

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter LIII: Haazinu (Deut. 32:1–32:52)

Essay 2. Reward and punishment

תענית פרק קמ"א "אל אמונה ואין עול": כשם שנפרעים מן הרשעים בעולם הבא אפילו על עבירה קלה שעושים, כך נפרעין מן הצדיקים בעולם הזה על עבירה קלה שעושים. והקשה מהרש"א דאדרבא תלי תנאי בדלא תנאי, פרענות לצדיקים אנו רואים בעינינו בעולם הזה ופרענות הרשעים אין אנו יודעין, ואיכפא הנה ליה למימר ועיי"ש.

Tractate Taanit, the first chapter:

“A faithful G-d, never false.”¹ Just as punishment is exacted from the wicked in the World-to-Come even for a light transgression that they commit, so too, punishment is exacted from the righteous in this world for a light transgression that they commit. [I.e., the righteous suffer their punishment in this world to purify them so they can enjoy the World-to-Come.]

- Taanit 11a

The Maharsha² questions that to the contrary, **“he makes that which was taught dependent upon that which was not taught.”³** In other words, **the sufferings of the righteous we see with our eyes in this world, but the suffering of the wicked in the World-to-Come we do not know**, as we are not yet in the World-to-Come.

ונראה לתרץ דהואיל שמצינו שהנביאים נתקשו על שלות הרשעים, ירמיה אמר "מדוע דרך רשעים צלחה" וכו', אסף אמר "כייקנאתי בהוללים שלום רשעים אראה" וכו', שמע מינה שהסבא נותנת שלרשעים יהיה להם עונש ויסורין אפילו בעולם הזה. ולאחר שנתרץ קושית הנביאים שהקב"ה משלם להם שכר איזו מצנה שעשו בעולם הזה כדי לטוהרן מן העולם הבא כדכתיב "ומשלם לשנאיו" וכו', במכל שכן שהדבר ידוע שיש להם לרשעים עונש גמור לעולם הבא שהרי נקראו שונאיו.

He seems to solve this that since we find that the prophets struggled with the apparent “tranquility of the wicked,”⁴ as Jeremiah said, “Why does the way of the wicked prosper?”⁵

* English translation: Copyright © 2022 by Charles S. Stein. More essays are at <https://www.zstorah.com>

¹ Deut. 32:4.

² Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels (1555–1631), Polish rabbi famous for his Talmud commentaries, Chiddushei Halachot and Chiddushei Agadot.

³ A Talmudic term found in Shabbat 22a, Ketubot 2a, and Bava Batra 134b.

⁴ The term appears in Yoma 86b.

⁵ Jer. 12:1.

Asaph said, “for I envied the wanton; I saw the wicked at ease.”⁶ Hear from this that the logical argument is that the wicked will receive punishment and sufferings even in this world.

After this, we can solve the question of the prophets, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, pays [the wicked] a reward for some commandment that they fulfilled in this world, in order to expel them from the World-to-Come, as it is written, “He repays those who hate Him.”⁷ For in any case, the matter is known that the wicked have a complete punishment in the World-to-Come, for they are called “those who hate Him.”

וְזוֹ הִיא פְּוֹנַת הַמַּאֲמָר כְּשֵׁם שְׁנִפְרָעִין מִן הַרְשָׁעִים לְעוֹלָם הֵבֵא אֶפִּילוֹ עַל עֲבִירָה קְלָה שְׁעוֹשִׁין שְׁהָרִי גִקְרָאוּ שׁוֹנְאָיו לְפִי שְׂאִינֹו עֲתִיד לְרַחֵם עֲלֵיהֶם כְּלָל, כִּי גִפְרָעִין מִן הַצְּדִיקִים בְּעוֹלָם הַגֵּה עַל עֲבִירָה קְלָה שְׁעוֹשִׁין, אַף עַל פִּי שְׁהִתָּה לְנוֹ סִבְרָא לֹמַר הוֹאִיל שְׁהֵם אוֹהֲבִים לְהַקְבִּי לֹא הִגִּיה לֹו לְהַקְבִּי לְדַקְדָּק כֹּל כִּי אֲחֻרֵיהֶם שְׁכֵן דְרָךְ הָאוֹהֲבִים שְׁלֵא לְהַשְׁגִּיחַ עַל כֹּל דְבָר, וּמִשׁוֹם הַכִּי אָמַר הַפְּתוּב "אֵל אֲמוּנָה וְאִין עֲוֹל".

This is the intent of the saying, “Just as punishment is exacted from the wicked in the World-to-Come even for a light transgression that they commit,” for they are called “those who hate Him,” because He will not have mercy upon them at all. The intent of the continuation, “so too, punishment is exacted from the righteous in this world for a light transgression that they commit,” is that the righteous are punished even though we have reason to say that because they love the Holy One, Blessed be He, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, shouldn’t be so strict about them. For it is the nature of beloved ones not to watch over everything done by those we love. Because of this, Scripture says, “A faithful G-d, never false,” i.e., G-d doesn’t play favorites to the extent of completely overlooking light transgressions of those who are [generally] righteous.

וּבְדִרְךָ זֶה נִבְאָר מֵאֵי דְאִמְרִינֵן בְּפִרְקָא קַמָּא דְרֵאשׁ הַשְׁנָה שְׁלוֹשָׁה סְפָרִים נִפְתְּחִים בְּרֵאשׁ הַשְׁנָה: אֶחָד שְׁלֵ צְדִיקִים גְּמוּרִים, וְאֶחָד שְׁלֵ רְשָׁעִים גְּמוּרִים, וְאֶחָד שְׁלֵ בִינֹנִים. שְׁלֵ צְדִיקִים גְּמֻתִּים וְנִחְתָּמִים לְחַיִּים וְכוּ'. וְקוּשָׁה וְהָא צְרִיךְ עוֹד שְׁנֵי סְפָרִים אֲחֻרִים. אֶחָד לְמֵי שְׁרוּבֹו צְדִיק דְּמַרְיָעִין לֹו בְּעוֹלָם הַגֵּה כְּדֵאִיתָא בְּפִרְקָא קַמָּא דְקַדְדוּשִׁין דְּמַרְיָעִין לֹו כְּמֵי שְׁשֻׁרְף אֶת הַתּוֹרָה. וְאֶחָד לְמֵי שְׁרוּבֹו רְשָׁע דְּמַטִּיבִין לֹו כְּמֵי שְׁקִימִים כֹּל הַתּוֹרָה כְּדֵאִיתָא הַתָּם.

In this way, we will clarify what was said in the first chapter of tractate Rosh Hashanah (16b) that three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah, one of complete righteous people, and one of complete wicked people, and one of intermediate ones.⁸ Regarding righteous people, they are written and signed for life, etc. It is difficult to understand why we need two more

⁶ Ps. 73:3.

⁷ Deut. 7:10.

⁸ Rosh Hashana 16b: “Rabbi Kruspedai said that Rabbi Yochanan said: Three books are opened on Rosh HaShana [before the Holy One, Blessed be He]: One of wholly wicked [people], and one of wholly righteous [people], and one of intermediate [people whose good and bad deeds are equally balanced]. Wholly righteous [people] are immediately written and sealed for life; wholly wicked [people] are immediately written and sealed for death; and intermediate [people] are left [with their judgment] suspended from Rosh HaShana until Yom Kippur, [their fate remaining undecided]. If they merit, [through the good deeds and mitzvot that they perform during this period], they are written for life; if they do not so merit, they are written for death.”

books. One book is for someone who is mostly righteous, that it's made bad for him in this world, as it brought in the first chapter of tractate Kiddushin (39b), that it's made bad for him, like one who burned the Torah.⁹ And one book is for someone who is mostly wicked, that it's made good for him in this world, like one who fulfilled the entire Torah, as it is brought there.¹⁰

וְנֵשׁ לֹמֵר הוֹאִיל שְׁמָהּ שְׁמָרִיעִין לְצַדִּיק הוּא לְטוֹבָתוֹ כְּדֵי שְׂיִהְיֶה צַדִּיק גַּמּוֹר וְיִזְכֶּה לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, הִיָּנוּ בְּכֻלָּל אוֹתוֹ שֶׁל צַדִּיקִים גַּמּוֹרִים, וְכֵן נָמִי מָה שְׁמָטִיבִין לְרָשָׁע הוּא לְרָעָתוֹ כְּדֵי שְׂיִהְיֶה רָשָׁע גַּמּוֹר וְיִפּוֹל בְּגִיּוֹהֶנּוּ, הִנֵּי נָמִי בְּכֻלָּל אוֹתוֹ שֶׁל רָשָׁעִים גַּמּוֹרִים, כִּי אֵלּוּ הַמְשַׁפְּטִים הֵם כְּדֵי לַעֲשׂוֹתָם גַּמּוֹרִים חֵד לְטוֹבָה וְחֵד לְרָעָה.

It can be said that the bad that is done for the righteous person is for his benefit, so that he may be completely righteous and gain the life of the World-to-Come; he is included in the category of the completely righteous.

Thus, also the good that is done for the wicked is for his detriment, so that he will be completely wicked and fall into Gehenna, he will also be in the category of the completely wicked, because these are the judgments, in order to make one completely for the good and one for the evil.

וְעַל כְּרַחֲמֵי צָרִיף לֹמֵר כִּד שְׁהָרִי הֵתָם אֲמַרִּינוּ רָשָׁעִים גַּמּוֹרִים נְכַתְּבִים וְנִחְתָּמִים לְאַלְתֵּר לְמִיתָה, וְהָרִי אָנוּ רוֹאִים שְׁהֵם מְתַקְיָיִמִים הַרְבֵּה שָׁנִים בְּרַשְׁעָתָם. אֲלָא נְדָאֵי צָרִיף לֹמֵר שְׂאָף עַל פִּי שְׂאִין גּוֹמְרִים דִּינָם לְמִיתַת הַגּוֹף בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁנָה מְפַל מְקוֹם גַּמּוֹר דִּינָם עַל מִיתַת הַנְּפֶשׁ.

And of necessity it should be said that here, in tractate Rosh Hashana, it is said that the completely wicked people are written and sealed immediately for death, but we see that they persist for many years in their wickedness. Rather, surely it's necessary to say that even if their sentence is not completed with the death of their body in the same year, nevertheless their sentences are completed for the death of the soul.

* * *

⁹ Kiddushin 39b: “Anyone whose merits are greater than his sins is punished with suffering [in order to cleanse his sins in this world and enable him to merit full reward for his mitzvot in the World-to-Come]. And [due to this punishment] he appears [to observers] like one who burned the entire Torah without leaving even one letter remaining of it.”

¹⁰ Kiddushin 39b: “Anyone whose sins are greater than his merits has goodness bestowed upon him [in this world], and he appears like one who has fulfilled the entire Torah without lacking [the fulfillment of] even one letter of it.”