

WALK THIS WAY

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Ki Savo

Walk This Way

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Today's Learning:
Yevamot 10:2-3
O.C. 624:1-3
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Sukkah 7
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Challah 8

This week's parashah tells us (28:9), "You shall walk in His ways," teaching that a person, through his good deeds, actually can walk in Hashem's footsteps. R' Eliezer Zvi of Komarno z"l (died 1898) observes, though, that most of us don't believe this teaching. Specifically, we do not believe in our own spiritual potential.

For example, how often do we pray, and, when we see that we are not answered, we assume that our prayers cannot really make a difference? The Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (died 1760) taught that this is the result of excessive self-deprecation. A person must believe that his prayers have untold consequences in the heavens, even if he does not see those effects. If a person did believe this, R' Eliezer Zvi adds, how joyfully would he pray?! How carefully would he pronounce every letter, every syllable?!

If a person believed that he is (in the words of Bereishit 28:12) "a ladder standing on the ground with its head in the heavens," if he believed that every movement, every word, every step and every

business deal makes a spiritual impact on the world, he would do all of those things for the sake of Heaven. Also, the Zohar comments, "If people knew the love with which Hashem loves the Jewish people, they would roar like lions in their eagerness to follow Him."

On the other hand, if a person thinks that he cannot make a difference, he should know that he is on the road to heresy. If a person thinks that way, it is a sign that the yetzer hara has succeeded with him and will soon deprive him of life in this world and in the next.

Rather than despair, one can learn from Yaakov, who said (Bereishit 35:5), "I lived with Lavan and I delayed until now." The letters of "Lavan" are the reverse of the letters of "Naval" / "degenerate one," a reference to the yetzer hara. Why was Yaakov successful in turning around the "naval" and "whitening" (from "lavan" / "white") it? Because "I delayed until now," i.e., because he did not expect immediate results from his prayers and mitzvot, but rather had faith that the results would come with time. (Zekan Beto, p.216)

"Moshe and the kohanim, the levi'im, spoke to all Yisrael, saying, 'Haskait' / Be attentive and hear, O Yisrael - This day you have become a people to Hashem, your G-d'." (27:9)

R' Moshe David Valle z"l (1697-1776; Italian kabbalist and colleague of R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l) writes: "Be attentive and hear" means "Do not stop paying attention to the curses and warnings that are in this parashah." This is similar to the verse (Mishlei 3:11), "My child, do not despise Hashem's discipline and do not despise his reproof."

In addition, our Sages interpret "Haskait" as two words: "has" and "kait" 'Has' has a gematria of 65, equal to Hashem's Name which is associated with mercy (aleph-dalet-nun-yud). 'Kait' alludes to 'katat' / pulverized. This teaches that even when Hashem must strike us harshly because of our sins, He also injects an element of mercy. King David said similarly (Tehilim 23:4), "Your rod and Your staff comfort me." The rod represents punishment, while the staff represents the Shechinah which supports us.

(Mishneh L'melech)

"Accursed is the man who will make a graven or molten image..."

"Accursed is the man who degrades his father and mother..." (27:15-16)

The Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) teaches that Hashem considers His honor and the honor of parents to be equivalent. The reason, R' Eliezer Dovid Gruenwald z"l (Hungarian rabbi and rosh yeshiva; died 1928) explains, is that as long as one honors his parents, he will not leave his faith, the faith which his parents have bequeathed to him. This is why our two verses above are juxtaposed to each other: A Jew who worships graven images (idols) degrades his parents as well.

(Keren Le'Dovid)

"All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you, until you are destroyed . . . because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant." (28:45-47)

Is it really possible that merely because one did not serve Hashem happily that he will be deserving of the terrible curses described in our parashah? After all, such a person did at least serve Hashem.

No! writes R' Meir Yechiel Halevi Halstock z"l (1852-1928; chassidic rebbe in Ostrowiec, Poland). Rather, the verse should be read as follows: "All these curses will come upon you . . . because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d." Did you feel guilty about this? No, it was "amid gladness and goodness of heart." You were happy and content over the fact that you were not serving Hashem.

(Meir Einei Chachamim III)

The anonymous work Orchot Tzaddikim (possibly dating to the early medieval period) interprets this verse as follows: "Because--amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant--you did not serve Hashem, your G-d." For example, he writes, drinking wine on Yom Tov is a mitzvah. However, if one focuses on his drink and drinks to excess, and loses sight of the mitzvah, he would be committing the violation described in this verse.

"When you have finished tithing every tithe of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give to the Levi, to the convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, and they shall eat in your cities and be satisfied. Then you shall say before Hashem, your G-d, 'I have removed [literally 'set fire to'] the holy things from the house . . .'" (26:12- 13)

R' Raphael Moshe Luria shlita (Yerushalayim) writes: The sin of Adam consisted of two parts, and the repentance for each is different. First, because he disobeyed G-d's command, there was an element of blasphemy in his sin. And, because his sin involved an element of deriving improper pleasure from G-d's creation. When one repents from a sin that involves blasphemy, one must distance himself entirely from his past. On the other hand, to repent from a sin that involved improper pleasure, one must elevate his enjoyment of creation to a level where it can be considered a Divine service.

Paralleling these two forms of repentance, there are different laws relating to produce. Sometimes--for example, in the case of orlah / fruit of a new tree--the prohibited food must simply be thrown away. In contrast, some mitzvot involve elevating the food--for example, by giving it to a levi as ma'aser or to a convert, orphan, or widow as ma'aser ani. One who has thus elevated the pleasures of this world can truly say, "I have set fire to the holy things," i.e., I have ignited a holy fire, using ordinary items "from the house."

(Ori Ve'yishi II, Introduction p.2)

"I did not eat of it in my intense mourning, I did not consume it in a state of impurity, I did not give of it for the needs of the dead ..." (26:14)

Literally, this verse is a statement that a Jew is required to make upon completing the three year tithing cycle attesting that he has complied with all the laws of ma'aser. However, in the spirit of the High Holidays, R' Moshe Avigdor Amiel z"l (1883-1945; Chief Rabbi of Antwerp and Tel Aviv) interpreted the verse as decrying the loss of proper focus in many people's service of Hashem. He writes in part:

In past generations, Yizkor was never a big deal. It has no source in the Torah or the books of the Prophets. Yet, it has become a major event, and people are very meticulous to observe it.

In contrast, many people forget to remember their own souls. We are supposed to recite every day (at the very beginning of the morning prayers), "Elokai / My G-d, the soul which You have placed in me is pure. You created it, You 'blew' it into me, You guard it within me, and You are destined to take it from me and return it to me in the World-to-Come." This "Yizkor" has the potential to save man from sin, but it has taken a back seat to a much less important Yizkor.

Likewise, Jews in our time take particular care to observe yahrzeits as if that is one of the Thirteen Foundations of our faith. This is another practice that seems to have received very little attention in earlier generations. In contrast, man forgets to observe his own yahrzeit. What does it mean to observe ones own yahrzeit? Our Sages teach: "Repent one day before you die." But, does a person know when he will die? they ask. Indeed not! Therefore, one should repent every day.

(Derashot El Ami)

Teshuvah

R' Mordechai Golob shlita (Yerushalayim) writes: Our Sages teach that if a person is in the process of becoming a tzaddik, Hashem showers goodness on him even now. In contrast, if a person is becoming wicked, Hashem judges him based on his present condition, not based on his future. If a person is destined to be neither a tzaddik nor a rasha, but just "average," Hashem does good to him now because of the good that he (the person) is destined to do, but He does not punish him for the bad that he has not yet done.

Therefore, one would be well advised in preparing for the High Holidays to get on the right path, the path that leads in the direction of achieving completeness and perfection. How? R' Golob offers some suggestions from sages of earlier generations:

(1) Study Torah. The Midrash notes that the study of Torah has the potential to bring back even those

who are quite distant from Hashem. Certainly, then, it can bring closer those who are already close. The Gemara (Kiddushin 30a) quotes Hashem, "I created the yetzer hara, and I created the Torah as an antidote to it."

(2) Study mussar / works on character development. The Chafetz Chaim writes that he spoke to many great sages who were opponents of the mussar movement in its early years [the late 19th century], and even they agreed that the study of mussar is necessary in "our" time [i.e., the early 20th century, and certainly the 21st century]. Without the study of mussar, the Chafetz Chaim writes, we have no assurance that our Torah knowledge or our fear of G-d will be retained. R' Yaakov Lorberbaum (the "Nesivos"; early 19th century) likewise wrote to his children in his will, "I warn you to set aside time every day to study mussar, for because of our sins, our hearts are hardened like stones, but mussar has the power to soften the stone." Finally, the Chatam Sofer (also early 19th century) wrote, "Believe me! On a day when I do not study mussar, I feel that my fear of G-d is weakened noticeably."

(3) Choose a good environment and good friends. Rambam writes (Hil. De'ot 6:1), "It is only natural that a person's views and ideas are influenced by his friends and comrades . . . Therefore, a person must attach himself to tzaddikim . . ."

(4) Choose a rabbi or spiritual mentor who will guide you. The Gemara says that a person should always live near his mentor. The proof for this is that as long as King Shlomo's rebbe was alive, King Shlomo did not marry the daughter of Pharaoh.

(5) Pray regarding spiritual matters. If one prays for help in improving his Torah study or in some other spiritual undertaking, Hashem will certainly answer him.

(6) Study the laws of lashon hara. This will help a person improve in all areas of interpersonal relations, not just in the specific area of not speaking evil about others.

(Eitzot Le'dina p.28-29)

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