

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXVIII: Metzora (Lev. 14:1–15:33)

Essay 6. Collecting a sinner's debt

פְּרָק י' דְּפֶסְחִים הוּדוּ לְמִי שְׁגוּבָה חוּבוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם בְּטוֹבָתוֹ: עָשִׂיר בְּשׂוּרוֹ, עֲנִי בְּשׂוֹי וְכוּ'. וּפְרָשׁ רַש"י בְּטוֹבָתוֹ רָצָה לוֹמַר בְּטוֹבָה שְׁנוֹתָן לוֹ הַקַּב"ה וְכוּ' וְעִי"ש.

The 10th chapter of tractate Pesachim:

Rav Chisda said: What is that which is written: “Give thanks to the L-rd for He is good” (Ps. 136:1)? [It means] **give thanks to the One Who collects the debt** [i.e., the punishment for a person's sins and wickedness], **in** [accordance with] **his goodness**. [He punishes] **a wealthy** [person by taking] **his ox**, and [He punishes] **a poor** [person by taking] **his sheep**. [He punishes the] orphan by [taking away] his egg, [and He punishes the] widow by [taking] her chicken. [G-d punishes each person based on his ability to endure deprivation, and He does not punish people with more than they can handle.]

- Pesachim 118a

Rashi explains “his goodness” wants to say by the goodness that the Holy One, Blessed be He, has given to him, etc., and see there.

קִשְׁיָה שֶׁהָרִי אַף אִם לֹא יִגְבֶּה מִמֶּנּוּ הַמָּמוֹן וְיִגְבֶּה מִגּוּפוֹ בְּחֻלָּיִים רָעִים בְּרִמְיֹן וּבְמִיתָה עִם כָּל זֶה נִקְרָא בְּטוֹבָה שֶׁל הַקַּב"ה, שֶׁהָרִי הוּא הַנּוֹתֵן חַיִּים וְרַפּוּאָה וְשְׁלִימָה לְכָל בֶּשָׂר, וְשִׂיבָה שְׁפִיר לוֹמַר הוּדוּ לְמִי שְׁגוּבָה חוּבוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם בְּטוֹבָתוֹ דֵּהֵיִינוּ בְּטוֹבָה שֶׁהִשְׁפִיעַ לוֹ, וְאֵין לָנוּ רָאִיָּה לוֹמַר דְּמִזִּירֵי דִּנְקָא לְעִנְיֵן הַמָּמוֹן.

A difficulty is that even if He did not collect the money from him, but instead collects from his body via serious injury—may it not happen, or even collects from him by his death, nevertheless this is called the goodness of the Holy One, Blessed be He, for He gives life and complete healing to all flesh. It seems that it would be more appropriate to say, “Give thanks to He Who collects the debt of man in His goodness, which is by the goodness with which He influences him.” We have no proof to say that [the Gemara] is specifically speaking of money. How did Rav Chisda know this?

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וגיש לומר דשלושה טובות יש לו לאדם בעולם הזה, החיים ובריאות הגוף והממון. החיים הם חשובים מכלם והממון גרוע מכלם, וכל זה הוא לגבי בני אדם, אמנם לגבי הקב"ה כל הטובות הן שוות שהרי הכל נברא במאמרו ולא הוציא זמן בבריאה זו יותר מזו, ובין החיים ובין הממון ובין הבריאות הם שווים לפניו, כמו שצריך אחד יצויר כמה צורות כל אחת משונית מתבררת, ומפור אומן כל אחת לפי ערכה, דהיינו שיששוב על כל אחת מהן כמה הוציא על זאת הוצאות הצבועים יותר מחברתה וכמה זמן הוציא בזו יותר מבזו, ולפי ערך זה ישלם הקונה דמי שנוייה ביותר. אמנם אם יהיו כלן שוות שהוציא כל כך זמן וצבע בזו כמו בזו, אינו יכול המוכר משורת הדין להעלות דמי זו יותר מזו.

It can be said that man has three good things in this world: life, and health of the body, and money. Life is the most important of all, and money is the most inferior of all. But all of this thinking is according to human beings, although with regard to the Holy One, Blessed be He, all of the good things are equal, because everything was created by His word, and He did not spend more time in the creation of one more than the other. Between life and money and health, they are equal before Him. This is similar to one painter, who will draw several figures, each different from the next one, and he will sell them each according to their value. That is, he will think about each one how much more he spent on it in paint expenses than the next one, and how much time he spent on it more than the other, and according to this value, the buyer will pay the appropriate value. But if they are all equal, that he spent as much time and paint on one as on the other, the seller cannot rightfully charge more for one than the other.

והנה האדם החוטא נקרא כמו מזיק, וקנימא לן הניזקין שמין להם בעידיה, ואם כן הנה לו למות כדי למרק עונותיו, ובפרט דקנימא לן פ' עקיבא דבמזיק שיימינן. ועם כל זה הקב"ה לטובתנו חושש לסכרת ר' ישמעאל דקאמר דבניזק שיימינן, ולגבי הקב"ה הכל אחד והכל נקרא מיטב, ומשום הכי הודו למי שגובה חובו וכו' בטובה שנותן לו, דלגבי דידיה הכל נקרא מיטב.

Here, the man who sins is considered as if he is a damager of another's property, and we hold that [a court] appraises land of superior quality for payment to injured [parties].¹ I.e., if someone causes \$5,000 harm to another, the court would award the injured party \$5,000 worth of property from the damager's best land, rather than \$5,000 worth of property from the damager's other land. If so, when talking about a sinner, he should die in order to erase his sins, for his life is his most precious possession, and we specifically hold as Rabbi Akiva, that we appraise [the value of the land] of the one who caused damage [and have him pay with his fields of superior quality].²

With all this, the Holy One, Blessed be He, for our good is concerned with the opinion of Rabbi Yishmael, who says that instead of appraising the property of the one who caused the damage, that we appraise the one who was damaged. Concerning the Holy One, Blessed be He, everything is the same and everything is called "the best." I.e., it didn't take G-d any more effort to give a person life than to give him good health or money. So instead of saying that a sinner

¹ Mishnah Gittin 5:1; Gittin 48b.

² Gittin 49a.

should die in order to erase his sins, because his life is his most precious possession, we say that from G-d's point of view, the person's life, health, and money are equal in value. Thus, G-d is often satisfied to take a person's money as compensation for a sin. **Because of this, we give thanks to the One Who collects the debt** [i.e., the punishment for a person's sins and wickedness], in [accordance with] his goodness, **in the goodness that He gives to him, for concerning Him, everything is called the best.**

Of course, as noted earlier, there are some where G-d decides that He must impact a person's health or even his life, but this is also a case where He is taking from the goodness that he previously bestowed upon an individual.

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