

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI

Torah as second nature

If in My statutes you walk... (Lev. 26:3). Rashi cites our sages that walking in the statutes mean “toiling in Torah study.” Why is walking the appropriate metaphor for the toil of Torah? Rabbi Yosef Rosen, the Rogatchover Gaon in *Tzafnas Paneach* writes about the idea of “walking” (as a method to acquire a field) that Maimonides in his commentary to the Mishnah in the beginning of *Bava Basra* understands that “walking” can only work to acquire that which is already ones own. This means that if someone owns a field in partnership with another person, and they decide to divide it between themselves, only in certain such situations can a persons part of the field be decided through this method of walking. The Rogatchover explains that this is the foundation behind the concept of “toiling in Torah”. When a person toils in Torah study, he is not acquiring something foreign to him, but rather simply discovering his relationship with the Torah on a deeper level, that was always there beneath the surface. It is for this reason that the method of acquisition of “walking” is the best possible metaphor for Torah study. See also the Midrash (*Vayikra* 35:1) which ties the passage “If in My statutes you walk...” to the verse “Upon considering my path, and I returned my feet to Your testimonies” (Ps. 119). The Midrash explains that King David said, “Master of the Universes, each and every day, I would plan upon going to one place or another so, yet my feet continue to bring me to the Synagogues and Halls of Study.” The commentators explain that the word “foot” (רגל) in the verse is related to the concept of habit (הרגל in Hebrew). Walking is a habit to the foot has been accustomed and represented the most natural type of habit. The Jewish People are expected to reach the point that studying Torah becomes like second-nature. Just like their feet naturally walk, they should be “naturally” drawn to the study and toil of Torah, such that without even thinking about it, their natural state of being is that they are sitting and studying Torah. Thus the Torah talks about “walking” in the Torah, since the goal is to get to the stage where our deep connection to Torah influences us to such an effect that we naturally fulfill it.

The Segulah of Torah Study

And I will give your rain in their time... (Lev. 26:4). Rabbi Chaim Palagi (*Nefesh Chaim*, Maareches Mem 25:1) cites the words of the *Tosafos* (to Shabbos 156a) that a great merit has the power to change one’s destiny not matter what may have been already determined by *mazal*. He explains that a “great merit” refers specifically to the

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI

merit of Torah which is called “great”, as the Mishnah says (Avos 6:4): “Torah is so great that it gives life to those who do it”. Of course, this only refers to those who study Torah for its sake (as is evident in *Shabbos* 64a). We also see this idea in Rabbeinu Nissim (*Pesachim* 17a in the Alfasi pagination) who explains Rava (*Pesachim* 50b) as saying that only when somebody follows the Torah its own sake does Hashem change the natural astrological system in his favor. Similarly, the *Pri Megadim* (*Orach Chaim, Eshel Avraham* 47 and *Eliyahu Rabbah* there) explains that when we refer to the merit of Torah, this refers to those who toil in the Torah and work hard at studying it in depth. With this in mind, we can understand Rabbi Meir’s statement (in Avos 6:1) which reads: “Whoever toils in Torah for its sake, merits many things.” Those “many things” refer to the three elements which are said to be determined through astrology (i.e., children, lifespan, and sustenance) which are bettered on one’s behalf if he devotes himself to Torah Study. See also Drashos Maharanach (to Parshas Emor) and Rabbi Meir Di Lonzano’s *Derech Chaim* (p. 115b).

I can’t get no satisfaction

And you shall eat your bread to satisfaction (Lev. 26:13). The work *Degel Machane Efraim* writes in the name of his grandfather an explanation of the passage, “The humble will eat and be satisfied” (*Tehillim* 22:27). He explains this passage in light of what the Talmud teaches (*Gittin* 70a): “A person shall always eat and drink one-third less than he needs to, so that if he becomes angry, he can always eat and drink his fill, using that distraction to abate his anger. Accordingly, he explains that humble people, who due to their humility do not get angry are allowed to fill themselves to satisfaction when they first sit down to eat because they will not need to use filling themselves as a way of stopping their anger.

Better Bread Bakers

And ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will return the weight of your bread, and you will eat and you will not become satisfied (Lev. 26:26). Rashi explains that according to this curse, the ten women will all bake in one oven because they will not have enough firewood to supply ovens for each woman. Rabbi Pinchas Horowitz in *Panim Yafos* explains that even so, there is actually an advantage to this sort of arrangement, as the Talmud (*Beitzah* 17a) advises that when one bakes, one should fill the oven with breads because bread bakes better when the oven is full. He further writes that when bread is baked better, it weighs less than it

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI

did in dough form, but if it is not baked as well, it is as heavy as it was when still dough. Based on this, Rabbi Horowitz interprets the meaning of the passage at hand as saying that “and they will return the weight of your bread” means that the breads will return from the full over at the same weight as they were when they were originally dough. In other words, the effects of this curse will be that even though usually baking multiple breads in one oven will cause the bread to come out lighter, the curse will cause these breads to still be heavy like dough, which are heavier to digest. This is in line with what the Abudraham writes in his commentary to the *Haggadah Shel Pesach* that slavemasters used to feed their slaves *matzah* because it was harder to digest and therefore would leave the slaves less hungry for the duration of their digestion.

Unsuitable Marriages

And you shall eat the flesh of your sons (Lev. 26:29). The Chizzkuni explains that this curse refers to those who people who accepted money in order marry of their children to unsuitable families. A similar approach is suggested by the Sheloh in interpreting the verse in Eicha “the hands of merciful mothers cooked their own children”. He explains that mothers who are so overly merciful to their children to the point where they fail to educate them in moral behavior are actually running their children, and it is to feed their own desires. One's children are not there so that their parents can have an accessory. Your children belong to Hashem. One must be careful not to “consume those children” to fill one's own emotional and psychological needs. Whether the parents want to have “my son the Doctor” should not be the defining factor in a child's life. Children who are pressured into lives, careers and marriages that they do not desire only to fill some need of a parent, have been cooked alive for consumption by that parent, and the tragedy of such an experience is unspeakable.

The Curse of Purim

And they will confess their sin and the sins of their fathers in their betrayal with which they have betrayed Me and even walked with Me by chance (Lev. 26:40). The work *Dorshei Reshumos* notes that the final letters of the phrase “in their betrayal with which they have betrayed Me and even” (במעלם אשר מעלו בי ואף) can spell out the word Purim (פורים). It seems that this can be understood by the next passage which reads, “And I will bring you to the land of your enemies, or then your uncircumcised heart will be subdued, and then your sin will be appeased”. This curse

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI

refers to the concept of Hashem “hiding” Himself from the Jewish People, and seemingly leaving their fate up to “chance”. This phenomenon is best reflected in the fight against Amalek typified by the holiday of Purim. Indeed, it was by seemingly “by chance” that Amalek first attacked the Jewish People (אשר קרך), and it was seemingly “by chance” that Haman chose the date of his Final Solution (i.e. via lottery).

Why mention our fathers' sin?

And they will confess their sin and the sins of their fathers... (Lev. 26:40). The *Bnei Yissaschar* in his *Maggid Taalumab* (*Brachos* 16b) explains this passage, as well as the liturgic confession formula which says “...but we and are our fathers sinned...” Why do we always mention our sins **and** the sins of our fathers? One way of answering this is that we must always confess our father’s sins along with our sins because we are taking responsibility for our own sins. We mention our father’s sins to show that we are not embarrassed of being their children, because our forefathers are not the causes of our sins. Even though our fathers may have also sinned, we do not hide behind that fact and say that we are really victims because our fathers sinned and that sealed our fate to sin as well. Instead, we recognize that even though our fathers sinned, this does not, *per force*, mean that we must sin. And if we did sin, it was our own choices which led us there—independent of our father’s sins. *Maggid Talumah* explains that the sinful deeds of one’s **descendants** can have a detrimental effect on their **ancestors** and might cause them to sin. Meaning – since these descendants were destined to come from those people, they were unable to entirely perfect themselves and thus fell prey to sin! Because of this, when one confesses his own sins he must also mention the possibility that his sins caused his fathers to also sin. The same idea appears in the work *Pas’shegen HaDas* (*Chiflayim L’Sushiah*, pg. 104) who writes that just as ancestors can affect the nature of their descendants, so can descendants affect the nature of their ancestors. He explains that sometimes the descendants—the branches of a tree—can become rotten and that will spread to the whole tree, and sometimes the ancestors—the roots of the tree—can become rotten and that will spread to the whole tree. However, he limits this phenomenon to a separation of four generations. For this reason, the Torah says that Hashem will visit the sins of the forefathers upon his descendants for up to four generations (if they follow in their ancestor’s sinful path), but beyond that the descendants are not influenced by their ancestors.

Rabbi Elchanan Shoff
PARSHAS BECHUKOSAI

The Curse after the Confession

And they will confess their sin and the sins of their fathers in their betrayal with which they have betrayed Me and even walked with Me ‘by chance’. I too will walk with you ‘by chance’, and I will bring you to the land of your enemies, or then your uncircumcised heart will be subdued, and then your sin will be appeased. (Lev. 26:40-41). Rabbi Efraim Lunshitz in *Kli Yakar* asks the obvious question: If the Jews already confessed their sin, then that means that they began the *teshuvah* process. Why, then, would Hashem walk with them “by chance”? He answers that this is because we are talking about a case in which they continue to betray Hashem even though they are confessing their sin. Even when they are admitting their misdeeds and recognize that those misdeeds are the causes of their downfall, they still continue to commit those very sins. He writes that in his times too there were certain sins which everybody readily acknowledged were the causes of various calamities that affected the Jewish People, yet they never reverted from doing those sins. They simply paid lip service by confessing them, but otherwise did nothing about these issues. They are like those who immerse in a *mikvah* while holding a dead insect; they never even gave the *mikvah* a chance to purify them. Alternatively, he answers that we are talking about people who confess their sins, but do not realize the severity of their own sins, they think that the calamities which befall them are because of their own sins compounded with their ancestors’ sins, because of this they do not take the situation seriously enough to stop sinning and their confession too is not serious.

Donations bring Salvation

A man—when he verbalizes... (Lev. 27:2). Rabbi Efraim Lunshitz in *Kli Yakar* explains that this passage is juxtaposed to the curses in order to teach that the Jewish People promise to give donations in times of distress, like Yaakov Avinu promised to bring sacrifices if Hashem saved him. We differ from Yaakov Avinu in some ways, because for Yaakov Avinu even when the period of distress passed and things were good, he never deviated from the path of the good and righteous. Historically, people often only promised to give donations in times of distress, but when a distressful period would pass, they would regret having offered these important commitments and revert to former incorrect ways.