

VOWS IN A TIME OF DISTRESS

by Shlomo Katz

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring
Edited by Shlomo Katz

Contributing Editor: Daniel Dadusc

Terumah

Volume XIV, No. 19
6 Adar I 5760
February 12, 2000

Today's Learning:

Eruvin 1:1-2

Orach Chaim 244:6-245:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 74

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sotah 36

The midrash teaches that at the moment when Bnei Yisrael said, "Na'aseh ve'nishmah"/"We will do and [then] we will hear," i.e., when Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah unconditionally, Hashem said, "Let them take for Me terumah." R' Chaim Aryeh Lerner z"l explains this as follows:

There is an opinion in the gemara that one is not permitted to take a vow. How then did Yaakov take a vow (Bereishit ch.28)? Tosfot explains that all agree that one is permitted to take a vow in times of trouble.

We might think that precisely when a person is anguished he cannot be trusted to fulfill his vows. However, G-d trusts us to have faith in Him and to repay our vows even if He seems not to be answering our prayers. For example, when a Jew promises to give charity as a merit for an ill relative,

G-d is confident that the vow will be fulfilled even if the relative does not recover. It is a Jew's nature to accept G-d's decrees.

The gemara (Shabbat 88a) records that a certain heretic told the sage Rava, "You are an impetuous nation! You should have heard what G-d was offering before you accepted it." Rava responded by explaining that when Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah unconditionally without even knowing its contents, they expressed their faith in Hashem that He would not mislead or disappoint them. This is precisely the same Jewish trait that was mentioned above in connection with the making of vows.

We learn a halachah from Yaakov's vow. From the fact that he said (Bereishit 29:22), "I will repeatedly tithe to You," we learn that one is permitted to give up to two-tenths, or one-fifth, of his wealth to charity. This is alluded to in the word "terumah" as well, as we can read the word: "torem heh" / "he gives five (i.e., one-fifth)." However, we could not learn this halachah from Yaakov's vow if we did not know that Yaakov was permitted to take a vow. And, we would not know that Yaakov was permitted to take a vow in his time of trouble if the Jews had not said, "Na'aseh ve'nishmah." This is why at the moment when Bnei Yisrael said, "Na'aseh ve'nishmah," Hashem said, "Let them take for Me terumah." (Imrei Chaim p.49)

"You shall place the kaporet/cover on the aron/ark from above, and into the aron you shall place the edut/testimonial [i.e., the luchot] that I shall give you." (25:21)

Rashi writes: "I do not know why this was repeated after it was already written (25:16), 'You shall place in the aron/ark the edut that I shall give you.' Perhaps it comes to teach that the luchot should be placed into the aron when it is just an aron without the kaporet." (This is learnt from the fact that the verse says, "Into the _aron_ you shall place the tablets.")

R' Baruch Yosef Sack z"l (1887-1949; the "Kobriner Rebbe") observes that Rashi's answer is alluded to in the words of the verse: "teetain et ha'edut" / "You shall place the testimonial [tablets]." The final letters of "teetain et ha'edut" have the gematria of 850, which is equal to the gematria of "kodem kaporet" / "before (the) cover."

R' Sack also offers a homiletical interpretation of our verse. Chazal teach that a person will be asked on the Day of Judgment, "Did you study Torah?" If he answers that he did, he will be told to recite what he has learned. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon every person to obtain a grasp of the Torah that he studies to the point that it can be said that his Torah is packed in his suitcase for his trip to the next world.

This is the meaning of our verse: If you expect a kaporet/forgiveness (from the word "kaparah") above, then into the aron/box you shall place the Torah that I shall give you. (Birkat Yosef)

"They shall be even at the bottom, and together yiheyu tamim/they shall match (literally: 'they shall be complete') at its top, for a single ring, so shall it be for them both . . ." (26:24)

Literally, this verse describes how the boards of the mishkan were to be assembled together. However, R' Yehuda Aryeh Perlow z"l (see page 4) offers the following homiletical interpretation:

Chazal teach that when man is in pain, Hashem says, "My head hurts. My arm hurts." The work Lachmei Todah explains that this refers to Hashem's "head" and "arm" where, according to the gemara (Berachot 6a), He wears His tefilin (metaphorically, of course). The gemara teaches that those tefilin allude to G-d's unity with His people in much the same way that our tefilin allude to our unity with Him. (Our tefilin contain the verse, "Shema Yisrael, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One," and we bind them to ourselves, symbolically binding ourselves to G-d. His tefilin contain verses that describe His love for us.) Because of His closeness to us, as represented by His tefilin, His "head" and His "arm" feel our pain.

Our Sages further teach that the only way that the typical person can achieve closeness to G-d is by attaching himself to a Torah scholar who is himself close to G-d. The work Lachmei Todah explains that this is the idea behind Chazal's statement that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because people abused Torah scholars. The whole purpose of the Bet Hamikdash was to bring Hashem close to us, as we read in this week's parashah (25:8): "They shall make a sanctuary for Me - so that I may dwell among them." And, achieving closeness to Hashem requires being close to Torah scholars. Therefore, if Torah scholars are abused, there is no point in having a Bet Hamikdash.

It follows, concludes Lachmei Todah, that when Torah scholars are abused and the unity of the Jewish people and Hashem is destroyed, Hashem's tefilin become blemished.

R' Perlow continues: we read in Megillat Esther (3:8), "Then Haman said to King Achashveirosh, 'There is a certain people scattered and dispersed'." We learn from here that the Jewish people in Mordechai and Esther's time were not united. Later we read (4:15), "Then Esther said to reply to Mordechai, 'Go assemble all the Jews . . .'" From this we learn that the Jewish people repented and became united. What caused their repentance? The gemara (Megillah 14a) says: "The removal of the ring from Achashveirosh's hand when he gave it to Haman was more effective in causing the Jewish people to repent than all of the words of all of the prophets."

Now to our verse: "They shall be even at the bottom" - when we are together (i.e., united) below, then,

"They shall be complete at its top" - Hashem's tefilin above will be complete. How can this unity be brought about?

"For a single ring" - by repenting as we did because of Achashveirosh's ring." Bringing about mass repentance may require us to rebuke others, but,

"So shall it be for them both" - any rebuke that you give must be for yourself also. Then you will be

fulfilling the mitzvah of "Love your fellow as yourself," which will bring about unity. (Lev Aryeh: Drush Shlishi Le'Parashat Terumah)

The Month of "Adar Rishon"

What is the halachic status of the first month of Adar in a leap year (which has two months of Adar)? On the one hand, many have the custom that if they lost a relative in the month of Adar in a year which was not a leap year, that they observe the traditional *yahrzeit* fast only in the *_first_* Adar. On the other hand, a child who was born in Adar in a year which was not a leap year but whose thirteenth year is a leap year observes his bar mitzvah only in the *_second_* Adar. Why?

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l explained: a *yahrzeit* is observed on the anniversary of another person's death. If the anniversary falls in Adar, then, in a leap year, there are two anniversaries. However, once a person has fulfilled his obligation to fast by fasting on the first anniversary which falls in a given year, he is no longer obligated to fast that year, even though the *yahrzeit* will fall again in the same year.

However, a bar mitzvah is not an observance of a *_day_*. It represents the completion of thirteen years of life and the beginning of the fourteenth year. If one's birthday is, for example, the last day of Adar, then even after the first Adar has passed, the whole month of Adar is still to come. How then can this boy say that he has *_completed_* thirteen years of life?! (Quoted in *Harrerei Kedem* p. 311)

Rabbis of the New World

R' Yehuda Aryeh Perlow z"l was born in 1878 in Novominsk, Poland, where his father, R' Yaakov, was rabbi and chassidic rebbe. (In 1896, R' Yaakov founded the first chassidic yeshiva in Poland.) When R' Yaakov died in 1902, his chassidim divided their allegiance between his sons R' Yehuda Aryeh and R' Alter Yisrael Shimon. The former established his chassidic court in the town of Vlodova while the latter remained in Novominsk.

In 1912, R' Yehuda Aryeh assumed the additional positions of rabbi and av bet din of Vlodova, and he founded a yeshiva there. In 1922, he accepted the call from his chassidim who had settled in the United States, and he reestablished his court in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.

R' Perlow was among the founders of the Agudath Israel of America and he also organized the Agudat Ha'admorim, a council of chassidic rebbes in the United States. He died on 10 Elul 5721/1961. (Sources: *Toldot Anshei Shem* p. 102; *Otzar Harabbanim*)

R' Perlow's nephew, R' Nachum Mordechai Perlow z"l (son of R' Alter Yisrael Shimon) was another pre-war chassidic rebbe in the United States. He was born in 1887 in Novominsk. At first, he served as rabbi in Sokolov, Poland, alongside his father-in-law. In 1925, he settled in Eretz Yisrael, but he

was unable to support himself there and he returned to Europe.

In 1927, R' Nachum Mordechai visited the United States to raise funds for the Sokolov yeshiva, and he was persuaded to remain here. He became the Novominsker Rebbe on New York's Lower East Side and later he moved to the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, where he attracted followers from among both the chassidic and Lithuanian communities. (It was said that his style of learning was similar to the "Brisker" method of Talmud study.) Still later, he moved to Boro Park.

R' Nachum Mordechai was actively involved in Agudath Israel and in numerous other public roles on behalf of Jewry as a whole. He passed away on 9 Elul 5736/1976. (Sources: Toldot Anshei Shem p. 102; Marbitzei Torah Me'olam Hachassidut Vol. 4, p. 255 and Vol. 8, p. 191; Contemporary Sages p. 7)

R' Nachum Mordechai's son, R' Yaakov shlita, is the current Novominsker Rebbe and is one of the leading rabbinic figures in the United States today.

Sponsored by Alan and Paula Goldman in memory of Sam W. Goldman

The Katz family on the yahrzeits of Avraham Abba ben Avigdor Moshe Hakohen Katz a"h and Etia (Etush) bat Avigdor Moshe Hakohen Landau a"h

Copyright © 1998 by [Shlomo Katz](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

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.
