

OPEN YOUR HEART, AND YOUR HAND

by Shlomo Katz

The Highest Form of Praise
Edited by Shlomo Katz
Contributing Editor: Daniel Dadusc
Reeh

Volume XIII, No. 42
25 Menachem Av 5759
August 7, 1999

Today's Learning:

Terumot 8:12-9:1

Orach Chaim 151:1-3

Daf Yomi: Rosh Hashanah 34

Yerushalmi Yevamot 5

"Fortunate is a man who listens to Me, and sits by My doors every day, guarding the entrances of My house. Those who find Me have found life, and will obtain favor from Hashem. A sinner damages his soul; those who hate Me love death" (Mishlei 8:34- 36). Rabbenu Yonah z"l writes that the first two verses quoted here sing the praises of a person who devotes his time to Torah study. By contrast, those who hate the Torah, its teachings, and its ethics will have no peace in this world or the next. These lessons parallel the opening section of our parashah: "Behold I have placed before you a blessing and a curse." Later (in Parashat Nitzavim) the Torah elaborates: "Life and death I have placed before you, the blessing and the curse." Chazal teach that we are free to choose what we will-life/blessing or death/curse-but Hashem advises (Devarim 30:19), "Choose life so that you and your children may live."

The choice described above is what the prophet Yirmiyah was referring to when he said (Eichah

3:38), "Good and bad do not come from the mouth of the One above." Rather, it is our choice. Therefore, (Eichah 3:39), "What can a person complain about, except each man over his own sins?" What should we do if we have sinned? Yirmiyah continues (3:40), "Let us search our ways and investigate, and return to Hashem." (Derashot U'perushei Rabbenu Yonah Al HaTorah)

"And you shall eat your tithes before G-d, in the place where G-d will choose to rest His Name . . . , in order that you should learn to fear G-d all the days." (14:23)

R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the "Alter of Kelm"; died 1898) explains the end of this verse: This does not mean that one must fear G-d all of one's days; that goes without saying. Rather it means that one must learn more on each of his days about how to fear G-d.

R' Chaim Friedlander z"l adds: This explains why one must "eat [his] tithes before G-d, in the place where G-d will choose to rest his Name," i.e., in Yerushalayim. Even though the Jews would pilgrimage to Yerushalayim three times a year for the holidays, the Torah wanted them to spend even more time in that holy and inspiring city. (Siftei Chaim)

"If there shall be a destitute person among you . . . you shall not harden your heart or close your hand to your destitute brother. Rather, you shall surely open your hand . . ." (15:7-8)

R' Yitzchak Karo z"l (died 1535; uncle of R' Yosef Karo z"l) derives several lessons from these verses regarding how to give charity. First, why does the verse mention the heart? Doesn't the poor person need your hand, rather than your heart?

He explains: When one is unable to give, he is often tempted to shut the door in the beggar's face. This is not proper. Even if your wallet is empty, open your heart and speak comforting words to the pauper. This, too, is charity. More generally, these words teach us to dispense charity with a smile.

Why does the Torah use the seemingly redundant language: "[Y]ou shall not close your hand to your destitute brother. Rather, you shall surely open your hand"? R' Karo explains: Sometimes you may reach into your pocket and remove a larger coin (or bill) than you intended. Even in such a case, the Torah emphasizes through its double language, do not close your hand. If the pauper has seen the large coin that was in your hand, give it to him. (Toldot Yitzchak)

"You shall make a holiday of Sukkot for yourself" (16:13)

R' Shlomo Halberstam shlita (the "Bobover Rebbe") notes that the root of the word "Sukkah" is the name for one of the forms of Ruach Hakodesh/Divine Inspiration, i.e., the ability to see that which is hidden (see Rashi to Bereishit 11:29). Thus, this verse may be read as a lesson that every person

should set aside times ("make a holiday") devoted to introspection, i.e., seeing oneself. (Quoted in Sukkat Bet Ropshitz p.31)

"Shiv'ah D'nechemta"

The haftarot of the seven weeks following Tishah B'Av are known as the "Shiv'ah D'nechemta"/"The Seven of Consolation" This name derives from the fact that each of these haftarot promises that Hashem will console us after the terrible suffering that we have experienced in exile.

R' Azaryah Figo z"l (Italy; 1579-1647) writes that the number seven is not random. He explains:

Before Tishah B'Av, we read the haftarot known as the "Gimel D'puranuta"/"Three of Calamity." (The number three parallels the number of weeks between the Fasts of the 17th of Tammuz and Tishah B'Av.) Because we are taught that the measure of Hashem's good exceeds the measure of His retribution, therefore we double the number associated with calamity (i.e., three) when we read the haftarot of consolation. This results in six haftarot of consolation. As for the seventh haftarah, it is different in that it speaks of Bnei Yisrael's acceptance of the promised consolation.

In addition, R' Figo writes, each of the "Gimel D'puranuta" contains two calamities, and each of the six haftarot of consolation "undoes" one of them. The first haftarah after the 17th of Tammuz begins: "Divrei Yirmiyahu"/"The words of Jeremiah." Chazal teach that the verb "le'daber" (in contrast to "laimor") connotes harsh speech. Paralleling this is the haftarah of Va'etchanan, in which the prophet speaks gently, "Nachamu, nachamu"/"Be comforted! Be comforted!"

Also, the first haftarah of calamity states: "See, I have appointed you [i.e., Yirmiyahu] this day . . . to uproot and to smash and to destroy and to raze." The haftarah for Eikev responds with verses such as: "Your spoilers and destroyers must depart from you" and "Hashem shall comfort Zion; He shall comfort all her ruins."

The second haftarah of calamity rebukes Bnei Yisrael for distancing themselves from the Torah: "[E]ven those charged with teaching Torah did not know Me." The haftarah for Re'eh counters: "All your children will be students of Hashem." And, in response to the calamitous verse (from the second haftarah), "Is Israel a slave? . . . Why has he become prey?" the haftarah for Shoftim responds, "Wake up! Wake up! Don your strength . . . for no longer shall there enter into you any uncircumcised or contaminated person." While the haftarah of calamity speaks of Israel as a victim of oppressors, the haftarah of consolation speaks of Israel's strength and glory.

Finally, the third haftarah of calamity informs us that Hashem will not accept our prayers because of our sins: "When you spread your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even if you were to increase prayer, I do not hear." The haftarah for Ki Tetze promises, however: "For but a slight moment I have forsaken you . . . With a slight wrath I have concealed My countenance." Also, while the third haftarah of calamity speaks of the punishment for misusing our wealth, the haftarah for Ki Tavo tells of the

great riches that await us: "In place of copper I will bring gold; and in place of iron I will bring silver . .
."

In the last haftarah, Bnei Yisrael accept these six consolations: "I will rejoice intensely with Hashem."
(Binah La'ittim: Drush Aleph L'Shabbat Nachamu)

Letters from Our Sages