

Job, Jonah, and Yom Kipur
Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger

- A) The Book of Job chapter 1, verses 1 – 3, 13 -22 (JPS English only edition pages 1339 – 1340)
 - 1) Verses 20 – 21
- B) Midrash Yalkut Shimoni , Proverbs, section 964

Rebbi Meir was studying in the beit midrash one shabat afternoon, when his two sons died suddenly. What did their mother [Beruriah] do? She left the two of them on the bed, and pulled a sheet over them. When shabat concluded, Rebbi Meir returned from the beit midrash and asked, "Where are my two sons?" Beruriah answered. "They went to the beit midrash."

"But I looked for them there," said Rebbi Meir, "and did not see them." She gave him a cup of wine and he concluded shabat with the recitation of havdalah. Again he asked, "Where are my sons?" She answered, "Sometimes they go to someone's house, they will soon return." She gave him to eat, and after he ate she said, "My teacher, I have a question to ask you." "Then ask your question," he said.

"At an earlier time, someone came and left a deposit with me, and now he has come to take it back; should I return it to him or not?" He answered, "Is not one who is holding a deposit obligated to return it its owner?" She said to him, "If this were not your position, I would not have been inclined to return it."

She took him by the hand, led him to the bedroom, and brought him close to the bed. She removed the sheet from upon them, and he saw the two of them lying there dead on the bed. He began to cry, "My children, my children, my teachers, my teachers." At that moment she said to him, "Did you not just say to me that we are obligated to return the deposit to its owner?"

Said Rebbi Haninah: With these words, Rebbi Meir was comforted.

- C) The Book of Job chapter 2, verses 7b – 10
- D) Talmud of the Land of Israel, Tractate Hagigah chapter 2, halacha 1

Said Rebbi Meir to his teacher Elisha ben Avuyah, "You have so much wisdom and yet you do not repent and return to your faith!" He answered, "I am not able." Rebbi Meir asked, "Why?" he answered, "For once I was passing before the Holy of Holies, riding upon my horse on Yom Kipur that fell on shabat, and I heard a heavenly voice emanating from the Holy of Holies and it was saying, "Return children in repentance –except for Elisha ben Ayuyah, who knew my power but nevertheless rebelled against me".

And that's all that happened, that's what brought this upon him?

Actually, once he was sitting and studying in the Valley of Ginosar and he saw a man ascend to the crown of a palm tree, reach into a nest, and snatch the mother bird that was roosting there upon her eggs. He descended the tree without incident. The next day, he saw another man ascend to the crown of the palm tree, and take away the eggs after sending the mother bird away. He descended, was bit by a snake, and died.

Elisha ben Avuyah said: 'It is written in the Torah, 'And you shall surely send the mother bird away and take the eggs, in order that it shall be good for you and you shall have a long life'. Where is the goodness for this man? Where is the long life that he was promised?'

And some say that he saw the tongue of Rabbi Yehudah the Baker who had been tortured and murdered by the Romans, in the mouth of a dog, dripping with blood, and he said: "This is Torah, and this is its reward?! This is the tongue that was engaged in study of the Torah all of its days! This is Torah, and this is its reward?! It appears to me that there is no reward and there is no ultimate resurrection of the dead."

- E) The Book of Jonah (JPS English only edition pages 1037 – 1040)
- 1) Chapter 1, verse 3 – We do not know why he is fleeing
 - 2) Verse 6 – He does not pray, and we don't know why
 - 3) Verse 10 – He tells the absolute truth, despite the danger that that entails
 - 4) Verse 12 – He suggests that they kill and refrains from asking for mercy
 - 5) Chapter 2, verse 8 – He prays only after 3 days and only when he feels he is about to die
 - 6) The prayer contains no contrition and no explicit plea for mercy, but only a vow that he will thank God. It contains no agreement to go to Nineveh
 - 7) Verse 11 – God says him for no good reason; he did nothing to deserve it
 - 8) Chapter 3, verse 4 – He makes no mention of any possible course of action to reverse their fate; no mention of teshuva
 - 9) Verse 10 – God relents, before they have really been given time to prove their sincerity
 - 10) Chapter 4, verse 2 – These are the divine attributes of mercy, recorded in Exodus 34 and repeated again and again in the Yom Kipur liturgy
 - 11) Verse 3 – Jonah is upset by God's unfair display of mercy. That is why he originally fled. He did not pray on the ship because he does not believe in mercy and does not want to ask for it – not from God and not from the sailors. That is why he did not pray for 3 days in the belly of the whale. Jonah is a man of justice and wants to live in a world of predictable law and justice.
 - 12) Verse 10 – God wants to teach Jonah about love and mercy. You did not work for the plant but still you are attached to it. He did not really need it; he could have found shelter elsewhere. It is human to become emotionally attached and to care for the things you become attached to.
 - 13) Verse 11 – God does not say that they repented and deserve to be saved, but rather that He loves His creations. Justice is not the sum total of the meaning of life on earth. Rather it is simply mercy, and without any rational legitimization or explanation. It is not even really about teshuva, but about forgiveness. Mercy, love, pity, grace, are at the essence of God, of His relationship to the world, and are what we should emulate.
- F) Summary
- 1) Job's wife, and Elisha ben Avuyah, and Jonah – strict justice
 - 2) Job, and Beruriah, and God – forgiveness, mercy and grace
 - 3) Not to say that justice is bad, but rather a balance must be struck
 - a) Midrash that God created the world through an amalgam of justice –din – and mercy - rachamim
- G) Tractate Rosh hashana, chapter 1, mishna 2 and the Babylonian Talmud on page 18a

All creatures pass before Him like *Bnei Maron*.

Like *Bnei Maron* – IN BAVEL it was translated, "like a flock of sheep" [Rashi: like lambs counted for the animal tithe, which are counted one by one as they pass through a small opening].

RESH LAKISH said: As in the ascent of Beit Maron [a textual variant reads "Beit Choron" – Rashi: a narrow pass where wayfarers had to proceed in single file, since the valley was deep on both sides].

RAV YEHUDA SAID IN THE NAME OF SHEMUEL: Like the troops of the House of David [Rashi: who pass in review one by one as they go out to battle].

- H) Sefer Vayikra chapter 16, verses 2 – 22, 29 -34
 - 1) Atonement is about forgiveness and pardon; it is the opposite of Justice and judgement
 - 2) A powerful symbolic ceremony of the sins of all of Israel being carried away into the wilderness; it requires confession and contrition, but not necessarily more than that
 - 3) A once a year cleansing to allow us to go forward unburdened by crippling guilt and to remind us that everything that we have is of God's grace
- I) Rosh haShana to Yom Kipur – from din to rachamim

ילקוט שמעוני תורה רמז תשפב

ר' יהודה בר נחמן בשם ריש לקיש פתח עלה אלהים בתרועה ה' בקול שופר בשעה שהקב"ה עולה ויושב על כסא דין בדין הוא עולה שנאמר עלה אלהים בתרועה, ובשעה שישראל נוטלין שופר ותוקעין הקב"ה עומד מכסא דין ויושב על כסא רחמים דכתיב ה' בקול שופר, ומתמלא עליהם רחמים ומרחם עליהם והופך להם מדת הדין למדת רחמים, אימתי בחדש השביעי,

ילקוט שמעוני תורה רמז תרמה

תקעו בחדש חדשו מעשיכם, שופר שפרו מעשיכם, אמר הקב"ה שפרתם מעשיכם לפני הריני נעשה לכם כשופר הזה מה השופר הזה מכניס בזה ומוציא בזה אף אני עומד מכסא דין ויושב על כסא רחמים ומרחם אתכם והופך לכם מדת הדין למדת הרחמים אימתי בחדש השביעי.

אוצר המדרשים (אייזנשטיין) פסיקתא עמוד 495

כתיב ועשיתם עולה לריח נחוח לה' פר בן בקר אחד ואיל אחד כבשים בני שנה שבעה תמימים וגו' ושעיר עזים אחד חטאת (במדבר כ"ט) הרי עשרה קרבנות כנגד עשרת ימי תשובה, ואם עשיתם תשובה בהם ואתם באים לפני ביה"כ נקיים אפילו היו לכם עונות מן הארץ ועד השמים אני מלבינם כשלג, כמו שנאמר אם יהיו חטאיכם כשלג ילבינו אם יאדימו כתולע כצמר יהיו (ישעיה א'). עשרה דברות הללו כנגד עשרה מאמרות שבהם ברא הקב"ה עולמו, שכל עוה"ז כולו עמד בדין ובדין נתחייב כלייה מפני עונותיו של אדם, והקב"ה עומד מכסא דין ויושב על כסא רחמים ומזכה עולמו

- 1) Rosh haShana is the Day of Judgment, but we can never be acquitted according to the rules of strict justice
 - 2) We ask for mercy, to be given another chance or just to be left off the hook
 - 3) Teshuva itself is a gift of mercy and even with teshuva we can rarely completely remake ourselves to be completely righteous. We are obligated for certain to try to the very best of our ability, but we will never fully accomplish what we should
 - 4) Yom Kipur is the Day of Mercy, and its very existence is a function of God's mercy
- J) The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, which were given on Yom Kipur and in reaction to sin, the sin of the Golden Calf
 - K) Broken Vessels Pleading to be Mended

Friends, on Yom Kippur there is nothing so whole as a broken heart. We must be broken; we must dig down deep inside and connect to our brokenness. We feel deep embarrassment as we stand in the presence of the Holy One Blessed be He and recall our failures. We must feel shame over what we have not accomplished. We must be humbled by all our mistakes and misdeeds.

But further, we are embarrassed by the overwhelming gifts we have received from God. We are dumfounded by the depths and extent of His grace. Everything we have and everything we are is

completely underserved. We must be completely engulfed by the existential anguish of the human condition on Yom Kippur. Even before we recall any of our sins we must be overwhelmed by a sense of inadequacy, of deserving nothing and receiving everything... and then squandering it with petty concerns, and foolish weaknesses.

And we must realize that even the day of Yom Kipur itself is an undeserved gift. The very day itself is another one of the unappreciated gifts showered upon us by heaven.

Then and only then, is there hope for purification. We are broken vessels pleading to be mended.

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