



THE CHALLENGE OF THE WEEK (TRANSLATED FROM VEHA'AREV NA 2)

HE DIVIDED THE SEFER?!

THE CHALLENGE: Reuven borrowed a very large *Sefer* from his friend Shimon containing the entire *Seder Nezikin*. The volume was extremely thick and difficult to use, and its binding appeared as though it could fall apart at any moment.

After a month, Reuven returned the *Sefer* – or so he thought. Instead of returning the original volume, he brought Shimon two smaller books.

Shimon was surprised. “Where is the volume I lent you?”

Reuven explained, “The book was so large and difficult to use that I decided to do you a favor. I took it to a bookbinder and had it divided into two equal-sized volumes, each with its own binding. I didn’t charge you anything – I did it entirely as a *Chessed*.”

Shimon, however, was not pleased. “Why did you change my *Sefer* without asking me? I actually prefer having everything in one volume. When I am learning, if I need to look up something in another *Gemara*, I can simply flip to the back of the same book. With two volumes, I have to get up and take the other one. Furthermore, it is easier for me to safeguard one book than two.”

Shimon therefore demanded that Reuven either have the two volumes rebound into the original single volume or purchase him a new one.

Reuven disagreed. “I didn’t damage your *Sefer*. Everything that was in the original book is still here, and the value of the *Sefer* certainly did not decrease. In fact, it may even be worth more now. Why should I be responsible?”

Who is right?

THE SOLUTION: Rav Zilberstein first discusses whether Reuven was permitted to divide the *Sefer* in the first place. He rules that he was not permitted to alter someone else’s property without permission, even if he believed that the change would benefit the owner.

The fact that Reuven intended to do a *Chessed* does not give him the right to make changes to Shimon’s property. This is different from the creation of Chavah, where Hashem took Adam’s rib and transformed it for his benefit. That was a divine act necessary for Adam’s well-being. In this case, however, Reuven had no certainty that Shimon would prefer the *Sefer* divided into two volumes.

Nevertheless, the question remains: Does Reuven have to pay for the *Sefer* or restore it to its original condition?

Rav Avraham Palagi (*Shut Vaya'an Avraham, Choshen Mishpat, Siman 17*) was asked a similar question and ruled that the borrower is exempt from payment. Since the value of the *Sefer* did not decrease – and may even have increased – Reuven did not cause Shimon a monetary loss.

Although Shimon claims that he prefers one volume because it is more convenient for *Iyun*, and that one book is easier to safeguard than two, these are not considered standard forms of monetary damage. Therefore, Reuven may have acted improperly by altering the *Sefer* without permission, but he is not obligated to pay for it when no actual financial loss was caused.

DVAR TORAH – The Serpent and the Power of Speech

And Hashem said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, cursed are you... On your belly you shall crawl, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life” (3:14).

The punishment of the serpent appears to be a classic example of *Middah Keneged Middah*. The serpent caused mankind to fall from its lofty spiritual level and ultimately become subject to death and return to the dust. In return, the serpent itself was lowered to the ground and condemned to eat dust.

Yet there is an obvious question. The serpent's most significant role in the story was not crawling or eating – it was speaking. It used sophisticated speech to deceive Chavah and convince her to sin. Why, then, does Hashem never explicitly say that the serpent would lose its ability to speak?

Rabbenu Bachyei offers a profound explanation. The serpent itself did not possess the power of speech. It served as a physical vessel (*Kli*) for a spiritual force – the primordial serpent, identified with the Satan. Thus, the story contains both a physical and a spiritual dimension.

The spiritual force behind the serpent committed the first act of *Lashon Hara* in history. It slandered Hashem by suggesting that He withheld the fruit from Adam and Chavah out of jealousy. Because it used speech to distort the truth and entice others to sin, its spiritual punishment was to be cast down from its elevated position and removed from the three camps of holiness.

Once that spiritual force was cast down, the serpent lost the (cont. on next side)

INSIGHT ON THE HAFTORAH – The Message of the Arrows

And I will send the lad, “Go, find the arrows.” If I say to the lad, “Behold, the arrows are on this side of you,” then come, for you are safe and there is no danger, as Hashem lives (Shmuel I 20:21).

Yonatan devised a secret signal to inform David whether he was safe or whether he needed to flee from Shaul. He would shoot arrows and then call out to the boy: if the arrows were near David, it meant that David could return safely; if they were beyond him, David would know that Shaul intended to harm him.

The *Mefarshim* ask: Why did Yonatan choose arrows as the signal? Why not simply communicate the message directly?

The *Abarbanel* explains that David needed to remain hidden, so Yonatan had to communicate with him discreetly. The arrows allowed him to convey the message without revealing David’s location.

The *Ahavat Yehonatan*, however, sees a much deeper message in the arrows.

Eisav was blessed by Yitzchak, *“And by your sword shall you live.”* This was fitting because Eisav’s strength was rooted in deception. He deceived his father through his speech and his ability to present himself falsely. His weapon was therefore the sword – symbolizing the power of deception and conflict.

The counter to Eisav is Binyamin. Binyamin was the only one of Yaakov’s sons who did not participate in deceiving his father about Yosef’s disappearance. For this reason, Binyamin – and ultimately his descendants – were associated with the sword that would oppose Eisav’s influence.

Yishmael, too, was associated with a weapon. When the angels came to Avraham after his *Brit Milah*, the Torah says, *“And he gave it to the lad”* – referring to Yishmael. *Chazal* understand that Yishmael became an expert archer. His weapon became the bow.

The counter to Yishmael is Yehuda. When Yaakov prepared to descend to Egypt to meet Yosef, he sent Yehuda ahead of him: *“And he sent Yehuda before him.”* Yehuda, like Yishmael, served as the one who went ahead. Therefore, his spiritual weapon became the bow.

This gives new meaning to Yonatan’s secret message. Yonatan was not merely telling David where the arrows were. He was hinting to him about which era was approaching.

If the arrows were near David, Yonatan was hinting: The era of the bow is close. The time of Yehuda is approaching. Your kingship is ready to emerge.

But if the arrows were beyond David, the message was: The time of Yehuda has not yet arrived. The era of Shaul – the descendants of Rachel and the sword – must continue. You must flee and wait.

This also explains David’s words after the deaths of Shaul and his sons. In his lamentation, David declared: *“Teach the children of Yehuda the bow.”*

Now David understood that a new era had begun. The reign of Shaul was over, and the time had come for Yehuda – and the spiritual weapon represented by the bow – to lead *Klal Yisrael*.

DVAR TORAH – The Serpent and the Power of Speech

(cont. from previous side) spiritual source that had enabled it to speak. Thus, the Torah did not need to record a separate punishment that the serpent would become mute – the loss of its speech was a consequence of the spiritual force being removed.

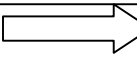
This also sheds light on the famous expression of *Chazal*, *“Afra Befumei”* – “Let there be dust in his mouth.” Rabbenu Bachyei explains that this phrase is associated with someone who speaks improperly, falsely, or gives harmful counsel. The *Gemara* (*Bava Batra* 16a), for example, uses it regarding Iyov when he spoke improperly about Hashem.

The serpent was the world’s first *Meisit*, an enticer who used words to lead another person away from Hashem. Its punishment was therefore perfectly measure-for-measure: the one who misused speech to bring mankind down was itself brought down, and its mouth was filled with dust.

The story of the serpent teaches us that speech is never merely speech. Words can elevate a person, strengthen another person’s faith, and bring people closer to Hashem. But words can also deceive, destroy reputations, and lead others away from what is right.

The serpent’s greatest weapon was not its physical power– it was its words. That is why its punishment was not merely to crawl on the ground, but to lose the spiritual power that enabled it to speak.

We should therefore recognize the awesome responsibility that comes with every word we say. Before we speak, we should ask ourselves: Are these words building holiness – or bringing someone down?

 *David had already been anointed by Shmuel to become king, yet he understood that being destined for greatness does not mean that the time for greatness has arrived. Sometimes Hashem gives us a glimpse of our future, but then asks us to wait. The challenge is not only to know where we are going, but to recognize when it is time to move forward and when it is time to retreat and wait.*

David did not force his destiny. He listened to the message of the arrows and trusted that when the right time came, Hashem would make it clear. Our task is to prepare ourselves for the role Hashem has destined for us, while having the patience and humility to wait until the right moment arrives.

SHABBAT SHALOM!