

CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Emor

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Today's Learning:
Mikvaot 2:1-2
O.C. 204:5-7
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Chullin 106
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sotah 21

The last part of our parashah tells the story of the blasphemer. The Torah relates that this individual fought with another Jew and ended up cursing G-d. Not knowing the punishment for that sin, Bnei Yisrael placed the blasphemer in custody and sought instructions from Hashem.

In response, Hashem informed Bnei Yisrael that one who blasphemes incurs the death penalty. He also taught them the punishments for killing another person, killing an animal, injuring another person, and hitting one's parent. R' Eliezer Ashkenazi z"l (1513-1585; rabbi in Egypt, Italy and Poland) asks: Why did Hashem teach these laws at this time?

Also, it would seem that it was not necessary for the Torah to tell us about the fight in which the blasphemer was involved just before he "blessed G-d," (in the euphemistic language of our Sages). Why are we being told about his fight?

R' Ashkenazi explains: The Torah wishes to teach us the danger of becoming angry, and to warn us

that particularly when a person is angry, he must consider the consequences of his actions. What started as a fight between two Jews ended with one combatant losing control of himself, cursing G-d, and incurring the death penalty. One who does not control his anger may kill an animal one day and may kill a person the next day. Or, he may intend to slap another person lightly and end up injuring him. An angry person may even go so far as to strike his parent. This is what the Torah warns us to avoid. (Ma'asei Hashem)

"He shall not leave the Sanctuary" (21:12)

Literally, this verse is instructing how the Kohen Gadol should behave when he is in mourning. However, says R' Mendel of Premishlan z"l (early chassidic leader; 18th century), there is a message here for every person - "Do not detach yourself from the Holy One. No matter what you do, your purpose should be to carry out G-d's desire and not for your personal benefit."

Of course, there are occasions when a person must concentrate on a mundane activity. What should he do then? Before he begins, he should expressly think, "I am now leaving home for a short time, but I plan to return soon."

(Darchei Yescharim)

"Ki tizbechu / when you slaughter a todah / thanksgiving- offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it l'rtzonchem / willingly." (22:29)

R' Hillel Lichtenstein z"l (see page 4) suggests that this verse can be interpreted in light of Tehilim (50:23), "Zove'ach todah ye'chabdanani." The literal meaning of that verse is, "One who sacrifices a thanksgiving offering honors Me"; however, our Sages interpret it to mean, "One who offers confession honors Me." [The words "todah" / "thanks and "vidui" / "confession" are closely related and both have as their root the concept of "acknowledgment."]

Writes R' Lichtenstein: Although G-d accepts repentance at any time and at any stage of a person's life, we are taught that the repentance of a youth is more meaningful than the repentance of an older person. The reason is that the youth has a stronger yetzer hara and stronger desires. Likewise, repentance undertaken before one is afflicted with punishments is more meaningful than repentance begun after one is afflicted with punishments. For this reason, the repentance of a rich man is more beloved to G-d than the repentance of one who has lost his riches. Similarly, the repentance of one who is living peacefully is more beloved than that of one who is plagued with troubles. In each case, repentance undertaken voluntarily is more significant than repentance undertaken in response to suffering.

Thus, says our verse (interpreted in the same way Chazal interpret the verse from Tehilim): "Ki tizbechu todah / when you offer confession, you shall offer it l'rtzonchem / willingly."

(Maskil El Dal III 7:2)

Pirkei Avot (Chapter 4)

"Who is strong ('gibor')? One who restrains his [evil] inclination."

Why is this statement phrased in the present tense? R' Baruch Hager z"l (the "Seret Rebbe"; died 1965) explains that restraining one's desires is a constant challenge from which one may never rest. In fact, notes R' Chaim Meir Hager z"l (the "Vizhnitzer Rebbe" and R' Baruch's brother), the Torah does not want us to finish the task. The mishnah does not say, "One who has destroyed his inclination." True, one must restrain his impulses and evil inclination, but there is a time to use them as well. In Chazal's words, "Serve Hashem with both of your inclinations."

(Mi'maayanot Ha'netzach, p.195)

"Rabbi Meir said: 'Minimize your involvement in commerce ("esek") and study Torah'."

R' Avraham Pinso z"l of Sarajevo writes: This can be understood in light of the gemara (Avodah Zarah 19b) which promises that if one studies Torah with the proper intentions, his investments will prosper on their own. It does appear superficially that this is not the case, but we cannot gage a person's inner motivations, and we therefore do not know whether he really deserves this blessing. Also, a person may study Torah with the purest of intentions, but forfeit this promise because of his sins. This is the likely explanation any time we see that a promise of the Torah is not fulfilled.

(Katit La'maor)

"Do not focus on the pitcher but on its contents."

R' Pinso writes: This is an allusion to the yetzer hara, the evil inclination. It looks like an earthenware jar, something of little value. In fact, however, it is filled with the sweetest wine. How so?

We think of the yetzer hara as a pest. We are constantly fighting with the yetzer hara, trying to do good and to please Hashem. For doing so, we earn our places in the World-to-Come. But without the challenge which the yetzer hara presents, we would never earn that reward.

(Ibid)

"Rabbi Shimon says, 'There are three crowns--the crown of Torah, the crown of royalty, and the crown of the priesthood- -and the crown of a good name is above all of them'."

Then aren't there four crowns? asks Rav Nachum Mordechai Friedman z"l (the "Tchortkover Rebbe").

He explains that the "crown of a good name" is not a separate distinction, but is the "crown jewel" of the other crowns. All of the Torah, royalty, and priestliness in the world are worthless if their master does not earn a good name as well.

(Doreish Tov p. 197)

R' Hillel Lichtenstein z"l

R' Hillel Lichtenstein was born on 11 Kislev 5575 / 1814 near Pressburg (present-day Bratislava, Slovakia), and he became one of the leading students of the rabbi of Pressburg, R' Moshe Sofer (the Chatam Sofer). After his marriage, R' Lichtenstein studied in Galante, Hungary.

R' Lichtenstein began his rabbinic career in 1846, first as rabbi of Margareten, Hungary, then as rabbi of Klausenberg (today, Cluj, Romania), and later, back in Margareten. Eventually, he became rabbi of Kolmyya, Galicia (today in Ukraine), the town with which he is most closely associated. While in Margareten, R' Lichtenstein began to visit R' Chaim Halberstam, the Zanze Rebbe. Although not from a chassidic background himself, R' Lichtenstein eventually began to act as a chassidic rebbe. Many chassidim gathered around him and he accepted kvitlach / notes with requests from them in the manner of a rebbe.

R' Lichtenstein was active in the affairs of the broader Jewish community beyond just the towns in which he served. While in Hungary, he was one of the founders of the "Orthodox Congress," an umbrella group of Jewish congregations. After moving to Galicia, he joined with R' Shimon Sofer (his teacher's son) to found a similar organization, "Machzikei Ha'dat." R' Lichtenstein was a popular speaker and he frequently traveled from town to town trying to strengthen Torah observance. He was also among the fiercest opponents of the Haskalah, the so-called "Enlightenment" movement.

R' Lichtenstein was a strong supporter of settlement in Eretz Yisrael, and he helped his son-in-law, R' Akiva Yosef Schlesinger, buy up land for what became the city of Petach Tikva. R' Lichtenstein himself died in Kolomyia on 10 Iyar 5651 / 1891 and is buried there. In addition to leaving many descendants, R' Lichtenstein wrote numerous books including Avkat Rochel (mussar), Bet Hillel (letters regarding strengthening observance), Maskil El Dal (derashot), Teshuvot Bet Hillel (responsa), and others. (Source: Encyclopedia L'Chassidut).

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