

POWER OF PRAYER

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**Matos-Masei: Power of Prayer
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Today's Learning:

Kelim 17:2-4

O.C. 56:5-57:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Zevachim 4740

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shekalim 1

We read in this week's parashah that one who commits unintentional manslaughter is exiled to a city of refuge until the Kohen Gadol dies. The gemara says that the mother of the Kohen Gadol used to send gifts to these people so that they would not pray that the Kohen Gadol die.

And so what if they do pray--will their prayers have any effect? The Talmud Bavli explains that the Kohen Gadol is in danger because he is culpable for each accidental killing. Had he prayed that no stumbling blocks come before the Jewish people, perhaps this crime would not have taken place.

This answer demonstrates how great is the power of prayer, writes R' Meir Bergman shlita. Although a person is responsible for his deeds, another person's prayer can rescue him from wrongdoing. Indeed, the Talmud Yerushalmi takes the power of prayer even further, saying that the murderer's prayer is a threat to the Kohen Gadol because even a wicked person's prayer is answered, even when he prays for something which is objectively wrong.

How can this be? R' Bergman explains (based on a comment of Maharsha to Kiddushin 29b) that it is one of the laws of nature that prayer is answered. No special Divine intervention is required each time a prayer is uttered; G-d has already built a rule into the laws of nature that prayers, whatever they may be, will be answered [in some form].

We learn another lesson from here, adds R' Bergman, i.e., that a person who has an opportunity to pray for another and fails to do so is punished for it. (Sha'arei Orah Vol. II)

"He shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth he shall do." (30:3)

R' Shaul Broch z"l writes: If a person wants the rebuke that he gives to be accepted, i.e., if he does not want others to desecrate his word, then he should do everything that he tells others to do. (Kehayom Timtza'elah)

"Nekom nikmat Bnei Yisrael/Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael from the Midianites, achar/then you will be gathered unto your people." (31:2)

R' Chaim Meir Hager (the "Vizhnitzer Rebbe") z"l observed: Shabbat is a time when one should be especially careful with his speech, as it is written: "If you proclaim the Shabbat 'a delight,' and you honor it by not discussing the forbidden" (Yishayah 58:13, paraphrased). Unfortunately, many people use their free time on Shabbat to cause dissension and speak lashon hara. Regarding this, Hashem commanded:

"Nekom" / "Avenge" the honor of Shabbat -- alluded to by the phrase "Nikmat Bnei Yisrael," whose gematria (1193) equals the gematria of "Shabbat malketah" / "The Sabbath Queen." From whom? "From the Midianites," i.e., those who bring din / G-d's Judgment on the Jewish people through their lashon hara-"Din" and "Midian" share a common root--and from those who tell lies--the gematria of "Me'et ha'Midyanim" / "From the Midianites" (600) equals the gematria of "sheker" / "falsehood."

What will be your reward for doing so? "Achar will be gathered unto your people." "Achar" has the same gematria (209) as "Bnei, chaye, umezonei" / "Children, [long] life, and sustenance." (Imrei Chaim)

"Behold! You have risen up in the place of your fathers, a society of sinful people." (32:14)

Rambam (Shemoneh Perakim ch.4) writes that the sin which caused Moshe not to enter Eretz Yisrael was not that he struck the rock (as described in Parashat Chukat) but rather the anger with which he did so. Why then was he not punished for the anger which he expressed in the above verse?

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l explained: Moshe thought that the tribes of Reuven and Gad

did not wish to participate in conquering Eretz Yisrael. That was indeed worthy of Moshe's anger.
(Quoted in Chiyuchah Shel Torah)

The Three Weeks

R' Gavriel Zinner shlita (well-known posek in Brooklyn, NY) writes: It is customary among many chassidic rebbes -- including those of Sanz, Lubavitch, Belz and Shiniva -- to make a siyum (a celebration upon the completion of a Talmudic tractate) during the three weeks between Shivah Asar B'Tammuz and Tishah B'Av. The first Gerrer Rebbe (the "Chiddushei Ha'rim") offered the following reason for this custom: The Bet Hamikdash was destroyed due to sinat chinam / senseless hatred. At a siyum, we correct this sin by rejoicing together wholeheartedly over one person's accomplishment. R' Chaim Elazar Shapira z"l (the "Munkatcher Rebbe") observes in his work Sha'ar Yissachar that this type of shared joy is precisely what the yetzer hara least wants to see among us. Indeed, one of the names of the yetzer hara - Sama'el - may be seen as an acronym for the phrase: "Siyum Masechet Ain La'asot" / "Do not make a siyum."

R' Zinner continues: Rashi writes (in his commentary to Sukkah 55a) that chapter 94 of Tehilim was sung in the Bet Hamikdash during the Simchat Bet Ha'shoavah on Sukkot because that psalm alludes to our ancestors' faith in G-d. It was that faith which enabled them to rejoice in the Temple despite their oppression at the hands of the Persians, Greeks and Romans. [For most of the Second Temple Era, the Jews did not enjoy complete political independence but rather were dominated by one of those empires.] Making a siyum during the Three Weeks similarly demonstrates our faith that G-d will redeem us from our present exile. Moreover, this faith actually hastens the redemption, particularly because, as the 16th century work Yam Shel Shlomo observes, Hashem has no greater joy in this world than when Jews study Torah.

R' Zinner adds: The special importance of Torah study during the period of the Three Weeks, and its ability to hasten the redemption, is alluded to in the book of Eichah itself, as explained in the work Yismach Moshe (by R' Moshe Teitelbaum z"l; died 1840). The verse (Eichah 2:19) says, "Arise! Cry out at night in the beginnings of the watches." This verse refers to the obligation to study Torah at night. ["The watches" refers to the night, which is divided into watches.] But why is this verse necessary? asks the Yismach Moshe. Are we not already commanded to study Torah day and night?

He explains: Night is a time that is associated with G-d's Justice. In the days of the Bet Hamikdash, the service of burning the fats and innards, which took place at night, softened G-d's Judgment. When there is no Temple, says Megillat Eichah, then extra Torah study at night is called for in order to take the place of the Temple service. (Nit'ai Gavriel)

R' Shmuel Yaffe Ashkenazi z"l

R' Ashkenazi was born in Turkey in approximately 1525, but his name indicates that he was of Ashkenazic descent. Some believe that he was a cousin of R' Mordechai Yaffe (author of the Levushim) and of another R' Shmuel Yaffe, the father of R' Yoel Sirkes (the "Bach").

R' Ashkenazi's teachers were the sages Mahari ben Lev, R' Shmuel Saba, and R' Shlomo Alkabetz (author of the poem Lecha Dodi). In 1564, R' Ashkenazi was appointed rabbi of one of the neighborhoods of Costa (now Istanbul). Together with other rabbis of Costa, R' Ashkenazi signed a number of decrees meant to strengthen observance of the prohibition on lending with interest. It appears that he also headed a yeshiva.

R' Ashkenazi wrote many halachic responsa. Although his own collection of the letters - entitled Bet Din Yafeh - has been lost, many of his responsa have been printed in other collections. He also wrote other halachic works. However, by far his greatest fame rests on his monumental commentaries on various Midrashim, in particular Yefeh Toar on Midrash Rabbah. He also wrote Yefeh Anaf on Midrash Rabbah to the Five Megillot, Yefeh Nof on the Midrash to Sefer Shmuel and other works.

R' Ashkenazi died on 19 Elul 5355 (1595). (Source: Gedolei Ha'dorot)

Midrash Shmuel (29:3) states that the final redemption cannot be brought about through Zechut Avot / the Merit of our Patriarchs, but only through the merit of Torah study. R' Ashkenazi asks: Do we not learn in Midrash Shocher Tov (Ch. 106) that the final redemption will be brought about by five factors - one of which is Zechut Avot?! Moreover, why does Midrash Shocher Tov not list the merit of Torah study as one of the factors that can bring the redemption?

R' Ashkenazi answers: The redemption can come at two times - either at the predetermined End of Days or at an earlier time, if we merit. It is clear from the context of the Midrash Shocher Tov that it is referring to the factors that will ensure that the redemption does take place eventually, i.e., not later than the predetermined time. On the other hand, the Midrash Shmuel is teaching that Torah study can hasten the redemption. (Yefei Nof)

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