

G-d's Justice

The age old question of the afflictions of the righteous, cannot be older than the question of whether to follow a Rabbi, when his philosophy does not make sense to your mind. In philosophy, no obligation exists to follow an opinion, when it is contrary to what your mind says is sensible.

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RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by students

Vayeche

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And I give you an additional portion, beyond your brothers, that I captured from the Amorite with my sword and bow." (Beresheit 48:22)

In this passage, Yaakov reiterates that Yosef's descendants will receive a double portion of the land of Israel. Yaakov describes this portion as

Faith in G-d is the mark of the righteous. It characterizes the unique outlook which the man of G-d has on reality. But what exactly is meant by faith in G-d is not simple to define. In times of trouble we are told to have faith, or 'beetachon.' We are expected to understand what is meant by this adjuration, as if it were self-explanatory. But when one takes the trouble of putting it into intelligible terms great difficulties or confusions emerge. Is one to believe with certainty that one's wishes will be fulfilled or that what one fears will not occur? If so, we are faced with the question of how we know what G-d has in store for us. Do we not believe that even the righteous may be punished? Haven't we seen people

with even greater faith than us suffer tragedy? Does having faith mean we ought to believe, 'all is for the good'? But then we are not speaking of faith, only acceptance. Acceptance and faith are on two different sides of experience: the latter prior to the experience, and the former after the experience, when all that we feared has already occurred. Some may say we cannot question the injunction to have faith. Such people are admitting that they are devoid of knowledge and understanding. We, the followers of Toras Mosheh, cannot look favorably upon ignorance, so we remain with an unintelligible injunction which even if adhered to cannot be truly virtuous, as virtue and ignorance are mutually

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exclusive. The ignorant cannot be righteous. Moreover, since we do not comprehend what is meant by faith we have no way of knowing if we are fulfilling the injunction. We do not know if what we think is faith is in fact faith and not some erroneous notion.

The Torah helps us in the task of unraveling the idea of faith as it is interpreted by our Talmudic scholars. In Genesis 40:23 we read, "and the chief butler did not remember Joseph and he forgot him." Rashi comments in the words of our Rabbis "since Joseph placed his faith in him to remember him [Joseph] to Pharaoh he was destined to be incarcerated for two years." Targum Yerushalmi elaborates, "Joseph abandoned the heavenly kindness that accompanied him from the house of his father, and placed his trust in the chief steward, in created flesh, flesh that tastes of death, and he didn't remember the passage that states and explains, 'Cursed shall be the man that relies upon flesh and makes flesh his stronghold and blessed shall be the man that places his trust in Hashem the Word of G-d and the Word of G-d shall be his stronghold' . On account of this the chief steward did not remember Joseph and he forgot him until his time came to be redeemed."

In the words of our Rabbis, Targum Yerushalmi and Rashi are referring to Joseph's entreaty to the chief butler as mentioned previously (40:14,15) where Joseph states to the chief steward in anticipation of the latter's release, "If you will only remember me when things are good with you and you will show kindness to me and you will make mention of me to Pharaoh and bring me out of this house. For I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews; and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon."

It was apparently considered sinful by the Rabbis that Joseph, after interpreting the dreams of the chief baker and chief steward, should plead with the chief butler to remember him to Pharaoh.

We are stymied by the words of our Rabbis.

What did Joseph do wrong? Doesn't the Torah teach us that we should make use of all available means to bring about for himself beneficial results? Is it anathema to ask another human being for help when in need? Didn't Jacob prepare an elaborate present to appease his brother Esav? Didn't Esther use her psychological insight to manipulate the emotions of the king? Did she not even fall at his feet crying and pleading, all of which she was praised for, being considered the savior of Israel? Why then should Joseph have been condemned when he used, it would seem, the most natural method of securing his freedom via the chief butler? Surely political savvy is not reviled by Torah; it is not viewed as a denial of one's faith in G-d.

The words of the Rabbis have deep meaning and we cannot comprehend them by a superficial glance. Let us look more closely at the account of Joseph. We must ask one question: what did Joseph do wrong in placing his request before the chief butler? More correctly, what should he have done, what alternative method should he have used? The answer comes slowly but clearly; he should have done nothing. He erred politically. Joseph had completed the interpretation of the two dreamers who were with him in prison. His interpretations convinced them that he was correct. In a few days reality would corroborate his interpretation with exactitude. The chief butler would walk away dazzled by this amazing man who could foresee future events via interpretation. Joseph would have left an indelible impression upon him, and at the first available opportunity he would tell his master Pharaoh of the unbelievable wonder he had witnessed while incarcerated in order to further ingratiate himself to his master. What prevented him from doing so? Only one thing - Joseph's request. The Rabbis tell us that a scholar is held in the highest esteem in the eyes of an ignoramus until the former tries to benefit from him. It is a matter of human nature that when one sees another person in need and

asking for assistance, one's estimation of that other person is seriously compromised, whether rightfully or wrongfully. It is further true that the baring of one's soul and the disclosure of how one was repeatedly wronged to another human being in an attempt to obtain sympathy is a double edged sword. At first, the listener may be compassionate. In the presence of the pleader his emotions are softened; but when he leaves, his mind ruminates other thoughts of a contrary nature: "Is this person truly a victim? Are all those who wronged him blameworthy? Perhaps this person is the cause (albeit unwittingly) of his own downfall." Such thoughts and others like them preoccupy the mind of the listener. The high esteem that was accorded the pleader is questioned and seriously reduced.

When Joseph bared his soul to the chief butler he destroyed the idealized image the latter had of him. Joseph removed himself from the pedestal he formerly occupied in the butler's mind. The butler instead saw a man in need of his favor, one who was wronged by many individuals. Were those who supposedly betrayed him, his family, and his master's house, totally to blame? Questions arose in the chief butler's mind about Joseph's true worth. His former high estimation was replaced with a low evaluation of Joseph. This is clear from the report the chief butler subsequently gave of Joseph to Pharaoh two years later as stated in Genesis 41:12, "And there was there with us a young man, 'naar,' a Hebrew servant to the officer of the guard." The Rabbis point out that the chief butler was belittling Joseph by these introductory remarks. The term naar, meaning youth, carries with it a connotation of foolishness. The word "Hebrew" implies that he is not one of us. The term servant or slave further indicates one of lowly status. Joseph had committed a faux-pas, a political indiscretion.

What was the cause of Joseph's blunder? In the theology of Yahadus every error is to be traced to some human imperfection. The Torah,

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being all embracing, leads one to be wise, to act judiciously. If one does not act so, he is not in harmony with its principles. Where does the imperfection that led Joseph to his blunder? The Rabbis trace it to a lack of faith, Beetachon. In the words of the Targum Yerushalmi, Joseph "abandoned the heavenly kindness that kindness which accompanied him from the house of his father." How did he abandon this? The answer is straight forward. He sought human compassion. He was lonely, estranged from every society he knew, even that of the house of his master. In a moment of weakness, he sought the compassion of a human being, the chief butler. Joseph bared his soul to him, looking for the satisfaction and the sense of security one receives when eliciting human compassion. He thwarted his own goal because of this momentary need. He unwittingly sabotaged the one element he had in his favor - the chief butler's idealization of him.

In the words of the Targum Yerushalmi Joseph abandoned the "chisda d'l'ail", the compassion of the above, the true compassion of G-d which had been with him from the day he left his father's house, the compassion which sustained him while he was alone all those years in a strange land. He reached instead for human compassion, "basar avid", created flesh that tastes of death. The sense of stability that man projects is illusory. Man is a created being who has a very transitory and fragile existence. "Put not your trust in princes, in the son of man, in whom there is no salvation; his breath leaves him, he returns to his earth..." (Psalm 146) He cannot offer the security man seeks when he is in need of compassion. The security man offers is illusory. It is supported by the senses, not by the mind. Man's task is to rise to the world of reality, a world beyond the senses, one which is known only by the Tzellel Elokim, the divine part of his nature, his mind. On this plane man realizes the only One he may turn to to seek compassion is the Source of all reality, the only

eternal being, G-d. Failure to rise to this level of existence is catastrophic for man. Joseph's momentary lapse from the world of true reality to the world of the senses and the emotions cost him two years of his life. Had he possessed beetachon, true faith, he would not have failed. His success was ironically imminent.

What then is beetachon or true faith? It is not a mental mechanism or device to be used when in need. It is a state of mind; an appreciation of ultimate reality. In this state of mind one is in contact both in mind and emotion with the creator. It is a state in which one senses total security in the knowledge that the Creator knows his plight, that all operates under his providence and jurisdiction. This idea offers man his true sense of well-being. It pervades him with an inner calm in the face of the most formidable obstacles. In such a mental framework he is not in search or in need of human compassion.

What gives man this view of reality? His knowledge of G-d, which stems from knowledge of G-d's works, his word - the Torah. As the Targum Yerushalmi translates, Blessed be the man who placed his trust in Hashem, the word of G-d. And the word of G-d shall be his stronghold. All of man's knowledge of G-d is of His word. The word means His Torah, His Law, His Creation. The term 'word' is always used to describe G-d's creation. With ten words the world was created. Who with His word created the heavens. This is all based on Genesis I in which the metaphor of speech is used to connote G-d's act of creations. Beetachon is based on an outward direction of one's mental energies. It's an appreciation of the full realm of the external world and its source. This is the exact opposite of primitive man whose energies are directed inward toward the self, who seeks to employ G-d as a means of satisfying his wishes. Primitive man seeks faith in G-d as a component of his overall egocentricity, a tool to secure his own well-

being. In Yahadus the concept is based on an appreciation of the outer world, the world of G-d's wisdom. Strange as it sounds, the person who has greater beetachon is less involved in the self. He sees himself as an insignificant component of the whole. This does not mean he has no needs but that his needs are different. As a creature of G-d he recognizes how integrally tied he is to his Creator, and his relationship with the Creator is an intimate one, one that is fully satisfying. He is not in need of man for approval or compassion.

The man of faith has G-d at the center of his world. His focus is constantly upon Him. He is in perpetual appreciation of G-d's word, His Torah, His universe, His wisdom. King David expresses it in Psalm 16,

"I have set Hashem before me always; because He is at my right hand I shall not falter. For this reason my heart does rejoice and my soul is elated, my flesh, too, rests in confidence: Because You will not abandon my soul to the grave, You will not allow Your devout one to witness destruction. You will make known to me the path of life, the fullness of joys in Your Presence, the delights that are in Your right hand for eternity." (verses 8-11).

His knowledge that the source of all creation knows him intimately, that whatever stems from that source is truly and of necessity the good, is the cause of his total calm and sense of well-being in all circumstances. As it is stated in Psalm 23, "Yae though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil for thou art with me." There can be for him no greater reassurance than this one idea.

Definitively we might say faith is knowledge of G-d as it concerns one's sense of security. Does having faith change the outcome of an event? Most certainly! But not as an isolated mechanism with some magical content. The outcome is changed indirectly. It is a result of the fact that an individual with such ideas who lives on such a plane is constantly under G-d's providence and thus meets with a different fate than the rest of humanity. ▣

MENNASHE & EPHRAIM'S BLESSINGS

RABBI BESSER

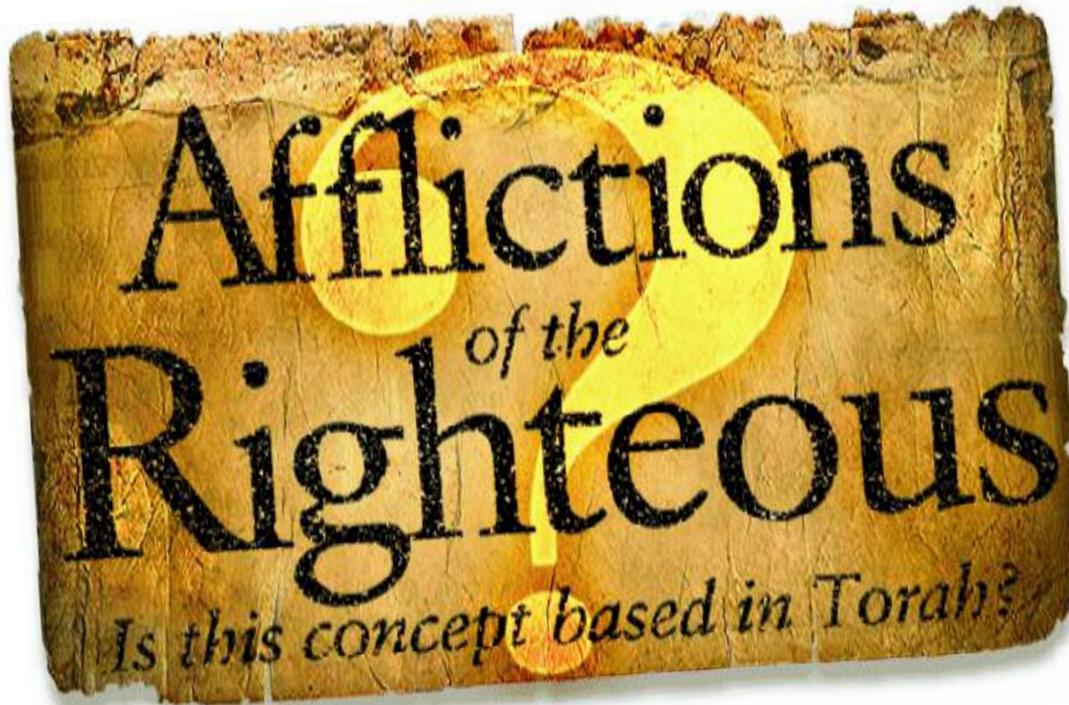
An interesting occurrence is noted during this weeks parsha: As Joseph brings his two sons before his father Jacob, Jacob blesses Joseph, by blessing Mennashe and Ephraim. What is strange is the placing of Jacob's hands on their heads, and in doing so, Jacob crosses his hands, placing his right hand on the child to his left, Ephraim, the younger child.

Rabbi Besser asked two questions: 1) Why must one place their hands on someone to bless? Won't the blessing take hold even without physical contact? 2) What was the nature of this blessing, that, according to Rashi, when one blesses their son in the future, one will say, "G-d shall place you as Ephraim and Mennashe". Why were these two selected to be the model of a father's blessing of his son?

Rabbi Besser answered the following: When Jacob saw Joseph's two sons, he desired to know one thing, "were they at odds with each other as all of the previous sons were?" Avraham had two sons, Yishmael and Isaac, and they were at odds. Isaac had Esav and Jacob, both at odds with each other. Jacob had 12 sons, 10 were opposed to one, Joseph. Now stands Joseph before Jacob. Are Joseph's two sons at odds with each other as well? To determine this, (Jacob

was not familiar with Mennashe and Ephraim, [Gen , 48:8] "who are these?" referring to Joseph's sons), Jacob sought to awaken any sibling rivalry by placing the dominant hand on younger son, Ephraim. (Normally the elder is favored, and Jacob was clearly favoring the younger). If there was rivalry, this would bring it to the forefront in some form. When Jacob saw there was no animosity between the two brothers, even as the younger was being favored, Jacob blessed them with the one blessing which specifically epitomizes children living properly - the absence of rivalry. He therefore blessed them stating that when a father wishes the best for his sons, he should bless them as Ephraim and Mennashe, as the two sons who shared peace, and not the common rivalry. The bracha itself embodies this concept, as the text reads. "G-d shall place you as Ephraim and Mennashe", Ephraim the younger, is first in the text.

One could ask as to what brought about this peace in these two brothers, not seen in earlier generations of the Avos. Perhaps this is answered by understanding the cause for 'sibling rivalry'. Two brothers do not rival each other without cause. It is based on the desire to gain the spotlight in front of the parent. Children crave attention. Perhaps these two did not desire attention, as they saw their father preoccupied with running Egypt, they realized this was his focus, and felt emotionally inadequate to compete with "Egypt", to gain their fathers shared attention. This caused them to accept a secondary role of importance in their father's eyes. Thus, they abandoned seeking this type of approval. Normally, a mature individual will overcome the rivalry emotion, but Ephraim and Mennashe were faced with conquering this emotion earlier in life. □



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I don't understand how you can say that no suffering comes upon righteous people in this world. You cite the dictum of our sages, "there is no death without accidental sin, and no suffering without willful sin". But, as anyone who studied this section in Talmud Shabbat 55a-b would know, this statement is actually refuted in the end. The Rabbis actually say that the righteous are semaychim biyisurim - they rejoice in suffering (see end of Moreh Nevuchim's discussion of the book of Job). The true benefit of Torah life is metaphysical; but, since we live in the physical world, we are subject to its impact in both positive and negative ways (see Meiri on the section in Shabbat). When we suffer, this reinforces our sense that true tranquility and completeness cannot be found in the material world, it must be sought in the domain of the intellectual.

Mesora: (I wish to thank my friend Joshua for exchanging ideas with me on this topic, and for correcting my reading of a Tosafos, which I have now omitted. I will now address the reader's question.)

Your explanation of an ends, (i.e., suffering reinforces that tranquility cannot be found in the material world) does not justify the means, that the innocent should suffer. Where is there justice in the suffering of the innocent? I say there is none. One who lives in accord with the Torah recognizes his joy is derived from wisdom. He does not overindulge in the physical, and therefore, requires no lesson, as you suggest.

But let us be clear. What is refuted by the Talmud - via argument - in Sabbath 55b, is that death occurs, and even without sin. However, the Talmud does not display any argument against the principle "there is no

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Afflictions of the Righteous

Is this concept based in Torah?

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suffering without willful sin." First, the Talmud cites four individuals who never sinned, yet, they met with death. Therefore, we see that death does visit even those with no sin. But it goes unchallenged that suffering does not happen unless some willful sin has been committed. Oddly, although this is not refuted through an argument, Tosafos make note that the Talmud accepts its refutation. But I ask, if no argument is presented, why do the Talmud and Tosafos both accept its refutation? They have no reasoning! But perhaps their reasoning. Perhaps they feel if there can be a "harsher" sentence with no sin (death), then a lighter "affliction" can certainly visit someone, although no sin is committed. For the Talmud and Tosafos, it is a simple deduction that lead the Talmud to subsume Earthly afflictions into the same category as punishment by early death.

But as this is a philosophical issue, we are not bound to adhere to the opinion of the Talmud. Only in Jewish law must we follow the Talmud and the Rabbis, "al pi haTorah asher yorucha", "in accord with the Torah (law) that they teach you..." My research inclines me to believe that there is no suffering when one has not sinned. Justice also demands if one has not willfully sinned, he should not receive suffering. This makes sense, as G-d's sufferings are only a means to direct one to perfect himself. (We must be clear again: we refer here only to suffering at G-d's hands. However, man may suffer at the hands of others, if he is so foolish as to associate with those who are abusive.)

A Rabbi once lectured on Maimonides' view of sufferings, and stated that Maimonides also views suffering with no sin, as a principle which is against Torah:

(Maimonides' "Guide to the Perplexed", Book III, Chap. XXIV)

"The doctrine of trials is open to great objections: it is in fact more exposed to objections than any other thing taught in Scripture. It is mentioned in Scripture six

times, as I will show in this chapter. People have generally the notion that trials consist in afflictions and mishaps sent by G-d to man, not as punishments for past sins, but as giving opportunity for great reward. This principle is not mentioned in Scripture in plain language, and it is only in one of the six places referred to that the literal meaning conveys this notion. I will explain the meaning of that passage later on. The principle taught in Scripture is exactly the reverse; for it is said: "He is a G-d of faithfulness, and there is no iniquity in him." (Deut. xxxii. 4).

The teaching of our Sages, although some of them approve this general belief [concerning trials], is on the whole against it. For they say, "There is no death without sin, and no affliction without transgression." Every intelligent religious person should have this faith, and should not ascribe any wrong to G-d, who is far from it; he must not assume that a person is innocent and perfect and does not deserve what has befallen him."

Maimonides teaches that one who experiences afflictions must have sinned to deserve them. And those without sin, will not be afflicted. To disagree, Maimonides says is a violation of the Scriptural principle "He is a G-d of faithfulness, and there is no iniquity in him." (Deut. xxxii. 4).

As we are on the topic, let us examine the statement, "there is no death without accidental sin, and no suffering without meaningful sin". What is the relation between death to accidental sin, and the relation between suffering and willful sin? It would seem that accidental sin is that, for which man is less culpable. His very nature demands that he sins, "For man is not righteous in the land who does good and does not sin." (Ecclesiastes, 7:20. Tosafos also note that this verse applies to the majority, as only these four mentioned never sinned.) Since by design, man must sin, his fate meets with death.

This was only decreed once Adam partook of the forbidden fruit. G-d's justice demanded His sentiment: "As man cannot completely follow Me, death must be delivered to him. He cannot live on Earth eternally as planned." Perhaps, G-d's death-decree helped Adam, (and us, who follow his design) to withdraw from the immortality fantasy which contributed to Adam's sin. G-d's punishments are righteous, and serve a positive purpose. The realization of our own mortality assists in our removal from that which is temporal. Since this is true for all mankind, G-d decreed that all mankind, even those who never sin, must follow this design, where death meets all of us. Death is not necessarily a punishment for an individual's sins. Due to Adam's demonstration of human shortcomings, death must be part of a new human design. As a Rabbi once put it, Adam partook in his very development - his actions sealed the fate for his own natural transition from immortal, to mortal. We now see how death is not due to one's own sins, although the Talmud does admit that if one does sin, he can be killed by G-d at a point earlier than initially planned.

In your question, you quoted "the righteous are semaychim biyisurim", that means, "the righteous are happy with their sufferings." You mistook this to refer to G-d's afflictions, when in fact, this quote is only discussing man's afflictions of the righteous (Sabbath 88b). In this section, a few positive traits are listed, and one is of the righteous, who hear others mocking them, and yet, they do not retaliate. (Rashi) This in no way bears any resemblance to our issue of G-d afflicting the righteous. Therefore, I remain in support of the dictum, "there is no suffering without willful sin." This principle is sound, and not challenged. I contend that such human oppression is of no concern or pain to the righteous individual. He hears their scorn, but places no value in their words.

This Talmudic section continues, quoting a verse as a metaphor for such righteous people: "My loved ones are like the sun, rising in its strength." (Judges, 5:31) What is the metaphor? I suggest the following interpretation: "Sun" is that which illuminates, this is also true of the righteous, their ways illuminate us towards truths. "Rising" is the most contrasting act of the sun; it lightens the darkness - sunrise is a more dramatic illumination than other day times. "In its strength" means that the sun follows its own course, unaffected by other events. So too the righteous. They are unaffected in their daily mission of illuminating others - the scorn of others has no affect on their steadfast course. Just as the sun goes unaffected, so too the righteous are unaffected. The fact that the Talmud says they are "happy in their afflictions"

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Afflictions of the Righteous

Is this concept based in Torah?

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(of man) means that they fully accept the world as G-d's design, they are happy with G-d's design, which also includes the scorn of others. This emotion which causes others to scorn, is no less a creation than the rest of the universe. Thus, the righteous appreciate all that G-d created in His world. But even more beautiful is this idea: the righteous are not centered on themselves, where they need to retaliate against their oppressors. No, this is not their concern. The righteous do not live with the goal of defending their egos, but conversely, they live to observe the external world, G-d's universe is their "playground". They care nothing about defending themselves against attacks, but are solely concerned with seeing new, exciting truths about G-d's creation. "His loved ones" means those who desire G-d's knowledge for the sake of that knowledge, they have no ulterior purpose. Their lives strive towards seeing new ideas. They care only for knowledge.

"Happy with their afflictions", refers to the realm of "human" affliction. Secondly, it means they are happy with G-d's creation, despite human oppression. Thus, this dictum has no bearing on G-d's affliction, and can not be used to defend your claim.

Let us view another Talmudic portion, Talmud Kiddushin 40b: "Rabbi Eliezer son of Tzadok said, "to what are the righteous compared to in this world? To a tree (whose trunk) stands fully in a pure place, and its branches reach out over an impure place. Its branches are cut, and it now stands fully in a pure place. So also, G-d brings afflictions upon the righteous in this world, in order that they inherit the next world." We see clearly, this quote discusses the righteous, but not the "wholly righteous". These righteous people quoted, have "branches in an impure area", that is, they have stretched their hands into impurity - they committed sins. Had they not sinned, this Talmudic section teaches that G-d would not have reason to visit afflictions upon them. Here, the term "righteous" does not mean without any sin. It means the majority of this person's life was righteous. Only when one sins,

does G-d see it fit to remedy his flaws with afflictions. Giving the righteous afflictions, G-d forces them to reflect, they discern their flaws, and they repent. But one who finally perfected himself, now with no flaws, would need no moral instruction.

Many verses in the Torah depict what we have stated:

Psalms 121:7: "G-d will guard you from all evil."

Psalms 134:20-21: "Many are the evils of the righteous, and from all, G-d saves him. He guards all his bones, not one is broken."

Talmud Brachos 5a: "Afflictions cleanse all of man's sins." If there are no sins, then afflictions do not come.

Proverbs 16:6: "When man's ways please G-d, He even makes his enemies at peace with him."

Proverbs 19:23: "Fear of G-d is to life, and satisfied will he sleep, no evil will visit him."

Malbim on Proverbs 21:19: "A man of honesty and integrity needs no atonement. Moreover, should a faithless man seek to kill him, he himself will fall victim in his stead, and the upright man will emerge safe."

G-d's justice. What is it? Is it exact? We must affirm. How can it not be exact? G-d has complete knowledge. "Justice" is a system where G-d metes out reward or punishment which is deserved. G-d created the system of justice, of which we apprehend only a minute degree of its workings. Thus, our great ignorance must be no grounds for dismissing unexplained and seeming "deviations" in G-d's justice. This is what Maimonides says is the

main lesson in the book of Job, that we cannot compare our ways with G-d's:

(Maimonides' "Guide to the Perplexed", Book III, end of chap. XXVIII)

"In the same manner, as the e is a difference between works of nature and productions of human handicraft, so there is a difference between G-d's rule, providence, and intention in reference to all natural forces, and our rule, providence, and intention in reference to things which are the objects of our rule, providence, and intention. This lesson is the principal object of the whole Book of Job; it lays down this principle of faith, and recommends us to derive a proof from nature, that we should not fall into the error of imagining His knowledge to be similar to ours, or His intention, providence, and rule similar to ours. When we know this we shall find everything that may befall us easy to bear; mishap will create no doubts in our hearts concerning G-d, whether He knows our affairs or not, whether He provides for us or abandons us. On the contrary, our fate will increase our love of G-d; as is said in the end of this prophecy: "Therefore I abhor myself and repent concerning the dust and ashes" (xlii. 6): and as our Sages say: "The pious do everything out of love, and rejoice in their own afflictions." (B. T. Shabb. 88b.) If you pay to my words the attention which this treatise demands, and examine all that is said in the Book of Job, all will be clear to you, and you will find that I have grasped and taken hold of the whole subject; nothing has been left unnoticed, except such portions as are only introduced because of the context and the whole plan of the allegory. I have explained this method several times in the course of this treatise."

We also must not invalidate G-d's system of justice when we behold a righteous soul living in much anguish and pain. Just as we do not invalidate $2+2=4$ as a truth when we cannot comprehend other mathematics, so too we must not invalidate what is just in the Torah when we have questions. G-d knows all. Man knows but a drop in the sea. We have no possible claims against G-d's workings. His knowledge is complete, ours, tragically incomplete. How can our idea of "justice" be more correct, than that of He Who made it?

Proverbs 24:12: "Does not He Who weighs hearts comprehend? And does He Who guards your soul not know? And will He not pay every man according to his actions?" □

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Vayeche

RABBI BERNARD FOX

the land that he captured from the Amorite with his sword and bow.

This phrase is difficult to explain. Yaakov seems to say that he is giving to Yosef a portion of land that he had seized from the Amorite in battle. However, there is no account in the Torah of Yaakov battling the Amorite. To what land and battle does Yaakov refer?

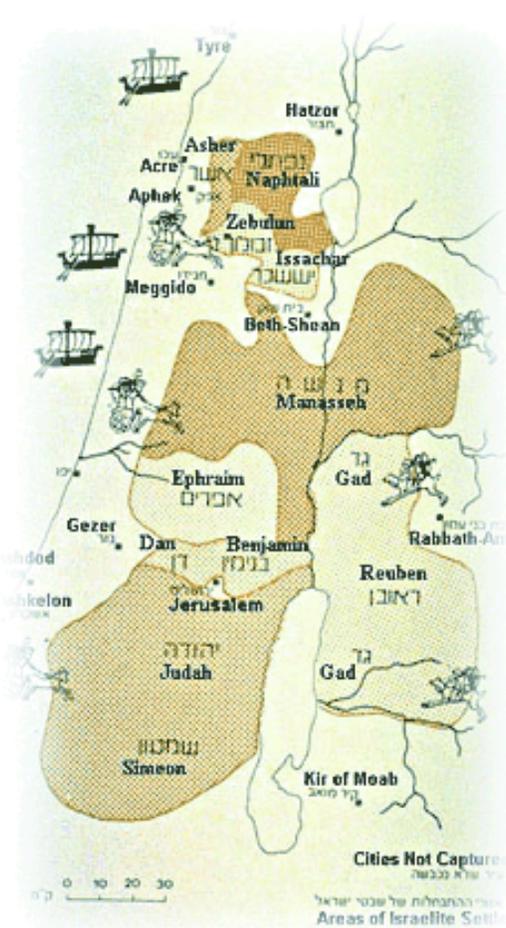
Rashi offers a number of explanations for this phrase. One is that Yaakov did wage a war with the Amorite nations. This was an outcome of Shimon and Leyve's slaughter of the people of Shechem. The surrounding nations regarded this attack as an atrocity. They banded together to destroy Yaakov and his children. Yaakov was forced to defend himself and his family. He defeated the Amorite nations and possessed their lands.[1]

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers an alternative explanation of the phrase. He explains that this phrase refers to the future. Yaakov tells Yosef that his children will receive a double portion of the land that will be captured from the Amorite nations in the future. Bnai Yisrael will leave Egypt. They will reenter the land of Israel. They will dispossess the Amorite nations. Yaakov tells Yosef that, at that time, his descendants will receive an extra portion of the land of Israel.

There is an obvious difficulty with Ibn Ezra's interpretation of the passage. According to Ibn Ezra, the pasuk refers to land that will be captured in the future. However, the phrase in the pasuk is written in the past tense. Translated literally, the phrase describes the land as already captured.

Ibn Ezra offers an important response to this problem. He explains that Yaakov knew through prophecy that his descendants would capture the land of Israel. His certainty in the validity of this prophecy was absolute. He expresses this conviction in the accuracy of the prophecy through employing the past tense. He is saying that the prophesized possession is so certain that it can be regarded as already accomplished.[2]

Ibn Ezra's comments deserve closer attention. According to Ibn Ezra, Yaakov was communicating a message regarding his certainty in his prophecy. On a basic level,



this message taught a lesson regarding prophecy. The prophet is absolutely certain in the veracity of his prophecy. He does not doubt the source of the revelation. He knows that the prophecy is a message from the Almighty. According to Maimonides, this is one of the lessons derived from Avraham's binding of Yitzchak. No father would be willing to sacrifice his son without absolute certainty that Hashem required this. Avraham bound Yitzchak and placed him upon the altar. He was willing to take his son's life. There can be no doubt that Avraham was certain that his prophetic knowledge of Hashem's will was accurate.[3]

However, there is another lesson communicated by Yaakov. We regard the past and present as more real than the future. The

past is known through experience. The present we perceive with our senses. The future is only glimpsed through the mind. The future is less concrete than the past and present. Therefore, we do not regard the future to be as real as the past and present.

Our evaluation of the future is not completely accurate. In fact, the future can be as certain as the past and present. All events are a result of the Creator's will. The past and present are an expression of His will. The future also evolves as a result of His will. In other words, all events – past, present and future – derive their reality from the will of the Almighty. Therefore, our evaluation of the relative reality of these events is not accurate. Prophecy reveals the Eternal's will regarding the future. With this revelation, we know the future with the same certainty that we associate with past and present experiences. Yaakov communicated this lesson. The future was as real to him as the past. Both are merely expressions of the Divine will.

“And he sees that rest is good and that the land is pleasant. And he bends his back to carry the burden, working like a servant.” (Beresheit 49:15)

Before his death, Yaakov blesses his children. This pasuk is part of the blessing of Yissachar. Our Sages understood this blessing as a reference to the special responsibility accepted by the Shevet – tribe – of Yissachar. This Shevet devoted itself to the study of Torah. The burden carried by Yissachar was the responsibility of complete devotion to the Torah. The servitude mentioned in the pasuk was the duty to provide religious leadership to Bnai Yisrael. Rashi comments that the Shevet of Yissachar provided a disproportionate number of judges and teachers to the nation.[4]

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam provides an interesting explanation of the beginning of the pasuk. Yaakov explains that Yissachar values rest. What is the meaning of this statement? Yaakov is explaining that Yissachar is not driven by a desire for conquest or domination. Yissachar enjoys the more quite pleasures.[5] Is there a

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Vayeche

RABBI BERNARD FOX

relationship between this personality trait and the Shevet's devotion to learning and spiritual pursuits?

There is an obvious relationship. Learning is, itself, a quite pleasure. One who seeks the more intense forms of stimulation will have difficulty finding meaning in intellectual or spiritual pursuits. However, there is another role played by these characteristics.

During the period of the composition of the Talmud there were two separate communities of scholars. One set lived in Israel. The other was situated in Bavel – Babylonia. The Talmud, in Tractate Sanhedrin, compares the methodology of these two different groups. The scholars in Israel preferred to develop their ideas cooperatively. Each scholar attempted to build upon and refine the theories of his fellow. The scholars in Bavel used a different method. This method was more confrontational. Scholars questioned each other intensely. Through the questions of his peers, each scholar was challenged to perfect his ideas. Both methods were fruitful and produced invaluable insights into the Torah. But is one method preferable?

Yad Ramah, a commentary on the Talmud, comments that there are two opinions on this issue. The first opinion maintains that the method of Bavel had an advantage. The rigor resulted in greater insight and deeper understanding. The second opinion argues that the method of Israel was advantageous. The group effort produced clear conclusions. In contrast, the Bavel method, although insightful, often failed to lead to a definite conclusion.[6]

This disagreement seems to imply two views of the purpose of Talmudic discourse. If we assume that the purpose is simply to uncover truth, then the method of Bavel is superior. It produced the greater insights and depth of understanding. However, Torah observance requires that we fulfill all of the requirements of the mitzvot. If the objective of Talmudic discourse is to provide definitive answers to questions of halacha, then it seems the method of Israel was more successful. The two opinions in Yad Ramah apparently

represent these two possible understandings of the purpose of Talmudic discourse.

The character trait of the tribe of Yissachar has a special value in Torah study. These same qualities were found, many generations later, in the scholars of Israel. These characteristics were fundamental to the development of the cooperative approach successfully applied by these scholars.

“And Yosef had Bnai Yisrael swear saying, "G-d will remember you and you will take up my bones from here". (Beresheit 50:25)

Yosef approaches his brothers. He tells them that he will die in Egypt. He does not want to be buried in Egypt. They will be redeemed by Hashem and brought to the land of Israel. At the time of their redemption, they should remove his body from Egypt and bury him in the land of Israel. The brothers agree to Yosef's request. They swear that they will fulfill his wishes.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt"l asks an interesting question. Why did Yosef turn to his brothers for assistance? Yosef had his own children. He knew that his own descendants would be rescued from Egypt. Why did Yosef not ask his own children to accept responsibility for fulfilling his wishes?

In order to understand Rav Soloveitchik's answer to this question, we must review an earlier episode in the parasha. Immediately prior to this incident, the Chumash discusses Yaakov's death and the brothers' reaction. The Torah tells us that the brothers were troubled by their relationship with Yosef. They were afraid that Yosef still harbored ill feelings towards them. They suspected that Yosef had deferred acting on these feeling during Yaakov's lifetime because of his love for his father. Now that Yaakov had died, perhaps Yosef would seek to punish them. Yosef assured his brothers that did not resent them and would continue to support care for them.

Yosef realized that his brothers did not completely accept him. Their suspicion was based on distrust. He was troubled by this

relationship. He knew that Bnai Yisrael must be a single unified nation. His descendants must live in peace with the children of his brothers. How could he bring about a more total reconciliation?

Rav Soloveitchik explains that Yosef identified the underlying cause of the friction between himself and his brothers. The tension was caused by his superior status. The brothers were dependent upon him. They had been forced to bow to Yosef. They had reluctantly accepted Yosef as their leader. This stratification was a source of resentment and distrust. Based on this evaluation, Yosef devised a plan to place his brothers at ease. The essence of Yosef's plan was to demonstrate that they were all mutually dependant upon one another. The brothers needed him. But he also needed the brothers. In order to create this mutual dependence he asked his brothers to accept responsibility for his interment in the land of Israel. He placed his fate in their hands. In this manner he demonstrated his trust in his brothers and created mutual dependency.[7] □

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 28:22.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 28:22.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 24.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 49:15.

[5] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 49:15.

[6] Rabbaynu Meir Abulafia, Yad Ramah Commentary on Mesechet Sanhedrin 24a.

[7] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Yemai Zicaron (Jerusalem, 1986), p 19.

Sons Punished for Fathers' Sins?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I have a non-religious friend that saw a video, and on that video it said the reason that Jews get murdered viciously in Israel is not because of the Arabs, rather because the Jews sin. He can't accept such an answer. How do I explain this to him?

Mesora: Both views are correct. The fact that G-d punishes people is clear to anyone who reads history. Also true is the fact that people have free will - Arabs do kill. If G-d chooses, He will not step in to protect us. See our Shema prayer where G-d promises reward and punishment in proportion to our correct actions. This is a central theme throughout the Torah. Reward and punishment forms much of the book of Genesis. Had Genesis been false, subsequent generations would not have passed down the story of the Flood, or any other story recorded there. But in fact the opposite is true, that is, the world accepts Biblical accounts of the Flood, Sodom, Abraham, and all other stories and figures as absolute truths, thereby acting as undeniable proofs of G-d's devastating punishments and His gracious rewards.

Reader: Thank you very much for your insightful answer. But, one of the things he can't understand is, if I do a sin why should someone else get punished for it?

Mesora: The Torah system - G-d's system - does not punish others for your own sin. This is unjust. Not only that, but Ezekiel 18 teaches that even the person who sins is not punished if he repents. It states further, that his sins are actually forgotten before G-d. Certainly, another person won't be punished if you are not! When the Torah makes the statement (Exod. 20:5) "G-d remembers the sin of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations...", this verse ends with an essential idea, "to those who hate Me." Meaning, G-d does not punish subsequent generations, unless, "they (too) hate G-d", i.e., if they follow the sins of their parents. If however they cease following their father's sins, they will not be harmed. G-d only punishes the sinner. Punishment has no meaning or purpose for one who lives correctly, regardless of his father's corrupt actions. Punishment from G-d is a corrective measure. When no correction is required, no punishment is meted out.

One may ponder G-d's statement: "He remembers the sin of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations..." Why does G-d's remembrance of sin cease at the fourth generation? Ibn Ezra explains, for this duration, G-d will refrain His anger, "perhaps the sinner will repent, or, perhaps a child will be born who is better than the father". G-d waits three or four generations, but no longer. Why not? As Ibn Ezra says, in the fourth generation, the remembrance of all previous sinners is wiped out. It seems Ibn Ezra teaches, G-d will not need to prolong His anger to the fifth generation, as there will be no fifth - He kills all in the fourth generation. We see this concept when G-d promised to take the Jews into the land of Canaan (Israel) only after the Canaanites reached irrevocable maturation of their sins, only then requiring annihilation.

This concept of G-d prolonging His anger makes sense. G-d does this, as Ibn Ezra says, to allow one a chance to repent, or future generations an opportunity at a better life. If however a sin is repeated for three or four generations, it is apparent from this unyielding attachment to sin, that such a society has no remedy, and will produce only wicked individuals. As they

have no purpose, and their deviance will corrupt others, G-d wipes out that civilization. Such was the case with the Flood and Sodom. Ninveh however heeded G-d's words and repented when Jonah announced G-d's plan to destroy them. As they repented from their evil ways, G-d's planned annihilation was no longer needed, and He spared them.

The next verse says, (Exod. 20:6) "(G-d) does kindness to the thousandth generation to those who watch My commands". Why such an imbalance? Why should this area not also be limited to three or four generations? What is the idea that G-d will "guard kindness to the thousandth generation"? It is repeated in Exod. 34:7. Doesn't justice demand that G-d keep kindness to those who keep His commands - even past the 1000th generation? And if they do not keep His commands, why is there a promise of 1000 generations or kindness? G-d should not keep kindness unless they keep His commands - regardless of the number of generations. The Ibn Ezra gives the explanation that G-d's kindness to the souls of the righteous is eternal, "eternal" being euphemistically phrased as "1000's of generations". This does not mean that G-d will show kindness to 1000 generations, regardless of their corruption. Ibn Ezra's explanation removes the problem.

Sforno explains "G-d will guard kindness to the thousandth generation" to mean that G-d will bestow good on the descendants of a righteous individual. This produces a question: What purpose is achieved by this practice? Why should future generations be promised such divine benefit from the righteousness of a single individual, who lived centuries earlier? They certainly do not 'deserve' good if they do not yet exist!

I believe this questions points us towards a basic theme in reward and punishment. The fact that G-d bestows good on future generations teaches a novel principle: G-d wishes the subsequent generations be influenced by their ancestors' perfection. When they see the good in their lives, they will recall G-d's principle of bestowing good for 1000 generations. They will then recognize that their ancestor's actions are favored by G-d, and they in turn will hopefully emulate their perfected ancestors. This is why our recollection of the Akeida - the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham - is so essential. According to Rambam, it teaches just how far one must go in their love of G-d. It is a lesson for future generations.

We now see a strong parallel between reward and punishment. Both take into consideration not only the person going through the experience, but future generations as well. Ibn Ezra said regarding punishment, G-d prolongs His anger to allow one a chance to repent, or future generations an opportunity at a better life. Regarding reward, G-d wishes subsequent generations be influenced by their ancestors' perfection. In G-d's system of reward and punishment, the individual and the society share equal consideration.

Perhaps this was why G-d would have spared Sodom, had there been ten righteous people. The presence of ten righteous people is a salvation for all five cities either because it indicates the cities were able to produce some good, or because these ten souls could direct the sinners towards repentance.

It is notable that this institution of "Son's not Being Punished for Father's Sins" forms part of the Ten Commandments, perhaps indicating just how central this idea is for man's correct appreciation of our Creator's justice. ■