

IS HE REALLY HUMBLE?

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Today's Learning:

Orlah 1:4-5

Orach Chaim 183:3-5

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Mo'ed Kattan 23

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ketubot 3

R' David Hakochavi z"l (Southern France; 13-14th centuries) writes: We have previously explained that Hashem, in His great kindness to mankind, created man in His tzellem/image so that he could follow a wholesome path and choose good over bad and truth over falsehood. Moreover, just as He created man following a period when nothing existed and He made man as a wondrous new thing, so He continues this closeness with personal hashgachah/attention to man, and through this hashgachah He does wonders for man. In particular, His wonders can be seen in the persons and the property of those whom He loves.

It is well known that the most important aspect of man's creation is the fact that he was created in G-d's tzellem and demmut/likeness and it was for this that He made the wondrous creation. Similarly,

He gives His attention and performs wonders primarily for those who reflect His image. It is such a relationship that G-d was describing when He said regarding Avraham [in our parashah; verse 18:19], "For I have loved him, because he will command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem . . ." Such a relationship is also alluded to in the verse [Shmot 19:4], "You have seen what I did to Egypt and that I have borne you on the wings of eagles . . ."

Further, writes R' David, once we believe that He gives His attention and performs wonders for those who reflect His tzellem and for their children and property, we must further believe that He performs wonders in order to perfect our own tzellem. We can understand, for example, that the revelation at Sinai was primarily to perfect the human mind [which is what distinguishes man from animals and therefore is the clearest manifestation of the tzellem of G-d]. Man is created with potential intelligence, and [only] if he understands the intention of Torah and its mitzvot will he understand fear of G-d and find sacred knowledge. (Migdal David: Sefer Ha'emunah: Pillar IV, Ch. 1)

"Sarah laughed inside . . ." (18:12)

"Sarah denied it, saying, 'I did not laugh'." (18:15)

"Sarah saw the son of Hagar . . . mocking. So she said to Avraham, 'Drive out this slavewoman with her son . . .'" (21:9-10)

R' Nosson Teomim z"l (the "Krystonopolyer Rav" in New York; died 1983) asks the obvious question regarding the first two verses quoted above: Did Sarah lie? He answers as follows:

The Ba'al Shem Tov (the founder of the Chassidic movement; died 1760) taught that one does not witness a sin unless he himself has committed a similar sin. Thus, whenever one sees another person commit any sin, the viewer should search his own deeds for a similar iniquity (albeit, perhaps of lesser severity) and repent for it.

Yitzchak's proper upbringing required that his half-brother Yishmael be expelled from Avraham's home. However, this would not happen unless either Avraham or Sarah saw Yishmael "mocking." Accordingly, Hashem brought about a circumstance that caused Sarah herself to mock; after she had committed this small sin, even inadvertently, it would be possible for her to witness Yishmael's sin and to take the first step toward expelling Yishmael from the household.

Of course, Sarah never meant to mock, and she therefore denied that she had laughed (meaning that she had not laughed inappropriately). This also allows us to understand why Avraham resisted expelling Yishmael; he had never had the opportunity to see Yishmael mock. (Bar Pachtai)

"And G-d said, 'Shall I conceal from Avraham that which I plan to do?!'"

"And Avraham said, 'Behold I have dared to speak to my Master though I am nothing but dirt and dust.'" (18:17,27)

R' Bachya ibn Pakudah z"l (Spain; 11th century) writes: This pair of verses demonstrates one of the five ways that we may judge whether a person who appears to be humble really is so. Those five are:

(1) How one reacts when another injures him - does the injured party restrain his anger despite having the ability to take revenge?

(2) How one reacts when his property is damaged or lost or a family member is (G-d forbid) hurt or killed - does he moderate his anguish and accept Hashem's decree with love? (This is what Aharon did when two of his sons were killed, as the verse says, "And Aharon was still" (Vayikra 10:3).);

(3) How a person handles his reputation. There are several aspects to this test.

First, if one is praised for a good deed which he did, he should feel that it is much ado about nothing. After all, no person approaches the fulfillment of his mission in this world, so why create a stir over one good deed?! Furthermore, it is possible that this good deed was done for a selfish motive (either conscious or subconscious) in which case it is worth a great deal less in the eyes of G-d (although no good deed goes completely unrewarded).

Second, it goes without saying that if a person is praised for a good deed which was not his doing that he must react and say: "It's bad enough that my own deeds are lacking! Please don't attribute to me that which is not mine."

Third, if a person is criticized for a bad deed which he did, let him not make excuses. Rather, one should face up to his mistakes and make amends for them.

Finally, if a person is accused of a sin which he did not commit, let him be patient and say: "Thank G-d that He saved me from committing the sin which you ascribe to me, just as He has always been kinder to me than I deserve for Him to be. Therefore, please spare your own soul and do not speak this lashon hara about me, for the punishment for such speech is very great."

(4) How a person reacts when he is given gifts in which most people would take pride - does he allow himself to become conceited? (This was Avraham's test when Hashem decided not to destroy S'dom without first telling Avraham. Although Avraham was given the gifts of prophecy, wisdom, and Eretz Yisrael (among others), he still thought of himself as mere "dust of the earth".); and

(5) How one reacts if he commits a sin for which a human court cannot punish him (for example, if there were no witnesses) - is he happy that he escaped punishment? One should hope that Hashem will take whatever steps are necessary to cleanse him of his sin. (Chovot HaLevavot, Sha'ar Hacheniah, ch. 7, as explained by the commentary Lev Tov)

"Hashem rained on S'dom and Amorah sulfur and fire, from Hashem, out of heaven." (19:24)
Rashi writes: "First rain, then it became sulfur and fire." Why?

R' Shalom Mordechai Schwadron z"l (1913-1997; the "Maggid" of The Maggid Speaks series) explains that this was a manifestation of Hashem's kindness. When the rain started to fall, the people of S'dom and the neighboring towns had the opportunity to repent. [It should be noted that this occurred after the first day of Pesach, when rain is unusual in Eretz Yisrael.] When they failed to repent, the rain turned to sulphur and fire.

We find that the same thing occurred at the beginning of the Deluge. First the rain started lightly, and then, when the people did not take heed, the rain became heavier. (Lev Shalom)

R' Yisrael Salanter z"l (1810-1883; founder of the mussar movement) once was invited to eat the Friday night meal at the home of one of his wealthy students. R' Salanter answered that he does not accept such invitations unless he knows every detail of how the household is run.

The student began to describe his household: "We follow every detail of halachah. I buy my meat from so-and-so. The meat is, of course, glatt. My cook is an observant woman, the widow of a Torah scholar. On top of that, my wife checks the kitchen regularly and pays attention to everything.

"On Friday nights, my table is set regally. After every course, there are divrei Torah. In addition, we have a lesson in Shulchan Aruch before dessert. Of course, we also sing zemirot and our meal ends very late."

"I will come to your house," said R' Salanter, "if you will shorten your meal by two hours."

Having no real choice, the student agreed. That Friday night, they rushed through the meal, and in less than an hour, they were ready to recite Birkat Hamazon. Before they began, the host turned to his guest and asked. "Tell me! What fault did you find with my routine that you made me change it?"

In response, R' Salanter called to the cook and said, "I'm terribly sorry that you had to rush the meal on my account, serving each course without a rest."

"To the contrary," the cook exclaimed. "May you be blessed many times over. I am exhausted from my long day's work, yet on ordinary Friday nights, I do not get home until very late. Thanks to you, I am now free to go home and rest."

Based on this story, writes R' Yaakov Baifus shlita, we can understand why, in our parashah (18:4), Avraham says, "Let a little water be taken." As is apparent from the use of the passive voice, Avraham did not intend to draw the water himself. He intended for a servant to do it. Even when Avraham was serving guests, he remembered to consider the feelings of the members of his household, and he

therefore offered his guests only a little water. (Yalkut Lekach Tov p. 75)

Dr. and Mrs. David Maslow in memory of their fathers Archie Maslow a"h (18 Marcheshvan) and Samuel Holstein a"h (25 Marcheshvan)

Mrs. Rochelle Dimont and family in memory of mother-in-law and grandmother, Chana Dimont a"h and father and grandfather, Rabbi Louis Tarshish a"h

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