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LA VOIE
A SUIVRE

WHY WERE RABBI AKIVA'S DISCIPLES PUNISHED? (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, “Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them: For a dead person, none shall defile himself among his people” (Vayikra 21:1). Here our Sages note an apparent redundancy in the expression “Say...and you shall say” (see Yevamot 114a). We also see that the verse first speaks in the plural (“say to them”), but ends in the singular (“among his people”). Why the change?

We may explain this according to a statement in the Mishnah: “If you have learned much Torah, do not claim special credit for yourself” (Pirkei Avoth 2:8). From here we see that a person must teach his students without ever thinking, “If I teach others, when will I study myself?” The Sages note that man was born to toil, le’amal (Job 5:7). Now the term le’amal evokes the expression *lilmod al manat lelamed* (“study in order to teach”), because no effort or devotion can be greater, namely to give one’s time to others. Hence a person who teaches others without thinking about himself is rewarded by the Holy One, blessed be He, measure for measure, retaining his Torah as if he had been studying it when teaching others. Thus the Sages have said, “He toils in one place, the Torah toils for him in another” (Sanhedrin 99b).

This is why the verse in question states, “Say...and you shall say.” The Torah is alluding to the fact that we must say to ourselves in order to say to others. We must not think, “I’ll study alone,” for the Torah of one who acts in this way will eventually render him impure, as it is written: “May a sword fall upon the neck of [the foes of] talmidei chachamim who sit and engage in the study of the Torah, solitary and apart. Not only that, but they also become fools. ... [T]hey also become sinners” (Makkot 10a).

This is why Parshiot Emor and Behar are juxtaposed to Parsha Bechukotai: “Say” – say to yourself; “and you shall say” – to

others; “Behar Sinai” (on Mount Sinai) – an allusion to humility, for Sinai made itself small before Hashem, and when a man forgoes his Torah in order to teach others, it is a sign that he is not proud. These parshiot are juxtaposed to Parsha Bechukotai, which contains the subject of Torah study – as our Sages have said, ‘If you walk in My laws’ [Vayikra 26:3] teaches us that G-d is proud that Jews study Torah” (Torat Kohanim, Bechukotai 1) – in order to tell us that the greatest form of devotion is when a person makes himself small like Mount Sinai so as to teach the Torah to others.

Do Not Claim Special Credit For Yourself

According to this, we may explain the teaching of our Sages when they said: “Rabbi Akiva had 12,000 pairs of disciples from Gabbatha to Antipatris, and all of them died at the same time because they did not treat one another with respect” (Yevamot 62b). This is difficult to understand, for Rabbi Akiva said that “You shall love your fellow as yourself” (Vayikra 19:18) is a great principle of the Torah (Torat Kohanim 4:12). Therefore how could his disciples not have fulfilled this teaching from their master?

To this we may add the statement of the Mishnah: “All glory is due solely for Torah” (Pirkei Avoth 6:3). The disciples of Rabbi Akiva did not study Torah together when one of them needed help. True, they respected one another in everyday life, but that did not help them because they did not study together when one of them did not fully understand a halachah or teaching, since they did not want to lose their time. The Holy One, blessed be He, punished them as a result, for man was created only to teach others, without claiming special credit for himself.

Rabbi Chiya was only honored because he taught Torah to others. He said of himself, “I ensure that the Torah will not be forgotten in Israel. For I bring flax seed, sow it, and

weave nets. I hunt stags with whose meat I feed orphans and from whose skins I prepare scrolls, and then proceed to a town where there are no teachers of young children, and write out the five books of the Chumash for five children, and teach another six children the six orders of the Mishnah. I then tell each one, ‘Teach your section to your fellows’” (Ketubot 103b). The Gemara adds that this is what Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi had in mind when he explained, “How great are the deeds of Chiya!”

The Water Hollowed out the Rock

Rabbi Akiva himself became the greatest among his generation only in this way. The Aggadah recounts that by the time Rabbi Akiva was 40 years old, he had not studied any Torah (Avoth D’Rabbi Nathan 6:2). One day, as he was next to a well, he asked: “What hollowed out this rock? He was told, “The water that falls on it all day long.” At that point, Rabbi Akiva logically deduced the same about himself: “If something this soft can shape something so hard, how much more will words of Torah – which are as hard as iron – shape my heart, which is but flesh and blood?”

He immediately went to learn Torah. In fact both he and his son sat before their teacher as he taught them both. Rabbi Akiva said, “Rabbi, teach me Torah!” He then wrote aleph beit and learned it, aleph tav and learned it, Vayikra and learned it. In fact Rabbi Akiva studied without respite until he had learned the entire Torah.

Since Rabbi Akiva had learned Torah only from the mouth of his teacher, who was not afraid of losing his time, he knew that each person must study Torah with others. He had learned Torah only from those who had studied with him without considering their time, which is why he taught his disciples to do the same. Since they did not, they were punished.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

The Prohibition Against Slaughtering an Animal and its Young in One Day

With regards to the mitzvah that we find in this week's parsha: "An ox or a sheep, you shall not slaughter it and its young in one day" (Vayikra 22:28), the Ramban states in regards to the mitzvah of sending a bird away from the nest: "The reason for both [mitzvot] is that we should not have a cruel heart and be uncompassionate, or it may be that Scripture does not allow us to destroy a species altogether, although it permits slaughter within that group. Now he who kills the mother and its young in one day, or takes them when they are free to fly, [it is] as though he cut off that species" (Ramban on Devarim 22:6). In his Guide for the Perplexed, the Rambam states that the reason for the mitzvah to release the mother bird when taking its nest, and the prohibition against killing the mother and its young in one day, is in order to admonish us against killing the young within the mother's sight, for animals feel great distress under such circumstances. There is no difference between the distress of man and the distress of animals for their young. The main prohibition in killing the dam and its young applies only when killing the young and then the dam, but not the other way around. However the further we distance ourselves from acts of cruelty, the better. The Rambam adds, "Do not contradict me by quoting the saying of the Sages: 'He who says in his prayer, "Even to a bird's nest do Your mercies extend," they silence him' [Berachot 33b], for that is one of two opinions, namely the opinion of the Sage who holds that the mitzvot have no other reason but the will of the Creator. We follow the second opinion, that there is a reason for the mitzvot" (Guide for the Perplexed III:48).

There is No Difference

The prohibition against killing "it and its young" only applies to a clean animal, as it is written: "An ox or a sheep, you shall not slaughter it and its young in one day." Since this pertains only to slaughtering, if we have struck the first animal or it died spontaneously, we are allowed to slaughter the second. However if we slaughter an animal and find that it is treif, it is forbidden to slaughter the second.

It is forbidden to slaughter an animal and its young in a single day. It makes no difference if the mother is slaughtered first and then its male or female offspring, or the male or female offspring is slaughtered first and then the mother. However there is a difference between slaughtering an animal and then its two offspring (in which case we have committed two transgressions), and slaughtering two offspring and then the mother (in which case we have committed one transgression). Likewise if we slaughter an animal and its female offspring, and then the offspring of its offspring, we have committed two transgressions. However if we slaughter an animal, followed by the offspring of its female offspring, followed by the female offspring, we have committed only one transgression.

The "one day" in question here is defined as nighttime and the following day, as at Creation: "There was evening, and there was morning." Exempted from this rule are the sacrifices, for which a day is defined as daytime and the following night, meaning that the fat and entrails left from a sacrifice made on a given day can be burned during the entire night that follows.

If one has transgressed this prohibition by slaughtering an animal and its young on the same day, the animals are permitted to be eaten. Some punish the slaughterer on the same day by prohibiting him from eating the second animal, although others are allowed to eat it (Shach al. 3).

The First to Slaughter

One who acquires an animal and its young from their owner has precedence over the owner, since it was for this reason that he acquired them – for slaughter. If two people have acquired two animals, one acquiring the mother and the other acquiring its young, the one who took the first will slaughter it first, and the one who took the second must wait until the following day to slaughter it. This is because the seller only sold a right to the second, and he himself could not have slaughtered the remaining animal. If the second person slaughters his animal first, the first person must wait until the following day. When does this apply? When

both people acquired the animals from a single person. However if they acquired these animals from two people, both of them are equal, and the one who slaughters his animal first has shown himself to be faster. In fact, one has no greater rights than the other.

One who acquires an animal should not try to determine if the mother or its offspring were slaughtered on that day. However the seller must warn him if such is the case.

It is permitted to slaughter a pregnant animal, and there is no reason to fear that "it and its young" applies to a pregnant animal, for we know that "a fetus counts as the thigh of its mother" (Nazir 51a). However if the fetus has emerged alive after its mother has been slaughtered, and it has separated itself (meaning that it has stood upon its legs, in which case the offspring must be slaughtered by rabbinic decree), we do not slaughter it on the same day. There is an interesting case that aroused the interest of the Rishonim. It involves the goat sent to Azazel on Yom Kippur. If the goat's mother is slaughtered on Yom Kippur for a sick person whose life is in danger, does the prohibition of "it and its young in one day" invalidate the animal from being sent to Azazel? We shall discuss this at another time.

A TRUE STORY

Forbidden to Marry

It is written, "They shall not marry a woman who has been divorced from her husband" (Vayikra 21:7).

In his Responsa Chatam Sofer (Even HaEzer 174), the Chatam Sofer Zatzal mentions the case of a kohen who lived in Italy and wanted to marry a divorced woman. This resulted from the fact that the Rabbinical Court had forced her husband to divorce her, for they had discovered something in him which the Sages say obligates him to separate from his wife. The rabbis did not allow the kohen to marry this divorced woman.

Now the kohen had close contacts with the royal family, and he addressed the Italian royal court to accuse the rabbis of not letting him marry a divorced woman. He asserted before the judges that the only reason a kohen cannot marry a divorced woman is because, since a woman has been sent away by her husband, she probably has questionable morals. Hence it is not fitting for a kohen to take such a woman as his wife, since he is holier than other people and should not take a woman that another man has driven from his home. Yet this case was different, the kohen asserted, because it was the woman who had rejected her husband, not the husband who had rejected her, as usually happens. That being the case, every prohibition against the kohen taking this divorced woman as his wife was only a rabbinic decree. The kohen did not want to obey the orders of the Sages, for in his view the Torah permitted him to marry her.

Also in the royal court at that time was a wise man, and he gave a pertinent rebuttal to the kohen's argument:

"When we look at the direct meaning of the Torah's words, nowhere do we find that spouses can leave one another. Rather, a divorce is granted when the husband does not want his wife and she no longer pleases him. The reverse case – that the woman does not want her husband, even if he is afflicted with ulcers – is nowhere found in the Torah. In such a case, the Sages of Israel have obligated the husband, under certain situations, to give her a divorce.

"That being the case," the wise man continued, "this woman is forbidden to marry a kohen under all circumstances.

"If a man and woman have faith in the Sages of Israel, who have obligated this woman's husband to divorce her, then they must also have faith in the Sages when they say that this woman cannot marry a kohen. If we literally interpret the Torah verses pertaining to divorce, without basing ourselves on the words of the Sages, it follows that this woman could not have divorced her husband, and so she is still married to him. It is therefore forbidden for anyone to marry her, since she is still a married woman."

These words satisfied the king and his ministers, and they did not allow the kohen to marry her.

AT THE SOURCE

The Difference

It is written, “Say to the kohanim...for his mother and for his father” (Vayikra 21:1-2).

With regards to a simple kohen, the commentators ask why Scripture first mentions “his mother,” whereas for the Kohen Gadol Scripture first mentions “his father” (v.11).

A direct explanation is given in the book *Ohr Torah*: “For his mother and for his father – this is when his mother dies and his father is still alive. For his father and for his mother – this is the opposite; his father dies first and then his mother.

“In both cases, there is something new in the verse: A simple kohen is allowed to become impure for his mother even when his father is still alive, and he can even occupy himself with her burial. On the other hand, it is forbidden for the Kohen Gadol to become impure for his mother, even when his father is no longer alive and cannot bury her.”

To Observe and Perform

It is written, “You shall observe My mitzvotay and you shall perform them” (Vayikra 22:31).

In his book *Yismach Israel*, the gaon Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer Zatzal states that both expressions (“you shall observe,” “you shall perform”) allude to what our Sages have said: “The reward for a mitzvah is a mitzvah.” In other words, one who performs a mitzvah is given an opportunity by the Holy One, blessed be He, to perform another mitzvah so he can receive an additional reward in the World to Come.

This is why the verse states, “You shall observe My mitzvotay.” That is, if you observe Hashem’s commandments as He gave them, then “you shall perform them” – you will merit to perform other mitzvot, which will be like a reward for the first mitzvah that led to the second.

Here we may cite another statement by our Sages, namely that the Holy One, blessed be He, combines good intentions with deeds (see *Kiddushin* 40a). Hence if “you shall observe My mitzvotay” – meaning that if you intend to observe mitzvot (“observe” in the sense of “looking for”) – I will consider it as if you had already “performed” them.

This Moment

It is written, “You shall count for yourselves, from the day after the Sabbath” (Vayikra 23:15).

Why do we not recite the Shecheyanu blessing on the mitzvah of counting the Omer, as we do for other mitzvot that occur on specific dates: Sounding the shofar, taking the lulav, kindling lights for Chanukah, reading the Megillah, etc?

The Rashba responds by saying that counting the Omer per se only constitutes a means and preparation for the essential part of the mitzvah. The essential part of the mitzvah is that after the days have been counted, we offer two loaves of bread in the Temple. Today we settle for the counting only, without performing the essential part of the mitzvah.

This is why we do not recite the Shecheyanu blessing, for “this moment” only brings us heartache and trouble, reminding us of the destruction of our Temple. That being the case, the Sages have not seen the need to recite the Shecheyanu blessing on the mitzvah of counting the Omer.

Stones as Numerous as Intentions

It is written, “They took the blasphemer to outside of the camp, and they stoned him with a stone” (*Vayikra* 24:23).

Parsha Shelach describes what was done to the person gathering wood on Shabbat: “They stoned him with stones” (*Bamidbar* 15:36). Why does the former verse say “stone” in the singular, while the latter verse says “stones” in the plural?

We shall cite the gaon Rabbi Yeshaya of Prague Zatzal to answer this question: The person gathering wood on Shabbat was, as we know, Zelophehad the son of Hopher, who wanted the Children of Israel to realize that the punishment for anyone transgressing Shabbat is death. When he was brought out to be stoned, each of the Children of Israel had a different intention in throwing a stone at him: One thought that he was a tzaddik who was not liable to death, but had acted according to Hashem’s will; another thought that he was probably a criminal who was justly being stoned, etc. Hence the verse states that they stoned him “with stones,” for there were various intentions behind his stoning.

As for the person who blasphemed, everyone knew that he was a criminal and that by all rights he should die. Hence it was as if they had thrown a single stone – with a single intention – which is why the verse states that he was stoned “with a stone.”

THE WAYS OF THE FATHERS INSIGHTS ON PIRKEI AVOTH BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA

Whoever Honors the Torah

Rabbi Yosei said, “Whoever honors the Torah, gofo [his body] is honored by men” (Pirkei Avoth 4:6).

Is a man’s goal in this world to have his body honored by others? Furthermore, what benefit is there in honoring the body? Honor is not something that is tangible or can be touched, and although we can only attribute vain and deceptive honor to the body, we cannot say the same about the honor that a man merits through Torah. The latter is spiritual honor, which relates only to the soul, not the body.

It is possible to interpret this Mishnah to mean that the Tanna Rabbi Yosei is warning man that he cannot honor the Torah and study it as he should until his body is honored and clean, as befits the honor of the Torah. After all, our Sages have said: “One must wash his face, hands, and feet daily in his Maker’s honor” (*Shabbat* 50b), as well as: “Any talmid chacham upon whose garment a stain is found, he is worthy of death, for it is said: ‘All who hate me love death’ [*Mishlei* 8:36]” (*Shabbat* 114a). The Sages have also said, “Cleanliness leads to...purity [which]...leads to Ruach HaKodesh” (*Avodah Zarah* 20b).

We also find in books of Halachah that if a person has sweat upon his body, he cannot pray before he washes himself (*Responsa Emek Halachah* par. 40). The *Shulchan Aruch* states that a person who touches a dirty place with his body or leaves the toilet without washing his hands, his wisdom will leave him if he is a talmid chacham, or he will go mad if he is not a talmid chacham (*Orach Chaim* 4:18). This is why the Tanna said, “Whoever honors the Torah, his body is honored by men,” since it is forbidden for a man to study Torah without his body being clean, and the Torah is honored when it is studied in a state of cleanliness. Even one’s clothes must be clean of all stains.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI YOSEF WALTOCH

More than 25 years have passed since the sudden passing of the hidden tzaddik Rabbi Yosef Waltoch Zatzal, a gaon in the revealed Torah and in Kabbalah. He was a descendant of the Maggid Rabbi Yechiel Michal of Zlotchov, a disciple of our teacher the holy Baal Shem Tov.

Rabbi Yosef Waltoch often visited the great men of Israel and cleaved to the dust of their feet. At the same time, he knew how to conceal his multi-faceted personality, hiding his greatness and righteousness to such an extent that many people really did not know him. The Rav and tzaddik Rabbi Meir Abuhatzera Zatzal would rise in his honor, saying of him: “This Jew is a hidden tzaddik.” In other words, it was very difficult to detect that he was actually a tzaddik, for he concealed his true personality. The great gaon Rabbi Ben Tzion Abba Shaoul Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Porat Yosef, testified that he concealed his deeds from him.

Incredible Inspiration and Lofty Understanding

We can see the power of his diligence in Torah study from the following story: Rabbi Yosef Waltoch was once on his way to Mea Shearim, accompanied by a young avrech. They entered a well-known bookstore, and Rabbi Waltoch and the avrech wanted to purchase Petach HaOhel, a profound four-volume work on Kabbalah by the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi David Abuhatzera Zatzal. When the avrech paid the salesman, Rabbi Yosef said to him: “Today is Sunday. G-d willing, I will return these volumes to you on Thursday, after I have finished consulting them.” The avrech agreed, and Rabbi Yosef put them into his bag. On Thursday, the books were returned to the avrech, their contents having been absorbed by Rabbi Yosef’s powerful intellect.

Rabbi Yosef Waltoch often went to pray by the graves of the tzaddikim throughout Eretz Israel. Both summer and winter, he would travel from one gravesite to the next, praying and studying with tremendous concentration. He would awaken the merit of the deceased and receive incredible inspiration and lofty understanding. The souls of the tzaddikim revealed themselves to him as he prayed by their graves, and he merited miracles. Rav Waltoch slept very little. He always went to bed very late, and despite his great fatigue he would arise very early to pray Vatikin. He would sometimes have a long discussion with a heartbroken Jew, in which case he would immerse himself in Torah study until the early hours of the morning. He would connect day to night with Torah study, praying Shacharit at sunrise, and only then would he go and sleep a little. Whenever he slept in Jerusalem, he would try to pray at the Kotel in the morning. One of his students, who joined him for the morning prayer at the Kotel, testified that “we often left my home before sunrise in order to reach the Kotel. We would stand on the sidewalk and a car would stop right next to us. The driver, whom we didn’t know, would offer to take us to the Kotel.”

We have to emphasize Rabbi Yosef’s great sanctity from the fact that he was extremely careful to never lower his hands below his navel. This extreme attention manifested itself as he carried two bags that he took along everywhere. These bags contained his holy books, works on the revealed and concealed Torah. Yet despite their great weight, the position of his hands never changed, for they were crossed upon his chest as he carried them.

He’s More Powerful than Me

Rabbi Yosef Waltoch’s prayers bore fruit, and many people were saved by the blessings that emerged from his pure mouth. With enthusiasm and perpetual joy, he would wish his acquaintances, “All the best” or “A great deliverance!”

In regards to this, Rav Yosef Cohen recounted that when Rabbi Waltoch was staying at his home in Jerusalem, Rav Cohen went to the tzaddik Rabbi Meir Abuhatzera to ask for a blessing about a certain matter. Baba Meir said to him, “Why are you coming to me? You have a tzaddik in your home who is more powerful than me in prayer.”

Afflictions of Love

Rabbi Yosef Waltoch did not live long, and he suffered during his entire life from various ills, especially an intestinal condition that caused him tremendous suffering. (Note: The Sages say, “The majority of the tzaddikim die of trouble in the intestines” [Shabbat 118b], and Rashi explains that this kind of suffering atones for sin. The Midrash also states that such suffering cleanses the bowels of food, in order for a person to be holy and pure like the ministering angels.) Each time that Rabbi Yosef Waltoch went to the home of the tzaddik Rabbi Meir Abuhatzera in Ashdod, Rabbi Meir – who was very familiar with his problems – would pray for him. Only then would Rabbi Yosef feel better, and only then, upon returning home, could he relieve himself. His sufferings were afflictions of love, for they did not prevent him from serving G-d.

On Iyar 20, 5743, Rabbi Yosef Waltoch was accompanied by two students as he went to pray by the graves of the tzaddikim. He would normally go and pray by the grave of the Tanna Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai as his Hilloula approached, not on the very day itself, because of the large crowds that gathered on that day. After praying in Meron, he headed towards an underground area, where he remained by himself for a long time. He did not feel well afterwards, and his companions returned with him to Sefat. There, upon reciting the blessing shehakol nehiye bidevaro (“by Whose word all things came to be”), Rabbi Yosef Waltoch rendered his soul to his Creator. May his merit protect us all.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Scoffers

My brother, realize that all this applies even if every word from a scoffer is true. Even in that case, it is forbidden for him to portray things to his listener in such a way that the subject is ridiculed.

When we think about this deeply, we see that one who ridicules others is also adding many lies to his statements. It often happens that scoffers, when they open their mouths to ridicule a speaker, say that he does not know what he is talking about, that he is just saying anything, and other derisive words, words that enter the heart of his listeners.

– Chafetz Chaim