



Torah Thoughts from the YIGC Community

Taking Stock, Looking Ahead
Letter from the Editors

This issue of *Clilei Hachodesh* is the seventh since we began last fall. Baruch Hashem, the first six monthly editions of this YIGC project have been very well received.

We also look forward to the third annual edition of *Clilei Torah MiCleveland*, which is scheduled to appear for the *Yamim Nora'im*.

Many of our members are already working on drafts for this third volume, and we would like to encourage everyone to consider contributing. We are available to help prepare an essay on any aspect of Torah that excites or intrigues you. Your thoughts are well worth sharing, and the experience of contributing is indeed fulfilling, bringing *nachas* not only to the writer, but also to his or her family and friends. Participation is welcome from members of all ages, including group/family efforts. We would appreciate receiving first drafts by **July 1st**.

Ronnie Shulman is available to discuss sponsorship opportunities, for both the monthly and annual publications. Sponsoring *Clilei HaChodesh* or *Clilei Torah* provides an opportunity to memorialize a loved one, celebrate an event, or simply share in the mitzvah of *harbatzas* Torah, the spreading of Torah thoughts.

As Shavuos approaches, we hope you will consider making a special effort to devote time to Torah study, to delve into whatever topic catches your heart, and to begin thinking about how you will share your learning with the YIGC community at large.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Sarah Rudolph and Rabbi Moshe Berger

Trop: Musical Interpretive Midrash; *The Case of Achitophel*

Jeffrey Lautman

It is well known that the cantillation notes, or *trop*, in Tanach represent not just punctuation but musical accompaniment appropriate to the text. In other words, the *trop* is interpretive, adding clarity, nuance, and depth to the Tanach's message. One classic example is the *shalshelet* on the word *וַיִּתְמַהֲמַה* in the story of Sodom's destruction (Bereishis 19:16). The word means to tarry, and the musical accompaniment is the longest note of our *trop*, enhancing the portrayal of Lot's hesitation.

In our Shabbos morning Tanach class, we have noted other such instances, often involving entire sentences or chapters. The example we shall present here is from chapter 17, verse 23, in the second book of Shmuel. This verse describes the death of Achitophel, who had been King David's most trusted advisor before supporting Avshalom's rebellion.

<p>וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ אֶל-עִירוֹ וַיִּצַו אֶל-בָּיתוֹ וַיַּחַגְמֵק וַיָּמָת וַיִּקְבֹּר בְּקִבְרֵי אָבִיו {ס}</p>	<p>and went to his home, to his city, and commanded his house, and strangled himself; and he died, and was buried in the tomb of his father. {S}</p>
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Let us set up the situation and break down the pasuk. Achitophel has realized that, because Avshalom refused to take his advice, the rebellion is doomed and he will inevitably be executed; as the phrase goes, he is a "dead man walking." It will be an ignominious death: the king will take over his possessions, leaving his family penniless, and he will not receive a proper burial in his family plot, but rather be interred in the section of a cemetery designated for executed criminals. Certainly a very depressing, dour situation to look forward to – leading Achitophel to choose the course of action described in our pasuk.

In the first three phrases of our pasuk, the descending notes *revi'i* and *zarka* are prominent, leaving us with an overwhelming musical sense of downward movement. That

<p>כִּי לֹא נִעְשְׂתָהּ עֲצָתוֹ וַיַּחַבֵּשׁ אֶת-הַחֲמֹר וַיָּקָם</p>	<p>23 And Achitophel saw that his counsel was not followed. He saddled his donkey, and arose,</p>
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very much corresponds to the situation in which Achitophel finds himself, and no doubt is an accurate musical representation of his feelings of doom.

Then, however, comes a strange one-word break. The *trop* on the word ויקם, “and he went up,” is known as an *azlageresh* and is ascending. This indicates a dramatic shift for Achitophel, to a more positive frame of mind.

The next three phrases, culminating with “and he strangled himself,” are vocalized with more straightforward *trop*, as Achitophel returns to his city, issues a final decree to his household, and then dies. His death is first described in a matter-of-fact tune, with the word “ויחנק,” and then with the word “וימת” – this time, with a *zakef-gadol*, which is a prolonged, more dramatic *trop*.

Finally, we return to the non-dramatic, as the pasuk concludes that he was buried in the family plot.

The shifts in *trop* in this pasuk represent a roller coaster of emotions. In the midst of Achitophel’s sadness, contemplating not only his death but the shame and poverty it will bring upon his family, he suddenly has an idea. “What if I can escape the king’s execution and preserve my family’s fortune and name?” After the downward tone of the first few phrases, his idea is marked by the word “ויקם,” “he arose,” and its rising *trop*. “I will arrange my own death and control its consequences!”

Achitophel then returns home and “commands” his family. The Gemara in Bava Basra (147a) tells us he gave them three charges. His first and third commands related specifically to the running of the household: he told them to get along with each other, and advised them on particularly advantageous times to plant. His middle decree, however, shows us where he wants them to go politically, based on his current situation: he advises them to lay low and not make any trouble for David kingdom.

This Talmudic elaboration reinforces the message implied by the *trop*; it reflects the resolute control which Achitophel found within himself following his initial depression. He now realizes that, although he will not live, he nevertheless possesses the ability to determine how he will die; in addition, he actualizes his desire to provide his family with guidance and security after his death.

Following these final exhortations, Achitophel dies – specifically, “ויחנק,” meaning, death through strangulation. Why this death?

The seventh chapter of Tractate Sanhedrin tells us there are four types of execution: stoning, burning, the sword, and strangulation, in order of decreasing severity. If the king executes a person, it is by the sword. Achitophel, however, chose the least severe form for himself – “חניקה,” or strangulation. The Gemara elaborates that this form of death leaves no mark on the body: it is the form applied when death is decreed from heaven (מיתה בידי שמים), and a divinely-arranged death leaves no mark; so טס, when חניקה is done בידי אדם, by human hands, it leaves no mark. By choosing this form of death, therefore, Achitophel can arrange his death without it looking like suicide.

That is why the next word, “וימת,” gets a long, elaborate *trop* – showing that Achitophel has successfully achieved the most self-determination possible under the circumstances.

Achitophel’s story concludes with the matter-of-fact statement, and *trop*, telling us he is buried in his family plot.

Dramatic changes in *trop* are associated with dramatic changes in character and in action. I am certain that the *baalei mesorah* were brilliant in musicology as well as in their biblical scholarship. The more we probe, the more we find these insightful enhancements.

Sponsoring Clilei HaChodesh is an opportunity to support the cultivation and spread of Torah while honoring a loved one.

**In memory of our Great Uncle, Rabbi Harry Gardin
(R' Boruch Tzvi ben R' Yehuda) זצ"ל,
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