

Pursuit of Purpose

INSPIRING A LIFE OF MEANING AND CONNECTION

פרשת נשא

VOL 3

Weekly Parsha

Feeling The Pain of A Lost Opportunity

based on the weekly Shmuess given by HaRav Shaya Cohen, Rosh HaYeshiva Zichron Aryeh

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח | לעילוי נשמת רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה | לרפואה שלמה יהושע דוד בן אלטא יענטא

The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 76:9) tells us that Yaakov was punished for hiding Dina from Eisav. The Mesillas Yesharim says, “Despite the fact that he had good intentions, however since he withheld kindness from his brother, the Medrash says, ‘Hashem said to him, you withheld kindness from your brother, and you did not seek to marry her to one who was circumcised, she will marry one who is uncircumcised, you did not seek to marry her off in a permitted manner, she will be married off in a forbidden manner.’” The Alter of Slabodka explains that obviously Yaakov did the right thing by withholding Dina from Eisav. Eisav was a Rasha and surely one is obligated to make sure his daughter does not marry a Rasha. However, Yaakov is held accountable for not feeling bad enough that he was not able to give Dina to Eisav.

It is clear from the Alter of Slabodka that Yaakov is not being held responsible for withholding the actual Chesed from his brother, because he was obligated to do so. Rather he was held accountable for a lack in his feelings. According to the Alter, the Medrash requires further clarification. The Medrash clearly says that Yaakov was held accountable for withholding the actual kindness from his brother. How can we reconcile the Alter’s approach with that of the Medrash?

We can answer and clarify the Medrash as follows: Granted Yaakov was obligated to withhold Dina from Eisav, and he felt bad about his inability to do Chesed to his brother. However, since on some ever so slight level he didn’t feel bad enough, he is held responsible not just for the lack of feeling, but also for withholding Chesed from his brother, even though he was obligated to do so.

We can apply this Medrash to the current situation that we find ourselves in. Due to Covid-19 and the recent protests, many of us were unable to attend Minyanim. We would assume that we would not be held accountable for our lack of Minyan attendance, as we were obligated to stay home. However, we see from the above that if there is a lack in our feelings, and we don’t feel the sense of loss of opportunity, we may be held responsible for that which we are obligated to do. It is therefore so important to strengthen our commitment to learning Mussar so that we develop within ourselves the proper feelings. This way even when we are withheld from fulfilling our obligation for valid reasons, we will feel the loss of opportunity.



Shir HaShirim Insights

In loving memory of Mr. Marvin Halpern

Chazal tell us (Shir HaShirim Raba, 2:14) that Hashem made the Imahos, Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah, unable to bear children because He craves to hear the Tefillos of Tzaddikim. It sounds like Hashem let them suffer so He could enjoy their Tefillos, Chas V'shalom. How can we understand this?

A better understanding of the central purpose of Tefillah may answer this question. The Mefarshim (Yefei Kol and Kanfei Yonah on Shir HaShirim Raba, 2:14) explain:

Tefillah is a treasure house full of many precious treasures. Great and lofty tenets of religion and Emunah are hidden there. Tefillah shows that one believes in Hashem's knowledge, detailed supervision, infinite powers, and desire to bestow kindness. If one is missing an awareness of one of the above, his Tefillah to Hashem would be unjustified. As would his Bitachon, that one throws all his worries and needs upon Hashem and trusts in Him and His goodness, require these prerequisites. When he relays to Hashem all of his needs, even though Hashem is acutely aware of them, he shows that he understands his great lacking and gives over all of his matters to Hashem.

Additionally, Tefillah shows one's subservience and lowliness before the Creator and his fear of Him. Therefore, sometimes Hashem will not bestow good upon worthy people without Tefillah, for through it they will recognize that all their matters are dependent upon His kindness and good will, and they will constantly turn to Him in their thoughts and prayers.

Based on the above, we can understand why Hashem craves the Tefillos of Tzaddikim. It is only because the Tefillah provides the one who davens the infinite benefit of the central tenets of the Torah. How can He deprive them of such infinite rewards just because of their righteousness?!



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Can Bitachon work even for a Rasha?

The Leshem (grandfather of Maran HaRav Elyashiv zt"l) answers: Yes, there is nothing that stands in the way of Bitachon. He basis this on a Medrash on the Pasuk (Tehillim 31:10), "Many are the torments of the wicked, but he who trusts in Hashem shall be surrounded with kindness." The Medrash comments: Even a Rasha who trusts in Hashem will be surrounded with kindness. The Medrash comments further: The Pasuk says, "Many are the torments of the Rasha," because they don't place their Bitachon in Hashem, however, "One who places his Bitachon in Hashem will be surrounded with kindness!"

This being true how is it possible that many of the greatest Tzaddikim suffered greatly? Why didn't they use Bitachon to circumvent it? The Leshem himself asks this question adding, "If they had used Bitachon they certainly would have been saved!"

The Leshem answers that sometimes Tzaddikim want the opportunity to fulfill the great mitzvah of accepting their suffering from Hashem with love. He sites the famous story of the Tana, R' Akiva, during his death (Brachos 61b): "When they took R' Akiva out to be executed, it was time for the recitation of Shema. And they were raking his flesh with iron combs, and he was reciting Shema. His students said to him, 'Our teacher, even now, as you suffer, you recite Shema?' He said to them, 'All my days I have been troubled by the verse: You shall love Hashem... with all of your soul, meaning: Even if God takes your soul. I said to myself: When will the opportunity be afforded me to fulfill this verse? Now that it has been afforded me, shall I not fulfill it?' He prolonged his uttering of the word: One, until his soul left his body as he uttered his final word: One. A voice descended from heaven and said: Happy are you, R' Akiva, that your soul left your body as you uttered: One.

We see from here that Tzaddikim sometimes wait their whole lives for the opportunity to love Hashem in the midst of and despite great suffering. Obviously, in such situations they wouldn't have used Bitachon to circumvent it. The Leshem finishes by saying, "However, in truth, there is nothing that stands in the way of Bitachon!" (Leshem, Vol. II 135b)