” Being modest means swallowing offenses, not answering back, and refraining from taking revenge. If Reuven hurt Shimon, it’s understandable if Shimon would want to hurt him back. But the Mesilat Yesharim explains that in truth Shimon was destined from heaven to receive that hurt. Reuven was only a messenger.

Another form of *anivut* is not deriving pleasure from being in the limelight. A Rav by the nature of his position is in the public eye. People pay him respect. But deep down he must abhor the honor. He must think, “I’m doing a kindness by spreading Torah but I must not enjoy the esteem I am getting.” Just as Hashem is an *anav v’shafal ruach* (modest and of humble spirit) a Jew should strive to be the same. Being a servant of Hashem is the highest state one can achieve. And it is through *anava* and subordinating all of one’s strength to do His will that one can come to this lofty level.

## Make It Count 25

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenabum

The 25th day of the Omer is *Netzach sheb’Netzach*, an indomitable, unstoppable force. This is the power of Rabbi Akiva. It is the urge to accomplish great things despite obstacles and setbacks. It’s not just the actual achievement but the ambition, the will, and the motivation behind it. On the one hand *Netzach sheb’Netzach* calls to action. On the other hand, it is humbling. It makes one cognizant that every action is a gift from Hashem. It is having faith in the eternity of Hashem and that He is the true *menatzeach*, conductor of the world. Nothing happens without Hashem making it possible. All our successes and victories belong to Him. *Netzach sheb’Netzach* empowers us to strive further in our *Avodat Hashem* and to

transcend challenges with faith.

No one personified this as much as Rabbi Akiva, who experienced numerous setbacks and failures. His mantra was, “*V’ahavta l’rei’acha kamocho*. Love your neighbor as yourself.” Yet his 24,000 students died because they lacked respect for each other. Rabbi Akiva didn’t see this as an insurmountable obstacle, but as an opportunity to start again. His quest to accomplish more and his strong desire to connect to the eternity of Hashem and his Torah drove him to achieve when others would have given up. He did not question how he would find new students. He did not doubt himself although all of his previous students had died, although he had

only begun learning at the age of 40, although he was the son of converts. Nothing stopped Rabbi Akiva. This is the power of *Netzach sheb’Netzach*. It empowers us to achieve and to become great. We have to look at ourselves and others this way in the spirit of true *Ahavat Yisrael*. Just as you believe deep down that one day you will accomplish and achieve great things, believe this about other people too.

On this day let’s create a mission statement of our soul. Let’s visualize our ambitions and let’s turn each one into a prayer. Let us plead that Hashem help us develop our *Netzach sheb’Netzach* so that we can come to actualize our true desires.