

Our *Parashah* begins: "When you will go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your *Elokim*, will deliver them into your hand . . ." The preceding verse, the final verse in last week's *Parashah*, concludes: "When you do what is upright in the eyes of Hashem." How are these verses related?

We read (*Tehilim* 101:5), "He who slanders his neighbor in secret – him I will cut down." This, says the *Gemara* (*Sotah* 5a), refers to one who speaks *Lashon Ha'ra*. R' Mordechai Banet z"l (1753–1829; Chief Rabbi of Moravia) observes: The next verse (101:6) begins, "My eyes are upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with Me." This person stands in contrast to the person in the previous verse who speaks *Lashon Ha'ra*. The "faithful" person is under Hashem's "watchful eyes."

Midrash Rabbah teaches: The generation of King Shaul consisted of righteous people, yet they were defeated in battle because they habitually spoke *Lashon Ha'ra* (as is evident from the book of *Shmuel I*). The subjects of King Achav were idolators, yet they were victorious in battle, because they did not speak *Lashon Ha'ra*. This, writes R' Banet, explains the transition from last week's *Parashah* to this week's. *Tehilim* teaches that G-d's "eyes" are upon the faithful, *i.e.*, those who do not speak *Lashon Ha'ra*. Says the Torah: When you do what is upright in the eyes of Hashem, *i.e.*, not speak *Lashon Ha'ra*, then, when you go out to war against your enemies, Hashem will deliver them into your hand. (*Machshevet Mordechai*)

Tefilah

This year, we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue discussing the thirteen types of prayer identified in *Midrashim*.

R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) writes: "*Chinun*"--from the same root as the familiar "*Tachanun*"--is asking for something for nothing. The foundation of this type of prayer is the recognition that one is asking G-d for something that he (the person praying) has no right to demand.

R' Pincus continues: It is difficult to find a precedent for such a request in human interactions. Even when a beggar asks a wealthy person for charity, he is not really requesting something for nothing. The wealthy person has a *Mitzvah* to give charity; therefore, the beggar has the right to request it. Also, consciously or subconsciously, we understand that all Jews are brothers and sisters; therefore, we naturally feel compassion for the person requesting charity, and we recognize an obligation to give. Lastly, we know that wealth comes from Hashem, who just as easily could have given it to the person who is now poor, while the person who is now wealthy could have been the pauper. When Hashem gives a person money, that person is no more than a trustee of a pool of resources that he is obligated to share appropriately with others.

The best analogy for this type of prayer, R' Pincus writes, is the famous apocryphal story of the person who murdered his parents and then begged for mercy because he was an orphan. When we need something, it is because our own misdeeds or lack of *Mitzvot* are preventing Hashem from being as generous to us as He would like. Thus, whether we are praying for health, sustenance, or anything else, we are, in effect, saying: "Hashem, I got myself into this situation where I need Your help. Now, please help me, even though I have no possible claim of entitlement." (*She'arim B'tefilah* p.110)

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring

10815 Meadowhill Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901 / 301-593-2272

Send e-mail to: TheTorahSpring@gmail.com

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“When you beat your olive tree, do not remove all of the splendor [i.e., the last fruit] behind you; it shall be for the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow. When you harvest your vineyard, you shall not glean behind you; it shall be for the proselyte, the orphan, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, therefore I command you to do this thing.” (24:20-22)

R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer z"l (1795-1874; rabbi of Torun, Poland; best-known for advocating resettlement of *Eretz Yisrael*) asks: Why does the Torah tie the *Mitzvah* of giving charity to the Exodus? He explains:

The Torah is teaching that one should not do good deeds because they appeal to his charitable nature. After all, if a person has such a nature, it is because G-d gave it to him. If so, what is the person bringing to the *Mitzvah*? Rather, we must do *mitzvot* because we acknowledge that G-d took us out of the slavery of Egypt to serve Him. (*Sefer Ha'Brit Al Ha'Torah*)

“A perfect and honest weight you shall have, a perfect and honest measure you shall have, so that your days shall be lengthened on the Land that Hashem, your Elokim, gives you.” (25:15)

Why is using honest weights and measures a reason that “your days shall be lengthened on the Land”? R' Elazar Fleckles z"l (1754-1826; Prague) explains: Our Sages teach that *Hashem's* Attribute of Justice does not touch a person until (literally) “his basket is full,” until Hashem is “fed-up,” so-to-speak. However, if a merchant's weights and measures are dishonest, if he sells baskets that are not “full” as full, then *Middah-K'negged-Middah*, Hashem will not wait for his “basket” to fill up. Rather, he is at risk of dying prematurely. In contrast, one who uses honest weights and measures can merit long life.

R' Fleckles continues: The zodiacal sign of the month of *Tishrei*, the time of judgment, is scales. “Know!” he writes, “that there are no scales in the Heavens.” Rather, every person is judged with scales of his own making. By the standard that he judges, he is judged. (*Olat Chodesh: Ma'amar* 117)

“Remember what Amalek did to you, on the way when you were leaving Egypt--that he happened upon you on the way, and he struck those of you who were lagging, all the weaklings at your rear, when you were faint and exhausted, and did not fear Elokim.” (25:17-18)

According to the *Peshat*, the last phrase, “and did not fear *Elokim*,” describes Amalek. However, notes R' Yissaschar Shlomo Teichtal (1885-1945; rabbi of Pieštany, Czechoslovakia and author of *Eim Ha'banim Semeichah*), “Amalek” also is a metaphor for the *Yetzer Ha'ra*. Just as one must always remember what Amalek did to us, so must one always be on his guard against the *Yetzer Ha'ra*. If one feels faint and exhausted and unable to continue his vigilance, it is a sign that he doesn't sufficiently fear *Elokim*.

(*Mishneh Sachir: Moadim* vol.2 p.147)

“Do not observe your brother's donkey or his ox falling and turn yourself away -- you shall surely help it up.” (22:4)

R' Yaakov Yosef Hakohen of Polnoye z"l (1710-1784; author of the first *Chassidic* work and a primary source for the teachings of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*) interprets this homiletically: “Do not observe your brother's donkey or his ox falling” --it would be better not to see your brother in a state of spiritual decline (becoming like a donkey or an ox). “Turn yourself away.”

But if you do see, “You shall surely help [him] up.”

(*Toldot Yaakov Yosef*)

“When you come into the vineyard of your fellow, you may eat grapes as is your desire, to your fill, but you may not put [any grapes] into your vessel.” (23:25)

On the level of *Peshat*, this verse is referring to a hired-hand's right to eat from the crops of a field while he is harvesting them; however, he has no right to take produce home.

R' Meir Horowitz z"l (1819-1877; *Dzikover Rebbe*) offers an allegorical explanation of this *Pasuk*, as follows: This verse is teaching that one should not become depressed when he returns home from visiting a *Tzaddik* and realizes that his behavior is essentially the same as it was before. Indeed, such depression is a scheme of the *Yetzer Ha'ra*, intended to destroy whatever gains the person did achieve and to discourage him from visiting *Tzaddikim* in the future. In reality, even the temporary gains that one experiences while he is in the presence of a *Tzaddik* are worthwhile.

A *Tzaddik* is called a “vineyard” (see *Yeshayah* 5:7). Says our verse: When you come to a *Tzaddik*, eat your fill, even if you expect that you will not take anything home, for even that short-term gain is worthwhile. (*Imrei Noam*)

“Beware of a Tzara'at affliction . . .” (24:8)

R' Yisrael Isser of Ponovezh z"l (Lithuania; mid-19th century) writes: One of the forms of *Tzara'at* is manifested by skin that appears healthy on the surface, though underneath the area is full of pus. The Torah (*Vayikra* 13:11) says of a person who has such a blemish, “The *Kohen* shall declare him contaminated.” This teaches that a person who acts as if his motivations are pure, though in reality they are not, is *Tamei*. For example, when one is offended and he reacts negatively, he may say, “I am not angry for my honor, but rather for the honor of the Torah that I have studied. Of course, I am not so vain as to think that I am a Torah scholar, but compared to the person who offended me . . .”

How can a person who lashes out “for the Torah's honor” measure whether his motivations are pure? Let him examine how he reacts when he sees a Torah scholar other than himself being offended. Also, how does he react when he sees a volume of a Torah work being treated disrespectfully? Finally, does this person who considers himself a minor Torah scholar defame the honor of the Torah by acting inappropriately himself? (*Menuchah U'kedushah* p.83)