

This week's *Parashah* opens with the *Mitzvah* to bring *Bikkurim*/ the year's first fruits to the *Bet Hamikdash*. Many comment on the fact that this *Mitzvah* follows the command at the end of last week's *Parashah* to remember Amalek's attack on *Bnei Yisrael*. R' Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z"l Hy"d (1885-1945; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Piešťany, Czechoslovakia) writes as follows:

We read (*Devarim* 8:18), "You shall remember *Hashem*, your *Elokim*--that it is He Who gives you strength to make wealth." This verse is teaching that a person must make a point to remember the true source of his success, for the *Yetzer Ha'ra* is always at work to make us forget. Perhaps this is why the very next verse begins, "It shall be if you forget *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, and go after the gods of others . . ." If you forget that *Hashem* is the One who gives you good things, you will eventually turn to worship other "gods."

It is clear to me, R' Teichtal continues, that this is the purpose of *Bikkurim*--so that a person will remember that it was not his efforts that made his crop a success; rather, it all came from *Hashem*. Indeed, *Rashi* z"l comments that the purpose of the declaration that one makes when he brings *Bikkurim* is to say, "I am not ungrateful." This recognition will lead a person to keep all of the *Mitzvot*.

Amalek's goal was to make *Bnei Yisrael* forget their gratitude to *Hashem* and to show that success comes from man's own efforts or by chance. Thus, *Bikkurim* is the antidote to Amalek. (*Mishneh Sachir*)

Teshuvah

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204) writes: What is *Teshuvah*? It means leaving behind one's sin, removing it from one's thoughts, and resolving in one's heart never to repeat it. One also must regret the past--all of this to the point that the Knower of Hidden Thoughts can attest that the former sinner will never return to this particular sin. The penitent also must confess verbally. (*Hil. Teshuvah* 2:2)

R' Yosef Yozel Horowitz z"l (1847-1919; the *Alter* of Novardok) asks: Can one ever be confident that he will not repeat a particular sin? Does a person know what challenges he will face in the future that may lead him to repeat a bad act or a bad *Middah* / character trait that he previously decided to abandon?

The *Alter* answers: Indeed, a person does not know what challenges he will face in the future, and *Rambam* does not mean that a person's *Teshuvah* for a sin is complete only when *Hashem* can attest that the person will never repeat that particular sin. Rather, *Hashem* must be able to attest that the penitent will never "return" to his sin, meaning that he has resolved to address all of the factors that led him to commit that particular sin in the past so that he will not repeat it under the same circumstances. Such resolve does not preclude the possibility that new challenges will lead a person to repeat a past sin, but that is not held against a person if he has addressed everything that was within his power to address.

On the other hand, continues the *Alter*, if a person does not comprehensively address the factors that led him to sin in the past, then he will be held accountable if he repeats his sin in the future, even if it is under unforeseen circumstances. Since he left himself open to repeating his sin, what difference does it make whether the ultimate cause of repeating the sin is a new circumstance or an old one? the *Alter* asks rhetorically.

The *Alter* adds: There are some circumstances that one knows will cause him to sin and others whose danger is unknown, and therein lies the distinction between a *Tzaddik* and one who is not a *Tzaddik*. A *Tzaddik* distances himself from that which may lead to sin, while others' attitude is that something that is not a known problem is not a problem at all.

(*Madregat Ha'adam: Ma'amar U'vacharta Va'chaim* ch. 13)

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“Because you did not serve *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, amid gladness and goodness of heart, when everything was abundant.” (28:47)

R' Yaakov Yosef Hakohen of Polnoye z"l (1710-1784) writes in the name of R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (1698-1760; founder of the Chassidic movement): Excessive humility distances a person from serving *Hashem*, for it causes him to doubt that his prayers and Torah study influence the entire world, and that even the angels are sustained by his prayers and Torah study. If a person believed in the power of his own prayers and Torah study, how joyous he would be, how much reverence he would have, and how careful he would be with every letter, every vowel, and every word! One must take to heart that he is “a ladder set earthward with its top reaching heavenward” (paraphrasing *Bereishit* 28:12), that every one of his movements, words, travels, and actions makes an impression on the “upper worlds”--then he will do everything for the sake of Heaven. But, if a person thinks, “Who am I to damage or repair the upper and lower worlds?” then he will say, “Peace will be with me, though I walk as my heart sees fit” (paraphrasing *Devarim* 29:19--i.e., if one believes that his choices have no impact, he will not be motivated to be careful about his choices).

(Toldot Yaakov Yosef: Eikev - Mitzvah “Ve’halachta B’drachav”)

A related thought:

We read (*Divrei Hayamim II* 17:6), “His heart was elevated in the ways of *Hashem*.” R' Betzalel Simcha Menachem Ben Zion Rabinowitz z"l (1935-2024; rabbi of Lugano, Switzerland, and *Biala Rebbe* in Yerushalayim) writes that this verse is describing “holy haughtiness”--the belief that *Hashem* desires one's Divine service and that one's service makes a difference to the world. Feeling “elevation of the heart” is essential to serving *Hashem* properly, the *Biala Rebbe* writes.

He continues: There is haughtiness that is the greatest blemish a person can have. Indeed, the *Gemara* (*Sotah* 5a) records that *Hashem* says of a haughty person, “The world is not big enough for both of us!” What is the difference between *Ga'avah D'kedushah* / “holy haughtiness” and *Ga'avah Me'usah* / “repugnant haughtiness”? The *Biala Rebbe* explains: Repugnant haughtiness involves raising oneself above others, while holy haughtiness never results in putting down another person. Holy haughtiness means recognizing the special qualities of all Jews--royalty, whose souls are hewn from under G-d's throne, so-to-speak. This special status has nothing to do with a person's accomplishments, so there is no room to glorify oneself or put down others. Moreover, if a person has special talents, that does not make him more important; it just means that he has an assignment to fulfill using those talents.

(Mevaser Tov: Va'yigbah Libo, Introduction)

“All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you (וְהִשִּׁיגְךָ), if you heed the voice of *Hashem*, your *Elokim*.” (28:2)

“All these curses will come upon you and pursue you and overtake you (וְהִשִּׁיגְךָ) . . .” (28:45)

Why, in the case of blessings, is the Hebrew word for “overtake you” spelled *Chaser* / incompletely, without the letter “Vav,” while in the case of curses it is spelled *Malei* / completely?

R' Yochanan Luria z"l (1440-1511; Alsace) explains: This difference reflects *Hashem*'s kindness to us. *Kohelet* (7:20) teaches, “There is no man on earth who is so wholly righteous that he does [only] good and never sins.” Therefore, every person must be punished to some degree. In His kindness, *Hashem* administers that punishment completely in this world, which is temporary, so that we will experience only good in the World-to-Come, which is eternal. In contrast, the reward for our *Mitzvot* is never paid completely in this world; rather, the bulk of the reward is held back to be paid in the next world.

(Meshivat Nefesh)

A related thought:

Our Sages say, “The reward for *Mitzvot* is not in this world.” But how can *Hashem* withhold man's reward until the next world? Does He not observe His own *Mitzvah* (*Devarim* 24:15): “On that day you shall pay his wages”--i.e., workers must be paid on the same day that they worked?

R' Yosef ben Moshe z"l (Przemsyl, Poland; died 1702) explains: The *Gemara* (*Bava Metzia* 110b) derives from a verse that if one hires workers through an intermediary, the *Mitzvah* to pay them on the day of their work does not apply. Likewise, *Hashem* gave us the Torah through an intermediary, Moshe. Therefore, *Hashem* is not obligated to pay our “wages” immediately.

In this light, R' Yosef continues, we can understand a *Midrashic* interpretation of Moshe's prayer (*Devarim* 3:24-25), “*Hashem, Elokim*, You have begun show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand . . . Let me now cross and see the good Land . . .” Says the *Midrash*: Moshe argued, “Other people have not spoken to You face-to-face, but I did. Therefore, let me enter *Eretz Yisrael*.” Moshe was arguing, explains R' Yosef, that *Hashem* is not obligated to reward others immediately because He hired them, so-to-speak, through an intermediary. But, I, Moshe, am your direct employee; therefore, You must pay me now by allowing me to enter *Eretz Yisrael*! (R' Yosef does not explain why *Hashem* did not accept Moshe's argument.)

R' Yosef offers nine additional reasons why man is not entitled to reward for his *Mitzvot* in this world. One reason is that every person comes into this world with a task to fulfill, and the very fact that a person is still alive means that he still has work to do. As such, until a person returns his soul to *Hashem*, he has not completed his job and has not earned his pay.

(Tzofnat Pa'neach Ha'chadash)