



The Path To Follow

BEMIDBAR

288

May 23rd 2009

29 Iyar 5769

Publication
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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

The Desecration of Hashem's Name

Because of our many sins, lying and cheating in commerce have increased among some individuals, and to them it has become as if permitted to lie in business. They say, "I purchased it for such an amount, and I was given such an amount," and they will sometimes swear an oath to it. (Now even an oath uttered in a mundane language is like the oath mentioned in the Torah.) They believe that all this is part of the cycle and art of earning money, saying that in our time a person who fails to do this will not have any bread to eat. The result is that because of our many sins, we have become the shame of our neighbors, those who say: "We know very well that Jews lie and cheat, and that there is nothing honest about them." Woe to us because of the desecration of Hashem's Name that such people cause!

Due to the prohibition against deception, the cycle of poverty comes into the world. A wealthy person in our time almost never remains rich for his entire life, but only for half of it, or even a third, and sometimes for only a few years. Such was not the case in past generations, when a person's wealth lasted for many years. Falsehood is the lone cause of this change. As we know, Jews are responsible for one another.

- Sefat Tamim, ch. 2

COMPLETELY NULLIFYING YOURSELF TO OBTAIN THE TORAH

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

The Shulchan Aruch teaches: "We always read Parsha Bamidbar Sinai before Atzeret [Shavuot]" (Orach Chaim 428:4). We need to understand why the Sages decreed that Parsha Bamidbar must be read before Shavuot.

We also need to understand the connection that exists between the parsha and the festival.

We may explain this according to what is said in the Midrash: "The L-RD spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai [Numbers 1:1]. Why in the desert of Sinai? Our Sages have inferred from this that the Torah was given to the accompaniment of three things: Fire, water, and desert" (Bamidbar Rabba 1:7).

It is possible that by saying this, the Sages wanted to teach us that it is only through the Torah, which contains these three elements, that a person can preserve what he has studied and defeat the evil inclination that seeks to control him each day. This is because the Sages have said, "I created the evil inclination, but I created the Torah as its antidote. If you occupy yourselves with the Torah, you will not be delivered into its hand" (Kiddushin 30b). We also read, "David said: Do not let my legs go where they want, but rather towards Your Torah" (Midrash Tehillim 119) – all day long in the Beit Midrash, where the evil inclination does not enter. It will accompany a person all the way to the Beit Midrash, but upon reaching it, the evil inclination has no authority to enter.

Now since the evil inclination is made of fire – as it is said: "The flaming fire His attendants" (Psalms 104:4) – a person can only resist it through the power of the Torah, which is compared to fire, as it is said: "Is My word not like a fire, says the L-RD" (Jeremiah 23:29). The evil inclination is like a small fire that can be extinguished by just about anything, and the Torah is a great fire that can never go out, as it is written: "Its flashes are flashes of fire, a great flame. Many waters cannot quench love" (Song of Songs 8:6-7). When a person is faced with a small fire, but has no water to extinguish it and fears that it will spread, what does he do? He places it within another fire, at which point it disappears. Likewise the fire of the evil inclination disappears within the fire of the Torah.

In order for a person not to grow proud because of the fire of the Torah, he must humble himself and resemble water. Just as water moves from higher to lower ground, a talmid chacham must conduct himself with humility. The Torah only endures among the humble, who are comparable to water, for it moves from higher ground to lower ground (Taanith 7a). When a person conducts himself with humility, the evil inclination will be unable to infuse him with pride. Since he achieves humility, it leads him to completely nullify himself to serve G-d, like a desert. Such a person, who nullifies himself for the words of the Torah, is therefore compared to a desert. He never complains about G-d's ways, in accordance with the statement of the Sages: "It is incumbent on a man to bless [G-d] for the evil in the same way as for the good...even if He takes

your soul" (Berachot 54a). Thus King David said, "All my bones will say, 'O L-RD, who is like You?' " (Psalms 35:10), which teaches us that he annulled each of his bones for the Holy One, blessed be He, by doing all that He commanded him.

Hence the Sages instituted the reading of Parsha Bamidbar next to the festival of Shavuot. It reminds a person that the Torah will only endure when he makes himself into a desert for carrying out G-d's will, like a slave who is entirely subservient to his master and does everything he commands him. We find something similar in Parsha Para and Parsha HaChodesh, which we read before Passover so as to remind ourselves to prepare for it (Rashi, Megillah 29a). We also read in the Midrash, "Why do we read Ruth during Shavuot? Because the Torah was only given through suffering and poverty" (Ruth, Zutah 1). Now Ruth, who was the daughter of Moab's king (Nazir 23b), completely annulled herself for the Torah and mitzvot. Hence she merited to have King David as a descendant.

Even in the desert, the Children of Israel only merited to receive the Torah when they annulled themselves before the Holy One, blessed be He, and announced: "All that the L-RD has said, we will do and we will obey" (Exodus 24:7). This means that they completely humbled themselves before the words of Hashem, having the desire to do everything that He would command them. Because they attained a very high spiritual level at that point – since the evil inclination had been ripped from their hearts (Shir HaShirim Rabba 1:15) – Hashem was concerned lest they succumb to pride. He therefore said to them, "Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely die. A hand shall not touch it, for he shall surely be stoned or thrown down. Whether animal or person, he shall not live" (Exodus 19:12-13). Since they did not approach the mountain and they stood at a distance, they did not arrive at pride, and they all immediately devoted themselves to Hashem.

We need to understand why they were told, "Whether animal or person, he shall not live." If a Jew, who had sanctified and purified himself for three days prior to receiving the Torah, had been told not to touch the mountain, then how much more was it forbidden for an animal, which was not sanctified, to touch the mountain!

However the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Children of Israel: If you transgress – if you come closer to the mountain and touch it – you will end up becoming proud. Therefore even if you possess Torah, you will be like animals, as the Sages said regarding Doeg: He was great in Torah, being able to weigh every reason logically in the Torah, and he counted 300 fixed laws "on a tower flying in the air" (Sanhedrin 106b). Nevertheless, because he failed to completely control himself in the area of Lashon Harah, he did not leave this world without having forgotten his studies. At his death, three angels of destruction came to him: One caused him to forget his learning, one burned his soul, and a third scattered his ashes to synagogues and schoolhouses.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Ending on a Positive Note

It is written, "They shall not come and look as the holy is inserted, lest they die" (Numbers 4:20).

Rabbeinu Yosef Haim, the Ben Ish Hai, answers a very interesting question in his book of responsa entitled Rav Pealim. Parsha Bamidbar ends with the verse, "But they shall not come and look as the holy is inserted, lest they die." Now a parsha does not usually end on a negative note, as the Shulchan Aruch states: "We must be careful to always begin with something good and to end with something good" (Orach Chaim 138). Therefore why does this parsha end with a verse that does not express something good?

The Ben Ish Hai replies: Why are you surprised? There are many similar cases! Parsha Noah ends with, "Terah died in Haran," Parsha Metzora ends with, "A man who lies with an unclean woman," and so on. We may explain this by saying that after the end of the parsha, the person called up for the reading of the Torah recites the blessing on the Torah, which was instituted by the Men of the Great Assembly and which is obligatory. We therefore do not consider Parsha Bamidbar to end with the phrase, "lest they die," but with the blessing of the Torah that follows it. Even if the Chazan was reading the parsha, whereas the person called up for the reading only recited the blessing, since we must listen to the blessing and reply "Amen," the Chazan who heard the blessing is considered to have read it as well.

The Ben Ish Hai draws the following conclusion: In all cases, a person who studies the parsha twice in Hebrew and once in the Targum, and who does not say a blessing after his reading, should not remain silent after reading the phrase, "lest he die." Instead he should read a verse from the following parsha, or another verse from the parsha that he just read, which he should also recite twice in Hebrew and once in the Targum. We should also be careful to do this for the Haftarah, such as for the Haftarah that ends with the phrase, "The people trampled him in the gate, and he died" (Haftarah Metzora, 2 Kings 7:20). This should be followed by reciting another verse from the same Haftarah. Hence for the Haftarah from Shabbat HaGadol, which ends with the phrase, "Lest I come and strike the land with utter destruction" (Malachi 3:24), the penultimate verse ("Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the L-RD") is usually reprinted at the very end of the Haftarah, so as to end the reading on a positive note.

A Pearl From the Rav:

Hashem Elevates One Who Studies Torah

Why are Parshiot Bamidbar and Nasso connected to Parsha Beha'alotcha? It is because when a person makes himself into a desert, he will grow spiritually, as the Sages have said: "If a man allows himself to be treated as the desert, upon which everybody treads, the Torah will be given to him as a gift" (Eruvin 54a). His Torah study will then endure; otherwise it will not. In fact a person can spiritually elevate himself, yet become haughty and congratulate himself on account of his Torah study. Therefore we have nasso, the word being formed by the same letters as soneh ("disaster"), teaching us that one must detest greatness. Is it possible for a person to humble himself before everyone? It is for this reason that we find Beha'alotcha right afterwards. Our Sages have said that the flame must arise on its own (Shabbat 20a), which teaches us that a person does not have the right to be proud of himself. The fact that the Torah elevates a person and

makes him grow only comes from the Holy One, blessed be He, for G-d elevates one who studies Torah, and people must respect him. However he himself does not have the right to pursue honor, just like the lamps of the Menorah, whose flames arose on its own, not through the intermediary of the priest. Thus it is the Holy One, blessed be He, Who elevates a person and makes him grow, bringing him to great heights. In fact, "Whoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake... he becomes like a fountain that flows with ever-increasing strength and like a never-ceasing stream. He becomes modest, patient, and forgiving of insult to himself, and it makes him great and exalts him above all things" (Pirkei Avot 6:1). Furthermore, "Whoever occupies himself with the study of the Torah becomes elevated" (ibid. 6:2). Likewise the Sages said, "From one who seeks greatness, greatness flees. But one who flees from greatness, greatness follows" (Eruvin 13b). They have also taught, "One should not say: 'I will read Scripture so I may be called a sage,' 'I will study so I may be called a rabbi,' 'I will study to be an elder and sit in the assembly.' Instead he must learn out of love, and honor will follow in the end" (Nedarim 62a).

The Key to the Existence of the Jewish People

It is written, "The L-RD spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai" (Numbers 1:1).

The Sages say, "The Torah was given to the accompaniment of three things: Fire, water, and desert" (Bamidbar Rabba 1:7). What characterizes Jews is that, from the day they became a people, they have always devoted themselves to Torah and faith. The Children of Israel went from the gallows to the slaughterhouse, stretching out their necks to be killed. They jumped into the sea and lost their lives on account of the wickedness of the nations, who tried to make them deny their Torah and their faith.

This strength and characteristic of the Jewish people manifested itself primarily by three events in their history. Abraham, the ancestor of the people, threw himself into a fiery furnace on account of his pure faith, a faith that spread among men. He thereby infused the power of absolute devotion into his descendants after him. If we think that it is the attitude of an individual that is more noble and elevated than everything else, the second event occurred when the Sea of Reeds split. At that point an entire people jumped into a dried-up sea at G-d's command "that they journey forth" (Exodus 14:15). If we think that this was just a momentary trial, the third event occurred when the Children of Israel ventured into a barren desert that was teeming with wild animals, serpents, and scorpions, a wasteland without food or water. There they remained for a long time, all on account of their love and devotion to G-d and His prophets, as it is written: "I recall for you the devotion of your youth, the love of your nuptials, when you followed Me into the desert, into an unsown land" (Jeremiah 2:2).

Because of these three trials, the "fire" of the furnace, the "water" of the Sea of Reeds, and the "desert" where the Children of Israel walked with devotion in order to follow G-d's command, the Torah was given to them as an eternal possession. These three trials constitute the surest pledge of the eternal existence of the Jewish people.

– Maharam Shapira of Lublin

Like a Desert

It is written, "In the desert of Sinai" (Numbers 1:1).

The Sages say, "Anyone who does not throw himself open to all like a desert cannot acquire wisdom and Torah, and so it is said: 'In the desert of Sinai'" (Bamidbar Rabba 1:7). The gaon Rabbi Yosef Rosowski, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Israel, explains that in Pirkei Avot, among the things by which the Torah is acquired, the Sages include humil-

ity, a love for people, and sharing in the problems of others. A person cannot attain these characteristics when he is filled with pride. Thus if he makes a big fuss every time he thinks that people have not shown him enough respect, where is his humility? Furthermore, when he is constantly spending all his time solely on his own concerns, how can he free himself to love others and share in their problems?

This is what the Midrash is saying here, namely that whoever does not throw himself open like a desert cannot acquire the Torah. This means that he does not even attain the key to the Torah, a reference to the characteristics by which the Torah is acquired. In fact as long as a person does not annul his personal acquisitions, meaning his ego, and as long as he does not make himself like a desert, he will be unable to acquire these characteristics.

– Darchei Mussar

Each Man by His Banner

It is written, “The Children of Israel shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers’ house. They shall encamp around the Tent of Meeting” (Numbers 2:2).

As we know, this parsha was said “on the first of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt” (ibid. 1:1). It is therefore surprising to note that the issue of the banners was delayed for an entire year while they were in the desert, and that they did not receive this order upon leaving Egypt. At first glance, the issue of the banners seems likely to have divided the people. Since each banner represented an aspiration and goal that was unique to each tribe, thereby distinguishing each tribe by its special characteristics and tasks, dissension could have easily arisen among them. Yet since they all shared the same center, namely the Sanctuary around which they encamped together, there was no longer anything to separate them. Everyone simply stood in his particular place among the overall assembly. As long as the Sanctuary had not been assembled, and as long as this unifying center did not exist, the banners were not organized, lest it lead to dissension. It was only when the Sanctuary was assembled that the Children of Israel were ordered to encamp, “each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers’ house... around the Tent of Meeting.”

– Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky

Overview of the Parsha

Following the book of Leviticus, which describes the bond between holiness and the holy people, the book of Numbers returns to the organization of the people around Hashem’s Sanctuary. Just as the book of Exodus (which precedes the book of Leviticus) deals with the formation of the people when they left Egypt, received the Torah, and built the Sanctuary, likewise the book of Numbers deals with the formation of the people when they find themselves in the desert with their Torah and their Sanctuary. Parsha Bamidbar begins with the counting of the people and its encampments in the desert according to their banners. The members of the tribe of Levi, a certain number of whom redeem the firstborn of Israel, are counted separately. The work of carrying the Sanctuary during their travels is shared among the descendants of Levi’s three sons, with Kohath’s descendants being responsible for carrying the Sanctuary’s holiest vessels.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Each in His Camp According to His Banner

In the book Sha’ar Hakavanot, our teacher the Arizal states that among most of our traditions, there are numerous differences in the formulation of blessings and prayers in Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and other communities. We have a tradition which states that in Heaven there are twelve gates, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel, with the prayer of each tribe ascending through its own particular gate. The secret of these twelve gates is mentioned at the end of the book of Ezekiel, and there is no doubt that if the formulation of our prayers were all exactly the same, there would be no need for these twelve gates. Yet since the formulation of our prayers are different, a special gate is required for each tribe, which is why each person should pray according to the same form and order of his ancestors, not turning from it either to the right or to the left. If a person modifies the custom of his ancestors, such as by saying Baruch She’amar before Hodu, or by making a similar change, his prayer will not ascend on high. In the responsa Levushei Mordechai, a question is asked concerning a Sephardic community that usually prayed in the main synagogue in town, where they had adopted Ashkenaz prayer customs. The Sephardim then left this synagogue and went to pray in the Beit Midrash according to Sephardic tradition and the customs of their ancestors. The rav of the town was not happy with this, because he thought that it was better for there to be a single place where the entire community would all pray together, for in his view this would constitute an even greater glory for Hashem. The Levushei Mordechai states that since the Sephardim do not have the right to change the customs of their ancestors, they must be allowed to have their own place where they can pray according to their customs, which would not affect the glory of the King in any way. On the contrary, if everyone prayed according to separate traditions in the same synagogue, it would transgress the prohibition against creating divisions.

In the book Keter Rosh, it is stated that the Vilna Gaon ordered his disciple the gaon Rabbi Israel of Shklov, who had gone to live in a Sephardic community, to follow their customs in prayer. In the sheiltot at the end of the book Ma’asei Rav (par. 90), it is stated that in a town where the majority follow Sephardic customs in prayer, there is no reason for them to change their customs, and the Sages have explained: “You shall not form separate sects” (Yebamot 14a). Divisions in customs lead to division among hearts.

ESHET HAYIL

Shame

Shame is what distances people from every kind of sin, for a person will sin in secret because he is too ashamed to sin in public. The Sages have said that as Yochanan ben Zakai was about to die, his disciples said to him: “Master, bless us!” He replied, “May it be [G-d’s] will that the fear of Heaven be upon you like the fear of flesh and blood.” They responded, “Is that all?” He said, “If only [you could do that]...for when a man wants to commit a sin, he says: ‘I hope no one will see me’” (Berachot 28b). This is because a person is afraid of being ashamed, and he will therefore avoid sin because he does not want to be shamed before others. Now through selfish reasons for observing Torah, a person will eventually observe Torah for unselfish reasons. However the greatest level of shame is to feel shame before the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written: “My G-d, I am embarrassed and ashamed to lift my face to You” (Ezra 9:6). If one were to ask, “How can I be ashamed of someone that I can’t even see with my eyes,” he must realize that although the Holy One, blessed be He, is hidden from the eyes of the living, He is found in the heart and reveals Himself in thoughts. We can attain lofty levels in the realm of shame by reflecting upon the greatness of Hashem, and by constantly recalling that the Holy One, blessed be He, sees our deeds, probes our hearts, and knows our thoughts.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

The Rebbe of Klausenburg

Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Halberstam was born in 5665 (1905) in Galicia, and passed away in Kiryat Sanz in Netanya on Tammuz 9, 5754 (1994). He came from a family of rabbis who descended from Rabbi Chaim Halberstam, the first Rebbe of Sanz. Before the Second World War, he briefly served as the Rebbe of Klausenburg in Transylvania. During the Holocaust, he was sent to concentration camps with his family and community, the great majority of which were murdered in the camps, including his wife and 11 children, though he himself survived. His conduct in the camps was an example of how to preserve the divine image found in man. He exerted all his energies in helping, both physically and spiritually, those Jews who were with him. After the Holocaust, he helped rebuild what remained, reestablishing Judaism, the observance of mitzvot, and the study of Torah in the displaced persons camps that were established in Germany. A certain time later, he arrived in the United States in order to restore the Chassidut of Sanz-Klausenburg in New York. He then moved to Israel, where he built Kiryat Sanz in Netanya and many other institutions, among them being the Laniado Hospital, a medical center that functions according to his guidelines. During all these years, he did a tremendous amount to restore the Torah world that had been destroyed by the Holocaust. Among other things, he instituted his Mifal HaShas ("Talmud factory") and participated in establishing Torah and chesed institutions the world over, all while leading the chassidim of Sanz in Israel and abroad. He also issued Halachic responses to every corner of the globe and was involved in various other activities. After his passing, his responsa were collected, some of which had survived the war (when many of his writings were lost). His responsa included Divrei Yatziv on Orach Chaim in two volumes, as well as two volumes on Yoreh Deah. His fifth volume was on Even HaEzer, the sixth on Choshen Mishpat, while his other writings dealt with the Temple and sacrifices.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

By the Merit of Faith

It is written, "I will betroth you to Me in faith" (Hosea 2:22).

The Sages have said, "Whoever accepts a single mitzvah with faith merits for the Holy Spirit to rest upon him." Exiles end on account of faith, as it is written: "Look from the peak of Amanah" (Song of Songs 4:8) and "I will betroth you to Me in faith."

In Orchot Tzaddikim we read that confidence in Hashem and faith are associated. Without faith, there can be no confidence, and faith is at the forefront of the Torah, as it is written: "I am the L-RD your G-d...you shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:2-3). If one does not believe, what purpose can the Torah serve? However when a person believes in the depths of his heart that the Creator will do everything that is written in the Torah, punishing the wicked and rewarding those who honor Him, such a person will fulfill the Torah. In fact if every thief knew with complete certainty that he would be killed for his theft, and that there was no way of escaping punishment, he would not steal. However all thieves are confident of being able to escape punishment, which is why they all want to steal. Likewise a sinner will not sin if he is certain that he will receive a severe punishment. Hence the entire Torah is included in faith, as it is written: "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4). Of Abraham it is said, "He believed in the L-RD, and He counted it to him for tzeddakah [righteousness]" (Genesis 15:6). Of Moses it is written, "He is faithful in all My house" (Numbers 12:7), and the Midrash praises the greatness of faith, stating: "It was on account of this faith that the Holy Spirit rested upon them and they recited the Song" (Shemot Rabba 23:2). Thus we read, "They believed in the L-RD and in Moses His servant" (Exodus 14:31), followed right afterwards by: "Then Moses and the Children of Israel sang" (ibid. 15:1), meaning that they were saved by faith.

A TRUE STORY

The Secrets of the Torah

It is written, "They shall not come and look as the holy is inserted, lest they die" (Numbers 4:20).

The Rebbe of Klausenburg Zatzal was once asked if it was proper for everyone to devote himself to the study of Kabbalah. He replied, "Let me tell you a true story. After his passing, my grandfather the Rebbe of Sanz appeared in a dream to the Rebbe of Sighet, the author of Yitav Lev, and said to him: 'As your father-in-law and faithful friend, I advise you to study the revealed Torah even more than the concealed Torah. When I was in this world, I gave this advice to two friends of mine, one who accepted it, and the other who did not. The one who listened to me did not regret it, while the other regrets it to this day. I am therefore giving you the same advice. It is enough to know the path of the truth and righteousness in our generation. Even in the revealed Torah, it is not enough to want a good reputation in order to obtain it, and even more so in Kabbalah, for which we are told to make a fence and not reveal its secrets to those who are unworthy of it. No one is permitted to study it if his interior is not as perfect as his exterior. Hence as far as I know, there is almost no place throughout the provinces of Galicia and Poland where the regular study of Zohar and books of Kabbalah occur in public. Only people who are extremely pious, and who know that they are worthy on account of the origin of their soul – those who purify their bodies numerous times according to all the conditions and warnings placed upon them – study books of Kabbalah, doing so in secret as much as possible.'

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

Suffering is Precious

When Rabbi Eliezer fell ill, four Sages went to visit him: Rabbi Tarfon, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah, and Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Tarfon said to him, "You are more valuable to Israel than rain, for rain is precious in this world, whereas you are precious in this world and the next." Rabbi Yehoshua said, "You are more valuable to Israel than the sun, for the sun is but for this world, while my master is for this world and the next." Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah said, "You are better to Israel than a father and a mother, for these are for this world, whereas my master is for this world and the next." However Rabbi Akiva said, "Suffering is precious." At that point Rabbi Eliezer said to them, "Support me, so I may hear the words of Akiva, my disciple." Rabbi Akiva said, "We know that Hezekiah taught Torah, but did he teach Torah to the whole world and not to his own son Manasseh? We must say that all the pains that he spent upon him, and all the labors that he exerted on his account did not bring him back to the right path. What saved him? It was suffering! Thus it is written, 'In his affliction, he sought the L-RD his G-d and humbled himself greatly before the G-d of his fathers and prayed to Him.' Thus we learn how precious suffering is."

– Yalkut Shemot 203

There was once a very G-d-fearing Kohen who did all his good deeds in secret. He had ten children, six sons and four daughters, from one wife. Every day he would pray, prostrate himself before Hashem, and request mercy so that none of his children would sin or be involved with anything unfitting or unpleasant. When Ezra led the Jews out of Babylon, this Kohen and his family accompanied him. He merited a long life in which, during the course of 50 years, he saw his children become High Priests and his grandchildren become younger priests. Of such a man the verse says, "Trust in the L-RD and do good" (Psalms 37:3).

– Yalkut Shemot 729