

Zera Shimshon

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Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter XXIV: Vayikra (Lev. 1:1–5:26)

Essay 6. The importance of weeding out sins¹

פְּסוּק "זרעו לכם לצדקה קצרו לפי־חֶסֶד נירו לכם ניר" וכו', "חַרְשֵׁת־רָשָׁע עוֹלָתָה קִצְרֹתָם אֲכַלְתֶּם פְּרִי־כֶחָשׁ פִּי־בִטְחָתָה בְּדַרְפָּךְ בְּרַב גְּבוּרֶיךָ", "וְקָאֵם שְׂאוֹן בְּעַמְדָּךְ" וכו'. קִשָּׁה דְהִנֵּה לֹא לֹאמַר "זַרְעוֹתָם רָשָׁע עוֹלָתָה קִצְרֹתָם", וּכְדֹכְתִיב בְּרִישֵׁי דְקָרָא, "זַרְעוֹ לָכֶם וְקִצְרוּ", וְעוֹד דְּקְדוּקִים אֲחֵרִים.

There are verse[s]:

Sow for yourselves according to righteousness, reap according to mercy, break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the L-rd, until He comes and rains down righteousness upon you. **You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, [and] you shall eat the fruits of treachery; because you relied on your way, on your host of warriors. But the roar [of war] shall arise in your own people . . .**

- Hosea 10:12–14

A question is that [the prophet] could have said, “You have sown wickedness, you have reaped injustice,” for as is written at the beginning of the Scripture, “Sow for yourselves . . . and reap.” In other words, to maintain a parallel sentence structure, Hosea 10:13 should have read, “You have sown” instead of “You have plowed.” Also, there are other grammatical questions.

וְגַרְסִינוּ בְּבָבָא מְצִיעָא (ק"ה פ"ט) מְתַנְיָתוּן, הַמְקַבֵּל שְׂדֵה מִתְּחִבְרוּ וְלֹא רָצָה לְנַפֵּשׁ וְאָמַר לֹא מָה אֵיכְפַת לָךְ הוֹאִיל שְׂאֲנִי גוֹתֵן לָךְ חִיכּוּרָךְ, אִין שׁוּמְעִין לֹא, מִפְּנֵי שְׂיָכוֹל לֹאמַר לֹא לְמַחַר אַתָּה יוֹצֵא מִמֶּנָּה וְנִמְעָלָה לְפָנֵי עֲשָׂבִים. וּבְגִמְרָא אֵיתָא, אִי אָמַר לֹא לְבַתֵּר הָכִי פְּרִיבְנָא לָהּ, אָמַר לֹא חִיטֵי מְעַלְיָתָא בְּעֵינָא, וְאִי אָמַר לֹא מִנְכִּישְׁנָא לָךְ שִׁיעוּר מְנַתִּיךְ אָמַר לֹא קָא מְנַסְבַת שֵׁם רַע לְאַרְעָא, וְהִתְנַן מִפְּנֵי שְׂמַעְלָה לְפָנֵי עֲשָׂבִים, אֱלֵא מְשׁוּם דְאָמַר לֹא בִיזְרָא דְנַפְל נָפַל ע"כ.

The proper reading in tractate Bava Metzia (page 105a, chapter 9) is: “We learned in a Mishnah, [The tenant farmer] who contracts with another for a field, did not want to weed, and told [the owner], what do you care since I am giving you your rent? [The court] does not

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¹ This essay does not directly quote from the parsha or the Haftarah. Perhaps the connection is a mention of unwitting sins, which are discussed in the parsha.

listen to him, since [the owner] may tell him, tomorrow you leave it and it'll be overgrown with grasses before me.”

And in the Gemara it is brought: “If [the tenant farmer] said to [the owner]: Afterward, [when I have reaped the field,] I will plow [it and remove the weeds, the owner can] say to him: I want superior wheat [not wheat that sprouted among weeds]. And if he says to [the owner]: I will buy [good] wheat for you from the market, [the owner can] say to him: I want wheat from my land. And if he says to [the owner]: I will weed for you [according to the] measure of your portion [but no more, the owner can] say to him: You are giving a bad name to my land [as everyone will see that it is full of weeds].”

[The Gemara asks:] “But didn’t we learn [in the Mishnah that the reason they do not listen to him is]: Because it’ll be overgrown with grasses before me [indicating that these other claims are not accepted]? Rather, [the explanation must be] because [the owner can] say to him: The seed that fell has fallen. [In other words, even if the tenant farmer later plows the land and uproots all of the weeds, their seeds remain in the ground and will sprout in the following years.]”

והנה ישראל קבלו את התורה "לעבדה ולשמרה", ואם חוטאים אמר הכתוב "סור מרע ועשה טוב", שמתחלה צריך דוקא לתקן הרע והפגם ואחר כך לעשות טוב. ואם יאמרו ישראל אנו נוהגים לה חיפורך שהם תרני"ג מצות אכל אין אנו רוצים לנפש, כלומר להסיר ולתקן הפגם של העונות שעשינו, ומה איכפת לה הואיל שכתב פירשנו עצמנו מן העבירות, אומר להם הקב"ה איני שומע לכם, מפני שלמחר אתם יוצאים ממנה, משום דקנימא לן עבירה גוררת עבירה, וכל צמר המלוכלך בטיט אינו קולט צבע יפה, כמו שכתב מהרש"א בשם העירוף על ההיא דכל דנקי אגב אימיה — סליק, ואם פן יש לחוש פן העבירות הקודמות תהיינה גרמא בגזיקין שתצאו מהתורה.

Here, Israel received the Torah “to till it and to tend it,”² and if they sin, Scripture says, “shun evil and do good,”³ for initially it’s especially necessary to correct the evil and the deficiency, and afterward to do good. Imagine Israel were to say, we are giving You Your rent, which is the 613 commandments that we fulfill, but we don’t want to weed, as if to say, to remove and to repair the deficiencies of the sins that we did. What does it matter to You, since we have already separated ourselves from the sins? The Holy One, Blessed be He, would say to them: I am not listening to you, for tomorrow you could leave [the Torah].” That’s because we hold, “One sin leads to another,”⁴ and “all wool that is dirty with mud will not accept dye nicely,” as the Maharsha wrote⁵ in the name of the Aruch⁶ on that which is written in the Gemara:

[The gentile philosopher,] Nimos HaGardi, asked Rabbi Meir: [Does] all wool that enters the cauldron [to be dyed] emerge colored? [In other words, do

² Gen. 2:15.

³ Ps. 34:15.

⁴ Pirkei Avot 4:2.

⁵ Chiddushei Agadot on Chagigah 15b. The Talmud commentaries Chiddushei Agadot and Chiddushei Halachot were authored by Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (“the Maharsha”) (1555–1631).

⁶ Nathan ben Jehiel of Rome (c. 1035 – 1106) (“the Aruch”), Jewish-Italian lexicographer. He authored the *Aruch*, a notable dictionary of Talmudic and Midrashic words.

all those who learn Torah emerge as decent and worthy?] **He said to him: Whoever was clean when [he was] with his mother, [i.e., from the outset] emerges [decent and worthy], all [those who were] not clean when [they were] with their mother, doesn't emerge [worthy]. [I.e., one who approaches Torah study having been flawed from the outset will not be properly influenced by it.]**

- Chagigah 16b

If so, there's reason to fear lest the earlier sins will cause damages that will take you out of the Torah.

וְנִדְוַע וְשִׂוְיָתֵר גָּדוֹל הוּא הַפְּגָם שֶׁעוֹשֶׂה הַצַּדִּיק כְּשִׁיחֲטָא מִמָּה שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה מִי שְׂאִינוּ צַדִּיק, וְעַל זֶה אָמְרוּ הַצַּדִּיקִים נַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם שְׂגָגוֹת כְּנִדְוֹנוֹת. וְזוֹהוּ, מַעֲלָה לְפָנָי עֲשׂוּבִים, שֶׁתּוֹצִיאוּ הַתּוֹרָה וְהַמַּעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים שֶׁעֲשִׂיתֶם חֵס וְשְׁלוֹם לְבֵית הַטֵּינּוֹפֹת. וְאִם יֵאמְרוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּרִיבְנָא לָהּ לְבַתֵּר הָכִי, תַּחֲלָה נַעֲשֶׂה הַמִּצְוֹת וְאַחֵר כִּי נִסְלַק הַעֲבִירוֹת וְנִתְקַן הַפְּגָמִים, יֵאמֶר לָהֶם הַקַּב"ה, חִיטֵי מַעֲלִייתָא בְּעֵינָא, אֲנִי רוֹצֵה שֶׁהַתּוֹרָה וְהַמִּצְוֹת יִהְיוּ בְּטָהֳרָה וּבְקִדּוּשָׁה.

It's known that the defect made by the righteous person when he sins is greater than that done by one who is not righteous, and about this they said, "the unwitting transgressions become for the righteous tantamount to intentional transgressions."⁷ This is the meaning of, "it'll be overgrown with grasses before me," that G-d forbid, you will take out the Torah and the good deeds that you have done to a place of filth. If Israel would say, "I will plow it afterward, first we will perform the commandments and afterward we will eliminate the sins and correct the deficiencies," the Holy One, Blessed be He, will say to them, "I want superior wheat. I want the Torah and the commandments to be in purity and holiness."

וְזוֹהוּ בִּיאוּר הַפְּסוּק "תְּרַשְׁתֶּם־רָשָׁע עוֹלָתָה קְצַרְתֶּם", אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁתְּרַעַתְתֶּם מִצְוֹת אַחֵר הַעוֹבוֹת, אֵינָם שְׁווֹת לְכֻלּוֹם דְּבִיזְרָא דְנָפַל נָפַל, שְׂאֵף אִם נִרְעָה חִיטִּים לֹא יִצְמַח בְּטוֹב, כְּמוֹ דּוֹאֵג וְאַחִיתוּפְל לְפִי שֶׁטִּינָא הֵימָּה בְּלָבָם, וְזוֹהוּ "עוֹלָתָה קְצַרְתֶּם". וְעוֹד "אֲכַלְתֶּם פְּרִי־כַחַשׁ", שְׂאֵם לֹא יִנְכַּשׁ מִתַּחֲלָה הַקּוֹצִים וְהַעֲשׂוּבִים רַעִים, לֹא יְבוֹאוּ חִיטִּים יְפוֹת, וְחִיטֵי מַעֲלִייתָא בְּעֵינָא. כִּי אִם לֹא יִחְזוֹר בְּתִשְׁבָּה וַיִּנְקֶה גּוֹפּוֹ מִהַעֲבִירוֹת לֹא יִהְיֶה הַמִּצְוֹת בְּקִדּוּשָׁה וּבְטָהֳרָה, וְזוֹהוּ "אֲכַלְתֶּם פְּרִי־כַחַשׁ כִּי־בִטְחַתְּ בְּדַרְכְּךָ" וְכו', שֶׁאֲמַרְתָּ אַחֲטָא וְאַשׁוּב.

This is the explanation of the verse, "You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice": Even though you have sown the performance of commandments after committing the sins, that is not equal to anything, for the seed of the weeds that fell has fallen, that even if wheat is sown, it won't grow well. I.e., by not weeding, the weeds grow and mature and drop seed, and then when plows again to prepare the soil for sowing seed, he is spreading the seeds dropped by the previous generation of weeds. That leads to more weeds. Thus, is analogous to one who plows wickedness and who then reaps injustice.

⁷ Bava Metzia 33b interprets Isaiah 58:1, "In the phrase 'declare to My people their transgression,' these [people] are the Torah scholars, whose unwitting [transgressions] become for them tantamount to intentional [transgressions], as they are held to a higher standard]. 'And to the house of Jacob their sins,' these are the ignoramuses, whose intentional [transgressions] become for them tantamount to unwitting [transgressions]."

This is like Doeg and Ahitophel, as they had mud in their hearts,⁸ and this is the meaning of “you have reaped injustice.” Furthermore, “you shall eat the fruits of treachery,” for if you do not initially weed the thorns and the bad grasses, nice wheat won’t come, and “I want superior wheat.” Thus, if you don’t return in repentance and purify your body from the sins, the commandments that you perform won’t be in holiness and in purity, and this is the meaning of, “you shall eat the fruits of treachery; because you relied on your way,” that you said, “I will sin and I will repent.”

ועוד, "וקאם שאון בעמך", דקא מינסבת שם רע לארעאי, שיבאו לידי חילול השם שיאמרו ראו פלוני שלמד תורה כמה מקולקלים מעשיו וכו'. שהרי הוא דומה לאילן שעומד במקום טהרה ונפוכו נוטה למקום טומאה ואינו רוצה לקוץ אותו הנורף. ולפעמים חס ושלום גורם חיות לקליפות במעשיו הטובים שיעשה קודם התיקון, ומשום הכי "סור מרע" מתחלה דקא, ואחר כך "ועשה טוב" ולא להפך.

Furthermore, “But the roar [of war] shall arise in your own people,” that you are giving a bad name to my land, that they will come to a desecration of the Name of G-d, that they will say, “See so-and-so, who has learned Torah, how corrupt his deeds are, etc.” For he is similar to “a tree is standing in a pure place and its branches hang over an impure place,”⁹ but he doesn’t want to cut its branches. Sometimes, G-d forbid, people cause *kliptot* (husks of impurity) through their good actions that they do prior to correcting their past sins, and because of this, Ps. 34:15 specifically says “shun evil” initially, and afterward says, “and do good,” and not the other way around.

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⁸ Chagigah 15b: “And Rabbi Ami said: Doeg asked Ahitophel three hundred questions with regard to a closet floating in the air [as they were both great Torah scholars]. And we learned [in a Mishnah, Sanhedrin 90a]: Three kings and four commoners have no portion in the World-to-Come [a list that includes Doeg and Ahitophel]. [If such great Sages could sin and forfeit their share in the World-to-Come], we, [who are less knowledgeable than they,] what will be of us? He said to him: Long-toothed one, there was mud [*tina*] in their hearts [i.e., they had certain flaws that prevented their Torah learning from protecting them].”

⁹ Kiddushin 40b: “Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Tzadok, says: To what are the righteous in this world compared? To a tree that is standing entirely in a pure place and its branches hang over an impure place. If its branches are cut, it will stand entirely in a pure place.”