

FUTURE JUDGEMENT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Ki Seitzei

Future Judgement

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The Sabrin family in memory of mother Bayla bas Zev a"h (Bella Sabrin)

Today's Learning: Bechorot 2:1-2 O.C. 191:2-192:1 Daf Yomi (Bavli): Gittin 64 Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sotah 47

One of the sections of our parashah sets out the laws of the ben sorer u'moreh / wayward and rebellious son who steals meat and wine from his parents and is put to death. Rashi z"l explains that a ben sorer u'moreh is killed to save him from his own destiny, since he is destined to be a murderer and a thief.

Several commentaries observe that this appears to contradict another well-known statement of Rashi, specifically his comment to Bereishit 21:17, that even though Hashem knew that Yishmael would one day oppress the Jewish People, He saved Yishmael from dying of thirst because, at that moment, Yishmael was righteous (or innocent). Is a person's future taken into account when he is judged, or not?

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (the Maharal of Prague; died 1609) answers that there is no contradiction. Rather, different rules apply to judgments in the Heavenly court (Yishmael) and a human court (ben sorer u'moreh). Specifically, the role of the human court system is to save wrongdoers from the punishment that they will obtain at the hands of Heaven. If it will further that goal, a human court can take a person's future into account. (Gur Aryeh)

Elsewhere, Maharal observes that the Heavenly court takes into account in its judgment whether the sinner has repented. However, a human court may not do that. Maharal explains that the role of the human court is to distance a person from evil. A human court is charged solely with looking at a

person's "dark side." In contrast, the Heavenly court judges the whole person. (Netiv Ha'teshuvah ch.2, as explained by R' Yehoshua Hertman shlita, editor of an annotated edition of Maharal's writings)

"When you will go out to war against your enemies . . ." (21:10)

Because our parashah is always read during Elul, many chassidic and mussar works interpret our verse allegorically as referring to one's battle against the yetzer hara. Below we present two elaborations in this vein:

The midrash Sifre comments: "Including against the Canaanites."

R' Yehoshua Horowitz z"l (1848-1912; the Dzikover Rebbe) writes about this: Our Sages teach that the more one humbles himself, the better. This is alluded to by the midrash, as the word "kenani" (Canaanite) shares a root with the word "hakna'ah" (humbling oneself). In other words, a tool for fighting the yetzer hara is to humble oneself.

The Aramaic translation of our verse is: "When you will 'tepok'." Notably, "tepok" has the same gematria as "shofar." Kabbalists teach that the service that we perform through the shofar is accepted when one humbles oneself. Indeed, the angel that carries the sounds of the shofar to G-d's throne, so-to-speak, is none other than Chanoch, the individual mentioned in Bereishit who entered Gan Eden alive. In his lifetime, Chanoch was a shoemaker, an occupation that deals with man's lowest point. (Ateret Yeshuah)

All wars in which Bnei Yisrael engage fall into one of two categories: milchemet mitzvah / an obligatory war, i.e., to conquer Eretz Yisrael or a war of self-defense, and milchemet reshut / a voluntary war. The midrash Sifre states that our verse is referring to voluntary wars.

R' Yerachmiel Eliyahu Botchko z"l (1888-1956; founder and rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Etz Chaim in Montreux, Switzerland) asks: How can the statement that our verse is referring to voluntary wars be reconciled with the widespread interpretation that our verse is also an allegory to the battle against the yetzer hara? Certainly fighting the yetzer hara is not voluntary!

R' Botchko explains: In a battle, one may fight and win, one may fight and lose, or one may flee. Fighting is honorable, whether one wins or loses, while fleeing generally is not honorable. So it is with the battle against the yetzer hara. Our task is to fight relentlessly. This does not necessarily mean we will defeat the yetzer hara; indeed, that is not our responsibility. When man fights his yetzer hara with all his strength, G-d finishes the job.

This is alluded to in our verse: "When you will go out to war . . ." Your task is to "go out" and fight. What happens next is beyond your control.

Why is this called a "voluntary war"? Because the way to fight the yetzer hara is to build fences, i.e., to voluntarily limit consumption of even permitted pleasures, thereby sanctifying oneself. (Ohr Ha'yahadut)

"If a man takes a wife . . ." (22:13, 24:1 and 24:5)

Our Sages frequently use a "wife" as a metaphor for the Torah. R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania, and a prolific author in all areas of Torah study) explains that just as one creates physical progeny together with his wife, so one creates spiritual progeny - Torah novellae and good deeds - through his Torah study. Moreover, just as one's wife is an "ezer k'negdo" - i.e., she is supportive when her husband is meritorious and is an obstacle when her husband is not meritorious - so the Torah is an "elixir of life" to those who study it with pure motivations, but a poison to those who misuse it.

Shlomo Ha'melech wrote (Mishlei 5:18), "Rejoice with the wife of your youth." R' Chaver comments: The real wife of one's youth is the Torah, for it was his companion in the womb. The Gemara (Sotah 2a) teaches that forty days before a child is conceived, a heavenly proclamation announces, "The daughter of so-and-so is destined for so-and-so." This also is a metaphor for Torah. Just as the Torah was given to Moshe Rabbeinu over a period of forty days, so preparations are made for forty days to give each person his true portion - the Torah that he will learn over his entire lifetime. (Quoted in Otzrot Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Chaver p.9)

"Beware of a tzara'at affliction . . ." (24:8)

R' Yisrael Isser of Ponovezh z"l (Lithuania; mid-19th century) writes: One of the forms of tzara'at is manifested by skin that appears healthy on the surface, though underneath the area is full of pus. The Torah (Vayikra 13:11) says of a person who has such a blemish, "The kohen shall declare him contaminated." This teaches that a person who acts as if his motivations are pure, though in reality they are not, is tamei. For example, when one is offended and he reacts negatively, he may say, "I am not angry for my honor, but rather for the honor of the Torah that I have studied. Of course, I am not so vain as to think that I am a Torah scholar, but compared to the person who offended me . . ."

How can a person who lashes out "for the Torah's honor" measure whether his motivations are pure? Let him examine how he reacts when he sees a Torah scholar other than himself being offended. Also, how does he react when he sees a volume of Torah literature being treated disrespectfully? Finally, does this person who considers himself a minor Torah scholar defame the honor of the Torah by acting inappropriately himself? (Menuchah U'kedushah p.83)

Teshuvah

Why is no berachah / blessing recited before performing the mitzvah of teshuvah / repentance? R' Menachem Simcha Katz shlita (Brooklyn, N.Y.) offers an anthology of answers, including the ones below. (Note that the parenthetical objections to some of the answers are from the cited work.)

(1) No berachah is recited because it is not within man's ability to complete the mitzvah, as only G-d can decide whether one's repentance will be accepted. For the same reason, no berachah is recited when giving charity, as the completion of the mitzvah is dependent on finding a worthy recipient. (One can argue, however, that this reason is not valid because we are guaranteed that heartfelt teshuvah will be accepted.)

(2) No berachah is recited because teshuvah is a mitzvah that comes about via a sin. Likewise, no berachah is recited over the mitzvah of returning a stolen object.

(3) No berachah is recited because the mitzvah of teshuvah is performed primarily in one's heart. Likewise, there is no blessing for bittul chametz / nullifying chametz.

4) The formula for the berachah on mitzvot is, "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to . . ." However, teshuvah is not a mitzvah that one should perform because he was commanded to do so. Rather, it should be performed because one is self-motivated to repent. Indeed, it would be an insult to G-d for a person to say, "I am repenting because You told me to."

(5) No berachah is recited because repentance is not complete unless G-d can testify that the penitent truly intends to never repeat his sin. This level is very difficult to attain, and, in effect, any berachah recited may be a blessing in vain. For the same reason, no berachah is recited on the mitzvah of honoring parents, since honoring parents to the full extent of the law is nearly impossible.

(6) No berachah is recited because teshuvah takes a long time.

(7) No berachah is recited because teshuvah often occurs spontaneously. (Simcha L'Ish Ch.38)

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.

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