

לעילוי נשמת  
מרת עקא עדנה  
צפורה ע"ה  
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל



# על פני השטח

## AL EI DESHE

Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur

## Kings and Battlegrounds

אַחֲרֵי הַכְּתוּבָה אֶת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֱמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב  
בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן וְאֶת עוֹג מֶלֶךְ הַבָּשָׁן אֲשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב בְּעֵשֶׂת־  
רֵת בְּאֲדָרְעִי

*After he had smitten Sichon, king of the Emori, who dwelled in Cheshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, who dwelled in Ashtaros, in Edrei.* (Devarim 1:4)

Rashi comments: "Sichon... who dwelled in Cheshbon – Even had Sichon

How much more so, since both the king and the region were difficult."

The Sfas Emes<sup>1</sup> points out a problem: the battle with Sichon did not take place in his region of Cheshbon, but rather in Yahatz, as the pasuk (Bamidbar 21:23) states: וְלֹא נָתַן סִיחֹן אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל עֶבֶר וְלֹא בְּגִבְלוֹ וְגו' וַיָּבֵא יְהִצְהוּ וַיִּלָּחֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל – *Sichon did not permit Yisrael to pass through his border... he arrived at Yahatz and waged war against Yisrael.* If so, what difference did it make that his country, Cheshbon, was a difficult region?

Chazal say<sup>2</sup> that some lands nurture their inhabitants and make them mighty. The Sfas Emes says Cheshbon was such a land, and even had its sole defenders been mosquitos, it would have been impenetrable, since they were Cheshbonite mosquitos. Certainly, its king, Sichon, was infused by his land with an extra dose of strength, beyond his natural might. This is what Rashi means: Bnei Yisrael's victory over Sichon was doubly remarkable, first because of Sichon's great natural

cont. on page 2

## Finding The Keys

The Gemara (Taanis 29a) relates that as the first Beis Hamikdash was burning, groups of young *kohanim* (*pirchei kehunah*) ascended to the roof of the *Heichal* holding its keys, and cried out: "Ribbono Shel Olam, since we did not merit to be worthy caretakers, we return the keys of the *Heichal* to you!" With that, they threw the keys upward, and a hand-like figure appeared and took the keys.

This story is difficult to understand in several aspects. Firstly, what importance can be ascribed to the keys of a destroyed Beis Hamikdash? If there is no Beis Hamikdash, presumably the keys no longer have any use. Nor were they considered *klei shareis* (vessels used for *avodah*), so the *kohanim* did not have to protect them from desecration.

One might suggest that since the gates of the first Beis Hamikdash were not burned but sank into the ground,<sup>8</sup> the *kohanim* wished to preserve the keys for the future, for when the gates would resurface.<sup>9</sup> But if so, why didn't they simply conceal them together with the gates? And if the *kohanim* were not aware that the gates would sink into the ground, then our original question returns: why did they wish to the preserve

cont. on page 3

People occasionally ask me for eitzos on how to guard their thoughts and eyes. But nobody ever asked me how to keep watch over a one-hundred-dollar bill.

himself not been difficult to defeat but he lived in Cheshbon, it would have been hard to defeat him, because the region is difficult. And even had he lived in a different city, it would have been hard, because the king (Sichon) was difficult.

1 *Likkutim* ד"ה ברש"י

2 Tanchuma, Shelach 6

8 Sotah 9a

9 See Maharsha to Taanis, *ibid.*

# Kings and Battlegrounds

cont. from page 1

strength, and again because of the extra might nurtured in him by his land, Cheshbon.

We may suggest another approach. Although the battle did not take place inside Cheshbon, both the land and its king were defeated and conquered. And that is precisely the miracle: Hashem planted the notion in Sichon's head to leave his mighty land of Cheshbon and meet Bnei Yisrael in battle at Yahatz, where the challenge to them would be less.<sup>3</sup>

Let us present yet another approach, with a lesson for us. The Chiddushei HaRim taught<sup>4</sup> that Sichon and Og are representative of two negative forces which oppose the *avodas Hashem* of Klal Yisrael. Sichon, king of 'Cheshbon,' attempts to convolute our *machashavos*, our thoughts; and Og, who resided in 'Edrei,' seeks to pervert our actions – since אדרעי has a connotation of זרוע, a mighty arm. The Imrei Emes<sup>5</sup> adds that for this reason, the pasuk says about Sichon and Og, אָשֶׁר יוֹשֵׁב – “who dwell,” in the present tense. Since they are an ongoing presence in the existence of Bnei Yisrael, challenging our *avodah* throughout the generations, they are described in terms not of the past but of the present.

One who wishes to avoid Og's temptation of sinning with action has

the option of tying his hands and putting the objectionable matter behind lock and key. But resisting Sichon by guarding one's thoughts is a much more complex challenge. Both the king – the *yetzer hara*,<sup>6</sup> and the region – the expanse of one's mind, are very difficult to keep in check. This is what Rashi means, “How much more so, since both the king and the region were difficult.”

People occasionally ask me for *eitzos* on how to guard their thoughts and eyes. But nobody ever asked me how to keep watch over a one-hundred-dollar bill. Everybody knows how to watch their tangible assets, because they are valuable to them. If people would value the purity of their eyes and minds, they would conceive ways and means of protecting them. Indeed, it remains a challenging task – fighting a difficult king on a difficult turf. But we are fortified with the strength of Moshe Rabbeinu, who defeated Sichon and his land – אַחֲרֵי הַכְּתוֹ אֶת סִיחֹן מֶלֶךְ הָאֱמֹרִי אָשֶׁר – יוֹשֵׁב בְּחֶשְׁבּוֹן.

\*\*\*

הָבוּ לָכֶם אַנְשִׁים חֲכָמִים וְגִבּוֹרִים וְיַדְעִים  
לְשִׁבְטֵיכֶם וְאֲשִׁימָם בְּרָאשֵׁיכֶם

*Provide for yourselves distinguished men, who are wise, understanding, and well-known to your tribes, and I shall appoint them as your heads. (1:13)*

Rashi remarks that the word וְאֲשִׁי־מִּן is written without a *yud* – וְאֲשִׁי־מִּן, connoting אשמה, guilt. Moshe meant that the guilt of Bnei Yisrael's sins rests on their leaders, for failing to object to their misdeeds and show them the proper path.<sup>7</sup>

Let us explore a deeper meaning. The Gemara (Shabbos 61a) says that when one smears himself with ointment, he should first smear his head, since it is the king over all his body parts. The body's king is its head, since it is responsible for all the body's actions. When a person sins, it is because he didn't listen to his head. וְאֲשִׁי־מִּן בְּרָאשֵׁי־כֹפֵר means that people sin because they fail to coronate their heads as their king, instead following every whim of their hands, feet and eyes. When this is the case, the person is missing a *yud* – his inner *Yid* is deficient.

וְאֲשִׁי־מִּן בְּרָאשֵׁיכֶם also alludes that all sins are due to a weakness in *yiras Shamayim*, as the Gemara (Shabbos 156b) links *yiras Shamayim* to the head: “Cover your head so that you will fear the King.”

In truth, however, it all comes together. By giving his head the rulership over his actions, a person achieves true *yiras Shamayim*, and all his activities are carried out properly.

(דברים תשכ"ב – שלום זכר; חיזוק לימי בין  
הזמנים, יום ה' דברים ו' מנחם אב)

3 I subsequently found that this explanation is given by R. Ovadyah of Bartenura.  
4 See *Likkutei HaRim* here; Chukas, on the pasuk האמורי; Tehillim, on the pasuk לסיחון  
5 5665  
6 מֶלֶךְ זָקֵן וְכִסִּיל - *an old and foolish king* (Koheles 4:13)  
7 See *Devarim Rabbah* 1:10

# Finding The Keys

cont. from page 1

the keys at all, since it seemed the gates would be burned?<sup>10</sup>

Another question: what point was there in ascending to the roof of the *Heichal*? The Gemara (Pesachim 94b) states that the *rakia* (heaven) is suspended a distance of five hundred years above the earth, so climbing one hundred *amos* to the *Heichal's* roof wouldn't seem to make a big difference.

What was the essential purpose of the Beis Hamikdash? The pasuk states (Devarim 16:16) שְׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָּל זָכוֹרָךְ אֶת פָּנָי, *Three times a year all your males should appear before Hashem*

A city's focal point must be its beis haknesses, its *ruchniyus* – so that standing on the roofs of the houses, one gazes up at the shul and gains *kedushah* and *yiras Shamayim*

*your G-d, in the place that He will choose.* יֵרָאֶה can also connote fear, meaning that the Beis Hamikdash instills *yiras Shamayim* in those who come to it. As we say in davening, “ושם – and there we will serve You in fear.”<sup>11</sup> This, then, is the function of the Beis Hamikdash: to implant *yiras Shamayim* in Klal Yisrael.

The Gemara (Shabbos 31a) states that a person who possesses only Torah but not *yiras Shamayim* is like a building's caretaker who was given the keys of the inner chambers but not of the outer doors. The keys of the Beis Hamikdash – the world's most essential keys – represent *yiras Shamayim*.

These keys were meant to open the gates of the *Heichal*, but not only in its literal sense. The pasuk (Yirmiyahu 7:4) says of Bnei Yisrael, הֵיכַל ה' הַמָּחָה – *they are the Heichal of Hashem*. The keys of the Beis Hamikdash were to fill the hearts of Klal Yisrael with *yiras Shamayim*. But who were the custodians of these keys, responsible to ensure that the Beis Hamikdash inspires *yiras Shamayim*? It was the *pirchei kehunah*, since they were especially zealous for *yiras Shamayim* and the purity of the Beis Hamikdash. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 81a) states that if an impure *kohen* served in the Beis Hamikdash, he would not be brought to *beis din*; rather, the *pirchei kehunah* would bring him outside and put him to death.

As the Beis Hamikdash burned, the *pirchei kehunah* realized that they had not succeeded in inspiring a fire of *yiras Shamayim* in Klal Yisrael. They declared to Hashem, “Since we were not faithful to our task of igniting *yiras Shamayim* in the Jewish nation, we return the keys of the Beis Hamikdash – the keys to *yiras Shamayim* – to You.”

But why did they do this on the roof of the *Heichal*? The Gemara (Shabbos 11a) states that a city whose roofs are higher than its *beis haknesses* will ultimately be destroyed, as the pasuk (Ezra 9:9) says, לְרוֹמֵם אֶת בַּיִת אֱלֹהֵינוּ, וּלְהַעֲמִיד אֶת חֲרֻבְתָּיו *to raise up the house of our G-d and to restore its ruins*. Why does the Gemara refer to the height of the city's “roofs,” and not simply the height of its houses? If a person would stand on the roof of a house in such a city, he would look downward upon its shul. That is the problem with this city: its primary focus is on its *gashmiyus*, its houses, and its *ruchniyus* is only secondary. Such a city cannot endure. A city's focal point must be its *beis haknesses*, its *ruchniyus* – so that standing on the roofs of the houses, one gazes up at the shul and gains *kedushah* and *yiras Shamayim* from it.

The “roof” represents a viewpoint of *ruchniyus* and one's efforts to draw close to *Shamayim*.<sup>12</sup> The Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of the “roof,” in that Klal Yisrael lacked the proper outlook toward *kedushah*, and did not appreciate the sanctity of the Beis Hamikdash. Having failed in their task of inspiring Klal Yisrael to *yiras Shamayim*, the *pirchei kehunah* stood on the roof of the *Heichal*, and returned its keys to Hashem.

The keys were accepted by an apparition like a hand. What was the meaning of this hand? The pasuk (Yeshayah 21:11-12) states, מִשָּׁא דְדוּמָה, אֲלֵי קוֹרָא מִשְׁעִיר, שְׁמֵר מָה מְלִילָה שְׁמֵר מָה מְלִיל. אֲמַר שְׁמֵר, אֶתְמָא בְקֹר וְגַם לִילָה, אִם תִּבְרָעִיוּן – *A prophecy concerning Dumah: He calls out to me because of Se'ir: 'Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?' The Watchman said, 'Morning is coming, but also night. If you seek [then] seek, repent and come.'* The Yerushalmi<sup>13</sup> explains that Bnei Yisrael asked Yeshayah if they would be redeemed from *galus* soon. Yeshayah answered, אִם תִּבְרָעִיוּן בְּעֵינֵי, – whenever you want the *geulah*, so will Hashem.” They replied, “We want the *geulah* immediately, and yet it is delayed. What is restraining it?” Yeshayah responded, שְׁבוּ אֶתְיוּ, repent and come – it is the need for *teshuvah* that holds back the *geulah*.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly, the *churban* of the Beis Hamikdash is meant to inspire us to *teshuvah*. The Gemara (Pesachim 119a) says that the hand of Hashem is outstretched beneath the wings of the *malachim* to accept *ba'alei teshuvah* and save them from harsh judgement.

The keys of the Beis Hamikdash were accepted by the hand of Hashem, and remain there awaiting those who are *chozer b'teshuvah*. Whoever does *teshuvah* will be accepted willingly and lovingly by Hashem, and will be imbued with the *yiras Shamayim* of the Beis Hamikdash's keys.

(בנאות דשא – דברים – שבת חזון תשכ"ב)

10 One may, however, suggest that they knew the gates would sink, but didn't manage to conceal the keys with them until it was too late.

11 See *Tosafos*, Bava Basra 21a s.v. *Ki; Sfas Emes*, Emor 5652 and Masei 5659

12 See Pesachim 86a, בארעא ואמרי באיגרא, דאכלי

13 Taanis 1:1

14 See Sanhedrin 94a

# Desecrating the Holy

The Gemara (Nedarim 62a) states that when the vessels of the first Beis Hamikdash were profaned by the non-Jewish marauders, they were made *chol*, unconsecrated, as the pasuk says (Yechezkel 7:22), וּבָאוּ בָהּ פְּרִיצִים וְחָלְלוּהָ – and into it will come lawless people and profane it. Thus, when Belshatzar partied with the vessels of the Beis Hamikdash, they were no longer *kadosh*.

*Shittah Mekubetzes* cites R. Eliezer of Metz that when profaned by non-Jews, the *keilim* become *chol* to the extent that their use is permissible. Nevertheless, Belshatzar was punished for using them — because this loss of *kodesh* status applies only to Jews; to non-Jews, the vessels retain their *kedushah*, in order that sinners should not be rewarded by being permitted to use the *keilim*.

How can it be that the *keilim* remain *kadosh* only for non-Jews and not for Jews? It was suggested that perhaps they retain their intrinsic *kedushah*, but their aspect of *mamon hekdesh* is voided. Thus, a Jew may use them since they are not *mamon hekdesh*,<sup>15</sup> but a non-Jew may not, since they are still intrinsically *kadosh*.

But this approach appears problematic. If we assume that a vessel's intrinsic *kedushah* does not prevent a Jew from using it, why would a non-Jew be different? And if a non-Jew cannot use it, a Jew should be no different.

Furthermore, we can understand that the *keilim* should retain holiness vis-à-vis those who plundered them, so that they should not be rewarded by being permitted to use them. But Belshatzar didn't plunder them; he only inherited the kingdom from Nevuchadnetzar, who sent Nevuzaradan to plunder the Beis Hamikdash. Since Belshatzar wasn't the one who sinned by stealing the vessels, why should he be different from the Jews, who were permitted to use the *keilim*?

When we look more closely at the words of R. Eliezer of Metz, a different understanding emerges. Other *Rishonim*<sup>16</sup> state that the vessels become unconsecrated when the marauders enter the Beis Hamikdash, or when they plunder the vessels; but R. Eliezer of Metz writes that the vessels become *chol* when the non-Jews use them. In other words, until Belshatzar used the *keilim*, they retained their *kedushah*.

In fact, this same approach is taken by the Maharal.<sup>17</sup> The Maharal asks why only Belshatzar was severely punished for using the *keilim* of the Beis Hamikdash, and not Achashverosh who used them as well. He answers that when Achashverosh used them they were already *chol*, since Belshatzar had profaned them by using them. Clearly, they were not made *chol* by those who stole them, but through their initial use by Belshatzar.<sup>18</sup>

We may now understand what R. Eliezer of Metz means to ask. Since the *keilim* became unconsecrated immediately with their first profane use, why was Belshatzar punished for his extended use of them? After all, the punishment was for using holy vessels, not for making them lose their *kedushah*.

To this he answers that in order that a sinner not be rewarded, the one who desecrated the vessels by making them *chol* is judged as if they retained their *kedushah* throughout his use of them.

(בנאות דשא - דברים - שבת חזון תשכ"ב)

15 This would fit with the understanding of R. Chaim of Brisk (*Hilchos Me'ilah*, chap. 8), that the prohibition of *me'ilah* is defined by stealing from *hekdesh*; thus, it would apply only to items which are *mamon hekdesh*. See also *Toras'cha Shaashu'ai*, Vayikra p. 58-62.

16 See Rashi, Avodah Zarah 52b and Rashi (*meyuchas*), Nedarim *ibid*.

17 *Ohr Chadash*, Esther 1:7

18 With this we may understand the words of the *piyut* in the Pesach Haggadah, referring to Belshatzar: משתכר בכלי קודש - who became inebriated with holy vessels. As above, the *keilim* were in fact *kodesh*, since they didn't lose their *kedushah* until they were used.