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RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL

DIRECTOR
TAL



THE SECRET SMALL ALEPH

There is a story of a US Naval ship travelling on a stormy winter night off the coast of Newfoundland;

The captain on the deck notices a dim green blip that suddenly appears on the radar screen.

Radioing into the Canadian Naval authorities, he says: Please divert your course 20 degrees to the North to avoid a collision.

The Canadians respond: Recommend you divert YOUR course 20 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

The US captain responds, "This is the Captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course."

Canadians retaliate: "No. I say again, you divert YOUR course."

Eventually getting fed up the US captain states, "this is the aircraft carrier uss lincoln, the second largest ship in the united states' atlantic fleet. we are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers and numerous support vessels. i demand that you change your course 20 degrees north, that's one five degrees north, or counter-measures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.

The Canadians take a gasp and say, "This is a lighthouse. Your call..."

A little humility goes a long way.

This week we begin the third book of the Torah Vayikra known as Torat Kohanim - the law of the priests - in rabbinic literature. Most of the book is occupied with the laws of

the specific sacrifices and the duties of the Kohanim in the Temple.

The book opens with an interesting encounter that hinted at with the unusual writing of the first word Vayikra.

The last letter of Vayikra – the aleph – is written much smaller than the rest of the word.

Why is the aleph small?

Our Sages explain that when G-d told Moshe to write the word Vayikra "And He called", Moshe didn't want to write that last aleph. It seemed to Moshe that it gave him too much importance. How could he write that G-d called to him? Who was he, after all? A mere man. Moshe would have preferred to write Vayikar – "And He happened (upon him)."

In other words G-d just "came across" Moshe, He didn't "go out of His way" to appear to him.

In spite of Moshe's protestations, G-d told him to write Vayikra – "And He called".

Moshe put the aleph at the end of the word as G-d had commanded him – but he wrote it small.

This is a fascinating story, but the sages are confused, don't we already know that Moshe was humble? Are we not told on numerous occasions in the torah itself that Moshe was humble? Why the necessity to make the aleph small?

The Midrash Tanchuma (Teruma) brings an intriguing encounter.

Rabbi Akiva was once challenged by a Roman General Turnus Rufus.

"Why does your G-d hate us?"

Stated the General, quoting the Pasuk: VeEt Eisav Saneti - I hate Eisav.

Rabbi Akiva seemed startled by the question. If he were to answer what he really thought, the general would kill him. Any false answer would not do justice to the question.

He told Turnus Rufus to return tomorrow and he would have a reply.

The next day Turnus Rufus returned promptly and again asked him the question. ▶

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DVAR TORAH

The Secret Small Aleph
RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL

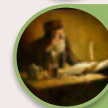
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This newsletter contains Divrei Torah and may contain Sheimot - Please dispose of accordingly

Rabbi Akiva told him that it was interesting seeing him, since that night he had a dream about two dogs. One was called Rufus and the other Rupina.

Turnus Rufus was not impressed.

"How dare you!

You are insinuating that my wife (Rupina) and I are dogs? You will pay with your life". Exclaimed the General.

Rabbi Akiva stopped the General before the guards would take him away.

"Stop, I don't understand. Dogs see and you see, dogs walk and you walk. Why are you so upset?"

Rabbi Akiva proceeded with his master plan.

"Look how upset you were when I compared you to a dog, and in actual fact there are many similarities!

G-d Almighty has created the heavens and earth, the vast seas and beautiful lands – how do you think He feels when you prostrate yourself to idols made of wood and stone proclaiming they have created all of this?"

Rabbi Akiva made his point and with that the General moved away.

Rabbi Shach zts'l once asked on this Midrash. Why is it that Rabbi Akiva didn't give Turnus Rufus this answer yesterday? Did he not know the answer then and there? Why wait?

Rabbi Shach explained that sometimes in order to portray a message we need to envisage or experience certain things; speech alone would not do justice to the cause.

If Rabbi Akiva would have just turned around and said, "G-d hates you because you worship idols," it is not certain that Turnus Rufus would have accepted his answer.

Once Rabbi Akiva made him come back the next day and via his 'dream' put Turnus Rufus in a personal situation, he was able to explain much better. Hence he waited that extra day to respond. Moreover sometimes speech alone cannot portray a concept. In order to fully comprehend we need to use other means of action as well.

Aleph is unique in the Hebrew alphabet, for it has no sound. The rest of the Hebrew alphabet is consonantal. Each consonant has a sound: Bet is "B", Mem is "M". When the vowel markings are added the sounds can be extended: Ba, be, boo, etc. But Aleph is soundless. Only when vowels are added do we hear it – or its absence: ah, eh, oh, oo. Aleph begins the alphabet, but has no sound.

Aleph is compared to the voice of G-d. That is, Aleph is the open space, the silence, the pregnant possibility, the soundless inspiration, the in-breath that precedes all human speech. We see the Aleph, we shape it, we read it, but we cannot make its sound.

The opening of our alphabet points us to the mystery from which our ability to speak emerges, giving us pause, making us listen before we begin.

We might already know that Moshe is humble, we might learn this every year, but when we see with our own eyes the small Aleph and we ask into its history, the lesson that it portrays is much more resounding. The simple action of writing a small Aleph depicts this message in a more powerful way.

As we begin the third book of the Torah let us ask Hashem to bless us that we too may portray the characteristics of our fine leader Moshe and succeed in all our endeavours.

■ **Shabbat Shalom**

AHARON GABAY - KOLLEL ZICHRON CHANA VERACHEL - JERUSALEM



BEYOND A SHADOW OF A DOUBT

We read the famous passage about erasing the name of Amalek. Amalek are a nation who despise the Jews with endless hate and there are even mitsvot related to erasing their name. But what is it that singles out Amalek more than any other nation? What is it that it is vital for us to have nothing to do with Amalek to point where we must erase them and blot them out.

Over the past century, mankind has made phenomenal scientific discoveries that tower the previous thousands of years. The observance of creation is amongst one of them. Evidence shows that in order for there to be a multitude of organisms that we see today, there must have been a perfectly timed, perfectly arranged accumulation of certain chemicals and elements to produce even the smallest living organism. The sophistication of our body is phenomenal. A build up of nervous, respiratory, digestive and immune systems which work effectively is probably the most complicated production ever seen and the chances of these chemicals assembling correctly by chance are in the millions. It is said that "there is more chances

of a Boeing 747 being assembled by a tornado sweeping through a junkyard". These figures are only referring to the human body, not to mention, plants, animals and natural occurrences such as a season changes, volcano eruptions etc. This turns the chances into a figure too big to read. The only alternative is that a supernatural being created it all - Hashem.

However, some scientists, despite the extraordinary low chances, believe that it is possible for such chemicals to come into alignment because there is a chance. Because they are threatened by religion and the existence of G-d they result to such distorted solutions. Because there is a doubt: maybe it all just happened by chance.

That so called doubt is Amalek. Amalek are the ones who deny G-d's existence by stating that there is always a chance. Amalek has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word safek - doubt. Hashem never created doubt, Hashem either created something or he didn't. There is no such thing as 'he might have created something'. Only when man approached and explored the world, they established doubt about physical and spiritual forces and objects. It is only the childish observation of man that claimed that 'maybe' such a thing exists or not. Amalek use this approach to suggest that there is no overpowering being that controls the world.

Amalek are not just a nation who strive to destroy the Jewish people, they also symbolise an ideal that promotes an alternative to Hashem's existence. An ideal that threatens our fundamental beliefs. That ideal we are told to erase and blot out because it defies the basis of our heritage.

With Purim just around the corner, the Megilla tells of an Amalekite, Haman, who wanted to destroy the Jewish people. The Gemara (Megilla 12a) says that the reason the generation of that time were held liable to be punished is because they bowed down to an idol. Idol worship promotes that Hashem does not exist and there are other ways that nature came to existence. This was so popular amongst society in that time. Mordechai and Esther grabbed onto their Jewish teachings and knowledge and refusing to accept such scepticism and ultimately through their commitment the Jews merited redemption.

We are continuously challenged in life with tests of faith in Hashem. Whether it's in His existence or in His involvement with our lives, it is incumbent upon us to cling to the idea that no other forces are involved besides those of our creator above.

■ **Shabbat shalom**

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OUR CHACHAMIM

RAV HUNA

Rav Huna belonged to the second generation of Babylonian Amoraim, and he was named Rosh Yeshiva of the academy at Sura after the death of Rav.

Despite his greatness, the Talmud does not say who his parents were, and only in one place is it stated that he was related to the family of the Exilarch.

Besides his considerable wisdom, what was remarkable about Rav Huna was his great qualities, particularly his generosity. With him, riches and the greatness of Torah went together as a pair. He also possessed abilities that characterize a leader of Israel. Early on, when Rav Huna was a student of Rav, he was extremely poor, and so he began farming. He worked the ground himself, irrigated it by his own means, and allowed only the flocks to graze on it. Obviously, he felt no shame in performing all these tasks, and he allowed no one to do it for him. One day, the Gemara says, he was walking with some farm equipment on his shoulder when a Talmid Chacham by the name of Chanah bar Chanilai met him and wanted to carry his load. Rav Huna told him, "If you are accustomed to carrying this type of equipment in your town, then you can do so here if you wish. But if not, do you think that I would allow myself to embarrass you so that I could derive personal honor from it?"

During this time Rav Huna's poverty was so great that once he didn't even have wine to recite Kiddush for Shabbat. He went and placed his belt as collateral in order to buy some wine, replacing his belt with a simple piece of string. When Rav noticed, he asked him, "What does this mean?" Rav Huna then explained that he was obligated to put his belt down as collateral in order to buy wine for Shabbat. Thus Rav gave him a blessing that Hashem should provide him with such wealth that he could wear clothes made of velvet!

Starting from then on, his business dealings began to prosper, to the point that he became extremely rich. Once, 400 barrels of wine that he owned became sour and turned into cheap vinegar, and he was faced with a huge financial loss. His friends, the Sages, came to him and advised that he should examine his ways, for he may have committed some sin.

"Do you suspect me of wrongdoing?" Rav Huna asked them.

"Do you suspect the Holy One, blessed be He, of making a Jew lose money for no reason?" the Sages replied.

"If such is the case, please tell me if you have heard anything concerning me that I should rectify. If so, I will immediately mend my ways," said Rav Huna in a spirit of repentance.

"We have heard," the Sages told him, "that you have not given your sharecropper his rightful portion of grapevine shoots. For the same reason as he has the right to a portion of a tree's fruits, a sharecropper has the right to a portion of its shoots and twigs."

Rav Huna was astonished. "But my sharecropper takes all the shoots, leaving me with hardly anything!" he replied. He then decided, "Perhaps starting from today I will set aside a fixed quantity of grapevine shoots for him. In this way he won't steal from me anymore!"

Success immediately began to smile on Rav Huna once again, and the price of vinegar started to rise, to the point that he lost nothing in the whole affair.

Rav Huna's incredible prosperity became well known, to the extent that it was said that whoever saw him in their dreams would experience miracles.

One day a fire broke out in Rav Huna's town, yet the flames didn't touch anything in the district where he lived. The residents of the town believed that they had been saved by his merit. However they were shown in a dream that this was insignificant compared to the greatness of Rav Huna, and that the district had been saved by the merit of a woman who each week lit her stove and allowed all her neighbors to benefit from its use. We can learn from this the power of generosity.

Rav Huna's yeshiva became ever larger. It had about permanent 800 students, and he paid for everything out of his own pocket. Moreover, thousands of students who studied independently during the whole year came to his yeshiva for two months out of the year (Yarchei Kallah in Adar and Elul). They came to listen to the Rosh Yeshiva's lectures, as well as to those of his colleagues, after which they would go back home and attend to their affairs. At that time Rav Huna had 13 assistants. He died at an advanced age. ■



HALACHOT

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

THE PROHIBITION AGAINST CONTRADICTING ONE'S PARENT

The Shulhan Aruch, in discussing the laws of respecting parents (Yoreh De'a 240:2), mentions that it is forbidden to contradict one's parent's statement in the parent's presence. If one's parent expresses an opinion, it is forbidden to tell the parent that the opinion is wrong. In fact, one may not even support his parent's viewpoint by saying, "I think he's right," because it is disrespectful to indicate that the parent needs the child's backing. Certainly, the child may not explicitly state that he thinks the other view is correct.

As for situations where the parent is not present, the Poskim instruct that one may express disagreement, but in an indirect or otherwise respectful manner. One example given is an instance where the Tur (Rabbenu Yaakov Ba'al Ha'turim, 1269-1343) disputes a Halachic ruling of his father, the Rosh (Rabbenu Asher Ben Yehiel, 1250-1327). But instead of explicitly stating that he did not accept his father's position, the Tur instead cited the ruling of the Ba'al Ha'teremot (Rav Baruch Ben Yishak of Worms, 1140-1211) – which was the same ruling as the Rosh – and then disputed his ruling. This way, the Tur disputed his father indirectly, rather than explicitly saying that he disagreed with his father's position. Likewise, in any circumstance where one disagrees with his father, he may express his disagreement when his father is not present, as long as he does so with the utmost respect and reverence.

The Pit'hei Teshuba, citing the Asmot Yosef (commentary to Masechet Kiddushin by Rabbi Yosef Ibn Ezra, Bulgaria, 1506-1589), notes that this Halacha does not apply to raising questions and posing challenges over the course of study. If a father and son are learning together, it is certainly permissible for the son to question what his father said as normally happens when two study partners learn together. This is part of the normal process of learning, and thus does not constitute an infringement upon the father's honor.

Summary: One may not dispute his parent's statement in his presence, and even when his parent is not present, disagreeing with something the parent said is allowed only if it is done respectfully. When a father and son learn together, however, it is permissible for the child to question and challenge what his father says as part of the usual learning process. ■

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