

THINGS ACQUIRED WITH PAIN

by Shlomo Katz

BS"D
Volume 31, No. 10
2 Tevet 5777
December 31, 2016

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (14:23), "In all eitzev / sadness, there will be gain, but dvar sefatayim / talk of the lips, brings only loss." R' Yaakov ben Chananel Sakly z"l (Spain; 14th century) explains:

This verse teaches that one should rejoice at suffering, for all suffering that one experiences brings in its wake reward, either in This World or the World-to-Come. "In all eitzev / sadness, there will be gain." Indeed, it is not possible to earn a place in the World-to-Come without experiencing suffering. First, suffering cleanses a person. Also, it can cause a person to pay less attention to his material desires--for example, one who is suffering has a reduced appetite--and to focus more on what is important. Therefore, one should not complain about suffering; in King Shlomo's words: "Talk of the lips brings only loss." Our Sages allude to this when they say (Berachot 5a): "Torah, Eretz Yisrael and Olam Ha'ba can be acquired only with suffering." The connection between suffering and Olam Ha'ba was just explained. Torah and Eretz Yisrael are the means to reach Olam Ha'ba; therefore, they too are acquired through suffering.

R' Sakly continues: No figure in our early history suffered more than Yosef. Why did he suffer? To atone for the Lashon Ha'ra that he spoke about his brothers. "In all eitzev / sadness, there will be gain." Once Yosef achieved atonement, he rose to the heights of power. One might ask, however, why Yosef was in prison for 12 years, since he only spoke Lashon Ha'ra about ten of his brothers. The answer is that he was punished with an additional two years after he asked Pharaoh's butler to remember him and help him be paroled. Here, too, we see that "Talk of the lips brings only loss." (Torat Ha'minchah)

"Take with you double the money, and the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks return in your hands; perhaps it was an oversight." (43:12)

R' David Dovid Wilovsky z"l (Ridvaz; 1845-1913; rabbi in Slutsk, Chicago and Tzefat) asks: Why did Yaakov add, "Perhaps it was an oversight," implying that the only reason to return the money to Egypt was that it might have been placed in the brothers' sacks by mistake? To the contrary, if the

money was not placed there due to an oversight, but rather as a test, then it certainly needed to be returned!

Ridvaz explains: The phrase, "Perhaps it was an oversight," does not explain Yaakov's instruction that the money be returned. Rather, it explains why Yaakov said, "The money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks return in your hands." If the money was placed in the brothers' sacks intentionally, as a test, they would not have been legally responsible for its safe-keeping. However, if it was placed there by mistake, then they would have to perform the Mitzvah of Hashavat Aveidah / returning a lost object. That Mitzvah includes not only returning the lost object, but also safeguarding it until it has been returned. Thus, they could not simply place the money in their sacks and forget about it; it had to be "in your hands," i.e., somewhere where they could safeguard it. (Nimukei Ridvaz Al Ha'Torah)

Chanukah

Teach us our Master: If there is oil remaining in the Menorah after the first night, may one relight it on the second night? This is what our Rabbis taught: If there is oil remaining in the Menorah after the first night, add a little bit and relight it on the second night; if there is oil remaining after the second night, add a little bit and relight it on the third night; and so on the other days. But, if there is oil remaining after the eighth night, one should make a separate bonfire with it. Why? Because the oil was designated for a mitzvah and may not be used. One should not say, "I will not observe the commandments of the Elders, since they are not from the Torah." The Master of the Universe says, "My sons! You may not say that; rather, observe whatever decrees they make, as is written (Devarim 17:10-11), 'You shall do according to the word that they will tell you . . . you shall not deviate from the word that they will tell you, right or left.' Why? Because I agree with their decrees, as is written (Iyov 22:28), 'You would utter a decree and it would be done'." Know that this is true, because when Yaakov blessed Menashe and Ephraim, he made the younger one, the older one, and Hashem ratified his decree. When? When the princes of the tribes brought offerings for the dedication of the Mishkan, and the tribe of Ephraim preceded the tribe of Menashe. (Midrash Tanchuma: Parashat Nasso)

What is the connection between Chanukah and Yaakov blessing his grandsons? R' Shalom Perlow z"l (1850-1925; rabbi of Brahlin, Belarus) explains: The Gemara (Shabbat 21a) records a dispute about the proper way to light Chanukah candles. The sages of Bet Shammai hold that one lights eight candles the first night, seven the second night, etc. The sages of Bet Hillel hold that one lights one candle the first night, two the second night, etc. R' Perlow writes that these opinions reflect two perspectives on how to serve Hashem. In Halachic disputes, Bet Shammai typically rules stringently, while Bet Hillel typically rules leniently, because Bet Shammai is associated with the Divine Attribute of Din / Strict Justice, while Bet Hillel is associated with the Divine Attribute of Chesed / Kindness.

Consistent with this, Bet Shammai holds that one must eradicate the evil within himself ("sur mei'ra") before focusing on doing good; thus, the Chanukah candles decrease in number each night--representing the evil that is going away. Bet Hillel, in contrast, holds that one should focus on doing good ("asei tov") and evil will be pushed away incidentally; thus, the Chanukah candles increase in number each night--representing the good that is increasing.

Yosef, like Bet Shammai, is associated by Kabbalists with the Attribute of Strict Justice. He gave his older son, Menashe, a name from the root meaning, "to forget" (specifically, forgetting his prior suffering), a name that commemorates "decreasing," like eradicating evil from one's soul. Only then did Yosef give his younger son, Ephraim, a name from the root meaning, "to increase," reminiscent of Bet Hillel's viewpoint.

We rule in accordance with Bet Hillel, both regarding the manner of lighting Chanukah candles and in most other cases as well. Similarly, when Yaakov blessed Yosef's children, he rejected the priority that Yosef gave to Menashe and instead blessed Ephraim first, a choice that Hashem later ratified. Yaakov said (Bereishit 48:19), "I know, my son, I know; he too will become a people, and he too will become great; yet his younger brother shall become greater than he." He meant: There will be those who will become great by following in the way that Menashe and Bet Shammai represent. However, even more will succeed by focusing on increasing goodness, which is the way of Ephraim and Bet Hillel. This explains the connection that the Midrash makes between Yaakov's blessings and Chanukah. (Divrei Shalom)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

The Mishnah (Menachot 8:3), when discussing the process of procuring olives and making olive oil for the Temple service, teaches: "Tekoa is alpha for oil. The sage Abba Shaul says, Regev across the Jordan River is second to it."

R' Ovadiah of Bartenura z"l (Italy; 1445-1515) explains: "Tekoa" is the name of a city, as in (Shmuel II 14:2), "Yoav sent to Tekoa . . ." "Alpha" means "the first choice, the best," just as Aleph is the first letter.

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; Spain and Egypt; 1135-1204) explains differently: "Alpha" is a Hebrew word, whose root--aleph, lamed, peh--means, "to learn." Tekoa is "learned" in producing excellent oil, meaning it is the nature of that place to produce fine oil.

Where is this Tekoa?

R' David Kimchi z"l (Radak; Provence; 1160-1235) comments on the above-cited verse in Shmuel, "Our Rabbis z"l (Menachot 85b) say: Why did Yoav send to Tekoa? Rabbi Yonatan says: Because they have a large supply of olive oil, wisdom is found there." Radak continues: This city is in the territory of Asher, as is written (Devarim 33:24), "Of Asher, he said, 'The most blessed of children is Asher; he shall be pleasing to his brothers, and dip his feet in oil.'"

R' Moshe Zuriel shlita (former Mashgiach Ruchani of Yeshivat Sha'alvim) notes that a connection between olive oil and wisdom is mentioned a number of times in the Talmud and Zohar. For example, Bava Batra (25b) teaches, "One who wants to become wise should angle himself toward the south . (Otzrot Ha'aggadah)

We say in the Al Ha'nissim prayer that the Greeks rendered all of the oil in the Bet Hamikdash tamei / impure. Why do we focus on the oil; didn't they make everything in the Temple tamei? R' Yitzchok Hutner z"l (1906–1980; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Chaim Berlin in Brooklyn, N.Y.) notes that the connection our Sages make between olive oil and wisdom answers this question: At stake in our war with the Greeks was whether Greek wisdom or Torah wisdom would prevail. Thus, the Greeks attacked the symbol of wisdom: olive oil. (Pachad Yitzchok: Chanukah 11:10)