

Can one deserve Divine punishment for doing the right thing?

Netziv is the rare mitnaged who sees aveirah lishmoh, sinning for the sake of the Name of Heaven, as an important practical and exegetical principle. His commentary to Genesis 27:9 (translated and attached) is perhaps the most elegant of the many places he applies it.

Our starting point is a midrash that connects the two goats that Rivkah tells Yaakov to bring, so that she can prepare him to impersonate Esav and deceive his father, to the two goats sacrificed on Yom Kippur. In Vayikra Rabbah 21 this is part of a series of connections drawn between the Forefathers and Foremothers and the Yom Kippur Temple ritual.

Netziv, however, draws a specific connection between this episode involving Yaakov and the nature of these sacrifices. Famously, one goat is sacrificed in the Temple, and the other sent to “azazel”, looking suspiciously like a sacrifice to dark powers, would that not be avodah zarah. Netziv suggests that the symbolism of the goats is that even the dark traits of human nature, such as the willingness to deceive, must have some purpose within the Divine scheme.

But one goat is sacrificed directly to G-d. Netziv uses this to argue that Yaakov here is not simply choosing between lying to his father and losing the blessings; he is actually caught between his parents. Yaakov is honoring his mother even as he is deceiving his father.

Here a conventional, if clever, dvar Torah might end. Both goats are ultimately part of the Divine scheme – therefore Yaakov’s deception of his father is as praiseworthy as his obedience to this mother. But Netziv goes on, citing another midrash which draws on the literary parallelism between Esav’s cry here and Mordechai’s cry in Megillat Esther to suggest that Yaakov was punished for causing Esav pain. Why for Esav’s pain, and not for Yitzchak’s? Netziv answers that Yaakov enjoyed Esav’s pain, and that when one is using dark traits for good purposes, any pleasure one receives is transgressive.

Perhaps this means that one ought not engage in such acts if one suspects oneself of insufficient schadenfreude-resistance. In other words, if Yaakov had known that he would enjoy Esav’s pain, he would have let the blessing be. This understanding, it seems to me, is behind some readings of Chofetz Chayyim’s similar requirement in the context of lashon hora, that even when it is for a good purpose one must be sure that no self-interest is involved.

I suggest, however, that Netziv intends something very different. The responsibility to act in such cases cannot be removed by recognition of one’s own spiritual weakness. That would be the act of the paradigmatic chassid shoteh, idiot saint, who fails to save a drowning woman because he doubts his own resistance to her erotic charms. Rather, one must be accountable both for one’s actions and for one’s character.

In other words – Yaakov would and should have acted as he did (on the assumption that he acted properly) even if he had known that Esav’s cry would gratify his yetzer hora – which doesn’t excuse him for succumbing to that gratification. “Knowing” that one will sin is no excuse for not resisting, and also no excuse for avoiding necessary action. One must expose corruption even if one intensely and personally dislikes the corrupt, although one must also be highly vigilant to avoid misreading situations out of personal animus.

One can be punished for doing the right thing, and one can even be required to do right things in full awareness that one will likely deserve punishment as a result. But the hope is that, over time, the habits of right behavior reinforce the best aspects of our character.

Shabbat shalom

Aryeh Klapper

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## ויקרא רבה (מרגליות) פרשה כא ד"ה [יא] בפר בן

[יא] בפר בן בקר (ויקרא טז, ג), זה אבינו אברהם, על שום ואל הבקר רץ אברהם (בראשית יח, ז). איל לעולה (ויקרא שם ט"ז, ג), בזכות יצחק, על שום והנה איל אחר נאחז בסבך (בראשית כב, יג). עז, בזכותו של יעקב, דכ' לך נא אל הצאן וקח לי משם שני גדיי עזים טובים (שם/בראשית/ כז, ט). מהו טובים, ר' ברכיה בש' ר' חלבו טובים לך וטובים לבניך. טובים לך שעל ידיהן את מקבל סימן ברכות, טובים לבניך שעל ידיהן מתכפר להן ביום הכיפורים, הה"ד כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם (ויקרא טז, ל), ואין לי אלא אבות, אמהות מנין, תל' לו' בד בבד, בד בד. ר' ברכיה ור' ירמיה בש' ר' חייה בר אבא כשירות שלמעלן כך שירות שלמטון, מה שירות שלמעלן איש אחד בתוכם לבוש בדים (יחזקאל ט, ב) כך שירות שלמטון כתנת בד קודש ילבש (ויקרא טז, ד).

## העמק דבר להנצי"ב כז:ט

"וקח לי משם" - גם היא עזרה אותו בטורח המצוה כל האפשר:

"שני גדיי עזים טובים" - אע"ג שהוא מרובה יותר ממאכל אדם, לפי הפשט הוא בשביל שני העורות על ידיו.

אמנם לפי הכלל בגמ' יומא ר"פ שני שעירי דבכ"מ דכתיב "שני" הוא מיותר לדרשה, דגם בל"ז סתם רבים המה שנים,

א"כ גם כאן מיותר תיבת שני, ובמדרש אי':

"טובים" לך ו"טובים" לבניך" -

טובים לך שאתה נוטל ע"י את הברכות; טובים לבניך שמתכפרים ע"י ביוה"כ,

והיינו שני שעירי יוה"כ - א' לשם וא' לעזאזל,

והוא פלא: מה שייכות אלו הגדיים לשני שעירי יוה"כ?

אלא כך הענין:

דיש לדעת דכל מדה רעה שבעולם המה בכלל היצירה, שברא הא' גם אותם, כדכתיב "יוצר אור וגו' ובורא רע", וע"כ

יש בהם איזה טוב,

וה"ז דומה לסם המות, דודאי מזדמן עתים שהוא סם חיים לחולה, ומכ"מ נקרא סה"מ משום שעפ"י רוב הוא ממית, וגם

בעת שנצרך להשתמש לחיים נדרש דקדוק גדול עפ"י הרופא ובצמצום שלא יוסף כ"ש ויסתכן,

כך כל מדה רעה המה טובים לשעה רצויה, רק יש ליזהר שלא להשתמש במדה זו כ"א ע"י רב מובהק ובצמצום שלא

יוסף על הצורך:

והנה הגיעה שעה ליעקב אבינו להשתמש במדת השקר וערמימות, וה"ז עבירה לשמה, אשר גדולה היא בזמנה. כמו

מצוה עצמה.

וכיב"ז שני שעירים - הא' לשם הוא קדושה, והא' לעזאזל הוא כעין קרבן לכחות הטומאה ח"ו, והוא מטמא - אבל מכ"מ

בעת ובזמן שצוה ה', ה"ז מצוה כמו השעיר לה',

והיינו דבר רבקה שיהיו שני גדיי וגו' כמו שני שעירי יוה"כ א' לשם וא' לעזאזל, שניהם שוין במצותן אע"ג שזה

לקדושה וזה להיפך, כך שתי המדות שיעקב עושה, הא' האמת בקיום מצות אמו והב' השקר שמרמה את אביו, שניהם

נחשבים למצוה ולהביא ע"י את הברכות.

והנה אמרו ברבה שנענש יעקב אבינו על שגרם לעשו שצעק צעקה גדולה ומרה, וזה הביא שמרדכי צעק צעקה גדולה

ומרה.

ולכאורה קשה: על מה זה נענש בצעקת עשו יותר ממה שגרם ליצחק אביו הצדיק שחרד חרדה גדולה!?

אבל הענין:

דלהשתמש בעבירה לשמה יש ליזהר הרבה שלא ליהנות ממנה כלום, ולא דמי לעושה מצוה דאע"ג שנהנה ג"כ המצוה

עומדת במקומה, משא"כ עבירה לשמה. ההנאה שמגיע להגוף מזה בע"כ הוא עבירה,

וכמבואר ביבמות דק"ג א' ונזיר דכ"ג. גבי האי שאמרו גדולה עבירה לשמה, וראי' מיעל, ומקשה והא קא מיתהני

מעבירה,

ואע"ג שודאי רשאה היתה משום פקו"נ, כמש"כ התוס', מכ"מ לא היתה משתבחת ע"ז, משום דהנאה שבזה נחשבת

לעון,

וה"נ בעבירה לשמה שעשה יעקב לא נהנה כלל בשעה שחרד יצחק, ובודאי נצטער ע"ז אבל אנוס היה.. משא"כ על

צעקת עשו שמח בלבו, ע"כ נענש, שהרי גרם זה ע"י עבירה של שקר, ואסור ליהנות מזה.

וע' מש"כ בס' שמות ל"ג כ"ז ראי' לכלל זה ממקרא מפורש:

## Netziv to Genesis 27:9

“And take for me from there” – Rivakh helped Yaakov with the mitzvah to the extent possible. “Two good goat kids” = even though these are more than one person can eat, according to peshat-interpretation this was for the two skins on his hands.

But according to the principle in Talmud Yoma that everywhere the Torah writes “two” it is extra and intended for derash-interpretation, as without the word any plural requires two, the word “two” is extra here as well, and in the midrash we find:

“good” – for you, and “good” – for your descendants –  
good for you in that you will take the blessings through them,  
and good for your descendants, who gain atonement through them on Yom HaKippurim referring to the two goats sacrificed on Yom HaKippurim – one goes to Hashem and one goes to azazel.

But this is astonishing: What is the connection of these kids to the two goats of Yom HaKippurim? But the meaning is as follows:

One should know that all bad traits in the world are included within the Formation, that the One created even them, as Scripture writes “Who forms light . . . and creates badness”, so that you must concede there is some good in them.

This is similar to a deadly potion, which certainly at times serves as an elixir or life for a sick person, but nonetheless it is called a deadly potion since generally it kills, and even when it is needed for life, it requires great care via a doctor and precision so that one does not take even a little too much and be endangered,

so too all bad traits are good in the proper time, just one must be careful not to use this trait except via an expert rabbi and with precision so as not to add to the necessary.

Now the time came for Yaakov to use the trait of falsehood and trickery. This is a sin for the Name, which in its time is as great as an actual mitzvah.

This is similar to the two goats – the one going to Hashem is holy, whereas the one going to azazel is like a sacrifice to the forces of impurity G-d forbid, and it transmits ritual impurity – nonetheless in its time, and when Hashem commands it, it is a mitzvah like the goat going to Hashem.

This is what Rivkah meant by saying that they should be two goat kids... like the two goats of Yom Kippur, one going to Hashem and the other going for azazel – the two of them equally mitzvot even though this one was for holiness and the other for the opposite, so two the two traits that Yaakov was actualizing, one loyalty/truth, in the fulfillment of his mother's command, and the other falsehood, that he was tricking his father – both of them considered mitzvot and for the sake of obtaining the blessings.

But they say in Midrash Rabbah that our forefather Yaakov was punished for causing Esav a “great and bitter cry”, and this is what caused Mordechai (in Esther) to cry a great and bitter cry), when it appears that this is difficult – why was Yaakov punished more for this than for causing his sainted father Yitzchak a great trembling?

But the meaning is:

When using a sin for the Name, one must be very careful not to derive any benefit from it at all, and this is not comparable to one who does a mitzvah, where even if he also derives benefit the mitzvah remains in place, which is not the case regarding a sin for the Name, where you must concede that any bodily pleasure derived from this is transgressive,

as is made clear on Yevamot 103a and Nazir 23a, where they say “Great is a sin for the Name”, and cite Yael as evidence, and then ask “but she derived bodily benefit from her transgression?!” which shows that even though she was certainly permitted to have relations with Sisera for the sake of lifesaving, as Tosafot write, nonetheless she is not praised for this, because the benefit involved in this is considered a sin,

and so too, the Name for the sin that Yaakov did, he did not derive any benefit at all when Yitzchak trembled, and certainly he was greatly pained by this, but he was coerced by circumstances, whereas with regard to the scream of Yitzchak, he rejoiced in his heart, and therefore he was punished, because he caused this through transgression-of-falsehood, and it is forbidden to benefit from this.

See where I have written regarding Exodus 33:27 a proof to this principle from an explicit verse.