



Dalet represents the number four in *gematria*, and some of the most famous fours are in the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*. We drink four cups of wine, ask four questions, and discuss four types of sons.

What these fours have in common is the concept of humility. The first two letters of *Dalet* are *Dalet-Lamed*, which spell *dull*, the Hebrew word for a poor person. Therefore, when explaining the letters of the *Aleph-Bais*, the *Gemora* says this about the letters *Gimmel* and *Dalet*:

Gimmel-Dalet means give to the poor (*gemol dalim*). Why is the leg of the *Gimmel* extended toward the *Dalet*? Because one who bestows loving-kindness pursues the poor. (*Shabbos* 104a)

Dalet itself figures prominently in the *Shema*, being the last letter of the word *Echad*. In a *Sefer Torah*, it is even written larger than the previous letters, making it stand out like the *Ayin* of the word *Shema*. Together, they spell *aid*, which means *witness* since we give testimony to God's Oneness when we say the verse.

As such, *Dalet* also alludes to the four directions of north, south, east, and west, all of which belong to God. Perhaps this is the reason for the story mentioned earlier for the letter *Raishb*:

[The Romans then sent] Nero Caesar against the Jews. When he came [to Jerusalem, he wanted to see his chances of success, so] he shot an arrow to the east and it fell in Jerusalem. [He shot another arrow] to the west [and it also] fell in Jerusalem. [He shot an arrow] in all four directions. . . (*Gittin* 56a)

Perhaps Nero wanted to see if God controlled all *four* directions of the world, not just the one to Jerusalem. When he saw that He did, Nero realized he was in the wrong business and served the wrong God. So against all logic of the outside world, he followed the logic of his inside world and converted to Judaism.

There is a similar story also in the *Gemora*:

[When Nebuzaradan, the commander of Nebuchadnezzar's army, reached the Sanctuary,] he saw the

blood of Zechariah boiling. [It had not calmed since he was killed in the Temple, so Nebuzaradan] asked: “What is this?”

They told him: “It is the blood of offerings that was spilled.”

[Nebuzaradan] said to them: “Bring [animals] and I will test [to determine] if [the blood of the animals] is similar [to the blood that is boiling].”

He slaughtered [the animals] and [their blood] was not similar [to the boiling blood. Nebuzaradan told them: “Reveal [the source of that blood] to me, and if not I will comb your flesh with an iron comb.”

[The *kobanim*] told [Nebuzaradan]: “This blood is the blood of a priest and a prophet who prophesied for the Jewish people with regard to the destruction of Jerusalem and whom they killed.”

He said, “I will pacify [the blood so the boiling will stop].”

He brought the *Chachamim* and killed them over [the blood] and it did not stop. He brought school-children and killed them over [the blood] and its boiling did not stop. He brought young priests and killed them over [the blood] and [its boiling] did not stop. [He continued killing] until he killed 940,000 people, and still it did not stop [boiling]. [Nebuzaradan] approached [the blood] and said: “Zechariah, Zechariah, the worthy among them I killed [on your behalf]. Is it satisfactory for you that I

kill them all?”

Immediately [the boiling] stopped. [Nebuzaradan] considered repentance. He said: “If they, who caused only one person to die [only atoned after all] this [killing, then with regard to] that man (i.e., himself), what will be [required] for him to atone?”

He deserted [his army] and sent [a last] will to his house and converted. (*Sanbedrin* 96b)

Another truly remarkable story about which one could ask many questions. But the point is the point. Like Nero after him, Nebuzaradan was humbled by what he saw and experienced, which is saying an awful lot for very proud and usually arrogant Babylonian and Roman warriors. What a testimony to the world of the reality of God and His Torah.

It was this newfound sense of humility inspired by the *Dalet* that led to their *teshuvab*. Even more amazing is what it led to: Nebuzaradan, the *Gemora* says, became a righteous convert. Nero not only became a righteous convert, but the great Rebi Meir even descended from him.¹ And all of *that* is alluded to by the *Dalet*.

¹ *Gittin* 56a.