

AND THEY ARISE EARLY: אָנִי מִשְׁכִּימִים לְדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה – I ARISE EARLY FOR WORDS OF TORAH, וְהֵם מִשְׁכִּימִימִים לְדַבְּרֵימִים בְּטִלִּים – AND THEY ARISE EARLY FOR IDLE WORDS. אָנִי עֹמֵל וְהֵם עֹמְלִים – I TOIL AND THEY TOIL: אָנִי עֹמֵל וּמְקַבֵּל שְׂכָר – I TOIL AND RECEIVE REWARD, וְהֵם עֹמְלִים וְאֵינָם מְקַבְּלִים שְׂכָר – AND THEY TOIL AND DO NOT RECEIVE REWARD.^[12] אָנִי רָץ וְהֵם רָצִים – I RUN AND THEY RUN: אָנִי רָץ לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא – I RUN TO THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME, וְהֵם רָצִים לְבְּאֵר שַׁחַת – AND THEY RUN TO THE PIT OF DESTRUCTION.^[13]

An incident:

בְּשַׁחֲלָה רַבִּי אֶלְיָעָזָר – The Rabbis taught in a Baraisa: כִּשְׁנֵי רֵבָנִין – WHEN R' ELIEZER BECAME ILL, נִבְגְּסוּ תַלְמִידָיו לְבַקְרוֹ – HIS STUDENTS ENTERED TO VISIT HIM. אָמְרוּ לוֹ – THEY SAID TO HIM: רַבֵּינוּ – OUR TEACHER, לְמַדְנָנוּ אֲוֶרְחוֹת חַיִּים – TEACH US THE WAYS OF LIFE, וְנִזְכֶּה בָהֶן לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא – THAT WE MAY MERIT THROUGH THEM THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME! אָמַר לָהֶם – HE SAID TO THEM: הִזְהָרוּ בְּבִדּוּד חֲבֵרֵיכֶם – BE MINDFUL OF THE HONOR OF YOUR COLLEAGUES; וּמְנַעוּ בְּנֵיכֶם מִן הַהֲגִיזוֹן – AND RESTRAIN YOU CHILDREN FROM RECITATION,^[14] וְהוֹשִׁיבוּם בֵּין – AND PLACE THEM BETWEEN THE KNEES OF TORAH SCHOLARS; וּבְשִׂאתָם מִתְּפִלָּים – AND WHEN YOU PRAY, דַּעוּ לִפְנֵי מִי אֶתֶם עוֹמְדִים – KNOW BEFORE WHOM YOU STAND;^[15] וּבְשִׂבְלֵי כֶּךָ תִּזְכּוּ לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא – AND ON ACCOUNT OF THIS YOU WILL MERIT THE LIFE OF THE WORLD TO COME.^[16]

Another incident:

וּכְשִׁחֲלָה רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּכַּי – AND WHEN R' YOCHANAN BEN ZAKKAI TOOK ILL, נִבְגְּסוּ תַלְמִידָיו לְבַקְרוֹ – HIS STUDENTS ENTERED TO VISIT HIM. כִּיִּן שָׂרָאָה אוֹתָם הִתְחִיל לְבִכּוֹת – WHEN HE SAW THEM HE BEGAN TO WEEP. אָמְרוּ לוֹ תַלְמִידָיו – HIS STUDENTS SAID TO HIM: נֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲמוּר הַיְמִינִי פְּטִישׁ הַחֹקֶק – LIGHT OF ISRAEL, RIGHT-

MOST PILLAR,^[17] MIGHTY HAMMER! בּוֹכָה – WHY DO YOU WEEP? אָמַר לָהֶם – HE SAID TO THEM: אִילוּ לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ בֶּשָׂר – IF THEY WERE LEADING ME TO JUDGMENT BEFORE A KING OF FLESH AND BLOOD, שָׁהִיּוּם בְּאֵין וּמָחָר בְּקִבְרִי – WHO IS HERE TODAY AND IN THE GRAVE TOMORROW, שָׂאֵם בּוֹעֵס – WHO, IF HE BECOMES ANGRY WITH ME, HIS ANGER IS NOT AN EVERLASTING ANGER, אוֹסְרֵנִי אֵין אִיסוּרוֹ – AND IF HE IMPRISONS ME HIS IMPRISONMENT IS NOT AN EVERLASTING IMPRISONMENT, וְאִנִּי יוֹבֵל לְפִיּוֹסוֹ בְּדַבְּרִים – AND I AM ABLE TO APPEASE HIM WITH WORDS וּלְשַׁחְדוֹ בְּמִמּוֹן – AND TO BRIBE HIM WITH MONEY, אִפֹּה עַל פִּי בֶן הַיְיָתִי בּוֹכָה – EVEN SO I WOULD WEEP. נֹחַ וְעַבְדֵי שְׂמוּלִיכִים אוֹתִי לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא – NOW THAT THEY ARE LEADING ME BEFORE THE KING WHO REIGNS OVER ALL KINGS, THE HOLY ONE, BLESSED IS HE, שְׂהוּא חַי וְקַיִים – WHO LIVES AND ENDURES FOREVER AND EVER, לְעוֹלָם וְלְעוֹלָמֵי עוֹלָמִים – WHO, IF HE BECOMES ANGRY WITH ME, HIS ANGER IS AN EVERLASTING ANGER, אִם – AND IF HE IMPRISONS ME, HIS IMPRISONMENT IS AN EVERLASTING IMPRISONMENT, וְאִם מְמִיתֵנִי – AND IF HE PUTS ME TO DEATH, HIS DEATH IS AN EVERLASTING DEATH, וְאִנִּי יוֹבֵל לְפִיּוֹסוֹ בְּדַבְּרִים – AND I AM UNABLE TO APPEASE HIM WITH WORDS וְלֹא לְשַׁחְדוֹ בְּמִמּוֹן – NOR TO BRIBE HIM WITH MONEY; וְלֹא עוֹד – AND NOT ONLY THAT, בְּרִיבֵי – BUT THERE LIE BEFORE ME TWO PATHS, אַחַת שֶׁל גֶּן עֵדֶן וְאַחַת שֶׁל גֵּיהֵנוֹם – ONE OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN AND ONE OF GEHINNOM, וְאִנִּי יוֹדֵעַ בְּאִיזוֹ מוֹלִיכִים אוֹתִי – AND I KNOW NOT ON WHICH THEY WILL LEAD ME, וְלֹא אֶבְכֶה – AND SHOULD I NOT WEEP?^[19]

NOTES

12. The *Chafetz Chaim* (quoted in *Chafetz Chaim al HaTorah, parashas Bechukosai*) argues that this statement seems strange. Surely anyone who works – be he a tailor, a shopkeeper or one in any other line of work – receives pay for his work. How can it be said that those who labor in other fields “toil but do not receive reward”?

The answer, the *Chafetz Chaim* replies, is this: Should a tailor labor long hours but not produce a suit, he would not be justified in demanding pay. The customer engaged him to sew a suit. If he cannot produce one, even if he labored all week long, the customer will not pay him, because it is not for his effort that he is paid but for the finished product.

Such is not the case with Torah. One who labors hard but still does not fully understand the subject he is studying is rewarded for his effort. This is the meaning of this prayer: We toil and receive reward for the toil, and they toil and do not receive reward for the toil, only for the finished product.

13. I.e. to hell (see *Psalms 55:24* with *Targum and Radak*; cf. *Rambam, Hil. Teshuvah 8:5*).

This last statement (“I run to the life of the World to Come etc.”) is not merely a rewording of the previous one (“I toil and receive reward etc.”). Rather, here a new thought is added: I realize that every day brings me closer (“I run”) to the day of death. Therefore, I arm myself with Torah and good deeds in order to merit a place in the Afterlife. (“I run to the life of the World to Come”). The idlers, however, are oblivious to the fact that the days are passing. They are therefore destined for (“run towards”) hell (*Rabbeinu Yonah*).

From the fact that the Baraisa opens with the words אָמַר, *What does one say*, rather than הִיאָה אָמַר, *What did he say*, *Rambam (Commentary to the Mishnah)* infers that the recital of these prayers is obligatory on everyone, and was not simply a private practice of R' Nechunya ben Hakanah. Indeed, this is the ruling of *Shulchan Aruch* (110:8). *Rosh Yosef* is therefore at a loss to explain why people are apparently not careful to recite these prayers. See, however, *Ritva* and *Meiri* to the Mishnah.

14. Do not accustom them to spend too much time studying Scripture, because they will be drawn to it [and neglect the study of the Oral Torah] (*Rashi*).

This refers even to children who are not yet old enough to begin

learning Mishnah or Gemara. R' Eliezer therefore continues that instead of having them sit idle, their fathers should bring them to sit at the feet of Torah sages, so that they may learn from their beautiful characters (*Maharsha*).

Another explanation of this phrase by *Rashi*: Do not allow your children to while away their precious time with children's chatter (see *Avos 3:10*).

A third explanation: Train your children not to translate literally those verses whose plain meaning might create ideological misconceptions (*Meiri*). [For additional explanations of this phrase, see *Iyun Yaakov, Eitz Yosef, Tzlach*.]

15. In order that you pray with awe and concentration (*Rashi*).

16. [The three things mentioned by R' Eliezer correspond to the three things upon which our Sages teach the world stands: Torah, the Temple service, and acts of kindness [תּוֹרָה עֲבוֹדָה וְגִמְלוּת חֲסִדִּים] (*Avos 1:2*). Placing one's children at the feet of Torah scholars corresponds to Torah bearing in mind before Whom one stands corresponds to the Temple service (since prayer today takes its place) and being careful with the honor of one's fellow corresponds to acts of kindness (*Pnei Yehoshua*).

17. [Solomon placed two massive pillars in the Temple (see *I Kings 7:2*). The rightmost pillar is singled out here because the right side is always considered the more important (*Rashi*; see *Iyun Yaakov*).]

18. I.e. he has the power to kill me only in this world, not in the World to Come (*Rashi*).

19. Even if I indeed am not sentenced to everlasting Gehinnom or eternal destruction as are the most wicked, I may still be made to pe through Gehinnom (to traverse the “path of Gehinnom”) for a limited time to purge my sins before I enter Gan Eden (see *Maharsha*, based *Rosh Hashanah 17a*).

Another explanation of what R' Yochanan ben Zakkai meant to add saying, “And not only that . . .”: When a person is judged by a court of flesh and blood, the outcome of the trial is limited to either punishment or freedom therefrom. If he is found guilty he is punished, and if he is acquitted he is set free. Reward, however, does not figure into the case.

Not so one who is judged by the King of kings. Here the difference between acquittal and conviction is the difference between punishment