
פרשת וישלח

פרק לא פסוק יא

קִטְנֹתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל־הָאֲמֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְּמִקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי
אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הִנֵּנִי לְשָׂגֵי מַחְנוֹת:

רש"י

קִטְנֹתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים. נִתְמַעֲטוּ זְכוּיֹתַי עַל יְדֵי הַחֲסָדִים וְהָאֲמֹת שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ עִמִּי, לְכֹד
אֲנִי יָרָא, שָׂמָא מִשְׁהַבְּטָחַתִּנִּי נִתְלַכְלַכְתִּי בַחֲטָא וַיִּגְרוּם לִי לְהִמָּסַר בְּיַד עֲשׂוּ.

מושג

לְעוֹלָם אֵל יַעֲמֵד אָדָם בְּמָקוֹם סַכָּנָה לֹא יִשָּׂא אֵין עוֹשִׂין לוֹ גַּם,
וְאֵם עוֹשִׂין לוֹ גַּם מִנְּכִיּוֹתָיו (שבת לב.).

Translation:

Never should one stand in a place of danger, saying that a miracle will be made for him, for perhaps they will not make a miracle for him. And, even if a miracle is made for him it will cause a reduction in his merits.

Explanation:

While one may not deserve punishment, he or she may not merit miracles either¹. Therefore one should not put themselves in dangerous situations, lest they not be sufficiently righteous to merit a נס נגלה, an open miracle². Additionally, even if a miracle is done for them, it will diminish their merits³.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The simple meaning of the words קִטְנֹתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים mean that I am not deserving of your kindness. Literally, 'I am small', not worthy. However, due to the fact that Pasuk did not say קִטְנֵן אֲנִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים, but rather קִטְנֹתִי, the Gemoroh reads a deeper meaning; that Yaakov is saying that 'I have been made small', my merits reduced, by Hashem's kindness.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Depending on open miracles diminishes one's merits.

Understand: Why will Hashem at times create miracles to protect Tzadikim and at times He will not? Why did Yaakov fear that Hashem would not protect him?

Think: Compare Yaakov's reaction to danger to the other Avos.

1 See note #1

2 See note #2

3 See note #3

NOTES

1. This concept has been explained in the previous Musag. When one places himself at odds with the forces of nature, Hashem does not necessarily openly interfere with those forces, which would leave the person in danger. The exception to the rule is a perfect Tzadik who needs not fear any situation⁴. Yaakov, feared his encounter with Eisav. Rashi explains that since he had been the recipient of much Divine kindness, his merits had diminished. If he were to view himself as a perfect Tzadik, this would be of no consequence. However, he feared that perhaps he had ‘soiled himself’ with sin and would not be saved from Eisav. Thus he feared the combination of factors - Eisav attacking, diminished merits and sinful behavior - would all lead to his demise.

It is interesting to examine why it was only in Yaakov that we find this constant fear. The Midrash Tanchuma (פרשת בשלח סימן כח) notes that it was his stay in Lavan’s house that worried Yaakov:

א"ל הקדוש ברוך הוא והנה אנכי עמך ושמרתיך (בראשית כח), ולבסוף ויירא יעקב מאד, אדם שהבטיחו הקדוש ברוך הוא היה מתפחד? אלא אמר יעקב שמא כשהייתי בבית לבן הטמא נתלכלכתי בטומאה ובחטא.

According to this explanation we can well understand the wording of the Midrash (which Rashi also uses) נתלכלכתי בטומאה, *I was soiled by the impurity*. Just as a person entering a dirty place will soil his or her clothes just by being in a dirty environment, so too Yaakov feared being made impure simply by being near Lavan.

Rov S.R. Hirsch adds an additional insight which might also explain the addition of the word ויצר, he was distressed.

“And how different is Yaakov’s attitude to Eisav to what it was to Lavan. We can recognize what strength the consciousness of innocence gives, and what an oppressive feeling even an appearance of guilt awakens. Twenty years endurance of a fight against wrong which you innocently have to bear do not have such a depressing effect as one minute’s feeling towards somebody whom we know feels hurt by us, and who may not see the motive which, though it may not justify our action, can at least excuse it.”

Yaakov harbors feeling of guilt for his ‘stealing’ of the blessings and for the pain this caused his brother. While his actions were justified, Yaakov fears that the tears of Eisav⁵ may have negative consequences for him and his children at this time of danger.

On a final note, we must remember that the one Mitzvah in which Eisav excelled was כיבוד אב, something Yaakov has not been able to actively fulfil for the past 20 years. When all the above is taken into account it is easy to understand Yaakov’s trepidation as he prepares to meet his brother.

2. A persons should be concerned that a miracle will not be provided for him for two reasons. First is because this would lead to his being harmed. Second is because this may cause a הילול השם. When a Jew is harmed, especially an outwardly religious Jew, it causes many to wonder why Hashem did not save him. Some will question the true religiosity of the man, but many will question G-d.

3. One could ask, “Does one use merits like a bank account?” Why do merits get reduced? It would seem that if a person is a Tzaddik, then Hashem should do unlimited miracles for him. The Ramban, who we mentioned in the previous note, agrees with this premise. It is only when a person has sinned does Hashem limit the number of open miracles that He will create for him.

4. Questions for further discussion:

a. What other laws in the Torah require us to act with our safety in mind?

b. Did ים סוף do the right thing by walking into סוף ים before it was split? After all he was depending on an open miracle!

4 The Ramban on Iyov (פרק לו:ז) explains that according to the level of the Tzadik will he warrant Hashem’s constant protection, and merit even open miracles when needed.

5 The words the Torah uses to describe Eisav’s pain, ויצעק צעקה גדולה ומרה, are echoed almost verbatim by Mordechai (אסתר ד:א), when fighting a descendant of Eisav, Haman. The message of the Tanach seems to be that when we do not live up to the moral expectations demanded of us, the cries of Eisav come to haunt us.