



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת בשלח תש"ע 5770 Parshas Beshalach

REDIRECTING WRATH

One of the interesting – and sobering – phenomena that we find in Torah literature is the notion of “co-opting” anger. There are instances in which a certain individual incurs Divine Wrath, but someone else comes along and (deservedly) becomes the target.

The Mishnah (*Avos 4:19*) provides an example, where Shmuel Hakattan offers the following advice:

שְׂמוּאֵל הַקָּטָן אוֹמֵר, בְּנִפְל אוֹיְבֶיךָ אַל תִּשְׂמַח וּבְכַשְׁלוֹ אַל יִגַּל לְבָבְךָ, כִּי יִרְאֶה ה' וְרַע בְּעֵינָיו וְהִשִּׁיב מֵעַלְיוֹ אָפוֹ.

“Shmuel Hakattan says: ‘When your enemy falls, do not be glad; and when he stumbles, let your heart not rejoice; lest Hashem see, and find this unfavorable, and He may transfer His wrath from the enemy (onto you).’”

(In truth, this entire passage is a verse in Mishlei [24:17,18]. It is attributed here to Shmuel Hakattan since he would frequently cite this idea [*Tiferes Yisrael, Avos, ibid.*].)

TRIAL AT SEA

A similar manifestation of this idea is present in our *parshah*. The *passuk* tells us that when the Jews crossed the Yam Suf (“Red” Sea), the waters parted to form walls on either side: “And the waters were a חוֹמָה (wall) for them, (flanking them) on their right and their left,” (*Shemos 14:22*). Elsewhere (v. 22), this word is spelled in truncated form – חִמָּה – which also indicates חֵמָה (wrath).

In fact, there was a measure of wrath percolating against the Jews at this time. According to the Medrash,

Sama’el, the accusing angel, cast aspersions on the Jews, claiming that their idolatrous ways rendered them unworthy of a miraculous salvation. In reaction, the sea began to churn and threatened to engulf B’nei Yisrael. Hashem intervened, however, and the mounting fury was unleashed upon the Mitzrim (Egyptians) instead, as the verse (*ibid.*, 26) goes on to state: “And the waters shall turn onto the Mitzrim,” (*Yalkut 234*).

The Dubner Maggid adds a measure of depth to our understanding of the events by the sea. What exactly triggered this amazing turnabout related by the Medrash, when the force of the ocean was redirected from the Jews to the Mitzrim? The Dubner Maggid turns once again to his plentiful store of lucid parables to shed light on the subject:

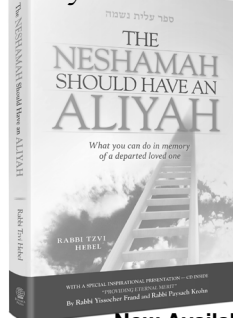
TAKING THE CREDIT

The financial fortunes of a certain wealthy individual took a sudden turn for the worse. He took out various loans from his rich friends in an attempt to stem the tide, but his efforts were in vain. In light of his previously distinguished station, however, these creditors took pity and postponed the date of repayment indefinitely.

One of the man’s acquaintances was a successful merchant, who decided to aid the hapless fellow by offering him employment. The merchant hired him as an agent to sell his merchandise.

Happy to be gainfully employed, the new agent began his task, traveling around to sell his wares. As per instructions, he extended credit to those customers who were unable to offer immediate payment.

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Sometime later, when the credit was due, the man once again made his rounds. When he came to collect payment, however, he exhibited unusual cruelty to his customers. “What do you mean, you don’t have the money??!!” he would scream at some unfortunate soul. He would then proceed to shake and beat the delinquent customer who could not produce the cash on demand.

Needless to say, such behavior – coming especially from a person in his situation – was a grave mistake. One of the customers who “merited” to receive such “treatment” was actually related to the very merchant who had graciously hired the man in the first place. This relative promptly reported to “the boss” about his employee’s collection methods. Shocked and incensed at the agent’s insolent behavior, the merchant related his disgust to his wealthy friends.

The news traveled quickly. When the agent returned home, he found that a large and angry welcoming party had been eagerly anticipating his arrival. There, in front of his eyes, were all of his wealthy buddies who had loaned him large sums of money in his hour of need and had graciously extended the time of repayment. They pounced on him and demanded that he immediately repay his debts.

Bewildered, the man protested. “How could you be so cruel?” he shouted. “You know my situation, how I suffered great losses and was reduced to poverty! How can I possibly repay you all now?”

The creditors, of course, were not impressed. They quickly reminded him of his own practice, in which he displayed no such sympathy to his needy customers.

The ordeal of the Mitzrim followed a similar pattern. There is a certain question that is often asked regarding the bondage in Egypt. Why, in fact, were the Mitzrim punished for oppressing B’nei Yisrael? After all, as the commentators explain, the bondage in Egypt was a form of punishment to atone for the sins of the Jews. Seemingly, the Mitzrim could claim that they were merely Hashem’s agents, carrying out His Will by afflicting the sinful Jews (a claim adopted and repeated by enemies of the Jewish people many times throughout our history).

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The intent of the Medrash, explains the Dubner Maggid, is to refute such a position. When the “agent” of our story displayed cruelty with the explanation that he was merely trying to collect what was due, he was swiftly reminded of his own predicament. He had wanted mercy from *his* creditors, but when he was pitiless to his customers, his own loans came due.

And so it was with the Mitzrim. Yes, the Jews at that time were somewhat iniquitous. But the Mitzrim themselves were far from perfect, as they were steeped in idolatry and immorality. For the time being, however, Hashem may have been willing to afford them a measure of patience.

But then they oppressed the Jews and rationalized their behavior with the claim that they were acting as Hashem’s “agents,” administering punishment for the Jews’ sins. At that point, then, their own “credit” ran out. As the Mitzrim themselves claimed, their sins had to be dealt with; and whatever Wrath had been mounting against the Jews was now turned against them.

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