

Our *Parashah* opens with the *Mitzvah* of *Bikkurim* / bringing the first fruits of the season to the *Bet Hamikdash* and giving them to a *Kohen*. Part of that *Mitzvah* is recitation of certain verses from our *Parashah*, which are, perhaps, most familiar to us from the *Pesach Haggadah*: "Then you shall call out and say before *Hashem*, your Elokim, 'An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation--great, strong, and numerous. The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and placed hard work upon us . . . *Hashem* took us out of Egypt . . . He brought us to this place, and He gave us this Land, a Land flowing with milk and honey.'"

R' Chaim Tիրer z"l (1760-1818; rabbi of Czernowitz, Bukovina) writes: The *Mitzvah* of retelling the Exodus at the *Seder* includes, "Beginning with degradation and ending with praise," i.e., telling about our slavery and subjugation first and only then telling about our salvation. This is how proper thanks is given. Likewise, we eat *Maror* at the *Seder* because we must remember the bitterness in order that our thanks and praise be expressed with the proper joy. This "unites" the Name of *Hashem*, i.e., it dispels any notion that bad things just happen and *Hashem* then saves us from them. No! The bad things and the salvation are all part of the same story and the same plan.

When one has this attitude, our *Parashah* continues, then: "You will be glad with all the goodness that *Hashem*, your Elokim, has given you . . ." (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*)

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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“והוֹתִירךְ / Hashem will give you bountiful goodness, in the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your animals . . .” (28:11)

In next week's *Parashah* we read (30:9), **והוֹתִירךְ / Hashem will make you abundant . . .** Why is the first word in our verse spelled “Chasser” / “lacking” a *Yud* in our verse and “Malei” / “full” in next week's *Parashah*?

R' Azriel Yechiel Rubin z"l (1844-1912; Michalovce, Slovakia) answers: Our verse is speaking about before *Bnei Yisrael* have sinned and been exiled. Since they are still destined to be exiled, the blessing is incomplete or “Chasser.” The verse in next week's *Parashah* is speaking about after the Final Redemption, when the blessing will be complete or “Malei.” (Sde Ya'ar)

The *Gemara* (*Ta'anit* 8b) relates that there once was a famine and a plague simultaneously. The sage Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachmani said, “One cannot pray regarding two troubles [*i.e.*, famine and plague] at once. Pray that the famine end because *Hashem* will not send plenty only to have it go to waste. When He sends plenty, He necessarily will give life also.” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Yaakov Yisrael Halevi Stern z"l (18th century; *Maggid* / preacher in Kremenets, Ukraine) writes that, in this light, we may understand our verse as follows: “*Hashem* shall give you bountiful goodness.” And, so that that bountiful goodness will not go to waste, He also will bless “the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your animals,” etc.--more than you asked. (*Sefat Emet*: *Mishlei* 10:20)

“The smallest shall increase a thousandfold, and the least into a mighty nation; I am Hashem, in its time I will hasten it.” (Yeshayah 60:22--in this week's Haftarah)

We read (*Hoshea* 2:1), “The number of *Bnei Yisrael* will be like the sand of the sea, which can neither be measured nor counted.” The *Gemara* (*Yoma* 22b) asks: Which is correct--the first part of the verse, which says that *Bnei Yisrael* have a “number,” or the second part of the verse which says they “can neither be measured nor counted”? The *Gemara* answers: This one is true when they do G-d's Will, and this one is true when they do not do G-d's Will. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Yehoshua Falik z"l (Rabbi and Dayan in Lissa, Poland; late 18th century) asks: The implication is that when *Bnei Yisrael* are not doing *Hashem*'s Will, they will be countable, but if they repent, they will immediately become uncountable. How is it possible for such a change to occur instantaneously?

He answers: We read (*Yehoshua* 7:5), “The men of Ai struck down about thirty-six of them,” and the *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 44a) teaches: “This refers to Yair the son of Menashe, who was equal to 36 people.” Likewise, our Sages say that Moshe and Aharon were equivalent to 600,000 people. We see, R' Yehoshua writes, that if *Bnei Yisrael* repent, they can increase quickly--not in terms of their absolute headcount, but in terms of the number of people to which they are equivalent.

This, concludes R' Yehoshua, is the meaning of our verse: “The smallest shall increase a thousandfold, and the least into a mighty nation.” That will occur when the Jewish People are deserving, as a result of which *Hashem* will hasten the Redemption before its time, as the verse concludes. (*Binyan Yehoshua*)

“Accursed is the man who will make a graven or molten image, abominable to Hashem, a craftsman's handiwork, and place it in secret"--and the entire people shall speak up and say, 'Amen.'

“Accursed is one who denigrates his father or mother' . . .” (27:15-16)

R' Eliyahu Capsali z"l (Chief Rabbi of Candia, Crete; died 1555) asks: Why does the Torah place these two curses adjacent to each other?

He explains: “Man's heart is evil from his youth” (*Bereishit* 8:21), and he naturally is drawn after material desires. If not for a person's parents who direct him bit-by-bit, “a little here, and a little there” (*Yeshayah* 28:10), to perform *Mitzvot* and good deeds and to behave in a civilized way, he would deny *Hashem* and rebel against his King and G-d. This is why these curses are adjacent to each other, R' Capsali writes: One who denigrates his parents is nearly guaranteed to deny the Torah as a whole and turn to heresy.

R' Capsali continues: We read, likewise (*Vayikra* 19:2-3), “You shall be holy, for I am holy, *Hashem*, your Elokim. Every man--your father and mother you shall revere . . .” One who does not revere his parents can never attain holiness. (*Me'ah She'arim*, *Sha'ar* 5)

“All these blessings will come upon you *Ve'hi'si'gucha* / and overtake you, if you listen to the voice of Hashem, your Elokim.” (28:2)

R' Yitzchak Meir Rotenberg-Alter z"l (1799-1866; first *Gerrer Rebbe*, known as the “*Chiddushei Ha'Rim*”) explains in the name of R' Simcha Bunim of Pshischa z"l (1765-1827; Chassidic Rebbe in Poland): Sometimes *Hashem*'s blessings are so great that a person is overwhelmed by them and cannot enjoy them. The word “*Ve'hi'si'gucha*” in this verse is a promise that one who observes the *Mitzvot* will be able to enjoy the blessings he receives.

R' Pinchas Menachem Elazar Justman z"l (1848-1920; *Chassidic Rebbe* in Pilica, Poland; grandson of the *Chiddushei Ha'Rim*) asks: In light of R' Bunim's explanation, how are we to understand the similar wording in the verse (28:15), “All these curses will come upon you *Ve'hi'si'gucha*”?

The *Pilica Rebbe* answers: When *Hashem* punishes, it is not in order to take revenge, as is the case when a human king punishes. Rather, *Hashem*'s punishments are meant to awaken us to repent. Thus, “*Ve'hi'si'gucha*” may be understood as a blessing--that one who experiences “curses” will appreciate their purpose and repent, so that the punishments can cease.

The *Pilica Rebbe* adds: When we speak of “*Teshuvah Me'ahavah*” / repentance because of love for *Hashem*, we refer to repenting out of a recognition that *Hashem* does not want to punish us. One who repents because of fear does so because he is afraid of being punished for his sins. In contrast, one who repents because of love for *Hashem* repents for the sake of *Hashem*'s honor--because he knows *Hashem* doesn't want to punish us, and he wants to make *Hashem* “happy.” (*Siftei Tzaddik*)