

notes that this phenomenon may be sadly observed in the world of he who has fallen prey to chemical addiction – be it drugs or alcohol. One loses control over his life; his ability to make a sensible decision is impaired, as he falls deeper and deeper into the abyss of unbridled, unrestrained desire and addiction. He cites the *Biur HaGra* in his commentary to the beginning of *Sefer Mishlei*, who quotes the *Zohar HaKadosh*, that one who sins becomes the unfortunate recipient of a *ruach hatumah*, unclean/contaminated spirit, which drives him to sin unabated by any positive restraint. Once the people introduced their own *taavah*, lust, for meat, Hashem added to their lust. Each time they made a demand for meat, their lust was (Heavenly) increased.

If we approach the *asafsuf*, sinners, as acting similarly to one who is a victim of substance abuse, it allows us to understand how one could observe his friend falling victim to the meat, and nonetheless continuing to eat it himself. His first lust generated a second lust – only this time the (second) lust was much stronger. This might explain why he continued eating, but, if this is the case, why blame him? Is he any different from someone who is chemically dependent, who are victims themselves of a disease?

Most alcoholics begin as social drinkers, but somewhere along the way they digress, and their drinking patterns change. With the disease there exists a physical, and/or psychological addiction to a mood altering chemical which will ameliorate his condition, and, when removed, results in withdrawal symptoms. This applies to all forms of chemicals – alcohol and drugs. The chemical disrupts a person's ability to function properly, to take control of his/her life. Once the addictive process begins, it becomes self-perpetuating, with the dependent person unable to stop – even though (he is aware that) the chemicals are destroying his family/social life, his ability to function and earn a living, and his health.

With this in mind, how can we refer to one group of sinners as *k'sheirim*, relatively decent, and the others as wicked? They were both obsessed with desire, victims of unbridled lust for meat. Were they different than the addict who has no control over his life?

I revert back to the beginning of this *dvar* Torah. It all harkens back to the origin of their sin: ingratitude. Some people simply do not care, while others are self-serving and selfish. Yet others have convinced themselves that they are not in someone's debt. Thus, the word *k'sheirim*, relatively decent, refers to the origin of their sin: Why were they not grateful? Concerning Hashem, we have no excuse whatsoever for ingratitude. Without His will, we would be nothing more than an afterthought.

Peninim is published weekly by *Peninim Publications* in conjunction with the *Hebrew Academy of Cleveland*, 1860 S. Taylor Rd. Cleveland, Ohio 44118

©All rights reserved – prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

For a yearly subscription or Parsha sponsorship, please contact:

In Cleveland – Rabbi L. Scheinbaum (216) 321-5838 Ext. 165

Outside of North America – E. Goldberg +972 2-569 5185

Va'ani Tefillah

וְגֵאֵלֵינוּ גְאוּלָּה לְמַעַן שְׂמַךְ
U'ge'aleinu geulah
l'maan shemecha.

Horav Yitzchak Kirzner, zl, explains the concept of *geulah ruchnis*, spiritual liberation, in a novel manner. Each of us is endowed with the spiritual potential that enables us to grow and become everything that Hashem intends for us to be. Some of us do not necessarily (for whatever reason), however, follow a lifestyle conducive to accessing this potential. Thus, the potential goes into a form of "captivity," thus preventing us from using it for our benefit. This situation maybe aptly be described as spiritual bondage. Redemption is achieved when we give something, and we receive something in return.

For a Jew, redemption means gaining access to a part of ourselves heretofore not accessible. It is not some kind of "born again" or receiving a spiritual revelation (as some would have us think). It means receiving the "prizes" that were always there – but inaccessible. Redemption is the direct result of change, such as *teshuvah*, repentance, which then allows us to reach the potential that has been dormant within us. The forgiveness we gain as a result of our *teshuvah* releases us from spiritual bondage. This is why we pray for spiritual redemption after praying for repentance (*Hashiveinu*) and forgiveness (*S'lach lanu*).

In memory
of

Robert and Barbara Pinkis

ר' ברוך גימפל בן חיים יהודה ז"ל

ואשתו אסתר חנה בת ר' אביגדור ע"ה

Michele and Marcelo Weiss and Family

Lisa and Eric Pinkis and Family

Visit us at:

<http://www.hac1.org>



פנינים על התורה

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

Parashas Beha'alosecha

תשע"ז

פרשת בהעלותך

יעש כן אהרן

Aharon did so. (8:3)

L'hagid shevacho shel Aharon shelo shinah, to teach the praise of Aharon that he did not deviate (anything from that which Hashem had commanded). In his eulogy for *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, the individual responsible for the transplanting of authentic Torah study (via the *Yeshivah* Movement which he championed) to America, the *Satmar Rav, zl*, declared that *Rav Aharon* embodied the concept of *shelo shinah*, adamantly refusing to initiate any change in the spiritual structure of the *yeshivah* from the way it had been, dating back generations. Whatever was good for our forebears would suffice for us. Thus, the approach to Torah study, manner and discourse and the varied customs that were prevalent in the European *yeshivos* were carried over to America. Once we allow change to occur, the alterations that may result from the slightest incursion are limitless.

The story is told that an individual who appeared to have the demeanor and erudition of a Torah scholar visited *Yeshivas Be'er Yaakov*, which was then under the leadership of *Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl*, to present a *sefer, halachic* treatise, he had written. Apparently, he had spent months studying and collecting the various opinions concerning the enunciation of the word *geshem* in the recitation of *mashiv ha'ruach u'morid ha'geshem*, which is added during the winter to the *Shemoneh Esrai* prayer. The issue was: Should the vowel beneath the *gimmel* be a *segol, geshem*, or a *kamatz, gashem*. Despite the fact that all *siddurim* employ the *komatz, goshem*, vowel, he contended that it should be read *geshem*. He supported his position with many concrete proofs. He sought the approbation of the *Rosh Yeshivah* for his work.

The students listened to him and were almost prepared to change the *yeshivah's nusach*, version of the *davening*, until someone spoke to *Rav Moshe Shmuel*. His response was immediate and emphatic: No change of the *yeshivah's* tradition. He explained, "To the best of my knowledge, I remember my father pronouncing the word as *goshem*. If my father read it as *goshem*, it was because this is what he had heard from the mouth of my grandfather, *Horav Rephael Shapiro, zl*, who had most certainly heard it from the *Netziv, zl*, who was *Rosh Yeshivah* of *Volozhin*. The *Netziv* never acted on his own. He followed in the footsteps of his father-in-law, *Horav Itzele Volozhiner*,

zl, who must have heard it from his father, the venerable *Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl*, who was the premier disciple of the *Gaon, zl, m' Vilna*. If the *Gaon* read it with a *kometz*, who are we to dispute him?"

In order to have some idea about how a *minhag*, Jewish custom, is initiated, so that we had better appreciate its significance, I cite a vignette, which occurred concerning *Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl*. The custom is to read from the Torah during *Minchah* of *Yom Kippur*. The portion that was designated by *Chazal* is the *parsha* of *arayos*, forbidden, immoral relationships. The custom is to read the Torah using the regular year-round cantillation – not the specific one reserved for *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. *Horav Yaakov Kelmas, zl, Rav* of Moscow, visited *Rav Isser Zalman* and spoke to him about the custom to alter the *Yom Tov* tune of reading during *Minchah*, when we read the Torah in the regular *Shabbos/weekday* tune. He explained that when the Jewish People were commanded concerning marital relationships, they wept; *Vayishma Moshe es ha'am bocheh l'mishpachosav*, "Moshe heard the people weeping by their families (ibid.11:10)." Our sages derive from the word *l'mishpachosav*, by their families, that they were upset that so many (incestuous) relationships had been prohibited to them.

"Therefore," said *Rav Kelmas*, "the *parsha* of *arayos* was accepted by the people amidst tears and pain. As a result, it is not appropriate to read it with the *Yom Tov* (joyful) *nusach!*"

When *Rav Isser Zalman* heard this explanation, he stood up with great awe and emotion at the realization of the source of a *minhag Yisrael*.

To alter a *minhag Yisrael* is to attempt to alter *halachah*. Every *minhag* has its source in profound collective analytical thinking. Much is factored into the establishment of a *minhag Yisrael*. We saw what happened when the secularists made their first incursion into abolishing *halachah* and, eventually, the Torah. It all began with the subtle change of a single *minhag Yisrael*.

ויהי העם כמתאוננים רע באזני ד'

The people were like those who seek pretexts of evil in the ears of Hashem. (11:1)

Our *parsha* begins with the *Menorah*, relates the laws of *Pesach Sheini* and then, in what appears to be a sad turn of events, records a series of puzzling

complaints originally initiated by the *eirev rav*, mixed multitude, with an added participatory voice from the people. It is not as if the complaints had any positive substance – or any substance at all. For the most part, they complained for the purpose of complaining, something atypical of a happy people who had recently been liberated from crushing servitude. They craved meat – and cried. They claimed they missed the free fish they had eaten as slaves – and the wonderful squash and watermelon, onions and garlic. Does this sound reasonable? *Rashi* observes that the *manna*, which was their daily staple, did not taste like these foods because they are injurious to nursing mothers. Perhaps this is what they were missing. Imagine being able to taste any food in the world, but, because they could not sense the taste of those few foods in the *manna*, they complained and cried. This was a nation that had the temerity to complain about meat, fish and garlic! Furthermore, why cry? Do mature people become emotional over food?

In “Wisdom for Living,” an adaptation of lectures from *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl*, the *Rosh Yeshivah* offers a powerful insight into the complaints leveled by the people. First and foremost, I have to underscore the fact that this was the *Dor De’ah*, generation of knowledge, men of great spiritual stature. Thus, their behavior, while it may have been questionable, is something we must work on understanding. These were not simple people. Their complaints were not ordinary complaints.

Ultimately, there is only one tragedy about which great people cry: being distant from Hashem. The generation which received the Torah from Hashem had only one thing on the agenda: being close to Hashem. A vacuum in their relationship with the Almighty was an unacceptable tragedy. When they noted that certain foods were being held back from them, they immediately realized that their *kesher*, bond, with Hashem had somehow waned. Something was amiss. When they were in Egypt, in the depths of their slavery, Hashem still provided them with free fish from the Nile River. If He did not supply them with fish in the wilderness, it meant that something was amiss. This meant that Hashem had found a deficiency in their behavior. He was moving away from them. It was not about fish or garlic; it was about Hashem and the Jewish People. For a tragedy of such proportion, one has reason to cry – bitterly.

If so, what did they do wrong? They had a reason to cry – and they did! Why punish them? *Rashi* teaches that the people complained that all they had to eat was *manna*. The *manna* was Divinely sent; it was excellent in so many ways; it tasted like almost anything a person could have possibly craved. The fact that certain foods were not included in its repertoire of “tastes” was by design. The people erred in not living with the belief that, “Everything Hashem does – everything – is for our good.” True, there were deficiencies, but these deficiencies were not a sign of G-d’s abandonment. On the contrary, they were a sign of Hashem’s deep, unabiding love for them. So, instead of viewing the scenario as a positive reinforcement of Hashem’s love, they interpreted it

negatively. For this, they cried.

Their erroneous conclusion was in and of itself an indication of a deep character failing on their part. They were lacking in the *middah*, character trait, of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude. They had received so much from Hashem: They were embraced by the *Shechinah* and surrounded by Clouds of Glory; they received water compliments of a rock, and a daily ration of *manna*. Veritably, they might have had a reason to think that Hashem was moving away from them, but, had they been sufficiently grateful for the multitude of Hashem’s gifts, they would never have complained. They would have believed that whatever deficiencies they noticed in the *manna* was for their good. Had they trusted Hashem, they would have believed, they never would have questioned.

Let us face it: a bitter person is a difficult person to satisfy. He smiles only as long as he is being fed, entertained, and made happy. The moment something does not go as he expects, he flies off the handle with a stream of complaints. Anyone who has ever run a program for a group is acutely aware that some people always say, “Thank you,” while others acknowledge your presence only when something does not meet their satisfaction quotient.

When the Jewish People came to Marah, they complained that the water was bitter. The *Baal Shem Tov, zl*, explains that *marim heim*, “they were bitter.” It was not the water that was bitter. It was they who were embittered.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* concludes his thesis with an observation. Every one of us experiences some form of lack in life. No one has a perfect life. It is how we respond to our individual collective challenges which reflects our sense of gratitude to Hashem. Those who fail to truly appreciate the good that Hashem lovingly bestows upon us are likely to respond with complaints and negativity – to the point that they conjecture that Hashem has abandoned them. One who is grateful for everything will remain steadfast in his unstinting love of the Almighty. He will realize that it is all part of His Divine plan: His attempt to strengthen us; to guide our growth; to teach us how to cope with adversity and challenge.

Waking up in the morning is a perfect time to begin our day by appreciating Hashem’s gifts. First and foremost, we wake up. There are those who, sadly, do not. Our daily *Modeh Ani*, thanking Hashem for this unparalleled gift, should be recited with feeling, imagining that we are in G-d’s Presence and talking to Him, thanking Him for granting us another day of life. When we begin our day with such gratitude, we will continue to express our positive feelings of gratitude throughout the day.

Veritably, complaining is never a good thing – but, when the complaint is founded in error and nurtured in malice, it is tragic, because it bespeaks a person whose ills go deeper than an inability to cope with imperfection.

הַאֲנֹכִי הֲרִיתִי אֶת כָּל הָעָם הַזֶּה... כִּי תֹאמַר אֲלוֹ שְׂאֵהוּ בְּחִיכְךָ
כַּאֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂא הָאָמֵן אֶת הַיֶּנֶק

**Did I conceive the entire people...that You say to me,
'Carry them in your bosom,' as a nurse carries a
suckling? (11:12)**

Nowhere in the Torah do we find that Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to carry *Bnei Yisrael* in his bosom. Why does Moshe intimate this to be true, that Hashem did, in fact, indicate to Moshe that his responsibility as a leader of the nation went beyond the accepted understanding of walking in front of the nation? He would have to carry them as a parent carries his child. *Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl*, (cited in *Im Levavi Asicha*) explains that, if a person is created with such ability that he is able to care for others as a father cares for his child, that he is able to carry someone in his loving embrace, then, not only is it incumbent upon him to do so, but the very fact that he has such ability is an indication of Hashem’s command to him to employ his ability. In other words, Hashem does not grant us talents and ability to lay dormant within our psyche. If we were created with acumen, it should be considered as if He instructed us to use it for Him. If we have special talents, then we must use them for Him. Otherwise, why would He have imbued us with them?

There are no freebies. If Hashem has given an individual a superior IQ, it was not meant to be used for anything other than for Torah purposes. Moreover, this is not a hypothesis; rather, if you are endowed with a remarkable brain, it is as if Hashem said to him, “I want you to use your brain to serve the Jewish People. I certainly did not give it to you to use for self-serving purposes.” We are all endowed with unique abilities – each individual in accordance with his own personal level: some are born with an exceptional personality; others with incredible intelligence; still others with amazing physical energy – just to mention a few. These were all given to us for a purpose. It, therefore, behooves each and every one of us to examine ourselves with extreme scrutiny, to analyze what it is we are uniquely capable of achieving and to act accordingly. Otherwise, not only are we ignoring Hashem’s instructions and request, we are intimidating by our non-compliance that what He imbued us with was a waste! Now why would any rational person consciously do that?

This is (in my opinion) the meaning of self-confidence. One is acutely aware that Hashem has given him a gift, and he uses that gift to its fullest. It is not that he believes in himself (that is arrogance); he believes in Hashem. If Hashem gave it to me, then it is my purpose in life to carry it out to the best of my ability, with maximum energy.

וְהָאֲסֵפְסוּף אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ הִתְאַוּוּ תְּאוֹיָהּ... וְאִכְלֵתֶם בְּשֶׁר... לֹא
יִם אֶחָד תֹּאכְלוּן וְלֹא יוֹמִים... עַד חֹדֶשׁ יָמִים עַד אֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂא
מֵאֲפֶכֶם

**The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving
... and you shall eat meat... not for one day shall you**

**eat, nor two days... until a month of days, until it will
come out of your nose. (11:4, 18, 19,20)**

An individual who lacks the basic character trait of *hakoras hatov*, gratitude, is a deficient person. His negativity toward those from whom he benefits engenders a negativity throughout his entire character, eventually leading to a lack of appreciation for all that Hashem does for him. Perhaps referring to an ingrate as deficient is not strong enough. An ingrate is a non-person. Part of humanness is the ability to recognize, acknowledge and appreciate the benefits one receives from others. Without this vital character trait, one is not a *mentch*, decent human being.

Having said this, we refer to the Torah’s account of the *asafsuf*, a group of malcontents comprised primarily of the *eirev rav*, mixed multitude, who had the gall to complain that they lacked sufficient nourishment. The *manna* which they received did not replace a good steak. They wanted beef! Furthermore, they did not merely complain about the lack of food, they denigrated the entire Exodus. They claimed that Egyptian slavery would be far more acceptable than starving in the wilderness. Ingratitude spawned by uncontrolled desire catalyzed a punishment whereby the sinners received what they wanted in such amounts that it killed them. This was much like the addict who gets his fix, but does not check the amount or quality of his deadly product until he overdoses. His *taavah*, lust, becomes his downfall.

There is a debate between the *Mechilta* and *Sifri* concerning the length of punishment (how much time elapsed before the sinners died) and whether all of the sinners had received an equal punishment. Apparently, complaining has its relative limits, in which some people exhibit greater insolence than others. Commensurate with one’s level of impudence is his form of punishment.

Rashi quotes the *Sifri* that distinguishes between the *k’sheirim*, relatively “decent ones,” who were to die in the plague. They were drained of their strength and were compelled to lay on their beds until they passed on. The wicked ones, however, died while the meat was still between their teeth. In contrast, *Mechilta* contends that it was the wicked ones who suffered for a month before they were eased out of this world. The *k’sheirim*, whose sin was not as egregious, died quickly, receiving the punishment they deserved – quickly, and with the least amount of pain.

One question is pressing with regard to those who did not receive immediate punishment. Why did they continue to eat? Once they saw that the others had died upon eating the meat, why did they continue to eat? Who in his right mind would eat meat that is highly suspicious of contamination? No sane person takes a chance with his life once he observes someone else writhing in pain, doubling over and dying before his very eyes. It would give him serious reason to distance himself as far as possible from this scenario. He certainly would not go on eating the same piece of meat that had been responsible for his friend’s death!

Horav Yerachmiel Shmuel Chasid, Shlita,