Toldot Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l Published Livorno 1776*

Chapter IV – Mishnah 4

ר' לוִיטָס אִישׁ יַבְנָה אוֹמֵר, מָאֹד מָאֹד הָנֵי שָׁפַּל רוּחַ בִּפְנֵי כָּל אָדָם, שֵׁתִּקְנַת אֲנוֹשׁ רְמָה.

Rabbi Levitas a man of Yavneh said: be very, very humble of spirit before every person, for the hope of man is maggots.¹

לא יַעַלָה עַל לָב אִישׁ, לָהִיוֹת מָצַפָּה וִמְקַנָּה רָק מִילִי דְּנָחָמָתָא, לֹא רְמָה וְתוֹלְעָה. וָאָם כַּן, קשָׁה עַל הַלְּשׁוֹן שֶׁל הַתַּנָּא "שַׁתְּקְוַת

אַנוֹשׁ רְמָּה", שֵׁמִי הוּא זֶה שֶׁמְצַפָּה לְדָבַר רַע. וְעוֹד, מַהוּ הַכֵּפֵל שֵׁל "מְאֹד מְאֹד".

It will not occur to anyone's heart to be expecting and hoping only for comforting words, and not maggots and worms. I.e., everyone knows that man's life is short, and then the body will die and decompose. If so, there is a question about the language of the Tanna, "the hope of man is maggots," for who would hope for something bad?

Furthermore, what is the meaning of the duplication of the word "very, very"?

וְיוּבַן, בְּמַאי דְּאִיתָא בְּפֶרֶק י' דְּסַנְהֶדְרִין, אֵיזֶהוּ בֶּן הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, עַנְוְתָן וּשְׁפַל בֶּרֶדּ, שָׁיֵיף עָיֵיל, שָׁיֵיף נָפִיק. וְיֵשׁ לְדַקְדֵּק, מַהוּ הענִין שׁיֵיף עיֵיל, שׁיֵיף נפִיק. וְעוֹד, שַׁנִּרְאָה כָּפל וִיתוּר לשׁוֹן, דְהַיִּינוּ "עַנוֹתו וּשׁפל בַּרֶדּ".

This can be understood by what is written in the 10th chapter of tractate *Sanhedrin* (88b): "Who is one who merits the World-to-Come? The humble and lowly of spirit, who enters the study-hall quietly and exits quietly."

We need to investigate, what is this "enters quietly and exits quietly"?

Also, there appears to be duplicative language, which is "humble and lowly of spirit."

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¹ In most editions of Pirkei Avot, the words "before every person" [בַּפְנֵי כָּל אָדָם] do not appear in this Mishnah. See also Mishnah 12, which duplicates the teaching "be humble of spirit before every person."

ְוָנְרְאֶה, דְּאִיתָא בִּירוּשַׁלְמִי דְּכִלְאַיִם רַבִּי, הַנָה עַנְוְתָן סִגּי, וְהַנָה אָמַר, כָּל דְּיֵימַר לִי בַּר נָשָׁא, אֲנָא עָבִיד, חוּץ מִמָּה שֶׁעָשׂוּ אַנְשׁי בְּנִשׁי בְּנִימַר לִי בַּר נָשָׁא, אֲנָא עָבִיד, חוּץ מִמֶּנָה. וְאָם בְּתֵירָא לְזְקַנִי, דְּשָׁרוּן גַּרְמוֹן מִנְשִׁיאוּתָן וּמְנוֹנֵיה. עכ"ל. וְזָהוּ "שָׁיֵיף עָיֵיל", אָם רוֹצִים לִיתֵּן לְּדְּלָּה, בְּרַח מִמֶּנָה. וְאָם תִּכְּנֵס עַל כְּרְחַךְּ לֹגְדוּלָה, מִּהְיֶה שָׁפֶּל וְעָנָו. וְעוֹד, "שָׁיֵיף נָפְ[י]ק", שֶׁאף לְאַחֵר שֶׁנְּכְנַסְתָּ, מִּהְיֶה עָנָו לִימְנָה לָהָלָל.
אָתַה מִגְּדוּלְתַךְּ, כְּמוֹ שֵׁעֲשׁוּ אַנְשֵׁי בְּתֵירָה לְהַלָּל.

It appears that it is brought in the Jerusalem Talmud of Kilayim (9:3): "Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] was exceedingly humble and would say, 'Anything a person asks of me, I will do, except for what the people of Beteira did to my ancestor [i.e., Hillel], for they removed themselves from their position of leadership and handed it over to him.'"

This is the meaning of "enters quietly": If people wish to bestow greatness upon you, flee from it. If you must accept a position of greatness, do so with humility and a lowly spirit.

Furthermore, "exits quietly" means that even after you have entered into a position of greatness, remain humble and give it to others and exit from your position of greatness, as people of Bnei Beteira did for Hillel.

ְהַשְׁתָּא אָתֵי שַׁפִּיר לִישָׁנָא דְּתַלְמוּדָא, דְּמֵעִיקֶרָא קַאָמַר, אֵיזֶהוּ בֶּן הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, עַנְוְתָן וּשְׁפַל בֶּרֶךּ. וְלֹא דֵּי לְהִיוֹת עָנָו סְתָם, אָלָא אָפִילוּ בִּמְקוֹם גְּדוּלָה, צָרִידְ לִהְיוֹת עָנָיו, שָׁיֵיף עָיֵיל, שָׁיֵיף נָפִיק, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפֵּירִשְׁנוּ. וּלְזֶה רָצָה לִרְמוֹז הַתַּנָּא בְּמַה שֶׁאָמַר "מָאֹד מָאֹד", בֵּין קוֹדֶם שֶׁתִּכָּנֵס לֹגְדוּלָה, בֵּין לְאַחַר שֶׁנִּכְנַסְתָּ, "הֵנִי שְׁפַל רוּחַ בִּפְנֵי כָּל הָאָדָם", כְּרַבִּי וּכְזִקְנֵי בְּתִירָא.

Now the language of the Talmud is fine, as it initially states: "Who is one who merits the World-to-Come? The humble and lowly of spirit." It is not enough to simply be humble; rather, even in a position of greatness, one must remain humble, who "enters quietly and exits quietly," as we have explained.

This is what the Tanna wished to emphasize by saying "very, very": both before you enter a position of greatness and after you have entered it, "be lowly of spirit before every person," like Rabbi [Yehuda HaNasi] and the elders of Beteira.

אִי נַמִּי יֵשׁ לוֹמַר, דְּאָמְרִינַן בְּפֶרֶק ו' דְּחוּלִין, גָּדוֹל מַה שֶׁנֶּאֱמֵר בְּמֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן, יוֹתֵר מִמֵּה שֶׁנָּאֱמֵר בְּאַבְרָהָם, דְּאָלוּ בְּאַבְרָהָם בְּמִיב "וְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאָפֶר", וּבְהָנְהוּ כְּתִיב "וְנַחְנוּ מָה". וְלָכֵן אָמֵר "מְאֹד מְאֹד", לֹא דֵי כְּאַבְרָהָם, אֶלָּא כְּמִשֶׁה. וְעוֹד, "בִּפְנֵי כָּל אַדָם", לֹא דֵי בָּפָנֵי הַגִּדוֹלִים מִמָּה, אֵלָא אַף בִּפְנֵי הַקּטַנִּים.

Alternatively, it can be said, as it is said in the 6th chapter of tractate *Chullin* (89a), that what is said about Moses and Aaron is greater than what is said about Abraham. For regarding Abraham, it is written, "I am but dust and ashes," whereas concerning Moses and Aaron, it is written, "What are we?" indicating even greater humility.

Therefore, he says "very, very"—it's not enough to be like Abraham, but like Moses. Furthermore, he says "before every person"—not only before those greater than you, but even before those who are lesser.

² Gen. 18:27.

³ Ex. 16:7.

ְּוָלֶפֶה, שֶׁתִּקְנַת אֲנוֹשׁ רְמָה, דְּלְעֵיל בְּפֶּרֶק ג' אָמֵר הַתּנָּא, "לְאָן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, לְמְקוֹם עָפָר רְמָה וְתוֹלֵעָה", וְיֵשׁ לְדַקְדֵּק, מַהוּ רְמָה וּלַבְּה, שֶׁתְּקנת אֲנוֹשׁ רְמָה לִי. וְכָתְבוּ הַמְּפֶּרְשִׁים שֶׁהָרְמָּה הִיא כְּמוֹ שֶׁרֶץ הַפּוֹרֵח עַל אֵיזָה אוֹכֶל, קוֹדֶם שָׁאוֹתוֹ אוֹכֶל יִהְיָה וֹלְעִים וֹלְעִים וֹלְעִים שְׁנִּבְאַשׁ הָאוֹכֶל. וְזָה נִלְמַד מִמַּה שֶׁמָצִינוּ בַּמָּן, דְּמִתְּחַלְּה כְּתִיב "וַיָּרֵם תּוֹלְעִים וֹלְצִים תּוֹלְעִים. וּלְבַסּוֹף כְּתִיב "וְלֹא הִבְאִישׁ וְרְמָּה לֹא־הָיְתָה בּוֹ", לֹא דֵּי שֶׁלֹּא הִבְאִישׁ, אֶלָּא נִיִּבְאַשׁ לְּכִילוֹ רְמָה שֶׁהוֹא דָּבָר קַל, לֹא הָיְתָה בּוֹ.

Why is this, that "the hope of man is maggots," as above, in Chapter 3, the Tanna said, "Where are you going? To a place of dust, maggots, and worms." It is worth examining: what is a maggot and what is a worm, and why do I need both to be mentioned? Commentators explain that a maggot is like a small insect that appears on food before it becomes rotten, whereas worms are more severe, as they come only after the food has rotted.

This distinction is learned from what we find with manna. Initially, it is written: "And it bred worms and became rotten," as if to say that because the manna became rotten, it developed worms. Later, it is written: "And it did not become rotten, and no maggots were in it." It's not enough that it did not become rotten, but even maggots—something minor—did not appear in it.

ּוּבְסַפֶּר מַצְבַר יַבּׂק דַּף קמ"ב כָּתַב, וְזָה לְשׁוֹנוֹ, וַאֲפִילוֹ מָסְפְּרֵי הַתּוֹלָעִים גוֹזְרִים מִלְמִעְלָה, לְפִי בָּאֲשׁוֹ וְצַחָנְתוֹ אֲשֶׁר פָּעַל וְעָשָׂה וּבְסַפֶּר מַצְבַר יַבֹּק דַּף קמ"ב כָּתַב, וְזָה לְשֹׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁיוֹ הַקְשִׁה לוֹ מְאֹד, וְבְסוֹף פֶּרֶק קַמָּא דְּבַתְרָא אָמְרִינַן, תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן, שִׁבְעָה לֹא וְרַקב עֲצָמוֹת מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ מַרְגִּישׁ. עכ"ל. וּבְסוֹף פֶּרֶק קַמָּא דְּבַתְרָא אָמְרִינַן, תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן, שִׁבְעָה לֹא שָׁלְטָה בָּהָם רְמָה וְתוֹלְעָה. וְהַקְשׁוּ בַּתּוֹסָפוֹת, תֵּימָה לְרִשְׁבָ"א, דְּכֵלְהוֹּ צַדִּיקִי נַמִּי, דְּאָמְרִינַן בְּשַׁבָּת פֶּרָק שׁוֹאֵל "וּרְקב עֲצָמוֹת קּנְשָׁה וְלַבְין. וְיֵשֻׁ לוֹ קְנָאָה בְּלְבּוֹ, אֵין עַצְמוֹת, נִרְקַבִין. וְיֵשׁ לוֹמַר, דְּיָכוֹל לְהִיוֹת שָׁלְטַר, בְּרַבִּי שְׁמְעוֹן בָּמְצִשֶּׁה דְּרָבִּי, עכ"ל.

In the book Ma'avar Yabok (page 142), it is written, and this is his language:

Even the number of worms is decreed from above, based on the foulness and decay caused by one's actions during their lifetime. The severity of worms in the flesh corresponds to the severity of one's deeds. This is not the same for everyone: regarding this severity, for some, it is exceedingly harsh; for others, they feel it but not as intensely; and for yet others, they do not feel it at all.

- Aaron Berachiah ben Moses, Ma'avar Yabok (Siftei Rinonot 3:41)

At the end of the 1st chapter of tractate *Bava Batra* (17a), it is said, "The Sages taught: Seven people were not affected by maggots and worms." Tosafot raises a difficulty:

Rashba wondered: Isn't that so for all righteous individuals? For it is stated in tractate *Shabbat*, in the 23rd chapter, entitled, "One who asks" (152b):

⁴ Pirkei Avot 3:1.

⁵ Ex. 16:20.

⁶ Ex. 16:24.

"A tranquil heart gives life to the body, but jealousy rots the bones" (Prov. 14:30). One who harbors jealousy in his heart will have his bones decay, while one who does not harbor jealousy in his heart will not have his bones decay.

It is possible that a person's body will not decay but that maggots will still affect it. As stated in the account of Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Shimon, in [tractate *Bava*] *Metzia* (84b), [when he instructed his wife not to bury him, she would examine the body from time-to-time, and it did not decompose, but once she did see that] an insect emerged from his ear.

- Tosafot, Bava Batra 17a

ְנָמְצֵינוּ לְמֵדִין, שֶׁמֵהַתּוֹלֵעָה שֶׁבָּאָה מְסֵרָחוֹן וּבֵיאוּשׁ הַבָּשֶׂר, הַצַּדִּיקִים וּמִי שֶׁאֵין לוֹ קְנְאָה בְּלְבּוֹ, נִיצוֹלִים מְמֶנָה. אֲבָל מֵהָרְמָּה, אָבָל מֵהָרְמָּה, אָבָל מֵהָרְמָּה, אִי אֶפְשָׁר לְכָל אָדָם לְהָנָצֵל. אַדְ אִם לֹא יֵשׁ סֵרָחוֹן וּבֵיאוּשׁ, אֵינוֹ מַרְגִּישׁ בּוֹ כְּלָל, וּכְמוֹ שֶׁבְּמוֹ עַבְּמוֹתִיו, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ מֵרְגִּישׁ כְּלָל. וּמִי שֶׁהוּא עָנָיו, בְּנַדֵּאי שֶׁאֵין קְנְאָה בְּלְבּוֹ כְּלָל, וְאִם אֵין קְנְאָה בְּלְבּוֹ, יִתְקִיִּימוּ עַצְמוֹתִיו, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ בִּיאוּשׁ וְסֵרָחוֹן, וְאִם כֵּן, לֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ תּוֹלֵעָה, רַק רְמָּה.

Thus, we learn that righteous individuals and those who harbor no jealousy in their hearts are spared from the worm, which arises from the stench and decay of the flesh. However, regarding the maggot, it is impossible for any person to fully escape it. Yet, if there is no stench or decay, one does not feel its presence at all, as the *Ma'avar Yabok* wrote, that there are some who do not feel it at all.

One who is humble surely has no jealousy in his heart, and if there is no jealousy in his heart, his bones remain intact because there will be no stench or decay. Consequently, he will not have any worms, only maggots.

וְלָכֵן אָמַר הַתַּנָּא "הֲנֵי שָׁפַל רוּחַ", מִפְּנֵי שֶׁתִּקְנת אֱנוֹשׁ הוּא שֶׁלֹא יִהְיֶה לוֹ רַק רְמָה, וְזֶה יַרְוִיחַ בְּמִדַּת הָעֲנָנָה. וְהָגַם שֶׁהַמַּצְבֵּר יַבֹּק שָׁם לֹא חָלַק בֵּין רְמָה וְתוֹלַעָה, עִם כֹּל זֶה, הַחִילּוּק הוּא מוּכְרָח, כְּמוֹ שֶׁפֵּירֵשׁ הַשִּׁפְתֵי כֹּהַן בְּפָרְשׁת בְּשׁלַח. וְכֵן נְרְאָה מִדְּבָרִי הַתּוֹסְפוֹת פָּרְקָא קַמָּא דְּבַתְרָא, וּמִמַּה שֶׁאָמֵר הַתַּנָּא "לְמְקוֹם עָפָר רְמָּה וְתוֹלֵעָה", דְּאִי לָאו הָכִי, תַּרְהֵּי לָמָה לִי, דְּהַיִינוּ רִמָּה וֹלְעָה. רְמָה תוֹלֵעה.

Therefore, the Tanna said, "Be of humble spirit," because the hope of man is that he will only have to endure maggots, which is achieved through the trait of humility. Although *Ma'avar Yabok* there does not distinguish between maggots and worms, nevertheless, the distinction is necessary, as explained by *Siftei Cohen on the Torah* in parashat Beshalach.⁷

This also appears to be the case from the words of Tosafot in the first chapter of *Bava Batra* (17a) and from the Tanna's statement of Pirkei Avot 3:1: "To a place of dust, maggots, and worms." For if this were not the case, why mention both, which is maggots and worms.

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⁷ Mordechai Cohen, late 16th century Kabbalist from Safed, who served as a rabbi in Aleppo, *Siftei Cohen on the Torah* (Venice 1605).