

HOW GOOD IS GOOD ENOUGH?

by Shlomo Katz

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Re'eh

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Dedicated by

The Lewin family

**in memory of father Dr. Isaac Lewin
(Harav Yitzchak ben Harav Aharon a"h)**

**The Rozen family
on Yitzchak's bar mitzvah**

Today's Learning:

Zevachim 1:2-3

Orach Chaim 696:6-697:1

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Batra 136

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shabbat 11

Parashat Re'eh always falls on or very close to Rosh Chodesh Elul, the beginning of the annual forty day period when our teshuvah / repentance is particularly pleasing to Hashem. Appropriately, our parashah begins with the verse, "Behold I am placing before you today a blessing and a curse." As the verses which follow explain, this is the choice that we make when we choose to observe the

mitzvot or to be lax in their performance.

We do not always realize that we are making such a choice. Many commentators note that most people - even objective people - think of themselves as being quite righteous. R' Yosef Chaim Azulai ("Chida"; died 1806) relates that such a person said to Rambam (Maimonides), "I do not recite the vidui / confession found in the Yom Kippur Machzor, for to do so would be a lie."

Rambam responded, "If you truly understood the extent of your obligation to G-d, you would realize that you have committed every single sin listed there many times over." It is not that G-d is overly demanding, explains Chida, but simply that the more intelligent and understanding a person is, the more that is expected of him.

In this light, says Chida, we may understand the Gemara (Niddah 30) which teaches that before a child is born, he is made to take an oath: "Even if the entire world considers you to be a tzaddik, see yourself as a rasha / evildoer." Some explain that this is because one's soul is accountable for the sins that "its body" committed in prior incarnations. We may say more simply, however, that the greater a tzaddik one is, the more strictly he is judged. Therefore, he will always be found lacking by the yardstick that he creates for himself by his good deeds. (Lev David ch. 12).

"See, I present to before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing, if you hearken to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, that I command you today." (11:26-27)

Rashi comments: "Al menat" / "With the view that you should obey."

R' Yosef Gruenwald z"l (the "Papa Rav" in Brooklyn; died 1984) asks: What does Rashi add by his comment? He explains: Halachah recognizes various ways of stating a condition. If a person uses the formula "Al menat," his intention is that if the condition is fulfilled later, the conditioned thing will be effective retroactively to the time the promise was made. [For example, if a man says to a woman, "Be married to me with this ring `al menat' that I get a certain job," and he later gets the job, the man and the woman are married retroactively to the time that he gave the ring. Thus, if another man gave the woman a ring in marriage in the interim, she is not married to the second man.] By adding "al menat," Rashi is telling us here that Hashem is eager to give us His blessings now, with the view that we should obey His commandments later.

(Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

"You shall cross the Jordan and settle in the Land." (12:10)

The Midrash teaches that the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael is equivalent to all of the mitzvot. R' Yitzchak Weiss z"l (rabbi of Verbau, Czechoslovakia; killed in the Holocaust) observes that this is alluded to in our verse. Specifically, the gematria of the final Hebrew letters of the above phrase

(40+400+50+40+90) equals 620. This is equivalent to the number of mitzvot in the Torah (613) plus the number of Rabbinic commandments (seven).

(Siach Yitzchak)

"When a prophet will arise among you . . ." (13:2)

The Gemara (Bava Batra 12a) teaches: "A wise man is greater than a prophet." R' Avraham son of the Rambam explains: The prophet referred to by this statement is not one of the prophets of the 24 books of Tanach, for they were all wise men and women in addition to being prophets, and they were certainly greater than someone who is only wise, but not a prophet. Rather, this statement refers to the many people mentioned in Tanach who experienced prophecy briefly, although they were not necessarily wise (see Shmuel I 19:20-21). Why is a wise man superior to them? Because he does not need them, but they do need him; without the wise man's wisdom and Torah knowledge, these "part-time" prophets would have no inkling of what is expected of them in this world.

Such a prophet is even required to stand in the presence of a wise man, for there is no level higher than that of a Torah scholar. Knowledge of Torah is the ultimate purpose of creation, as Hashem told the prophet (Yirmiyahu 33:25), "If not for My covenant [being kept] day and night, I would not have created heaven and earth." For the same reason, even the king is required to have a Sefer Torah with him at all times.

(Igrot R' Avraham ben Ha'Rambam, No. 7)

"Give him, you shall give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him, for in return for this matter, Hashem, your God, will bless you in all your deeds and in your every undertaking." (15:10)

R' Aharon Lewin z"l (rabbi of Rzeszow, Poland and member of the Polish parliament; killed in the Holocaust) writes: There are two attitudes that can lead one to give tzedakah / charity. One can feel sorry for the downtrodden pauper and give him charity as an expression of mercy. Such charity certainly is a worthy deed, but it is not the highest form of tzedakah. The highest form of charity is to give because it is a good deed; it is G-d's Will and His commandment to us.

R' Lewin notes that R' Yosef Albo z"l (author of Sefer Ha'ikkarim; 1380-1444) uses the above idea to explain the verse (Yishayah 32:17): "The product [literally, 'deed'] of charity shall be peace; and the effect [literally, 'service'] of charity -- quiet and security forever." The deed of giving charity, no matter why it is done, brings peace to the one who does it. However, the service of tzedakah, giving charity because it is a form of service to G-d, is far greater. Such tzedakah brings the doer quiet and security forever.

R' Lewin continues (citing his grandfather, R' Yitzchak Shmelkes z"l): One advantage of giving

tzedakah because it is a mitzvah rather than because one feels pity is that the feeling of pity wears off eventually. Moreover, when we see that poverty is widespread, we become insensitive to it. Not so if one gives charity to fulfill the Will of G-d. That Will is unchanging, and so one's charity will be unending. This is the teaching of our verse: "Give him, you shall give him." Say Chazal: You shall give to a pauper repeatedly, even a hundred times. How can you train yourself to do this? "Let your heart not feel bad when you give him" - don't give because you feel bad, but because G-d commanded it.

(Hadrash Ve'ha'iyun)

"You may not slaughter the Pesach in one of your gates [i.e., cities] which Hashem gives you." (16:5)

Chazal teach that the Jews in Egypt fell through the 49 gates of impurity and Hashem had to lift them out. So too, at any time, a person may fall through those gates, and Hashem may rescue him. However, says R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (Hungarian rabbi; died 1926), a person should not be satisfied with the "gates" that Hashem "gives" him. Rather, he should work on his own to climb through further gates of holiness.

(Haggadah Shel Pesach Chasdei David)

From our Archives . . . Tomer Devorah

Tomer Devorah, authored by R' Moshe Cordevero z"l (1522-1570; Tzefat, Israel) is one of the best known of the Mussar classics written from a Kabbalistic viewpoint. The author was the most renowned Kabbalist in Tzefat in the generation preceding the "Arizal" (R' Yitzchak Luria). R' Moshe's teacher in Kabbalah was his brother-in-law, R' Shlomo Alkabetz (author of many works including the Shabbat song "Lecha Dodi"), and R" Yosef Karo (author of Shulchan Aruch) taught R' Moshe Talmud and Halachah.

Tomer Devorah is structured as an explanation of the "Thirteen Attributes of Rachamim" (loosely translated "Mercy"). In particular, the work demonstrates how man can -- and must -- emulate each Attribute. However, the work is based, not on the best known version of the Thirteen Attributes found in Shmot 34:6- 7, but on verse in the book of Michah (7:18-20). This is based on the statement of the Zohar that the verses in Michah describe a higher manifestation of the parallel verses in Shmot.

In Tomer Devorah, "Ramak" (as the author is commonly known) explains in Kabbalistic terms the effect of sin on the world. In essence, the spiritual fulfillment which we seek may be thought of as a nut within a shell (in Hebrew, "Kelipah"). Every mitzvah that we do chips away a small piece of that shell, but every sin restores part of the Kelipah to its place. Another point that Ramak emphasizes is that the task of destroying all of the Kelipot (the plural form) is impeded not only by sinners but by

their victims, if the latter improperly withhold forgiveness.

In emulating Hashem, says Ramak, we must love even those who do not appear worthy of our affection. How can we achieve this? The prophets taught that when we sin, Hashem still loves us because He remembers the "Days of Old," i.e. when our nation was born. Similarly, we should always remember that no matter how unworthy a person seems, at least his parents loved him. If they could find some redeeming quality in him, we can love him too.

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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.
