

## וַיְהִי

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## DAN

In his blessing to Dan, Yaakov used a strange metaphor:

יהי דן נחש עלי דרך

Dan shall be a snake in the way (*Bereishis* 49:17).

What sort of blessing is it when a father calls his son a “snake”? The *Zohar* (*ibid.*) points out that Yaakov was referring to the symbolism of the primordial snake of Adam and Chava. Just as the snake instigated Adam and Chava to sin, so did Dan embrace idolatry in the days of Yeravam son of Nevat (*Melachim I* 12:19), when Yeravam set up an idol in Dan’s territory.

The *Gemara* elaborates further (*Sanhedrin* 96•). Avraham Avinu’s pursuit of Lot’s captives ended in the territory of Dan:

וירדף עד דן

And pursued as far as Dan (*Bereishis* 14:14).

תשש כחו ראה בני בניו שעתידין להעבוד ע"ז

There Avraham’s strength waned, for he saw that at a future time his children would set up an idol there (*Sanhedrin* 96•).

Although that particular territory was not yet designated for Dan, Avraham, through *Ruach Hakodesh*, was spiritually weakened by that foreshadowing vision, and already felt the pervading “*tumah*” of the *avodah zarah*.

One of *Klal Yisrael*’s earliest incursions against Hashem occurred in the *midbar*, when the son of Shelomis bas Divri, of *Sheivet Dan*, cursed Hashem:

ויקב בן האשה הישראלית את השם ויקלל

...And the son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name, and cursed (*Vayikra* 24:11).

In the *midbar* the Clouds of Glory expelled *Sheivet Dan* from their protective custody, due to Dan’s inclination to idolatry; while Amaleik, the pre-eminent proponent of idolatry, sought to join with *Sheivet Dan* (*Targum Yonasan, Devarim* 25:18). In the *midbar*, Dan had not yet publicly declared their involvement with idolatry, but secretly engaged in its practice; hence, devoid of the Clouds’ protection, they were exposed to Amaleik’s magnetic attraction to them, yet at this point they declined to join with Amaleik. Their hidden love of idolatry resulted in the deaths of many members of *Sheivet Dan* in the war with Amaleik (*Targum Yonasan, Shemos* 17:8). Many other members of *Sheivet Dan* were killed by Hashem in the fire-plague resulting from the *misonenim* — murmurers — (*Targum Yonasan, Bamidbar* 11:1).

The first instance of public idol-worship in the early settlement of *Eretz Yisrael* occurred in the territory of Dan; it involved Micha and the grandson of Moshe *Rabbeinu* (*Shoftim* 18). “*Pesel Micha*” — “the idol of Micha” — seemed to be instrumental in helping Dan conquer his portion of *Eretz Yisrael*. Micha’s priest, Yonasan, and his offspring, remained as the idol-priests in-residence up until the time Dan was exiled from *Eretz Yisrael* by Sancheriv. In fact, Yeravam ben Nevat peddled his proposed idolatrous temple to all the *Shevatim*, only to be rejected by all — except *Sheivet Dan*. Dan embraced the idolatrous concept (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:10).

Idolatry so permeated *Sheivet Dan* that it is not surprising to see Rabbi Yehudah remark:

אין דן אלא לשון ע"ז

Dan's name is synonymous with idol-worship (*Shabbos 67:*).

What sort of blessing did Yaakov give Dan, comparing him to the snake of idolatry? One would think that Yaakov should have steered Dan in another direction. What then, is the actual meaning of "Dan shall be a snake in the way"?

It is known that Dan's fixed traveling position in the *midbar* was in the northern section of the camp:

דגל מהנה דן צפנה לצבאתם

The standard of the camp of Dan shall be on the north side by their armies (*Bamidbar 2:25*).

It is also known that Dan occupied the northern-most territory of *Eretz Yisrael* (*Yehoshua 19:40, Bechoros 55*•). There is a significant correlation between Dan's northern positions, his idolatry, and Yaakov's blessings.

The *Midrash* relates (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 3*) that the northern section of the world was created by Hashem in an imperfect state. "He created the northern side, but did not complete it. He said,

רוח פנס הצפון ברא ולא גמרו. אמר, שכל מי שיאמר שהוא אלוה, יבוא ויגמר את הפינה הזאת

Whoever considers himself a deity — come and complete it (also see *Yalkut Iyov 913*).

In fact, *tzafon* (north) is another name for the *yeitzer hara* (*Sukkah 52*•).

The purpose of creation is the exercise of man's *bechirah* (free-will). This can only be accomplished by including the possibility of man's "judgment error" in creation. By leaving the northern border of the universe unfinished, Hashem left room in man's mind for the worship of idolatry. The Maharal (*Chidushei Aggados, Bava Basra 25*•) explains that it was impossible for the universe to have been created perfect; there had to be imperfection in creation. Hashem is perfect — but He wanted His creation to leave room for doubt in man's mind. Hence, the "northern side" is symbolic of Hashem's (seeming) competition — idol worship. The fact that Dan always occupied the "northern side" is consistent with his position as the proponent of idolatry in *Klal Yisrael*. For "from the North emanates darkness to the world" and *Sheivet Dan* heralds that darkness (*Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar 2:10*; see *Rabbeinu Bechaya, Shemos 32:4*; Ramban, *Shemos 32:1*).

Yaakov understood that in order for the full Glory of Hashem to ultimately be revealed, in the Messianic era, the involvement of the *Shivtei Kah* was essential. The greatest *Kiddush Hashem* will come about when all humanity perceives Hashem as the One and only true Deity. It was thus imperative that one of the *Shivtei Kah* be involved with idolatry in *Olom Hazeh*, so that when the ultimate rejection of idolatry occurs *Sheivet Dan* will lead the way. For humanity's complete recognition of Hashem to occur, the children of Yaakov must be directly involved. At this time, the "northern side" of the universe will be completed in order to demonstrate the sovereignty of Hashem; at the same time the *Sheivet* which occupied the 'northern side' will teach humanity

how to reject idolatry. Eisav, the arch-enemy of *Klal Yisrael*, the embodiment of *Avodah zarah* in *Olom Hazeih*, was killed by Chushim the son of Dan (*Sotah* 13•); this was to symbolize Dan's future as the initiator of the rejection of *avodah zarah*.

The supreme sacrifice, the acceptance of idol-worship, was made by *Sheivet Dan*. Yaakov recognized this in Dan's blessing, and wished him the strength to withstand this ordeal. The only *Sheivet* capable of withstanding this ordeal was Dan — for Dan had the strength derived from the *Midas Hadin* — the divine attribute of judgement, which is associated with strength.

דן ידין עמו

Dan shall judge his people (*Bereishis* 49:16).

The Vilna Ga'on (*Shir Hashirim* 4:16) points out that the north is synonymous with *Midas Hadin*. In Moshe *Rabbeinu's* blessing, Dan's name was mentioned twice consecutively:

ולדן אמר דן

and of Dan, he said Dan.... (*Devarim* 33:22).

This, the *Midrash* points out (*Bereishis Rabbah* 95:4), indicates *Gevurah* (גבורה), a special strength.

Dan is historically linked with *Sheivet Yehudah*, as the *Midrash* (*Shemos Rabbah* 40:4) points out:

אין לך גדול משבט יהודה, ואין לך ירוד משבט דן...לפי שהגדול והקטן שוין לפני המקום.

There is no greater than Yehudah, and there is no lower than Dan . . . the great and the small are equal before Hashem (*Shemos Rabbah* 40:4).

In the final analysis, when Dan will finally reveal his true purpose, he will be shown to be an equal of Yehudah (Ramban, *Bereishis* 49:16). Yehudah, representing *malchus* — kingship — is the zenith of perfection in *Klal Yisrael* (see page 425), while Dan, representing *avodah zarah*, is at the nadir. Yet the same *mesiras nefesh* (self sacrifice) required of Yehudah in achieving *Malchus*, will also be evident in Dan as he plays out his unique role. Moshe, when blessing Dan, referred to the metaphor:

דן גור אריה

Dan is a lion's whelp (*Devarim* 33:22);

this is parallel to Yaakov's blessing of Yehudah,

גור אריה יהודה

Yehudah is a lion's whelp (*Bereishis* 49:9) (see *Rabbeinu Bechaya*, *Shemos* 38:22).

Betzalel of *Sheivet Yehudah* constructed the *Mishkan* together with Ohaliahav of *Sheivet Dan* (*Shemos* 31:6). This parallels the construction of the first *Beis Hamikdash*, which saw the collaboration of Shlomo *Hamelech* of *Sheivet Yehudah*, and Chiram, whose mother was of *Sheivet Dan* (*Arachin* 16:). The *Midrash* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 99:11) informs us that one of our most illustrious *Shoftim*, Shimshon *Hagibor*, was paternally descended from *Sheivet Dan* and maternally descended from *Sheivet Yehudah*. In a similar vein the *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Bereishis*

49:160) points out that *Mashiach ben David* will be maternally descended from Dan (while paternally descended from Yehudah).

The link between *Sheivet Dan* and *Sheivet Yehudah* is further emphasized in the *parshah* of the *Nesi'im* (*Bamidbar* 7:12,66). The first twelve days of the inauguration of the *Mishkan* were highlighted by the presentation of *karbanos* (sacrifice offerings) by a designated *Nasi* (prince). *Sheivet Yehudah's* designation was day one, while *Sheivet Dan's* designation was day ten. Kabbalistically, the respective numerals one and ten are considered to be the two holiest numbers (*Kuzari* 4:25).

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