

WISDOM FROM AN ANT

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Shoftim

Wisdom from an Ant

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (6:6), "Go to the ant, lazy one; see its ways and become wise. For it has no commander, policeman or ruler, yet it prepares its bread in the summer and stores away its food at the harvest." R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; 14th century) explains that this verse teaches two important lessons, one relating to the body and one to the soul.

First, man must make appropriate efforts to provide for his own needs. One should avoid laziness and practice diligence. Our Sages have taught: If you make an effort, you will be blessed; otherwise, you will not. At the same time, one may not take pride in his wealth because even diligence is unavailing without G-d's blessing.

Second, this verse teaches that man must prepare provisions in this life for the World-to-Come. One must be diligent about this, for one does not know when he will run out of time. This is why our Sages taught: Repent one day before you die, which means every day, for one never knows when he will die. Moreover, even if one did know how long he has, should he therefore waste his best years?

R' ibn Shuiv continues: To accomplish the above goals, Hashem gave us three types of intelligence, referred to in the fourth berachah of Shemoneh Esrei as "De'ah," "Binah" and "Haskel." These refer respectively to the ability to understand nature, the ability to understand the Torah, and the ability to attain prophecy. These are alluded to as well in our parashah by the mitzvah to appoint a king to deal with worldly matters, the mitzvah to appoint a sanhedrin to decide Torah matters, and the mitzvah to obey a prophet. (Derashot R"Y ibn Shuiv)

"So that [the king's] heart does not become haughty over his brethren and not turn from the commandment right or left, so that he will have years over his kingdom, he and his sons amid Yisrael." (17:20)

R' Hillel Lichtenstein z"l (1814-1891; rabbi of Kolomyia, Galicia) writes: We learn in Pirkei Avot, "If his fear of Heaven precedes his wisdom, his wisdom will persist." Fear of Heaven is the foundation for remembering one's learning.

This may be alluded to in our verse, R' Lichtenstein writes. Our Sages say that if one is haughty, his wisdom will be forgotten. And, there is an expression in the Gemara, "Who are royalty? Torah scholars!" Thus, our verse could be read: If one is not haughty and one does not deviate right or left from the mitzvot, i.e., he has fear of Heaven, then he and his descendants will remain royalty, i.e., Torah scholars. (Shiyarei Maskil 1:4)

"The officers shall continue speaking to the people and say, 'Who is the man who is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return to his house, and let him not melt the heart of his fellows, like his heart'." (20:8)

Rashi z"l writes: Rabbi Akiva said that these words are meant literally, referring to a person who is afraid to go into battle where he will see swords and blood. Rabbi Yose Ha'Gelili, however, says that it refers to a person who is afraid of the sins he has committed. [Until here from Rashi]

R' Yerucham Halevi Levovitz z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Mir Yeshiva; died 1936) asks: Isn't fear of sin praiseworthy? Why should a person who experiences fear of sin be disqualified from serving in the army of Yisrael?

He explains: There are two types of "fear of sin." We read (Tehilim 100:2), "Serve Hashem with joy." Elsewhere, we read (Tehilim 2:11), "Serve Hashem with fear." Aren't these instructions contradictory? Rabbeinu Yonah z"l (Spain; died 1263) explains that they are not in conflict. In everyday situations, "joy" and "fear" are mutually exclusive, but when we recognize G-d's greatness and fear Him because of it, it is an uplifting and joyful experience.

R' Levovitz continues: The fear of sin which is praiseworthy is that fear which is joyous and uplifting. That is not the fear of sin of which our verse speaks. Our verse speaks of a fear of sin that leads to depression. The uplifting fear of sin goes hand-in-hand with bitachon / trust in G-d. Yaakov Avinu, for example, feared that he would fall into the hands of Esav because perhaps he (Yaakov) had sinned, but that did not stop Yaakov from continuing to pray. In contrast, a person who experiences a depressing fear of sin will have weakened bitachon. Such a person does not deserve to experience miracles on the battlefield, so he is better off returning home. (Shevivei Da'at: Mo'adim p.142)

Elul

Rambam z"l writes: "If one transgressed any mitzvah in the Torah -- whether an affirmative commandment or a negative commandment, whether intentionally or negligently -- when he repents and returns from his sin, he is obligated to confess before G-d, Blessed is He." (Hilchot Teshuvah 1:1)

Many commentaries observe that, according to Rambam, there does not appear to be a mitzvah to repent. Rather, when one is ready to repent, there is a mitzvah to follow a certain procedure, which Rambam outlines.

R' Yosef Gruenwald z"l (the Pupa Rav; died 1984) explains, citing the work Yismach Moshe, that one cannot be commanded to repent, because the essence of repentance is regret, which is a feeling. Feelings cannot be commanded; either one has them or he does not.

However, R' Gruenwald notes, the Sefer Chareidim does list repentance as a mitzvah. [The Chareidim lists two aspects to this mitzvah -- one part which occurs in the individual's mind, i.e., regret, and a second part which is spoken, i.e., confession.] R' Gruenwald explains that although feelings cannot be commanded, one can be commanded to perform actions that awaken feelings. In this case, the action that awakens the feeling of regret that leads to teshuvah is studying mussar works and the laws of teshuvah. (Quoted in Imrei Vayechi Yosef p.99)

Shemittah

This coming year - 5775 - will be a shemittah / sabbatical year, when certain agricultural activities are prohibited in Eretz Yisrael. In preparation, we are devoting a portion of each issue to legal and/or philosophical aspects of the sabbatical year. The following laws are taken from Chapter 2 of Sefer Ha'shemittah, by R' Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky z"l (1872-1956), a prominent halachic authority in Yerushalayim, probably best known outside of Israel for his work Gesher Ha'chaim on the laws of mourning.

The shemittah includes four general categories of commandments:

1) Letting the earth rest from agricultural work, as the Torah says (Vayikra 25:2), "The land shall observe a Sabbath rest for Hashem." The Torah also states (Shmot 34:21), "You shall desist from plowing and harvesting," and (Vayikra 25:4-5), "Your field you shall not sow and your vineyard you shall not prune; the after-growth of your harvest you shall not reap and the grapes you had set aside for yourself you shall not pick."

One does not transgress the law of "You shall desist from plowing and harvesting" unless he physically works the field of a Jew, whether his own field or the field of another Jew. However, the owner of a field transgresses the positive commandment of "The land shall observe a Sabbath rest

for Hashem" if his field is worked by anyone, even a non-Jew. [This will be discussed in a future issue.]

2) It is a mitzvah to abandon the produce of one's fields that grows in the seventh year and to declare it hefker / ownerless, as it is written (Shmot 23:11), "And in the seventh, you shall leave it untended and unharvested, and the destitute of your people shall eat . . ."

All produce that grows on its own, whether on trees or in the fields, must be treated as hefker. One may bring from them into his house like anything that he acquired from hefker. However, one may not lock his gardens. One who does lock his garden or who gathers all of his produce into his house [at one time] transgresses this positive commandment.

If one did guard his produce, most poskim / halachic authorities hold that the produce does not thereby become prohibited [although a mitzvah was transgressed].

Fields adjacent to non-Jewish communities, for example on the borders of Eretz Yisrael, may be guarded so that they will not be looted. In such a case, it appears [R' Tukachinsky writes] that one may bring more than his immediate needs home at one time; however, one should harvest with a shinui / a change from the ordinary method. Of course, even in such a field, one must let any Jew take from the produce.

3) It is a mitzvah to treat the produce of shemittah with sanctity and not to market or waste it. This is learned from Vayikra (25:6), "The Sabbath produce of the land shall be yours to eat," [i.e., not to market or waste]. This mitzvah includes the requirement to destroy all of the remaining produce at a certain time, for the next verse continues, "And for your animal and for the beast that is in your land shall all its crop be to eat." [Ed. note: From here our Sages learned that each type of produce of the shemittah may be eaten only so long as it is found in the wild. This mitzvah, called "Biur," will be discussed in a future issue.]

4) The fourth commandment is not dependent upon the Land. It is to forgive outstanding loans at the end of the shemittah year. [This, too, will be discussed in a future issue.]

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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