

THE HIGHEST FORM OF PRAISE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Reeh

The Highest Form of Praise

By Shlomo Katz

Re'eh

Volume 23, No. 41

25 Av 5769

August 15, 2009

Sponsored by Nathan and Rikki Lewin on the yahrzeit of his father, Dr. Isaac Lewin (Harav Yitzchok ben Harav Aharon a"h)

Today's Learning: Ohalot 14:7-15:1 O.C. 326:13-328:2 Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Metzia 112 Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shevuot 30 King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (8:34-36), "Ashrei / Praiseworthy is the person who listens to me [i.e., the Torah], to hasten to my doors every day, to the doorposts of my entranceways. For one who finds me finds life and elicits favor from Hashem. But he who sins against me despoils his soul; all who hate me love death." Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (Spain; died 1263) explains: "Ashrei" refers to the highest form of praise that can be given. For this reason, King David opened the book of Tehilim with Ashrei. Likewise, the chapter in Tehilim known as the "eight-faceted praise" [because it repeats the aleph-bet eight times] begins with Ashrei. The word "Ashrei" is in the plural form because it can never be applied to a person who has only one good trait, only to someone who is well-rounded with good character traits.

R' Yonah continues: King Shlomo writes, "Ashrei is the person who listens to me," because one's

willingness to hear what the Torah has to say is the source of all life [i.e., it is the basis for proper mitzvah observance and character improvement]. "Me" can mean not only the Torah in general, but the book of Mishlei (Proverbs) in particular. On the simplest level, the lessons in Mishlei are the key to a happy, successful life in this world, while on a deeper level, they bring a person to Olam Ha'ba.

King Shlomo continues: "All who hate me love death." R' Yonah explains: The goal of Torah study is to inherit life in this world and the next. This is a choice that man has, as the opening verses of our parashah tell us, "See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing--that you listen to the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, that I command you today . . ." (Drushei U'perushei Rabbeinu Yonah Al Ha'Torah)

"You are children to Hashem, your G-d." (14:1)

R' Yisroel Meir Kagan z"l (the Chofetz Chaim; died 1933) writes: Imagine that someone (call him Reuven) has a son who behaves improperly. Imagine further that another person (call him Shimon) gossips about Reuven's errant son and publicizes his misdeeds. Reuven would be justifiably angry at Shimon. Reuven (the father) would say, "Even if you meant well, you should have rebuked my son privately rather than humiliating him publicly. Moreover, I know that your intentions were not pure; rather, you enjoy seeing other people's shame."

Our verse teaches that we are children to Hashem. The Torah means this literally; Hashem's love for us is similar to a parent's love for a child, even an errant child. Therefore, Hashem "rejoices" when good things happen to us, and He is "pained" when we have troubles. Let us imagine, then, how He "feels" when someone speaks ill of a fellow Jew for no justifiable reason! (Shemirat Ha'lashon: Sha'ar Ha'tevunah ch.5)

"Rather, only at the place that Hashem, your G-d, will choose from among all your tribes to place His Name shall you seek out 'l'shichno' / His Presence and come there." (12:8)

Ramban z"l (R' Moshe ben Nachman; 1194-1270) explains this verse as follows: You will come to the place from distant lands and you will ask, "Which is the way to the house of Hashem?" You will say to your friends (paraphrasing Yishayah 2:3), "Let us go up to the mountain of Hashem, to the house of the G-d of Yaakov."

Ramban continues: In the midrash Sifrei it states about our verse, "Shall you seek"--through a prophet. I might think that we should wait until a prophet tells us to seek the place; therefore the verse says, "Shall you seek out His Presence and come there." First you will seek and find the place, and later a prophet will tell you.

Ramban concludes: The verse says, "Shall you seek out 'l'shichno' / His Presence and come there."

This means, "Seek His honor and come there to see the 'face' of Hashem, the G-d of Yisrael." It is from here [from the word "l'shichno"] that the Sages derived the expression, 'the Shechinah'." (Commentary on the Torah)

Citing the second paragraph of the above Ramban, R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer z"l (1794-1874; German rabbi; leading advocate both for resettling Eretz Yisrael and for renewing the Temple service) wrote to the famous Orthodox banker Asher Anshel Rothschild z"l in the summer of 1836:

"Clearly we are instructed not to wait for a prophet to come to tell us, 'Go up, seek out Hashem, and sacrifice a korban.' Rather, we must seek on our own and go up if it is within our power to do so. Then we will merit for a prophet to appear to us [i.e., Eliyahu Hanavi or mashiach]." (Reprinted in Drishat Zion p.297)

"If there shall be a destitute person among you, any of your brethren in any of your cities, in the Land that Hashem, your G- d, gives you, you shall not harden your heart or close your hand against your destitute brother. . . You shall surely give him, and let your heart not feel bad when you give him. . ." (15:7, 10)

R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (rabbi of Rzeszow, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) writes the following regarding this mitzvah:

The Gemara (Berachot 10b) teaches: "If one has a Torah scholar as a guest in his house and allows the scholar to benefit from his (the host's) property, it is as if he (the host) offered a Tamid offering in the Bet Hamikdash." What, asks R' Lewin, is the purpose of the words, "in his house"? He explains:

We learn in Pirkei Avot (Ch.1): "Let your home be wide open and let the poor be members of your household." This is a message to the many people who give charity generously but who never allow the poor into their homes. Rather, all collectors and beggars are required to stand in the front hall and receive their donations there. Even if they are given food, they are made to eat it standing at the door or even outside of the house. This is not proper; rather, says the Mishnah, let your home be wide open and let the poor be members of your household.

But what about the carpet and the couch? What if the poor track mud or snow into the house? R' Lewin writes that King Shlomo already answered these questions. We read (Mishlei 31:20-21-in the description of the Eishet Chayil / "Woman of Valor"), "She spreads out her palm to the poor and extends her hand to the destitute. She fears not snow for her household, [though] her entire house is clothed [i.e., upholstered] in scarlet wool."

If this is how one must treat an ordinary charity collector, how much more so a Torah scholar! This is what the Gemara means when it says, "If one has a Torah scholar as a guest in his house . . .," not merely at the door.

The importance of the attitude with which one gives charity is taught in our verses. One must not only give, one must not feel bad when he gives. To the contrary, one must speak gently to the beggar and console him over his troubles and embarrassment. (Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun)

From the same work . . .

There are two attitudes that can lead one to give tzedakah / charity. One can feel sorry for the downtrodden pauper and give him charity as an expression of mercy. Such charity certainly is a worthy deed, but it is not the highest form of tzedakah. The highest form of charity is to give because it is a good deed; it is G-d's Will and His commandment to us.

R' Lewin notes that R' Yosef Albo z"l (1380-1444) uses the above idea to explain the verse (Yeshayah 32:17): "The product [literally, 'deed'] of charity shall be peace; and the effect [literally, 'service'] of charity - - quiet and security forever." The deed of giving charity, no matter why it is done, brings peace to the one who does it. However, the service of tzedakah, giving charity because it is a form of service to G-d, is far greater. Such tzedakah brings the doer quiet and security forever.

R' Lewin continues (citing his grandfather, R' Yitzchak Shmelkes z"l): One advantage of giving tzedakah because it is a mitzvah rather than because one feels pity is that the feeling of pity wears off eventually. Moreover, when we see that poverty is widespread, we become insensitive to it. Not so if one gives charity to fulfill the Will of G-d. That Will is unchanging, and so one's charity will be unending. This is the teaching of our verse: "Give him, you shall give him." Say Chazal: You shall give to a pauper repeatedly, even a hundred times. How can you train yourself to do this? "Let your heart not feel bad when you give him" - don't give because you feel bad, but because G-d commanded it.

This Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

24 Menachem Av: On this date, the Torah law of inheritance was reinstated in Eretz Yisrael. For some time during the Greek occupation of Eretz Yisrael (during the Second Temple period), the Saducees had succeeded in corrupting the law, but after the Chashmonaim defeated the invaders, they reinstated Torah law (Megilat Ta'anit). According to Bava Batra 115b, this event occurred on 24 Tevet.

Today is the yahrzeit of R' Ephraim Zalman Margaliot z"l (1762-1828). R' Margaliot was a successful businessman in Brody, Galicia, and held no rabbinic position, yet he left behind several influential halachic works. One of these is Sha'arei Ephraim, dealing with the laws of Torah reading, the aliyot, mi she'berachs, and related subjects. Another work is Mateh Ephraim, dealing with the laws of the High Holidays. Some have the custom to begin studying this work today, continuing through the High Holidays, in commemoration of R' Margaliot's yahrzeit.

Shabbat Mevorchim: In the Oberland region of Hungary, it was customary to "bless" the new moon using the melody of the High Holiday prayers. (Luach Davar B'ito p.1268)

R' Yisrael Salanter z"l (1810-1883; founder of the mussar movement), writes:

At one time, as I know [from personal experience], every person was gripped with fear upon hearing the declaration: "Elul." This trembling bore fruit in bringing one closer to Divine service, each person on his own level. However, contrary to expectations, the person who was most far from G-d all year long was not the one most overcome by worry and fear from the awe of the [forthcoming] judgment and the realization that Torah and good deeds are the shield against bad things, G-d forbid. To the contrary, a double measure of improvement for the good was seen among those who followed a holy path all year long. (Ohr Yisrael, Letter 14)

Erev Rosh Chodesh: It is a meritorious deed to study the entire Pirkei Avot every erev Rosh Chodesh. (Ohr Ha'yashar ch.15)

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.

Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. The low cost of sponsorship is \$36. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.