

NOT SO SECRET MESSAGES

by Shlomo Katz

Volume 33, No.48

14 Elul 5779

September 14, 2019

Sponsored by

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on the yahrzeit of her father

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King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (25:21-22), "If your enemy is hungry, feed him bread; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink--for you will be 'choteh' coals on his head, and Hashem will reward you." R'

Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; 14th century) initially rejects the popular translation of the word, "Choteh," i.e., "scooping." He writes: G-d forbid that King Shlomo would suggest that one perform kindness for his enemy for the purpose of taking revenge on him. Rather, the word means, "removing." One who performs acts of kindness for his enemy "removes" burning coals--i.e., anger--from the enemy's heart and promotes peace. Alternatively, if the word does mean, "scooping," the intention would be that one may perform acts of kindness for his enemy so that his enemy will be ashamed to continue hating him.

We read in our Parashah (22:1), "You shall not see the ox of your brother or his sheep or goat cast off, and hide yourself from them; you shall surely return them to your brother." In Parashat Mishpatim (Shmot 23:4), this same Mitzvah is worded differently: "If you encounter the ox of your enemy or his donkey wandering, you shall return it to him repeatedly." The commandment in our verse, writes R' ibn Shuiv, is of general applicability, while the commandment in Mishpatim, i.e., to return the lost animal of one's enemy, is an act "Lifnim Mishurat Ha'din" / beyond the letter of the law, applicable to a person who wants to conquer his Yetzer Ha'ra. R' ibn Shuiv adds that the "enemy" spoken of here is a person that a righteous Jew hates because of the other's sinful deeds. Otherwise, it is forbidden to hate another Jew. Even so, Hashem does not completely despise even a wicked person, and there is therefore a Mitzvah to assist him, for one should not try to be "more religious" than G-d Himself.

(Derashot R"Y ibn Shuiv)

"When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your Elokim, will deliver them into your hand, and you will capture its captivity." (21:10)

R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (1698-1760; founder of the Chassidic movement) observes: Why does anyone listen to the Yetzer Ha'ra? Instead, a person should learn from the Yetzer Ha'ra to serve Hashem with as much determination and dedication as the Yetzer Ha'ra carries out the mission that Hashem gave it!

He continues: This lesson is alluded to in our verse--"When you will go out to war against your enemy"--the Yetzer Ha'ra--"you shall capture its captivity"--you shall take the Yetzer Ha'ra prisoner and use its own tricks against it. (Ketter Shem Tov 254)

"You shall make a fence for your roof, so that you will not place blood in your house if a fallen one falls from it." (22:8)

Rashi z"l comments: The person who falls is called "fallen one" to indicate that he deserved to fall to his death on account of some crime he had committed. Nevertheless, make a fence around your roof so that you won't be the agent of his misfortune, for meritorious things are brought about through the agency of meritorious people and bad things through the agency of unworthy people. [Until here paraphrased from Rashi]

R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (1741-1804; Dubno Maggid) writes: We should learn from this teaching that, no matter what happens to a person, he is expected to study the event to determine why Hashem did this to him. Every misfortune, great or small, is a message from Hashem, a sign of some Divine displeasure. By studying the particulars of the misfortune--its timing, its severity, its nature, etc.--one can find hints as to its cause.

He adds: The Gemara (Chullin 94a) says that a guest may not share his food with the child of his host without permission. The Gemara relates that this decree was made after an incident in which three guests did share their food with their host's child, unbeknownst to their host. When the host saw his child eating, he assumed his child had taken the food without permission, and he hit his child so hard that he killed him. When the child's mother saw this, she went up to the roof and jumped off.

Why, asks the Dubno Maggid, did our Sages react by decreeing that guests not share their food? Clearly, the host and his wife reacted irrationally! Nevertheless, he explains, our Sages understood that, if such a tragedy could result from sharing one's food with the host's child, it must be an act of which Hashem disapproves [even if we don't know why]. Therefore, they outlawed that practice. We, too, are expected to look for signs that Hashem disapproves of our actions and to react to those

signs. (Sefer Ha'middot: Sha'ar Ha'Yir'ah ch.14)

R' Yitzchak Maltzen z"l (1854-1916; Lithuania and Eretz Yisrael) writes: Based on the above, we can understand also the Gemara (Shabbat 10b) that teaches: "One should never show favoritism to one child for, because of the two measures of silk that Yaakov gave Yosef over his brothers [i.e., the Ketonet Pasim], one thing led to another until our ancestors went down to Egypt." R' Maltzen asks: Did Yaakov's favoritism really cause our ancestors' exile? Hadn't Hashem foretold the exile to Avraham more than 150 years earlier? He explains: The Gemara does not mean that Yaakov's favoritism caused the exile to Egypt. Rather, the Gemara is teaching that the fact that Hashem used Yaakov's favoritism of Yosef as an instrument to bring about the exile indicates that Hashem does not approve when parents show favoritism to one child. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Siach Yitzchak p. 3b)

"You shall wipe out the memory of Amalek from under the heaven--you shall not forget." (25:19)

Here the Torah commands that we erase the memory of Amalek. But, in Parashat Beshalach we read (Shmot 17:14), "I [Hashem] shall surely erase the memory of Amalek from under the heavens." Who, then, is to erase the memory of Amalek--Hashem or us?

R' Meir Rosenbaum z"l (mid-20th century rabbi in Cuba and Guatemala) answers: Amalek was an actual people, the first nation that attacked the Jewish People after the Exodus. But, the term "Amalek" has come to represent more than that one nation--it represents antisemitism in general.

He continues: There are two kinds of antisemitism. There are gentiles who have an unexplainable hatred for Jews despite never having met a Jew. An example of such an anti-Semite was William Shakespeare, who is unlikely to have met a Jew since he lived at a time when Jews were banished from England. Nevertheless, he caricatured a stereotypical Jewish money-lender in one of his works. Then there are gentiles who become anti-Semites because they witness one Jew or a few Jews misbehaving or because they are jealous of a few Jews who they see living ostentatious lifestyles. This latter type of antisemitism is what Yaakov Avinu warned of when he told his sons (Bereishit 42:1), "Why make yourselves conspicuous?"

R' Rosenbaum concludes: The two verses about erasing the memory of Amalek refer to these two types of antisemitism. We must destroy the "Amalek," the antisemitism, that is a response to our behavior or lifestyle. But, there is also irrational antisemitism that we can never eradicate on our own; that "Amalek" only Hashem can erase. (Ha'Torah L'Ohr Ha'Tekufah p.340)

Tehilim

Siddur Avodat Yisrael cites a custom to recite Psalm 32 on the Shabbat on which Parashat Ki Tetze is

read. Accordingly, we present here verses from, and commentaries on, that Psalm.

"Praiseworthy is one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered over!" (Verse 1)

The Gemara (Yoma 86b) asks: This verse seems to contradict another verse (Mishlei 28:13), "One who conceals his sin will not succeed, but he who confesses and forsakes them will be granted mercy."

The Gemara answers: One verse speaks of a sin that is already public knowledge, and one speaks of a sin that is not public knowledge. Alternatively, one speaks of sins between man and G-d, while the other speaks of sins against man. [Until here from the Gemara]

Rashi z"l explains: If the sin is already public knowledge, it is better for a person to confess it publicly. However, if the sin is not public knowledge, it is preferable to conceal it, for every sin that becomes known to the public lessens the honor of Heaven.

Rashi continues: If one sinned against his fellow man, the benefit of revealing it to the public is so that they might persuade the victim to forgive the sinner.

Regarding the above-quoted verse from Mishlei, R' Eliyahu z"l (1720-1797; the Vilna Gaon) writes: One who conceals his sin, i.e., he denies that he sinned, will not succeed, for the victim or Hashem, as the case may be, will surely take retribution. But, he who confesses, i.e., he tells his fellow, "I truly regret what I did and have forsaken my sin," will be granted mercy by his victim or Hashem. (Be'ur Ha'Gra Al Mishlei)