

REALITY OF CONSEQUENCE

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

"...and they died before Hashem" (10:2)

The Zohar relates that both Nadav and Avihu were under the age of twenty when they died.¹ Since their deaths were a punishment *ohnahshc* - by heavenly means, a difficulty arises; their deaths violate the accepted rule that the heavenly court does not mete out punishment to anyone under twenty years of age.² Some of the later commentaries respond to this difficulty based upon the opinion of the Tzelach that if a child exhibits superior intellect, he can be held responsible for his actions, even at a young age.³

Perhaps we can offer a different answer. In the beginning of Parshas Acharei Mos, Rashi explains the juxtaposition between the deaths of Aharon's sons and the prohibition of entering the Holy of Holies. Rashi says that just as a doctor's warning is more effective when he points out to his patient the fate of someone who failed to heed his directives, Hashem warns Aharon that if he enters the Holy of Holies indiscriminately, he will die in the same manner as his sons.⁴ Why does Rashi use a doctor-patient scenario as a parable? Would it not have been more appropriate to compare Hashem and Aharon to a king and his subject?

If Rashi would have used a king-subject scenario, the message would be that if the subject does not follow the king's directions, he will die as a punishment. However, if a person fails to follow the instructions of a doctor and dies as a result, we consider this to be a logical consequence, not a punishment; the patient brought upon himself his own demise. Entering the Holy of Holies without permission is the same concept; the result is the death of the individual as a logical consequence of being in a place so holy that his soul cannot tolerate it. His death is not a punishment. Therefore, Rashi compares Hashem and Aharon to a doctor and his patient, for if Aharon would die as a result of not adhering to Hashem's warning, this would be an inevitable consequence. There is no questions as to how the heavenly court could have punished Aharon's sons; their deaths were not a punishment, rather a consequence of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, to which even minors are not impervious.

1.Begining of Parshas Achrei Mos see Sefer Drash V'iyun 2.Bamidbar Rabbah 18:4 See Pardeis Yoseif Parshas Chayei Sarah 3.Tzelach Berachos 31b 4.16:14.

Good Enough To Eat

"For distinguishing between the impure and the pure and between the creatures that may be eaten and the creatures that may not be eaten"(11:47)

At the end of the parsha we are commanded to distinguish between the animals that may be eaten and those that may not. Careful analysis of the Hebrew text reveals that the verse lacks parallel structure. The expression used to refer to the animals which may be eaten is "hachaya hane'echeles", for which the expression with parallel structure would be "hachaya asher ainena ne'echeles" - "the animals which may not be eaten". However, the Torah uses the expression "hachaya asher lo sayachel" to refer to the animals which may not be eaten. Why does the Torah not use the expression with parallel structure?

The Rambam in his introduction to Pirkei Avos poses the following question: Which is a higher service of Hashem, one who by nature does not have the desire to violate the precepts, or one who struggles with the desire, finally conquering his evil inclination, and does the will of Hashem? The Rambam comes to the following conclusion: In the Torah we find two categories of precepts. There are those which, by nature, we sense the obligation to uphold them. We understand that violating them would mean doing something intrinsically wrong, i.e. murder, theft, and adultery. The second category of precepts includes those which we would have no inkling of their prohibitive nature, were it not for Hashem having restricted us from doing them, i.e. the dietary laws, and shaatnez. Concerning those that we identify as being intrinsically wrong, the Torah obligates us not to desire to do them. The soul that adheres to these precepts, but desires to violate them is defective. Concerning those with which we do not associate an intrinsic wrong, the higher level of adherence is desiring to violate them, but restraining ourselves only because Hashem commands us to do so.¹

The verb "ne'echeles" - "may be eaten" is a passive participle which in the context of the verse functions as an adjective. This adjective defines the nature of the animal, i.e. it is edible. "Lo sayachel" is a verb which attaches an action to the object, but does not define the object itself, i.e. it may not be eaten, not that it is inedible. If the expression "ainena ne'echeles" would have been used, it would have defined non-kosher as inedible. The Torah is careful in its choice of words to relay the message that non-kosher does not mean abhorrent and inedible, rather, as the Rambam explains, something desirable but nonetheless prohibited.

1.Shemoneh Perakim Ch.6

Controlling Kindness

"And the chasida..." (11:19)

The Talmud teaches that each locale has a proclivity toward certain character traits or behaviors. Babylonia is noted for its high incidence of flattery, and as a source for this, the Talmud cites a verse found in the vision of the prophet Zecharia in which two winged women transport a measuring utensil to Babylonia. The Talmud interprets this to be an allusion to their bringing the trait of flattery to Babylonia.¹ Rashi explains the inference to flattery in this verse in the following manner: The Torah describes the women as having the wings of a "chasida" - stork. The Talmud explains that a chasida is so named because the stork performs acts of "chesed" - kindness for its friends.² How does performing acts of kindness for its friends transform the stork into the symbol of flattery?

To begin answering the aforementioned question, we must first address another difficulty raised by the commentaries. The Ramban teaches that since the birds which we are prohibited to eat exhibit negative character traits, consumption of them would infuse a person with these traits.³ In light of this, it is difficult to reconcile the Ramban's teaching with the Talmud's explanation of the name "chasida".⁴ Why would the Torah name an unclean bird with a positive trait?⁵ The Talmud is teaching us that what person does for his friends should be done out of commitment and obligation to the relationship. Viewing all that we do for friends as acts of kindness is a negative trait. Therefore, the chasida is being defined by a negative trait, not a positive one.

What motivates a person to view that which he does for his friends as acts of kindness? The Hebrew word for "friend" is "chaver", which is a derivation of the word "chibur" - "to be joined with". The closer a relationship is, the greater the loss of independence; commitment to a relationship is accompanied by obligations. A person must make himself available to accommodate his friend's needs. When a person views that which he does for his friend as a kindness, he maintains a distance within the relationship, not allowing for a commitment that would require obligation. He seeks to maintain his independence, for this allows him to have a relationship on his terms. What he is doing in essence is retaining his control over the relationship.

The act of flattery is essentially the same as the behavior exhibited by the chasida. When a person resorts to flattery within a relationship, he is giving his friend a false sense of reality. This is a manipulative act, giving the flatterer control over the relationship. Again, the relationship is being dictated on his terms. This explains a statement made by the Talmud: The punishment of the flatterer is that he will fall into the hands of the one who he flattered.⁶ Since he attempted to control, the quid-pro-quo is that he will eventually be controlled.

1. Kiddushin 48b 2. Ibid 3. See 11:13, these are birds that exhibit cruelty 4. Chullin 63a 5. See Chidushei Harim, Torah Temimah who address this issue 6. Sotah 42b

