

IT'S FREE!

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vaeschanan

It's free!

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (19:17), "One who is 'chonain' / gracious to the poor has lent to Hashem, and He will repay him." Rabbeinu Bachya z"l (Spain; 14th century) explains: In this verse, King Shlomo teaches us the benefit of charity and how great its reward is in this world and the next. It is well-known, R' Bachya continues, that the wealthy tend to place their trust in their wealth or in the large network of friends and acquaintances who gather around them because of their wealth, as we read (Mishlei 14:20), "Those who love the wealthy are many." In contrast, the pauper has no one to turn to except Hashem, for even if he once had friends, they shy away from him because of his poverty. Therefore, King Shlomo teaches that Hashem loves the one who is despised by others. If one is gracious to such a person for no other reason than because Hashem loves him, it is as if one has lent money to Hashem. And, it follows, that Hashem will be "obligated" to repay this "loan."

R' Bachya continues: Our verse refers to "One who is 'chonain' / gracious to the poor." Why didn't it refer to one who is "merachaim" / compassionate to the poor? "Chonain" comes from the same root as "chinam" / "for free," and it connotes giving something for nothing, even to a person who is undeserving. This is how Hashem acts toward us; after all, we don't deserve anything that Hashem gives us or does for us! It is all given to us for nothing. This, concludes R' Bachya, is the perspective from which all prayer should occur: "I am making requests of you G-d, though I deserve nothing." This is how Moshe Rabbeinu prayed, as well, as we find in the opening verse of our parashah -- "Va'etchanan."

"From there you will seek Hashem, your Elokim, and you will find Him, if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul." (4:29)

R' Simcha Bunim of Pshischa z"l (1765-1827; chassidic rebbe in Poland) comments: Some people seek G-d "there," i.e., in philosophical inquiries. In reality, the place to find G-d is in your heart. Once

someone purifies his midot / character traits, he will find Hashem in his heart. (Torat Simcha No.133)

"Or has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation. . ." (4:34)

Our Sages comment on the words "a nation from amidst a nation"--"As a shepherd births a sheep." R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995) comments:

We read in the Pesach Haggadah that the Exodus was brought about by G-d Himself, not by an angel. Why does that matter; isn't the important thing that we're free?

In fact, R' Auerbach explains, the Exodus was not about freedom, but about rebirth, a completely new beginning. That is something only G-d can bring about. (Quoted in Minchat Avot p.118)

"You shall not recognize elohim acheirim / the gods of others (literally, 'other gods') in My Presence." (5:7)

R' Chaim Mordechai Yaakov Gottlieb z"l (rabbi in Oyber Visheve, Hungary; died 1936) writes: The midrash says that those who recognize "elohim acheirim" cause goodness to be withheld from mankind. R' Hillel z"l [perhaps referring to R' Hillel Lichtenstein z"l; 1814-1891] explained that "elohim" means "leader" (see, for example, Shmot 7:1). The Gemara (Tamid 28a) states that a leader who puts the people's needs first and acts for the sake of Heaven, is a true leader and brings goodness to the world. It follows that a leader who is thinking of his own interests, i.e., one who recognizes "other elohim," causes goodness to be withheld from the world. (Yagel Yaakov p.10)

"Hear, Israel, Hashem is our Elokim, Hashem is One!" (6:4)

R' Yehoshua Rokeach z"l (1825-1894; Belzer Rebbe) asks: When we recite Shema, we are accepting G-d as our King. Why then is it customary to sit when reciting Shema? One would expect that we would stand out of reverence!

He explains: Accepting G-d as King is a mitzvah that one is obligated to perform constantly. But, of course, no one can stand all of the time. By reciting Shema seated, we are emphasizing that one must accept G-d as King no matter where he finds himself. (Quoted in Orchot Rabboteinu p.22)

"And you shall repeat them to your sons and speak of them, when you sit in your homes . . ."
(6:7)

R' Daniel Movshovitz z"l Hy"d (Kelm, Lithuania; killed in the Holocaust) writes that the reference here to the home does not refer to the wood and stone structure. It refers to the family. The beginning of a person's judgement in Heaven will address whether he set aside times for Torah study--in particular, whether he dedicated times to study Torah and discuss the subjects of faith and trust in G-d with his family.

It doesn't matter so much what one learns at these times. R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l, a great teacher of mussar [see page 4], used to read the Tze'enah u'Re'enah (a Yiddish translation and commentary on the Torah) at meals. The simple lessons of faith contained in that work often make a more long-lasting impression than do complicated discourses. (Kitvei Ha'Saba Mi'Kelm V'talmidav p. 610)

"Be consoled, be consoled, My nation,' says your Elokim. 'Speak to the heart of Yerushalayim and proclaim to her that her time [of exile] has been fulfilled, that her iniquity has been conciliated, for she has received from the hand of Hashem double for all her sins'." (Yeshayah 40:1-2 -- in this week's haftarah)

The midrash Eichah Rabbah teaches: They sinned a double sin, as is written (Eichah 1:8), "Yerushalayim sinned a sin;" they received a double punishment, as is written (in our verse), "She has received from the hand of Hashem double for all her sins;" and they will receive a double consolation, as is written (in our verse), "Be consoled, be consoled." [Until here from the midrash]

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) asks: What is the nature of the "double sin" mentioned here? It cannot mean that they committed a particular sin twice, for they probably committed some sins--for example, idolatry--a thousand times. Nor can it mean that they committed two sins, as the term "a double sin" doesn't seem to fit that scenario.

Rather, explains R' Kluger, every sin is a "double sin." The first sin is that one transgresses G-d's will by performing some act that He doesn't want performed (for example, idolatry, murder or violating Shabbat). The second sin is that the sinner "forces" Hashem to punish him, which is not something He wants to do.

It therefore is understandable as well why there will be a "double consolation." When we repent, we will be consoled once for the teshuvah that we have done and a second time for the pleasure we give to Hashem by repenting. (Kohelet Yaakov: Shabbat Nachamu p.116)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Chatzkel Levenstein z"l (died 1974), one of the great mussar teachers of the 20th century--first in Poland; then in Petach Tikvah; then at the Mir yeshiva in Poland and, later, in Shanghai, China; and finally at the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. The letter was written in the winter of 1937-38 after R' Levenstein had returned to Poland from Petach Tikvah to succeed his teacher, R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l. The latter had passed away in 1936, and the Mir Yeshiva was suffering from the absence of a major mussar personality.

I received your precious letter and I have delayed responding because I have no answer that will satisfy you. I know how much you desire to raise the level of the crown of Torah and fear of G-d in the yeshiva in Petach Tikvah. Indeed, that should be the desire of every person who has a share in the Torah of Moshe and Yisrael, for the holy land is in truth the central point in our hearts. One cannot separate the Land from the Torah, for they are included together in Birkat Hamazon / Grace after Meals: "We thank You, Hashem, our G-d, because You have given our forefathers as a heritage a desirable, good and spacious land; . . . for Your Torah which you have taught us . . ." There is no real Torah other than the Torah of Eretz Yisrael, for [Yeshayah 2:3] "From Zion will go forth Torah." Attaining the Land really must precede attaining the Torah, for the Land is an inheritance from the Patriarchs, while the Torah was commanded to us by Moshe [who came after the Patriarchs]. What need is there for us to say more about the Land? It atones for sins. Anyone who walks four cubits in the Land has his sins forgiven. I think you, my friend, know how much I always loved to talk about our holy land. I spoke a number of times about the emunah / faith that can be obtained by living in the Land, and I myself benefitted in this way [presumably during his short stay in Petach Tikvah in the 1930s]. . .

Aside from this, I have family reasons for making my place in our holy land. But what can I do? The situation in the yeshiva here absolutely precludes my returning to our holy land. You know how complex things are here and that it is impossible to think about replacing me with someone else. Not only must I be here for the peace of the institution, but also for the good of the students I am needed here . . . (Ohr Yechezkel: Michtavim No. 9)

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](https://torah.org)** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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