

A RIGHT FOR REASONS

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Today's Learning:

Pe'ah 2:4-5

Orach Chaim 53:23-25

Daf Yomi: Yoma 40

Yerushalmi Yoma 33

This week's parashah contains civil laws and laws regarding the judicial system, two types of rules without which no society could exist. Rashi writes that the parashah begins with the conjunction "And" to remind us that just as the Aseret Ha'dibrot in last week's parashah were given at Sinai, so the laws in this week's parashah were given at Sinai.

Why must the Torah remind us of this fact? R' Yitzchak Meir z"l (died 1866; the first "Gerrer Rebbe," known as the "Chiddushei Ha'rim") explains that because these laws are both essential and logical, there is a risk that one would think that they are man-made. The Torah therefore instructs us that they were given at Sinai and that they should be observed, not because they are logical, but because they are G-d's will.

Rashi writes that Moshe might not have taught Bnei Yisrael the reasons for the mitzvot in this parashah, but Hashem commanded that he should. The Sefat Emet (the second "Gerrer Rebbe") explains similarly that Moshe did not want the Jewish people to observe the mitzvot because they agreed with the reasons. He wanted to ensure that Bnei Yisrael observed the mitzvot as G-d's decrees.

Hashem told Moshe, "No! Teach them the reasons. The real challenge is to understand the mitzvot and _nevertheless_ to observe them solely because that is the will of Hashem." (Quoted in Ma'ayanah Shel Torah)

"He shall provide for healing." (21:19)

The midrash offers two interpretations of the verse (Iyov 36:19), "Ought then your prayers make you free of care and from all overwhelming experiences?" The sage Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat interprets, "Honor your Healer before you need Him." Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish interprets, "Arrange your prayer before your Creator so that you shall not be oppressed from above."

What are these sages teaching?

R' Moshe Yaakov Beck z"l (20th century rabbi in Hungary and later New York) observes that the statements of these two sages in the midrash appear to be consistent with their teachings in Sanhedrin (44b). There, R' Elazar says, "A person should always pray before troubles come." R' Shimon ben Lakish says, "Whoever prays mightily below will have no oppressors above." R' Beck explains that these two sages disagree as to which person shows greater trust in G-d - one who recognizes Hashem even when he is not immediately in need (by praying that Hashem keep suffering away) or one who expresses confidence that no matter how terrible one's suffering, Hashem can save the person from it.

(She'eilot U'teshuvot Chemdat Moshe: Introduction p.17)

"To the poor person with you . . ." (22:24)

The poor person's money is with you, and you must therefore give charity. The money that you possess is only a bailment with which Hashem has entrusted you so that you can support the poor.

(Ma'aseh Rokeach; quoted in Ma'ayanah Shel Torah)

"When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you . . ." (22:24)

The gemara (Ta'anit 24b-25a) relates that the sage Rabbi Chaninah ben Dosa was so poor that his weekly consumption of food was limited to a quart of carobs. (Rashi writes that R' Chaninah could

not even afford bread for Shabbat.) The gemara continues:

His wife said to him, "How long will we suffer so?" He responded, "What shall I do?" She answered, "Pray that you be given something." He prayed, and he was presented with a golden table leg. Thereafter, he [some say, she] dreamt that all of the tzaddikim in Heaven sat at tables with three legs, while R' Chaninah sat at a table with only two legs. He discussed this with his wife and then prayed that the table leg be taken away from him.

R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (died 1764) asks several questions regarding this gemara: Why was R' Chaninah's wife complaining? Surely she was righteous like her husband and was not troubled by poverty! Also, why do all tzaddikim sit at three-legged tables, and what is the meaning of R' Chaninah's losing a table leg? He explains as follows:

The complaint of R' Chaninah's wife was not that she was hungry but, rather, that she could not perform the mitzvah of tzedakah. It pained her to see a poor person and to know that she could do nothing to ease his suffering. She therefore asked her husband to pray that Hashem give them the means to give charity.

However, what happened as a result of R' Chaninah's prayers was the opposite of what his wife intended. When a person truly desires to perform a mitzvah but he is prevented from doing so by circumstances that are completely beyond his control, Hashem views it as if that person had, in fact, performed that mitzvah. Thus, so long as R' Chaninah and his wife were paupers and were unable to give charity, Hashem judged them as if they actually had given a great deal of charity.

On the other hand, when a person does have money and actually gives charity, he can never be sure that he has performed the mitzvah properly. Has he given as much as he should? Has he prioritized his donations properly? Has he, in fact, given substantial sums of money to people who were not deserving?

The three-legged tables in R' Chaninah's (or his wife's) dream represented the three pillars on which the world stands: Torah study, prayer and acts of kindness. Tzaddikim who have served Hashem in each of the three areas sit at tables with three legs. Had R' Chaninah and his wife remained poor, they also would have sat at a three-legged table because Hashem would have credited them with the mitzvah of charity (i.e. kindness) that they wanted to perform but couldn't. However, once they became wealthy, they became obligated to give charity, and they risked losing a table leg if they did not perform the mitzvah properly.

(Ya'arot Devash Vol. I, end of Drush 4)

"Distance yourself from a false word . . ." (23:7)

R' Zusia of Anipol z"l (18th century chassidic rebbe) said, "When you speak untruths, you distance yourself from Hashem and all of your good deeds will not draw you close again."

R' Zusia's brother, R' Elimelech, said, "I am confident that when I am asked Above whether I toiled in Torah study, I will tell the truth: 'I did not.' The outcome will be that because I told the truth, I will merit a place in the World-to-Come."

(quoted in Itturei Torah)

Letters from Our Sages

The following letter was written on behalf of R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (1905-1993; the "Klausenberger Rebbe"). It appears to be a response to an individual who was dissatisfied with a perceived lack of opportunities to serve Hashem. The letter appears in Michtavei Torah, Volume IV, p.71.

Your precious letter . . . was received by the Rebbe (shlita) [atzal]. The Rebbe instructed me to write to you that in his opinion, the meaning of the verse [Mishlei 3:6], "In all your ways know Him," is as follows: Whatever direction a person "happens" to go, on whatever path a person's life takes him, he must know Hashem and serve Him with all his heart. A person may not let his spirit fall or get caught up in thoughts of hopelessness over the fact that G-d did not direct him along a smoother road. Rather, in all your ways know Him - as you are and in whatever circumstances you find yourself.

Therefore, if one who is not fortunate enough to make the Torah his full-time occupation and he works to support his household by the toil of his hands, he should serve Hashem through his work and he should remember the words of the Sages [Avot Ch.2], "Torah study is good together with an occupation, for toiling in both of these causes man to forget sin." If he will set times for Torah study to the extent he is able, then the words of Torah (which is likened to fire, as it is written [Yirmiyah 23:29], "Behold! My words are like fire") will consume the yetzer hara, which is also called "fire" [in a number of places in the Talmud].

Our sages have taught [Kiddushin 30b] that Hashem created the Torah as an antidote to the yetzer hara; know that every letter of gemara that is learned for the sake of the mitzvah of Torah study destroys a portion of the yetzer hara, and "may all evil vanish like smoke . . ." [as we say in the High Holiday prayers]. However, know that just as with a medicine for the body, where if a small dose doesn't work the doctor will increase the dosage, so with medicine for the soul, if a person feels that two hours of Torah study has not enabled him to control the fire of the yetzer hara, he must double or triple the amount of his Torah study until he gets the fire under control.

Clarification

In last week's issue we quoted the work Yad Haketanah and noted that it was published anonymously in the early 19th century. While that was correct - the work was published in 1800 - it is known that the author was R' Dov Berish Gottlieb z"l (1740-1796), a businessman who lived in the

Galician town of Shiniva. (Source: Encyclopedia Le'chachmei Galicia p.638)

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