

Living Midrash: Bereishit Rabbah 1:5 – Disdain for Creation

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Trigger pesukim

1. Tehillim 31, modified JPS Translation (from <http://www.hareidi.org/bible/Psalms31.htm>)

¹For the Leader. A Psalm of David. ²In You, O Gd, have I taken refuge; let me never be ashamed; deliver me in Your righteousness. ³Incline Your ear to me, deliver me speedily; be to me a rock of refuge, even a fortress of defence, to save me. ⁴For You are my rock and my fortress; therefore for Your Name's sake lead me and guide me. ⁵Bring me forth out of the net that they have hidden for me; for You are my stronghold. ⁶Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Gd, Gd of truth. ⁷I hate those who regard lying vanities; but I trust in Gd. ⁸I will be glad and rejoice in Your lovingkindness; for You have seen my affliction, You have taken cognizance of the troubles of my soul, ⁹And You have not given me over into the hand of the enemy; You have set my feet in a broad place. ¹⁰Be gracious to me, O Gd, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away with vexation, even my soul and my body. ¹¹For my life is spent in sorrow, and my years in sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones are wasted away. ¹²Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach, yea, to my neighbours exceedingly, and a dread to my acquaintance; they who see me outside flee from me. ¹³I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind; I am like a useless vessel. ¹⁴For I have heard the whispering of many, terror on every side; while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. ¹⁵But as for me, I have trusted in You, O Gd; I have said: 'You are my Gd.' ¹⁶My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me. ¹⁷Make Your Face shine upon Your servant; save me in Your lovingkindness. ¹⁸O Gd, let me not be ashamed, for I have called upon You; let the wicked be ashamed, let them be put to silence in the netherworld. ¹⁹Let the lying lips be dumb, which speak arrogantly against the righteous, with pride and contempt. ²⁰Oh how abundant is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You; which You have wrought for them who take their refuge in You, in the sight of the sons of men! ²¹You hide them in the cover of Your presence from the plottings of man; You conceal them in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. ²²Blessed be Gd; for He has shown me His wondrous lovingkindness in an entrenched city. ²³As for me, I said in my haste: 'I am cut off from before Your Eyes'; nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried to You. ²⁴O love Gd, all His godly ones; Gd preserves the faithful, and plentifully repays he who acts haughtily. ²⁵Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all who wait for Gd.

2. Tehillim 31:19-20

תאלמנה שפתי שקר הדברות על צדיק עתק בגאווה ובוז: מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראיך פעלת לחסים בך נגד בני אדם

3. What troubles us about these pesukim?

4. Rashi to 31:19

עַתֶּק - סרה דבר שאינו כמו ויעתק משם (בראשית י"ב), ודונש פתר אותו לשון דבר גדול וקשה כמו עתקו וגם גברו חיל (איוב כ"א) וכו' They spoke that which leads astray, like "And he travelled [*vaya'ateik*] from there. [Bereishit 12:8]" Dunash explained it as "A great and tough thing," like "They grew large [*atku*], and gained strength. [Iyyov 21:7]"...

Our midrash

5. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 1:5 – Part 1

ר' הונא בשם בר קפרא פתח (תהלים לא) תאלמנה שפתי שקר וגו', אתפרכן, אתחרשן, אשתתקן. אתפרכן, אתחרשן, היך מה דאת אמר (שמות ד:יא) או מי ישום אלם או חרש או פקה או עור הלא אנכי ד', ואומר (בראשית לז:ז) והנה אנחנו מאלמים אלומים בתוך השדה והנה קמה אלומתי. אשתתקן כמשמעו.

R' Huna cited Bar Kappara, opening: "Lips of falsehood should be *ilem*" – Crumbled, deafened, silenced.

"Crumbled, deafened" – As in, "Or who makes one mute [*ilem*], deaf, sighted or blind? I am Gd." And, "Behold, we were binding crumbling sheaves [*alumim*] in the field, and my sheaf rose." "Silenced" is its normal meaning.

6. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 1:5 – Part 2

'הדוברות על צדיק' חי העולמים. 'עתק' שהעתיק בבריותיו. 'בגאווה' אתמהה - בשביל להתגאות ולומר אני דורש במעשה בראשית! 'ובו' אתמהה - מבזה על כבודי! דא"ר יוסי בר חנינא כל המתכבד בקלון חבירו אין לו חלק לעולם הבא, בכבודו של מקום על אחת כמה וכמה! ומה כתיב אחריו? (תהלים לא) 'מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראיך', ליראיך ולא לבוזים את מוראך [הרב], אל יהי ב'מה רב טובך'.

"They speak of the righteous one" – The Eternal One.

"*Atak*" – That which He removed from His creations.

"Due to arrogance" – This is shocking; they do it in order to be arrogant and say, "I explain Creation!"

"And scorn" – This is shocking; they do it to scorn My honour! As R' Yosi bar Chanina said: One who honours himself with the shame of another has no share in the next world; how much more so regarding the honour of Gd!

And what follows? "How great is Your good, which You have stored for those who revere You" – Those who revere You, not those who scorn Your great reverence. They will not be included in "How great is Your good."

7. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 1:5 – Part 3

בנוהג שבעולם מלך ב"ו בונה פלטין במקום הביבים, ובמקום האשפה, ובמקום הסריות, כל מי שהוא בא לומר 'פלטין זו בנויה במקום הביבים ובמקום האשפה ובמקום הסריות' אינו פוגם? כך כל מי שהוא בא לומר 'העוה"ז נברא מתוך תוהו ובוהו' אינו פוגם? אתמהה! ר' הונא בשם בר קפרא אמר אילולי שהדבר כתוב אי אפשר לאמרו, 'בראשית ברא אלקים', מנין הן? 'והארץ היתה תהו ובהו'.

Normally, if a flesh and blood king were to build a palace in a place of sewers, trash and decomposition, wouldn't it be degrading [the palace] if someone said, "This palace is built in a place of sweers, trash and decomposition"? So, too, isn't one degrading [Creation] when he says, "This world was created from *tohu* and *bohu*"? This is shocking!

R' Huna cited Bar Kappara: Were it not written, one could not say it: "In the beginning, Gd created" – from where? "And the land was *tohu* and *bohu*."

Understanding our midrash

8. Three parts: They should be mute; They speak against Gd and will suffer; What they say

9. Eitz Yosef to Bereishit Rabbah 1:5

"ויאמר ד' אליו מי שם פה לאדם או מי ישום אלם או חרש" – דמדלא קאמר נמי "או מי ישום אזן או חרש" להיות ג"כ דבר והפוכו כלפי החרש שימת האוזן, אלא ודאי חרש הוא ג"כ הפוכו של "מי שם פה לאדם" וה"ק: "מי שם פה לאדם או מי ישום נעדר כה הפה", וזה משני פנים – או אלם בטבעו שאין לו כה הדיבור או חרש... כי אם אינו שומע אינו מדבר.

"And Gd said to him: Who has given man a mouth? Or who makes one mute or deaf?" It did not say, "Or who has given an ear, or made one deaf," to present opposition between the deaf and the one with an ear. Certainly, then, "deaf" is also opposite "Who has given man a mouth." It is thus: "Who has given man a mouth, or made one lack the power of a mouth" in two ways – either with natural muteness lacking the power of speech, or the deaf... for one who cannot hear also cannot speak.

10. Answering our three questions – *Ilem, atak, tzaddik*

11. Mishnah Chagigah 2:1

וכל המסתכל בארבעה דברים רתוי לו כאילו לא בא לעולם מה למעלן ומה למטן מה לפניו ומה לאחור כל שלא חס על כבוד קונו רתוי לו כאילו לא בא לעולם

One who looks at four things would have been better off not having entered the world: What is above, below, before and after. One who does not respect his Creator's honour would have been better off not having entered the world.

12. A significant difference between our midrash and Mishnah Chagigah 2:1

Other approaches

13. Midrash, Shemot Rabbah 52:2 – Moshe is the tzaddik

14. Talmud, Bava Metzia 75b – Warning: Do not appear to falsely accuse the righteous

Last note – Whose enemies are these?