

מלכים א פרק יט:יא-יב

ויאמר:

צא ועמדת בהר לפני יקוק

והנה יקוק עבר

ורוח גדולה וחזק מפרק הרים ומשבר סלעים לפני יקוק

לא ברוח יקוק

ואחר הרוח רעש

לא ברעש יקוק:

ואחר הרעש אש

לא באש יקוק

ואחר האש קול דממה דקה:

ישעיהו פרק סה: ג

העם המכעיסים אותי על פני תמיד זבחים בגנות ומקטרים על הלבנים:

איוב פרק לג: כט-ל

הן כל אלה יפעל א-ל פעמים שלוש עם גבר:

להשיב נפשו מני שחת לאור באור החיים:

1 Kings 19:11-12

He said:

“Go out and stand on the mountain before Hashem!”

Now Hashem is passing –

There is a great and strong wind, taking mountains apart and shattering boulders before Hashem -

Hashem is not in the wind;

After the wind an earthquake –

Hashem is not in the earthquake;

After the earthquake a fire –

Hashem is not in the fire;

After the fire a quiet delicate voice.

(Note: The verses from Yeshayah and Iyov above are translated in multiple mutually exclusive ways in the commentary, so I will not translate them here)

דעת זקנים לבעלי התוספות דברים ל:ב

"ושבת עד ה' אלקיך" –

דכתיב "ושב ה' אלקיך את שבותך ורחמך וגו'".

כל כך למה?

כדא"ר יוחנן בפ"ב דיומא:

גדולה תשובה שמקרבת הגאולה

שנאמר "ובא לציון גואל"; מה טעם? משום "ולשבי פשע ביעקב"

וכו' מענין גדולה תשובה כדאי' התם.

ועוד תני

ר' יוסי בר' יהודה:אומר:

אדם עובר עבירה פעם ראשונה – מוחלין לו;

וכו'

רביעית אין מוחלין לו

שנאמר "כה אמר ה' על שלשה פשעי ישראל ועל ארבעה לא אשיבנה"

והטעם שמעתי מרמ"ל

לפי שיש לו שלש מחיצות לפני הקב"ה

ראשנה רעש

ואחר הרעש אש

ואחר האש רוח

ואחר הרוח קול דממה דקה

ששם שכינתו של הקב"ה

ובכל מחיצה יש מלאכים

וכאשר יחטא הראשון, בא למחיצה הראשונה - הן מעכבין אותו ואין מניחין אותו לעבור, ונמחל;

וכן שלישי נמחל המחיצה שלישית;

וכשאדם חוטא רביעית, שבא לפני הקב"ה עד מחיצתו - אינו נמחל,

וש"ה "הוי המכעיסים אותי על פני" -

הוי שמכעיסים כמה פעמים עד שבא לפני.

הדר זקנים לבעלי התוספות דברים ל:ב

"ושבת עד ה' אלקיך" –

וכתיב מיד

"ושב ה' אלקיך את שבותך ורחמך וגו'".

וכל כך למה?

כדא"ר נתן:

גדולה תשובה שמקרבת הגאולה

שנאמר "ובא לציון גואל ולשבי פשע ביעקב נאם ה'".

"ושבת עד ה' אלקיך" –

וא"ת

מה טעם אמרו "הן כל אלה יפעל א-ל פעמים שלש עם גבר" ולא יותר, דמשמע שהקב"ה מעביר ראשון ראשון

וכן שני וכן שלישי?

וי"ל והטעם הוא ששמעתי מפי ר' מאיר הלוי ז"ל

לפי שיש ג' מחיצות לפני הקב"ה

ראשנה רעש

ב' אש

ג' רוח

ואחריה קול דממה דקה

ששם שכינתו של הקב"ה

ובכל מחיצה ומחיצה יש מלאכים ממונים

וכאשר יחטא הראשון, בא למחיצה הראשנה - ומעכבין אותו ואין מניחין אותו לעבור, ונמחל;

והב' בא למחיצה שניה ונמחל

וכך הג' נמחל בג';

הד' שבא למחיצתו של הקב"ה אינו נמחל,

וזש"ה "הוי המכעיסים אותי על פני" -

המכעיסו אותי כ"כ עד שבא פשעם לפני.

Daat Z'keinim to Devarim 30:2 (edited by me on the basis of Hadar Zkeinim)

"You will return (*veshavta*) unto Hashem your God" –

And immediately Scripture writes:

"And Hashem will restore (*veshov*) your captivity (*shevutkha*) and have mercy on you etc."

Why all this (i.e., so rapidly)?

Along the line of what Rav Natan said in the second chapter of Yoma:

"Great is repentance, for it draws Redemption nearer,
as Scripture says: "And a redeemer will come to Zion . . ."; Why? Because
". . . and to those who have repented their iniquities etc."

It further teaches a beraita:

Rabbi Yosay son of R. Yehudah says:

When a person transgresses a particular transgression the first time – they forgive him;

the second time – they forgive him;

the third time – they forgive him;

the fourth time, they do not forgive him,

as Scripture says: "Thus says Hashem: For three sins of Israel, but for the fourth, I will not restore her (*ashivenah*)" (Amos 2:6)

[Alternative: As Scripture says: "Truly G-d will do all this three times with a man". (Iyov 33:29)]

I have heard the reason for this from R. Meir HaLevi:

Because there are three boundaries before The Holy Blessed One:

The first is earthquake;

After the earthquake is fire;

After the fire is windstorm;

After the windstorm is a quiet delicate voice

which is where the Presence of The Holy Blessed One is.

Within each boundary are angels.

When he sins the first time, he comes to the first boundary – they prevent him and do not let him pass, so he is forgiven;

So too the second time – he is forgiven at the second boundary;

So too the third time - he is forgiven at the third boundary;

But when a person sins for the fourth time, so that he comes before the Holy Blessed One, unto His boundary – he is not forgiven.

The meaning of the verse is thus "Woe to those who anger Me to My face"
– Woe to those who anger Me several times, so that it comes before Me.

ילקוט שמעוני איוב רמז תתקיט

"הן כל אלה יפעל אל פעמים שלש עם גבר" (ברמז תקל"ט).

ר"א אומר:

שמעתי באזני ה' צבאות מדבר –

ומה דבר ?

"נתתי לפניך היום את החיים ואת הטוב ואת המות ואת הרע" –

אמר הקב"ה:

הרי נתתי להם שני דרכים לישראל,

של טוב יש בה שני דרכים - אחד של צדקה ואחד של חסד, ואלהו ז"ל ממוצע ביניהם;

כשיבא אדם ליכנס, אלהו זכרונו לברכה מכריז עליו: "פתחו שערים ויבא גוי צדיק שומר אמונים";

ושל רע ושל מות יש בה ארבעה פתחים, ועל כל פתח ופתח שבעה מלאכים עומדים - ארבעה מבחוץ ושלשה

מבפנים - אלו שמבחוץ רחמנים, ואלו שמבפנים אכזרים;

כשיבא אדם ליכנס, הרחמנים מקדימין ואומרים לו: "מה לך ולאש זו? מה לך ולגחלים הללו? שמע לנו ושוב!"

אם שמע להם – מוטב, ואם לאו - הוא אומר להם "בהם הם חיי".

אמרו ליה: הרי נכנסת בפתח ראשון; אל תכנס בפתח שני!"

בא ליכנס בפתח שני, הרחמנים מקדימין אותו ואומרים לו: מה לך להיות מחוק מתורת אלקיך? לא מוטב לך

להיות חקוק על תורת אלקיך מלהיות מחוק? שמע לנו ושוב!

אם שמע להם - מוטב; ואם לאו, הוא אומר להם "בהם הם חיי".

אמרו ליה: "הרי נכנסת בפתח שני; אל תכנס בפתח שלישי!"

בא ליכנס בפתח השלישי, הרחמנים מקדימין אותו ואומרים לו: "מה לך להיות בורחים ממך וקוראין לך טמא?

לא מוטב לך להיות קוראין לך טהור?"

אם שמע להם מוטב, ואם לאו הוא אומר להם "בהם הם חיי".

בא ליכנס לפתח רביעי, א"ל: "הרי נכנסת לפתח שלישי; אל תכנס לפתח רביעי!"

בא ליכנס לפתח רביעי, הרחמנים מקדימין אותו ואומרים לו: "הרי נכנסת בכל הפתחים ולא שמעת לנו, ולא

שבת; ועד עכשו הקב"ה מקבל שבים, ועד עכשו מוחל לעונות וסולח ואומר בכל יום 'שובו בני האדם'.

אומרים האכזרים: "הואיל ולא שמע לראשונה - נוציא רוחו!

שנאמר "תצא רוחו ישוב לאדמתו",

ועליהם הכתוב אומר "על שלשים ועל רבעים לשונאי",

וכתוב אחר אומר "הן כל אלה יפעל א-ל פעמים שלש עם גבר".

Yalqut Shim'oni Iyov 919

“Truly all these Hashem does three times with a man” –

Rabbi Eliezer said: I have heard with my ears Hashem Lord of Hosts speaking¹ -
What did he say?

“I have placed before you this day life and good, and death and evil” –

Said the Holy Blessed One:

“Behold I have given two paths to Israel.

The good contains two paths – one of righteousness and one of lovingkindness, and Eliyahu of blessed memory is sandwiched between them.

When a person comes to enter, Eliyahu of blessed memory proclaims regarding him:

“Open up gates, and let a righteous nation enter, that preserves faithfulness”.

That of evil and death contains four doorways, and seven angels are appointed at each door – four outside and three within – those outside are merciful, but those within are cruel.

When a person comes to enter, the merciful speak first and say: “What do you need with this fire? What do you need with these coals? Heed us and repent!”

If he listens to them, good; if not, he says to them “But these are my livelihood.”²

They say to him: “Behold you have entered the first doorway – don’t enter the second!”

. . . (and so on up to the fourth) . . .

When he comes to enter the fourth doorway, the merciful ones speak first and say to him:

“You have entered all the doorways and not heeded us and not repented; up to this point the Holy Blessed One accepts penitents, and up to this point He forgives sins and says every day ‘Repent, O Sons of Adam’.

The cruel ones say: “Since you did not listen to the first one – let us remove his spirit!”

. . .

¹ Any information about this apparent idiom would be appreciated

² I am not confident of this translation, and welcome corrections.

This week's dvar Torah will take the form of an unfinished narrative, by which I mean that I will largely retrace my footsteps learning this sugya rather than reordering the material, and that I am still fairly early in this journey. I hope we will journey together further along this route sometime in the next few weeks.

We begin with the Daat Zkeinim to 30:2. What first interested me here was the remarkable interpretation he cited from RML³ of Eliyahu's epiphany in 1Kings 19. Eliyahu, you will recall, is shown successively an earthquake, a fire, and a windstorm, but perceives that G-d is present in none of these, following which he hears a quiet delicate voice⁴. According to Rabbi Meir HaLevi, this apparently means that Eliyahu is first shown the three borders at which angelic customs officials stop sins from coming to G-d's attention, and thereby enable them to be forgiven. In the end, Eliyahu is shown past the border to G-d Himself, where forgiveness is no longer possible.

Now the Daat Zekeinim is not here interested in the Eliyahu story for its own sake, and so we can only speculate as to how he understood this episode. One possibility is that the tableaux showed Eliyahu that any disobedience this time would not be forgiven; thus when he intransigently repeats the apology *pro vita sua* he offered before seeing this vision, G-d can remove him as prophet without qualm. A second possibility is that the tableaux confirmed Eliyahu in his belief that judgment rather than forgiveness is truly Divine.

The claim that forgiveness is angelic, but not Divine, fits well with Exodus 32:3, where G-d apparently sends an angel to precede the Jews into Canaan, rather than accompanying them Himself, because His presence would inevitably destroy them. The image of angels enabling forgiveness three times, but not 4, can be found in Yalkut Shimoni 919 and Pirqei deRabbi Eliezer 15. So at this point we can say that RML's creative contribution was to combine an idea from Shemot with an image from the Midrash and another from 1 Kings so as to interpret our verse.

There are, however, many other challenging aspects of this commentary, at least some of which seem to result from scribal errors. Here are two straightforward examples, both of which appear in the parallel text Hadar Zkeinim as well:

- 1) In Kings, the order of appearance to Eliyahu is windstorm, earthquake, fire, but this commentary speaks of earthquake, then fire, then windstorm.
- 2) The verse cited at the conclusion of the commentary is "Hoi hamakh'isim oti al panai", but no such verse appears in our Tanakh – we have rather "ha'am hamakh'isim etc. (Yeshayah 65:3).

Neither of these errors seem likely to have arisen independently twice, meaning that both our versions were probably copied from a common source, which I have not yet found, and which might shed much light on the entire passage.

I want to call attention to one issue for now. If the Eliyahu scene is taken as representing the Divine administration, there is no way to avoid the number 4.

³ I would appreciate an email definitely identifying RML from anyone who knows – in Hadar Zkeinim's version of Rabbinu Asher's Commentary the acronym is expanded to Rabbi Meir HaLevi, whom I believe would be the RAMA, Rabbi Meir Abulafia,.)

⁴ I provide many interpretations of that scene here and here. (insert links)

Indeed, the statement quoted here from Rabbi Yosay son of R. Yehudah appears undisputed in the Vilna edition of Talmud Bavli Yoma 86. However, the RIF in his commentary there quotes R. Yosay son of R. Yehudah as saying that it is the third sin which is unforgiven; he then cites an anonymous beraita as taking the position that the third is forgiven but not the fourth, and reconciles the two beraitot by assigning one to individuals and the other to communities. Maimonides (Laws of Repentance 3:5) seems to have shared Rif's text, as he states that individuals' sins are not forgiven the third time.

We cannot know whether Rabbi Meir HaLevi would have maintained his interpretation of the Eliyahu story had he accepted Rif's text of the Talmud. What is further interesting, however, is that in both versions R. Yosay's prooftext is Iyov 33:29, "Hen kol ayleh yif'al E-l p'amim shalosh im gever". How can that be?

I suggest that the versions may disagree as to whether the verse should be read declaratively, or rather incredulously; either "Surely G-d will behave so three times with a man", or else "Would G-d truly behave so with a man three times?"

There is yet another prooftext cited, however – Amos 2:6, "Al shloshah pish'ay Yisrael v'al arba'ah lo ashivenah" – which seems to support the position that the third sin is forgiven, but not the fourth. It is contextually reasonable, however, to ascribe that verse to the community, and the verse possibly from Yeshayah to the individual, so that the prooftexts line up with Rif's version. Perhaps one might even consider reading Amos as saying "For three sin of Israel, let alone four!", in which case both texts could be read as saying the third is unforgiven.

Now I am uncomfortable binding G-d to any formal structure where the acceptance of repentance is concerned. (This discomfort may be shared by Rosh, whom we may discuss another time). Nor am I pleased with the notion that teshuvah works because G-d created a bureaucracy that sins find difficult to navigate in order to report themselves. Furthermore, this theology seems to lead to the absurd conclusion that our goal and hope when doing teshuvah is that we keep our distance from G-d, lest He find out what we have done and are now repenting for.

At the same time, I do think that the reading of the Eliyahu story is powerful, and serves to make a more general point, that as Rav Soloveitchik wrote, kedushah is dangerous, and the magnitude of our sins increases as we come closer to the presence of G-d. Thus it is much easier for an observant Jew to commit a "chillul Hashem", as desecration of the Divine Name, than for anyone else. This should not dissuade us from observance, but rather inspire us to more successfully fulfill the great responsibilities that accompany great holiness.

Shabbat Shalom v'Shanah Tovah!