

WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU FORGOT?!

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Eikev

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Today's Learning:
Bikkurim 3:11-12
O.C. 399:10-400:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Shabbat 117
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Avodah Zarah 34

Three great chassidic rebbes of the early 19th century--R' Sar Shalom Rokeach of Belz z"l, R' Naftali Horowitz of Ropszce z"l and R' Zvi Elimelech Langsam z"l of Dinov--once met and began discussing the verse from this week's parashah (8:19): "V'hayah im shachoch tishkach / It shall be that if forget, you forget, Hashem, your G-d, and go after the gods of others, and worship them and prostrate yourself to them -- I testify against you today that you will surely perish." R' Zvi Elimelech (known as the Bnei Yissaschar) asked: Why does the Torah threaten such a terrible punishment for a sin that is the result of forgetfulness? He answered: It is understandable that a person can sin as a result of forgetting Hashem for a time. However, an upstanding person will soon repent and regret his forgetfulness. In that case, he has an excuse for his sin: he forgot! Not so the person referred to in our verse. The Gemara teaches that the word "V'hayah" connotes a joyous occasion. If person forgets his religious obligations and is happy that he forgot, then his subsequent actions cannot be forgiven.

R' Naftali offered a different answer: The halachah is that a person who forgets to make an Eruv Tavshilin before a Yom Tov that falls on Friday may rely on the Eruv Tavshilin prepared by the town rabbi. However, a person may only do that once. The second time he forgets, he is considered a sinner and he is penalized by being prohibited from cooking on Yom Tov in preparation for Shabbat. So, too, the person in our verse, of whom it says, "It shall be that if forget, you forget." A person might forget G-d once, but someone who forgets twice is an ordinary sinner.

Finally, R' Sar Shalom spoke: The Torah commands a farmer to leave behind bundles of stalks that he forgets in the field so that poor people may take them. However, says the Mishnah, this applies only to small bundles. A large bundle is never considered forgotten. So, too, regarding our verse, concluded R' Sar Shalom. Some things are just too important to forget. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

"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)

R' Chaim ben Betzalel z"l (1515-1588; rabbi of Friedberg, Germany; often referred to as "Rabbeinu Chaim, brother of the Maharal of Prague) observes: The phrase, "in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live," implies that man does not live by bread alone, but of course he needs bread as well. Yet, the next phrase, "rather by everything that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live," implies that man does not need even bread--only the word of G-d keeps man alive. Which inference is correct?

He answers: If a person merited, he could live without bread, as Moshe did on Har Sinai for 40 days and as Eliyahu Hanavi did also (see Melachim I 19:8). However, the typical person cannot do this. He does need bread. Nevertheless, know that man does not live on bread alone; he must combine the word of G-d with it. In particular, when he eats, he should bring the word of G-d to the table [for example, by reciting a Dvar Torah or studying a Torah work during the meal].

How do we know that a person should not feel guilty about the fact that he needs to eat? The Torah says (Vayikra 11:2-4), "These are the creatures that you shall eat from among the animals that are upon the earth. Everything among the animals that has a split hoof, which is completely separated into double hooves, and that brings up its cud -- that one you may eat. But this is what you shall not eat..." Isn't that last verse redundant? If the Torah says what I may eat, is it necessary to say what I may not eat? Could we not figure that out by ourselves through process of elimination? The purpose of the redundancy is so that we will not interpret the first verse merely as permission, but as a directive: A normal person needs to eat.

(Sefer Ha'chaim III, Ch. 1)

"A Land of wheat, barley, grape, fig, and pomegranate; a Land of oil-olives and date-honey." (8:8)

The Gemara teaches that if one has two of the fruits of this verse before him, he should generally recite the berachah on the one that is mentioned earlier in the pasuk. However, if he has one fruit from the first clause of the verse and another fruit from the second clause, then the blessing should be recited on the one that is closer to the word "Land." For example, an olive (#1 in the second clause) would precede a grape (#3 in the first clause).

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: Just as berachot in general direct us towards good traits and beliefs [for example, recognizing who gives us our food], so all the detailed laws of berachot have something to teach us. In this case, the lesson is the centrality of Eretz Yisrael to our beliefs. "Whatever is closer to the Land takes precedence." The more one loves Eretz Yisrael and the more one works to build it, the closer he is to being blessed and achieving perfection.

Why is the verse broken into two parts? Because different people have different reasons for being attached to Eretz Yisrael. Some see its spiritual qualities--the five fruits in the first clause representing the Five Books of the Torah. Others see Eretz Yisrael as a place where the Jewish People can find rest and material fulfillment, represented by the oil and honey of the second clause. This verse, says R' Kook, teaches the greatness of those who desire the Land even for the latter reasons. A fruit in the second group is blessed before a fruit in the first group if it is closer to the Land. Someone who actually settles in Eretz Yisrael because of its material bounty is blessed over someone who loves Eretz Yisrael's spiritual qualities but who remains far from the Land. The reason is that when the nation attaches itself to Hashem's Land, regardless of the reason, it will eventually come closer to Hashem as well.

(Eretz Chaifetz p. 21)

"It will be that if you listen to My commandments that I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul." (11:13)

Rashi asks (paraphrasing the Sages), "Serve Him with a service that is in the heart, i.e., prayer, for prayer is termed service ('avodah')."

R' Yaakov Krantz z"l (1741-1804; the Dubno Maggid) asks: What is the purpose of prayer? G-d already knows our needs and our desires. If something we want is good for us, let Him give it to us. If it is not good for us, then prayer can have no effect. We are all witnesses to the fact that a person will sometimes pray for something 1,000 times and still not be answered.

The answer is that Hashem wants us to sense the difference between good circumstances and bad ones. If Hashem gave us everything we needed before we asked for it, we would never sense His beneficence. We would think that everything comes about naturally.

For example, a person who is healthy, who is whole in body and limb, whose eyes can see and whose ears can hear, and so on, does not usually rejoice over his physical faculties. He is not aroused to bless his Creator for these gifts. Only a person who is lacking one of these faculties and then is cured is aroused to appreciate what he now has.

To what may prayer be compared? To night watchmen who call out every hour, "It is such-and-such o'clock and all is well." Why do they wake up sleeping townspeople to make this announcement? Not because the townspeople need to know the time, but in order to prove that the watchmen are awake and alert. Likewise, Hashem does not need our prayers. Rather, we pray to prove that we are "awake."

(Kol Bochim Al Megillat Eichah 1:5; Voice of Weepers, p. 14)

Letters from Our Sages

[R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l was one of the foremost teachers of mussar / character development of the second half of the 20th century. His best known written work is Alei Shur. The following is taken from a short collection of letters by R' Wolbe that was published on the shloshim of R' Wolbe passing, which occurred during Chol Ha'moed Pesach of this year.]

Many thanks for your letter. I meditated upon your question, and I see that you are demanding too much of yourself. To be aware at every moment of hashgachah pratit / Hashem's watchfulness over man - that is a very high level which cannot be attained without preparations . . .

In practice, the time to meditate on hashgachah pratit is during prayers. Birchot Ha'shachar / the first blessings recited in the morning are expressions of personal gratitude for Hashem's watchfulness. Pesukei D'zimrah / the psalms and other verses recited after Baruch She'amar describe the revelation of G-d's hashgachah throughout all parts of creation. [For example,] Ashrei describes G-d's Attributes in general. The next psalm ("Halleli nafshit et Hashem" / "My soul will praise Hashem") describes G-d's hashgachah in the life of the individual. The verse "Bonei Yerushalayim Hashem" / "Hashem builds Jerusalem" describes Hashem's hashgachah over history. The psalm "Hallelu et Hashem min ha'shamayim" / "Praise G-d from the heavens"-His hashgachah over nature. "Shiru l'Hashem shir chadash" / "Sing to Hashem a new song"-His hashgachah over the Congregation of Israel. . .

Next come the blessings surrounding Kriat Shema. First we describe the angels' recognition of Hashem's hashgachah. [The entire first blessing after Barchu is describing how the angels praise

Hashem.] As we recite there, the angels praise Him as the "one who alone effects might deeds, makes new things, etc." In the blessing Ahavah Rabbah, we describe the pinnacle of His watchfulness over us-He gave us the Torah. In Shema, we acknowledge His uniqueness and our resulting obligations to Him, and the fact that He rewards and punishes [which are manifestations of the fact that He is watching over us] and the Exodus. These themes are reviewed and summarized in the blessing which follows, until the words, "Ga'al Yisrael."

After that, once these acknowledgments of His hashgachah have penetrated deep within us, then we [recite Shemoneh Esrei to] request all of our spiritual and material needs.

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

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