

THE KINDNESS OF HASHEM

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Today's Learning:
Ma'aser Sheni 2:8-9
Orach Chaim 167:4-6
Daf Yomi: Megillah 12
Yerushalmi Yevamot 47

Siddur Avodat Yisrael writes that there is a chapter of Tehilim which corresponds to each parashah - this week, psalm 71. Once again, the selection appears to be related to the season; indeed, it contains a verse which is found in the selichot each day: "Do not cast me off in the time of [my] old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me." (In our prayers, however, we change the singular to the plural.)

David recited this psalm as he fled from his son Avshalom. The entire chapter is the cry of a helpless man who has no hope but G-d. "In You Hashem I took refuge, let me not ever be shamed. In Your righteousness rescue me and give me escape, incline Your ear to me and save me. . . Hashem, be not far from me; my G-d, hasten to my assistance." Similarly, Chazal say that no one can really repent and improve his ways without G-d's help. Also, these verses remind us of the obligation to appreciate G-d's kindness, a theme addressed in our parashah (32:6, see Ramban).

The psalm ends on a joyous note: "I, too, shall thank You on the neivel [an instrument], for Your faithfulness, my G-d, I shall sing to You on the kinor [also an instrument] Holy One of Israel. My lips shall rejoice when I sing to You, and my soul which You have redeemed." Perhaps this selection also alludes to our confidence that G-d will forgive us on Yom Kippur and to the joyous holiday of Sukkot which follows. May we all be inscribed and sealed for a good year.

"Is it to Hashem that you do this, O vile/naval and unwise people? Is He not your Father, your Creator? Has He not made you and established you?" (32:6)

"They provoked Me with a non-god, angered Me with their vanities; so I shall provoke them with a non-people, with a vile/naval nation shall I anger them." (32:21)

Commentaries write that the second verse quoted above is the punishment for the sin of the first verse. Rashi writes that the "vile nation" described in the second verse is one that denies G-d. The question is, therefore, how is it a fitting punishment for our ingratitude that we will be enslaved by non-believers?

R' Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg shlita explains that failure to show gratitude to G-d leads to not believing in Him. This progression is demonstrated in the Torah in the actions of Pharaoh--first he denied Yosef's kindness, then he said, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to Him?" (Derech Emunah U'vitachon p. 212)

"The Rock/Tzur that gave birth to you you have weakened. . ." (32:18)

Rashi explains: Hashem would like to do good for us, but we weaken Him, so-to-speak, in that our sins do not allow Him to be kind to us.

R' Yehuda Alkali z"l (Sarajevo; 1798-1878) writes that this verse alludes to Haman, who is called the "tzorer"/"one who terrorizes" the Jews. The difference between the words "Tzur" and "tzorer" is the letter "resh" which has a numerical value of 200. This is the numerical value of the words "yayin nesech"/"non-kosher wine," which Haman offered the Jews to drink at the king's banquet. This alludes to the fact that Haman hoped to turn the Jews away from G-d (and "weaken" Him) through wine.

Haman attacked Hashem's "rulership"/"malchut." Add 200 to the word "malchut" (496) and you have "tzarot"/"troubles." These are the troubles which Haman caused us.

Chazal say that among the earliest creations were Hashem's "throne" and the plans for the Bet Hamikdash. These are learned from the verse (Yirmiyahu 17:12), "A throne of honor, exalted, from the first--the place of our Temple." In Hebrew: "Kisei kavod marom me'rishon mekom mikdashenu." The first letters of this verse (kaf, kaf, mem, mem, mem, mem) also add up to 200. However, Amalek,

from which Haman came, weakens the very throne of Hashem (see Shmot 17:16). Take away the two kafs, representing "kisei kavod"/"a throne of honor," and the 200 becomes 160. This is the value of the word "kesef"/"silver," representing the bounty which Haman offered Achashveirosh. (Shlom Yerushalayim p.164)

"Return, Israel, to Hashem, your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity." (From the haftarah - Hoshea 14:2)

R' Shaul Yisraeli z"l (rosh yeshiva at Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav) asks: Why does the prophet direct his call to repentance to "Yisrael" rather than to "Yaakov"? (The name "Yisrael" denotes those among the People who have attained the highest spiritual level. The name "Yaakov" denotes a lower spiritual level.)

R' Yisraeli answers as follows:

Rambam writes that it is impossible for a person to weigh his own merits against his sins. This is a task that only the Omnipotent can accomplish.

Why? R' Yisraeli explains that a deed that is done, whether for good or for evil, does not exist in isolation. It sends out waves, i.e., it impacts not only the one who did it but also his surroundings. Also, it begins a chain - each good deed begets another, and the same is true of a bad deed. Although we know that these effects exist, they are for the most part imperceptible to us. Accordingly, one cannot weigh his own merits or sins.

We are taught that Hashem judges those closest to Him most strictly. Why? Because their minor errors make greater "waves" than the intentional sins of lesser people and have a greater detrimental effect on the world as a whole. [Ed. note: Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that if one stands near the center of a circle - representing proximity to Hashem - and turns away even a hairsbreadth, he will end up more degrees off-course than would a person standing farther from the center who turns the same "hairsbreadth."] Thus, it is precisely those who are called "Yisrael," i.e., who are on the loftiest levels, who must return even from their iniquities, i.e., their minor sins. (From the website of Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav)

Letters from our Sages

This week's letter was written by R' Yisrael Salanter z"l (died 1883) and is printed in Ohr Yisrael, No. 15. The letter is dated on this day in 5637/1876.

The foundation of the days of repentance is to accept upon oneself to abandon sin. This is the most difficult of all the tasks that we have on Yom Kippur. The weightiest sin of all is theft, as Chazal said,

"Of a box full of sins, which one accuses first? Theft."

Man must seek [ways] to repent on Yom Kippur, especially from the most serious sins. What is "serious" depends upon the circumstances; the easier a particular sin is to avoid, the more serious the sin is considered to be and the greater is the punishment. This is what Chazal meant when they said, "The punishment for not wearing the white strings of the tzitzit is greater than the punishment for not wearing the techelet/blue string." The severity of a sin also depends on the identity of the victim; for example, stealing from a poor person is worse than stealing from a wealthy person . . .

The same is true with regard to other sins, including bittul Torah/neglecting Torah study. The easier it is for a person to study, for example, on Shabbat, when one is free, the greater is the sin of not doing so. Likewise, the sin of not studying that which one needs to know in practice is greater than the sin of not studying other parts of the Torah . . .

One needs to search his ways and make a strong commitment - in almost every area of his life - to guard at least from those things that are easy to avoid. In this way, one's teshuvah will cover the majority of his deeds. Rambam teaches that sins are not weighed by their quantity, but rather by their quality; one sin that was easy to avoid counts more than several sins that were difficult to avoid. Also, within each sin, there are aspects that are easier to avoid than others . . .

One should study mussar works that speak of the severity of bittul Torah . . .

Sponsored by Bert Anker, Judy Gabel and Harvey Anker on the yahrzeit of their father, Moe Anker a"h

Rochelle Dimont and family on the yahrzeit of husband and father, Rabbi Albert Dimont a"h

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