

MY ENEMY, MY BROTHER

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Ki Seitzei

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King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (25:21-22), "If your enemy is hungry, feed him bread; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink--for you will be 'choteh' coals on his head, and Hashem will reward you." R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; 14th century) initially rejects the popular translation of the word, "choteh," i.e., "scooping." He writes: G-d forbid that King Shlomo would suggest that one perform kindness for his enemy for the purpose of taking revenge on him. Rather, the word means, "removing." One who performs acts of kindness for his enemy "removes" burning coals--i.e., anger--from the enemy's heart and promotes peace. Alternatively, if the word does mean, "scooping," the intention would be that one may perform acts of kindness for his enemy so that his enemy will be ashamed to continue hating him.

We read in our parashah (22:1), "You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep or goat cast off, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother." In Parashat Mishpatim (Shmot 23:4), this same mitzvah is worded differently: "If you encounter the ox of your enemy or his donkey wandering, you shall return it to him repeatedly." The commandment in our verse, writes R' ibn Shuiv, is of general applicability, while the commandment in Mishpatim, i.e., to return the lost animal of one's enemy, is an act "lifnim m'shurat ha'din" / beyond the letter of the law, applicable to a person who wants to conquer his yetzer hara. R' ibn Shuiv adds that the "enemy" spoken of here is a person that a righteous Jew hates because of the other's sinful deeds. Otherwise, it is forbidden to hate another Jew. Even so, Hashem does not completely despise even a wicked person, and there is therefore a mitzvah to assist him, for one should not try to be "more religious" than G-d Himself. (Derashot R"Y ibn Shuiv)

"They shall say to the elders of his city, 'This son of ours is wayward and rebellious; he doesn't listen to our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' All the men of his city shall pelt him with stones and he shall die; and you shall remove the evil from your midst; and all Yisrael shall hear

and they shall fear." (21:18-21)

Rashi z"l writes: "The ben sorer u'moreh / wayward and rebellious son is put to death on account of his future. The Torah foresees that, in the end, he will squander his father's property and, seeking in vain the pleasures to which he has become accustomed, he will stand at the crossroads and hold-up people. Says the Torah, 'Let him die innocent, and let him not die guilty'."

In contrast, Rashi (to Bereishit 21:17) writes that, when Yishmael, son of Avraham Avinu, was dying of thirst, the angels argued that he should be left to die because his descendants would cause the Jewish People at the time of the destruction of the First Temple to die of thirst. Hashem responded, "Right now, is he innocent or guilty?" "Innocent," the angels answered. "If so," said Hashem, "he will be judged based on his actions now and not based on the future."

Why the different treatment? R' Eliyahu Mizrachi z"l (1455-1526; Chief Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire) explains: At the point at which the angels were arguing for Yishmael's demise, he had not yet begun down the path that would lead his descendants to kill Jews. Thus, he was entirely innocent of that crime. In contrast, the ben sorer u'moreh has already begun his life of crime. Thus, he is no longer innocent and can be judged based on the inevitable path he has started down.

R' Mizrachi adds: If the Torah foresees for him a future as a murderous robber, why is he punished with stoning? That is far more severe than the punishment for murder, which is death by the sword.

He answers: The Torah foresees that the ben sorer u'moreh not only will be a robber and a murderer, but that he will commit those acts on Shabbat. For violating Shabbat, the punishment is stoning. (Mizrachi Al Ha'Torah)

Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter z"l (1847-1905; the Gerrer Rebbe) suggests that the cases of the ben sorer u'moreh and of Yishmael aren't comparable because the angels clearly were not arguing that Yishmael should be left to die. After all, they foresaw that his descendants would kill Jews, though Yishmael had not yet fathered children at that time. Obviously, he was going to live. Rather, the angels were merely arguing that Yishmael did not deserve to be saved in a miraculous fashion. (Sefat Emet to Rosh Hashanah 16b)

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 8:7) offers a slightly different explanation for the ben sorer u'moreh's fate: "G-d foresaw that this youth is destined to consume his parents' assets, to sit at the crossroads and steal from people, to murder people, and, in the end, to forget his Torah learning. Therefore, it is better for the youth to die innocent rather than to die guilty."

Is forgetting one's Torah learning worse than committing murder, as the progression above implies? R' Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler z"l (1892-1953; head of the Gateshead Kollel and mashgiach ruchani of the Ponovezh yeshiva) explains that no matter what sins a person has committed, as long as he remembers his Torah learning, there is hope he will repent. However, once he has lost what he

learned, all is lost.

R' Dessler continues: Rabbeinu Yonah z"l (Spain; died 1263) writes in Sha'arei Teshuvah of the great value of Torah study, so much so that life without it is worthless. If so, asks R' Dessler, how is it possible that people who do not study Torah are nevertheless alive?

He answers: Such people are allowed to live to serve as tools of the satan / the evil inclination, who says, "Look! There are so many people who do not study Torah, and they are alive and well."

But what difference does it make? Life is life! R' Dessler concludes: We recite during the High Holiday period, "Remember us for life, the King Who desires life, and inscribe us in the book of life, for Your sake, the living Elokim." We want life for G-d's sake, i.e., for the sake of revealing G-d's Name. We do not want life if it means being tools of the satan. (Michtav M'Eliyahu I p.105)

"Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt--that he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were lagging, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and did not fear Elokim." (25:17-18)

According to the peshat, the last phrase, "and did not fear Elokim," describes Amalek. However, notes R' Yissaschar Shlomo Teichtal (1885-1945; rabbi of Pishtian, Czechoslovakia and author of Eim Ha'banim Semeichah), "Amalek" also is a metaphor for the yetzer hara. Just as one must always remember what Amalek did to us, so must one always be on his guard against the yetzer hara. If one feels faint and exhausted and unable to continue his vigilance, it is a sign that he doesn't sufficiently fear Elokim. (Mishneh Sachir: Moadim vol.2 p.147)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Shimshon David Pinkus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) in response to a question from a yeshiva student.

To a beloved young man who is unknown to me, shlita:

I read your letter, and although I am not competent to offer advice or tell you what to do, I will write what appears to be correct in my humble opinion. First, I will summarize what you wrote.

It appears that you are striving mightily to grow in Torah study and fear of Heaven. You are doing all you can, and have already done all that is expected of you. Now you are at a stage where you need assistance from the outside. The reason for this is simply that your goals are so lofty and awesome,

i.e., you aspire to attain Torah and to develop an inner drive to continue your growth. Attaining these goals is simply above man's capabilities, and although man certainly is required to make an effort, a time comes when outside assistance must be sought.

Therefore, I will give you a name and address to which you should turn, and there you will find assistance.

His name is "Hashem." He is very powerful, for He created everything. I have inside information that He has a great love for you personally and is pining away for your call.

You will have no trouble finding His address, for He is everywhere --literally. Even this minute, as you are reading this letter, you can turn to Him.

I write this because many people believe that G-d is found only through prayer, mitzvot and special regimens for spiritual growth. Of course, He is in all of those "places," but those are not the primary places to find Him. The main thing to know is that G-d is a real and living being with whom it is possible to form a personal relationship. No one who has tried this has ever been disappointed.

This is so simple and practical and therefore so beneficial. The key is to have a simple personal connection in which you tell Him your problems and ask Him again and again to help you.

If someone gives you different advice, it will be a pity on the effort that you expend following it. Go straight to the One who can really help, grab hold of Him and do not let go. Do not be silent until you have attained whatever you desire.

Signed with great respect for a ben Torah who is truly seeking, but unfortunately does not know where to look, [Rabbi] Shimshon David Pinkus.

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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