

A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

We Are What We Will

RABBI
NOSSON
WIGGINS




The Talmud in Rosh Hashana (16b) teaches that three Books of Judgment are opened before Hashem on Rosh Hashana. The righteous are immediately written and signed into the Book of Life and the wicked are written and signed into the Book of Death. However, the judgment of the *beinonim* (lit. the ones in the middle) is suspended until Yom Kippur. If they are *zoché* (deemed worthy) by Yom Kippur then they are written and signed into the Book of Life. However, if not, they are written and signed into the Book of Death.

Rav Yitzchak Blazer (also known as Rav Itzele Peterburger), one of great disciples of Rav Yisrael Salanter, observes that the word *zoché* implies that the *beinoni* is literally 50/50 and if he performs even one *mitzvah*, he has tilted the scales and earned himself a good judgment. Based on this understanding, Rav Itzele questions the Rambam, who, when citing this Gemara, substitutes the word *zachu* (were deemed worthy) with the words *a'su teshuvah* (they repented), thus necessitating that the *beinoni* repent in order to merit a good judgment. Why does the Rambam require the *beinoni* to repent from his sins? Wouldn't it be sufficient for him to perform one additional *mitzvah* to merit a good judgment?

Rav Yitzchak Hutner offers an innovative understanding of the Rambam which reveals the essence of what *teshuvah* is all about. He explains that we are not simply tallying up the numbers; the *tzadik* is not someone with 51% or more *mitzvos* and the *beinoni* is not someone who is exactly 50/50. Rather, Rav Hutner says, the Rambam is describing a *middah* (character trait) within a person. A *tzadik* is some-

body whose *ratzon* (desire) is to do good and serve Hashem, a *rasha* is somebody whose *ratzon* is to do evil, and a *beinoni* is somebody whose *ratzon* is undefined. We can now understand why the Rambam requires the *beinoni* to repent. Without *teshuvah* the *beinoni* remains in the same state of uncertainty. However, through the *teshuvah* process, the *beinoni* develops a true *ratzon* to come close to Hashem and His will and can therefore be deemed a *tzadik*.

The Rambam has taught us an important lesson about the *teshuvah* process; it's about changing our desires and goals, which can practically be defined as the alignment of life's goals with the Will of Hashem and internalizing a true ambition to serve Hashem. Although this is certainly a tall order, one who successfully creates a real change within himself is immediately transformed from a *rasha* to a complete *tzadik* as the Gemara in *Kiddushin* (49b) rules: If a man says to a woman "Behold, I am married to you on condition that I am a completely righteous person," even if he is a *rasha*, the marriage is pending, because perhaps he has contemplated thoughts of repentance in his heart. Likewise, the Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 17a) relates that Rabbi Elazer ben Dordaya, who was entrenched in sin, did *teshuvah* and died a complete *tzadik* a few moments later. Thus, *Chazal* (our sages) teach that if a *rasha* can align his *ratzon* with Hashem's will, he is considered completely righteous.

The *avodah* (work) of the Jew during the Days of *Teshuvah* is to align his desires, ambitions, and goals with that of his Creator. Then we will become *tzadikim* and be inscribed in the Book of Life! 

THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI MEIR MINSTER

Last week's *parasha*:

Q Why do the *brachos* in this week's *parasha* lack the detail of the curses that follow?

A) The Malbim offers two answers in addressing a similar question, "Why are there so many more curses than blessings?" First, he says that the punishments are not meant to occur all at the same time. They represent events that would or could happen at various times and periods, all fine-tuned to the specific needs of those periods and the particular sins of that time. The blessings, on the other hand, paint a picture of the optimum state for the Jewish people. Alternatively, he suggests that the true rewards for *mitzvos* is in the world to come; whatever reward we do receive in this world is just the "fruits" (dividends) of those *mitzvos*. The extent of the principal, which is the reward waiting for us in the world to come, is beyond description.

The Shela"h adds to this second idea by explaining that the comparatively minimal reward that we do receive in this world is given to us solely to give us the strength and resources to continue in our service of Hashem, allowing us to achieve at our full potential and ultimately to earn even greater reward in the future. It is a form of Divine «reinvestment of dividends plan» that Hashem has put

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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in place for us.

R. Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, zt"l, in *Sichos Levi*, takes this idea of the Shela"h one step further. If the blessings offered here are meant to be understood as only to help us in our service of Hashem, perhaps this is also the intent in recording all the curses as well. Rather than being a list or menu of available punishments, it is actually a call for repentance and a prod to better ourselves. It should be understood as being motivational. It should be used to remind us about the severity of sin and inspire us to do *teshuvah* and return to serving Hashem properly. In this sense the details and length of the curses are intended for our benefit, driving home their message even more vividly and dramatically. With this deeper understanding, we can better appreciate why these blessings and curses are always read during this period of Elul, just before Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. 

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! If you would like to submit a question on the parasha, please email it to parasha@cincykollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A SHINING EXAMPLE

It was a week before Pesach and Mrs. Tzippy Reifer, a noted Jewish outreach professional, was up to her ears in Pesach cleaning. The phone rang, and seeing that it was her daughter Yocheved, she put down her cleaning rag, straightened her back, and answered the phone. "Hi Ma, I'm here waiting to *kasher* the pot you sent me with and I met a lady who looks religious but is asking me if she can *kasher* her pots that are not kosher here with what people are doing for Pesach. Do you know?" "Tell her to wait on the pots and bring her back to the house. I would like to meet her." A while later, Yocheved brought the lady she had met home. Not surprisingly, Maria had recently converted to Judaism and did not yet have any kosher pots to cook with. "Can you afford to buy new cookware right now?" asked Mrs. Reifer. "Not really," answered Maria, "I lost my job so I have been tight on money recently." "Let's go to a store nearby and we'll see what we can do." They went together to a local Jewish housewares store and began filling up the shopping cart while Mrs. Reifer wondered how they were going to pay for it. After they had been there for some time, one of the store managers approached Mrs. Reifer when she was not next to Maria, and asked, "You don't seem to be mother and daughter, yet it appears you are helping her shop, does your companion need any



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help?" "She is a recent convert who has no dishes, so we are figuring out what she needs." "You know what," said the store manager, "my mother just passed away and had just bought full, new sets of pots, pans, and dishes. I would be so happy to give them to you!" And just like that, Maria was all taken care of. 




THE FALSE MESSIAHS OF JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI NOSSON WIGGINS

THE FRANKISTS (PART VI)

Following the sudden death of their protector Bishop Dembowski, the Podolian Sabbatians fled to Turkey. However, on July 11, 1758, King Augustus III of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth issued an edict which proclaimed that the kingdom would provide protection for the Sabbatians. Slowly, the Podolian Sabbatians began returning to their homeland, and in August 1758 Jacob Frank himself returned to Podolia. However, the edict was only in effect for three months and by the late fall of 1758 the rabbis relaunched their assault on the Podolian Sabbatians.

Frank and his followers were stuck. The rabbis would certainly never consider them an independent sect of Judaism and they had lost all of their Christian support and protection since the death of Bishop Dembowski. The only option Frank and his followers had was to convert to Christianity. Up until this point, although Frank and other Podolian Sabbatians had publicly declared their belief in certain principles of Christianity, nonetheless, they still remained, and intended to remain, Jews. This changed on February 20, 1759, when Frank and his followers submitted a formal petition to Archbishop Lubinski to be baptized by the Holy Catholic Church of Poland. The submission ended with a request that, prior to conversion, they be granted a disputation with the rabbis of Lwow to prove, amongst six other things, that the Jews believe that Christian blood is needed for ritual purposes. The famous Lwow Disputation which followed was mostly a bitter debate about the notorious blood libel accusations which had plagued the Jewish nation for centuries. 

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