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PARSHAT BALAK

THE VOICE AND THE SWORD: A META-NARRATIVE IN RASHI

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"And Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "God, please! Heal her, please!" (Numbers 12:13)

This essay is dedicated to all those in need of healing and to the mental health community. May the Creator and Sustainer heal those who are suffering, and may those living with mental illness be empowered to find their voice.

Hear our voice, Lord our God, pity us and have mercy on us and receive in mercy and favor our prayer. (Amidah)

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Rashi's classic Commentary on the Torah is often read as a series of local comments, as explanations to resolve textual difficulties on individual verses. This mindset is illustrated by the perennial question: "What's bothering Rashi?" Asked by super-commentaries ranging from *Siftei Hahamim* to Nechama Leibowitz, this question focuses the reader on the problems Rashi comes to solve with his aggadic, halakhic, or exegetical quotes.

However, Rashi is a reader of Tanakh, not just of its verses. His view of the beginning of a narrative informs his comments throughout it, and his portrayal[1] of a character in one narrative reflects his general understanding of the character elsewhere. He forms continuous narratives[2] as well as meta-narratives: collections of comments spread throughout narratives, between characters, and across Biblical books that can be read together to tell a new story.[3]

This essay will present an expansive pattern that emerges from several of Rashi's comments in Genesis and Numbers. Rashi identifies two motifs which he uses to characterize Biblical characters and nations. The voice is Jacob's identifying feature. Blessed by Isaac, it

[1] Through his quoting and rephrasing of Rabbinic texts.

In this essay, when Rashi quotes the Rabbis, for brevity's sake and by common convention I attribute the statement to Rashi. For readability, I have also refrained from providing Rashi's sources, as many Rashi publications include inline. I do not mean to suggest that Rashi singularly invented his statements. (However, I would like to point out that Rashi makes a point when choosing one Rabbinic text over another and when tweaking them in his rewriting of sources.)

[2] An example regarding Yehoshua reads Rashi on Deuteronomy 3:28 s.v. "ki hu ya'avor", in light of his comment on Numbers 27:17, s.v. "asher yatza lifneihem." This can be expanded to a metanarrative about a leader's role in battle by including Rashi's comment on 14:6, s.v. "v-et amo lakah imo."

[3] For an example of a meta-narrative across characters within the same Biblical book, read Rashi on Genesis 32:8 (s.v. "va-yira va-yetzer") with Rashi on Genesis 42:14 (s.v. "hu asher dibarti"). For a meta-narrative between a character in a book in Humash and another in the Prophets, read Rashi on Numbers 16:15 (s.v. "lo hamor ehad me-hem nasati") with Rashi on 1 Samuel 12:3 (s.v. "v-hamor mi lakahti"). Unlike the last example, Rashi explicitly ties these two together with his comment on Numbers 16:7 (s.v. "rav lakhem b'nei levi"). (Thanks to Dov Greenwood and the rest of our Rashi *Iyun* group from my Shana Aleph at Yeshivat Har Etzion. Together, we developed a passion for Rashi's Commentary on the Torah and methodologies for reading it that have inspired me spiritually and intellectually. This essay provides only a small taste of the rich methodology and library of examples we have collected.)

reappears generations later as Moses's chief characteristic and the Nation of Israel's key strength. Esau, on the other hand, is blessed with the power of a strong hand and with the life of the sword. The sword becomes a symbol of strength for both Edom and the Nations and represents their primary approach to resolving conflict.

By tracing Rashi's references to these strengths—the voice and the sword—throughout his commentary, we can develop a meta-narrative: a larger story that cuts across these Biblical narratives. This new framework illuminates other Biblical narratives and—perhaps more importantly—highlights a critical element of our national identity and offers a new paradigm to understand our history.[4]

We'll start with the Book of Numbers. The Book's focus on the Children of Israel and their leaders pauses for *Parashat Balak,* a narrative excursion that departs from the newly formed nation to provide a vital perspective: the outside one. Its unbroken columns feature not the children of Israel but Balaam, the son of Beor, an anti-hero and diviner[5]—and prophet,[6] poet,[7] and philosopher.[8] Rashi describes this character at the start of *Parashat Balak*:

> *The land of the children of the people*—. . . And if you ask: Why did the Holy One blessed be He, rest his *Shekhina* upon an evil heathen (*goy rasha*)? — In order that the nations have no excuse to say, "If we had prophets, we would have changed for the better," He raised up prophets for them. And they breached a fence in the world, as, initially, they were fenced in from sexual immorality (*arayot*), and this one (Balaam) advised them to give themselves over to whoredom (*znut*). (Rashi, Numbers 22:5)

Balaam is a foil to Moses. Appointed for justice's sake,[9] he compels the Nations to injustice, and is thus described by the Rabbis and Rashi as evil (*rasha*). His power comes from his prophetic voice, which he uses to instigate sin rather than to ward it off; he misuses his voice, a gift that, too, mirrors Moses:

> *(And Moab said) to the Elders of Midian* — . . . And what induced Moab to take counsel of Midian? When they saw that Israel was victorious in a supernatural manner (*she-lo ke-minhag ha-olam*), they said: the leader of these people grew up in Midian; let us ask them what is his (chief) characteristic (*midato*). They said to them; "His power lies only in his mouth." They said: "Then we must come against them with a person whose power lies in his mouth." (Rashi, Numbers 22:4)

This Rashi is the first anchor for our meta-narrative. While Balaam's poetic oracles hone in on the key features—humility, majesty, godliness—that define the Israelites[10] (so much so that the Rabbis incorporated his words into our liturgy[11]), his own character and actions serve as a foil that helps us better understand our people; and in this case, our greatest, most iconic and formative prophet and leader. Upon reflection, it is no surprise—regarding the leader whose supplications saved the nation from destruction time and time again, who had face-to-face conversations with God, who composed two iconic songs[12] and delivered a speech that became a Book of the Torah itself—that Moses's chief utility is the "power in his mouth"—his voice.[13]

By venturing through Rashi's commentary, we can develop this further. Moses's *midah*, his chief characteristic, is not unique to his character; Moses's skill reflects, as we will see, a feature of our national identity throughout the generations.

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Immediately after the incident of the Waters of Merivah in *Parashat Hukat*, the nation sets out towards the land of Canaan, but must first pass through the territory of other nations. Rather than immediately resorting to war, Moses tries his hand at diplomacy, sending messengers to the king of Edom. They begin by referring to Israel as Edom's brother. Rashi comments:

> *Your brother Israel* — What reason had he to mention here their brotherhood? But in effect he said to him: We are brothers, sons of Abraham, to whom it was said (Genesis 15:13) "You shall surely know that your seed shall be a stranger [in a land not theirs]," and upon both of us, being of Abraham's seed, was the duty of paying that debt.
>
> *You know all the hardships* — It was on this account that your father separated himself from our father, as it is said (Genesis 36:6), "And he (Esau) went to another land on account of Jacob, his brother" — because of the responsibility (*shtar hov*) which was placed upon both of them, which he (Esau) placed onto Jacob. (Rashi, Numbers 20:14)

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[4] The ability to reapply itself is a key aspect of a *meta-narrative*—it is not just another narrative, but an overarching paradigm for narratives; a story of stories.

[5] Joshua 13:22 describes Balaam as a *kosem*.

[6] See *Bava Batra* 15b; *Bamidbar Rabbah* 20; the first comment of Rashi in Numbers 22:6; and Rashbam ad loc.

[7] Balaam's prophecies are in Biblical verse and are introduced uniquely: "*Va-yissa mishelo va-yomar*…" For a fascinating analysis of one of Balaam's poems, see J.P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Poetry* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2001), 69-70. (Thanks to Dov Greenwood for bringing this to my attention.)

[8] *Pesikta D-Rav Kahana 15*.

[9] See the beginning of *Bamidbar Rabbah, 20*, which suggests that the nations were given a prophet, Balaam, due to God's desire for justice. "And Balak son of Zippor saw—The Torah says (Deuteronomy 32) 'The Rock--perfect is His work for all of His ways are justice.' . . . "

[10] See Numbers 24:9 which reflects—almost word for word—Isaac's defining blessing to Jacob in Genesis 27:30.

[11] The *Mah Tovu* prayer.

[12] The Song of the Sea and *Shirat Ha'azinu*.

[13] Moses's statement in Exodus 6:30, "See, I am of impeded speech (*aral sefatayim*)," poses an interesting challenge to our argument that can be resolved with either local *parshanut* or with a broader understanding of Moses's character development.

Rashi connects Biblical passages by hooking onto Moses's language, which calls Israel Edom's *brother*. He hearkens back to the Jacob and Esau story and to the bookends of the patriarchal narrative: at the first end, the covenant between God and Abram (*brit bein ha-betarim*); at the last, the final mention of either Esau or Jacob before the start of the Joseph narrative in *Parashat Va-yeshev*. Rashi masterfully ties both ends together, suggesting that Esau's final departure is because of God's promise to Abram: Esau wishes to avoid the burden placed upon Abram's descendants.

Rashi's callback floods the reader with textual memories, inviting the reader to recall the original relationship of Jacob and Esau, with its heated trickery and its fraternal complexity.[14] The verses and Rashi continue:

> (16) We cried to the LORD and He heard our voice,
> and He sent a messenger who freed us from Egypt.
> Now we are in Kadesh, the town on the border of your territory.
> (17) Allow us, then, to cross your country. . . (Numbers 20)
>
> *He heard our voice* — through the blessing with which our father, Jacob, had blessed[15] us — "the voice is Jacob's voice" (*hakol kol Yaakov;* Genesis 27:22), because whenever we cry we are answered. (Rashi, Numbers 20:16)

We now begin to see a deeper narrative take form. Earlier, Rashi similarly described Moses as one who is "assured that any time he wishes he can speak to the Shekhinah" (Rashi, Numbers 9:7). The *midah* of Moses parallels that of the Nation of Israel, which had derived it from Jacob. This idea—of a defining skill echoing through the generations—is developed further by Rashi on Numbers 20:18:

> (18) But Edom answered him, "You shall not pass through us,
> else we will go out against you with the sword."
>
> *Else we will go out against you with the sword.* You pride yourselves on the voice which your father bequeathed you as a blessing, saying, "And we cried unto the Lord and He heard our voice." I, therefore, will come out against you with that which my father bequeathed me when he said, (Genesis 27:40) "And by your sword you shall live." (Rashi, Numbers 20:18)

The reader is vaulted to the height of the tension between Jacob and Esau, that of Isaac's blessing, and a new side of the narrative is revealed. Jacob was blessed with the voice—the "power in the mouth" as Rashi refers to it later. Esau was blessed too. His chief characteristic was not the voice but the sword—physical power.

> But they replied, "You shall not pass through!" And Edom went out against them in heavy force and with a strong hand. (Numbers 20:20)
>
> *And with a strong hand* — with the assurance[16] of our ancestor: (Genesis 27:22) "and the hands are the hands of Esau (*ha-yadayim y'dei Esav*)." (Rashi on Numbers 20:20)

The motif of Esau's gift of physical power continues in the above Rashi, mirroring the Rashi on Numbers 20:18. This motif—symbolized by the sword—reflects Rashi's views on Esau earlier in the text.[17]

We have thus discovered a meta-narrative in Rashi: a pair of characteristics beginning with Jacob's and Esau's blessings, developing through their lives and interactions, reappearing in their descendant nations' further encounters, and concentrated in their leadership. The next section will explore how we can read this meta-narrative into Biblical stories.

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Jacob's power of the voice remains separate from Esau's power of the sword. We rarely see Jacob using physical force; he operates using verbal trickery and diplomacy. But it does not take long for Esau's gift to tempt the Israelite family. The events in Genesis 34 at Shechem present a hybrid approach amongst Jacob's sons:

> Jacob's sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile (*mirmah*) because he had defiled their sister Dinah. (Genesis 34:13. See the description of Jacob himself in Genesis 27:35)
>
> … Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor's son Shechem. (Genesis 34:18)
>
> *With guile*—cleverly.[18] (Rashi's identical comment on both Genesis 27:35 and Genesis 34:18)

Although the brothers initiate their plan with the power of voice that they have inherited from their father (as shown by Rashi's identical

[14] We may point out a creative reading that can be gleaned from Rashi's innovation here. This final mention of Esau's movement recalls the previous one, three chapters earlier: he sets out to Seir (a key location in Edom, often used interchangeably with it), inviting Jacob to join him. Jacob responds that because of his children and animals he is too slow to keep pace—he will catch up later, he says. But Jacob does not follow Esau to Seir, and instead settles in Sukkoth, and then Shechem. He does not keep his word. Now, Jacob's descendants are asking Esau's for help, and Rashi seeks, perhaps, to justify that request in the face of Jacob's disloyalty.

[15] It is interesting to note that at this part of the narrative, which is the lead-up to the actual blessing, Isaac's statement is considered a blessing. It seems that Rashi reads this descriptive, local statement ("The voice [that I hear now] is Jacob's voice") as a prescriptive, global one: "*the* voice (i.e., the gift of the voice) is (and shall be) Jacob's voice."

[16] See footnote 15. Note the difference in language between Jacob's blessing (*berakhah*) and Esau's assurance (*havtahah*). This appears to be Rashi's own choice; his Rabbinic source—*Midrash Tanhuma, Be-shalah 9*—uses neither.

[17] See Rashi on Genesis 27:3, which reads an ambiguous implement as a sword, and Rashi on Genesis 25:29, which reads Esau as a murderer.

[18] *B'hokhmah*; alternately, "with wisdom." I read this as a light endorsement or approval of the behavior.

comments by Jacob and his sons) Simeon and Levi carry it out using the sword:[19]

> On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, brothers of Dinah, each with his sword, came upon the city confidently and slew all the males. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. (Genesis 34:25-26)

Jacob is upset by their actions, concerned that they have incited the neighboring tribes to violence. The narrative itself does not choose a side, leaving the reader to reflect. Does any circumstance justify the sword?

Perhaps, in this case, the power in the mouth was not powerful enough. Perhaps the voice and its capabilities—guile, diplomacy, persuasion, prayer—can only go so far.[20]

Similarly, the approach in *Parashat Hukat* begins with the voice, as Israel seeks passage through Edom with diplomacy. Moses sends messengers to Edom, as Jacob sent to Esau generations earlier,[21] to seek peace and cooperation. But when this fails, the nation simply turns away.[22]

In Chapter 21, this attitude changes. When the King of Arad physically attacks the people, diplomacy is no longer an option. But this does not mean that the voice is exhausted. Israel moves to action, demonstrating the power in the mouth in one of the most weighty actions a voice can do in Judaism:[23]

> Then Israel made a vow to the LORD and said, "If You deliver this people into our hand, we will proscribe their towns." (Numbers 21:2)

Then—echoing the language regarding Egypt in Numbers 20:16—God listens:

> The LORD listened to Israel's voice and delivered up the Canaanites; and they and their cities were proscribed. So that place was named Hormah. (Numbers 21:3)

The voice does not always completely serve the nation's goals as it does here. But throughout *Parashat Hukat*, Israel elects to use the voice before the sword.[24]

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> *Why were so few voices raised in the ancient world in protest against the ruthlessness of man? Why are human beings so obsequious, ready to kill and ready to die at the call of kings and chieftains? Perhaps it is because they worship might, venerate those who command might, and are convinced that it is by force that man prevails.* (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, Chapter 9)

The blessing of Isaac unto Jacob becomes Jacob's chief characteristic. The voice of Jacob then funnels through the generations, becoming the voice of Israel and Moses's "power in the mouth." Esau's blessing—the power of the sword—funnels, too, through history, becoming Edom's inheritance.

Rashi expands this beyond Edom.[25] The power of the sword—as exemplified by the ruthless Canaanite violence in *Parashat Hukat*—is the weapon not just of Edom, but of the non-Israelite nations.[26] The success of Israel in *Parashat Hukat* proves the triumph of the voice over the sword.

This dynamic is picked up by Balak and Midian. Ammon failed. Bashan failed. They opted for the sword. It's time, thought Balak, to try something new.[27]

Balaam's attempt to weaponize the power in the mouth—a unique attribute of Moses and Israel inherited from their ancestors—was destined for failure. This power simply isn't his. A final Rashi rounds out the meta-narrative:

> And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, with his drawn sword in his hand . . . (Numbers 22:23)
>
> *And his sword drawn in his* hand —He (God) said: This evil one has abandoned the tools of his trade, — for the offensive weapons of the nations of the world consist of the sword, and he is attacking them with his mouth which is their specialty (*omanut*); I will seize what is his and come against him with his own specialty (*omanuto*). Thus, indeed, was his end (Numbers 31:8): "And Balaam the son of Beor they slew by the sword." (Rashi on Numbers 22:23)

God comes to Balaam with a sword in the angel's hand—the sword that should be in Balaam's hand. The weapon he ignores comes to stop him on the way and warn him: *the mouth belongs to Israel who pray to Hashem, but not to you*.[28]

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[19] For a further bifurcation of the two strategies, see Ramban on Genesis 34:13.

[20] Note Jacob's silence in Genesis 34:5.

[21] Compare Genesis 32:5 with Numbers 20:4.

[22] Numbers 20:21.

[23] See Numbers 30:3.

[24] See Numbers 21:21-24, where they first use diplomatic tools with Sihon, and only upon Sihon's engaging in violence does Israel use the sword.

[25] See Rashi on Numbers 31:8, quoted below, which applies the same verse that tied Esau to Edom—"by your sword you shall live"—to the nations of the world.

[26] *Tanhuma Be-shalah* 9, Rashi on Numbers 22:23 (quoted below), and Rashi on Numbers 31:8.

[27] See Rashi on Number 22:4, quoted above.

[28] *Siftei akhamim*, ad loc.

Balaam doesn't listen. His ironic fate is to be killed by Israel as *they* take the sword to slay him.[29]

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> *And the voice of the shofar (*kol shofar*) became increasingly louder; Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.* (Exodus 19:19)
>
> *And on that day, a great shofar shall be sounded; and the strayed who are in the land of Assyria and the expelled who are in the land of Egypt shall come and worship the LORD on the holy mount, in Jerusalem.* (Isaiah 27:13)

The Jewish People has often been described in terms of our holy texts. The Torah, and later, the Talmud, have comprised our timeless, traveling homeland, functioning as "compact, transferable history, law, wisdom, poetic chant, prophecy, consolation and self-strengthening counsel,"[30] keeping us together against the eroding onrush of time.

This meta-narrative shows that before the Book, we were the People of the Voice. Rashi takes two verses in Genesis--27:22 (*the voice is the voice of* Jacob) and 27:40 (*and by your sword you shall live*)—masterfully mapping them on other narratives through his comments. These connections are not my own—as we have shown, Rashi's comments by Edom and by Balak explicitly use these verses to apply the archetype to Edom, Israel, Moses, Balaam, and the Nations. With this paradigm in place, we can understand the identity of our patriarch, our leader, and our people, using it to read other narratives—Shechem for Jacob and his children, the Waters of Merivah for Moses,[31] and the conquests in *Parashat Hukat* for the Nation of Israel. But we can also use it to understand Jewish history itself.

Jacob's *berakhah*, Moses's *midah*, and the Children of Israel's *omanut*—we used it to cry, to persuade, to swear; to declare, to celebrate to sing; to accept, to teach, to pray; striving throughout history to maintain our voice through songs, laws, and stories. The voice of Israel became that of its prophets, listening to the still, small voice of God and proclaiming that voice to the people. The prophetic voice became the voice of the Rabbis, the voice of the schoolhouse and the voice of the *minyan*, the voice of the halakhic *makhloket* and the voice of the aggadic *derashah*. The national voice became the voice of exile, the proclamations of the martyr and the shouts of the mourner. Today, the voice of dispersion sings in cacophony with the voice of the returned people—both voices are proud and confident, if out of sync.

While the Book provides the source material, the Voice brings it to the world. We are a People of the Book, but the voice is our trade. May the ever-growing Jewish voice soon usher in the *kol shofar*—the voice of redemption.

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Tasting the World to Come: a Novel Interpretation of Tzidkatkha Tzedek

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I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the editors who spent countless hours improving this article, to Prof. Simi Chavel for assistance with Biblical verses and translations, and to Rabbi Marianne Novak for help in formulating the ideas expressed here.. All errors are mine only. This article is dedicated to the memory of my beloved daughter Batsheva Chaya Stadlan z'l.

On Shabbat *Minhah* after the repetition of the *Amidah*, there is an ancient practice, codified as early as the *siddur* of R. Amram Gaon, to recite three verses from Psalms. Commonly referred to in the aggregate as *Tzidkatkha Tzedek*, these verses are:

> Your righteousness is eternal; Your teaching is true. (Psalms 119:142)
>
> Your righteousness, high as the heavens, O God, You who have done great things; O God, who is Your peer! (Psalms 71:19)
>
> Your righteousness is like the high mountains; Your justice like the great deep; man and beast You deliver, O Lord. (Psalms 36:7)

The usual explanation[32] for the placement and recitation of these verses is that Moshe Rabbeinu died at the time of Shabbat *Minhah*, and therefore this recitation is a form of *Tzidduk ha-Din* (accepting the divine decree). The Zohar (*Parshat Terumah*) expands the number of those commemorated here to three ancestors who died on Shabbat afternoon - Moshe, Yosef, and David - with each verse referring to one of them.[33]

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[29] Cf. Rashi on Numbers 31:8. Reminiscent of Simeon and Levi's role in Shechem *vis-à-vis* Jacob, Phineas—the iconic, violent zealot—oversees this campaign, rather than Moses himself (Numbers 31:6).

[30] Simon Schama, *The Story of the Jews: Finding the Words 1000 BC – 1492 AD* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), Chapter Two.

[31] See Rashi on Numbers 20:11. Moses hits the rock, using his hands (Esau's blessing) rather than his voice—his own specialty—as he was commanded.

[32] For example, see the standard Artscroll or Koren *siddur* commentaries.

[33] The idea of mourning the loss of Moshe and others is used to explain two other Shabbat afternoon customs. R. Saadia and R. Sar Shalom Gaon note that the basis for the reading of *Pirkei Avot* at *Minhah* time on Shabbat afternoon is in commemoration of the death of Moshe, who died at that time. This is based on a statement in the Talmud that "if a scholar dies, all study ceases"- i.e., we do not have public study, just private study, and we do not directly study the deceased's work (i.e., the Torah). Therefore the custom evolved not to have public lectures, just individual study, and not of Torah, but of Mishnah. Additionally, some have the practice not to say "*gut Shabbos*" to others after *Minhah*. While this may not be a well-known custom, R Eliyahu Kitov writes: "It is also customary, out of a spirit of mourning for Moshe, not to wish others 'good Shabbos' after Mincha. If someone greets a person, he should reply in a low voice." *The Book of Our Heritage* Volume 2 (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1997), 718.

In this essay I would like to suggest that the equation of *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* with *Tzidduk ha-Din* is not as certain as portrayed, and an analysis of the *pesukim* of *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* in conjunction with an investigation into the themes of Shabbat afternoon can lead to an alternate understanding of the prayer. But before developing that thesis, we should start by defining two key terms.

Tzedek* and *Din

Both *tzedek* and *din* are difficult terms to define. It appears to me that these are best understood as reflecting a human, not divine, perspective. Generally, *tzedek*[34] may be thought of as justice tempered with compassion. While *tzedek* may usually be thought of as beneficence, in certain circumstances it can encompass adverse outcomes, specifically for those (evil-doers) who deserve it. *Din,* on the other hand, denotes strict justice, untempered by mercy. Applied to outcomes of judgments (whether human or divine), *tzedek* is an outcome that seems fair or better, while *din* can reflect outcomes that may appear fair, but also those that do not. These definitions will help us to argue for a distinction between the motifs of *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* and *Tzidduk ha-Din*. To do so, let us briefly review the latter.

Tzidduk ha-Din

Tzidduk ha-Din is commonly recited at the cemetery by the relatives of the deceased. The circumstances under which it is recited and the precedents for its recitation, as will be shown, illustrate that it is a statement of acceptance of the will of God, even (especially) when it is painful and seemingly unjust from a human perspective. *Tzidduk ha-Din,* after all, is not recited on happy occasions, but only following the death of a loved one or relative. The core of *Tzidduk ha-Din* is the *din*: God has decreed, and *Tzidduk ha-Din* is at best willing and at worst grudging acceptance of the decree, whether it seems fair or not. If *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* is equated with *Tzidduk ha-Din*, this means that *Tzidkatkha* reflects an unquestioning acceptance of God's plan, no matter how painful or incomprehensible.

The core verse of *Tzidduk ha-Din* and the source of the concept that God's judgement is perfect is the verse from Ha'azinu (Deuteronomy 32:4):

> The Rock! His deeds are perfect, Yea, all His ways are just; A faithful God, never false, True and upright is He.

Ramban interprets this verse as an allusion to the attribute of justice (*din*).

Tzidduk ha-Din as referring to acceptance of the divine decree is first[35] found in the *Gemara* and the *Sifre*. The *Gemara* (*Avodah Zarah* 18a) relates the story of the murder of R. Hananiah ben Teradyon and his wife, and the sentencing of their daughter to a life of prostitution:

> When the three of them went out after being sentenced, they accepted the justice of God's judgment. Rabbi Hananiah ben Teradyon said: "The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice" (Deuteronomy 32:4). And his wife said the continuation of the verse: "A God of faithfulness and without iniquity." His daughter said: "Great in counsel, and mighty in work; whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways" (Jeremiah 32:19). Rabbi Yehuda ha-Nasi said: How great are these righteous people, that these three verses, which speak of the acceptance of God's judgment, occurred to them at the time of accepting the righteousness of His judgment.

It is used in similar fashion in *Numbers Rabbah* (8:4), where Ritzpah bat Ayah recites the verse, and says *Tzidduk ha-Din* as she accepts the murder of her children.

As a further illustration of the implications of the verse, the *Gemara Bava Kama* 50a quotes R. Hanina:

> Anyone who states that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is forgiving [*vatran*] of transgressions, his life will be relinquished [*yivatru*], as it is stated: "The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

In other words, God does not waive heavenly justice.

The emphasis of this verse clearly is on judgment (*din*). The righteousness (*tzedek*) aspect connotes acceptance, but not necessarily human understanding. It is an acknowledgement of God's righteousness in His own eyes.

The Historical Understanding of *Tzidkatkha Tzedek*

Given this background to *Tzidduk ha-Din*, we can see why the proposed link to *Tzidduk ha-Din* is far from certain. Further, there are additional reasons to question the equation of the verses of *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* with *Tzidduk ha-Din*. Tosafot (*Menahot* 30a) note the custom of reciting *Tzidduk ha-Din* on Shabbat because of the death of Moshe, but then argue that Moshe died on a Friday, not on Shabbat. This suggests something of a difficulty with this equation. Similarly, the *Midrash Psalms* (90) states that on the day of his death, Moshe wrote a *Sefer Torah* for each tribe, something he obviously would be forbidden from doing on Shabbat.

Given this contradiction,[36] other rationales or explanations for *Tzidkatkha* have been proposed. One suggestion[37] is that *Tzidkatkha* is like *Tzidduk ha-Din* not because of the death of Moshe, but because of the sinners who return to *Geihinom* after Shabbat (after having a respite on Shabbat). Therefore, it is not the death of Moshe and others that is being accepted, but the punishment of those deserving of it. However, this explanation is not without weakness. One argument against this is that *Geihinom* apparently is in operation

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[34] For example, see here by Rabbi Sacks: https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2269078/jewish/Tzedek-Justice-and-Compassion.htm.

[35] According to R. Kaufman Kohler and Crawford Howell Toy, the book of Revelation (part of the New Testament) is an adaption of a Jewish manuscript from the second temple period, and they understand Revelation 16:5-7 as a statement of *Tzidduk ha-Din*. From what I understand, modern scholarship has cast doubt on this assertion. A summary is available here: http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12712-revelation-book-of.

[36] There are those who attempt to resolve this contradiction. For example, R. Eliyahu Ki Tov (pg. 720) writes that Moshe could have died on a Friday, but that the Jewish people were so stunned that they did not begin to fully mourn until the next day.

[37] Rabbinical Council of America, *Siddur Avodat Halev* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2018), 652, based on *Sanhedrin* 65b.

on *Rosh Hodesh* and *Yom Tov*, days on which *Tzidkatkha* is not said, due to them being days when *Tahanun* is omitted. So if one were reciting it to accept the punishment of those in *Geihinom* and/or try to bring them some merit, it would be logical to recite it every day, even on days that *Tahanun* is omitted.

Abudarham (David ben Yosef Abudarham, c. 1340) brings another reason for reciting *Tzidkatkha* at Shabbat *Minhah*. After *Minhah* one eats *Seudah Shelishit*, and the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 118a) states that anyone who eats three meals on Shabbat is saved from three punishments. Abudarham connects each verse of *Tzidkatkha* to a punishment, and concludes that we recite *Tzidkatkha* to acknowledge the three punishments from which we are saved by consuming Shabbat meals.

The commentary in *Siddur Avodat Yisrael,* however, reviews much of the above and states: "And this is difficult and contradictory. If *Tzidkatkha* is like *Tzidduk ha-Din* in that it is not recited on days when Hallel is recited, then, why do we recite *Tzidkatkha* every Shabbat? After all, we do not recite *Tzidduk ha-Din* on Shabbat.[38] And what Yom Tov is greater than Shabbat?" The commentary points out that the rationale for reciting or omitting *Tzidkatkha* is not consistent with identifying it with *Tzidduk ha-Din*. It then concludes:

> But the apparent truth is that *Tzidkatkha* is not *Tzidduk ha-Din*. It was established to reflect *Tahanun* of weekdays. And because we do not say *Tahanun* on Shabbat, we have *Tzidkatkha* instead of *Tahanun*. Therefore if Shabbat is a day on which we would not say *Tahanun* had it been a weekday, we also don't say *Tzidkatkha* on that Shabbat.

The *Siddur Hegyon Lev* (with commentary by the author of *Peri Megadim*) also records much of the above information, and comments: "The conclusion from this is that the recitation of these verses is more ancient than the *Geonim*, who struggled to find a rationale for it." It appears quite possible, then, that the connection between *Tzidkatkha* and *Tzidduk ha-Din*, while ancient, may be more of a post hoc justification, and that a different understanding may be offered.[39] To do so, let us return to the verses that comprise the *Tzidkatkha* prayer.

The Pesukim of *Tzidkatkha* in Context

The plain meaning of the verses of *Tzidkatkha* emphasize beneficence, not a mandate to submit to God's will. While the word *"mishpat"* occurs once, *"din"* does not appear at all. A survey of the context of the *pesukim* and the classic commentators on *Tanakh* at those locations does not support a *Tzidduk ha-Din* interpretation. For the most part, the commentators understand these *pesukim* as praising God's beneficence. This beneficence is not hidden, but is clearly discernible from a human point of view. Punishments, when mentioned, are only for the wicked.

The first verse is from Psalms 119:142. There is a verse (Psalms 119:137) prior to the one incorporated in *Tzidkatkha* that potentially could be construed as referring to *din*. It states: "You are righteous, O Lord; Your rulings are just." But this verse refers to God as *Tzadik,* and the word used for 'just' is *yashar*, not *din.* Furthermore, most of the verses in Psalms 119 emphasize an attachment to *mitzvot* and their performance, the reward for those who perform *mitzvot* and the punishment for those who do not, and the desire to be close to God through *mitzvot*. Radak comments on Psalms 119:142 that the righteousness that God has established with the world is one that will be eternal. *Din* or similar concepts are not mentioned. Metzudat David states that the word *tzidkatkha* refers to the *tzedakah* that God performs for those who remember His commandments - that righteousness stands forever.

The theme of Psalms 71 (the source of the second verse) is that God is a refuge for those who depend on Him. God is depicted as Rescuer, Hope, and Support. The term "*ve-tzidkatkha"* here continues the pattern of referring to God's good (in human understanding) deeds and His beneficence. Malbim uses the verse to discuss various ways in which God provides salvation, whether through natural or supernatural means. In all three *midrashim* that reference this verse (*Lamentations Rabbah* 1:41, *Pesikta Rabbati* 46:1, and *Leviticus Rabbah* 26:8), *tzidkatkha* is meant as beneficence, something that is good from the human perspective.

Psalms 36 (the source of the third verse) begins with a meditation on sin and its consequences. But then, starting with verse six, a contrast is drawn between sin and God: "God, Your faithfulness (*hesed*) reaches to the Heavens, Your steadfastness (*emunah*) to the sky." And then our *pasuk* continues the characterization of God. To the *hesed* and *emunah* enumerated in the previous *pasuk*, our *pasuk* adds beneficence and justice (using the word *mishpat*, not *din*), all culminating in the conclusion that God will save man and beast. The next four *pesukim* emphasize human dependence on God's goodness, and are chanted by many after reciting the *berakhah* over the *tallit gadol.*

A *midrash* on this *pasuk* (*Midrash Tanhuma Buber Noah* 8:6) uses the third verse to emphasize how God's beneficence actually reigns over the the attribute of *din*:

> Another interpretation (of Psalms 36:7): Your Righteousness is like the mighty mountains. R. Simeon bar Yohai said: Just as the mountains hold down the deep so that it does not rise and flood the world, so Your righteousness holds down divine justice and retribution so that they do not come into the world. Your righteousness is over Your judgments as the mighty mountains are over the great deep.

According to this *midrash*, the *pasuk* is an embrace of beneficence and rejection of *din.* This fits quite well with the *peshat* of the *pesukim*, the context of the *perakim* in which the *pesukim* are found, and the understanding of traditional commentary. Understanding these *pesukim* as referring to *din* and not *tzedek* is a very radical change, one not supported by the context.

The Shabbat Experience

In light of the above, I would like to suggest an alternate understanding that fits more closely with the *peshat* of the *pesukim*, one that is based on an ideal of the Shabbat experience. The verses of *Tzidkatkha* make up the final public liturgy unique to Shabbat. The

[38] According to some it is not recited on *erev Shabbat* after midday.

[39] As an aside, the customs of reciting *Pirkei Avot* and not saying "*gut Shabbos*" after *Minhah* do not necessarily support the connection between *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* and the death of Moshe or others. For example, Prof. Ismar Elbogen, in his comprehensive review of liturgy, states that there are many possible rationales for the learning of *Pirkei Avot*, and doubts that it is related to mourning for Moshe. R. Shmuel Wosner addresses the issue of not saying "*gut Shabbos*" and dismisses it as not being a very widespread *minhag*.

next public prayer is *Maariv*, which is recited after Shabbat. Perhaps, then, similar to the *Shema Yisrael*/*Barukh Shem*/*Hashem Hu* of Yom Kippur, *Tzidkatkha* should be seen as the culmination of our Shabbat prayer and experience. Just as those verses recited on Yom Kippur are the pinnacle of our *tefillah* and our recognition and acceptance of the sovereignty of God, perhaps *Tzidkatkha* also is meant to reflect the height of our Shabbat experience.

What is the Shabbat experience? The *Gemara* (*Berakhot* 57b) tells us that Shabbat is one-sixtieth of the World to Come. The *ha-Rahaman* we recite in *Birkat ha-Mazon* in honor of Shabbat asks God to grant us a day that is entirely Shabbat, namely the World to Come. The Mishnah (*Tamid* 7:4 - recited as part of Shabbat *Mussaf*) states that the special psalm for Shabbat is "a song for the time to come, for the day that will be all Shabbat and rest for everlasting life." *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (1:8) adds more details: "a world that is entirely Shabbat, where there is no eating or drinking or business, only the righteous sitting with crowns on their heads being sustained by the emanations of the *Shekhinah* (an aspect of God)."

R. Levi Yitchak of Berditchev expands on this idea (*Kedushat Levi* on *Ki Tisa*):

> Another way of explaining the wording of our verse (Exodus 31:13) is based on the realization that God, in His love for the Jewish people, gave them commandments by means of which they would establish their claim to eternal life after their bodies had died (*Makkot 3:*16). The Sabbath features especially largely in that context, as by observing it we experience a foretaste of the afterlife. On that day, as part of its observance, every Jew can experience the meaning of a truly spiritual experience and the satisfaction it brings to the person enjoying it.
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> However, we have a rule that the reward for performance of the commandments of the Torah is not given in this world, i.e. during a person's lifetime on earth (compare *Kiddushin* 39b). So God therefore gave the enjoyment of the spiritual pleasure on the Sabbath as a gift (not as a reward- ed.). God arranged for this "foretaste" of what to expect in the afterlife, the principal reward being preserved for when the person's soul returns to its celestial origins.
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> When a Jew experiences that as a result of observing the Sabbath he enjoys an additional dimension of spiritual and physical wellbeing, he does not need to be an intellectual in order to fantasize about how much more of this he will experience in the world to come, where he has been assured that the principal reward for Sabbath observance as well as *mitzvah* observance generally will be shared out.

The paragraph in *Shemoneh Esrei* unique to Shabbat *Minhah* reinforces the idea that Shabbat is a foretaste of *Olam ha-Ba*. Shabbat is the only time when the *Minhah Shemoneh Esrei* is different from the one recited at *Shaharit*. The three different paragraphs of Shabbat *davening* (*Maariv* on Shabbat night, *Shaharit*, and *Minhah*) have been understood to reflect three different *Shabbatot*: *Maariv* reflects the Shabbat of creation, *Shaharit* reflects the Shabbat of *Matan Torah*, and *Minhah* reflects the Shabbat of the future (World to Come).[40]

The paragraph begins *attah ehad ve-shimkha ehad*, "You are one and Your Name is one." It continues, "Avraham and Yitzchak will be happy, Yaakov and his sons will rest in it." And then the key words: *menuhah* - peaceful rest, *hashket* - peaceful quiet (in Modern Hebrew we use *sheket* for silence, but in earlier Hebrew the world for silence is actually *dumiyah*), and *betah* - trust/security. This phrasing is an adaptation of Isaiah (32:17):

> For the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, calm and confidence forever.

The content of *Attah Ehad,* with the emphasis on the quiet and rest that will be enjoyed (the verbs are in the future tense) by ancestors who have already passed away, combined with the reference to eternity in Isaiah, can be understood as a reference to the world to come. A further hint that this paragraph refers not just to Shabbat but to *Olam ha-Ba* lies in the opening words, *atta ehad.* Abudarham notes that the first sentence is an adaption of a verse from Zekhariah (14:9):

> And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one Lord with one name.

The *pasuk* looks towards the end of days, when all will acknowledge God. In the *Shemoneh Esrei*, the future tense is changed to the present tense, perhaps indicating that we can strive to experience the future *Olam ha-Ba* every Shabbat.

The paragraph of *Atta Ehad* reinforces the idea that the essence of Shabbat and of *Olam ha-Ba* is an incredible experience of peace of mind and contentment. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the first paragraph of the beginning prayer of Shabbat, *Kabbalat Shabbat*, ends with a form of the word *menuhah* (*menuhati*). On Shabbat we are not only granted a glimpse of *Olam ha-Ba*, but our "work" for Shabbat is to understand and appreciate the ultimate rest and contentment that *Olam ha-Ba* represents.

If we assume that one aspect of Shabbat is to develop an understanding and appreciation of *Olam ha-Ba*, and to experience a small fraction of it, then it seems all the more odd that the recitation of *Tzidkatkha Tzedek*, the culmination of this experience, is a reluctant acceptance of loss or punishment that we cannot fully understand.

Affirmation of God's beneficence

I suggest that by the time of *Minhah* of Shabbat afternoon, we have had an opportunity to glimpse and understand, as much as humanly possible, the peace and tranquility of *Olam ha-Ba*. At the least, this seems to be a desired outcome of optimal Shabbat observance. Having some understanding of peace of *Olam ha-Ba*, *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* should be seen as an affirmation of the just God who has

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[40] "It was Franz Rosenzweig who stressed the 'messianic' atmosphere of the Sabbath Afternoon Service. The Friday evening service deals with the belief in Creation. The Sabbath morning service speaks of Revelation. It is the Sabbath afternoon service in which the belief in Redemption is concentrated. Here, the central section of the *Amida* says: 'Thou art One, and Thy Name Is One' – a clear reference to 'that day' when, according to the prophet, 'the Lord shall be One, and His Name One.' The weekly Sabbath is meant to give us the flavor of that age which will be 'a day that is altogether Sabbath and rest in the life of the world to come.'" From *Shabbat Minḥah Prayers*, a prayer-pamphlet by Dr. Jakob J. Petuchowski (1966).

given rightful reward to those who did not receive what (we perceive) they should have in this world. It is not a reluctant acceptance of loss and the divine decree, but a statement of belief that those who did not experience rest and peace in this world are experiencing the ultimate in peace and contentment in the next. Simply put, *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* proclaims that, through our experience and understanding of Shabbat, and through it *Olam ha-Ba*, we realize that theodicy is an illusion produced by our lack of understanding and appreciation of the world to come. This idea is expressed in a different explication of the verse in *Haazinu* (*Taanit* 11a):

> "A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, He is just and righteous" (Deuteronomy 32:4). The *baraita* interprets "a God of faithfulness" to mean that just as punishment is exacted from the wicked in the World-to-Come even for a light transgression that they commit, so too, punishment is exacted from the righteous in this world for a light transgression that they commit. The righteous suffer their punishment in this world to purify them so they can enjoy the World to Come.

If this is the meaning of *Tzidkatkha Tzedek,* then we logically should remove all of the mourning aspects of *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* and recite it even on those occasions when *Tahanun* is not said. On the other hand, while the above analysis may reflect an ideal, it does not reflect human reality. Those who have suffered deep loss often face a terrible dilemma. They want to remember their loved one, and make sure that at least the memories live on. But at the same time, the memories are reminders of the loss. So there can be significant pain associated with the memories, no matter how happy. Some memories may have less associated pain than others, but all are reminders of who is not there, consigned only to memory. Even the thought of a loved one enjoying the ultimate in peace and contentment will not eliminate the very human experience of loss. Perhaps *Hazal* understood this. Therefore, as Shabbat wanes, we try to appreciate the glimpse of rest and contentment that the Master of the Universe has given us, and take comfort that this ultimate of peace and contentment has been bestowed fully on the loved ones that we have lost. But this very thought reminds us of our loss. We recognize this feeling of loss by not reciting these verses on those occasions where mourning would not be appropriate.

I suggest that my analysis, while novel, is not unprecedented, given the discomfort commentators have shown with the standard explanations. What is more, it serves as a challenge to experience the aspect of *Olam ha-Ba* in Shabbat. *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* is a reminder, at the end of the day, of one purpose of Shabbat. Shabbat is not just a day of rest, relaxation, good food, friends, and family. Shabbat, experienced in the fullest, truly is a taste of the World to Come. *Tzidkatkha Tzedek* expresses the belief that in the World to Come, God rights all wrongs. And though that realization comes with some feelings of loss, ultimately God will "wipe the tears from all faces" (Isaiah 25:8).