

A MOTHER'S LOVE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Eikev

A Mother's Love

In this week's haftarah, Hashem consoles the Jewish People: "Would a mother forget her nursling, refrain from feeling compassion for the child of her womb? Even were these to forget, I would not forget you." R' Naftali Hertz Landau z"l (late 19th century; rabbi of Strelisk, Galicia) explains:

There are two types of feelings that parents have for their children. When the children are helpless youngsters, parents feel "blind" love, loving the children because they are extensions of the parents. As children grow older, especially after they marry and move away, the relationship changes, as some of the blind love of former years is replaced by pride in the children's accomplishments or, G-d forbid, disappointment at the children's failures. Often, a certain distance grows between the parents and adult children at this stage.

R' Landau continues: Still, a parent is always a parent and a child is always a child. Therefore, a grown child can be confident of a parent's compassion. In contrast, at the earlier stage, one cannot speak of a parent's compassion, just as we don't say that a person has compassion for himself.

These two relationships exist between Hashem and the Jewish people as well, as we read (Yirmiyah 31:19): "Is Ephraim My most precious son or a delightful child?" "Ephraim"--the Jewish People--is at times a "delightful child," beloved just for the delight a parent feels at having children, and at times a "precious son," valued for his accomplishments. Similarly, Hashem says in our verse: Would a mother forget her nursling? Does she fail to have compassion for the child of her womb (a reference to older children)? Likewise, in either state, I will not forget you! (Ahavat Zion p.89)

"You will eat and you will be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem, your Elokim, for the good Land that He gave you." (8:10)

The Gemara (Berachot 50a) teaches: "From the way a person words his blessings, one can tell if he is

a scholar or a boor. If he says (in the zimun / 'invitation' before bentching), 'Uv'tuvo / In His goodness, we have lived,' he is a scholar. If he says, 'U'mi'tuvo / From His goodness, we have lived,' he is a boor."

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005; a leading teacher of mussar) explains: If one says, "In His goodness, we have lived,' he demonstrates his understanding that we are surrounded at all times by Hashem's goodness. But, if one says, "From His goodness, we have lived," he implies that Hashem sits aloofly in the Heavens and sends some goodness down to us, which is not true. (Da'at Shlomo: Shavuot p.497)

"V'hayah / It shall be that if you forget Hashem, your Elokim, and go after the gods of others, and worship them and prostrate yourself to them--I testify against you today that you will surely perish. Like the nations that Hashem causes to perish before you, so will you perish because you will not have listened to the voice of Hashem, your Elokim." (8:19-20)

R' Zvi Elimelech Shapira z"l (1783-1841; chassidic rebbe, popularly known as the "Bnei Yissaschar") asks: Midrash Rabbah teaches that the word "v'hayah" always introduces something joyous, as opposed to "va'yehi," which is used to introduce something sorrowful. Why then does our seemingly depressing verse begin with "v'hayah"?

He explains: The Gemara (Chagigah 15a) relates that the sage Elisha ben Avuyah (a contemporary of Rabbi Akiva) became a heretic. Later, he heard a bat kol / Heavenly voice proclaim, "All wayward sons return except for that one," a reference to himself. He said, "In that case, there is no hope for me, and I can do as I please." [Until here from the Gemara] In fact, the Bnei Yissaschar writes in the name of R' Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz z"l (1745- 1815; chassidic rebbe known as the "Seer of Lublin"), Elisha should have understood that Heaven was challenging him with this proclamation. Had he responded, "If I indeed have no place in the World-to-Come, I can now serve G-d completely altruistically with no hope of reward," then his repentance would have been accepted.

In this light, the Bnei Yissaschar concludes, we can understand our verse. Hashem warns of the fate that awaits us if we stray after false gods. We will, G-d forbid, "surely perish." There will be no hope. But, if we ignore this message of despair and repent, then "v'hayah," it will be a joyous occasion, "because [we] will not have listened to the voice of Hashem" when He said all hope for us was lost. (Agra D'pirka #1)

"Now, Yisrael, 'mah' / what does Hashem, your Elokim, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your Elokim, to go in all His ways and to love Him, and to serve Hashem, your Elokim, with all your

heart and with all your soul." (10:12)

The Gemara (Menachot 43b) teaches: Rabbi Meir used to say, "A person is obligated to recite 100 berachot every day, as the verse says, 'Mah' does Hashem, your Elokim, ask of you.' Don't read, 'mah,' but rather, 'me'ah' / 'one hundred'" [as if the verse says: "One hundred does Hashem ask of you"].

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (see above) writes: If our Sages learned from this verse that Hashem expects us to recite 100 berachot every day, it must be that saying those berachot with proper concentration can help a person attain all of the levels mentioned in the verse: fearing Hashem, going in His ways, loving Him, and serving Him--all the way up to becoming attached to Him. Every berachah that is recited with proper concentration strengthens one's emunah / faith.

More generally, R' Wolbe continues, the way to strengthen one's emunah is through concrete steps. For example, if one recites Adon Olam regularly with proper concentration, he will feel that the world (olam) has a Master (Adon). Of course, if a person says Adon Olam superficially, even for many decades, he will feel nothing. (B'emunato Yichyeh pp.21-22)

"Zion said, 'Hashem has forsaken me; my L-rd has forgotten me.' [Hashem replies:] 'Would a mother forget her nursling, refrain from feeling compassion for the child of her womb? Even were these to forget, I would not forget you. Behold! I have engraved you on [My] palms; your [ruined] walls are before Me always.'" (From the haftarah - Yeshayah 49:14-16)

The Gemara (Ta'anit 4a) teaches: The Jewish People made an improper request (Shir Ha'shirim 8:6): "Place me as a seal on Your heart, as a seal on Your arm." Hashem said, "You have asked me to place a sign of our bond in a place (the arm) which is sometimes revealed and sometimes concealed. I will do better than that and place the sign in a place that is always revealed, [as our verse says,] 'Behold! I have engraved you on [My] palms . . . before Me always'."

R' David Cohen shlita (rosh yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) writes in the name of R' Moshe Shapiro shlita: When we speak of Hashem having a "place which is sometimes revealed and sometimes concealed" we refer to Hashem's way of acting in the world supernaturally. On the other hand, a "place that is always revealed" refers to Hashem's interaction with the world through nature. In other words, the Jewish People asked Hashem to protect us supernaturally, and Hashem responded, "I will protect you even when I am hidden behind (revealed only through) the laws of nature."

R' Cohen continues: In this light we can explain the opening verses of the haftarah as follows: "Zion said, 'Hashem has forsaken me'." In the exile, when Hashem conceals himself, He will forget me. Hashem responds: I have engraved a reminder of you in a place which is never concealed. Even in

the exile, when Hashem conceals himself and does not perform open miracles, He never forgets us, as a mother never forgets her child. (Yemei Purim p.9)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Pinchas Altshul z"l (1747-1823), a student of the Vilna Gaon z"l and maggid / preacher of Polotsk, to his children as a tzava'ah / final instructions before his death regarding their service of Hashem. This excerpt is part of his instructions regarding Torah study.

Our Sages say (Kiddushin 30a), "One should always divide his years--i.e., each day--in thirds: one-third for Tanach / scripture, one-third for Mishnah and one-third for Gemara. Tanach precedes Mishnah, and Mishnah precedes Gemara; one who reverses them is a golem / a body with no mind. The order of learning Tanach is to learn the book of one prophet with the commentary of Rashi and then to review it several times without Rashi until it is fluent in your mouth [i.e., memorized].

Even if you learn it additional times with Rashi, don't make an effort to memorize all of the midrashim that Rashi quotes. The main thing is to be sure to understand the pshuto shel mikra / plain meaning of the verse. That is what you should remember. Remember that your goal is to learn Tanach, not midrash. If you want to learn midrash, do that separately, for what does midrash have to do with the meaning of the verse?

In this respect, our nation has gone astray. Because of the midrash, they don't know Tanach. Most likely, if you ask someone about a verse, he can tell you a midrash about it but doesn't know the verse's meaning. He won't know which prophet said it, to whom, why, when, or about which exile or consolation--all because of the midrashim that confuse him and his mind. You, my son, take care to know the verse's meaning, to whom it was said, why, and about what, and don't confuse yourself with midrashim--then you will succeed. . . .

This is the proper way to learn aggadot [the non-halachic parts of the Gemara; similar to midrash]: Your goal should be to understand how the aggadah is interpreting the verse . . . Also, your intention should be to understand in each case what ethical lesson or guidance can be derived from each aggadah, for all good character traits and true piety can be found in the words of the aggadot. Nevertheless, you must be aware that our Sages' intention in the aggadah was to conceal matters of kabbalah. Thus, they spoke in hints, parable and riddles, for it is an honor to G-d to conceal these matters. (Rosh Ha'giv'ah)

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

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