



Parsha Encounters

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Parshas Toldos – Rabbi Dovid Greenberg

The Joy of Being Needy

The blessing that Yaakov received from Yitzchak begins with the words “V’yeeten L’cha”, **and** He will give you. Since it is the start of a new topic, the conjunction, “and”, seems to be superfluous. Rashi explains that this is an expression of repetitive acts of giving. What is the significance of this blessing? Wouldn’t it have been better to be granted the goodness that Hashem wants us to receive all at once? Indeed, that is the case in Esav’s blessing when he was promised the good fortune of a fruitful land once and for all. Being that Yaakov’s blessing was the ideal one, it would imply that having to constantly receive blessings is the preferable option.

The Mechilta in Parshas Beshalach records the following discussion. The students of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai asked him, “Why couldn’t the Jews in the desert receive an amount of “manna” that would sustain them for a year? Why did they have to collect it daily?” Rabbi Shimon answered with a parable. A king used to give his son an annual stipend, and therefore he ended up seeing the prince only once a year. Wanting to have a more intimate relationship, he started to give the prince only enough for his daily needs. Hence, the prince visited the palace daily. The key to understanding this parable is based on the purpose of creation. Hashem, in His infinite kindness, wanted to bestow His goodness upon His creations. Being that He Himself is the essence of good, the greatest gift He could give is a relationship with Himself. Although the true manifestation of this connection can only be discerned in the next world, the place to build this relationship is only in this one. When one stands needy and lacking before the Almighty, asking Him for sustenance, he is acknowledging that only Hashem has the power to fulfill all his needs. By doing so, one cre-

ates a powerful connection to the Divine that lasts for eternity. Hence we can understand why Hashem would specifically want our whole nation to go to sleep with empty cupboards for forty years in the desert. In this way, they would beseech Hashem every night and connect with Him. This explains too, why the preferable blessing which was given to Yaakov, was one which entails constant requests to Hashem for continued fulfillment.

With this reasoning we can answer a troublesome point from parshas Bereishis. After the snakes terrible crime of causing death to come to this world, he is cursed “You shall eat dust all the days of your life”. Although dust and dirt are hardly palatable, the snake is being spared one of the most universal worries affecting all living creatures, i.e. where their next meal is coming from. How could having a readily available food supply not be considered a blessing? But with the above mentioned understanding, we can see that this is truly the greatest curse of all. While all the other creations have to constantly beseech Hashem for their food, and therefore relate to Him, the snake is being denied this tremendous opportunity.

In fact, Chazal explain many of the sufferings of our greatest ancestors, like the barrenness of our matriarchs, with the saying, “Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous”. This again is an extension of our theme. Hashem wills that close connection that one can gain with Him through prayer. So in truth, it’s not that there is an intrinsic lacking that needs to be rectified through prayer, rather in order to encourage prayer a lack is created. This concept is true regarding many of our sufferings and troubles. Knowledge of this fact leads us to an encouraging idea. If we sincerely work on our relationship with Hashem, then sometimes painful prodding may be relaxed.

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Halacha Encounters

A Tzaddik's Brachos

Rabbi Ari Friedman

In this week's parsha, the posuk tells us that Rivka went "Lidrosh es Hashem"- to seek Hashem after experiencing unusual pains. The Targum Yonasan understands this to mean that she went to the bais medrash of Shem to daven to Hashem. The implication is that she either asked Shem to daven for her or that she invoked the z'chus of Shem to benefit her tefillos. This practice of seeking out the prayers and the blessing of a tzaddik is found later in the parsha as well, with the brachos of Yitzchak. This is also the accepted practice of Jews in all communities. The Shulchan Aruch states that one who has a choleh in his house should consult with a talmid chacham to daven for him (Y. D. 335-10).

How do we understand this concept and what is the actual role of the tzaddik when he is consulted? The Meiri writes (Taanis 8A) that the real purpose of visiting a tzaddik is in order for the tzaddik to advise him on the proper course of teshuva and tefilla. The tzaddik leads him in prayer similar to the way a shliach tzibur leads the kehilla and arouses those around him. The Sefer Chasidim (755) writes that the tzaddik should investigate the petitioners' ways to see if perhaps there is a particular sin which may be the cause of this persons' troubles. The tzaddik should then tell the person, "If you want me to daven for you, you must fix yourself in this particular area". The Sefer Chasidim goes on to say that if his advice is not heeded, he should not daven for the person, lest the person attribute the continuation of his troubles to a deficiency in the tzaddiks' prayers when in reality it is his own sins which are the source of his troubles.

Thus far we have explained why it is beneficial to visit the tzaddik, but what still needs explanation is why the tefillos of the tzaddik help? The simple explanation is that although Hashem listens to the prayers of all Jews, some people unfortunately have sins which may prevent the efficacy of their prayers. They therefore request of a tzaddik to daven on their be-

half. Because the tzaddiks' prayers are from a completely pure source, they possess more power. The Chasam Sofer suggests (O.C. 166) based on the concept that "kol yisrael areivim zeh lazeh"- all of Am Yisrael is like one body, that it is preferable for the head of the body (i.e. the tzaddik) to make the request rather than the foot (i.e. a simple person). The Maharam Shik offers another explanation. He says that when a person pours out his troubles before the tzaddik, the tzaddik himself is pained and is suffering as well. Since Hashem did not intend for the tzaddik to suffer, he heeds his tefillos and heals the petitioner, thereby alleviating the suffering of the tzaddik.

Kivrei Tzaddikim

In addition to visiting a tzaddik in his lifetime, it is also the practice to visit kivrei tzaddikim (graves of tzaddikim) to be mispallel (pray). This practice is also rooted in Tanach and Talmud. The intent of one who goes to kivrei Tzaddikim is a matter of dispute. The Maharil, as quoted in the Mishna Berura (581-27) writes that when one visits kivrei tzaddikim, he should not direct his hopes toward the tzaddik, rather he should beseech Hashem for mercy in the merit of the tzaddik. The simple understanding of the Maharil is that he should not direct his words to the deceased at all, rather his words should be completely directed to Hashem (Chayei Adam 138-5). The Pri Migadim, however, points out that from the text of some of our prayers it seems that we do direct our words to the tzaddik by asking him to beseech Hashem on our behalf. The Minchas Elazar (1-66) points to many instances throughout Sha'as where it is clear that the prayers were directed towards the deceased. He therefore offers an alternative understanding of the Maharil. He explains that one should not place his hope in the deceased, thinking that he has any power to actually help him. He may however address the tzaddik; asking him to plead his case before Hashem. All agree that the burial place of a tzaddik is a place where a person's tefilos are more likely to be answered.

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