

Eikev 2017

1.

Tests

“Who feeds you manna in the wilderness, which your forefathers knew not, in order to afflict you and in order to test you, to do good for you in your end.” (8, 16)

"המאכלך מן במדבר אשר לא ידעון אבותיך למען ענתך ולמען נסתך להיטבך באחריתך."

Why are we tested? The Chafetz Chaim explains that **we are tested in order that our dedication and loyalty to Hashem will be properly identified. Tests will uplift us. We will grow after passing the test that we were faced with. When Hashem wants someone to spiritually ascend, he tests them. Hashem only tests those who he knows could handle it.** In fact, the Berashis Raba says that one doesn't become great until Hashem tests him.

This shtims (coincides) with what we discussed in parshas Tetzaveh. The pasuk states "וְאָתָה תְצַוֶּה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ שֶׁמֶן זֵית זָךְ כֶּתִית לַמָּאֹר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד." "Now you should command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure olive oil, pressed, for illumination, to kindle a lamp continually." (27, 20) The Nachalas Tzvi (page 224) explains that the menorah symbolizes that we need to learn purely lishma (for the sake of heaven). **Sometimes we are 'pressed' financially. However, we should not let this get to us. We should still diligently learn, eventually everything will work out.**

That's why the pasuk uses the word "pressed", to teach us that even in situations where we feel 'crushed', we should continue to learn so that the candle will remain lit.

The pasuk states (Megilas Esther 8, 16) "the Jews had light." The Gemara in Megilah (16b) explains that the light mentioned in the pasuk refers to the Torah! "ליהודים היתה אורה ושמחה וששון (ויקר" אמר רב יהודה "אורה" זו תורה, וכן הוא אומר "כי נר מצוה ותורה אור".

There is a fundamental question that has plagued the minds of many great philosophers. Why do good things happen to wicked people and why do bad things happen to righteous people? The Gemara in Berachos (7a) relates that Moshe asked Hashem this question. Hashem responded that bad will happen to someone who isn't truly righteous. However, someone who is truly righteous will not encounter bad. Rashi (Berachos 5a, Kiddushin 39 and other places) offers another answer. He explains that **righteous people get punished in this world in order that they will get more reward in the world to come. Wicked people on the other hand get punished in this world in order that they will suffer more in the world to come.**

We can improve from tests in many ways that would have been impossible to grow otherwise. Even though many times when one gets tested it looks like the outcome is poor, nevertheless, the test is truly for his ultimate benefit.

2.

Tefila

“It will be that if you hearken to My commandments that I commanded you today, to love Hashem, your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” (11, 13)

"והיה אם שמע תשמעו אל מצותי אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום לאהבה את יקוק אלהיכם ולעבדו בכל לבבכם ובכל נפשכם."

The Gemara in Tanis (2a) darshens this pasuk and says that davening is called an avoda (service) of the heart. (תניא לאהבה את ה' אלהיכם ולעבדו בכל לבבכם, איזו היא עבודה שהיא בלב? הוי אומר זו תפלה.) Rabbi Yitzchak Pinchas Goldwasser (Avodas Levav pages 139-141) explains that we must serve Hashem just as a slave serves his master. This slave helps and gives to his master. How do we give to Hashem by davening? On the contrary, aren't we asking from Hashem? The Mabit (Beis Elokim) asks another question based on a Gemara. The Gemara in Berachos (34a) quotes Rabbi Chanina who says that the first three berachos of Shemoneh Esray are comparable to a servant who orders his praise in front of his master. The middle berachos of Shemoneh Esray are similar to a servant who asks for his pay check. The last berachos are similar to a servant who received his reward and departs from his master. It seems from this Gemara that this servant anticipates that he will immediately be answered. This Gemara seemingly contradicts another Gemara. The Gemara doesn't recommend someone to expect an immediate answer to his Shemoneh esray. That being so, what is the explanation of the previous Gemara that said that the last berachos are similar to a servant who received his reward and departs from his master? Lastly, why do we constantly request Hashem for the same matters? Aren't we upsetting Hashem? Shouldn't we get the hint that since we weren't answered after asking many times, we will not get answered? The lesson is that **we shouldn't be completely focused on whether our prayers are answered or not. The main reason we pray is not in order that we will be answered, rather we pray in order to demonstrate that Hashem is the one fitting for us to pray to. Davening essentially demonstrates that we are lacking. Our davening symbolizes that the only way to get what we want is from Hashem. In other words, we don't daven in order that we will get that which we ask for; rather, it is in order that we will realize that Hashem can provide for us with what we are asking.** It is for this reason that before Shemoneh esray we ask 'O Lord, open my lips that my mouth may declare Your praise.' ('אדני שפתי תפתח ופי יגיד תהלתך.') The requests we ask Hashem for are only a means to an end. They help us praise Hashem and demonstrate that it is only because of His omnipotent limitless powers that we are able to survive. That's why tefila is called an avoda. The mespallel (one who davenes) isn't taking, rather he is giving to Hashem. How? His prayer demonstrates that Hashem is the only one who is able to provide for us. We aren't anticipating our prayers to be answered; rather, we are praising Hashem. We certainly aren't upsetting Hashem by continually praying, rather we are gladdening Hashem via our praises. We find this concept that Hashem provides and is the master of everything in another Gemara as well. The Gemara in Berachos (40b) quotes Rabbi Yochanan who says that any beracha that doesn't have the word מלך (king) in it isn't considered a beracha. What about the first beracha of Shemoneh esray that doesn't have מלך? Saying אלקי אברהם (the God of Avraham) is like saying מלך since Avraham publicized and made Hashem great.

This is the deeper message behind this pasuk and the purpose of davening. We must strive to reach the realization that we are nothing without Hashem.