

# THE HIDDEN LIGHT

by Shlomo Katz

## Parshios Behar & Bechukosai

### The Hidden Light

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The Katz family on the yahrzeits of Avigdor Moshe ben Avraham Abba Hakohen Katz a"h and the other kedoshim of Oyber Visheve, Hungary, Hy"d

Parashat Bechukotai opens, "If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." Rashi z"l comments: "If you will follow My decrees' means: If you will toil in Torah study."

How does Rashi's interpretation fit the verse? R' Shmuel Shmelke Guntzler z"l (rabbi of Oyber-Visheve, Hungary for 45 years; died 1911) explains: The midrash Yalkut Shimoni asks: Why are Torah scholars poor? It answers: So that they will not busy themselves with other things. This requires explanation, R' Guntzler writes, for there are many Torah scholars who are not poor, and even some who are very wealthy.

He continues: Our Sages teach that the original light that was created on the first day of creation was hidden away for the future because this world is not fit to enjoy it. The Zohar explains that that light is all goodness, with no hint of strict justice. Thus, were that light revealed, the world would be so bountiful that mankind would serve Hashem because of the goodness He has given them, and not for the sake of doing mitzvot. This, explains R' Guntzler, is what the midrash means when it says that Torah scholars are poor--the absence of the light is itself the poverty--so that they will not be distracted from doing mitzvot for their own sake.

The Gemara (Sotah 21a) states: "A sin can extinguish a mitzvah, but it cannot extinguish Torah." R' Guntzler explains: A mitzvah is called a "candle," while the Torah is called "light," a reference to the hidden light. As noted, that light is all goodness, with no hint of strict justice; therefore, a sin cannot

extinguish it.

Returning to our verses, the Torah promises, "If you will follow My decrees . . . then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." As explained above, true goodness follows from Torah study. Therefore, "If you will follow My decrees" must refer to that activity. (Meishiv Nefesh)

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"If your brother becomes impoverished and sells part of his ancestral heritage, his redeemer who is closest to him shall come and redeem his brother's sale." (25:25)

R' Menachem Mendel Hager z"l (1886-1941; rabbi, rosh yeshiva and chassidic rebbe in Oyber Visheve, Hungary) writes: This verse can be understood in light of the Arizal's explanation of the words of shemoneh esrei, "Place our lot with them [the righteous]." How can we pray for something that depends on our own free will? Rather, the Arizal explains, when a person sins, the reward for his good deeds is taken from him and given to tzaddikim. However, the truly righteous do not want what is not theirs, and they voluntarily return this reward to its original owner. Thus we pray: If we have sinned and lost our reward, at least place our lot with the type of tzaddik who will return it to us.

R' Hager continues: Our verse can be understood similarly. "If your brother becomes impoverished"--referring to a person who is "impoverished" of good sense and therefore sins--"and sells part of his ancestral heritage"--he transfers what should have been his to someone else--"his redeemer"--a tzaddik--"who is closest to him shall come and redeem his brother's sale."

However, R' Hager notes, a person does not have to rely on the kindness of a tzaddik; he can earn his reward back. Thus, the next verses says: "If a man has no redeemer, but his means suffice and he acquires enough for its redemption; then he shall reckon the years of his sale and return the remainder to the man to whom he had sold it; and he shall return to his ancestral heritage." Through teshuvah, a person's "means [can] suffice" to acquire back what once was rightfully his. The tzaddik himself will make arguments on the person's behalf, noting that his sins are the result of the long exile, i.e., "he shall reckon the years of his sale [into the hands of the gentile nations]." (Sheirit Menachem)

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"I will remember My covenant with Yaakov and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham I will remember, and I will remember the Land." (26:42)

What does it mean that G-d "remembers" His brit Avot / covenant with the Patriarchs? R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania, and a prolific author in all areas of Torah study) explains:

There are three different ways that Hashem interacts with His world, each in the appropriate time-- with chessed chinam / kindness for the undeserving; din gamur / absolute justice; and rachamim / forbearance, meaning that Hashem delays exacting punishment to allow time for repentance. However, as a result of the sin of Adam Ha'rishon, until the time of the Patriarchs, Hashem's interaction with the world was for the most part hidden. Instead, the world appeared to operate automatically according to the laws of nature. Then the Patriarchs came along, and they began the process of removing the veil that hid Hashem's control of nature. Avraham revealed that Hashem practices chessed, Yitzchak revealed the attribute of din, and Yaakov, the attribute of rachamim. Not coincidentally, Avraham exemplified the trait of chessed, and so on.

Hashem established a covenant with the Patriarchs because of their efforts to reveal Him to the world. Even so, the Patriarchs only laid the groundwork, and not until the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah was Hashem's control over nature and His use of the above attributes completely revealed. When we speak of Hashem remembering the brit Avot, we mean that Hashem takes note that He was once again hidden--due to man's sins, for example--but now is revealed again [for example, as a result of exacting punishment as described in our parashah], just as the Patriarchs revealed His attributes. This means that whatever suffering or punishment was taking place has accomplished its purpose and now can end. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim)

Rashi z"l understands the above verse as a promise that, after G-d punishes the Jewish People, He will remember the Patriarchs and will be merciful. In contrast, R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (1905-1994; the Klausenberger Rebbe) quotes R' Yeshayah Halevi Horowitz z"l (the Shelah Ha'kadosh; died 1635) who explains as follows: Imagine that two thieves appear in court to be sentenced for the identical crime, but they receive very different sentences. The one who received the harsher sentence asks the judge why, and the judge replies, "He is a thief the son of thieves; what more can we expect from him? But you? Your ancestors were nobles, so you are held to a higher standard." Similarly, our verse teaches, why is the punishment for the Jewish People's sins so severe? Because Hashem remembers who our Patriarchs were!

Based on this, R' Halberstam concludes, we can understand why we say in Ya'aleh ve'yavo, "May the remembrance of our Patriarchs come before You for good." (Haggadah Shel Pesach Halichot Chaim p.129)

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## **Pirkei Avot**

There are four character types among people: (a) One who says, "Mine is mine and yours is yours," is an average character type, but some say that this is the characteristic of Sdom; (b) "Mine is yours and yours is mine," is an unlearned person; (c) "Mine is yours and yours is yours," is scrupulously pious; (d) "Yours is mine and mine is mine," is wicked. (Chapter 5)

R' Menachem Mendel Hager z"l (see above) explains: We read (Mishlei 3:6), "In all your ways know Him." One should introduce holiness even into fulfilling his physical needs. We read further (Tehilim 119:57), "My portion, I said 'Hashem,' in order to fulfill Your words." About "my portion"--in all mundane matters--"I declared that it should be for Hashem."

In this light, our mishnah may be read as follows: If a person says, "Mine is mine and Yours is Yours," i.e., he keeps his physical and spiritual worlds separate, he is average. "But some say," i.e., there are people who say their spiritual world is spiritual, but it is all talk; they are like the people of Sdom. In contrast, one whose life is based on the principle, "Mine is Yours and Yours is Yours," is scrupulously pious. (Quoted in Yalkut Avhan Ela'in)

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## **Shabbat**

R' Chaim Yaakov Mordechai Gottlieb z"l (1899-1973; pre-war rabbi in Oyber-Visheve and other Hungarian towns) said in his Shabbat Shuvah derashah in 5686 (1925): Typically, a fortress wall is not the outermost fortification that the fortress has. Rather, there may be a moat and/or a series of lower walls intended to prevent enemies from even approaching the main walls.

Similarly, there are certain mitzvot which are the fortresses that protect Judaism, and each of these is protected by Rabbinic decrees that prevent the deterioration of the mitzvah in question.

One of these mitzvot is emunah / faith. Emunah means believing the 13 articles of faith set forth in the Ani Ma'amin. One must accept these concepts upon himself when he recites Shema. And, when one recites the verse "Ve'ahavta" / "And you shall love Hashem . . . with all your life," he must accept upon himself a willingness to give his life for these beliefs.

What are the outer walls that guard this fortification? To believe in the words of our Sages; to pray with a minyan in a shul, taking care to say every single word; and to recite, "Amen, yehei shemei rabbah . . ."

A second fortress is Shabbat. When one keeps Shabbat as required, two angels accompany him home and say, "May it be His will that next week will be the same." On the other hand, if one transgresses Shabbat in public, he is like an idol-worshiper. The yetzer hara knows well the importance of Shabbat, but it also knows that it cannot seduce an observant Jew to transgress outright. Instead, the yetzer hara may tell a person, "You will earn more if your animals work on Shabbat, while you, of course, rest." This is a big mistake, for Shabbat is the source of all sustenance and blessing. One who attempts to become wealthier by working on Shabbat is like one who attempts to extinguish a fire by throwing straw or kerosene in it. It is true that we do not see immediately that one who should know better but transgresses Shabbat loses his wealth, but in the end, G-d makes an accounting.

What are the outer walls that guard this fortification? They are: not doing business on Shabbat; not directing a gentile to perform labor on one's behalf on Shabbat; and not moving muktzah items. (Derashot Yagel Yaakov p.14)

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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.

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