

GOOD AND BAD COMPANY

by Shlomo Katz

Parshios Miketz & Chanukah

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Sponsored by
Martin and Michelle Swartz
on the 50th yahrzeit of
Martin's great-grandfather Barnett Swartz
(Dov ben Yehoshua a"h) (3 Tevet)

The Vogel family
on the yahrzeit of mother and grandmother
Miriam bat Yehuda Leib a'h (Mary Kalkstein)

Today's Learning:
Shevuot 4:7-8
O.C. 53:5-7
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 98
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shekalim 33

The midrash at the beginning of our parashah comments: "So long as the yetzer hara exists, darkness and death will exist. When the yetzer hara is uprooted from the world, darkness and death will cease to exist." What is this midrash teaching, and how is it connected to our parashah?

R' Moshe Teitelbaum z"l (1915-2006; Sighet-Satmar Rebbe in New York) explains: At the end of last week's parashah we read that Pharaoh's butler *"did not remember Yosef, and he forgot him."* Rashi z"l

comments: "He did not remember him immediately, and he forgot him after time." What does this mean?

The Gemara (Makkot 10b) teaches: "They lead a person in the way that he wants to go." The commentator Maharsha z"l observes that the Gemara does not say that Hashem leads a person in the way he wants to go. "They lead him . . .," writes Maharsha, refers to the angels that Hashem creates from a person's deeds. If one does good deeds, he causes the creation of "good" angels who lead him down a good path. If he does bad deeds, he causes the creation of "bad" angels who lead him astray.

Another midrash teaches that a person should fight the yetzer hara with "bundles of mitzvot." In light of the above, we can understand this to mean that a person should cause the creation of hordes of "good" angels who will overpower the "bad" angels that try to mislead him.

In this light, also, we can understand Rashi's comment. It means that on the spot, the butler decided to forget Yosef. Because of this sin (lack of gratitude), the butler did not remember Yosef after a time either (at least until it served his own self-interest to remember Yosef in order to look good in Pharaoh's eyes).

Finally, we can understand the lesson of the midrash with which we began and its connection to our parashah. Why did two years pass before Yosef was released from prison? Because as long as the yetzer hara exists it will cause people to act as the butler acted, and the world, therefore, will be filled with darkness and death, i.e., with the "bad" angels that are created as a result of sin. (Beirach Moshe)

"They had left the city, had not gone far, when Yosef said to the one in charge of his house, 'Get up, chase after the men; when you overtake them, say to them: Why do you repay evil for good? Is it not the [cup] from which my master drinks, and with which he regularly divines? You have done evil in how you acted!'"

"He overtook them and spoke those words to them. They said to him, 'Why does my lord say such things? It would be sacrilegious for your servants to do such a thing. Here, look! The money that we found in the mouth of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we have stolen from your master's house any silver or gold? Anyone among your servants with whom it is found shall die, and we also will become slaves to my lord.'

"He replied, 'What you say now is also correct. The one with whom it is found shall be my slave, but the rest of you shall be exonerated'." (Bereishit 44:4-10)

Is either death or slavery the proper punishment for stealing? Also, why did Yosef's agent say, "What you say now is also correct," and then go on to contradict the brothers?

R' Aryeh Leib Zunz z"l (Polish rabbi; died 1833) explains this conversation in light of a verse in Tehilim (19:10), "The judgments of Hashem are true, altogether righteous." There are two standards by which a person's actions are judged. One is "justice." In the eyes of justice, like actions deserve like punishments. Thus, if someone steals \$100, justice is not interested in whether either the thief or the victim is a millionaire or a pauper.

The second standard is called "righteousness." We read in Shmuel II (chapter 12) that the prophet rebuked King David for taking Bat Sheva by likening his action to that of a wealthy man who stole the only lamb of a poor man. On hearing the parable, but before realizing that it was about him, King David exclaimed that the wealthy man deserves the death penalty. Is that the punishment for stealing? Not according to justice. According to righteousness, however, King David's act in taking the wife of a commoner and bringing about her former husband's demise deserved death.

This is what Yosef's brothers said to Yosef's agent: We are rich men and do not need your master's cup. Furthermore, we recognize how important your master's cup is to him. Therefore, if one of us stole Yosef's goblet, then not only justice, but righteousness, should prevail.

Yosef's agent replied: You are correct. Righteousness should prevail, and strict punishment is called for. However, you have exaggerated what that punishment should be. (Kometz Ha'minchah)

Bitachon

[Introduction: Our Sages teach that Yosef erred at the end of last week's parashah by placing his trust in Pharaoh's butler rather than in Hashem. This week we read that Yosef was forced to remain in jail for two more years -- according to Chazal, as a punishment for his error. In that connection, we present the following insights from R' Yaakov Emden z"l (1697-1776; Germany) regarding bitachon / trust in Hashem.]

There are seven traits that Hashem possesses that make it appropriate to place one's trust in Him and in no other being:

- (1)** He is the most merciful and compassionate of all beings. Moreover, any mercy that other beings exhibit is merely derivative of His mercy, as we read (Devarim 13:18), *"He will give you mercy and be merciful to you."*
- (2)** He knows all that is good for man and helpful to him. Likewise, no one knows the cures for diseases and other ailments better than the One who created them.
- (3)** His strength is greater than any force that can be imagined, and no being can contradict His will.
- (4)** He watches over the actions of all men, and He ignores nothing. Nothing is hidden from Him, and later events do not cause Him to forget earlier events.

(5) No being can do anything for himself or for or against another person without His consent. When one realizes that no being can hurt him without Hashem's consent, one realizes that it makes no sense to fear any being except Hashem.

(6) Hashem is good beyond description, and He does untold numbers of good things for every person with no initiative on the person's part.

(7) Every being (except Hashem) is subject to limitations, and one can do neither more nor less than Hashem desires. Thus, the laws of nature cannot change themselves, and any deviation from those laws that occurs is a purposeful act by Hashem Himself. (Migdal Oz - Bet Ha'middot: Aliyat Bitachon ch.3)

Chanukah

The mitzvah of lighting Chanukah lights is unique among mitzvot in that a person has three options for how to perform it. One can fulfill the mitzvah in a complete manner by lighting one light per household per night. One who chooses to perform the mitzvah in a more beautiful manner may have each member of his household kindle one light each night. Finally, one who wants to do the mitzvah in the most beautiful manner will add an additional light each night.

Why was this mitzvah "designed" this way? R' Yitzchak Isaac Sher z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Slobodka Yeshiva; died 1951) explains: We read in Yeshayah (26:20), *"Hide for a brief moment until the wrath has passed."* The Chashmonaim could have followed this approach and hidden in caves until the danger had passed. However, like Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah who chose to be thrown into a furnace rather than run away (when Nevuchadnezar ordered them to bow to his statue), the Chashmonaim stood up to resist. Because they went beyond the letter of the law, the mitzvah that resulted gives us an option to go beyond the letter of the law. (Lekket Sichot Mussar II p.151)

Shemittah

This week we continue discussing the sanctity of the fruits of shevi'it / the seventh year. The halachot below are taken from chapter seven of Sefer Ha'shemittah by R' Yechiel Michel Tikochinski z"l.

Produce of the seventh year may be eaten, drunk, applied to one's skin, kindled to give light, or made into dye - each item in accordance with its normal use. Any plant growth (of the seventh year) that is fit for one of the above purposes is deemed to have kedushat shevi'it / sanctity of the seventh year.

From when does kedushat shevi'it apply to produce? From the point in its growth when it is fit for its intended purpose. If a fruit would fall off the tree before it is fit for its intended purpose, it would not

have kedushat shevi'it. However, so long as it remains on the tree and is destined, under normal circumstances, to continue to grow, it has kedushat shevi'it. Accordingly, a tree on which such fruit is growing may not be cut for lumber. [Ed. note: Even in non-shemittah years, one generally may not cut fruit-bearing trees for lumber. An exception is made if the tree's value as lumber exceeds the value of its produce. During the shemittah, cutting a fruit tree is prohibited even in the latter case. It should be noted also that our Sages record that terrible suffering has befallen those who have felled fruit trees. Accordingly, one should not cut down such a tree at any time even for constructive purposes, for example, to make room for a home expansion, without seeking rabbinical guidance.]

Produce of shevi'it which is fit for human consumption may be consumed only by humans and not by animals. However, one need not stop animals from eating it on their own.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), 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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