

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

Elliot B. Gertel in his recent article "Moses, Elisha and Transferred Spirit" assumes that Elisha requests of Elijah that he (Elisha) desires double of the "Divine spirit" possessed by Elijah. Obviously, Gertel understands *pi shnayim* in II Kings 2:9 to mean "double". In modern Hebrew and in all dictionaries *pi shnayim* is indeed rendered as "double". But not so in Tanakh where the expression appears three times. In addition to II Kings 2:9, it is also found in Deuteronomy 21:17 and in Zechariah 13:8. Let us examine the other two, which may cast light on our verse.

In Deuteronomy 21:17 a man, about to divide his estate between a firstborn son and another son, is inclined toward favoring the latter. No, says Scripture. You may not do so. The firstborn is entitled to *pi shnayim*. In this case, he is to receive two-thirds and his younger brother one-third.

In Zechariah 13:8, we read as follows: *Throughout the land Pi shnayim shall perish, shall die and the remaining third shall survive*. Again, and even more convincingly, we find *pi shnayim* to mean "two-thirds". Logic would also dictate that no disciple would have the *chutzpa* to request double the Divine spirit possessed by his master and mentor. What Elisha requests is that he be granted a fraction – in this case, two-thirds – of his master's spirit. See the translation given in the N.J.P.S.

Saul Leeman
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Sir,

In "Moses and Samuel" (XXX:4, October-December 2002), Harvey Minkoff compares Samuel favorably to Moses. He notes Psalm 99:6 and Jeremiah 15:1, where Samuel is compared to Moses and Aaron.

Moses anoints Aaron as priest (Ex. 30:30), clearly delineating his own role as prophet from his brother's as priest. He also recognizes that prophecy is by a call of God to an individual, and is not dynastic. He does not anoint his sons to succeed him, but Joshua bin-Nun whom God established (Num. 27:23).

Samuel is the first and only one to be judge and priest and prophet together. Is that one of the reasons why the people wanted a king separate from a prophet? Samuel does not appoint his sons as his successors, but that is because the people reject them, since they *took bribes and perverted justice* (I Sam. 8:3).

In I Samuel 1:1, we are told that Samuel's father Elkanah was from the mountain of Ephraim and was an *ephrati*, presumably from the tribe of Ephraim, and Professor Minkoff calls Samuel *of Ephraim*. Samuel as priest acts as the successor of Eli (who, ironically, also had evil sons). When King Saul prepares and offers a sacrifice to God, Samuel arrives instantly after the offer is made and says '*What have you done?*' As priest, he claims to be the only one qualified to make sacrifices. (I Sam. 13:10-11). How does a priest come from the tribe of Ephraim?

What kind of a prophet was Samuel? Saul, the tragic and failed first King of Israel, was seemingly chosen by God, by Samuel, by lot, and by the people. Later, God tells Samuel to go to the house of Jesse and anoint another king whom He has chosen (I Sam. 16:3). Is God implying that He did not choose the first king? Samuel looks at Jesse's sons and chooses the first-born because of his appearance. God says to Samuel: '*Look not on his countenance, nor his height . . . the Lord looks on the heart*' (16:7). Saul also was handsome and very tall (9:2). Does this parallel imply that Samuel made a mistake in choosing Saul by his looks, and made the same mistake again many years later?

In contrast to a favorable comparison between Moses and Samuel, I would suggest that Samuel may have usurped the position of priest, tried to make the judgehood dynastic, and been a poor prophet.

Moshe Reiss
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Sir,

Once again, I continue to be impressed with your remarkable journal. It is a source of never ending information and creativity. The essays by Rabbi Derby are enriching and provocative.

The footnote #5 in his essay on Jonathan might have better fleshed out the identification of Shebuel with his thesis. Indeed, in I Chronicles 26:24, Shebuel is clearly identified as the son of Gershon, the son of Moses. One does not need rabbinic commentary to make that connection with Jonathan. It is almost self-evident.

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Sir,

I wish to express my appreciation for the very lucid article by Ronald T. Hyman "Amos 5:24: Prophetic, Chastising, Surprising, Poetic" (XXX:4, Oc-

tober-December 2002), analyzing the poetic qualities of Amos 5:24. It is rare that an author is able to bare the general principles of prophetic poetry by treating a single verse: *But let justice roll up like the waters and righteousness like a mighty stream*. Indeed, after focusing on these words, it occurred to me that the particular metaphors used by the prophet enable us to better understand the relationship between *mishpat* and *tzedakah*. Hyman points out that the two terms appear more than 40 times in *Tanakh* and together form a word-pair. To understand why this is so we must understand the difference between the two, which is blurred by the usual translations of "justice" for *mishpat* and "righteousness" for *tzedakah* which are not very precise.

A study of the occurrences of the term *mishpat* in all of its cognate forms in the Torah indicates that, as an abstract term, it denotes a "rule of law" based on morality because it: 1) precludes a state of anarchy which *every man does what is right in his own eyes*; 2) maintains equality before the law administered without discrimination; 3) disqualifies judges who take bribes. However, this alone is not sufficient to satisfy the moral requirements of a biblical God who loves *tzedek u'mishpat* (Ps. 99:4) which are the *foundations of His throne* (Ps. 97:2). *Mishpat* must always be enhanced by *tzedakah* – connoting equality and fairness – which addresses itself to the problems of inequality among individuals and society.

With this in mind, we are in a position to understand the subtle choice of metaphors in Amos 5:24: *mishpat* is likened to a *wave* and *tzedakah* to a *stream*. This enables us to graphically grasp the essential difference between the two. *Mishpat*, as a "rule of law," is a general societal condition, which engulfs the individual and the community as a *great wave*. However, *tzedakah* appears as a *mighty stream*, which sweeps away injustice in society. Thus, the difference in metaphor helps to underscore the conceptual difference between the terms, which is what a good metaphor is supposed to do.

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