



TIFERET HASHABBAT

This Week in Tiferet

After a beautiful Chag Sukkot in Eretz Yisrael, Tiferet students returned to continue their learning in earnest. We started the zman with a tiyul on Wednesday to the Dead Sea area. We woke up in the morning to rain in Beit Shemesh, a wonderful response to our prayers for *geshem* just two days before. But as we traveled Eastward the rain tapered off and we were able to enjoy a hike at the beautiful natural spring of Ein Gedi, and to hear about its connection to events in Tanach and afterwards. Then we headed towards the beach at Yam Hamelach, to refresh and get ready for the year ahead of us!

תורת תפארת

Unnatural Events Rav Azriel Rosner Parashat Bereishit

Parashat Bereishit includes the dramatic story of the first murder, when Kayin kills his brother Hevel. After G-d confronts Kayin with his action, Kayin is punished,
 "ועתה ארור אתה מן האדמה אשר פצתה את פיה לקחת את דמי אחיך מידך" (פרק ד פסוק יא)
 "And now, you are cursed from the land which opened its mouth to take the blood of your brother from your hand." (Bereishit 4: 11)

However, instead of using the word "פתחה" for "opened," the Torah uses a different, more unusual word, "פצתה". What is the reason for choosing this less-standard word?

This phrasing actually appear a few other times in Tanach, and it is worthwhile to point out a few of the other occurrences. Most famously, in Sefer Bamidbar, after Korach arrogantly rebels against the leadership of Moshe and Aharon, Moshe cries out to G-d,
 "ופצתה האדמה את פיה ובלעה אותם ואת כל אשר להם וירדו חיים שאולה" (במדבר פרק טז פסוק ל)
 (ל)

"And the land should open its mouth and swallow them and everything that they have and they shall descend alive to the grave..." (Bamidbar 16: 30)

In a totally different context, in Sefer Shoftim, Yiftach, one of the shoftim of Bnei Yisrael, takes a vow that if he returns home successfully from way, then he will sacrifice to G-d the first thing that comes out to greet him from his door. When his daughter comes out first, and he realizes what a mistake he has made, Yiftach says,

"ואנכי פציתי פי אל ה' ולא אוכל לשוב." (שופטים פרק יא פסוק לה)
 "And I have opened my mouth towards G-d and I cannot turn back." (Shoftim 11: 35)

These two stories – those of Korach and of Yiftach – share a clear common denominator. In both cases, the mouth "opening" occurred in an unusual, unexpected way. The ground opening its mouth to swallow up Korach was certainly an unnatural phenomenon. Moshe himself notes that this had never occurred before in the history of mankind. In a different way, Yiftach's vow was also unusual, unexpected and foolish. Chazal in fact criticize Yiftach

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for making a vow that – even if it had had a less dire result – could still have been inappropriate. After all, the first animal to come out of Yiftach's house might have been a non-Kosher one, or an animal with a blemish.

Therefore, we can understand the word "פצה" in this light – as an opening that is non-standard and unexpected. This is why Tanach uses this verb in the two stories of Korach and of Yiftach. In fact, Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch says that this verb is related to the word "פצע", which means wound in Hebrew. A wound also in an unnatural, unexpected opening in a body, very similar conceptually to the word פצה.

But what of our story of Kayin and Hevel? After Kayin murdered Hevel, Hevel's blood seeped into and was absorbed by the ground. What could be more natural than that? Of course soil absorbs a liquid that is on top of it! How does this verb, פצה, fit in with the events of our perek in Bereishit?

Perhaps, the unnatural aspect of this event lies not in the absorption, but in the fact that the blood was even there in the first place. Murder is obviously a forbidden act, both for Jews and non-Jews, both before the giving of the Torah and afterwards. And there is no question that Kayin had committed a grave sin in this heinous deed.

The Torah, using the word פצה, is teaching us an additional point. Not only is murder forbidden, but it is unnatural. It is not the way the world was designed and it is an aberration from G-d's plans. Thus when the land opened its mouth, it was an unexpected action, something that should never have had to happen.

In our own lives we too should incorporate this perspective on aveirot, especially Bein Adam Lachaveiro. Jealousy, cruelty and selfishness should not only be seen as forbidden, but we should see them as unnatural and unexpected. All of us need to work on ourselves and on our midot so that we will be once again more in sync with G-d's true design for the world.

Mazal Tov!

Mazal Tov to Rav Judah and Ora Mischel on the birth of a daughter and a son! May they be zochim to raise them l'Torah, l'chupa u'l'maasim tovim!

Mazal Tov to Sara Weinberger (5772) on her engagement to Benny Berlin! May they be zochim to build a bayit ne'eman b'Yisrael together!

Mazal Tov to Noah and Lisa (Reidler, 5766) Elbogen on the birth of a daughter, Liana! May they be zochim to raise her l'Torah, l'chupa u'l'maasim tovim!

Mazal Tov to Shlomo and Jackie (Fiedler, 5767) Weiss on the birth of a son, Matthew! May they be zochim to raise him l'Torah, l'chupa u'l'maasim tovim!

