

# THE GIFT OF SCHOLARSHIP

*by Shlomo Katz*

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Today's Learning:

Ta'anit 3:4-5

Orach Chaim 321:13-15

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nedarim 66

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bava Kamma 23

Last week's parashah contained the dire warnings of what will happen when we sin. This week's parashah continues to warn Bnei Yisrael not to sin and speaks of the need for repentance. However, the final verses of last week's parashah and the beginning of this week's appear to speak of other matters. R' Samson Raphael Hirsch z"l (1808-1888) explains:

Moshe made a break in the announcement of the future of the nation for the purpose of bringing about a correct appreciation of the blessings and curses which he had announced. He did this by reminding Bnei Yisrael of certain facts they had experienced and by giving them certain explanations.

The facts he reminded them of are found in verses 1-8 at the end of last week's parashah: Hashem

took you out of Egypt, gave you food miraculously, and defeated the nations on the borders of Eretz Yisrael. The explanations that He gave them are found in our parashah in verses 9-20.

Verses 9-14 announce that Hashem's covenant is made with all members of the Jewish people, from the righteous scholars to the humble water carriers, and with all generations, those born and those as yet unborn. This, R' Hirsch writes, averts "any taking if the duties of the covenant to be limited to certain conditions or generations or times." "Verses 15-20," R' Hirsch continues, "avert the misunderstanding that the proclamation of the blessings and curses had only the national defection in mind, so that an individual could assume freedom for his evasion of the Torah as long as the nation kept publicly faithful to G-d and His Torah." Moshe also warned, on the other hand, that it would not suffice to protect one's own level of observance; one had to ensure the spiritual solidarity of the whole nation. These admonishments were particularly important as the nation was about to disperse throughout the Land.)

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*"For this commandment that I command you today - it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is not in the heavens . . . Nor is it across the sea . . . Rather, the matter is very near to you - in your mouth and in your heart - to perform it." (30:11-14)*

Rashi writes that these verses refer to the mitzvah of Torah study.

R' Menachem Mendel of Kotzk z"l (died 1859) explained that these verses are the source of the Talmudic statement, "If one will tell you, 'I have labored [in Torah study] but have not found it,' don't believe him." How could the Sages make a sweeping generalization that if one has not succeeded at studying Torah, it is because he has not tried hard enough? Such a statement is possible because the Torah already has promised that the mitzvah of Torah study "is not hidden from you and it is not distant. . . Rather, the matter is very near to you - in your mouth and in your heart - to perform it." (Quoted in Ramatayim Tzofim, Part II, Ch. 14, No. 11)

Why does the gemara quoted above say, "I have labored but have not found it?" It would seem more appropriate to say, "I have labored but have not succeeded."

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l explains: Even when one studies hard and becomes a Torah scholar, he should not take credit for his accomplishments. Just as an object that one finds in the street is a gift from Hashem, so the scholarship that one attains is a gift. (Ruach Chaim)

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*"And their children who do not know, they shall hear and they shall learn to fear Hashem . . ." (31:13)*

R' Moshe Sternbuch shlita writes: Here the Torah teaches us how to educate our children. The way to attain fear of G-d is to study the Torah constantly. However, young children who cannot yet absorb a significant amount of Torah knowledge can still attain fear of G-d by being around those

who study Torah and hearing their words (even though they don't understand).

He adds: Adults, too, who can't learn Torah in depth should try to keep company with Torah scholars. (Ta'am Va'da'at)

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"[The nation] will say on that day, 'Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?' But I will surely have concealed My face on that day . . ." (31:17-18)

If the nation seemingly has recognized the evil of its ways, why should Hashem continue to hide His face? R' Bunim of Peshishca z"l answers: It's a sin to say that G-d is not in our midst. Even in our darkest hour, Hashem is with us. (Ma'ayanah Shel Torah)

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## Selichot

The following observations regarding the laws and structure of selichot, the extra penitential prayers which Ashkenazim begin to recite tonight (Motzaei Shabbat), are presented from the work Harerei Kedem by R' Michel Zalman Shurkin shlita, based on the lectures of R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l.

The origin for the recitation of selichot is the gemara (Rosh Hashanah 17b) which tells that after the sin of the golden calf, Hashem (so-to-speak) wrapped Himself in a tallit and taught Moshe "seder tefillah" - "the order of prayer." Hashem said (the gemara relates), "Any time the Jews sin, let them do thus before Me and I will forgive them." (It was at this time that Hashem taught Moshe the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.) Based on this, we may understand the ruling of R' Moshe Isserless z"l (the "Rema") that the one who leads selichot should be "the most worthy and the greatest in Torah study and good deeds who can be found." Since Hashem was (so-to-speak) the first chazan in the history of selichot, those who follow Him should be the most worthy individuals possible.

Because the gemara refers to selichot as "seder tefillah" - a term usually reserved to describe shemoneh esrei - it is customary to stand for selichot (or at least for the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy). The work Levush explains that this is also the reason that we recite "kaddish shalaim" (with "titkabbel") after selichot, although that kaddish usually is recited only after shemoneh esrei. Similarly, says R' Soloveitchik, this is why we begin selichot with praises of Hashem, just as shemoneh esrei begins with praise of Hashem.

Why are selichot recited at night? (Even the selichot recited every morning during the next week were intended to be recited before sunrise.) Rambam writes: "It is the way of repentance for the penitent to cry before Hashem with tears and entreaties." When is the time for crying? We read in Eichah (1:2), "She weeps bitterly at night." We also read (Bemidbar 14:1), "The people wept that night." It is customary in many communities that the one who led selichot leads all of the prayers that day. Some commentaries explain: "When one begins a mitzvah, we tell him to finish it." This implies that

selichot is not a separate mitzvah; rather, it is part of the day's prayers. If, for some reason, a person recited selichot but did not recite the day's prayers, he would not have fulfilled his obligation to recite selichot. (In this respect, selichot are analogous to ne'ilah on Yom Kippur, which is meant to be an "added" prayer. If one recited ne'ilah but had not recited any of the prior prayers, he would not fulfill the mitzvah of ne'ilah because his ne'ilah would not be "added.")

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R' Yehoshua Isaac Shapiro z"l  
("Reb Eizel Charif")

R' Eizel was born in 1801 in Glubki, near Vilna, and his first teacher was his father, R' Yechiel. R' Eizel was a child prodigy whose genius was recognized by the age of seven, and he was soon nicknamed, "The Iron Head" (presumably because he never forgot what he learned). He later earned the nickname "Charif" / "The Sharp One," although he claimed, in his humility, that it was only an acronym of "Chatan Reb Yitzchak Fein" / "son-in-law of R' Yitzchak Fein."

At one point, R' Eizel was a disciple of the chassidic rebbe, R' Aharon of Staroselya (a leading disciple of Chabad's founder, R' Shneur Zalman), but he later became a critic of chassidut. He also studied in the famed Blumke's kloiz in Minsk, where, it is said, he used to review the entire Talmud every month. In 1832, R' Eizel was appointed rosh yeshiva and darshan / preacher in Minsk's Kloiz Chevra Kadisha.

R' Eizel received semichah / ordination from R' Abale, the av bet din / chief rabbinical judge of Vilna, and through the latter's recommendation was appointed a dayan / rabbinical judge in Kalvaria, Lithuania. After 1839, he held rabbinic positions in Kutna and Tiktin.

In 1853, R' Eizel was appointed rabbi of Slonim, the town with which he is associated for posterity. In every town where he served, R' Eizel somehow found time, despite his superhuman schedule of learning and writing, to engage in numerous communal and charitable activities. In addition, many dinei Torah / legal disputes were brought to R' Eizel for resolution, and he was one of the three judges appointed to rule on the dispute involving the leadership of the Volozhin Yeshiva.

R' Eizel's nickname, "Charif," alludes in part to his sharp sense of humor, which he readily used to humble those who he felt needed humbling and to criticize those whose scholarship was not up to par with the standard that he expected of Torah leaders. (Chassidic rebbes were frequent subjects of his witticisms.) In particular, R' Eizel was adept at making puns or plays on the words of verses and Talmudic statements.

R' Eizel died in 1873, leaving 11 works including Emek Yehoshua, Nachalat Yehoshua and a commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud, Noam Yerushalmi. Many of his derashot are in the style of the 18th century Parashat Derachim, explaining midrashic stories and actions of biblical figures in halachic terms. All exhibit a wide-ranging knowledge of halachah, midrash and Tanach. (An example

will appear in next week's issue of Hamaayan.) (Gedolei Ha'dorot p. 685)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

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