

RELIVING THE PAIN

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

"My wrath shall blaze and I shall kill you by the sword, and your wives will be widows and your children orphans"(22:23)

The Torah prohibits Bnei Yisroel from exploiting the vulnerability of a widow or orphan. Hashem warns that if He will hear the cries of widows or orphans, He will kill their oppressors by the sword and render their wives and children, widows and orphans. The necessity for the Torah to state that the wives and children of the oppressors will become widows and orphans implies that this is an integral part of the punishment; not only will the sinner be killed, but his wife and children will suffer because of his actions. Axiomatic to all of Hashem's punishments is the principle of "midah keneged midah" - "quid pro quo"; Hashem punishes with a severity commensurate to the offense. Why is death by the hands of heaven not a sufficient response for the mistreatment of widows and orphans? The Torah's stress on the children and wives becoming widows and orphans implies that there are two responses, death and bereavement of kin, for one action, the mistreatment of widows and orphans.

Rabbeinu Yona explains that the Hebrew word for widow, "almanah" is rooted in the word "ilem" - "mute", for with the death of her husband the widow is silenced, i.e. she has no one to defend her. Similarly, the word "yatom" - "orphan" correlates to a word found in Bereishis in the verse "vayitom hakesef"- "and the money was depleted". When a child loses a father his confidence is depleted, for he senses that he has no one to champion his cause. Every time widows or orphans are oppressed, they are forced to relive the loss of their husband or parent. They become acutely aware that if their relative, who in the past would defend them, were alive, they would not be forced to endure the current mistreatment. The Torah therefore warns the oppressors that as a result of their actions they will cause their own wives and children to experience the pain and suffering which they have inflicted upon others.

1.Rabbeinu Yona cited by the Shaarei Aharon 2.47:15

What About The Starving Children In India?

"You shall worship Hashem, your G-d, and He shall bless your bread and your water..."(23:25)

The Torah teaches that upon entering Eretz Yisroel, we are commanded to destroy all vestiges of idolatry and show complete allegiance to the Almighty. Doing so insures that He will bless our bread

and water. The Talmud states that we should not read the word in the verse as "u'veirach" - "and He will bless" (your bread, etc.), rather as "u'vareich" - "and you shall bless" (prior to partaking of your bread and water). This, continues the Talmud, is a Scriptural allusion to the requirement to make a blessing before eating or drinking.¹ In an earlier section in the same Tractate, the Talmud records that no Scriptural source is necessary for the obligation to make a blessing, for it is obvious that prior to receiving benefit from Hashem's world we must ask permission in the form of a blessing.² How do we reconcile these two sections of the Talmud?

As a rule, when the Sages offer an alternative reading for a word in the Torah, it is not to contradict the original interpretation, rather to shed light upon it. How does changing the meaning from "He will bless" to "you shall bless" accomplish this goal?

The Talmud states that a person who does not make a blessing prior to partaking from this world steals from his father and mother. His father, explains the Talmud, is Hashem, and his mother is the Assembly of Israel.³ What is the notion of stealing from the Assembly of Israel?

According to some commentaries the root of the word "beracha" - "blessing" is "berech" - "knee", for when reciting a blessing, we are figuratively kneeling before Hashem, submitting ourselves to Him as the Creator of the world; we ask His permission prior to benefiting from that which is His. The Rashba offers another interpretation for "beracha", saying that it stems from the word "beraicha" - "pool" or "source"; an object can only be blessed when it is connected to the source from which all abundance emanates, i.e. Hashem.⁴

When reciting a blessing we are asking for permission to benefit from Hashem's world, as well as being cognizant of the fact that by benefiting, we are causing the depletion of some of the world's resources. We therefore appeal to the source of all blessing to restore this lost resource, ensuring that others may benefit from it as well. Reciting a blessing over an item that we are about to consume connects it back to its source so that the blessing of abundance can be bestowed upon it, enabling this resource's replenishment.

Failing to recite a blessing results in two wrongdoings: We are stealing from our Father by taking that which is His without permission, and we are also stealing from our mother, i.e. society, for we are depleting the world of a resource without ensuring its replenishment. It is concerning the first notion, the requirement to request permission prior to partaking from Hashem's world, that the Talmud comments that no scriptural source is necessary. However, the requirement to ask Hashem to restore the depleted resource is not an idea that we would have derived had it been left to our own intellectual capacities. Therefore, for this second notion a scriptural source is presented. The verse states "He will bless you (with abundance)" but it can be read "you shall bless". There is no contradiction between the two, for both ideas coalesce. For us to receive Hashem's blessing of abundance we are required to bless our food. By connecting our food to the source of blessing, the

blessings of abundance will be bestowed upon us.

1.Berachos 48b 2.Ibid 35a 3.Ibid 35b 4.Responsa5:51 See Nefesh Hachayim II: 2
