YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**SEFER DANIEL**

**By Rav Yaakov Medan**

**Shiur #24: *Sefer Daniel* – 14**

**On the Resurrection of the Dead**

The Resurrection is a vast subject. When will it happen? What is the connection between it and life in the World to Come and the eternal life of the soul? All of this is discussed in the Rambam's introduction to "*Perek Chelek*" in Mishna *Sanhedrin*, and is also covered by Ramban in his *Torat Ha-adam* (*Sha'ar Ha-gemul*). In this shiur, we will address only some marginal issues pertaining to this very deep subject, focusing on points that are almost entirely absent from their discussion.

1. **Resurrection of the Dead in *Tanakh***

There are two references in our chapter to the Resurrection of the Dead:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awaken, some to everlasting life, and some to reproach and everlasting shame. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn the many to righteousness – like the stars forever and ever. (12:2-3)[[1]](#footnote-1)

And you – go your way until the end comes, and you shall rest, and stand up for your allotted portion at the End of Days. (12:13)

In general, the subject of the Resurrection is not treated extensively in *Tanakh*. In the Torah, there are only allusions to the concept, and *Chazal's* discussions of them seem quite disconnected from the literal text.[[2]](#footnote-2) In the Books of the Prophets, there are three instances in which individuals who had died were brought back to life: the son of the woman from Tzarfat, who was revived by Eliyahu (*Melakhim* 1:17); the son of the Shunamite woman, who was revived by Elisha (*Melakhim* II 4); and the man whose bones touched Elisha's grave (*Melakhim* II 13). One central source for the concept of Resurrection is Yechezkel's vision of the dry bones. The other is the prophecy of Yishayahu:

Your dead shall live; my dead body shall arise. Awaken and sing, you who dwell in the dust, for your dew is like the dew on herbs, and the earth shall cast down death's shadows. (*Yishayahu* 26:19)[[3]](#footnote-3)

On the face of it, it is difficult to bring clear proof from these sources, since even the vision in *Yechezkel*, which explicitly describes dry bones returning to life, was a prophetic vision in the view of the Rambam.[[4]](#footnote-4) The intention of the prophecy there unquestionably concerns the revival of the nation, with the bones representing the House of Israel returning from exile to its homeland. Seemingly, Yishayahu's prophecy expresses a similar idea.[[5]](#footnote-5) If this is so, then the only clear source that we have is *Sefer Daniel*.

Despite what we have said, it would seem that the verse from *Yishayahu* and, more importantly, the vision in *Yechezkel*, do in fact represent proofs concerning the Resurrection, since even if resurrection is described there only as a metaphor for the redemption of Israel, a metaphor is usually more easily understood and perceived by the senses than the idea that it represents. That is precisely the function of the metaphor: it is intelligible and makes sense in its own right, and thereby helps the listener to grasp an idea which follows the same logic, but is less intuitive. The metaphor of the dry bones and the message that it conveys in *Sefer Yechezkel* suggest that it is easier for the listener to understand and assimilate the resurrection of dead people than it is to understand and assimilate the resurrection of the nation and its return to its land. Hence we deduce that not only did the prophet himself have faith in the Resurrection, but also that this concept was a simpler matter for the people to grasp than a return to the land from the exile where they had been scattered. Still, we are left with the question of the origin of the idea: how was this idea of the Resurrection – of dry bones emerging from their graves and once again being covered with flesh and filled with vitality – so simple and obvious and well-known?

As noted above, we proceed from the position that the Resurrection is only alluded to in the Torah, and hence basis of this belief is from the Oral Law. Indeed, a review of the Principles of Jewish faith shows that most of them are based on the Oral Law; the Written Law on its own is not sufficient basis for them. Perhaps this is what *Chazal* mean in their teaching that "The words of the Sages are more beloved than the words of Torah" (*Yerushalmi Berakhot* 1:4 and elsewhere), and that the Oral Law preceded the Written Law, since all the *mitzvot* are derived from the Principles of Faith, and they are the essence. (The reason why the principles of faith are conveyed through the Oral Law and not set down in the Written Law requires a lengthy explanation that lies beyond the scope of this *shiur*.) Moreover, even the *midrash* asserting that the Torah preceded the creation of the world may be interpreted as meaning that the Oral Law in general, and its Principles of Faith in particular, are what preceded the world.[[6]](#footnote-6) The same can be said of the *midrash* that describes God looking into the Torah and then creating the world accordingly (*Zohar, Toldot* 134a). In fact, explaining the "Torah" here as a reference to the Oral Law offers a simple understanding of the *midrash*, since the conventional understanding of it – implying that God wrote in the Torah that He had created the world, before He had actually done so – is problematic. This paradox demands some answer, and our proposal represents one possibility. Moreover, the source for the idea that the Torah preceded the creation of the world is to be found in *Mishlei*:

"God created me as the beginning of His way, the earliest of His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, from before the world. While the depths did not exist I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were set in place, before the hills, I was brought forth. Before He had made the earth, or the open places, or the highest part of the dust of the world. When He established the heavens, I was there; [and] when He drew a circle over the face of the deep; when He established the clouds above, when the fountains of the deep grew powerful. When He gave the sea its command that the waters should not transgress His word; when He appointed the foundations of the earth, I was a nurseling by Him and was [His] delight daily, always playing before Him; playing with the universe, His world, and my delights were with the sons of man. (8:22-31)

The simple reading of the text in context would suggest that the principles of morality and faith are talking here, not necessarily the words of Torah as we know them. And we must ask further: why is the Resurrection not set forth explicitly in the Torah and in the Prophets, as is the future redemption? We have no clear answer to this question; we can only propose a possible explanation.

Over and over again, the Torah rules out bloodshed, for any purpose, and especially for human sacrifice. Perhaps if the Resurrection was spelled out in the Torah, this might be interpreted as offering leniency towards the crime of murder. In revealing the future Resurrection, the Torah would be stating explicitly that death is temporary; it is not an injustice that can never be repaired, for after all, the victim is ultimately going to be resurrected.[[7]](#footnote-7) It may be for the same reason that the Torah conceals the reality of life in the World to Come, thereby leaving us with the unequivocal position that murder is murder and that the blood of the victims will not be atoned for. There is no justification after the fact or leniency towards the crime of murdering another person just because of the existence of the World to Come and the Resurrection.

It is perhaps for this reason that Daniel is the first to speak openly and explicitly of the Resurrection. The death that hovers over Daniel and his three companions, the death that he speaks about during the period of the war waged by the Greeks and the Hellenists against the covenant and commandments of the Torah, is the death of those who defend the covenant; it is a death for the sanctification of God's Name. This death must be a temporary death, for God will never abandon His followers, those who forge His covenant through sacrificing their own lives. This would seem to be the meaning of the "*Kaddish*," in which we sanctify God's Name specifically in the face of death, at the grave. The essence of the *Kaddish* is the declaration, "May His great Name be blessed forever and for everlasting eternity." When someone has just died, at the meeting point between this world and the next, we declare our faith that God's Name is blessed not only in our world, but also in the other worlds, to which the deceased is now moving – worlds which exist forever, and also in the world of the Resurrection.

It may also be that the Resurrection is not stated in the Torah but rather handed down from generation to generation as an oral tradition because of the almost infinite distance separating that reality from that of our present lives. To explain this further: Rashi and the Rambam are divided as to when the Resurrection will take place. According to Rashi, it will happen at the time of the coming of the *Mashiach*, may it be soon in our days. This is his position on the question in the *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* as to why it is important to discuss the formulation of R. Eliezer's position when it comes to laws that are not applicable today; when these laws are renewed with the coming of *Mashiach* and the Resurrection, it will be possible to ask R. Eliezer himself.

However, according to the Rambam, the coming of *Mashiach* will not herald any change in the natural order of the world. The Resurrection, to his view, is a separate event, and we cannot know when and how it will come about.[[8]](#footnote-8) In the formulation of the Principles of Faith based on the Rambam,[[9]](#footnote-9) the statement of our faith in the Resurrection is worded differently from the statement of our faith in the coming of *Mashiach*:

I believe with perfect faith in the coming of *Mashiach*. And though he tarries, I nevertheless await his coming every day.

When it comes to faith in *Mashiach*, we are required to anticipate salvation at every moment. This may also entail active anticipation, requiring that a person actually make preparations every day. When it comes to the Resurrection, however, the immediacy is absent:

I believe with perfect faith that there will be a Resurrection, at the time that it is willed by the Creator, blessed be His Name, and His mention shall be exalted forever and for all eternity.

This principle says nothing about daily anticipation of the Resurrection; rather, it speaks of faith that it will happen at a time that God chooses. We are not required to prepare ourselves for this event, only to believe that it will come about. It would seem that we must believe that *Mashiach* could arrive today, and if his arrival is postponed, it is because we have not yet merited it through our actions; we must therefore examine our ways and return to God. The time of the Resurrection, on the other hand, does not appear to be connected to our actions.

The same distinction arises from the formulation of our *Amida* prayer, which was composed by the Men of the Great Assembly. Concerning the deliverance that is connected to the coming of *Mashiach*, we ask:

… And may You soon establish the throne of David within [Jerusalem];

May You soon cause the offspring of Your servant, David, to flourish, and raise his pride with Your salvation, for we hope for Your salvation all day long.

These items, with their emphasis on the word "soon," are located among the middle blessings of the *Amida* – the supplications. The blessing for the Resurrection, in contrast, is located in the opening section of the *Amida* – the offering of praise. The Resurrection is not something that we request; rather, we declare that God is destined, in His might, to bring the dead to life:

And You are faithful to resurrect the dead.

As noted above, this may be the reason why the Resurrection is not set forth in the Torah, but rather handed down as part of the Oral Tradition. The Written Law confines God's limitless word in time and place and relevant meaning.[[10]](#footnote-10) The Oral Tradition includes all the Principles of Faith – even those that lie outside time and space as we know them in this world.

This may help us to understand the very first verses of the Torah, in the first chapter of *Bereishit*:

(1) In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

(2) And the earth was without form and chaos, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and God's spirit hovered over the face of the water.

The lack of symmetry in the verses has disturbed those who study the literary structure of the Torah. Indeed, literary symmetry would seem to require the insertion of another verse in between these two, beginning with the words, "The heavens were…," and only afterwards, "And the earth was…." But no such verse appears, and of course this is not an "editorial error."

Perhaps the Torah is conveying a message through this lack of symmetry. The word "*shamayim,*" meaning "heavens," comes from the word "*sham,*" meaning "there."[[11]](#footnote-11) The text is telling us that in the beginning, God created a "there" and a "here". "Here" was without form and chaos, but what was "there" is not revealed to us. It is the Oral Tradition that talks about the Throne of Glory and all that exists "there" – including the Garden of Eden, *Gehennom*, the Resurrection, the essence of the soul, the worlds of the angels, etc.[[12]](#footnote-12)

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

1. See *Sanhedrin* 92a. See also *Rosh Ha-shana* 16b (where the *gemara* discusses three groups on the Day of Judgment, based on our verses here) and the extensive commentaries there. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See *Sanhedrin* 90b. The central verses addressed there are: "Behold, you will lie with your forefathers, and [there] shall arise…" (*Devarim* 31:16); "Upon the land which the Lord promised your forefathers to give to them"; and "And you, who cleave to God… are all alive this day." These verses are cited there mainly in the context of religious polemics with the Cutites. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See also *Devarim* 32:39 – "I put to death and bring to life" (and Sifri ad loc. 329); *Shmuel* *I* 2:6 – "God puts to death and brings to life; He brings down to Sheol and raises up", and other verses such as *Daniel* 5:19 and more. Admittedly, these verses can also be understood differently, but even if they are interpreted in a metaphorical sense, the very fact that the metaphor speaks of life after death and rising up from Sheol is in itself proof for the presence of the Resurrection in the Oral Law. See also *Yishayahu* 66:24 and Ibn Ezra's commentary (and others), who compare the text there to the verses in our chapter of *Sefer Daniel*. It should be noted that the *gemara* in *Rosh Ha-shana* 17a suggests that the judgment of the wicked which is mentioned there refers to the heretics, apostates, and the like amongst *Am Yisrael*. In contrast, the *gemara* in *Eruvin* 19a refers to the wicked of the other nations. The subject is a broad one, and we cannot elaborate further here. See also the extensive discussion in *Sanhedrin* 90-92, as well as in the *Mekhilta de-Rabbi* *Yishmael* on *Shemot* 15:1, and more. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Moreh Nevukhim* part II, chapter 46. See the Y. Kapach edition (Jerusalem, 5732), p. 267, n. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* discusses Yishayahu's prophecy, as well as another proof from *Shir* *Ha-shirim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Bereishit Rabba* 8 and elsewhere. However, in the version found in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (*Nusach* 1), 31, this interpretation is not possible. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *R. Sa'adia Gaon* offers a similar explanation in his long commentary on the Torah regarding the story of the *Akeida*. He proposes that Avraham could have maintained his faith in the Divine promise that "your seed shall be called through Yitzchak" since, even if he slaughtered his son, the promise could be fulfilled after Yitzchak arose at the time of the Resurrection. In light of what we have said here, this is a most surprising interpretation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. "Do not imagine that the king, *Mashiach*, must perform signs and wonders and introduce new phenomena in the world or resurrect the dead, or the like; this is not so" (Hilkhot Melakhim U-Milchamoteihem 11:3). "Do not imagine that in the days of *Mashiach* anything of the ways of the world will cease to be, or that anything new will be introduced into the natural order; rather, the world will continue in its ways." (ibid., 12:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. It is not clear who actually formulated the principles as we know them, but we have chosen this version owing to its conciseness. The principles are based on the Rambam in his introduction to "*Perek Chelek*" in his Commentary on the *Mishnayot* in *Sanhedrin*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This may be what *Chazal* mean in their teaching (*Nidda* 61b) that the commandments will be nullified in the time to come. However, we do not delve into hidden matters. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Seforno on *Bereishit* 1:2. Cf. also *Kohelet* 3:1,17. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In my youth, I heard an interpretation in this direction from my esteemed teacher, R. Yoel bin-Nun. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)