

Praying for the Destruction of the Wicked People

Source Sheet by Mordechai Lewis

TEHILLIM TOGETHER by HaRav Betzalel Rudinsky - Week #11

תהילים ב':ט'

(ט) תִּרְעַם בְּשֵׁבֶט בְּרִזְגַל כִּכְלֵי יוֹצֵר תִּנְפְּצֵם:

Psalms 2:9

(9) You can smash them with an iron mace, shatter them like potter's ware.”

Psalms 3:8

(8) Rise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! For You slap all my enemies in the face; You break the teeth of the wicked.

Deuteronomy 13:13-17

(13) If you hear it said, of one of the towns that the LORD your God is giving you to dwell in, (14) that some scoundrels from among you have gone and subverted the inhabitants of their town, saying, “Come let us worship other gods”—whom you have not experienced— (15) you shall investigate and inquire and interrogate thoroughly. If it is true, the fact is established—that abhorrent thing was perpetrated in your midst— (16) put the inhabitants of that town to the sword and put its cattle to the sword. Doom it and all that is in it to destruction: (17) gather all its spoil into the open square, and burn the town and all its spoil as a holocaust to the LORD your God. And it shall remain an everlasting ruin, never to be rebuilt.

Sanhedrin 2a

A city **may be designated as an idolatrous city**, i.e., a city whose residents all practice idolatry, and therefore according to Torah law all the residents must be killed and the city must be destroyed (see Deuteronomy 13:13–19), **only in accordance with** the ruling of a **court of seventy-one** judges. Additionally, the court **may not designate** a city as an **idolatrous city** if it is **on the frontier**, close to the borders of Eretz Yisrael, **and three** adjoining cities may **not** be designated as idolatrous cities. **But** the court **may designate one city, or two** adjoining cities, as idolatrous cities.

רש"י על סנהדרין ב' א

בספר - כרך המבדיל בין ישראל לנכרים ובלע"ז מרק"א ובגמרא (שם) מפרש טעמא:

Mishneh Torah, Foreign Worship and Customs of the Nations 4:4

(4) None of the cities of escape is adjudged a seduced city, as it is said: "Within any of thy gates" (Deut. 17.2); nor is Jerusalem adjudged a seduced city as it was not divided among the tribes. A buffer city must not be adjudged a seduced city, lest the idolaters enter through it and destroy Eretz Ysrael. A single tribunal should not adjudge three cities, one alongside the other, seduced cities, but if they be far apart it may be done.⁶

Deuteronomy 13:18

(18) Let nothing that has been doomed stick to your hand, in order that the LORD may turn from His blazing anger and show you compassion, and in His compassion increase you as He promised your fathers on oath—

Sefer HaChinukh 16:2

(2) ...You must know, that a man is acted upon according to his actions;

Psalms 104:35

(35) May sinners disappear from the earth, and the wicked be no more. Bless the LORD, O my soul. Hallelujah.

Berakhot 10a

Every chapter that was dear to David, he began with "happy is" and concluded with "happy is." He opened with "happy is," as it is written: "Happy is the man who has not walked in the counsel of the wicked or stood in the way of sinners or sat in the dwelling place of the scornful" (Psalms 1:1). And he concluded with "happy," as it is written at the end of the chapter: "Pay homage in purity, lest He be angry, and you perish on the way when His anger is kindled suddenly. Happy are those who take refuge in Him" (Psalms 2:12). We see that these two chapters actually constitute a single chapter. With regard to the statement of Rabbi Yehuda, son of Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi, that David did not say *Halleluya* until he saw the downfall of the wicked, the Gemara relates: **There were these hooligans in Rabbi Meir's neighborhood who caused him a great deal of anguish. Rabbi Meir prayed for God to have mercy on them, that they should die. Rabbi Meir's wife, Berurya, said to him: What is your thinking? On what basis do you pray for the death of these hooligans? Do you base yourself on the verse, as it is written: "Let sins cease from the land" (Psalms 104:35), which you interpret to mean that the world would be better if the wicked were destroyed? But is it written, let sinners cease?"** Let sins cease, is written. One should pray for an end to their transgressions, not

for the demise of the transgressors themselves. **Moreover, go to the end of the verse,** where it says: **“And the wicked will be no more.”** If, as you suggest, **transgressions shall cease** refers to the demise of the evildoers, how is it possible that **the wicked will be no more**, i.e., that they will no longer be evil? **Rather, pray for God to have mercy on them, that they should repent,** as if they repent, then the wicked will be no more, as they will have repented. Rabbi Meir saw that Berurya was correct **and he prayed for God to have mercy on them, and they repented.** The Gemara relates an additional example of Berurya’s incisive insight: **A certain heretic said to Berurya: It is written: “Sing, barren woman who has not given birth,** open forth in song and cry, you did not travail, for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, said the Lord” (Isaiah 54:1). **Because she has not given birth,** she should **sing** and rejoice? Berurya responded to this heretic’s mockery and **said: Fool! Go to the end of the verse, where it is written: “For the children of the desolate shall be more numerous than the children of the married wife, said the Lord.”** **Rather, what** is the meaning of: **“Sing, barren woman who has not given birth”?** It means: **Sing congregation of Israel, which is like a barren woman who did not give birth to children who are destined for Gehenna like you.** In explaining passages from Psalms, the Gemara relates another instance of a response to the question of a heretic: **A certain heretic said to Rabbi Abbahu, it is written: “A Psalm of David, when he fled from his son, Absalom”** (Psalms 3:1), **and similarly it is said: “To the chief musician, *al tashhet*, a *mikhtam* of David when fleeing from Saul into the cave”** (Psalms 57:1). **Which event was first? Since the event with Saul was first,** it would have been appropriate **to write it first.** Rabbi Abbahu **said to him: For you, who do not employ the homiletic method of juxtaposition of verses, it is difficult.** But for **us, who employ the homiletic method of juxtaposition of verses, it is not difficult,** as the Sages commonly homiletically infer laws and moral lessons from the juxtaposition of two verses. Regarding the juxtaposition of verses, **Rabbi Yoḥanan said: From where** in the Bible is it derived that one may draw homiletical inferences from the **juxtaposition** of verses? **As it is said: “The works of His hands in truth and justice, all His commandments are sure. Adjoined forever and ever, made in truth and uprightness”** (Psalms 111:7–8). Conclude from here that it is appropriate to draw inferences from the juxtaposition of God’s commandments. Accordingly, David’s fleeing from Absalom is situated where it is in order to juxtapose it to the next chapter, which mentions the war of Gog and Magog; the second chapter of Psalms opens: **“Why are the nations in an uproar?”** **Why was the chapter of Absalom juxtaposed with the chapter of Gog and Magog?** They are juxtaposed **so that if a person should say to you,** expressing doubt with regard to the prophecy of the war of Gog and Magog **“against the Lord and against His anointed”:** **Is there a slave who rebels against his master?** Is there someone capable of rebelling against God? **You too say to him: Is there a son who rebels against his father** and severs the relationship with the one who brought him into the world and raised him? **Yet,** nevertheless, **there was** such a son, Absalom, and **so too there can be** a situation where **people** will seek to rebel against God. **Rabbi Yoḥanan said** explanations of other verses **in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai: What is the meaning of that which is written: “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of loving-kindness is on her tongue”** (Proverbs 31:26)? The Sages explain that this chapter discusses the wisdom of Torah and those who engage in its study, so **with reference to whom did Solomon say this verse? He said this verse about none other than his father, David,** who was the clearest example of one who opens his mouth in wisdom, and **who resided**

in five worlds or stages of life **and his soul said a song** of praise corresponding to each of them. Five times David said: “Bless the Lord, O my soul,” each corresponding to a different stage of life. **He resided in his mother’s womb**, his first world, **and said a song** of praise of the pregnancy, **as it is stated**: “Of David. **Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me bless His holy name**” (Psalms 103:1), in which he thanks God for creating all that is within his mother, i.e., her womb. **He emerged into the atmosphere of the world**, his second world, **looked upon the stars and constellations and said a song** of praise of God for the entirety of creation, **as it is stated**: “**Bless the Lord, His angels, mighty in strength, that fulfill His word, listening to the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all His hosts**, His servants, that do His will. Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His kingship, bless my soul, Lord” (Psalms 103:20–23). David saw the grandeur of all creation and recognized that they are mere servants, carrying out the will of their Creator (*Ma’ayan HaBerakhot*). **He nursed from his mother’s breast**, his third world, **and he looked upon her bosom and said a song** of praise, **as it is stated**: “**Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all His benefits [gemulav]**” (Psalms 103:2). The etymological association is between *gemulav* and *gemulei mehalav*, which means weaned from milk (Isaiah 28:9). We still must understand, however, **what is meant by all His benefits?** What in particular is praiseworthy in what God provided, beyond merely providing for the infant? **Rabbi Abbahu said**: In contrast with most other animals, God **placed her breasts** near her heart, **the place** that is the source of understanding. **What is the reason** that God did this? **Rav Yehuda said**: **So that** the nursing child **would not look upon the place** of his mother’s nakedness. **Rav Mattana said**: **So that** the child **would not nurse from a place of uncleanness**. **He witnessed** in both vision and reality **the downfall of the wicked and he said a song** of praise, **as it is stated**: “**Let sinners cease from the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless the Lord, O my soul, Halleluya**” (Psalms 104:35). The fifth world was when David **looked upon the day of death and said a song** of praise, **as it is stated**: “**Bless the Lord, O my soul. Lord my God, You are very great; You are clothed in glory and majesty**” (Psalms 104:1); for even death is a time of transcendence for the righteous. The connection between this final praise and the day of death is unclear. The Gemara asks: **From where is it inferred that this verse was stated with regard to the day of death?** The Gemara answers: We can derive this **from the verses at the end of the matter**, where it is written: “**You hide Your face, they vanish; You gather Your breath, they perish** and return to the dust” (Psalms 104:29). Other interpretations of this verse exist. The Gemara relates how **Rav Shimi bar Ukva, and some say Mar Ukva, would regularly study before Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi**, who was well versed in *aggada* and **would arrange the aggada before Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi**.

Once, Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi **said to him**: **What is the meaning of that which is written**: “**Bless the Lord, my soul, and all that is within me bless His Holy name**”?

Rav Shimi bar Ukva **said to Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi**: **Come and see that the attribute of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is not like the attribute of flesh and blood**, as this verse praises the formation of man in his mother’s womb. **The attribute of flesh and blood is such that he shapes a form on the wall** for all to see, yet **he cannot instill it with a spirit and soul, bowels and intestines**. While **the Holy One, Blessed be He, is not so**, as God **shapes one form within another form**, a child in its mother’s womb,

and instills it with spirit and soul, bowels and intestines. And this is the explanation of what Hannah said with regard to the birth of Samuel: “There is none holy like the Lord, for there is none like You, and there is no Rock like our God” (I Samuel 2:2). What is the meaning of there is no rock [tzur] like our God? There is no artist [tzayyar] like our God. The Gemara continues to interpret the rest of that verse homiletically: What is the meaning of “there is none like You”? Rabbi Yehuda ben Menasya said: Do not read the verse to mean “there is none like You [biltekha]”; rather, read it to mean “none can outlast You [levalotkha],” as the attribute of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is not like the attribute of flesh and blood: The attribute of flesh and blood is such that his creations outlast him, but the Holy One, Blessed be He, outlasts His actions. This did not satisfy Rav Shimi bar Ukva, who said to Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi: I meant to say to you as follows: Corresponding to whom did David say these five instance of “Bless the Lord, O my soul”? He answered him: He said them about none other than the Holy One, Blessed be He, and corresponding to the soul, as the verse refers to the relationship between man’s soul and God. The five instances of “Bless the Lord, O my soul” correspond to the five parallels between the soul in man’s body and God’s power in His world. Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, fills the entire world, so too the soul fills the entire body.

Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, sees but is not seen, so too does the soul see, but is not seen.

Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, sustains the entire world, so too the soul sustains the entire body.

Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, is pure, so too is the soul pure.

Just as the Holy One, Blessed be He, resides in a chamber within a chamber, in His inner sanctum, so too the soul resides in a chamber within a chamber, in the innermost recesses of the body.

Therefore, **that which has these five characteristics, the soul, should come and praise He Who has these five characteristics.** With regard to redemption and prayer, the Gemara tells the story of Hezekiah’s illness, his prayer to God, and subsequent recuperation. **Rav Hamnuna said: What is the meaning of that which is written praising the Holy One, Blessed be He: “Who is like the wise man, and who knows the interpretation [peshar] of the matter” (Ecclesiastes 8:1)? This verse means: Who is like the Holy One, Blessed be He, Who knows how to effect compromise [peshara] between two righteous individuals, between Hezekiah, the king of Judea, and Isaiah the prophet. They disagreed over which of them should visit the other. Hezekiah said: Let Isaiah come to me, as that is what we find with regard to Elijah the prophet, who went to Ahab, the king of Israel, as it is stated: “And Elijah went to appear to Ahab” (I Kings 18:2). This proves that it is the prophet who must seek out the king. And Isaiah said: Let Hezekiah come to me, as that is what we find with regard to Yehoram ben Ahab, king of Israel, who went to Elisha the prophet, as it is stated: “So the king of Israel, Jehosaphat and the king of Edom went down to him” (II Kings 3:12). What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do to effect compromise between Hezekiah and Isaiah? He brought the suffering of illness upon Hezekiah and told Isaiah: Go and visit the**

sick. Isaiah did as God instructed, as it is stated: **“In those days Hezekiah became deathly ill, and Isaiah ben Amoz the prophet came and said to him: Thus says the Lord of Hosts: Set your house in order, for you will die and you will not live”** (Isaiah 38:1). This seems redundant; **what is the meaning of you will die and you will not live?** This repetition means: **You will die in this world, and you will not live, you will have no share, in the World-to-Come.** Hezekiah said to him: **What is all of this?** For what transgression am I being punished?

Isaiah said to him: **Because you did not marry and engage in procreation.**

Hezekiah apologized and said: **I had no children because I envisaged through divine inspiration that the children that emerge from me will not be virtuous.** Hezekiah meant that he had seen that his children were destined to be evil. In fact, his son Menashe sinned extensively, and he thought it preferable to have no children at all. Isaiah said to him: **Why do you involve yourself with the secrets of the Holy One, Blessed be He? That which you have been commanded, the mitzva of procreation, you are required to perform, and that which is acceptable in the eyes of the Holy One, Blessed be He, let Him perform, as He has so decided.** Hezekiah said to Isaiah: **Now give me your daughter as my wife; perhaps my merit and your merit will cause virtuous children to emerge from me.**

Isaiah said to him: **The decree has already been decreed against you and this judgment cannot be changed.**

Hezekiah said to him: Son of Amoz, cease your prophecy and leave. As long as the prophet spoke as God’s emissary, Hezekiah was obligated to listen to him. He was not, however, obligated to accept Isaiah’s personal opinion that there was no possibility for mercy and healing. Hezekiah continued: **I have received a tradition from the house of my father’s father, from King David, the founding father of the dynasty of kings of Judea: Even if a sharp sword rests upon a person’s neck, he should not prevent himself from praying for mercy.** One may still hold out hope that his prayers will be answered, as was David himself when he saw the Angel of Destruction, but nonetheless prayed for mercy and his prayers were answered. With regard to the fact that one should not despair of God’s mercy, the Gemara cites that **it was also said that Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Eliezer both said: Even if a sharp sword is resting upon a person’s neck, he should not prevent himself from praying for mercy, as it is stated in the words of Job: “Though He slay me, I will trust in Him”** (Job 13:15). Even though God is about to take his life, he still prays for God’s mercy.

מדרש תהילים ב' י"א

(יא) ככלי יוצר תנפצם. אמר ליה רבי יוסי ככלי יוצר זה עד שלא הוסק אין קיומו ברור ואם נשבר יש לו תקנה שיכול לעשותו אחר ומשהוסק קיומו ברור ואם נשבר אין לו תקנה. אבל כלי זכוכית משהוסק קיומו ברור ואם נשבר יש לו רפואה. אמר ליה השמיע לאזניך מה שאתה מוציא מפיוך ומה כלי זכוכית על ידי שנעשה בנפיחה מרוח בשר ודם ואם נשבר יש לו רפואה אדם שהוא עשוי בנפיחה של הקב"ה שנאמר (בראשית ב ז)

ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים על אחת כמה וכמה. א"ר יצחק כלי יוצר אין כתיב כאן אלא ככלי יוצר. עד שלא הוסק יכולין הן לחזור:

שיר השירים רבה ה':ב':ב'

(ב) אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּנִי, פְתַחוּ לִי פֶתַח אֶחָד שֶׁל תְּשׁוּבָה כְּחֶדְהָ שֶׁל מַחַט, וְאֲנִי פּוֹתֵחַ לָכֶם פְּתָחִים שֶׁיְהִיוּ עֲגָלוֹת וּקְרוּנִיּוֹת נִכְנָסוֹת בּוֹ.



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