

CAN YOU PASS THE TEST?

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Chullin 3:1-2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sanhedrin 66

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Eruvin 23

In this parashah, all but one of Yaakov's twelve sons are born. The Torah's account of their birth begins (29:31), "Hashem saw that Leah was unloved, so He opened her womb; but Rachel remained barren." Why does the Torah mention that Rachel remained barren? The main point of the verse, after all, is that Leah became pregnant!

R' Nosson Wachtfogel z"l (Mashgiach of the Lakewood Yeshiva) explains in the name of R' Simcha

Zissel Ziv z"l (the Alter of Kelm): Apparently the Torah is criticizing Rachel for not doing more to make Leah feel comfortable in Yaakov's home. Therefore, the Torah notes the contrast - Leah's womb was opened but Rachel's was not.

The Gemara records that Yaakov had expected Lavan to try to trick him out of Rachel's hand, and Yaakov therefore provided Rachel with a secret password before their scheduled marriage. However, Rachel, seeing that Leah would be shamed, had shared the password with her sister. If so, asks R' Wachtfogel, what more was expected of Rachel? How could she be punished for not making Leah feel more at home?

The answer is that G-d puts man to many tests, and the fact that man has passed the great test does not absolve him of his duty to pass the lesser tests. Rachel passed her great test; she gave her husband to her sister. Now she was expected to pass the lesser test of making her sister feel at home.

R' Wachtfogel continues: In the 1920's and 30's, there were a small number of dedicated young men who left the comfort of the United States to study in the great yeshivot of Eastern Europe. They passed their great test, one that required unusual devotion to Torah study over all other ends. And yet, R' Wachtfogel recalled, even these American students were not immune from wasting time. Imagine that! After making the greatest imaginable sacrifice, they failed the small test. We, too, must fight to succeed in every challenge, large or small. (Noam Ha'mussar)

"Va'yifga / He encountered the place . . . because the sun had set." (28:11)

Rashi writes: Our Sages interpreted "va'yifga" as a reference to prayer, as in the verse (Yirmiyah 7:16): "Do not tifyga / entreat me." From here we learn that Yaakov established the prayer of Ma'ariv.

R' Eliyahu Capsali z"l (Italy and Crete; 16th century) asks: Our Sages teach that Avraham established Shacharit, Yitzchak - Mincha, and Yaakov - Ma'ariv. However, since the day begins at sunset, why did Avraham not establish Ma'ariv, the first prayer of the day?

He answers: Ma'ariv has a lesser halachic status than the other prayers, and thus has certain halachic leniencies. Therefore, Avraham chose not to make that "his" prayer.

The above is a possible answer, but on a deeper level, R' Capsali continues, the question of why Avraham did not introduce the prayer of Ma'ariv is not a meaningful one. In truth, each of the Patriarchs established the prayer that related to the unique powers of his soul. Shacharit relates to chessed / kindness, for the morning is the time when light spreads over the world, just as chessed brings "light" to the world. Thus we read (Tehilim 42:9), "In the day, Hashem will command His lovingkindness." Therefore, Avraham, the man of chessed introduced Shacharit.

Minchah alludes to din / justice, as the Zohar teaches, "At the time of Minchah, justice prevails in the

world." Thus we read (Yirmiyah 6:4), "Woe to us, for the day draws to a close." (This, writes R' Capsali, is one reason why the Sages warn a person to take special care to recite Minchah.) Accordingly, Yitzchak, the man of justice (see Bereishit 31:42), introduced Minchah.

[R' Capsali concludes with a kabbalistic explanation for why Yaakov established the prayer of Ma'ariv.]

(Me'ah Shearim, Ch. 90)

"Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely Hashem is present in this place and I did not know'."
(28:16)

R' Reuven Halevi Horowitz z"l (early 19th century Polish rabbi) comments: "Yaakov" refers to a Jew when he is at a lowly spiritual state (in contrast to "Yisrael" which refers to a Jew when his spiritual state is elevated.) A Yaakov should awake from the stupor caused by excessive entrenchment in the materialism of this world, and he should repent. What is the most effective tool for accomplishing this? Recognizing that Hashem is present everywhere - "The whole world is filled with His glory" (Yishayah 6:3) - although we easily forget this fact. One should say to G-d, "I'm sorry! I would never have sinned if I had remembered that You were watching."

(Dudaim Ba'sadeh)

Shabbat

"Two angels accompany a person home from shul on Friday night - one good and the other bad. When the person comes home and finds the candles lit and the table set, the good angel says, 'May it be so next week as well,' and the bad angel is forced to say, 'Amen'."

(Shabbat 119b)

R' Shalom Noach Brazovsky z"l (the Slonimer Rebbe; died 2000) asks: How can a "bad angel" accompany a person out of shul? We are taught that mitzvot create "good angels" and sins create "bad angels"!

He explains: Shabbat has two aspects - "Zachor / Remember" (Shmot 20:8) and "Shamor / Observe" (Devarim 5:12). "Zachor" is an affirmative commandment. Specifically, it refers to reciting kiddush, but more generally, it includes all pleasurable aspects of Shabbat. "Shamor" is a negative commandment that enjoins us to not work on Shabbat. More generally, however, shamor demands that we uproot any bad that is within us.

There is no question, writes R' Brazovsky, that both of these approaches to Divine service have a place on Shabbat, but which is primary? This is a subject of dispute between the so-called good angel and the so-called bad angel. The former asserts that the primary means of serving Hashem is

to do good, while the latter claims that the primary means of serving Hashem is to uproot bad. [He is called the "bad" angel because he is concerned with our bad deeds, not because he is bad.]

This is what the Gemara is teaching: When the two angels enter the house and see the beauty of the Shabbat candles and of the set table, the "good" angel says, "You see! What could be more pleasing to Hashem than this? Let this person observe Shabbat in this way next week as well." And, seeing the radiance of the Shabbat table, even the "bad" angel is forced to admit that Zachor is indeed the most beautiful way of observing Shabbat.

The Midrash states: "Lest you think that I (G-d) gave Shabbat to you for your detriment [literally: 'for your bad'], know that this is not so. I gave it to you for your good!" Could anyone think that Shabbat is bad for us? Rather, R' Brazovsky explains in the name of R' Avraham Weinberg z"l (an earlier Slonimer Rebbe), this Midrash is teaching the same lesson stated above: The primary observance of Shabbat is to grow through doing good, not to focus on eradicating sin.

The Gemara (Shabbat 118b) states: "If one observes Shabbat properly, even if he committed idolatry, he will be forgiven." How so? Once again, the idea is the same. We know that repentance motivated by true love of Hashem can eradicate any sin. Love is the feeling which leads one to do good, while fear is the feeling that leads one away from bad. Thus, this gemara, as well, is teaching us to focus on the "do good" aspect of Shabbat.

(Nesivos Shalom; Moadim p. 24)

R' Klonimus of Lucca z"l

R' Klonimus was a member of the famous Klonimus family that had been influential in the development of scholarship in Italy and France since the eighth century. Tradition records that a French king - some say, Charlemagne - had brought an ancestor of this family to Mainz (now in Germany) in order to bolster the Jewish communities there.

R' Klonimus himself lived in Lucca, Italy in the 10th century, and was recognized by his contemporaries as a leading halachic authority and paytan / author of liturgy. Some of R' Klonimus' responsa have been preserved and published. Rabbeinu Gershom Me'or Hagolah, today the best known Ashkenazic sage of that era, praised R' Klonimus' liturgical works, among which is "Malchuto be'kahal adato" which is recited by many congregations on Yom Kippur morning. Tosfot to Menachot (109b) quotes three Talmudic interpretations that R' Klonimus uttered on his deathbed, literally moments before he died.

R' Klonimus' son, R' Meshulam, lived from approximately 950 to 1020. R' Meshulam also was a noted Talmudic scholar, posek, and paytan. He corresponded extensively with the roshei yeshiva of Babylon, R' Sherira Gaon and his son R' Hai Gaon, and he is cited in Rashi's commentary to Zevachim (45b). Like his father, some of his halachic responsa have been published, and several of his poems

are included in the Yom Kippur Machzor. R' Meshulam also wrote a commentary to Pirkei Avot, which has been lost.

Late in his life, R' Meshulam settled in Mainz. Among his many illustrious descendants were R' Yehuda Ha'chassid (died 1217), author of Sefer Chassidim, and R' David ben Shmuel Halevi (1586-1667), author of Turei Zahav.

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