



How shameful and disgraceful to God's name and Judaism, are those Rabbis who take money, for their promises that their recital of Tehillim or blessings will definitely improve their ignorant donors' affairs. But no improvements take place. Time after time I hear suffering people recount how Rabbis took their money in exchange for empty promises. What should we do? We must pray to God, seek counsel, reflect, repent, and improve. Is God not more of a guarantor, than any man? "In every place that you mention My name, I will come to you and bless you". (Exod. 20:21) Follow Torah, not the masses.

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Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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Weekly Parsha

VaYishlach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And Dina the daughter of Leya who she had born to Yaakov went out to observe the daughters of the land.” (Beresheit 34:1)

This pasuk begins the Torah's account of the abduction of the Dina – Yaakov's daughter – by Shechem and her subsequent rescue by her brothers. Although this account is

(continued on next page)

Others

PRAYING FOR

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Jessie: The Mishna in Talmud Brachos 34b states the following:

“If one erred in his prayers (Shemoneh Esreh) it is a bad sign for him. If the leader (Shali'ach Tzibur) erred in his Shemoneh Esreh, it is a bad sign for the congregation, for a person's agent (Shali'ach) is like himself. R. Chanina Ben Dosa used to pray for sick people; he would say which would live and which would not. His students inquired, “How do you know who will live?” R. Chanina responded, “If my prayer flows smoothly, I know that it is accepted; if not, I know that it is not accepted.”

The Talmud cites a case (Beraiisa):

“A case occurred, R. Gamliel's son fell sick; he sent two wise men to R.

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(VaYishlach cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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dramatic and engaging, the reason that it is included in the Torah is not completely clear. In general, Sefer Beresheit and Sefer Shemot provide an outline of Hashem's providence over humanity and Bnai Yisrael. The account of Dina's abduction and rescue does not seem to conform or be relevant to this theme. In order to understand the reasons for the inclusion of this account in the Torah, let us begin by considering the incident more carefully.

“And they said to them, "We are unable to do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for it is a disgrace to us. But in this manner we can agree to you – if you will be like us, to circumcise every male among you. Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters unto us. And we will dwell with you and be one nation.” (Beresheit 34:14-15)

Dina, Yaakov's daughter, is abducted and violated by Shechem, who is a prince among his people. Shechem falls in love with Dina, and, accompanied by his father Chamor, he requests of Yaakov and his sons permission to marry her. The brothers respond that they will not allow Dina to marry an uncircumcised person. If Shechem, his father and all of the males of the city will circumcise themselves, then the children of Yaakov will agree to the marriage. Furthermore, they will join with the citizens of the city as one nation.

Shechem, Chamor and the inhabitants of the city agree, and they perform the circumcisions. Three days later, while the men of the city were recovering, Shimon and Leyve, two of Yaakov's sons, enter the city and kill all of the males. They rescued Dina and eliminated all those who might attempt to oppose their decision.

This incident raises a number of questions. Let's focus on two of these problems. First, the offer that Yaakov's sons made to Shechem and Chamor seems somewhat odd. Shechem had kidnapped and raped their sister. Are we to assume that they were willing to allow Shechem – Dina's assailant – to marry their sister? It is remarkable that they would allow such a union under any circumstances!

Second, whatever their motives, the sons of Yaakov did agree to a bargain. It seems that the conditions of this bargain were met. Shechem, his father and the citizens performed circumcision. Why did Shimon and Leyve kill the males of the city? Why were Yaakov's sons not satisfied with the response of Shechem, Chamor, and the inhabitants of the city? They had fulfilled the condition demanded by Yaakov's sons?

“And the sons of Yaakov answered Shechem and Chamor his father with wisdom and they

said – because he had defiled Dina their sister.” (Beresheit 34:13)

Sforno answers both of these questions. In order to understand his response, we must begin with the passage above. This pasuk immediately precedes their response. There are two problems with this pasuk. First, the pasuk does not clearly state that the sons of Yaakov answered with wisdom. The term used in the Hebrew text is somewhat ambiguous. In the Hebrew text, the Chumash explains that they responded with *mirmah*. Rashi – based on Unkelus – translates this term to mean “wisdom.”[1] However, the term *mirmah* often indicated trickery or deviousness. Sforno and many others seem to suggest that there was an element of deviousness in their response. What was this element of deviousness?

Second, the pasuk is difficult to follow. The pasuk begins by telling us that Yaakov's sons responded with wisdom or deviousness. Then – before outlining the actual response – the pasuk adds that they were motivated by the consideration that Shechem had defiled their sister. How did this consideration influence and shape their response?

Sforno explains that their primary consideration in formulating their response was Shechem's violation of their sister. Because of Shechem's actions, they were completely unwilling to consider a marriage between Shechem and Dina. However, they did not feel that they could reject Shechem's overtures outright. They concluded that an outright rejection would be dismissed by Shechem and Chamor, and they would merely do as they pleased with Dina. Therefore, Yaakov's sons decided that they must at least create the appearance of being willing to accept some sort of settlement. But at not point were they actually willing to allow Shechem to marry Dina. This was the element of deviousness in their response. They were not attempting to negotiate a solution that would actually be acceptable to all parties. Instead, they were formulating an offer that they never imagined would be accepted. They assumed that their offer would be rejected and they would then demand Dinah's return.[2]

To the surprise of Yaakov's sons, their offer was accepted. This created an unexpected situation. They had never actually considered as an option Dina's marriage to Shechem. We can now understand their response to this situation. Once it became clear that Shechem would go to remarkable lengths to secure Dina as a wife, they had no choice other than to rescue her through force and eliminate all opposition to their efforts. They entered the city, killed the male inhabitants, and rescued their sister.

“And Yaakov said to Shimon and Leyve, “You have stained me through making me

(continued on next page)

Prayer

(VaYishlach cont. from pg. 2)

Weekly Parsha

Praying for Others II

Rashi, Genesis, 21:1, Talmud Baba Kama 92a: *"If one prays for another person while possessing that very same need, he/she is answered (by God) first."*

What perfection exists in a person when he is less personal in prayer? I say 'perfection' as God responds more readily to one who is more perfected, and I say 'less personal' since he prays for another person's needs before his own. When one is less personal, in other words, "objective" about the needs of people even before his own, he displays that which God desires, i.e., an objective embrace of the ideas of the Torah per se, as opposed to reacting to his own, personal needs. God answers him or her because they are attached to the truth, and not to what is important only for themselves. It should be noted however, that this is not a game. That is, one cannot expect to be answered first if he or she is really praying for another - with selfish motives. ■

despicable to the people of the land – the Canaanites and the Prezites. And my people are few in number. And they will gather against me and strike me and destroy me and my household." (Beresheit 34:30)

In our pasuk, Yaakov condemns the actions of his sons. The sons defend their behavior. They argue that they could not allow their sister to be treated as a prostitute. This dispute is difficult to understand. Yaakov was present when the brothers presented their proposal of circumcision. He certainly knew that circumcision would not change the moral character of Shechem, Chamor and their people. He must have suspected that the brothers had some hidden plan. Yet, when this plan was executed Yaakov protested! What was his dispute between Yaakov and his sons?

As explained above, Yaakov and his sons felt that it would be tragic to give Dinah to Shechem. They had never expected this outcome. However, at this point Yaakov and his sons were faced with the consequences of the bargain. Yaakov maintained that they must accept these unfortunate results and give Dinah to Shechem in marriage.

We can now understand the dispute between Yaakov and his sons. According to Sforno Yaakov made two points. He argued that Shimon and Leyve had endangered all of Bnai Yisrael. They were a minority group in the land of Canaan. The other people of the land would identify with the Shechem, Chamor and their people. They would seek to avenge this wrong committed by his sons. Yaakov and his children could not defend themselves from such an attack.

However, this was not Yaakov's whole argument. Yaakov and his sons had violated their bargain. This disturbed Yaakov. The people of Canaan would conclude that Yaakov and his sons were dishonest. This would reflect poorly on their morality and ultimately on Hashem.

What was the response of Shimon and Leyve? According to Sforno, they disputed both of Yaakov's arguments. They maintained that the people of Canaan were not so immoral as to condone the behavior of Shechem. They would recognize the right of Yaakov and his sons to rescue Dinah. Finally, they would understand the necessity of using subterfuge. Shechem, Chamor and their people outnumbered Yaakov and his sons. They could not rescue their sister without first disabling her captors. Bnai Yisrael would not be condemned for acting unethically. Neither were they in danger of retribution.[3]

Before returning to our original question, let us summarize the Sforno's position. Yaakov's sons never considered as an option allowing a marriage between their sister and Shechem. When confronted with the acquiescence of Shechem, Chamor, and the inhabitants of the city

to their offer, they reacted by rescuing Dina by force. Yaakov disapproved. He felt his sons had shamed their family and endangered them. His sons disagreed. They argued that the people of the land would understand and sympathize with their actions.

This incident precedes the Torah's account of the conflict between Yosef and his brothers. That conflict led to the exile of Bnai Yisrael to Egypt. If we understand Sefer Beresheit as an account of Hashem's providence over Bnai Yisrael, there is an implied relationship between this incident and the eventual exile of Bnai Yisrael. What is this connection?

Before Bnai Yisrael would be prepared to possess the land of Israel, the family of Yaakov would need to grow into a nation. However, it is difficult for a family to develop into a distinct nation. A single isolated family is subject to tremendous pressure to assimilate into the surrounding nation and culture. Yaakov's children would be faced with this pressure. How could they resist this pressure to assimilate into the surrounding peoples?

This assimilation could only be avoided if Yaakov's children would see themselves as separate and different from the surrounding peoples. But the debate that Sforno describes between Yaakov and his children suggests that they did not see themselves as an alien family in the land of Canaan. They believed that the people of Canaan had accepted them as their own and would respect the measures they had taken to protect their interests. Perhaps, this attitude suggests that the environment for assimilation already existed.

This conclusion has important implications. If an environment for assimilation already existed in Canaan, then the family of Yaakov could only develop into the nation of Bnai Yisrael in another land – a land in which they would not be permitted to assimilate. Egypt was such a land. The Egyptians could not accept Bnai Yisrael – even Yosef – as their equals. In the environment of Egypt, assimilation would be impossible.

We can now identify a possible reason for the inclusion of this account in the Torah. These events were relevant to the unfolding of Hashem's providence. Perhaps, the attitude of Yaakov's sons to the people of Canaan is one of the factors that dictated that the exile in Egypt was necessary! ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 34:13.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 34:13.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 34:30-31.

Talmud



NOACHIDES: NO REST

Talmudic Law & Theory

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Talmud Sanhedrin 58b discusses the prohibition of Noachides (gentiles) observing the Sabbath. This prohibition is derived from God's words in Genesis, 8:2: "Furthermore, all the days of the land; planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease." God stated this after Noah exited the ark and sacrificed to God, having been saved from the flood. God then promises not to destroy the earth again with a Flood, and not to suspend the seasons as was effectuated during the Flood. Both promises are praises of man's potential to recognize God, witnessed in Noah's sacrifice.

Rashi explains that the words "shall not cease" are not only a reference to the seasons, but also to man: man may not cease from planting and harvesting. Mankind, in Noah's generation, was exclusively Noachide – Jews did not yet exist. Thus, that decree that man too must not cease from labor, even for a single day, applies today to Noachides. Noachides may not observe the Sabbath or any holiday, as days of rest. Our first question is why this prohibition from a rest day was necessary.

In the Talmud, Ravina comments that the Noachide may not even celebrate Sabbath on a Monday: not only is the Saturday celebration prohibited, but also any day of the week carries the identical prohibition. What is the dispute between these two views?

I believe the idea behind this prohibition is, by definition, related to the plain reading of the verse, "Seasons shall not cease". Why won't God suspend the seasons again, as He did during the Flood? The answer is found in Noah's perfection: via his sacrifice, Noah demonstrated man's poten-

tial to live in accord with God's plan, and strive to reach God. Since Noah was able to reach such perfection, others too might, and no future catastrophe would be required. Thus, a suspension of the natural laws so as to eradicate life was no longer required, and all seasons will remain eternally. And, as man's recognition of, and commitment to such a life worth sustaining, he must endorse God's maintaining of the seasons, by reacting to each season in kind: in summer time, he plants, in fall, he harvests, etc. But he may never rest; as this would be a denial of God's mercy in promising to never halt nature. We learn that the prohibition on Noachides to rest is meant to force an appreciation in man for God's oath to never eradicate mankind.

This is Ravina's view: any day carries a prohibition to rest, since the act of resting – on any day – denies God maintenance of natural law.

However, the Talmud's view appears to prohibit a Noachide from resting on Sabbath (Saturday) alone. Any other day is then permissible for his rest. How do we understand this view? I believe the reasoning is that a Noachide cannot mimic a Jew, and by resting on Saturday, he blurs the lines between Noachide and Jew, as both now appear identical via their duplicated behaviors. But one moment: what is wrong with acting as a Jew? Is not Judaism God's will? Cannot a Noachide convert?

The reason Noachides cannot mimic the Jew, is by doing so, mankind will mistake him for a Torah observant individual, and seek to learn Torah from him. However, not commanded in the 613 laws, a Noachide is not necessarily as well versed in Torah, as is a Jew, who does study diligently, so as to perform his greater number of Torah obligations. Therefore, to help all involved, a Noachide may not observe Sabbath completely as does a Jew, thereby, insulating the Torah system, and maintaining the Jew's identity as distinct, and protecting his exclusive role as a Torah educator. If however any Noachide chooses, he may convert, and observe identically as a Jew, benefiting equally as Jews. Hence, according to this view, a Noachide may establish a rest on any day other than Saturday, as no one will confuse days, and equate a Noachide with the Jew who rests on God's biblically-originating day of rest.

At this point, one might ask, "Why is this prohibition to rest reserved for Noachides alone: the Jew as well descends from the saved Noah, so he too ought to display thanks to God by working, should he not? Both Jew and gentile today are alive due to God upholding all natural laws. Hence, Jews as well should demonstrate thanks by continued work. Why does the Jew have permission to rest?"

The reason the Jew must rest is in order to set himself apart from others, as Maimonides teaches,

and attract the necessary attention so mankind might inquire of the nature of his rest. Thereby, the Jew responds, and teaches mankind of the Sabbath, which reflects Creation, and simultaneously, God's existence as Creator. A follow-up question might be posed: "Why then doesn't the Jew rest one day, but he must work six days?"

On this question, I wondered why in both of the Torah's instances of the Ten Commandments, the command of Sabbath includes the words, "Six days you shall work" before stating that on day seven, one must rest. These introductory words seem superfluous. If the command is simply to abstain on the seventh day, why also state that we shall "work six days"? Although I saw one opinion who says that this means "it is permissible, not commanded, to work six days", I wonder if there is another view who holds that just as the Noachide, a Jew "must" also work, albeit one day less, an albeit without punishment of he does rest. I could not find a source sharing this view.

This fact, that Jews have no command to work six days as a Noachide must work seven, led me to think that perhaps the Noachide alone must continually work, since his system is one of minimal laws, which earn him his right to life. If he cannot observe these seven, basic Noachide laws that protect society, then he forfeits his life. His system, as a Rabbi explained, is not a system of "perfection". In contrast, the 613 commands is a system of utmost perfection, wherein over involvement in the physical (constant work) is antithetical to perfection, which is more intellectual and spiritual. The Jew's role is to be an educator of the world. His energies are to be bound up with continued Torah study, working minimally to sustain himself. Pirkei Avos says, "Minimize your work, and indulge in Torah". Also, "Make your Torah study primary, and your work peripheral."

Before Moses and the Torah, there were no Jews: Abraham, the Patriarchs, the Twelve tribes and all mankind were bound to work seven days as this portion of Talmud teaches. This clarifies the statements in Midrash and Rashi which state that "Abraham observed Passover", or someone else "observed the Torah"...before it was given. In fact, Abraham could not observe Passover before the Exodus took place. It is impossible historically, and from a religious standpoint. What this means, is that Abraham possessed the perfections that Passover offers man. He arrived at the perfections of Passover on his own "as if" he observed it. (Rabbi Reuven Mann)

In conclusion, I will leave you with one question: if Noachides are commanded to work all seven days, why is this law not an "eighth" Noachide command? See the Talmudic source we opened with to locate the answer. ■

Chanina Ben Dosa to ask him to pray for him. When R. Chanina saw them coming, he went to the upper story and prayed; he came down and told them that the fever had abated. The wise men asked, "Are you a prophet?" R. Chanina responded, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet; I have a tradition, if my prayer flows smoothly, it was accepted; if not, not. The wise men wrote down what time it was; they returned to R. Gamliel, who said that this was exactly when the fever abated."

I assume this section of Talmud is recorded, so as to teach some lesson regarding prayer. What do we learn about prayer from the parallel between Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa's prayer and the health of those for whom he prayed? It does not seem to be referring to a 'causal' relationship, i.e., if I have proper intent and state of mind in prayer, this intent (kavanna) "causes" me to be answered.

Thank you, Jess

Mesora: Jessie, we must first clarify a few statements, and then place this section of Talmud in the context of the Talmud's subsequent elucidation. We must examine the many cases where prayer effectuated change, and also did not. Only then, may we arrive at a system of rules regarding God's justice. A rule cannot be assessed based in one or few cases. Regarding how one's intent might alter God's response, we learned that both Eliyahu and Elisha lay upon the unconscious children to focus their prayers. Isaac too prayed "facing" his barren wife Rebecca for the same reason. Therefore, kavanna (intent) certainly plays a role. This is stated in the portion you quoted: the Talmud's first question was, "In which prayer is poor enunciation a sign that one's prayer was not accepted? In the first blessing of Avos." Rashi comments that this error in speech displays that from the outset (Avos is the first prayer) the person does not desire to pray. And if this is so, God will not respond. The person is not convinced of the effectiveness of prayer, and this why it is a burden to him. As such, he lacks the proper attention to his words and errs in his speech. The Talmud also says elsewhere that "One who makes his prayers a burden (he rushes), it is not supplication before God." And if a quorum promotes someone to lead, and this person errs in his prayers, why is this a bad sign for the quorum? Perhaps, since the quorum selected this person, it reflects poorly on them, as this Talmudic portion says, "A messenger is akin to those who sent him." This means that

one selects as a messenger whom he values. Thus, those who select a poor messenger share his flaws, as their estimation of the messenger is based on their own values.

Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa's prayers were of a great level, as Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai and the Talmud itself attest to later in this section. When the latter's son fell ill, he asked Rabbi Chanina to pray for him, and he was healed. His reasoning was that Rabbi Chanina might approach God more readily and more favorably than he.

The greatest prophets, such as Eliyahu and Elisha did not revive man: they prayed to God, and God alone healed the sick children. The Torah teaches God's perfect justice, "Each man in his own sin will be killed." This general rule means that "my" actions and views are what cause my fate, and what another person does or says does not affect my perfection or corruption. My merits and flaws cannot be affected at all by another, without his educating me. This is just, but there are mitigating factors outside the realm of my personal merit, where God might yet alter my fate for good, such as the cases where great individuals prayed on behalf of others and altered their fate. The Talmud states in connection with the prayers of the righteous, that "God loves them", that "they change God's wrath to mercy". (Yevamos, 64a) Hence, prayers for others can be effective.

God alters the condition of those prayed for, as their sickness was no longer needed. Why was it no longer needed? Perhaps through the awareness of the sickened state of those individuals, the great person praying for them will also help direct them to see their flaws, so they might repent. This is seen in the case of Eliyahu when the child fell ill, when his mother said, "My sins have been recalled". Meaning, she viewed her son's illness properly, as a means to awaken her to her sins. Perhaps this is why God responded favorably to Eliyahu. We might also suggest that God related to this woman, as she was on a high level: she gave of her miniscule sustenance to Eliyahu. This act of self-sacrifice earned her greater Divine providence, and perhaps the illness of her son was to increase her awareness, to elevate herself even further. "For those who God loves does He rebuke." (Proverbs, 3:12)

Prayer is an institution where one may judge himself, and determine his flaws: if one's prayer goes unanswered, he learns that his request is not in line with God's will, or perhaps, he is not perfected enough that God will relate to him in this matter, although God hears all prayers of all peoples.

Moses prayed for his sister Miriam when she was smitten with leprosy, and God said she must

remain in her state for seven days. One commentary suggests Miriam deserved a longer punitive measure, but it was shortened due to Moses' prayer. Moses' prayer for the Jews after the Golden Calf sin received an apparent stay of execution, as also occurred after the spies incited their rebellion.

Rabbi Chanina Ben Dosa stated, "If my prayer is accepted, then I know the person will be healed." Did he conclude this the very first or second time he prayed, when his words flowed with no error, and the person recovered? No. He said that he has a "tradition": meaning after many instances, he saw a repeating phenomenon; smoothly flowing prayers were followed by a positive response. And when his words did not exit his lips with ease, he witnessed a negative occurrence. We might also suggest that Rabbi Chanina would receive communication from God, in his prayer, in the form of either perfect or imperfect speech as an indication. Why did God desire Rabbi Chanina to obtain this knowledge? Perhaps to remove his further prayers, as in such a case, no remedy existed for the person. Or perhaps, God wished to inform Rabbi Chanina that the flaw of the person was quite severe. This might induce Rabbi Chanina to alert the ailing individual, to help their reflection and subsequent recovery. This idea requires further research, and I only suggest it as a possibility.

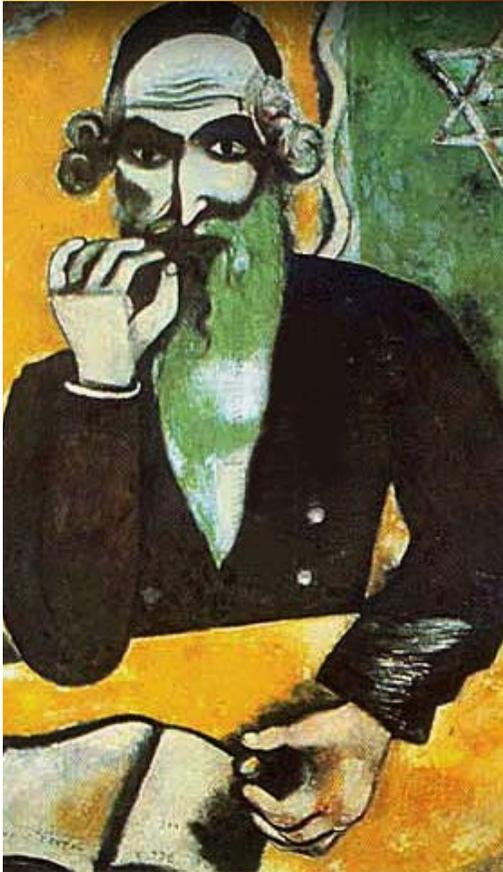
Additional cases of prayers include: Isaac's prayer for Rebecca's conception, and God's positive response to Isaac, not Rebecca, granting them children (Gen. 25:21); Abraham's prayer for Avimelech's healing which was received (Gen. 20:17); Eliyahu's and Elisha's prayers for the "dead" children, who were both revived (Kings I, 17:21,22, Kings II, 4:33-35), and King David's prayer for Batsheva's son, who nonetheless died. Perhaps King David's son was not healed and died, as the verse states, (paraphrased) "You sinned privately, but you will be punished publicly." (Samuel II, 12:12) Perhaps something exists in some sins performed in private, where its punishment cannot be averted. Nonetheless, King David did not abandon hope, and fasted and prayed for his son. He attested to human ignorance of God's justice, "...for who knows, God might show me mercy and revive the child." (Samuel II, 12:22) This is an important lesson: man cannot know God's thoughts, and therefore, he should never abandon hope of God's mercy.

Some prayers meet with success, others do not. Wherein lies the distinction among these cases? Note that Radak did not hold that the child for whom Eliyahu prayed was actually dead. As proof for this theory, Radak cites the

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(Praying for Others continued from page 5)

Prayer



Targum who says that Eliyahu prayed that the child “not die”: he must have still been alive to suggest this.

Regarding the Spies’ Rebellion (Num. 14:10) Sforno says God’s words “I have forgiven as your words” mean that God never intended the Jews to be killed suddenly, rather, over a period of 40 years in the desert. It only appeared as forgiveness, in Moses’ estimation.

Regarding the Golden Calf, God told Moses, “And now, leave Me and My anger will consume them and I will destroy them and I will make you (Moses) into a great nation.” Immediately, Moses began to pray. Rashi states that until God said, “Leave Me”, Moses did not know that he should pray for the Jews. (Rashi, Exod. 32:10) That catches your attention. Moses did not know he should pray, until God hinted, with His words, “And now, leave Me, and My anger will burn in them, and I will destroy them and I will make from you a great nation.” Rashi says Moses now understood that God gave him an opening. The Jews’ salvation depended on Moses’ prayer. This is what God meant, “Leave Me, and I will destroy, but remain and pray, and I will not.” But this is not always the case. However, in this isolated instance, God informed Moses that he might salvage the nation by his merit. Perhaps this is true here, as all depended on Moses’ relationship with the people. However, it is essential to note that

Moses, the greatest prophet, felt that in this case, prayer was inappropriate, until God advised him otherwise. Why did Moses feel prayer inappropriate in this case? Perhaps it was due to the sin being one of idolatry, the worst violation of God and Torah. I am not certain.

To elaborate on the Jews’ sin, they had miscalculated Moses’ scheduled 40th day of descent from Sinai. Upon the Jews’ flawed count, they said, “and the man Moses, we know not what happened to him.” They thought Moses died. They immediately created the Golden Calf, as they desperately required some tangible figure in which they would follow. Moses the “man”, they said, was gone. Of course he is a man! However, the verse records their word “man” to convey the human over-attachment forged by the Jews in the physical person of Moses. Perhaps, all relied on Moses: only Moses could address this flawed attachment, so the Jews could be spared. God therefore tells Moses, “Leave Me and I will destroy them.” Meaning, “If you remain and pray – reflecting – you may arrive at a solution, and the Jews need not be destroyed.” This was the sense of God’s words to Moses. God instructed Moses that this sin was generated from their strong attachment to Moses, the “man”. Herein lay the area that can be addressed, and Moses took this instruction and deployed his solution. Thus, the Jews were not destroyed. Perhaps this is why Moses broke the Tablets: to teach the Jews that just as they attached themselves to the “man” Moses, they would also do so with the Tablets. His act of breaking them “in front of their eyes” (Deut. 9:17) might have been a lesson to the Jews to break their attachment to physical objects, like Moses. Breaking one physical object “in front of their eyes” was meant to break their attachment to other objects, i.e., Moses the “man”. (As heard from a Rabbi)

One must note Ibn Ezra’s emphasis, “God was not consoled”. Meaning, God does not change His mind. For God’s omniscience rejects the possibility that a “new” consideration must now be entertained, in response to which, God would change His mind. Ibn Ezra states that the Torah speaks in the language of man. Therefore, “And God was consoled regarding the evil that he spoke to perform to His people” must be interpreted as no change in Him. As a matter of precision, note that the verse says God’s ‘intended’ punishment, something He merely “spoke to do” and not that He will “certainly do”. This implies a threat, and not an irreversible decree, if some recourse is not taken. However, God knew that Moses would respond as he did, as God knows all future events. God meant to suggest the gravity of the Jews’ sin, and not that He truly intended to destroy them at this point.

Answering the Questions

We understand that through prayer, one might reflect on his situation, learn a new insight or flaw, and act to correct the matter. In this same manner, one’s prayer for others may offer him greater knowledge, and with that knowledge, the person who prayed might educate the ill individual. The Talmud states, “One who is sick should consult with a wise individual”: this wise person can inform you of your failings, and you might correct yourself. (Baba Basra 116a)

It is clear: if God gave an illness to someone, it was intended to direct him to reflect. Either with his own knowledge, or someone else who imparts insights, the ailing person might learn his sin, repent, and deserve God’s healings. The Matriarchs were all barren, as “God desires the prayers of the righteous”. This means that God wished that the Matriarchs perfected themselves with regards to their relationships with their children, so as to raise them in line with God’s will, and not in their current views. God desires the Matriarchs to relate to children, as God deems proper, not as their predispositions might dictate. For this reason, Chana had no child until she prayed and dedicated him (Samuel) to Temple service. In prayer itself, Chana elevated her thinking, realized a new purpose for her child, and was heard. And when the Matriarchs perfected themselves, they too were given children. When Job perfected his flawed thinking concerning God’s justice, he too was given children, health, and wealth. Moses’ prayer was effective, as it raised his level to the point that he could address the Jews’ sin. But we must note: if someone stricken by God does not improve himself, what would be the justice in his release from his sickness? If it was in accord with justice that he receives his condition, and this justice is based on his flaw, then until the flaw is removed, the sickness should also remain. (This does not mean that every sickness is due to God’s will. For example, people may eat poorly and destroy their health independent of God’s actions.)

This same reasoning applies to a child, although not yet culpable for sins, is killed as punishment to the parent. This was the case regarding King David’s son from Batsheva. King David sinned with the death of Uriah, so his child from his union with Uriah’s “wife” met with death. God creates life, and does as He pleases with life...until one earns his or her own merit, demanding that justice enter the equation for the child who turned adult. But until obligated in Mitzva, a child has no claim to God, as he or she has no righteousness as of yet. Through death of an infant, the parent might reflect on some sin. King David’s prayers for his infant son did not save the child. But he prayed,

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(cont. from pg. 6)

Prayer

and I repeat, "For who knows, perhaps God will show me mercy, and the infant will live." (Samuel II, 12:22) King David thereby attested to our ignorance of God's workings of justice, but his hope was not vanquished. "Even if the sword is at your neck, do not despair from God's mercy."

King David said further, after the child was dead, that there was no longer reason to mourn: "Can I return him to life?" Having mentioned this, we wonder at the acts of Eliyahu and Elisha, who according to the plain reading of the Prophets revived "dead" children. If they could revive the dead, why was King David convinced that his prayers could not? We might explain this in accordance with Radak's view, as we mentioned: the child was not dead. Targum says, Eliyahu asked of God that the child "not die". He was still alive, albeit in a minimal sense. There is no conflict between the story of King David's son, and the prayers of Eliyahu. Additionally, if Eliyahu performed resurrection, what further significance exists in God's resurrection of the dead in the future?

Summary

God might save a person if another person is negatively affected by his predicted demise, and prays for an alternative outcome: the effects it may have on another might mitigate God's justice for one person. But as seen with King David, this is not always the case. God will also reverse His decree, of some remedy is at hand, as seen with Moses and the Golden Calf. We also learn this in God's words to Abraham, that He would not destroy Sodom had ten righteous people been found. For through these ten, others might be influenced back towards a life of proper morality and justice. If someone perfects him/herself through prayer, a new result may be delivered. Chana's prayer and oath to dedicate her son Samuel to Temple worship, and the Matriarch's prayers teach this principle. And prayer might offer another party the knowledge to impart to the sick individual, so through his own increased knowledge, he will recover. King David taught us "for who knows" concerning God's justice. Man has little understanding of the Creator.

As we see, there is a myriad of cases – each one diverse in elements from the next. Each case must be studied to learn why God responds one way or the other. With our understanding of God's choice words in our Torah, we may be fortunate to unravel more of God's justice. In His perfect words, lie the answers. ■

Thought



One Word:

Worth 1000 Pictures

GHG

It is always more comforting to have visual proofs, along with logical proofs of our inherited Torah.

I decided to join Sherlock Holmes' fraternity of detectives to see how far back I could go to find photos, then paintings, of men performing the Mitzva of wearing Tzitzis. Since photography only recently began in the early nineteenth century, my research would involve, primarily finding and reviewing fine works of art.

Before I began this ambitious project, I realized that I should brush up, and expand my knowledge of the laws pertaining to the Mitzva of Tzitzis. Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch, in his Horeb writes in chapter thirty nine:

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying: 'Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them throughout their generations, fringes in the corners of their garments,

and that they put with the fringe of each corner, a thread of blue. And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that you go not about after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you use to go astray; that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy unto your God. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God'." (Num. XV, 37-41) "Thou shall make thee twisted cords upon the four corners of thy covering, wherewith thou coverest thyself. (Deut. XXII, 12)

Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch writes: "But God does not wish you to follow the course prompted by your heart or your eye, and so He has given you a means whereby in the present, visible world you will always have a visible reminder of God – Himself invisible – a present reminder of His law given in the past. It will remind you also, that the animal within you strives only to find gratification in things invisible and material. This means is Tzitzis. God commanded that Tzitzis be entwined in the corners of your four-cornered garment – fringes instituted by Him for the physical eye to behold as a reminder of His commandments. The fringes will help you to raise yourself above the world envisaged by the senses and to dedicate your material senses to the service of Him. The Tzitzis remind us of God and his law, and that 'you go not about after your own heart and your own eyes'."

Just before I started to type in the web site address for my first search for "Antique Jewish Paintings", the saying, "One picture is worth a thousand words" popped into my head. That's what I was trying to accomplish: find the earliest paintings of Jews wearing Tzitzis as a visually "comforting" proof of this law's antiquity and authenticity. Then it occurred to me that the converse is really true: "One word (of Torah) is worth a thousand pictures"...meaning, all the world's "proof-positive" in paintings do not equate to even one word of our precious Torah. Pictures cannot validate what reason tells us, that the Torah is authentic and its reasons are undeniable and beyond reproach. My initial notion was incorrect: images should not play any role in assessing Torah truths.

Well, I just completed studying Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch's commentary on Tzitzis in his all-encompassing Horeb. I had the proof, the Torah's proof. Look how much time I saved. Who needs pictures?

Time to shut my PC down, and take Sherlock's pipe out of my mouth. I hope its not too late to run down to Tuvia's bookstore. I hope he has my Tzitzis size in stock. ■

Blessings



MAN BLESSING MAN

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader 1: The last part of Toldos seems to advocate the idea that blessings have real power, as opposed to what I assume your philosophy to be: man's blessings are merely intended to give others support, emotionally and psychologically.

If Isaac meant to originally bless Esav, what did it matter if Jacob was the one standing there? Why is Isaac unable to bless Esav with the same blessing? Just because Jacob happened to be there at the time, he takes it all? It seems more logical that Isaac should have given Jacob the same blessing, and then having realized his error, retract it and give it to Esav. Did Isaac suddenly realize the mistakes he was making in wanting to bless Esav, and that is why he confirmed even Jacob's trickery in obtaining the blessings?

What's going on here? –Rafi

Reader 2: What difference does it make who blesses who? Do not all blessings depend on God's grant of that blessing? If so, why would Rivkah and Jacob concern themselves with obtaining Isaac's blessed words? God knows who should receive blessing, and who should not. Is this to say that without Isaac's blessings, Jacob would be bereft of some good he deserves from God? –Howard

Mesora: These are very important questions. To answer them, we must study the Torah's words and those of Rashi, when according to Rashi, at this inceptional transition; God no longer blessed man directly, but gave this right to Abraham – the

right to bless others. This was then passed to Isaac when he blessed Jacob. (Gen. 27:29)

Let us review Genesis 12:1-3: [1] "God said to Abraham, 'Get yourself from this land, and from your birthplace, and from the house of your father, to the land which I will show you. [2] And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be blessed. [3] And I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse, and all the families of Earth will bless you.'"

Rashi comments on the last words of 12:2 "and you will be blessed" as follows: "The blessings are given into your hands. Until now, blessings for Adam and Noah were in My hands, and from now [on] you shall bless who you desire."

A number of questions present themselves:

1) Why did God make this change, handing over blessings to man – to Abraham?

2) What is meant, that man (Abraham) "blesses" other men: do not all blessings emanate from God alone?

3) What is the distinction regarding Abraham, that for him, and not for Adam or Noah, did God make this change?

4) If God does in fact bless people by Himself, what were Rivka's and Jacob's urgencies to secure the blessings of Isaac, and what was Isaac's need to bless Jacob?

5) When Isaac does bless Jacob, he passes on these very words: "Those who curse you will be cursed, those who bless you will be blessed". (Gen. 27:29) How do we understand this continuum? What is the sustained objective in "man blessing man"?

Before we approach Rashi, let us appreciate a more basic view. According to Daas Zikanim of Tosfos, the "blessings" mentioned with regard to Abraham refers to a "command that Abraham continue commanding mankind on recognizing their Creator, and that mankind blesses God."

Abraham's culture and era was steeped in idolatry, and as the Rabbis state, he was not welcome in his hometown, where he was cast into a furnace. Nonetheless, to Abraham's great, heroic credit, he defied threats, and sought the spiritual well being for his brotherhood of mankind. Threats did not change the course this mighty patriarch and his concern for all others. Certainly, threats were no surprise – Abraham understood the unpopular nature of his monotheistic views and proofs. But he also understood what spiritual and eternal life mankind would forfeit, had they continued their course of idolatry. Abraham was not only to educate mankind on the Creator's existence, but as Daas Zikanim adds, to engender mankind's "blessings of God". "Blessings" adds a new dimension: that mankind appreciates God, to the point, that they bless Him...for their very

existence. This may not resonate with many people, as our global society is so distant from: 1) knowing God truly exists, and 2) the genuine, daily feeling of appreciation that God created us...gave us life...and gave us intellect to realize amazing truths. God gave us each: existence, and the ability – if we so choose – to enjoy a most exciting life.

This is the view of Daas Zikanim. However, according to Rashi, God gave Abraham rights in actually blessing man. How do we understand this? How do we answer our questions? Let us first appreciate that God granting man rights to bless others, addresses two parties: 1) the blesser, i.e., Abraham, and 2) those blessed. More often, when approaching this area, people tend to view blessings exclusively from the perspective of the recipient. However, this might be promoted from egotistical drives, and not a full analysis of all facets.

The Blesser

From the perspective of Abraham, we might suggest that it was now God's will that man take a central and authoritative role in promulgating society towards perfection. Man, namely Abraham, would now determine who was to be blessed. Similarly, God desires the institution of kings (Malachim). Although initially the Jews requested a king to be as "other nations", their objective in identifying with gentile nations was incorrect, but the institution of kings was proper. Again, the institution of priests (Kohanim) as well as that of Rabbis also attests to God's will that some men lead others. From these truths, we may conclude that God desires not to be presenting His word constantly, but that man engages his mind and teaches others using his own reason. God desires man to live independently, and constant miracles or "Revelations at Sinai" compromise man's independence, and actually imply man's dependence on God for thought. However, God equipped man to live on his own. God's act of granting Abraham rights of blessing means that God endorses this individual, who extricated himself from the depths of idolatry, using his mind alone, to teach others that they too are fully equipped to do the same. Raising Abraham to this level of prominence and fame, God says, "And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great". Thereby, we learn that God desires man to determine which other men and women are attached to truth, and through their blessings of others, this is achieved. Of course all blessings emanate from God, so man's role in blessing others is merely to teach others that man must lead. The blessing itself originates only from God. This brings us to our next group.

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(Man Blessing Man continued from page 8)

Blessings

**Those Blessed**

An interesting thought occurred to me here. I have no proof, but perhaps the verses do indicate the idea. Let us review Rashi once again: “The blessings are given into your [Abraham] hands. Until now, blessings for Adam and Noah were in My hands, and from now [on] you shall bless who you desire.”

We must ask what distinction Abraham possessed over his predecessors. We noted that during Abraham’s time, idolatry pervaded the world. Now, what is the primary cause of idolatry? It is man’s overestimation of physicality, his insecurity and infantile fears, from which he did not mature. Remaining attached to his need for the parent well into adulthood, and after his parents die, he seeks replacements for them, expressed in

idol worship. During Abraham’s era, man was so desperately attached to figurines, mostly humanoid in design, as is revealed in our museums today. These statues and idols served to duplicate and replace their lost parental figures.

Perhaps, God now desired to harness those strong emotions for man’s good. Man would not leave this infantile dependent state, so God created the institution of “man blessing man” as a replacement, something that would appeal to idolaters and all peoples distant from God, redirecting them towards the teachings and lifestyles of those leaders, like Abraham. Thus, man’s blessings might have been intended to effectuate a redirection of man from his false notions towards the good, but using his current orientation of dependency. As we said, all blessings

emanate from God...He does not need man to bless His creations, and man cannot effectuate blessings. God created the entire universe...alone. However, to assist those individuals lost in idol worship, God may have selected to elevate perfected individuals to prominence, to offer others a new object of admiration. This was not needed or perhaps, would not work before Abraham, so it was not instituted. That is what Rashi said; God initially blessed Adam and Noah directly, directing their lives with no other human leader. But perhaps Abraham’s generation could be assisted with this new institution of “man blessing man”.

We might explain verse 2 as follows: first, “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great”. This first

part of the verse is the actual cause for the ending, “and you will be blessed”. Meaning, through God’s intervention of elevating Abraham to greatness, “he will be blessed” is the result. That is, mankind will admire Abraham due to God’s elevation, such that Abraham’s blessings are actually respected. His promotion to greatness will cause all others to value who Abraham blesses.

Perhaps this explains why Jacob yearned for Isaac’s blessings. He was not dependent on Isaac’s words to live properly and thus, receive God’s providence. Rather, Jacob wished to sustain this institution whereby he would be successful in earning the admiration of others, to the point, that they would value and adhere to his perfected lifestyle. Thus, Jacob may have desired the blessings of Isaac, as a means to set himself up as an example for others. Through his prominence and receipt of Isaac’s blessings, mankind would value Jacob, and mimic his perfections.

However, it must be understood: these blessings originating with Abraham were given with Divine inspiration. This explains why Isaac told Esav regarding Jacob’s securing of the blessings, “gam baruch yihyeh”; “he is blessed.” (27:33) Although deceived, since the blessings went through well, Isaac confirmed that Jacob was indeed blessed by God. Isaac conveyed that Divine inspiration was present.

God allowed Isaac’s blessings to take hold, even unknowingly blessing Jacob, not his intended Esav. We learn from this that man’s intent is irrelevant regarding who actually receives God’s blessings. I believe this fact proves that blessings have nothing to do with man: for even unintentionally blessed, Jacob remained truly blessed. The purpose in blessings is not so much for the blesser, but for the recipient to bear the endorsement of perfected people, for all others to follow. Perhaps this adds another two reasons why Isaac told Esav that “Jacob is indeed blessed”: 1) Isaac wished to impress upon Esav who was worthy. Perhaps now realizing that Esav was unworthy, Isaac now attempted to correct his son’s flaws by focusing Esav on Jacob who deserved the blessings, and not him; 2) Isaac wished to preempt any future quarrel. For someone might suggest that being fooled, Isaac did not truly bestow blessing on Jacob. Therefore, Isaac enunciated “gam baruch yihyeh”; “he is blessed.”

The verses also teach that blessings are only through God, “And I will bless those who bless you, and those who curse you I will curse”.

Since man cannot effectuate blessings, perhaps we learn that “man blessing man” is intended to harness man’s need for leadership, redirecting him away from false leaders and gods, towards those perfected individuals who are to be emulated. ■