

והיית לנו לעינים

“...and you *shall be* as eyes for us...”

a view from a *GER*

יונתן נח בן אברהם

yonason noach *BEN AVRAHAM*

Parashas TZAV

SUMMARY: *B'rachos* 4b states, “*R. Eleazar b. Abina says: Whoever recites ‘Praise of David’ three times daily, is sure to inherit the world to come.*” Really? Just say *Tehillim* 145 three times a day and inherit the World to Come? If it sounds too easy, “too good to be true,” then either you’re being *schnookered*, or you’re not fully understanding that in Torah the easier something sounds, often the more demanding the task really is.

A number of years ago this author was introduced to an acronym at a motivational seminar for sales people. The speaker’s topic was something about the evils of living off of the public dole. “If you don’t work,” he said, “then you shouldn’t eat.” He continued, “TNSTAF~~L~~, is what you should tell all of those who expect for the rest of us hard working individuals to put food into their non-productive mouths.” “TNSTAF~~L~~?” the audience questioned, all of us being unfamiliar with the “word.” “Yes,” the speaker explained, “TNSTAF~~L~~: There’s No Such Thing As a Free Lunch!”

This lesson, imparted from a (presumably) non-Jewish motivational speaker has “Torah written all over it!” In *Pirkei Avos* (5:26) we learn, “...Ben Hei Hei says: *The reward is in proportion to the exertion (read ‘effort and/or discomfort’).*” This “Torah Concept” is one that is akin to the *mishpatim* (commandments that mankind would have realized on their own), meaning that one does not need a Revelation at Sinai to realize that the more effort that is put forward, the faster one comes to accomplishing the task at hand. But it is interesting that there is an *hashkafah sheker* [a false *Weltanschauung*] that an off-shoot of *Yiddishkeit* holds to be true, that denies the validity of the TNSTAF~~L~~ lesson, and –unfortunately – that false outlook is not beyond the *Yiddisha yetzer hara* to entertain, even gravitate towards.

“In those days [the *End of Days* when all mankind will be aware of The *Hashkafah Emes*] they shall say no more, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.* But every one shall die for his own iniquity; *every man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.*” (*Yirmiyahu* 31:28-29; cf. *Yechezkel* 18:2) This lesson, taught to us by our *Navi’im*, make it clear that the idea of “vicarious atonement¹⁵” – the idea that one person can sin, and another can take the sinner’s place

¹⁵ This author is well aware of the parts of Torah that suggest something that seems close to “vicarious atonement,” such as *Shemos* 20:5, “...for I the Lord your God am a jealous G-d, *visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation...*” (cf. *Shemos* 34:7; *Bamidbar* 14:18; *Devarim* 5:9); or *B'rachos* 62b where the death of Abishai son of Zeruiah was to expiate the sins of the generation (cf. *Yoma* 42a, the death of Rabia b. Kisi; *Mo'ed Katan* 28a, the death of the righteous afford[s] atonement; et al). However, the Torah (*Devarim* 24:16) states, “*The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin,*” which is clearly the lesson we have quoted from our *Navi’im*. So how can these competing concepts reconciled? Atonement has to include with it some modicum of pain, whether mental/spiritual pain, or physical pain (or a combination thereof). Consider: *Tehillim* 51:19, “*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart...*” *Chullin* 7b, “R. Chanina further said: *No man bruises his finger here on earth unless it was so decreed against him in heaven...*” *Arachin* 16b, “*Raba* (or, as others say, R. Chisda, or again, as some say. R. Isaac, or as it was said, it was taught in a *Baraita*):

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in the atonement process – is antithetical to Torah-based *Yiddishkeit*. Yet despite this clear teaching, a majority of the population of the world believes that they can suffer a tooth-ache, and yet send another person in to suffer the dentist’s drill. The lesson, of course, is that if it sounds too good to be true, then perhaps one needs to take a closer look at what is being offered. Or, TNSTAFL.

However, this author has noticed several teachings found with the Torah that seem (if understood on a simplistic level) almost too good to be true, and are the kinds of things that the *yetzer hara* could grab hold of and abuse. For instance *Pirkei Avos* (2:15) teaches us, “**Rabbi Eliezer says ... repent one day before your death [and you will inherit the World to Come]!**” An abuse of this piece of Torah could leave an *hashkafah* challenged person with the idea that he can do whatever he pleases, as long as he repents just before he dies. The *yetzer hara* can fool the *guf* [goof!] into thinking that it is almost immortal, “You have plenty of time to do *t’shuvah*, so why bother making a concerted effort today? There’s always tomorrow!” The problem is, though, that one cannot play a con game with HaShem. He knows everything that is going on within each of our minds, and He can (and will) thwart anyone attempting to “get one (let alone several) over on Him.”

Pesachim 113a reads, “R. Yochanan said: Three are of those who will inherit the world to come: he who dwells in *Eretz Yisrael*; and he who brings up his sons to the Study of the Torah; and he who recites *havdalah* over wine at the termination of the Sabbath.” Again, the *yetzer hara* could look at these “guarantees of the world to Come” in a way that is *hashkafically* incorrect, but – then again – that the “job” of the *yetzer hara*. “All I have to do is move to Israel?” asks the *guf*, “And the rest is garnish!” We have to remember that, unfortunately, the majority of *Yidden* who currently live in *Eretz Yisrael* are not *Shomer Shabbos*, so there must be more to it than that. “I’ll just live ‘vicariously’ through the Torah of my son,” the *yetzer hara* declares, “this is great! Go, son, go!” Again, *details, details*. “Saying *havdalah* takes about three minutes (especially if I say it at the same speed I *daven* the silent *Shemoneh Esrei*!),” the *goof* says gleefully, “and with three minutes a week I’ve guaranteed my spot in the World to Come.” If it sounds too good to be true....

And consider the Rambam’s commentary to *Mishnayos Makkos* (3:16), the *Mishnah* that is traditionally said after learning *Pirkei Avos* (“Rabbi Chanania ben Akashya said...”). There the Rambam writes: “**He [HaShem] gave them [Klal Yisrael] Torah and mitzvos in abundant measure ... Rabbi Chanania said that because there are many mitzvos, it is impossible that a person will not perform one [mitzvah] each day in a perfect manner, and thus merit to grant his soul life through that deed.**” It is clear from the remainder of what the Rambam writes there that it is not necessary for one mitzvah a day, but rather **one mitzvah done just once in one’s entire life with the proper intention is enough to be a Ben Olam Haba.** What could the *yetzer hara* do with this!? “One *mitzvah* just once, in the span of my one hundred and twenty years? No problem!” But remember our premise: TNSTAFL!

Now it should be obvious to the reader that this author has taken the above examples out of context, without any of our Sages’ input as to the *details* of these “guarantees of *Olam Haba*,” but that is exactly the point of this *D’var Torah* – that it is entirely possible to take something out of context, or to allow ourselves to rely upon an offer that “seems too good to be true.” But that would be our *yetzer hara* speaking, not our G-d created *neshamah*. **However, regarding the above “offers,” it is this author’s opinion that the easier something sounds within the context of Torah, specifically something that**

Even if he puts the hand into his pocket to take out three [coins] and he takes out but two...” Each of these affords the sinner the ability to suffer in *Olam Hazeh*, as opposed to suffering the torments of *Gehinnom*, but the death of a child (*chas v’shalom*) is the kind of suffering that is so intense that the sufferer is almost certainly cleansed of his sins. The same with the death of a righteous person, if the sinner suffers a loss due to the death of a teacher, a sage, et al, that is an atonement for his sins – but only commensurate with the pain he feels because of the loss. Thus, there is no such thing as “vicarious atonement” in *Yiddishkeit*, and those who attempt to read this *hashkafah sheker* into Torah are practicing eisegesis, not exegesis.

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offers a gateway to the World to Come, the more difficult that it actually is. To do *t'shuvah* is one thing, but *t'shuvah shalaymah* is something entirely different, and not so easily accomplished. Moving to *Eretz Yisrael* is possible, but living up to the “Rules of The Land,” HaShem’s Torah, not so simple. Raising a son to be a Ben Torah, all one has to do is spend a little time learning Torah, right? But we must remember that Chizkiyahu *HaMelech*’s son was Menasha – does one think that Chizkiyahu didn’t spend time learning Torah with his son? To properly say *havdalah*? Got that one in the bag. But to correctly comprehend the lessons of *Shabbos* verses the days of the week, and to even attempt to make the claim that one has kept *Shabbos*, with all of the *toldos* involved – hubris! And the enormity of doing just one *mitzvah* once in one’s lifetime teaches us that just doing this is almost beyond the reach of most of us. One part of Torah that offers *Olam Haba*, saying *Ashrei* three times a day, has not been overlooked by this author, but he has chosen to allow Rabbeinu Bachya – who has made this author’s *chiddush* into a *b'ruch shekivanti* – to make his point for him.

Rabbeinu Bachya (*Shemos* 7:37) reads:

“On the words of our verse, ‘*this is the law of the burnt offering, etc.,*’ our sages in *Menachos* 110 say that anyone who studies the laws of these offerings is considered as if he had personally offered them on the altar. What the sages mean is that once one has familiarized himself with the deeper meaning of each type of offering, it enables the student of these laws to gain new insights which in turn will strengthen his resolve to meticulously observe all the precepts of the Torah ... It is certainly unreasonable to suppose that the sages meant that the mere mouthing of the words of the Oral Torah listing the detailed laws of the sacrificial rites would have such an elevating effect. There is a somewhat similar statement by the sages in *B'rachos* 4 concerning people who recite *Tehillim* 145 every day qualifying for a place in the hereafter. They certainly did not mean to imply that all that is necessary to ensure for one his place in the hereafter is a mindless recital of the words in that *Tehillim*. What the sages meant was that by reflecting on the words in this *Tehillim* and by understanding the allusions contained in them, the reader (student) will emerge with a newly strengthened belief in G-d and His loving care for mankind. This will trigger his serving G-d with greater intensity than before he had studied this *Tehillim* [as opposed to merely reciting it three times a day at break-tongue speed!]. This in turn will result in that person earning or retaining his share in the World to Come.”

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