

STEPS ON A LADDER

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Today's Learning:

Kelim 21:1-2

O.C. 64:4-65:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Zevachim 68

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shekalim 21

Our parashah contains repeated adjurations to love and fear G-d and to walk in His ways. Yet each such instruction is different. First we read (8:6), "You shall observe the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, to go in His ways and fear Him." First, go in His ways, then fear Him.

Next we read (10:12), "Now, O Israel, what does Hashem, your G- d, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your G-d, to go in all His ways and to love Him." In this pasuk, fearing Hashem is before going in His ways, which is followed by loving Him.

Finally we read (11:22), "To love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in all His ways and to cleave to Him." Here, loving G-d comes before going in His ways, which is followed by cleaving to Him. Why?

R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) explains: The Torah is teaching us that fear of G-d and love of G- d are steps on a ladder. As described in the first verse, the first step is to

observe the Torah's commandments. One must then follow in Hashem's footsteps - just as He is kind, you must be kind; just as He is merciful, you must be merciful, and so on. This will eventually bring a person to fear G-d.

Then the process begins anew. As the second verse describes, even after one has attained fear of G-d, he must again walk in Hashem's ways if he wishes to attain love of G-d. Now, of course, his performance of mitzvot will be of a higher caliber. Eventually, this will lead to love of G-d.

But that is not the end. Beyond love of G-d is cleaving to G-d. How does one get there? The third verse tells us - one must walk in G-d's ways on a higher level yet. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

"He afflicted you and let you hunger, then He fed you the mahn that you did not know, nor did your forefathers know, in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live" (8:3)

As related in Parashat Beshalach, Hashem did not feed Bnei Yisrael the mahn until they cried for food. R' Dr. Avraham J. Twerski shlita explains that had Hashem anticipated all of the Jewish People's needs -- for example, had He provided the mahn before they were hungry -- they would never have developed trust in Him. This, writes R' Twerski, is an important principle in parenting as well. If parents anticipate all of their child's needs and provide for them before the child has had an opportunity to identify those needs, the child may never learn that his needs will be met. A child must be allowed to feel his needs. When the parents respond in a way that meets those needs, then the child learns to trust his parents. (Successful Relationships p.32)

"Not by bread alone does man live, rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live." (8:3)

"And you may say in your heart, 'My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!' Then you shall remember Hashem, your G-d -- that it was He Who gave you strength to make wealth." (8:17-18)

A wealthy chassid, an owner of forests, once came to visit his rebbe, R' David Moshe Friedman of Chortkov z"l (1828-1904), for Sukkot. When he entered the rebbe's study for a personal interview, he related with joy that he had been offered a rare deal - to buy all the forests of a certain count at half price. The profits, the chassid said, would double his wealth.

The rebbe listened, and then he said, "Take my advice. Cancel the deal."

The chassid was stunned. He had already given a deposit, and the profit was as good as in his pocket. And so, his desires got the best of him, and he disregarded the rebbe's advice and went

through with the deal.

Soon, the first trees were felled and the first shipment was on its way to the mill. After several days, the chassid received an urgent telegram: "The trees are rotten. Your shipment will be returned." Darkness descended upon the chassid. He hurried to examine what remained of his forest, and sure enough, it was all rotten. His entire investment was lost. Worse yet, he was left with the expenses of felling and shipping the trees, expenses that would never be recovered. In short order, the chassid's entire fortune was lost.

The chassid reasoned that this fate had befallen him because he did not listen to his rebbe. At first, he was embarrassed to even visit the rebbe, but then he reasoned, "I've nothing left in this world. Shall I cut myself off from Olam Haba also?" Mustering all his courage, he set out for Chortkov. He entered the rebbe's study and begged for forgiveness for disobeying the rebbe. "I've been punished enough," he said. "My entire fortune is lost."

A look of bewilderment appeared on the rebbe's face. "No Jew has ever been punished on my account," R' David Moshe said. "True, I advised you not to buy the forest, but do you know why? When you told me about the wonderful deal that was offered to you and the riches that were almost within your grasp, I saw that you were so sure of yourself that you had forgotten that success is possible only with G-d's help. You did not place your trust in G-d and you did not pray to Him. Therefore I feared for the outcome, and I advised you not to go through with the deal. Now, however, that you know that Hashem determines who will be wealthy or poor, return to your business, pray to G-d, and your wealth will return." (Haggadah Shel Pesach Adir B'meluchah p.237)

"You will eat and you will be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem, your G-d, for the good Land that He gave you." (8:10)

This verse is the source of the mitzvah to recite Birkat Hamazon / Grace after Meals. The following divrei Torah relate to the text of Birkat Hamazon:

"We thank You, Hashem, our G-d because You have given to our forefathers as a heritage a desirable, good and spacious land; because You removed us, Hashem, our G-d, from the land of Egypt . . ."

Why do we say that Hashem gave our forefathers Eretz Yisrael but that He removed us from the land of Egypt? Also, why are these events mentioned out of chronological order? R' Shmuel Hominer z"l (20th century) explains:

Five separate times, the Torah tells us, "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt." This is the source of the law stated in the Gemara, codified by Rambam, and quoted in the Pesach Haggadah: "In every generation, a person is obligated to view himself as if he himself had left Egypt." This is not a law that applies only at the Pesach Seder; we fulfill it every time we recite Birkat

Hamazon.

This answers both of our questions. Hashem did not give the Land to us personally, but He did take each of us out of Egypt. And, it turns out, the events are mentioned in chronological order, for the Land was given to our forefathers thousands of years ago, while we must see ourselves as having been redeemed today.

R' Hominer adds: One must concentrate intently when thanking Hashem for redeeming him from slavery. To fulfill this mitzvah, one should imagine himself slaving with bricks and mortar, with no hope of escape, if not for the fact that Hashem performed wonders and miracles and took us from a state of mourning to having a yom tov, from darkness to a great light, and from subjugation to redemption. (Olat Tamid)

"May Your Name be blessed by the mouth of all the chai / living."

R' Nosson Nata Shapiro z"l (Poland; died 1577) asks: Why do we say "by the mouth of all the living" and not "by the mouth of all flesh" or "by the mouth of all creations"? (R' Shapiro notes that the same question could be asked about the identical phrase in the blessings after the haftarah).

He offers two answers:

The term "chai" refers to the righteous, as in the verse (Shmuel II 23:20), "Benayahu ben Yehoyada, ben ish chai / the son of a living man . . ." Our Sages interpret this verse to mean that Benayahu was a perfect tzaddik. Tzaddikim, our Sages say, are called "living" even after their deaths. The text of Birkat Hamazon attributes blessings of G-d to the righteous because of the verse (Mishlei 10:7), "Zecher tzaddik l'vrachah / Remembrance of a righteous one brings blessing."

Alternatively, the text of Birkat Hamazon is based on the verse (Tehilim 145:16), "You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing." (Seder Birkat Hamazon)

"Please do not make us needful - Hashem, our G-d - not of the gifts of human hands [literally: 'not into the grip of gifts of humans'], nor of their loans . . ."

R' Yitzchak Yaakov Rabinowicz z"l (the Biala Rebbe; died 1905) asks: Why don't we say simply, "Please do not make us needful - Hashem, our G-d - of the gifts of humans, nor their loans"? Why do we say, "the gift of human hands"? He explains:

There is virtually no one on earth who can support himself without receiving gifts, or at least loans, from other people. Indeed, many righteous people and Torah scholars support themselves exclusively through gifts. This benefits everyone -- the Torah scholar who is free to study and the benefactor who earns reward for his charity. Thus, we do not pray that we never need gifts or loans.

Rather, the meaning of this statement is as follows:

Sometimes, when a person sees that his livelihood is dependent on another, he flatters that person or is afraid to rebuke that person if the latter behaves improperly. He feels as if he is in that person's "hands," and he does not trust in G-d. Little does he realize that G-d can take away one source of income and replace it with another in the blink of an eye.

Therefore we pray: Please do not make us feel as if we have fallen into the hands of humans. Rather, we continue, "only Your hand that is full, open, holy and generous." (Haggadah Shel Pesach Divrei Binah)

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