

THE DANGER OF ANGER

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Emor

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Today's Learning:

Eduyot 6:3-7:1

Orach Chaim 671:4-6

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Batra 38

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ma'aser Sheni 8

The last part of our parashah tells the story of the blasphemer. The Torah relates that this individual fought with another Jew and ended up cursing G-d. Not knowing the punishment for that sin, Bnei Yisrael placed the blasphemer in custody and sought instructions from Hashem.

In response, Hashem informed Bnei Yisrael that one who blasphemes incurs the death penalty. He also taught them the punishments for killing another person, killing an animal, injuring another person, and hitting one's parent. R' Eliezer Ashkenazi z"l (1513-1585; rabbi in Egypt, Italy and Poland) asks: Why did Hashem teach these laws at this time?

Also, it would seem that it was not necessary for the Torah to tell us about the fight in which the blasphemer was involved just before he "blessed G-d," (in the euphemistic language of our Sages). Why are we given told about his fight?

R' Ashkenazi explains: The Torah wishes to teach us the danger of becoming angry, and to warn us that particularly when a person is angry, he must consider the consequences of his actions. What started as a fight between two Jews ended with one combatant losing control of himself, cursing G-d, and incurring the death penalty. One who does not control his anger may kill an animal one day and may kill a person the next day. Or, he may intend to slap another person lightly and end up injuring him. An angry person may even go so far as to strike his parent. This is what the Torah warns us to avoid. (Ma'asei Hashem)

"You shall sanctify him, for he offers the food of your G-d; he shall remain holy to you, for holy am I, Hashem, Who sanctifies you." (21:8)

R' Elazar Meir Preil z"l (1878-1933; rabbi of Elizabeth, New Jersey) writes in the name of his brother R' Yehoshua Yosef Preil z"l (1858-1896): This verse teaches that Judaism does not attribute special status to its priests in the sense that some other religions do. For example, we do not believe that any person needs a kohen's help to pray successfully or to enter heaven after death. We do not attribute divine or semi-divine status to any person.

R' Preil continues: This is the meaning of the Gemara's statement (Chullin 139b), "Where is Moshe alluded to in the Torah? In the verse (Bereishit 6:3), 'Hashem said, "My spirit shall not contend evermore concerning Man, 'beshagam' / since he is but flesh; his days shall be a hundred and twenty years"'. [The gematria of "beshagam" equals the gematria of Moshe's name. Also, Moshe lived 120 years.] What does the Gemara mean when it asks, "Where is Moshe alluded to in the Torah?" The Sages obviously knew that Moshe is mentioned hundreds of times in the Torah! And, why does the Gemara answer its question with a verse that does not mention Moshe?

The answer, writes R' Preil, is that the Gemara was looking for an allusion to our lesson. Where in the Torah is there a hint that we do not deify Moshe (and certainly not any other leader)? It is in this verse, which teaches that all men are but flesh. (Sefer Ha'maor)

"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them - Hashem's appointed festivals that you are to designate as holy convocations - these are My appointed festivals. For six days labor may be done, and the seventh day is a day of complete rest, a holy convocation, you shall not do any work; it is a Shabbat for Hashem in all your dwelling places." (23:2-3)

Rashi comments (quoting a midrash): What relation is there between Shabbat and the festivals? [In other words, why is the introductory verse which refers to the festivals followed by a verse about Shabbat? Rashi answers:] By putting both into juxtaposition, the Torah intends to teach you that he who desecrates the festivals is regarded as though he had desecrated Shabbat, and that he who keeps the festivals is regarded as though he had kept Shabbat.

R' Zalman Rotberg shlita (rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Bet Meir in Bnei Brak) explains: We are taught that one's success in a given week is dependent in part upon the manner in which he observed the preceding Shabbat. One's Shabbat-observance sets the tone for the entire week to come. Thus, one cannot absorb the holiness and the message of the festival unless he has observed the prior Shabbat. If one transgresses the festival [either literally, or by failing to realize the full opportunity for growth that the festival provides], it is a sign that his observance of the prior Shabbat was somehow lacking. (Tuv Da'at p.16)

"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'Hashem's appointed festivals that you designate as holy convocations - these are My appointed festivals'." (23:2)

R' Shmuel Yehuda Katzenellenbogen z"l (also known as R' Yehuda Mintz; 1521-1597; Italy) writes: One of the oldest and most widespread Jewish practices is to make the holy Torah the center of all of our joys. Whereas others devote their holidays to food, drink and frivolity, we, the people of Hashem, have our Torah in our hearts, and, on our holidays, we devote the better part of the day to expounding upon the Torah.

This is the meaning of the above verse: If you designate the festivals as holy convocations, then they will be My appointed festivals. If you sanctify yourselves on the holidays and devote yourselves to Torah study, then they will be G-d's festivals. If not, the prophet Yishayah has already said (1:14), "Your new moons and festivals, My soul hated."

R' Katzenellenbogen continues: This applies not only to festivals but also to weddings and even to social gatherings. Thus we read in Pirkei Avot (chapter 3), "If three people eat at one table and do not exchange divrei Torah, it is as if they have eaten from sacrifices to idolatry." (Derashot Mahari Mintz No. 4)

"You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree . . ." (23:40)

Chazal say: Why is the fifteenth day of Tishrei called "the first"? It is the first day in the reckoning of transgressions.

R' Yehuda Laib Sobel z"l (20th century Hungarian rabbi) offers the following explanation: Each of the three festivals - Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot - atones in part for the sin of Adam. There are four opinions in the Talmud as to what fruit the Etz Ha'daat bore. Some say that the Etz Ha'daat was a grape vine, others say it was a stalk of wheat, still others say that it was a fig tree, and a fourth opinion is that it was an etrog tree.

On Pesach, we perform the mitzvah of matzah, which is made of wheat, and we drink four cups of wine, which is made from grapes. In this way, we atone for Adam's sin according to two opinions.

On Shavuot, we bring bikkurim / the first fruit, a major part of which was figs. This atones for Adam's sin according to the third opinion. Also, on Shavuot, we received the Torah. The gematria of the word "Torah" equals 611, which is the combined gematria of "chitah / wheat (22), "geffen" / grape (133), and "te'ainah" / fig (456).

Finally, on Sukkot, we perform the mitzvah of etrog, which atones for Adam's sin according to the last opinion. Significantly, the gematria of the phrase "ha'rishon pri aitz hadar" / "the first [day] the fruit of a citron tree" (209 + 160 + 290 + 562 = 1221) equals the combined gematria of "chitah" (22), "geffen" (133), "te'ainah" (456), and "etrog" / citron (610). Thus, Sukkot is the first day in the reckoning of transgressions, i.e., it is the day that alludes to the first of transgressions. [It also appears to be the first day in the cycle of the festivals starting with Pesach that the transgression is atoned.] (Perach Ha'geffen)

Rabbi Yishmael the son of Rabbi Yos, said: "One who studies Torah in order to teach is given the means to study and to teach. One who studies in order to practice is given the means to study and to teach, to observe and to practice." (Pirkei Avot, Chapter 4)

R' Menachem Nachum Friedman z"l (the heir-apparent to his uncle, the "Stefanesti Rebbe," at the time of his own death in 1933) observes that there are manuscripts which have a different version of this mishnah. They state: "One who studies Torah in order to teach is not given the means to study and to teach." This alternative version appears to be more correct, R' Friedman writes, for the person that the mishnah describes is in fact a rasha.

He explains: The second part of the mishnah refers to a person who studies Torah with the intention of implementing what he has learned. The first part of the mishnah, then, must be referring to a person who does not plan to practice what he learns. This is nothing short of evil, and therefore the mishnah states that Hashem will ensure that this person does not have the opportunity to teach others.

Judaism does not permit man to separate theory and practice. Thus, when one of the sages of the mishnah became a heretic, he was expelled from the bet midrash and is forever known by the appellation "Acher" / "The Other One," instead of by his own name. This is also what Hillel meant when, in the famous story of the convert who wanted to learn the entire Torah while standing on one foot, he said, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to others - this is the entire Torah." Many society's preach this ideal, but if you wish to convert, you must practice it as well. (Peirush Mahn)

R' Yom Tov Lipman Heller z"l (16th century) accepts the standard reading ("is given the means"), and writes: Of course, the first part of the mishnah does not refer to someone who intends to teach the Torah, but not to observe it. About such a person it is written (Tehilim 50:16): "But to the wicked, G-d said, 'What business do you have discussing My decrees?'"

Rather, the first part of the mishnah speaks of someone whose primary motivation is to teach Torah in order to be honored or in order to earn a living. The mishnah teaches that such a person will be assisted from Heaven even though his motives are not pure. This person will not, however, be assisted to observe the laws.

In contrast, the second part of the mishnah teaches that a person whose motivation is pure - he studies Torah in order to observe its laws - will be aided in all aspects of his relationship to the Torah, teaching and mitzvah observance included. (Tosfot Yom Tov)

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