

THE POWER OF WORDS

The uninformed reader may not be aware of the fact that many passages in Scriptures have been composed in such a way that they convey a certain message - not only through the meaning of the words, but also through the form and the arrangement and the sound of the words. The idea behind many passages in Scriptures is that when someone reads that passage in the original language, the intended message is strengthened by language tools (or figures of speech) such as sound play (a repetition of the same sound in different words) or word play (a repetition of the same root word, but with different meanings) and simple word repetition. An excellent example of this may be found in YeshaYahu 24:16-17. The translation of The Scriptures is as follows: "But I say, I waste away, I waste away! Woe to me! The treacherous betray, with treachery the treacherous betray. Fear and the pit and the snare are upon you". In the Hebrew one can clearly see how the writer made use of language tools to strengthen the effect of his words:

"razi li razi li oi li" (notice the repetition of the word "li" and the fact that these six words all end with the "i" sound);

"bogedim bagadu ubeged bogedim bagadu" (notice that these five words are all different forms of the same root "bagad" which means to betray)

"pachad wapachat wapach alecha" (notice how the first three words of this section all contain the sound "pach")

What is the purpose of the wordplay in these three sentences? Clearly, it serves to put even more emphases on the words than what is already conveyed by their plain meaning. Words alone are sometimes inadequate to fully express a certain attitude or emotion. The repetition of the "i" sound in the first sentence emphasises that the prophet himself is in a desperate state because of what has become of the world around him (Hebrew words referring to the first person usually end with an "i"). The fivefold repetition of the word "bagad" emphasises the feeling of utter betrayal that consumes the being of the prophet. And the various forms of "pach" in the third sentence convey the feeling that everyone is caught up in this wave of betrayal and may be compared to birds or animals being covered or captured with a net. Let us look at a number of other places in Scriptures where wordplay is used in a similar way to emphasise the importance of certain truths.

Bereshit (Genesis) 1:3 And Elohim said, Let there be ("yehi", from the root "hayah") light, and there was ("wayehi") light. (Yahweh, through the power of his Name, is both the one who calls into existence and perfects that which he had called into existence).

Bereshit 2:25; 3:1 And they were both naked ("arumim", from the root "aram"), the man and his wife, yet they were not ashamed. And the serpent was more crafty ("arum", from the root "aram") than any beast of the field which Yahweh Elohim had made (Satan, by his craftiness, managed to turn nakedness into shame and perversion).

Devarim (Deut) 32:21 They made Me jealous ("kinúni", from the root "kana") by what is not I, They provoked Me with their worthless matters. But I make them jealous ("akniém", from the root "kana") by those who are no people, I provoke them with a foolish nation. (The way in which Yahweh reveals his "jealousy" is the complete opposite of the way we would have expected it).

Mishleh (Proverbs) 19:16 He who guards ("shomer", from the root "shamar") the command protects ("shomer", from the root "shamar") his life, He who despises His ways dies (Guarding the commands of Yahweh is the only guaranteed way of protecting one's life against the real dangers of this world).

Kohelet (Eccl) 7:1 A good name ("shem") is better than precious oil ("shemen"), and the day of death than the day of one's birth. (Inner qualities and what a person essentially IS, is so much better [and more worthwhile] than outward qualities and what a person HAS).

YermeYahu 10:11 The mighty ones that did not make ("avadu", from the root "avad" which means "to make") the heavens and the earth shall perish ("yevadu", from the root "avad" which means "to destroy") from the earth and from under these heavens. (There is a immeasurable difference between Yahweh and the mighty ones people often choose for themselves.)

Yonah 1:2-3 Arise, go ("qum, lech") to Nineweh, the great city, and cry out against it, for their evils have come up before Me. But Yonah rose up to flee ("wayaqam livroach") to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh (Knowing what is the right thing to do, we often start off in a promising way but end up doing exactly the opposite thing).