

Our *Parashah* opens, "When you will go out to war against your enemies, and *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture its captivity." Given that this *Parashah* is read annually during the month of *Elul*, many commentaries find allusions in our verse to the process of *Teshuvah*.

We learn in *Pirkei Avot* (ch.1), "If I do not do for myself, who will do for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?" [Until here from the *Mishnah*.] R' Moshe Sofer z"l (1762-1839; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Pressburg, Hungary, known as the "*Chatam Sofer*") writes: The *Gemara* (*Kiddushin* 30b) teaches that a person cannot defeat the *Yetzer Ha'ra* without *Hashem's* assistance. One might think, therefore, "I will sit back and do nothing. and I will let *Hashem* conquer my *Yetzer Ha'ra* for me." If one thinks this, writes the *Chatam Sofer*, he will never defeat his evil inclination, as *Pirkei Avot* says, "If I do not do for myself, who will be do for me?" One might think, then, that he can defeat the *Yetzer Ha'ra* all alone. No, teaches the *Mishnah*, "If I am only for myself, what am I?" One might also think that he need not fight the *Yetzer Ha'ra* now, he can wait until he is older and his temptations are weaker. No, says *Pirkei Avot*, "If not now, when?" *Teshuvah* is more valuable in G-d's eyes when it is done while a person still has temptations that are strong.

This, concludes the *Chatam Sofer*, is the message of our verse: "When you will go out to war against your enemies"--i.e., the *Yetzer Ha'ra*--know that you cannot do it alone. Rather, "*Hashem*, your *Elokim*, will deliver him into your hand." (*Torat Moshe*)

Teshuvah

Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (1210-1263; Spain) identifies twenty components of complete *Teshuvah* / repentance. He writes: The thirteenth is that even "light" sins should be weighty in a person's eyes. There are four reasons for this, R' Yonah explains.

First, one should not focus on the smallness of the sin, but rather on the greatness of the One Who commanded us regarding that sin. [R' Aharon David Goldberg *shlita* (*Rosh Hayeshiva* of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland, Ohio) explains: We are taught that every *Mitzvah* and every sin includes two elements. One is the specific purpose for which that particular commandment was given, and the other is the fact that it is the King's command. In the former respect, some *Mitzvot* or sins may be more significant than others, but in the latter respect they are all equal, for they are all commands of the same King. (*Meshivat Nafesh* p.89)]

Second, continues R' Yonah, the *Yetzer Ha'ra* can more easily persuade a person to commit a small sin, and, because it is small in the person's eyes, he may commit it repeatedly. Together, these repeated small sins are equivalent to a big sin. That collection of sins may be compared, writes R' Yonah, to a cable made of many thin threads. While the individual threads have little strength, they are very strong when they are cabled together.

Third, when one repeats a sin, he begins to feel that it is no longer a sin, but rather a permitted activity. When this happens, he is considered an apostate--someone who has abandoned Judaism--vis-à-vis that sin.

Fourth, if the *Yetzer Ha'ra* has defeated a person today in a small way, it will defeat him tomorrow in a bigger way. Thus the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 105b) teaches: One who breaks something in anger is viewed as someone who committed idolatry, for such is the way of the *Yetzer Ha'ra*: Today it says, "Do this [smaller sin]," and tomorrow it says, "Go worship idols." [Until here from the *Gemara*]

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Moshe Aharon ben Menashe Yaakov Reiss a"h

“You shall not pervert the judgment of a convert or orphan, and you shall not take the garment of a widow as a pledge. You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing. When you reap your harvest in your field, and you forget a bundle in the field, you shall not turn back to take it; it shall be for the convert, the orphan, and the widow, so that *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, will bless you in all your handiwork . . . You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, therefore I command you to do this thing:” (24:17-22)

Why does the Torah switch from referring to “Egypt” to referring to “the land of Egypt”? R’ Tzvi Abba Gorelick z”l (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva Gedolah Zichron Moshe in South Fallsburg, N.Y.; died 2010) explains:

According to one opinion in the *Gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 115a), our verse’s prohibition on taking the garment of a widow as a pledge for a loan applies only if the widow is poor. The reason is that a person who takes a garment as a pledge from a poor person must lend the garment back to its owner on a daily basis (and then reclaim it as a pledge every evening), and neighbors will gossip about the widow if a man (*i.e.*, the lender/pledge-holder) is seen visiting her house every day.

R’ Gorelick continues: *Bnei Yisrael’s* enslavement in Egypt had two parts--physical slavery and immersion in the spiritual impurity and immorality of Egypt. Whenever the Torah speaks of redemption from “the land of Egypt,” it is speaking of *Bnei Yisrael’s* physical redemption; hence the reference to “the land,” which is physical. On the other hand, when the Torah speaks of *Bnei Yisrael’s* redemption from the spiritual impurity and immorality of *Mitzrayim*, it refers only to the place as “Egypt.”

The later verses quoted above speak of giving part of one’s harvest to the poor. That is a physical matter, so the Torah reminds us that we, too, were once subjugated in “the land of Egypt.” The earlier verses, in contrast, which are concerned about the appearance of immorality when the lender visits the widowed borrower, remind us only that we were slaves in “Egypt,” not “the land of . . .” (*Pirkei Mikra*)

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R’ Yonah adds: This is the meaning of *Hashem’s* warning to Kayin (*Bereishit* 4:7), “Surely, if you improve yourself, you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin crouches at the door.” The *Yetzer Ha’ra* is always crouching at the door waiting for an opening to attack. If one does not improve himself after committing a small sin--in Kayin’s case, jealousy that Hevel’s sacrifice was accepted, the *Yetzer Ha’ra* will lead him to commit ever greater sins. (*Sha’arei Teshuvah* 1:38)

“*Ki tetze* / When you will go out to war against your enemies, and *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, will deliver him into your hand, and you will capture its captivity.” (21:10)

The verse before this, the last verse of last week’s *Parashah*, ended with the words, “When you do what is upright in the eyes of *Hashem*.” R’ Eliyahu Ha’Tzarfati z”l (1715-1805; rabbi of Fes, Morocco) writes: The juxtaposition of these verses hints that when you do what is upright in the eyes of *Hashem*, then, when you go out to war, *Hashem* will deliver the enemy into your hand, *i.e.*, you will not even need weapons--neither offensive or defensive.

R’ Eliyahu continues: Why does the verse say, “against your enemies”? Who else would one go to war against? He explains: The Torah is teaching that winning a war requires focusing on the enemy, not thinking about the booty one may capture. If one does this, then, in the end, “You will capture its captivity.”

Why does the Torah use the singular form: “*Ki tetze* / When you will go out”? The Torah is teaching that the war will be won in the merit of unity. Why is the enemy also referred to in the singular: “Will deliver him into your hand”? To teach that when we are united, the enemy will be as easy to defeat as if it is one person. (*Eliyahu Zuta*)

“But *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, refused to listen to Bil’am, and *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, reversed the curse into a blessing for you, because *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, loved you.” (23:6)

R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap z”l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim’s Sha’arei Chesed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) asks: Would it not have been an even greater miracle if Bil’am had been allowed to utter his curses, but they still had had no effect?

R’ Charlap explains that our verse is answering this very question: When Reuven (*i.e.*, any person) loves Shimon (*i.e.*, another person), not only will Reuven not accept something bad that is said about Shimon, he will not even listen when someone says a bad word about Shimon. Similarly, says our *Pasuk*: *Hashem* refused to listen to Bil’am because *Hashem* loved you. Instead, *Hashem* reversed the curse into a blessing for you. (*Mei Maron: Nimukei Mikra’ot*)

“When a man marries a new wife, he shall not go out to the army . . . One shall not take an upper or lower millstone as a pledge, for he would be taking a life as a pledge.” (24:5-6)

R’ Yehuda Aryeh Leib Heine z”l (died 1989) writes in the name of his great-grandfather R’ Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter z”l (1847-1905; second *Gerrer Rebbe*; the “*Sfas Emes*”): People commonly go into debt and mortgage their property to make a wedding, but for a *Brit Milah* they make a relatively modest meal. The Torah, however, envisions the opposite: The juxtaposition of our two verses--unrelated on a *Pshat* level--hints that a person should not mortgage his property when marrying. In contrast, *Midrash Tanchuma* comments that the Jewish People are so committed to the *Mitzvah* of *Brit Milah* that a father is joyous even if he needs to mortgage his property to pay for the *Brit Milah* feast. (*Likutei Yehuda*)