

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter VIII: Vayishlach (Gen. 32:4–36:43)

Essay 5. A prayer against uninterrupted hardship

מדרש רבה על פסוק "וימתן בנד-עבדיו עדר עדר לבדו", מהו "ורנח תשימו". אמר יעקב לפני הקב"ה רבוננו של עולם אם יהיו צרות באות על בני לא תביא אותם זו אחר זו, אלא הרנח להם מצרותיהם עכ"ל. צריך עיון מה ענגן תפלה זו, ומה סלקא דעתא הנה שביאם הקב"ה כולם בפעם אחת עד שיצטרף יעקב להתפלל על זה.

There is a **Midrash Rabbah** on the verse, **“These he put in the charge of his servants, drove by drove, and he told his servants, ‘Go on ahead, and keep a distance between droves.’”**¹

What is [the meaning of] “keep a distance”? Jacob said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: “Master of the universe, if troubles will befall my descendants, do not bring them one after another, but rather, create distance for them between their troubles.”

- Gen. Rabbah 75:13

Investigation is required what the meaning of this prayer is, and what could have led one to think that the Holy One, Blessed be He, would bring all the troubles upon them at once, so that Jacob would need to pray about this.

ונראה שנה תלוי במחלוקת רש"י ותוספות בקדושין פרק קמא וכל העושה מצנה אחת יתירה על זכויותו מטבין לו? ורמיהו: כל שזכויותו מרובין מעונותיו – מריעין לו, ודומה כמי ששחרף כל התורה כלה ולא שיר ממנה אפילו אות אחת. וכל שעונותיו מרובין מזכויותו – מטבין לו, ודומה כמי שקיים כל התורה כלה ולא חסר ממנה אפילו אות אחת. אמר אבני: מתניתין דעבדין ליה יום טב ניום ביש.

And it seems that this depends on the dispute between Rashi and Tosafot in *Kiddushin*, chapter one, where the Gemara states:

Does anyone who performs one mitzvah in addition to his [other] merits have goodness bestowed upon him [in this world]?

[The Gemara] raises a contradiction [from a *Baraita*]: Anyone whose merits are greater than his sins is punished with suffering [in order to cleanse

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¹ Gen. 32:17.

his sins in this world and enable him to merit full reward for his mitzvot in the World-to-Come]. [Due to this punishment,] **he appears [to observers] like one who burned the entire Torah without leaving even one letter remaining of it.**

[Conversely,] **anyone whose sins are greater than his merits has goodness bestowed upon him [in this world], and he appears like one who has fulfilled the entire Torah without it lacking even one letter.**

Abaye said: [When] **the Mishnah** [said that he is rewarded, it means] **that he has a good day and a bad day.** [I.e., he is rewarded for the mitzvot he performs, but he sometimes has bad days which cleanse him of his sins. The *Baraita* is referring to those bad days.]

- Kiddushin 39b

וּפְרֵשׁ רַשִׁי יוֹם טוֹב וְיוֹם בִּישׁ, מִי שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוָה אַחַת וְתִירָה, דִּהְיֵי רוּבָא זְכוֹת, מִתְקַנֵּן לוֹ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה יוֹם טוֹב שְׁנֵפְרָעִין מִמֶּנּוּ עוֹנְתֵיו. וְזֶהוּ תִיּוֹן יוֹם טוֹב לוֹ לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, וְכָל שֶׁעוֹנְתֵיו מְרוּבִין מְזְכוֹתֵיו דְקָתְנִי מְרִיעִין לוֹ הֵינּוּ דְעֵבְדִין לִיהֵ הַזְּמַנֵּת יוֹם בִּישׁ, שְׁמֻשְׁלֵמִין לוֹ שְׂכָר מִצְוֹתָיו כְּאִן לְהֵיּוֹת מִתּוֹקֵן לְיוֹם רַע לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

Rashi explains “a good day and a bad day”: **One who performs one additional mitzvah, which increases his merits beyond his sins, they prepare a good day for him in this world, meaning he is punished for his sins in this world. This is the preparation of a good day for him in the World-to-Come.**

Anyone whose sins outweigh their merits, as stated by the Mishnah, he is treated poorly, meaning that a bad day is prepared for him. He is rewarded for his mitzvot here in this world, so that he is prepared for a bad day in the World-to-Come.

וְהַתּוֹסְפוֹת הַקָּשׁוּ עַל פִּירוּשׁ זֶה, וּפְרוּשׁ תּוֹסְפוֹת מִתְנִיתִין דְעֵבְדִין לִיהֵ יוֹם טוֹב וְיוֹם בִּישׁ תְּרַוּוּיָהּ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, שְׁלִפְעָמִים מִי שֶׁזְכוֹתָיו מְרוּבִין מִעוֹנֹתָיו עֵבְדִין לִיהֵ יוֹם בִּישׁ וְהֵינּוּ מְרִיעִין לוֹ דְבְרֵייתָא, דְבְּאוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם דּוּמָה כְּאִלוֹ שְׂרַף כָּל הַתּוֹרָה כְּלָה, וְכֵן מִי שֶׁעוֹנְתֵיו מְרוּבִין לְפָעָמִים עוֹשִׂים לוֹ יוֹם טוֹב וּבְאוֹתוֹ יוֹם דּוּמָה כְּאִלוֹ קִים כָּל הַתּוֹרָה כּוֹלָה, אֲבָל רַב יָמָיו שֶׁל צַדִּיק שְׂרוּי בְּטוֹבָה עַכ"ל.

Tosafot challenge this explanation. Tosafot explain: **The Mishnah, which states that they treat him with both a good day and a bad day, refers to both of them happening in this world. Sometimes, when a person’s merits exceed his sins, he is treated with a bad day, and this is in accordance with the statement in the *Baraita*, that on that day, it is as if they have burned the entire Torah.**

Similarly, when a person’s sins exceed their merits, sometimes he experiences a good day, and on that day, it is as if he has fulfilled the entire Torah.

But the majority of a righteous person’s days are spent in goodness, and the majority of a wicked person’s days are spent suffering.

נמצא לפירוש רש"י ז"ל שהחוטא פשיט לו לירש העולם הבא מריעין לו בעולם הזה ודומה כאלו שרף את התורה כדי להזמין לו יום טוב לעולם הבא, וכשיש לו לירש גהינם מטיבין לו בעולם הזה. ולפי דעת התוספות אף החוטא שיטש לו לירש גן עדן מטיבין לו אף בעולם הזה אלא שמריעין לו גם כן באיזה ימים, וכן מי שיטש לו לירש גהינם מריעין לו אף בעולם הזה אלא שמטיבין לו גם כן באיזה ימים.

According to the explanation of Rashi, of blessed memory, the sinner who is destined to inherit the World-to-Come, because his mitzvot outnumber his sins, is treated with severity in this world, and it is as if he has burned the entire Torah, in order to prepare for him a good day in the World-to-Come. But if he is destined for Gehinnom, because his sins outnumber his mitzvot, they treat him well in this world.

But according to Tosafot, even the sinner who is destined to inherit Gan Eden, because his mitzvot outnumber his sins, is treated well in this world, but they also treat him with severity on some days. Similarly, one who is destined for Gehinnom is treated with severity in this world, but on some days, they treat him well.

ויעקב התפלל לפני הקב"ה אם יהיו הצרות באות על בני לא תביא אותם זו אחר זו, כלומר ליתן להם בעולם הזה תמיד רעה כפי דעת רש"י ע"ה הואיל שיטש להם לנפות לעולם הבא כי כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא, אלא יהיה כפירוש התוספות הרוח להם מצרותם תן להם יום טוב ניום ביש.

And Jacob prayed before the Holy One, Blessed be He: "If troubles are to come upon my children, do not bring them one after another," as if to say, to give them constant hardship in this world, according to the interpretation of Rashi, may he rest in peace. This is because they are destined to inherit the World-to-Come, as "all of Israel has a share in the World-to-Come."² Rather, let it be according to the explanation of Tosafot, "relieve them from their troubles," meaning give them both a good day and a bad day in this world, rather than uninterrupted hardship.

וענין צריך טעם מה ראה יעקב להתפלל כך ונקא בשעה הזאת ובזמן הזה. ויש לומר דאמרינן במדרש רבה על הפסוק "ויפרץ האיש מאד מאד", מלמד שגפרצה לו פרצה מעין העולם הבא עכ"ל. ואמר יעקב, מתחלה פשראיתי שהקב"ה נותן לי טובה בשפע גדול הייתי סבור שמא בשביל שאני צדיק גמור ואמרינן בברכות צדיק וטוב לו זהו צדיק גמור.

Still, it requires explanation why Jacob specifically prayed this way at this moment and time. It can be said that it is explained in *Midrash Rabbah* (Gen. 73:11) on the verse, "And the man became exceedingly prosperous,"³ that this teaches that a breach was made for him that was a microcosm of the World-to-Come. I.e., Jacob was so blessed with wealth that it was like a peek into the World-to-Come.

Jacob said: At first, when I saw that the Holy One, Blessed be He, was giving me abundant good, I thought it was because I was a completely righteous man. It is said in *Berachot* (7a), "The righteous have it good," this is referring to a completely righteous person.

² Sanhedrin 7a.

³ Gen. 30:43.

אמנם עתה שאני רואה שבאה לידי צרה זו של עשו ואני מוצרך לאבד ולחסר ממוני, שמע מינה שיש לי איזה חטא, או בשביל מצות כבוד אב ואם שלא שמרתי כל השנים הללו, או לפי שאחרתי נדרי כמו דאיתא במדרש תנחומא, ואילו הנה כפרש רש"י לא הנה לי לזכות לכל אותה טובה, אלא על פרוץ צריך לומר שאתה מתנהג עמי כפירוש התוספות דעבדין ליה יום טוב ויום ביש, ובנדאי שלפעמים אתה נוהג כפי פירוש רש"י, שהרי אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים.

However, Jacob thought to himself, now that I see that this trouble has come upon me from Esau, and I am forced to lose and diminish my possessions, I hear from this that I must have some sin. Perhaps it is because I did not properly honor my father and mother all these years,⁴ or because I delayed my vow to bring an offering upon returning to the Land of Israel,⁵ as is stated in *Midrash Tanhuma* (parashat Vayishlach, siman 8). If it were as Rashi explains, I would not have been deserving of all that goodness.

Therefore, it must be that You are acting toward me according to Tosafot's interpretation, that sometimes You give both a good day and a bad day in this world, for I have great wealth, but sometimes I suffer.

Certainly, at times You act according to Rashi's explanation, because both views are the words of the living G-d. I.e., whenever there is a dispute between Torah scholars, both opinions can be valid. Thus, Jacob felt that G-d was treating him according to the opinion of Tosafot, but he was concerned lest G-d treat his descendants according to the opinion of Tosafot. He prayed that G-d would treat his descendants the same as him, according to Tosafot.

ואין להקשות דאם כן משוא פנים יש כאן שהרי כתיב "הצור תמים פעלו כי כל דרכיו משפט", ועל פרוץ צריך לומר שמי שיש לו הרבה עבירות אבל מכל מקום זכותיו מרובים מעונותיו, אתה נוהג עמו כפרש רש"י הואיל שיש לו הרבה עבירות. אבל מי שכולו צדיק ואין לו רק שמים או שלשה עבירות דהיינו מיעוטא דמיעוטא, אז אתה נוהג עמו כפירוש התוספות, כמו שעשית עמי. ומעתה אני מתפלל שתמיד בכל עת תנהוג עם בניך כדאפילו שיהנה להם הרבה עבירות, שאף על פי שגם פרוש רש"י אמת, מכל מקום זכות תפלה זו תועיל לקרוע הגזר דין ולהפוך הדיו לרחמים לכללות עם ישראל.

One should not ask, "Is there favoritism here?" in asking why G-d treats some people according to Rashi's view and others according to the view of Tosafot, for it is written, "The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are justice."⁶ Therefore, we must say that when a person has many transgressions but nonetheless, his merits outweigh his sins, You act with him according to Rashi's explanation, since he has many transgressions.

But when someone is completely righteous and has only two or three transgressions, a very small number, then You act with him according to Tosafot's explanation, as You did with me.

From now on, I pray that You always act this way with Your children, even if they have many transgressions. For although Rashi's explanation is also true, this prayer of mine will help tear up the decree and transform the judgment into mercy for the entire Jewish people.

⁴ See Rashi on Gen. 37:34.

⁵ See Gen. 28:20–22.

⁶ Deut. 32:4.

אמנם על היחיד לא התפלל יעקב אך אמרו ו"ל "וְחַנּוּתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אָחֹז" אף על פי שאינו הגון "וְרַחֲמֵי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אָרַחֵם" אף על פי שאינו כדאי. ואף כּאן יש להקשות שַׁנְרָאָה דַּיֵּשׁ מִשׁוּא פָּנִים בְּדָבָר. ולפי דרכנו נחא, שמי שיש לו הרבה עבירות אבל זכותיו מרובים כנזכר לעיל שהדין הוא להתנהג עמו כפרש רש"י, אם ינדרז עצמו בתפלה ותחנה אז "וְחַנּוּתִי" אף על פי שאינו הגון. ומשום הכי אמר "וְחַנּוּתִי" לשון "וְאֶתְחַנֵּן", אבל מי שיש לו מעט עבירות שהם מיעוטא דמיעוטא, אפילו בלא התפלה אני מרחם עליו ונוהג עמו כפירוש התוספות. ובזה מתורץ הפסל של "וְחַנּוּתִי . . . וְרַחֲמֵי."

However, Jacob did not pray for the individual, but for the Nation as a whole. But the Sages said on the verse, “And I will show favor to whom I show favor,”⁷ this means even if one is not deserving, and regarding the continuation of that verse, “And I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy,” this means even though one is not worthy.⁸

Here, it may still seem that there is favoritism in this matter. How can there be justice if G-d is giving leniency to someone who is unworthy? **According to our explanation, this is understandable: if a person has many sins but his merits outweigh them, as mentioned earlier, the rule is to treat him according to Rashi’s interpretation,** whereby he would receive uninterrupted suffering in this world. **However, if he prays and entreats, then “I will show favor” even though he is not deserving.** I.e., he will have good days and bad days, as per Tosafot. **Because of this, G-d said, “and I will show favor” [וְחַנּוּתִי] [ve’chanoti], which is the language of “And I pleaded [וְאֶתְחַנַּן] [va’etchanan].”** I.e., the similarity of the terms indicates that G-d will extend favor to one who pleads with Him through prayer.

But someone who has only a few sins, which are a very small number, even without prayer, I have mercy on him and treat him according to the interpretation of Tosafot. This explains the apparent repetition of “I will show favor” and “I will have mercy,” the first term alludes to prayer, and means that one with many sins will receive favor only if he prays, while the second term means that one with very few sins will receive favor even without prayer.

ויובן נמי מאי דאמרין בסוף מסכת ברכות אמר ר' אבין הלוי מאי דכתיב "וענף ה' ביום צרה ישגבך שם אלהי יעקב", "אלהי יעקב" ולא אלהי אברהם ויצחק, מפאן לבעל הקורה שיקנס בעוביה של קורה, ופרש רש"י כף יעקב סבל צער גידול בנים והרבה בתפלות, אמטו להכי "ישגבך שם אלהי יעקב", שהוא נקרא בעל הקורה ועליו תלוי לזכות את ישראל.

We can also understand what is stated at the end of tractate *Berachot*: Rabbi Avin haLevi said, “What is the meaning of what is written, ‘The L-rd will answer you on the day of trouble; the name of the G-d of Jacob will set you [securely] on high’ (Ps. 20:2)? [Why] the G-d of Jacob, and not the G-d of Abraham and Isaac. From here, [we learn that] one who owns a beam should approach [carrying] the thick portion of the beam.” I.e., when two people carry a beam, the owner should carry the heavy end.⁹

Rashi explains: Jacob endured the hardships of raising children and many prayers. Therefore, “the name of the G-d of Jacob will set you [securely] on high,” for Jacob is called the “owner of the beam,” and it is through him that the merit of Israel is sustained.

⁷ Ex. 33:19.

⁸ Berachot 7a.

⁹ Berachot 64a.

ולפי דרכנו אתי שפיר "ישגבך שם אלהי יעקב", משום דייעקב התפלל שיהיה כפירוש התוספות אם יהיו צרות באות על בני נכו'. משום הכי אמר "יענה ה' ביום צרה" ונרניס לה "אלהי יעקב". וכדי שיהיה ניפר הרניח, אף "ישגבך", שיעלה לגדולה. אמנם אברהם ויעקב לא בקשו על זה, אלא אברהם בירר את המלכות ואת הגלות ויעקב תבע ייסורין, כנראה מהמדרש רבה על הפסוק "ויהי כייזקן יעקב", ולא התפלל ליתן ריח באמצע הייסורין והצרות. ועוד אמרין במדרש על הפסוק "והיה כאשר תריד", אמר ר' יוסי בן חלפתא אם ראת אחיה פורק עולה של תורה מעליו גזור עליו שמדים ואתה שולט. הדא הוא דכתיב "כייאתה אבינו" וכו' ויעקב היכן הוא מי שהיה אומר גזור עליו שמדים אתה מתקיפו לאבות.

According to our explanation, “the name of the G-d of Jacob will protect you” makes sense, because Jacob prayed that it should be according to the explanation of Tosafot that “if troubles will befall my descendants, do not bring them one after another, but rather, create distance for them between their troubles.”

Therefore, it says, “The L-rd will answer you on the day of trouble,” and “the G-d of Jacob” will protect you. To make it clear that this is a benefit, it says “He will set you [securely] on high,” that he will elevate you to greatness.

However, Abraham and Isaac did not pray for this. On the contrary, when given a choice between his descendants being punished in Gehinnom or in exile, Abraham chose punishment by the kingdoms and decrees of exile.

Isaac requested suffering in this world, as is evident from the *Midrash Gen. Rabbah* 65:9 on the verse, “When Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see . . .”¹⁰ He did not pray for relief during suffering and troubles.

It is also said in the *Midrash Gen. Rabbah* 67:7 on the verse, “Yet by your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you grow restive, you shall break his yoke from your neck” (Gen. 27:40): Rabbi Yosi ben Chalafta said, this means, if you see your brother casting off the yoke of the Torah, and you have the power to dominate him, you should impose upon him a decree of persecution. This is what is meant by the verse, “Surely, You are our Father, though Abraham regard us not, and Israel recognize us not.”¹¹ But where is Isaac in this verse? Regarding one who says, “Impose upon [Jacob] a decree of persecution,” should he be mentioned with the other patriarchs? I.e., because Isaac accepted suffering, rather than praying for relief, he is not mentioned.

Thus, Abraham and Isaac sought suffering so that the Jewish people would be spared from Gehennom, following the opinion of Rashi. In contrast, Jacob followed the opinion of Tosafot, and prayed for a break between intervals of suffering.

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¹⁰ Gen. 27:1.

¹¹ Isaiah 63:16.