

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE BELOVED

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vaeschanan

The Good, the Bad and the Beloved

Rabbeinu Nissim ben Reuven z"l ("Ran"; Gerona, Spain; 1320-1376) writes: When one wants to direct a person who has strayed back onto the proper path, there are two ways to do so. One is to inform him of his errors and to warn him of the consequences of continued foolishness. After all, if one ignores his errors, he cannot repent from them. This is why King David said (Tehilim 51:5), "My transgression I know, and my sin is before me always." The second way to re-direct a person is to inform him of his great potential and to tell him that even though he sinned, he is still beloved.

These two approaches are reflected in last week's and this week's parashot, R' Nissim writes. In Parashat Devarim, Moshe Rabbeinu rebuked Bnei Yisrael for their sins: the Golden Calf, the Spies, etc. In this week's parashah, Moshe Rabbeinu reminded Bnei Yisrael how much Hashem loves them. Moshe did this by telling Bnei Yisrael that he was punished on their account, as we read (3:26), "Hashem became angry with me **for your sake**." According to R' Nissim, the reason that Moshe Rabbeinu could not enter Eretz Yisrael was **not** because he hit the rock, but because (at that same incident) he insulted G-d's chosen people, calling them "rebels" (Bemidbar 20:10). Moshe Rabbeinu was the "father" of Torah, of wisdom, and of prophecy, yet Hashem loved Bnei Yisrael more than He loved Moshe, refusing to forgive Moshe for insulting Bnei Yisrael.

At first glance, R' Nissim adds, this idea is found in last week's parashah (1:37): "With me, as well, Hashem became angry because of you." There, however, Moshe didn't say, "For your sake." Rather, he **blamed** Bnei Yisrael for Hashem's anger at him. (Derashot Ha'Ran V)

"Let me now cross and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon." (3:25)

The Gemara (Sotah 14a) quotes the sage Rabbi Simlai: "Why did Moshe Rabbeinu want to enter the Land? Did he need to eat its fruit? Rather, Moshe said, 'There are many mitzvot which can be

performed only in Eretz Yisrael. Let me enter the Land and perform them."

Commentaries ask: Why didn't Rabbi Simlai answer simply, "Moshe wanted to fulfill the mitzvah of entering Eretz Yisrael"? R' Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg z"l (1915-2006; Yerushalayim; prolific author of halachic responsa) answers: Some authorities want to prove from here that there is no mitzvah to merely "enter" (visit) Eretz Yisrael. (R' Waldenberg notes that that is a matter of dispute.) As for living there, Moshe already knew that Hashem would not let him live in the Land.

Alternatively, R' Waldenberg writes, since Hashem had told Moshe that he could not live in Eretz Yisrael, he no longer had a mitzvah to do so. Thus, he had to find another reason to enter the Land. (She'eilot U'teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer, VII, No. 48 [p.223])

"Ascend the mountain, and look at the Land which I have given to the people of Yisrael." (3:26)

For what purpose was Moshe commanded to "look" at Eretz Yisrael?

R' Mordechai Rhine shlita (rabbi of Southeast Hebrew Congregation-Knesset Yehoshua in Silver Spring, MD) explains based on a story that is told about R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995; Yerushalayim):

A man who worked in R' Auerbach's yeshiva told R' Auerbach that he would soon be moving to a new apartment. In reply, R' Auerbach asked the man to tell him once the move was finalized, but before the family moved in. The man was surprised by the request, but he complied, whereupon R' Auerbach asked that they go together to see the apartment.

When they arrived at the apartment, R' Auerbach requested a tour. As they entered each room, R' Auerbach smiled enthusiastically, and in each room he added a pleasant comment: "So this is where the children will play. . . This is where your wife will cook such nurturing meals. . . This is where you will have your Shabbat meals," etc. The man enjoyed the attention and the enthusiasm, but he was confused all the same why R' Auerbach had taken the time for a tour of the apartment.

Sensing the man's confusion, R' Auerbach explained: "I know that the last few years have been difficult for you. You've had health problems, and some financial issues. The apartment you were in was too small for your family, and this too was causing much stress. Therefore, I wanted to bestow an 'ayin tova' (literally, 'a good eye'), an attitude of blessing on your new home."

Similarly, by looking at the Land where Bnei Yisrael were destined to settle, Moshe Rabbeinu was able to bestow an ayin tova on it. (A Parsha Message: Pinchas 5774)

"Bind them as a sign upon your arm and let them be ornaments between your eyes." (6:8)

R' Shlomo Ganzfried z"l (1804-1886; dayan / rabbinical court judge in Ungvar, Hungary) writes: The mitzvah of tefilin is a very precious mitzvah, as demonstrated by the fact that the entire Torah is equated to it, as is written (Shmot 13:9), "And it shall be a sign for you on your arm and a reminder between your eyes--so that Hashem's Torah may be in your mouth." A man who does not put on tefilin is called, "A sinner with his body." [See below]. As for one who puts on non-kosher tefilin, not only does he not fulfill the mitzvah, he recites many berachot [on tefilin] in vain. Therefore, one should take care to purchase tefilin from a scribe who is proficient in his craft and is G-d-fearing. The retzuot / straps also must be purchased from someone trustworthy to ensure that they were tanned for the sake of the mitzvah using hides of kosher animals. Due to our many sins, R' Ganzfried continues, there is a serious problem of people buying tefilin from just anyone, because he sells them inexpensively. Every G-d-fearing person should take to heart that, just as he takes care that his clothes and belongings are properly made--how much more so, when dealing with G-d's "concerns," one should not skimp on the cost, but rather should take care to buy what is certainly kosher, notwithstanding the higher cost. (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 10:1)

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16b-17a) describes the fates of the righteous and of different types of sinners on the Day of Judgment, and it states: "Those who sin with their bodies go down to Gehinom for twelve months. After twelve months, their bodies are gone, their souls are burned, and the ashes are dispersed under the soles of the feet of the righteous." The Gemara asks: "What is the meaning of 'a sinner with his body'?" It answers: "A head that did not put on tefilin." [Until here from the Gemara]

Why is the mitzvah of tefilin singled out? R' Shmuel Eliezer Eidels z"l (Maharsha; 1555-1631; rabbi of Ostraha, Poland, and an important Talmud commentator) explains: The purpose of tefilin is to connect the neshamah, represented by the head, to the ruach / life force, represented by the arm (the limb of action). A person who fails to connect his ruach and neshamah has missed the purpose of his existence. (Chiddushei Aggadot)

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270; Spain and Eretz Yisrael) writes that the Gemara refers specifically to someone who *never* put on tefilin [including someone who never put on *kosher* tefilin]. He adds: Tefilin is just an example of an affirmative commandment. The same thing is true if a person neglected any affirmative commandment for his entire life--for example, failing to recite Kriat Shema or Birkat Ha'mazon. But, Ramban writes, the fate described by the Gemara is only for a person whose sins outnumber his mitzvot and among those sins is neglecting any affirmative commandment for an entire lifetime. (Shaar Ha'gemul)

Memoirs

R' Yaakov Halevi Lifschutz z"l (1838-1921) was the long-time secretary to R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l (1817-1896; rabbi of Kovno), who was one of the leading halachic authorities of the second half of the 19th century as well as a spokesman and lobbyist for Russian Jewry in the Czar's court. Through his position, R' Lifschutz was a witness to, and a participant in, many important events of that era. His memoirs are entitled "Zichron Yaakov." He writes:

From the fifteenth day of the month of Menachem Av [which falls this coming Monday], the season for learning in the bet ha'midrash even at night began. After ma'ariv, all of the tables in the batei midrash were filled with ba'alei batim / working people until there was no room. There was no empty space because of all of the ba'alei batim, of all ranks, who learned for several hours every night. The same was true all winter until Pesach. It was inconceivable that a person of any stature at all did not have a regular time when he studied Torah in the bet ha'midrash. The righteous women supplied sufficient candles for all those who studied and prayed in the bet ha'midrash so that no one said, "There is no place for me here" [a phrase borrowed from Avot ch.5].

Many of the ba'alei batim, especially the craftsmen, established night-long learning sessions so the light of Torah would never be extinguished in the bet ha'midrash. The first shift began around 9 PM, when most people had begun to go home. This shift studied mishnah or Ein Yaakov until around 1 AM. The next shift went from 1 AM until 4 AM, at which time the groups known as "Anshei Ma'amad" [a nickname for the early risers] began to gather- -some to study Gemara, Rashi and Tosafot, others to recite Tikkun Chatzot and Perek Shirah, etc. For yeshiva students, the bet ha'midrash was also their dormitory. [Ed. note: Yeshiva dormitories as we know them were as yet unheard of.] Each one claimed a bench on which to sleep, and no one could disturb that chazakah / claim. (At one time, the Maskilim made light of this system of chazakah. Today, ironically, rich men and Maskilim claim a chazakah on railway seats.) When the ba'alei batim came to the bet ha'midrash to learn, no one dared awaken the yeshiva students, knowing they had learned until after midnight.

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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