



#189 • BESHALACH • 11 SHVAT, 5778 • 1/27/18

# DAF KESHER

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## DVAR TORAH WHY WAS PHARAOH A "LETZ"?

What is the meaning of the Hebrew word "letz" (לֵצֵן) in the verse "... לֵצֵן תִּפְּקֶה וּפְתִי יֵעָרֵם – You strike the letz and the foolish one becomes smart ..." (Mishlei 19:25)?

In his Sichot Al Sefer Shemot (pp. 129-139), Harav Avigdor Nebenzahl, שליט"א, the Rav of Yerushalayim's Old City, makes it clear that even though the word "letz" is sometimes translated as a "joker" (ליצן is the word in modern Hebrew for a clown), that cannot be the case in this verse in Mishlei.

Rashi, based on the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 27:6 and Tanchuma Yitro 3) explains that this verse refers to Yitro seeing the downfall of Pharaoh at the Splitting of the Sea and Amalek at Refidim. Hashem struck the "letz" – Pharaoh and Amalek – and the foolish one – Yitro – became wise and joined the Jewish People. Pharaoh and Amalek are not known as jokers but as evil people. The same use of "letz" as an evil person appears in other verses, like, "יָד יָהִיר לֵצֵן שָׂמוּ עוֹשֶׂה בְּעִבְרַת זָרוֹן" – An arrogant malicious sinner is called a 'letz'; he acts with angry malevolence" (Mishlei 21:24).

On the flip side, we also find some Talmudic praise for people who say humorous things. Rav Beroka Choza'ah heard from Eliahu Hanavi that two people in the marketplace were "people of the World to Come." It turned out that they would cheer up people who were sad through good humor (Taanit 22a). In another passage we are taught that Rabbah would say something humorous, and only then begin his shiur (Shabbat 30b). So what is a "letz" and why is Pharaoh called one?

Rav Nebenzahl adopts Rabbeinu Yonah's definition of a "letz" (Harav Yonah of Gerundi, זצ"ל, 1210-1263, in Shaarei Teshuvah 3:176) to explain its use in Tanach. A letz, he says, is a scoffer, one who negates someone or something that is truly important. Pharaoh said, "Who is G-d that I should listen to him?" (Shemot 5:2). He was the one who was able to ignore plague after plague, watch his country get destroyed, yet not send out the Jewish People. Amalek had the same characteristic. Other nations were terrified when the Sea split (and, as Rachav told Yehoshua's spies, were still terrified forty years later), but Amalek attacked Israel.

Rabbeinu Yonah teaches us how hopeless the letz is. He is not willing to accept criticism and rebuke because "what brought the letz to this bad characteristic is that he is wise in his own eyes (חֲכָם בְּעֵינָיו). This causes him to mock and reject others' opinions. This is a middah (character trait) that is hopeless [to correct]. For it says, 'If you have seen someone wise in his own eyes, there is more hope for the fool than for him' (Mishlei 26:12)." Until he stops being "wise in his own eyes" he is hopeless.

The humor of letzanut – arrogant scoffing, mockery – is terrible and destructive because it takes that which is truly serious and diminishes its importance. But humor that diminishes the importance of that which is truly **not** important is praiseworthy. That is why Eliahu praised those two comedians who used humor to cheer up people who were sad. A letz is a scoffer, but one who tells jokes might be worthy of the World to Come.

Also in this week's Daf Kesher: Source Guide – "Then Moshe Sang" – "Tomorrow," by Rabbi Mendel Farber

## SOURCE GUIDE: THEN MOSHE SANG

The Midrash connects the word “אז – then” that begins the Song of the Sea (Shirat Hayam), with the same word “אז” that Moshe used when speaking with Hashem in the early stages of the Exodus. This source guide is based on that Midrash and the theme it develops.

### A. Two “אז”s

The word “אז – then” appears in the opening of the Shirat Hayam (the Song of the Sea):

<p><b>1. Shemot 16:1</b>  <b>Then</b> Moshe and the Children of Israel sang this song to Hashem and they said: I will sing out to Hashem for he was exceedingly lofty; the horse and its rider were cast into the Sea.</p>	<p><b>שמות טז: א:</b>  אָז יִשִּׁיר מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לַה' וַיֹּאמְרוּ לַאֲמֵר: אֲשִׁירָה לַה' כִּי גָאָה גָאָה סוּס וּרְכֹבֹו רָמָה בַיָּם.</p>
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That word אז seems superfluous. Wouldn't we have known that immediately after the Splitting of the Sea Moshe and Israel sang if the Torah said וישיר משה? Why does the Torah say that “then” they sang? The Midrash answers that the Torah alludes to another appearance of the word אז, near the end of Parshat Shemot, when the initial stages of Moshe's mission did not seem to bear fruit and Moshe confronted Hashem:

<p><b>2. Shemot 5:22-23</b>  (22) Moshe went back to Hashem and said: My Master, why have You wronged this Nation? Why have You sent me?  (23) <b>And from when</b> I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name it has become worse for this Nation and You have not saved Your Nation.</p>	<p><b>שמות ה: כב-כג:</b>  (כב) וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וַיֹּאמֶר: אֲד-נִי לָמָּה הִרְעַתָּה לְעַם הַזֶּה לָמָּה זֶה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי. (כג) וּמֵאָז בָּאתִי אֶל פַּרְעֹה לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁמְךָ הִרַע לְעַם הַזֶּה וְהִצַּל לֹא הִצַּלְתָּ אֶת עַמְּךָ.</p>
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### B. Curing “Then” with “Then”

According to the Midrash, Moshe regretted his initial use of “אז” in the verse “ומאז באתי אל פרעה” and therefore that word opens up the Shirah:

<p><b>3. Shemot Rabbah 23:3</b>  “Then Moshe sang” – This is what is meant by “Your lips drop forth sweetness [honey and milk are under your tongue]” (Shir Hashirim 4:11). Said Moshe: Master of the Worlds, through what I sinned before You I praise You.</p>	<p><b>שמות רבה כג:</b>  “אז ישיר משה” – הה”ד “נופת תטופנה שפתותיך [דבש וחלב תחת לשונך]” (שיר השירים ד:יא). אמר משה: רבון העולמים, במה שחטאתי לפניך בו אני מקלסך.</p>
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Rabbi Levi enriches our understanding of Moshe's use of the word אז through a parable:

<p><b>4. Shemot Rabbah 23:3</b>  Rabbi Levi son of Chiya said: This can be likened to a country that rebelled against an emperor, and the emperor said to his commander (dux), “Let us go and wage war against it.” The commander said, “You will not be able to succeed.” The king secretly went by himself at night and conquered it. The commander knew, made a crown, and brought it to the emperor. The emperor asked: “What is the purpose of this crown?” He replied, “It is because I sinned through this matter by telling you that you are not able [to conquer it].”   Thus Moshe said to the Holy One, blessed be He: “I know that I sinned before You through “אז” – as it says, “And from when (ומאז) I came to Pharaoh ...” And behold, You drowned them in the Sea. Therefore I praise You through אז. This is what is meant by “Then (אז) Moshe sang.”</p>	<p><b>שמות רבה כג:</b>  א”ר לוי בר חייא: משל למדינה שמרדה על המלך, ואמר המלך לדוכוס שלו, “נלך ונלחם בה.” אמר לו דוכוס, “אין אתה יכול.” החריש המלך והלך בלילה בעצמו וכבשה. ידע דוכוס, עשה עטרה, והביא למלך. אמר לו, “העטרה הזו למה?” אמר, “בשביל שחטאתי בדבר ואמרת לך אין אתה יכול.”   כך אמר משה לפני הקב”ה: “יודע אני שחטאתי לפניך באז, שנאמר ‘ומאז באתי אל פרעה’, והרי טבעת אותו לים. לכך אני משבחך באז.” הה”ד “אז ישיר משה.”</p>
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Moshe saw his initial words to Hashem as, on some level, doubting the Divine power, not sufficiently appreciating the Divine Crown. He therefore made a gift of the word **אז** by opening his singing out to Hashem using that same word. According to the Radal (Harav David Luria, זצ"ל, 1795-1855, Lithuania), Moshe's exchange of the problematic **ומאז** with the "sweet" **אז** of the Song is hinted at by "דבש וחלב תחת לשונך – honey and milk are **under** your tongue," the words from Shir Hashirim the Midrash quotes. It reads תחת as instead of, not merely under. [See also Mishlei 5:3!]

Not only Moshe, but the righteous in general, take this approach of using the sin itself to repair sin:

<p><b>5. Shemot Rabbah 23:3</b> Come and see the way of the righteous. Through what they sin with they repair. This is "Your lips drop forth sweetness" (Shir Hashirim 4:11).</p>	<p><b>שמות רבה כג:ג</b> בא וראה דרך הצדיקים. במה שהם סורחים הם מתקנים. הוי "נופת טוֹפְנָה שפּתוֹתֶיךָ כלה" (שיר השירים ד:יא).</p>
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The righteous learned it from Hashem Himself:

<p><b>6. Shemot Rabbah 23:3</b> From whom do they learn? It is from Hashem, for He heals using that with which He strikes. As it says, "For I will heal you and from your wounds I will heal you" (Yirmiyah 30:17). Through the wounds that I strike you with I will heal you.  How do you know this? It is from the Holy One, blessed be He. Go and learn it from Marah, where He instructed Moshe to take something bitter, cast it into the water, and thereby sweeten the water. As it says, "Hashem instructed him [to take] (bitter) wood and he cast it into the water" (Shemot 15:25) ... It was bitter wood and it sweetened the bitter waters. Thus Moshe complained using the word <b>אז</b>, and through what he sinned he repaired his deeds and said, "Then Moshe sang."</p>	<p><b>שמות רבה כג:ג</b> ממי הם למדים מן הקב"ה שבדבר שהוא מכה הוא מרפא שנאמר, "כי אעלה ארוכה לך וממכותיך ארפאך" (ירמיה ל:ז). ממכות שאני מכה אותך מהם אני מרפא אותך.  מנין תדע כן? מן הקב"ה. צא ולמד ממרה שהורה למשה דבר מר והשליך למים ונמתקו המים. שנאמר, "ויורהו ה' עץ וישלך אל המים" (שמות טו:כה) ... עץ מר היה והמתיק המים המרים. וכך משה לא קנטר אלא ב"אז", ובמה שסרח תיקן מעשיו ואמר "אז ישיר משה."</p>
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Another expression of this theme is that for one who repents out of love (תשובה מאהבה), Hashem transforms his very sins into merits (Yoma 86b).

## TOMORROW BY RABBI MENDEL FARBER

When Moshe sends Yehoshua to fight against Amalek he says, "בחר לנו אנשים וצא הלחם בעמלק **מחר** אנכי נצב על" – Choose men and go fight against Amalek. **Tomorrow** I will stand on the mountain on the top of the hill with the staff of G-d in my hand" (Shemot 17:9). Rashi explains the verse: Go and fight, said Moshe. And tomorrow, during the war, I will stand on the hill. The fight will begin immediately, but the victory will be **tomorrow** and the tefillah will be **tomorrow**.

Why did Moshe wait until the next day to stand on the top of the hill in prayer? Why was "tomorrow" such an essential part of the war against Amalek?

Generations later, we find the same emphasis on **מחר**, tomorrow, in the struggle against the Amalekite Haman. Esther invites the king and Haman to a party. At the party she requests the following: "אם מצאתי חן בעיני המלך – ואם על המלך טוב לתת את שאלתי ולעשות את בקשתי יבוא המלך והמן אל המשתה אשר אעשה להם **ומחר** אעשה כדבר המלך" – If I have found favor in the eyes of the king and the king thinks it good to grant my request and do what I ask, he should come with Haman to a second party I will make, and **tomorrow** I will do as the king requested" (Esther 5:8). Once again, why did Esther push off her true request until "tomorrow"?

Esther uses "tomorrow" one more time, when she comes to Achashveirosh on the 13th of Adar after the victory

over Amalek. On that day she asks: “וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִם עַל הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יִנָּתֵן גַּם מָחָר לַיהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּשׂוֹשָׁן לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדַת הַיּוֹם – Esther said to the king, “If it is good with the king, let also **tomorrow** be given to the Jews that are in Shushan to do as today (to fight another day) and let the ten sons of Haman be hung on a gallows” (Esther 9:13). Why did she only request that Haman’s ten sons be hung “tomorrow”?

We must understand Moshe’s and Esther’s use of the word “tomorrow.” They were not merely making practical decisions by stating that at a particular time, tomorrow, something would happen – Moshe’s prayer or Esther’s feast.

Moshe, through the word “tomorrow,” was actually defining for Yehoshua the essence of the conflict with Amalek. It is the tomorrow we are fighting about. We believe that the world is progressing towards a future world where we can become partners with Hashem in fully realizing the Divine Ideal. Every today connects with and is motivated by the tomorrow, the future. Israel is on a historical journey leading to a great tomorrow.

Amalek is looking to eliminate the tomorrow. He comes today to prevent the tomorrow from coming. Amalek opposes the whole concept of a historical journey. The whole concept of a future is antithetical to Amalek. In the eyes of Amalek there is no goal or destiny to which the world is progressing. There is no purpose to the world other than the present moment. There is no tomorrow. All that exists is the here and now.

We, the Jewish People, do not live for the moment. On the contrary, our present is motivated by our dream of the future. The future is not [merely] a result of what happens before it. What happens before it is a result of the future, our dream of the perfect world. It is a world in which man is free to rise to the heights of humanity, reaching closer and closer to his Creator and thereby receiving the Divine Good for which he was created.

Our whole history is a journey towards the future. And that is precisely what Amalek opposes, a purpose, a mission which is obligating. The pleasures of the present become secondary. The ideal takes precedence over all momentary experience. Amalek vehemently opposes being obligated to anything other than his own selfish interests. In order to be truly victorious over Amalek, Moshe and Esther needed to focus on the tomorrow.

The very word for tomorrow, **מָחָר**, contains an important message. The letters of the word **מָחָר** are also the letters of the word **רַחֵם**, as in Rachamim, mercy. Middat Harachamim, the Divine attribute of Mercy, sustains existence, as the Ramchal explains (Harav Moshe Chaim Luzzato, זצ"ל, 1707-1746, in the fourth chapter of Mesillas Yesharim), that the Middat Harachamim gives time to the sinner. Strict judgement would have dictated that the sinner be eliminated instantly when he goes against the Divine Will. Rachamim gives the sinner time to correct and rectify what he did. Middat Harachamim gives us the future within which we can correct the past; otherwise existence would be impossible. It is not coincidental that the letters of the word **מָחָר** spell **רַחֵם**. The Machar grows out of the rachem; without rachamim there is no Machar. The continuum of time is the basis of our existence. And the source of the future is in the womb and, in Lashon Kodesh, is called **רֶחֶם**.

The history of our People is a journey towards our promised future. The obstacle to a smooth journey is our nemesis, Amalek. We are victorious over Amalek through tomorrow, **מָחָר**.

### שבת שלום ומבורך

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The following digital Torah resources have been extremely helpful in researching and preparing the Shapell's Daf Keshet:  
DBS – Hataklitor Hatorani, Otzar Hachochmah, the Bar Ilan Responsa Project, Hebrewbooks.org, and the Tanach section of Chabad.org.

**We continue to pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.**