

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Esther *bas* Yehudah Zev *a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

Borei Nefashos and the Giants

PARSHAS EIKEV 5776

The Mishnah in Berachos (6:8) outlines the blessings associated with drinking water:

השׁוֹתֶה מִיָּם לְצִמְאוֹ, אוֹמֵר שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ... בּוֹרָא נַפְשׁוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחֶסְרוֹנָן.

“One who drinks water to quench his thirst recites ‘*Shehakol niheyeh bidvaro*’ (That all came into being through His word) (and) ‘*Borei nefashos rabos v’chesronan*’ (He creates many souls and their deficiencies).”

Unlikely Neighbors

It seems straightforward enough, on the surface of it. What is somewhat less simple, however, is the reappearance of this *halachah* elsewhere in the teachings of Chazal. Puzzlingly, the *medrash* juxtaposes this ruling with a *passuk* from this week’s *parshah* that seems completely unrelated: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲתָה עֹבֵר הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַלְכָה אֲדָם מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁשׁוֹתֶה מִיָּם לְצִמְאוֹ אוֹמֵר שֶׁהַכֹּל נִהְיָה בְּדַבְּרוֹ... בּוֹרָא נַפְשׁוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחֶסְרוֹנָן (Devarim 9:1). (There is) a *halachah*: An individual from Yisrael who **drinks water to quench his thirst recites ‘*Shehakol niheyeh bidvaro*’... (and) ‘*Borei nefashos rabos v’chesronam*’**” (Devarim Rabbah 3:8).

One might have imagined that viewing the *passuk* in its full context would have clarified the issue. At first glance, however, this does not seem to be the case. Moshe was apprising the people that they would encounter some formidable enemies upon entering the land. Nonetheless, he exhorted them to maintain strong faith and trust in Hashem: שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲתָה עֹבֵר הַיּוֹם אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבֹא לְרִשְׁתָּהּ גּוֹיִם גְּדֹלִים וְעַצְמִים מִמֶּךָ עָרִים גְּדֹלוֹת וּבְצֻרֹת בְּשָׂמַיִם, עִם־גְּדֹלוֹ וְרָם בְּנֵי עֲנָקִים אֲשֶׁר אֲתָה יֹדְעֵת וְאֲתָה שֹׁמְעֵת מִי יִתְנַצֵּב לְפָנַי בְּנִי־עֲנָק, וְיֹדְעֵת הַיּוֹם כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ הוּא־הָעֹבֵר לְפָנֶיךָ אִשׁ – “Hear Yisrael, you are crossing the Yarden River this day, to come and inherit nations that are greater and stronger than you; cities that are great and fortified to the heavens; a great and exalted people – the children of the giants, of whom you know and have heard – who may stand before the children of the giants? But you shall know this day that Hashem your G-d – He is the One Who is crossing before you as a consuming fire; He shall destroy them and humble them before you” (*ibid.* v. 1-3). A rousing message, to be sure; but what is the connection to *Borei Nefashos*?

Actually, the *passukim* themselves seem to present a bit of an issue. Yisrael is encouraged to enter the Land with confidence despite the presence of strong and formidable inhabitants, for Hashem is fighting on their behalf and will dispatch them accordingly. But the question can be raised: Why, indeed, was such an arrangement necessary? Why *were* the original inhabitants indeed comprised of such mighty and intimidating warriors, to the extent that it was necessary to banish them through miraculous means? Seemingly, it would have been more prudent if the denizens of Cana’an had been weak and incompetent and could be cleared out from the land with ease!

The Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe*) clarifies this matter in a most interesting way: by elucidating the blessing of *Borei Nefashos*.

Best of Both Worlds

As familiar as we may be with the text of the blessing, its actual meaning may be somewhat elusive. A cursory glance – supplied here by a mere literal translation – reveals a message whose meaning may not be altogether clear: בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִלְּךָ הָעוֹלָם בּוֹרֵא נַפְשוֹת רַבּוֹת – “Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the Universe, who creates many souls and their deficiencies, for all that was created to sustain thereby every living soul. Blessed is the Life-Source of the Worlds.”

The Chasam Sofer elucidates the blessing by addressing a fundamental question. Of course we are grateful to Hashem for providing our sustenance; once a person is thirsty, it is truly a relief to obtain a drink of water. But why is this necessary? Wouldn't it have been preferable for a person to have been created in total fullness, without any need for external provisions? If he would never be hungry or thirsty, he wouldn't need food or water in the first place!

But of course, this was a most purposeful arrangement, intended for man's ultimate and maximum benefit. If a person automatically had all of his needs, he would be complacent. But since beings were created “*v'chesronan*” – in a state of wanting and dependent on other factors “to sustain thereby every living soul” – they will perforce turn their eyes to the Almighty, beseeching Him to supply these needs. What emerges, then, is that they receive both worlds – Hashem delivers their physical needs, and they merit the World to Come for their reliance on and devotion to Hashem. The blessing concludes in the plural form to underscore this point: “*Baruch Chei Ha'olamim* – Blessed is the Life-Source of the **Worlds**” – this one and the Next.

This, the Chasam Sofer continues, accounts for the connection forged by the *medrash*. The blessing's meaning is also the key to understanding the issue raised above regarding the Land's inhabitants: Why were strong ones placed there instead of weaklings? The truth is, however, that the alternate arrangement would have opened the door to some other tremendous problems. Had the inhabitants been inherently easy to overcome, the people could have been led to adopt the mistaken (and heretical) attitude that כַּחַי וְעַצְמִי יְדִי עָשָׂה לִי אֶת־הַחֵיל – “It is through the strength and might of my own hand that this great achievement was wrought for me” (*Devarim 8:17*). Thus, to protect them from this spiritual trap and help foster a reliance on the Almighty instead, Hashem implanted mighty and formidable inhabitants in the Land. Now, Yisrael would not only inherit the Land in This World, but they would also accrue great merit in the World to Come.