

א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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כי תשא

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משה's Wish

By Yakir Samuels

In last week's פרשה, תצוה, משה's name does not appear even once. From the birth of משה in פרשת שמות until his death in וזאת הברכה, this is the only פרשה where משה's name is not mentioned. The בעל הטורים (שמות כז:כ) says the reason for this omission is due to a פסוק in this week's פרשה, כי תשא, where it says: "וְעַתָּה אִם-תִּשָּׂא חַטָּאתָם וְאִם-אֵין מַחְנִי לָא מִסְפָּרָךְ אֲשֶׁר כָּתַבְתָּ:ּ", And now, if you forgive their sin—, and if not, erase me, from Your book which You have written. To put this in context, after the עגל הזהב, ה' is so angry He wants to destroy בני ישראל. משה then prays and pleads to ה' for Him to forgive the people of ישראל. משה goes so far to support בני ישראל that he tells ה' that if He will not forgive the people of ישראל, then ה' should erase משה from His book. This statement by משה asking to be erased from ה'’s book is a confusing one: What book is משה talking about?

רש"י says that the book is the תורה, and משה says that if ה' destroys the בני ישראל then he doesn't want to be mentioned because, "people will say about me that I was not worthy enough to pray effectively on their behalf for ה'’s mercy." However, this explanation, given by רש"י, is a challenging one. This is because it would seem from משה's response that he isn't acting selflessly, but rather seems concerned about his reputation, when we know that משה always strived to act in the most selfless way possible.

רמב"ן, however, says that the book here is not the book of the תורה, but rather the book of life. משה was saying, if you are going to kill them, then also kill me. Or maybe he was even saying take me instead of them. According to this interpretation, משה is acting completely selflessly and is even willing to sacrifice his life for בני ישראל.

ה' is moved by משה's plea and agrees to forgive בני ישראל. However, the בעל הטורים quotes from the משנה on גמרא which says "קללת חכם אפילו על תנאי היא באה" the curse of a scholar is always fulfilled, even if in a small way. Therefore, since משה said the words "erase me from your book," rather than take משה's life, his name was left out of one פרשה in the תורה.

There are a couple of lessons we can learn from this. First, according to the רמב"ן, משה's model of selflessness - his willingness to put his life up for his people shows that we should also try to be selfless and humble. Second, another idea we can try to learn from משה is to be dedicated to our family and friends and stand up for them when they are in trouble. Even though משה and ה' were very angry at בני ישראל, משה still took בני ישראל's side and tried to fulfill his job as a נביא and a leader. And lastly, we should be careful with our words, because even when we don't mean for them to be acted upon, they may still have consequences.

מחצית השקל The Birkas Rivka צדקה Fund and the

By Avi Berlove

Imagine walking into a bedroom, your bedroom which you share with four siblings. There are no beds, you sleep on the floor, no shelves, your belongings are scattered along with those of your siblings, and no table to work on. All you have is a hard, concrete floor. This is the reality for a portion of Israelis in today's world. This year, the Maimonides student-run צדקה fund is collecting for a charity that is working to deal with this urgent problem. Birkas Rifka is a Jerusalem based charity which trains unskilled, generally religious young men in the trade of carpentry and donates the custom furniture they create to needy Israeli families. Their efforts are of obvious importance, but when viewed through the lens of Rabbinic writings, two important goals achievable here become clear: breaking the dependency cycle of charity and donating to the poor of Israel.

Through active commitment to this charity, the key goal of צדקה in establishing self sufficiency is realizable. There are two main goals of charity in Jewish thought: giving the poor individual enough to meet his or her needs in the short term and giving the individual enough support to break out of poverty in the long term. Most of the צדקה related commandments do have to do with the first aspect of צדקה. לקט and שכחה, the laws of leaving forgotten grain for the poor, and פאה, the commandment to leave a certain portion of the field unharvested for the poor, all accomplish this first goal. These commandments are not going to return the gifts' recipient to financial stability, but they will keep him going. Yet, there is also a second goal in צדקה. The Rambam writes of the necessity of giving money to the poor is to provide for their basic needs, but he adds that the highest form of charity is giving, "כדי לחזק את ידו עד שלא יצטרך לבריות", "to strengthen [the poor individual's] hand so that he will not need human [support]." Thus, we see here the second aspect of צדקה. Charity funds should be directed to organizations, like Birkas Rifka, that allow the poor people involved to raise themselves from poverty.

Supporting the poor of ישראל, especially those of ירושלים, is another priority in צדקה. This is brought down in the הלכה as שולחן ערוך, perhaps because of the importance of maintaining a power balance between poor and rich with regards to our national future. This very idea is found in this week's פרשה, where we say "העשיר לא ירבה והדל לא ימעיט ממחצית השקל", that the rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a שקל. The דעת זקנים note that every Jew should give an equal amount to the national goal, in some circumstances, so that the rich will not tell the poor person that the former's share is greater. Rather, when the Jews undertake a collective task, be it משכן building in the times of משה or nation building today, everyone should have a chance to contribute on a level playing field. No individual should have access to a greater share of the outcome than another purely because of financial status. Therefore, by strengthening the poor of Israel, we build a stronger and more peaceful future for all Jews.

The tidbits of Rabbinic thought just mentioned show us how we can raise up our brethren and ourselves by correcting poverty long-term, especially in our national homeland of ישראל. The period between פסח and פורים is busy for charities, and let us, make it even busier yet. Through this holy endeavor, may we merit to say with full כוונה and honesty, "כָּל דֹּכָפִין - יֵיטִי וְיִכַּל", "Let all who are hungry come and eat," speedily in our days.

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