

# DIVINE JUSTICE AND THE MYSTERIOUS 'VOV'

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #944 – Honoring Kohanim – Even Children? Good Shabbos!

## Incidents with Job and King David Explain A Vov In Parshas Emor

This week's parsha contains the *pasuk* "You shall guard My commandments and do them; I am Hashem. You shall not defile My holy Name and I shall be sanctified among the Children of Israel; I am Hashem Who sanctifies you." [Vayikra 22:31-32]. There are several difficulties with these two *pesukim*.

First, it is unclear what the difference is between the imperative "You shall guard My commandments" (using the verb *u'shmartem*) and "do them" (using the verb *v'asisem*). Either verb alone should have been sufficient to convey this idea of keeping the commandments. Rashi notes this difficulty and interprets that the word *u'shmartem* refers to study of the commandments (from the word *Mishna*) and the word *v'asisem* refers to actually doing the commandments (from the word *ma'aseh*).

The Chasam Sofer writes that the expression *u'shmartem* is reminiscent of an expression used by Yaakov guarding the dreams of Yosef in his mind (*v'Aviv shamar es hadavar*). Yaakov put these visions into the back of his mind – waiting to see how they might unfold. Therefore, the Chasam Sofer interprets the word *u'shmartem* in terms of anticipation. The *pasuk* is teaching that it is not sufficient for a person merely to do the *mitzvos* but a person must be anxiously awaiting the opportunity to perform the *mitzvos*.

A friend, whose father was an old time Chossid from Europe, told me a story. My friend came to visit his father on the first night of *Succos*. It was pouring rain. His father was standing by the window looking up at the sky, almost on the verge of tears: When would it stop raining so he could fulfill the mitzvah of *Succah*? Other people take the approach that if it rains, we are exempted from *Succah*. They go into the *Succah* (the first night) make *Kiddush*, have the minimum required measure of bread, and that is it! This Jew had such a strong longing to perform *mitzvos* that he was simply depressed by the specter of not being able to fulfill this mitzvah of *Succah* on the first night of *Succos*. This, explains the Chasam Sofer, is the imperative of *u'shmartem mitzvosai* – to yearn and long for the opportunity to fulfill them.

A more problematic expression contained in the above quoted *pesukim* are the words "*v'lo s'chalelu es shem kodshi*" [You shall not defile My holy Name]. The *pasuk* begins with a connecting "*vov haChibur*", which links the two *pesukim*. The passage thus reads, "You shall guard My commandments and do them... AND not defile My holy Name." Without this joining *vov*, we would certainly read them as two unrelated *pesukim*: The first *pasuk* tells us to keep the *mitzvos* and then the Torah introduces us to the serious sin of Desecrating the Name of G-d. Since the second *pasuk* begins with a *vov*, we are clearly being taught that these *pesukim* are somehow related. What is that connection?

I saw a novel interpretation in the *sefer* Ner Uziel from Rav Uziel Milevsky, z"l. Rav Milevsky bases his insight on a comment of the Vilna Gaon on a Gemara in Bava Basra (16a). In the tragic story of Iyov, Iyov is introduced with the following description: "...that man was wholesome and upright; he feared G-d and shunned evil." [Iyov 1:1]. As we know from the story, the Satan came before the Almighty and urged him to test Iyov, claiming that he would crack under pressure, revealing that he was not such a righteous person after all. The Almighty then visited upon Iyov that which has become a metaphor – the sufferings of Job. First, he lost his money, then he lost his family, then he became sick. In the end, Iyov did not rebel and he stayed true to the *Ribono shel Olam*. He passed the test.

However, in the course of these events, there was one occasion in which Iyov expressed (let us call it) his "dismay" at the Almighty for what happened to him. The Gemara wonders how this expression of dismay can be reconciled with Iyov's complete righteousness. One answer the Gemara gives is that a person cannot be held responsible for things he says "in the time of his grief" (*ayn adam nitfas bish'as tzaaro*). When a person is in extreme pain, he is not always held accountable for everything that comes out of his mouth.

There is another Talmudic opinion there in which Rava states that Iyov "wanted to turn the plate upside down" (*l'hafoch ka'arah al peeha*). The Vilna Gaon gives an amazing analogy to explain this enigmatic metaphor. The Vilna Gaon says the situation can be compared to a king who had a trustworthy and loyal servant who never did anything wrong in his life. For whatever reason, one day the king decided "Off with his head" for no reason whatsoever. This servant was so devoted to the king that he said, "If the king executes me, it is going to be such a disgrace to the king. There has never been a servant more loyal than I am. What will the people think about the king if he executes me? They will assume the king is cruel and capricious." Therefore, he went over while the king was eating, took the king's plate and threw it onto the king's lap. Then everyone said, "We see the king is right. This person deserves to be executed. He is a disloyal servant who must have done this in the past as well. The king clearly knows what he is doing."

In actuality, this act of apparent disrespect portrayed an amazing level of devotion on the part of the servant. Most people would say, "Let the people think the king is cruel and capricious! He is in fact wicked to be so unappreciative of all my service to him." However, the honor of the king was so dear to this servant he made it seem like the king was righteous in killing him.

The Gaon explains the Talmudic expression "Iyov wanted to turn the plate upside down" in light of this analogy. Iyov knew he was a perfect *Tzadik*, as described in the opening *pasuk* of the Sefer. However, he saw all the tragedies that happened to him and he knew that these events were causing people to question G-d's Justice. People were asking, "This is Torah and this is its reward?" This the meaning of "Iyov wanted to turn the plate upside down". He uttered a complaint against the Almighty. Now people had something to hang their hats on to which they could attribute his downfall.

There is a similar Gemara in Sanhedrin 107a. "(King) Dovid was on the verge of worshipping idolatry. Chushi haArki came to him and asked, 'Do you want people to say that a king such as yourself worships idols?' Dovid's response was 'Should a king such as I have his son try to kill him?'"

Dovid's son Avsholom was trying to kill him. This was a tremendous *Chillul HaShem* [Desecration of G-d's Name]. In one of the most dramatic scenes in all of *Tanach*, King Dovid and his entire entourage fled Jerusalem because his son Avsholom was trying to kill him. People were saying "How could this happen to Dovid King of Israel – he is a *Tzadik*, a pillar of the world!? How could a just G-d let this happen – that his own son rebels against him? How could this be? Is this Torah and this is its reward?"

The Talmud concludes with Dovid's reason for attempting to worship idolatry: "Better let idols be worshipped than allow G-d's Name to be publicly desecrated." In a selfless act, Dovid *HaMelech* said, "I am going to look like I am an idolater so people will understand why this tragedy is happening to me." This is exactly the same calculation made by Iyov. Both were quintessential servants of G-d. To a loyal and devoted servant, there is nothing more important than the reputation of his master. "Let me go down in history as an idolater or a blasphemer as long as it does not affect the Glory of the Almighty."

The Ner Uziel says that now we can understand the linkage of the two *pesukim* quoted above. "You shall guard my commandments and do them; I am Hashem". Every one of the commandments should be observed. Why? It is because sometimes others perceive us as big *Tzaddikim*. However, in our inner chambers, in the privacy of our own homes, when no one else is looking we do things we should not be doing – for which the *Ribono shel Olam* needs to punish us. No one knows that. Every one thinks we are perfectly righteous, observing the entire Torah. When the Almighty punishes us for that which we did in private and we need to suffer, people will murmur, "This is Torah and this is its reward?"

Sometimes in fact, it is a case of "the righteous suffer", but other times suffering comes to those who do in fact deserve it. The Torah therefore urges us to keep the commandments – both publicly and privately. In order that (connective vov) my Holy Name not be desecrated.

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