

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF G-D

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Today's Learning
Mikvaot 10:8-11:1
Kitzur 201:6-202:3
Pesachim 27
Yerushalmi Eruvin 60

This week's parashah tells us (28:9), "*You shall walk in His ways,*" teaching that a person, through his good deeds, actually can walk in Hashem's footsteps. R' Eliezer Zvi of Komarno z"l (died 1898) observes, though, that most of us don't believe this teaching; we do not believe in our own spiritual potential.

For example, how often do we pray, and, when we see that we are not answered, we assume that our prayers cannot really make a difference? The Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (died 1760) taught that this is the result of excessive self-deprecation. A person must believe that his prayers have untold consequences in the heavens, even if he does not see those effects. If a person did believe this, R' Eliezer Zvi adds, how joyfully would he pray?! How carefully would he pronounce every letter, every syllable?!

If a person believed that he is (in the words of Bereishit 28:12) "a ladder standing on the ground with

its head in the heavens," if he believed that every movement, every word, every step and every business deal makes a spiritual impact on the world, he would do all of those things for the sake of Heaven. Also, the Zohar comments, "If people knew the love with which Hashem loves the Jewish people, they would roar like lions in their eagerness to follow Him."

On the other hand, if a person thinks that he cannot make a difference, he should know that he is on the road to heresy. If a person thinks that way, it is a sign that the yetzer hara has succeeded with him and will soon deprive him of life in this world and in the next.

Rather than despair, one can learn from Yaakov, who said (Bereishit 35:5), "I lived with Lavan and I delayed until now." The letters of "Lavan" are the reverse of the letters of "Naval"/"degenerate one," a reference to the yetzer hara. Why was Yaakov successful in turning around the "naval" and "whitening" (from "lavan"/"white") it? Because "I delayed until now," i.e., because he did not expect immediate results from his prayers and mitzvot, but rather had faith that the results would come with time. (Zekan Beto, p.216)

"On this day, Hashem, your G-d, commands you to perform these decrees and the statutes . . . You have distinguished ("he'emmarta") Hashem today to be a G-d for you . . . And Hashem has distinguished you ("he'emmarcha") today to be for Him a treasured people . . ." (26:16-19)

R' Yaakov Abuchatzzeirah z"l writes: In these verses, Moshe informed the Jewish people that their actions here "build worlds" in heaven [i.e., have enormous spiritual consequences]. Accordingly, Bnei Yisrael should not take lightly the performance of mitzvot, the study of Torah or proper prayer. Even man's pure thoughts can "build worlds" above.

Man has this opportunity every single day; therefore Moshe said, "On this day . . ." Chazal interpret this verse to teach that one should approach mitzvot every day as if they are fresh, as if the Torah had been given on that very day. Since man can build new worlds every day, he should approach his task fresh every day.

In the same vein Moshe continued: "You have distinguished Hashem," i.e., through your speech ("amirah") (note the common root "amar" of the two Hebrew words), your prayers and Torah study, you create new worlds over which Hashem can rule.

The proof of the power of speech is that "Hashem has distinguished you" through. His speech (again, note the root "amar"). Indeed, everything Hashem does is said to be through speech [see Avot 5:1]. (Pitched Chatham)

*"On this day you have become a people . . .
" (27:9)*

Rashi writes: "Every day should be in your eyes like the day that you entered into His covenant."

The gemara similarly comments: "Was the Torah given on that day? The Torah had been given 40 years earlier! However, the intent of this verse is that Torah should be beloved by those who study it as if it had been given that day. The sage, R' Tanchum the son of R' Chaninah from Kfar Acco, said, 'A person may recite Shma every morning and every evening, but if he misses it once, it is as if he never recited the Shma'."

R' Moshe Sternbuch shlita explains: A person is obligated to improve himself every day, and, having done so, to enter the covenant anew on the higher level where he now stands. This, in turn, will make him realize that he never kept the Torah sufficiently before, and he will begin to observe it as if it is new.

This is the idea behind the daily recitation of Shma. Every day, a person accepts the yoke of Heaven upon himself, but, hopefully, on a different level than his acceptance on the day before. And, if a person is improving himself daily, than yesterday's Shma will be insignificant compared to today's - as if he never recited the Shma. It follows that if one missed today's Shma, it is as if he never read Shma at all. (Ta'am Va'da'at)

The Midrash Tanchumah states that this parashah contains 99 distinct punishments that await the Jewish people if they sin. Why that number?

R' Elazar Rokeach z"l (18th century) explains: The maximum number of lashes that an earthly court can inflict is 39. Also, the gemara (Chagigah 15a) refers to a punishment which is inflicted by the Heavenly court called, "Sixty lashes of fire." Together, these total 99.

Also, the Hebrew representation of 99 is the letters "tzaddi- tet." The letter "tzaddi" is sometimes called "tzaddik." When the names of the letters "tzaddik-tet" are spelled out in Hebrew, the result is: "tzadi-dalet-yud-kuf-tet-taf," whose gematria is: 90+4+10+100+9+400 = 613. This teaches that the 99 punishments come to those who fail to observe the 613 mitzvot. In particular, we learn that G-d punishes us for failing to observe the positive commandments, something which is not mentioned in the Torah (See below).

Rashi writes (in next week's parashah - 29:12) that the number of punishments is 98. However, writes R' Rokeach, another midrash says that the punishments in this parashah were inflicted at the time that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed. If we add the destruction of the Bet

Hamikdash to the 98 punishments, there are 99. (Ma'aseh Rokeach)

Does Hashem punish man for failing to observe the positive commandments, or does man merely lose the opportunity to be rewarded? For example, if a man misses an opportunity to wear tzitzit, is he punished for it?

The gemara (Menachot 41a) teaches that Hashem does not punish for such sins alone, but when He becomes angry and punishes for other sins, he throws into the equation man's failure to observe the positive commandments.

Is a person punished only if he wears a four-cornered garment and fails to attach tzitzit to it, or also if he fails to wear a four-cornered garment so that he will not have to wear tzitzit? R' Yosef Dov Soloveitchik z"l (died 1892) writes that even the latter person is punished because his actions demonstrate his disdain for mitzvot. (Bet Halevi: D'rush 11)

In contrast, the proper attitude towards mitzvot is demonstrated by Moshe Rabbenu, who wanted to enter Eretz Yisrael in order to observe its unique mitzvot. Although he was not presently obligated to observe them, he wanted to be obligated. (Tosfot: Shabbat 32a)

An Astonishing Midrash

"There is no peace,' Hashem said, 'for the wicked'" (Yishayah 48:22) - this proves that Hashem loves the wicked.

Chazal say that when the wicked are dispersed, it is for their own good, so that they will be unable to conspire together. Similarly, if there is no peace among the wicked, it is for their own good, because Hashem loves them and wants to keep them out of trouble. (Binat Nevonim)

*R' Menachem Ha'meiri z"l
born approx. 5009/1249 - died approx. 5066/1306*

R' Menachem ben Shlomo Ha'meiri, who, until modern times, was virtually unknown to any but the most erudite scholars, is today one of the most quoted commentators wherever Talmud is studied. Meiri's popularity is due to the rediscovery and publication of his monumental Bet Ha'bechirah on most of the

Talmud. Meiri's commentary is unique in its lucid and facile presentation and in its very arrangement. Strictly speaking, Bet Ha'bechirah is not a commentary at all, but a digest of the gemara's comments, arranged in the form of a commentary to the mishnah. This digest, however, is given together with all the pertinent interpretations of the greatest authorities up to and including his time.

In addition to Bet Ha'bechirah (which he completed in fifteen years), Meiri also composed novellae to many tractates in the style of the classic Spanish commentators. His other works include Chibbur Ha'teshuvah, on repentance; Magen Avot, defending the customs of Provence; and books on other subjects. He also authored a Tanach commentary, of which only the portions on Tehilim and Mishlei are known.

R' Menachem was a student of R' Reuven ben Chaim and was a descendant of several distinguished Provencal scholars. (Source: The ArtScroll Rishonim, p. 175)

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