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# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

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## BECHUKOSAI

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### Rains in their Time

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וְנָתַתִּי גֶשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעֵתָם

*I will provide your rains in their time.*<sup>1</sup>

Rashi, citing the Toras Kohanim, explains that “in their time” means in a time which is convenient for the rain to fall since people are not outdoors, such as Friday nights.

With this in mind, the Rama<sup>2</sup> gives a most elegant and straightforward explanation of a phenomenon mentioned in the Midrash,<sup>3</sup> namely, that there were certain righteous generations during whose days a rainbow was never seen. The significance of this is that the rainbow is a sign that Hashem will never again bring a flood,<sup>4</sup> but its appearance is also something of a criticism, for it implies that the people need to be reminded of this fact. Hence, in a generation which were exceptionally righteous, no rainbow was seen as no such reminder was necessary.

The commentators discuss the implications of this phenomenon. If the appearance of a rainbow is a natural effect of the light refracting off the moisture after rainfall, was that natural law miraculously suspended in those generations? The Rama, however, diffuses the entire question. The reason no rainbow was seen in those years is as described in our verse: when the people fulfill Hashem’s will, the rain comes at night! Hence, there is never any sunlight after the rainfall which could produce a rainbow, and therefore, none was ever seen in those righteous generations.

Beautiful.

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<sup>1</sup> Vayikra 26:4.

<sup>2</sup> *Toras Ha’olah* Sec. 2 Chap. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Bereishis Rabbah 35:2, cited in Rashi to Bereishis 9:12 (see also Kesubos 77b).

<sup>4</sup> Bereishis 9:13–15.

וְשִׁבְרְתִי אֶת גְּאוֹן עֲזָכֶם

*I will break the pride of your might.*<sup>5</sup>

The Toras Kohanim on our verse records a dispute among the sages as to what this curse is referring to:

- ▷ The first opinion explains that the reference is to the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, citing a verse from Yechezkel which explicitly refers to the Beis Hamikdash as “גאוון עוזכם – the pride of your strength.”
- ▷ R’ Akiva states that the reference is to the mighty among Israel, such as Yoav, son of Zeruiah, and his colleagues.

R’ Akiva’s specific choice of Yoav ben Zeruiah as representing the mighty among Israel is somewhat puzzling. Yoav was a general in King David’s army many centuries before R’ Akiva’s time. Why was he named as an individual through whom this curse was fulfilled?

R’ Reuven Margolios<sup>6</sup> suggests that, with these words, R’ Akiva was not actually talking about Yoav, but someone who lived in his own time.

Yoav, David’s general, was initially a completely righteous person. Tragically, however, he subsequently soured to the point where he even killed the innocent Amasa.<sup>7</sup> Closer to R’ Akiva’s time there was another such individual, Shimon Bar Kochba. Initially a fully righteous person, he led the revolt against Rome with the full support and endorsement of R’ Akiva. However, at a certain stage, he too fell from that level, culminating in the killing of his uncle, the sage R’ Elazar Hamodai. This marked the beginning of the downfall of the Bar Kochba revolt, which ultimately ended in crushing defeat, the death of Bar Kochba himself and further persecution of the Jewish people under Roman rule.

It was this tragic situation that R’ Akiva was lamenting in his comment regarding our verse. However, to openly eulogize the leader of the revolt against Rome would itself be taken as an act of rebellion. Therefore, R’ Akiva chose an individual from ancient history whose life story and trajectory mirrored that of Bar Kochba. In this way, he was able to give full expression to the grief and disappointment that had occurred in his time, naming a figure from Israel’s past, but with all those present fully aware of whom he was referring to.

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<sup>5</sup> Vayikra 26:19.

<sup>6</sup> *Olelos*, chap. 15.

<sup>7</sup> See Shmuel II chap. 20.

וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב

*I will remember My covenant with Yaakov.*<sup>8</sup>

Commenting on the unusual “full” spelling of the name יַעֲקֹב, i.e. with a *vav*, Rashi writes:

*In five places [the name Yaakov] is written full, and [correspondingly], Eliyahu is written [with the vav] missing in five places.<sup>9</sup> Yaakov took a letter from Eliyahu’s name as a pledge, so that [Eiyahu] will come and herald the redemption of [Yaakov’s] children.*

What is the significance of Yaakov taking a letter from Eliyahu’s name five times? The Maharal in the Gur Aryeh explains, based on verses in Mishlei,<sup>10</sup> that taking a pledge and assuming responsibility for something is typically accompanied by a handshake. How does this take place between Yaakov and Eliyahu? The letter *vav* represents a finger. As such, the five transfers of letter *vavs* from Eliyahu to Yaakov represent the giving of a hand that contains five fingers. In this way, Eliyahu reaches across time to extend a handshake pledging to announce the redemption to Yaakov’s children!

חזק חזק ונתחזק

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<sup>8</sup> Vayikra 26:42.

<sup>9</sup> I.e., as “אליה”, without a *vav* at the end.

<sup>10</sup> 6:1-3.