

LET THE LIGHT IN!

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Today's Learning:

Zevachim 9:4-5

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Batra 164

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shabbat 39

The Midrash comments about the opening verse of our parashah (Devarim 29:9), "You all are standing here today": Just as the day is part light and part dark, so you, too, will have dark, but in the future, it will become light for you. When? When you are joined as one group.

R' Nachum Mordechai Friedman z"l (the "Chortkover Rebbe") writes: Chazal mean to teach us that just as when the day becomes dark, it is because the earth has turned away from the source of light (the sun), so, too, when it becomes "dark" for us, it is because we have turned away from the Source of Light. It is not because the "light" has gone away, but because our sins have built a wall between us and the "Light."

This midrash also teaches: Just as you know with certainty that the sun will rise in the morning, so you must believe with unshakable faith - indeed, you must know - that "Light" will be restored to you.

Finally, do not think that just as you can calculate the time of sunrise, so you can calculate the time of G-d's salvation (i.e., the return of the "Light"). When will it happen? Only when you are joined as one group! (Doresh Tov)

"You are all standing today, before Hashem, your G-d; the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers - all the men of Israel; your small children, your wives, and your proselyte who is in the midst of your camp, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water, for you to pass into the covenant of Hashem . . ." (29:9-11)

Philosophers divided people into several categories. The unlearned masses who observed the Torah's laws, they said, were like those who try to reach the king's palace, but never see it. Those who study Talmud only are like those who circle the palace, but never enter it. Those who study philosophy enter the palace, and the most expert among these actually reach the throne room.

Our verses prove that this is not so, writes Rav Moshe Avigdor Amiel z"l (Chief Rabbi of Antwerp and Tel Aviv). Even the unlearned water carrier and woodcutter can pass into the covenant of Hashem. (L'nevochei Hatekufah Ch. 13)

R' Mordechai Yosef Leiner z"l (1801-1859; the "Izbica Rebbe") comments that the above verses teach that G-d does not expect the same thing from every person. Rather, G-d expects every person to maximize his accomplishments using the tools that he has been given, whether those be the tools of a tribal elder or of a water carrier. This, writes R' Leiner, is the meaning of our Sages' teaching: "Yiftach in his generation is like Shmuel in his generation." On an absolute scale, Yiftach certainly was not as great as Shmuel, but each utilized the tools at his disposal to accomplish the mission that G-d had assigned to him. (Mei Hashiloach)

"It [the Torah] is not in the Heavens." (30:12)

From this verse, Chazal learn that once the Torah was "sealed" at the end of Moshe's life, no prophet may change it. G-d has given the Torah to us to interpret according to the rules that the Torah itself contains, and even if He would tell us how to act, we would not listen. Rather, we base our actions only on the Torah, as interpreted by the sages. (See Bava Metziah 59b and Temurah 16a)

Yet, we find instances where sages consulted angels regarding the proper halachic decision. R' Yaakov of Marvege, a 12th century Tosafist, did so regularly, and composed the work She'eilot Uteshuvot Min Hashamayim ("Respona from Heaven"). Indeed, this work is quoted by poskim and followed! How is this consistent with the rule: "It is not in the Heavens."

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l ("Chida"; 1724-1806) explains that the Heavens may be consulted when the gemara has discussed a question and left it unanswered. In such a case, there is no way that we can be expected to resolve the matter using our own intellectual abilities. (Shem Hagedolim: Erech R' Yaakov Hechassid)

The Mishnah teaches: "If one says, 'I will sin and I will repent, I will sin and I will repent,' he will not be given the opportunity to repent."

Why is the phrase "I will sin and I will repent" repeated? The gemara answers that once a person has committed the same sin twice, it becomes permitted in his eyes. A person who says, "I will sin and I will repent," may actually repent. However, once he adopts this attitude twice, he will never repent.

R' Chaim Hager of Kosov z"l offers another explanation for the double expression. Teshuvah is one of the 613 mitzvot, so it could be argued that a person is obligated to sin in order to fulfill this mitzvah. However, even if that were true, a person would only be obligated to sin once in his lifetime. The first time that a person says, "I will sin and I will repent," he may be doing so for the sake of the mitzvah, but the second time, we can be sure that he is really a sinner.

In light of this, says R' Chaim, we can understand Yosef's response to the wife of Potiphar (Bereishit 39:9): "How can I do this great evil and I have sinned to G-d." Shouldn't he have said, "How can I do this great evil and I will sin to G-d"? R' Chaim answers that Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Yosef with the argument that it is a mitzvah to sin in order to repent. But only once, Yosef answered. Therefore, "How can I do this great evil and I have [already] sinned to G-d" and fulfilled the mitzvah of teshuvah. (Torat Chaim)

R' Chaim of Friedberg z"l

R' Chaim ben Bezalel of Freidberg was born in approximately 1515. He was one of four brothers about whom the great commentator and posek, R' Shlomo Luria ("Maharshal"), wrote: "I have heard about the wise brothers, the lofty, wise and pious one, R' Chaim; the lion of Torah, R' Laib; and the two shining stars, R' Sinai and R' Shimshon . . ." R' Chaim was a leading sage of his generation, though his legacy is overshadowed by that of his younger brother, R' Laib, better known as the Maharal of Prague. When he is quoted, it is usually by the name, "R' Chaim, the brother of Maharal." (See, for example, the marginal gloss in most editions of Berachot 64a).

R' Chaim was educated in at least three yeshivot. His earliest teacher was R' Yitzchak Sephardi, a Spanish exile who settled in Posen, Germany (R' Chaim's birthplace). R' Chaim writes that "[H]e taught me Mikrah / Bible with great care, and Rashi's commentary in great depth." Throughout his life, R' Chaim continued to study and teach Rashi's Torah commentary, and he wrote Be'er Mayim Chaim, a commentary to Rashi's commentary. R' Chaim repeatedly emphasized that Rashi's comments are much deeper than meets the eye, and require careful analysis. In this, R' Chaim was followed by his brother, whose book, Gur Aryeh, is one of the most popular commentaries on Rashi's work. It is believed, as well, that Maharal's interest in the systematic study of Mikrah and Mishnah according to the recommendation of Pirkei Avot (ch. 5) was inspired by R' Chaim, who had been so taught by R'

Yitzchak Sephardi. R' Yitzchak also taught R' Chaim Hebrew grammar, and the latter encouraged his own students to pursue this discipline along with their other Torah studies. (R' Chaim's grammar book, *Etz Chaim*, has not been published.) R' Chaim also sought to produce an accurate Yiddish translation of the Torah.

As a young man, R' Chaim traveled to study under R' Shalom Shachna of Lublin, one of the leading sages of Poland and the leader of the pilpul school of Torah studies. However, like his fellow student R' Moshe Isserles ("Rema"), R' Chaim apparently rejected the pilpul method.

R' Chaim's next teacher was Maharshal, and it was his method of studying halachah that R' Chaim adopted as his own. Maharshal was strongly opposed to the practice of studying halachah from codifications such as the *Shulchan Aruch* of R' Yosef Karo. Maharshal wrote that halachic codes were written with the intention of making "one Torah" out of the many views that exist, but instead they have the opposite effect. Because of the brevity of the codes' statements and the lack of discussion therein, anyone can say, "I suspect that this author did not take into account the view of Rabbi So-and-so, and that is my view." Furthermore, wrote Maharshal, with the existence of codes, the layman thinks that he has no more need for rabbis, for he thinks that he now knows the whole Torah.

To these criticisms, R' Chaim added a third concern. German Jewry, which R' Chaim served his entire career, possessed many unique customs that, in some cases, had been passed down from generation to generation for over 1,000 years. However, after the 15th century, Germany had relatively few Torah scholars. As a result, noted R' Chaim, when the Spanish and Polish sages composed halachic codes, there was usually no one to speak up for German's customs, and these were invariably left out of the codes.

The correct method for studying halachah, according to both Maharshal and R' Chaim, was the method of the *Tosafot*. Always begin with the relevant Talmudic passages. Compare them, contrast them, and, if necessary, reconcile them. Then advance to the early commentaries, testing their words against the Talmud's conclusions. In this way, the halachah can eventually be determined. R' Chaim wrote in a letter that the *Shulchan Aruch* and other codes definitely provide a worthwhile service as a review for those who have already studied the entire Talmud, but they should not be used as independent halachic sources.

Consistent with these views, R' Chaim was reluctant to leave any written works. He encouraged his students to memorize material and study by heart, thus developing their memories and their analytical abilities. That R' Chaim wrote any books is a testimony to the persistent demands of his students, and even so, he postponed his writing until an epidemic forced him to be quarantined and separated from anyone with whom he could "talk in learning." (This happened in 1569 and again in 1579.) R' Chaim passed away in 1588.

Because many readers did not receive last week's issue, the following dvar Torah relevant to the month of Elul is reprinted here:

It is said that R' Yisrael Salanter z"l (founder of the Mussar movement; died 1883) was visibly terrified during the month of Elul. Once a Jew asked him, "Of what are you afraid - is Elul a bear [i.e., a frightening animal]?"

R' Salanter answered: "Elul is more frightening than a bear. Look at King David! He said (Shmuel I 17:36), 'Your servant has slain even lion and bear.' And yet, King David himself said (Tehilim 119:120), 'My flesh shuddered from dread of You, and I feared Your judgments'."

R' Shimshon David Pinkus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) observes: It is difficult for us to understand R' Salanter's feelings. Each of us says, "I'm still around after all of these years. Why should I expect to die all of a sudden?" Nevertheless, our Sages have instructed us to pray during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah / Ten Days of Penitence: "Remember us for life, O King who desires life, and inscribe us in the Book of Life . . ." Apparently, our Sages understood that it is necessary that each of us pray for his life.

The truth, explains R' Pinkus, is that the season of Elul and the High Holidays demands of us emunah / belief in G-d. We do not perceive that our very lives are hanging in the balance, but we are called upon to believe it nevertheless. Indeed, Rambam writes in Sefer Hamitzvot that the mitzvah of emunah includes the belief in reward and punishment, and it requires us to fear that punishment.

This mitzvah is particularly difficult for those of us who are surrounded by Hashem's kindness, concludes R' Pinkus. We live lives of ease, comfort and even luxury, and we do not see that one moment on Rosh Hashanah can change everything - for us, for our families, and even for the entire Jewish people. We must teach ourselves to believe this. (Sichot R' Shimshon David Pinkus)

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