

IT'S A WONDER

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Kelim 6:2-3

O.C. 38:13-39:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Zevachim 5

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sukkah 11

Among the laws in this week's parashah are the laws of the nazir, who takes a vow not to drink wine, eat grape products or cut his hair for a certain period. These laws are introduced by the verse, "A man or a woman who will `yafli' to take a vow..." While some understand the word "yafli" to mean "disassociate himself," Ibn Ezra understands it to be from the root "pele," meaning "to do a wondrous thing."

R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (the Mirrer Mashgiach) explains: Many people claim that they can readily change any of their habits, but that they just don't want to. This verse says that this is not so; it truly is a "wonder" when a person makes a fundamental change in his habits. [Therefore, a person who wants to change cannot expect to work on himself casually. Rather, supreme effort is required.] (Da'at Torah Vol. IV, p.41)

R' Eliyahu Dessler z"l came to understand man's ability to fool himself by reflecting on his own battle to quit smoking. Every evening, as he suffered from terrible chest pains, he promised himself that the next day he would not smoke. But in the morning he said, "One cigarette won't hurt." And, before he smoked the second cigarette he said, "This, too, is only one cigarette." Before he knew it, he had smoked all day long, and again was suffering from terrible chest pains.

And so it is when man evaluates any of his deeds. (Michtav M'Eliyahu Vol. I, p.111)

"They shall confess the sin that they committed..." (5:7)

R' Yitzchak Arielli z"l (Mashgiach of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav and author of Enayim La'mishpat) asks: Why is the mitzvah to confess one's sins taught here, in the context of the prohibition on theft? Doesn't the obligation of vidui / confession apply to all sins equally?

He explains: Theft represents the essence of all sins, for by stealing one expresses his belief that everything in the world exists for his own pleasure, and all other people are subservient to him. This same attitude vis- -vis G-d Himself is at the heart of every transgression. (Midrash Arielli)

"He [a nazir] shall not come near a dead person." (6:6)

According to Ba'al Haturim, the reason for this mitzvah is so that if the nazir experiences Divine revelation as a result of his abstinence, he will not be suspected of black magic (which uses human bones in a ritual that mimics prophecy).

R' Yehuda Ze'ev Segal z"l adds: The Ba'al Haturim is teaching us that one who controls his appetites can in fact reach the level of Divine revelation.

The Gemara (Nedarim 9b) states that Shimon Hatzaddik (the kohen gadol) never ate from the sacrifices of a nazir until he met a certain young man. That nazir had gorgeous locks of hair, and Shimon asked him: "What brought you to shave this beautiful hair?" [A nazir who completes his term must shave his hair.]

The nazir explained, "I saw my reflection in a pond and realized my own beauty. Momentarily, I thought of sinning, but I said to my yetzer hara, 'You evil one--why do you take pride in a world which is not yours, and in which you will end up as dust. I swear I shall shave your hair for the sake of

heaven'."

This story teaches, says R' Segal, that a person must speak to his yetzer hara and tell him that he doesn't agree to go along with him. In fact, one must literally shout at his yetzer hara. (Yir'ah Vada'at)

"Ye'va'rechecha / May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. Ya'air / May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you. Yisa / May Hashem lift His countenance to you and establish peace for you." (6:24-26)

R' Yaakov Ba'al Haturim writes: "Ye'va'rechecha / May Hashem bless you" recalls the merit of Avraham, about whom it is written (Bereishit 24:1), "Hashem had blessed Avraham with everything."

"Ya'air / May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you" recalls the merit of Yitzchak. The Midrash records that at the time of the Akeidah, Yitzchak saw the Shechinah and died. Subsequently, Hashem illuminated Yitzchak's eyes with new life.

Finally, "Yisa / May Hashem lift His countenance to you" recalls the merit of Yaakov, about whom it is written (Bereishit 29:1), "So Yaakov lifted his feet, and went toward the land of the easterners."

R' Chaim Moshe Reuven Elazary z"l (long-time rabbi in Canton, Ohio; died 1984) asks: What particular merit is there in the fact that Yaakov "lifted his feet"? Since he obeyed his parents and fled to Lavan's house, he had to lift his feet!

There is a lesson here. We are used to thinking that a person who does a mitzvah is merely rewarded for the mitzvah he has done. This is not so. Every act a person does in the process of performing a mitzvah is separately rewarded by G-d. [For example, G-d does not only reward a person for praying with a minyan, he rewards every step that a person takes preparing for and getting to the minyan.] Yaakov, too, was not only rewarded for heeding his parents' instructions to flee to Lavan, he also was rewarded for every step he took along the way.

This way of judging man's deeds is alluded to in the Torah in the story of the Akeidah. We read (Bereishit 22:10), "Avraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slaughter his son." The main object was "to slaughter his son," but the Torah also records that Avraham performed two preparatory acts - he stretched out his hand and took the knife. (Netivei Chaim)

Pirkei Avot

"Get yourself a teacher and avoid doubts." (Pirkei Avot Ch.1)

R' Moshe Yechiel Halevi Epstein z"l (the Ozhrover Rebbe) teaches: This does not refer to halachic doubts -- although a person will certainly avoid such doubts if he has a teacher -- for a person's

need for a mentor to teach him the applicable laws is too obvious to be taught in the Mishnah. Rather, the Mishnah refers to moral and ethical doubts and questions about a person's priorities in life and in his service of Hashem. Many people do not even realize that they should have questions in this area, and the result is that the evil inclination sometimes leads them to think that a particular sin is actually a mitzvah. This is why every person needs a teacher. (Quoted in Mi'ma'ayanot Ha'netzach, p.64)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) expresses a similar idea in explaining a pasuk in Mishlei (28:9): "One who removes his ear from hearing Torah -- his prayer too is an abomination." Everybody knows that the Torah teaches what is right and wrong in the realm of physical activity. However, some people think that when it comes to their spiritual aspirations and their love of G-d -- the types of thoughts that people experience during prayer -- it is what is in their hearts that counts.

That is incorrect. The Torah teaches us as well what a person's thoughts must be, including when he prays. Thus, a person who does not learn Torah, cannot know how to pray properly. (Olat Re'iyah, p.21)

R' Yitzchak ben R' Shmuel z"l ("Ri Ha'zaken")

R' Yitzchak was born in Ramerupt, France in approximately 1120. His father was the son of R' Simcha, author of Machzor Vitry, one of the earliest siddurim. His mother was a granddaughter of Rashi, and the sister of Rabbeinu Tam and Rashbam. Those two uncles of R' Yitzchak were his foremost teachers.

R' Yitzchak was one of the greatest of the Ba'alei Tosfot, the sages whose teachings are recorded in the Tosfot commentary to the Talmud. Only R' Yitzchak's uncle Rabbeinu Tam is quoted more frequently in that commentary. Regarding the genesis of R' Yitzchak's Talmud commentary, it is reported that he used to sit with sixty students before him, each of whom was studying a different Talmudic tractate. Between them, these students had the entire Talmud at their fingertips, and whenever R' Yitzchak would speak, they could challenge him from any tractate. When R' Yitzchak was questioned, he and his students would debate the matter until it had been fully resolved.

R' Yitzchak was known for his humility and his piety. He was known to pray for an exceedingly long time, and he used to observe Yom Kippur for two consecutive days (just as we observe all the other holidays for two days outside of Eretz Yisrael).

R' Yitzchak's students included the Mishnah commentator and Tosafist, R' Shimshon of Sens, and R' Yitzchak's own son, R' Elchanan. The latter was martyred in his father's lifetime, in 1184. R' Yitzchak died in Dampierre, France in approximately 1200.

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