

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Bemachashavah Techilah

“The Holy One blessed is He is exacting with those that surround him (i.e. the very righteous) even to the extent of a strand of hair” (Bava Kama 50a). In other words, G-d punishes those closest to Him for even the most minor of infractions. The Toldos Yitzchak (R' Yitzchak Caro, who was R' Yosef Caro's uncle) uses this to explain the first verse in *Parashas Acharei Mos*; Nadav and Avihu died for a (relatively) minor sin specifically “because they were close to G-d” (Vayikra 16:1).

Why is it, though, that G-d plays hardball with those closest to him? It would seem that, if anything, He should be tougher on those that are not so righteous. Those that are very righteous should perhaps be cut a little slack, not treated harsher!

The Toldos Yitzchak brings three reasons why G-d is more exacting with those closest to him. The third reason he brings (going in reverse order) is that “a small sin is large for someone that fears G-d and has turned away from evil.” It is precisely because the individual has reached such a high level that his sin is considered so large. This could be because more is expected of him, or because the damage done by his smaller sin is as great as or greater than that of a larger sin committed by another. This would certainly apply to Nadav and Avihu, so it is possible

that they were punished with death for doing something that might have received a lesser punishment (or even been overlooked) had it been done by less righteous people.

The second reason given is that being more exacting is actually beneficial for the sinner, and is therefore a

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(sort of) favor that G-d does for the more righteous. Rather than letting the amount of punishment due pile up and be given in one shot, He metes it out little by little, as it is accumulated. The Toldos Yitzchak expands upon a parable used by the Talmud of a wealthy individual that lent money to two people.¹ He collects from the one he likes little by little, using smaller payments to make it easier, whereas from the one he dislikes he demands payment in full – knowing that he will be unable to pay and will be jailed for defaulting. Similarly, G-d punishes the righteous in smaller doses, for each little thing, rather than letting them off the hook until the big payback comes.

This reason is interesting on several fronts. First of all, unlike the others, according to this the punishment for the minor infraction

committed by the righteous is not necessarily greater than that received by the less righteous for the same action. Only the timing is different (immediate, in small doses vs. one severe punishment for numerous sins at once). It can be compared to the Talmud's explaining that G-d punishes the righteous in this world so that only reward remains for the next world, and pays any reward due to the wicked in this world so that they get none in the next² (except that the Toldos Yitzchak seems to be comparing two ways of punishing in this world, possibly because he is comparing the righteous with the not-as-righteous, while the Talmud is comparing the righteous with the wicked).

Rav Eliyahu Dessler³ also explains that G-d is more exacting with those close to Him for their own benefit, but takes a different approach. He defines one close to G-d as an individual that serves G-d “lishmah” (i.e. for the right reasons), and says that only those on such a level merit individualized divine supervision. This “divine intervention” includes messages sent so that the individual will examine (or re-examine) his deeds, in order to improve them. By punishing the righteous for even small mistakes,

² Kiddushin 39b

³ Michtav me'Eliyahu II, pg. 75

¹ Avodah Zarah 4a

the message is sent that this is an area that needs improvement.

It would seem that this approach, as well as the Toldos Yitzchak's second reason, would not apply to Nadav and Avihu, as their punishment was immediate and severe. The first reason that the Toldos Yitzchak gives, though, would explain how their "closeness" to G-d caused their "minor" infraction to be dealt with so severely.

Just as Rav Dessler said that only those close to G-d merit His individualized supervision, the Toldos Yitzchak says that "the righteous are before Him at all times and He watches over them constantly. Therefore, every sin that he commits – even if it is a very small one – he gets punished for immediately. And he that is far from G-d [He] isn't as

concerned about sinning, and it is as if He doesn't see it."

Most of the time, the commentators (e.g. Rambam, Ramban, Rabbeinu Bachya) use the principle of G-d's divine intervention being limited to those close to Him to

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explain how they are protected from the dangers that life presents (while others can suffer consequences beyond the specific punishments their actions deserve – as they actually deserve whatever happens to them as "punishment" for not reaching that level of closeness⁴). The Toldos

⁴ Cf. Meiri on Sotah 2a

Yitzchak is adding that attaining that level provides not only divine protection, but also a higher standard to live up to. True, the only "punishments" will be those specifically deserved, but they include punishment for even minor infractions. And while this may often be beneficial (as it includes the reminder to improve that Rav Dessler refers to), it cost Nadav and Avihu their lives.

After giving his three reasons why G-d is more exacting with the righteous, the Toldos Yitzchak says that the Source comforted (the mourning) Aharon by telling him that it was only because his sons were so close to Him that they died. In the process, the Toldos Yitzchak provides us with great insight into how G-d runs the world.

RABBI YAAKOV FELDMAN

Bakeish Shalom

By the time the Chazan called out "*Shalom!*" and they all responded "*Shalom!*" after a lengthy "Aay Yaay Yaay Yaay..." the air was fraught with out-and-out *kedushah*. We had all somehow been transported in time, place – and in *madreigah*. And everyone knew it.

2.

What exactly is *kedushah*, though? Terms like "holiness", "sacredness", and "saintliness" – which all denote the same thing but offer nothing new – come to mind. Yet we are told to be holy in this week's *parashah* (Vayikrah 19:2). So we will obviously need help on this.

Interestingly enough, Rambam does not list being holy as a mitzvah per se, but depicts it instead as an overall goal of living the

I lived in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn when I was a teenager. Bound in and nourished by the sea, Brighton was sunny and bright in the summer, cold and crisp in the winter. A lower-middle-class neighborhood, it had no airs and made no assumptions. And while nearly everyone there was Jewish, almost no one was religious.

Brighton's Jewish men smoked cigars, played cards, drank beer, worked hard, and loved their families – and the resplendent beach. And its Jewish women wore pants and light blouses everywhere, played canasta and bingo, ate well, kept a tidy home, and also loved their families and the beach.

But when Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur came, all of Brighton was religious, and things like cigars

and sunning oneself on the beach went by the waysides. Everyone was in shul.

Some could read Hebrew and follow along with the service but many could not; yet nearly all of them stayed for the long haul (except for the die-hard communists who only came for Kaddish).

The most magical moment to my mind was when all the Cohen, Katz, and Kagan men went up to *duchen*, and every one of them shone.

"*Yevareichecha!*" the chazan would call out, and the Kohanim would chant in all earnestness and fervor, "*Yevareichecha!*", and so on. And for a while, each one of them stood in the *Beis HaMikdash* with his *alter zaida*, bentching Klal Yisrael in the presence of the Ribbono Shel Olam.

mitzvah life.¹ The commentators offer many insights, of course. Some say it touches on our relationship to food, drink, and all other earthly delights, and offer that a holy person would not sully himself by indulging in forbidden things – or overindulging in permitted things (Rashi, Ramban). Others depict it as a charge to be in the world yet removed from it at the same time (Ohaiv Yisrael, Chid-dushei HaRim, Chassam Sofer, as cited in Nachshoni's Haga'os b'Parshiyos HaTorah). And yet others who are sensitive to the loftiness of perch required of someone who would be holy do indeed assure us that we each do have it within us to achieve it (Ohr HaChayim, as cited by Nachshoni; also see Hilchot Teshuvah 5: 2).

But that last point alludes to something that the commentators do not seem to address: what I would depict as an inherent human need to believe in actual holiness; full, rich, unalloyed, and refreshing piety. For there seems to be a thread along the lining of every human heart that never gives up hope in that; that knows somehow or another

¹ See Sefer HaMitzvos, Shoresh 4

er that despite the cynical take we have on humanity in our age there are indeed holy people.

So let us explore the devices that the great and indeed holy Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto himself

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suggests we use to arrive at true *kedushah*.

3.

First off, he portrays *kedushah* as a barometer of sorts of relative closeness to Hashem. Thus, the closer one is to Him (emotionally and devotionally), the holier he is.² So we would need to strive for such closeness. He suggests elsewhere that holiness comes down to utter kindness and benevolence,³ which we would also do well to foster.

But he makes another point elsewhere that seems to sum it up

² Ma'amar Ha'kkarim

³ Adir BaMarom 1, pp. 194-195

best, and also seems to bring us back to Brighton Beach.

"Holiness is a twofold matter," he says; one that "begins in effort and ends in recompense; begins in striving and ends in being given as a gift." That is, first each one of us would have to set out to truly sanctify him- or herself, and in the end G-d will see to it that we are indeed sanctified.⁴

What this seems to imply is that we are to first accept the notion that holiness is indeed possible, and that we too can achieve it. But we are also to realize that we would somehow or another have to step out of character to do that, be what we are capable of being but are not yet. And that we would have to call upon Hashem to come to our side and enable us to "*duchen* from the *bimah*" despite ourselves, and to serve Him there based on our *yichus* as Jews and/or Kohanim.

May the Ribbono Shel Olam grant us that wish, and may our Cohen's, Katz's, and Kagan's soon *duchen* from the *bimah* of the rebuilt Beis HaMikdash!

⁴ Messilas Yesharim, ch. 26

REB JONATHAN BAKER

Sefasai Tiftach

We are now in the period of *Sefiras HaOmer*. The simple count of days and weeks mandated by the Torah has accreted other prayers and psalms, mostly since the time of the Arizal, who largely reshaped many of our liturgical practices, introducing explicit kabbalah into the various *nuscha'os*. Most are psalms, but the prayer for correction of *sefiros* has long puzzled me. How do we

correct these *sefiros*? What does correcting *sefiros* mean?

I recently purchased a terrific book that finally explains these issues: *Us'fartem Lachem HaShalem*, by R' Daniel Frisch, author of the commentary, *Matok Mi-Devash*, on the Zoharic corpus.

First off, the whole system of 49 sefiros and 49 days fits nicely into the ancient practice of Jewish symbolism. Symbolism generally consists of finding correspondences

between similar items, be they parallel (3 *aliyos* – Kohen Levi Yisrael – Avraham Yitzchak Yaakov – Torah Nevi'im Kesuvim...), or (more commonly) between an abstraction and a thing symbolized (*Echad Mi Yodei'a* is a good example). Both come into play here. Days correspond to *sefiros*, which abstract behavioral attributes.

49 days are 7x7 days, corresponding to the 7 lower, or

emotional, *sefiros* (*Chessed Gevurah Tiferes Netzach Hod Yesod Malchus*); the three upper ones, ([Kesser] *Chochmah Binah [Daas]*), reference intellectual qualities. Each day gets a pair of *sefiros*, one changing each week, the other changing each day of the week, in the same order. The seven *sefiros* also correspond to different body parts, and (Biblical figures) each of which has an attribute (Avraham is *Chessed*, Yaakov is *Emes*, etc.); the confluence of correspondences equates each *sefirah*-pair to a personality attribute.

It is only through hard personal work that these attributes can be corrected¹. This period, between the Exodus, and the highest level of holiness at *Matan Torah*, facilitates that personal work.

These are the seven *sefiros*.²

Sefirah	Body	Person	Attribute
Chessed	R Arm	Avraham	Chesed
Gevurah	L Arm	Yitzchak	Pachad
Tiferes	Torso	Ya'akov	Emes
Netzach	R Leg	Moshe	Permanence
Hod	L Leg	Aaron	Love, Thanks
Yesod	Groin	Yosef	Hospitality
Malchus	Mouth	David	Tzedakah

Each set of three *sefiros* create a dialectic: two opposites synthesized by the third. *Chessed* and *Gevurah* are synthesized in *Tiferes*, *Netzach* and *Hod* in *Yesod*, and all channel through *Malchus*, the mouth, in moving to lower levels.

¹ Arizal, *Shaar Hakavonos*, p. 42 sec. a. Unless otherwise stated, footnotes drawn from R' Frisch's book.

² Based on *Zohar Hadash* Yisro 33b.

R' Frisch advises on Man/God relations, Man/Man, actions of the limbs, and actions relating to time – the person relating to G-d, to others, to himself in space and time. The attribute from *Avos* 6:6 on acquiring Torah also appears. Each recommendation is extensively footnoted to the *Zohar* and other Kabbalistic works.

He notes that this system developed a few generations after the Ariza'l. While the Ari recommended working on the seven attributes, the system of correspondences was developed (apparently) by siddur-printers. Note that the attributes are *not* Lurianic *kavvanos*, against which the Chida³ and the Minchas Elazar⁴ warn the masses.

We now take R' Frisch's advice for Shabbos, the 26th day of the Omer, Hod of *Netzach*, as a sample:

Man/God:

1. Thank G-d daily to establish (*Netzach*) the positive & negative mitzvot in one's heart, as thanksgiving derives from *Hod*⁵

2. Work on conquering one's *yetzer*, thanking G-d for renewing His help daily, enabling one to establish the mitzvos internally. Thus *Hod* in *Netzach*.

3. Recognize, and thank Him for His aid in decisionmaking, as advice comes from *Netzach* – thus *Netzach* through *Hod*.

Man/Man:

1. Help others to solidify their inclinations through *hakaras hatov*, as *Netzach* through *Hod*.

³ *Machazik Bracha* 489 note 3. cited in *Sidur Otzar Hatefillos*.

⁴ *Shaar Yissachar* Nissan, *Omer Hatenufah* sec. 6.

⁵ *Zohar* III:223b.

2. Thank groups, e.g. shul donors or *marbitzei Torah*, with plaques and dedications, inspiring more thanksgiving and establishment of life eternal.

3. Thank a friend for good advice.

Space:

Use the right leg while thanking someone for advice, or being *makir tov* (this should reinforce the consciousness of the corresponding attributes).

Time:

1. Thank G-d for these in the morning, especially if it is Wednesday (both *Netzach*).

2. Concentrate on the beracha *Mekabetz Nidchei Amo Yisrael*, re-establishing Israel.

3. Think on the name *Elokim Tzevakos*, and on Moshe Rabbeinu if you read a verse with either in it.

Kinyan Torah:

Make a fence for Torah.

* * *

Get this book, if you normally say the *Yehi Ratzon* for correcting the middos – it will give your Omer a whole new light.

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