

# WHAT DO WE REALLY SEE?

Many stories in Gemara, Midrash, and Zohar begin with an episode of great Tannaim walking or traveling on the road and witnessing something.

Then what often happens is that one Tanna explains that what they had just seen actually clarifies a certain possuk in Torah. The common expression in these anecdotes, “This is the meaning of the verse...”

At first glance, this transmits the beautiful message of how the great tzadikim would always connect things they saw to Torah. But on closer examination these stories can raise some difficult questions.

Are the concepts in Torah really so codependent on events in our lives, to the extent that even the great Tannaim needed them to understand what the Torah says?

The Rebbe asked this question, using the following story in Zohar as a target encounter to understand this point in the full spectrum of such episodes:

Rebbi Yosi was traveling when he met Rebbi Chiya, and they began discussing Torah.

Before Rebbi Yosi and Rebbi Chiya continued on their journey, they saw a man in a low-class neighborhood riding on a horse. The horseman rode into a private vineyard and broke off a branch of a tree.

Rebbi Yosi exclaimed, “This is the [meaning of the] verse, ‘And you should make yourselves holy and become holy.’ A man sanctifies himself from below and he is sanctified from above.”

How did Rebbi Yosi arrive at his conclusion? He saw the non-Jewish rider do one transgression by taking the horse into a neighbor’s vineyard. Once inside, he progressed to a second transgression and broke a branch off his neighbor’s tree.

## REACHING ABOVE AND STAYING BELOW

The Rebbe’s father, Harav Reb Levi Yitzchok explained that the horseman was riding on “*malchus of klipa*,” with the horse representing *malchus*. This



A LOOK AT THE TORAH OF  
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THROUGH THE REBBE'S SICHOS

was his defiling himself on his own initiative.

The second transgression was the horseman being influenced by Heaven. In the terminology of Kabbalah, he grasped *yesod* of *klipa*, represented by the tree branch. That means that once he started to sin, he was pushed from above to continue. This is represented in the story by the branch being above his head.

Rebbi Yosi explained that if such a thing exists in *klipa* it must exist equally and even more powerfully in *kedusha*. When one does an act of *kedusha*, he is pushed from on high to do more. When he makes himself holy, “*vehiskadishtem*,” he is sanctified from above, “*v’hiyisem kedoshim*—you will become holy.”

Additionally, Rebbi Yosi and Rebbi Chiya saw in themselves similar components of the horse and the branch. Rebbi Yosi represented *malchus* and Rebbi Chiya *yesod*.

### WHAT DIDN'T WE KNOW?

Didn't Rebbi Yosi know that one sin leads to another, and one mitzvah

leads to another? Why did he need the horseman to illustrate this idea?

Also not understood is how this is connected with the Zohar's introduction to the story. The Zohar tells us that when Rebbi Chiya and Rebbi Yosi met, they first began a Torah discussion. Rebbi Chiya explained to Rebbi Yosi what the *possuk* means, “And, therefore, I have sworn to the house of Eili, that the iniquity of the house of Eili shall not be purged by sacrifice or by offering forever.” Rebbi Chiya explained that *korbanos* cannot atone. Torah, however, does have the power to atone. Rebbi Chiya went on to express many other qualities of Torah, including *kedusha*, sanctity. Torah brings sanctity to man. At that moment, Rebbi Yosi saw the horseman and the rest of the story unfolded.

The Rebbe applied this perplexity to all stories of similar nature. Why can't the concepts of Torah be understood independently? Why the need for the stories—especially when contemplating the virtue of Torah, which surpasses all the sacrifices combined, as the Zohar points out?

### AFFIRMATION VS. EXPRESSION

The answer is that Rebbi Yosi never saw a horseman. He didn't see a vineyard, nor the branch or the horse.

Rebbi Yosi exclaimed, “*This is the meaning of the verse.*” He saw only the *possuk*.

He saw only the concept of “You should become holy because I am holy,” unfolding in front of his eyes in real life.

The Rebbe explains that we have been reading the stories incorrectly all this time. The stories that we read are not telling us how the great *tzaddikim* understood Torah through life examples in the world. Rather, the opposite is true. The stories illustrate to us how they saw the world. The world around them was only an expression and a mirror of the verses in Torah. As the Alter Rebbe once put it, “I don't see the beam, I see the *koach hapoel b'nifal* [Hashem's word creating it].”<sup>1</sup> **T**

1 Adapted from sichas Shabbos Parshas Kedoshim 5744.



לע"נ  
הרה"ח ר' יצחק נח ע"ה בן האדמו"ר  
משה מנחם מענדל מסלאנים ע"ה  
סילווער  
גלב"ע ח"י סיון ה'תשמ"ב  
הרה"ת ר' בנימין זאב ע"ה בן יבלחט"א  
הרה"ת ר' אברהם יוסף שיח"ל סילווער  
גלב"ע כ"ב סיון ה'תשע"ג  
תנ"צ'בה  
נדפס ע"י הרה"ת ר' אברהם יוסף  
וזוגתו מרת צבי' הינדא שיח"ו  
סילווער