

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir,

In the article "And Dinah the Daughter of Leah Went Out," by Gilad J. Gevaryahu (Issue XXXVII:2 – April-June 2009), mention might have been made of the word "*vateze*" in Judges 4:18 describing Jael. As was the case with Dinah and with Leah, the term here also has sexual connotations (see 5:27, *bein ragleha* even though it is translated as "at her feet").

Fred Gottlieb
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AUTHOR'S REPLY:

Thanks for the comment. Indeed *vateze* in Judges 4:18 is an excellent parallel situation, but since Rashi does not comment on the word there, I did not use it. The same applies to Judges 4:22. I agree that it has the sexual connotation, especially based on Judges 5:27, but again Rashi is silent there, and so I could not use it to advance my understanding of Rashi.

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Sir,

"Koheleth and Goethe's Faust" by Isaac Rosenberg (Issue XXXVII:2 – April-June 2009) is highly interesting. Years ago, I held a conference on the same topic, but I came to different conclusions. Instead of finding "the same theme and the same basic idea," I see a fundamental difference in aim and problem setting, Goethe representing the Hellenistic science-orientated views of the world and Koheleth the Jewish ethical one.

When it comes to evaluating a piece of art it is always necessary to consider the time and place from which it stems. Goethe lived at the beginning of modern technology (1749-1832); his generation was drunk on the perspectives opened by the discoveries of the previous century. For the first time in human history, machines supplied energy and made its use independent of wind, water, and muscular force; the basic discoveries of chemistry, physics, and astronomy changed the comprehension of the universe and challenged religion. There was a belief that in the near future everything could be known and done.

Reflecting this genius of the period, Faust in the opening verses of his monologue, after despairing of the uselessness of what he had learned by conventional means, turns to magic "that I may recognize what in its innermost binds the World together, see all the power behind the effects and the nature of the seed." At the same time, he rejects the religious answer, saying, "I do not fear heavens and devil." So, Faust's quest is only for knowledge to understand how the clock mechanism of the universe operates, not for wisdom to find the purpose of the world and the sense of life. And when even this way is closed and an intention of suicide fails, he finally accepts Mephisto's proposal to substitute the useless effort of knowledge with infinite enjoyment in life here against hell in afterlife, conditioned to the Devil's success in getting him satisfied to the point that he would want that moment to endure, which he wagers will never occur.

The second part of the drama, written many decades after the first by the old Goethe, changes the goal. Instead of seeking satisfactions by enjoyment, Faust now strives for satisfaction by work for general progress. But even so the fundamental wager remains solely the impossibility of absolute personal satisfaction.

On the other side, I see *Koheleth* (like *Ruth*) as a work written during the threat of forced assimilation to the Hellenistic culture under the Seleucid rule. The author submits the entire Greek philosophical schools en vogue to revision and finds them useless to give an answer to the meaning and purpose of transient and fleeting life, an answer which only the belief in and submission to God can yield.

In other words: Faust represents the endeavor to get more and *Koheleth* the endeavor to be more. (That is no value judgment, since both forces are indispensable for human progress).

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