



PARSHAS NOACH • 5787

THIS WEEK'S QUESTION

Zecher Tzaddik Livrachah — Why Here?

בראשית ו:ט אלה תולדות נח נח איש צדיק תמים הָיָה בְּדֹרֹתָיו אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים
הַתְּהַלֵּךְ נֹחַ.

“These are the generations of Noach. Noach was a righteous man, perfect in his generations; Noach walked with Hashem.”

Rashi explains:

הואיל והזכירו, סיפר בשבחו, שנאמר זכר צדיק לברכה.

“Since the Torah mentioned him, it spoke in his praise, as it says: “The memory of a tzaddik is a blessing.””

The Torah does not praise every tzaddik each time his name is mentioned. Rather, it teaches this principle once, just as it teaches us the importance of refined speech without repeating the lesson in every case (see 7:8 and Pesachim 3a).

But if this praise is connected simply to mentioning Noach’s name, why did the Torah not teach us this principle the first time he is mentioned, at the end of Parshas Bereishis (5:29)?

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר זֶה יִנְחָמנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמִמַּעֲצָבוֹן יְדִינוּ מִן הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר
אֲרָכָה ה'.

“And he called his name Noach, saying: This one will comfort us from our work and the toil of our hands, from the ground which Hashem has cursed.”

The Kli Yakar asks this question and therefore explains the pasuk differently. We are looking for an answer according to Rashi.

THE QUESTION: Why teach zecher tzaddik livrachah here, not earlier?

LAST WEEK'S QUESTION

Parshas Bereishis 5787

בראשית ד:כג וַיֹּאמֶר לִמֶּךְ לְנָשָׁיו עֲדָה וְצִלָּה שְׁמַעְנָן קוֹלִי נָשִׁי לִמֶּךְ הֲאַזְנָה אֶמְכְּרִי כִּי אִישׁ הִרְגָתִי לִפְעֻעִי וְיֵלֵד לְחִבְרָתִי.

“Lemech said to his wives, Adah and Tzillah: Hear my voice, wives of Lemech; listen to my words. Have I killed a man by wounding him, or a child by bruising him?”

In his second explanation, Rashi quotes Bereishis Rabbah:

ומדרש בראשית רבה, לא הרג למך כלום, ונשיו פורשות ממנו משקיימו פריה ורביה, לפי שנגזרה גזרה לכלות זרעו של קין לאחר שבעה דורות, אמרו מה אנו יולדות לבהלה, למחר המבול בא ושוטף את הכל. והוא אומר להן וכי איש הרגתי לפצע, וכי אני הרגתי את הבל, שהיה איש בקומה וילד בשנים, שיהא זרעי כלה באותו עון, ומה קין שהרג נתלה לו שבעה דורות, אני שלא הרגתי לא כל שכן שיתלו לי שביעיות הרבה! וזה קל וחומר של שטות, אם כן אין הקדוש ברוך הוא גובה את חובו ומקיים את דברו.

“According to the Midrash in Bereishis Rabbah, Lemech did not kill anyone. His wives separated from him after they had fulfilled the mitzvah of having children, because a decree had been issued that Kayin’s descendants would be wiped out after seven generations. They said: Why should we bear children for nothing? Tomorrow the Flood will come and wash everything away. Lemech responded: Did I kill a man, causing myself a wound? Did I kill Hevel, who was a man in stature but a child in years, that my descendants should perish for that sin? If Kayin, who did kill, was granted a delay of seven generations, surely I, who did not kill, should be granted many times seven generations! This is a foolish kal vachomer. If so, Hashem would not collect His debt and fulfill His word.”

However, were it not for the words of the Midrash, Lemech’s argument would seem to be very sound.

There is, of course, the pasuk in Shemos (34:7).

פֶּקֶד עֹון אָבוֹת עַל בְּנִים וְעַל בְּנֵי בְנִים עַל שְׁלִשִּׁים וְעַל רִבְעִים.

“He visits the sins of fathers upon children and upon children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.”

This pasuk appears connected to our case. It could be understood to mean that Hashem visits the sin on the fourth generation in addition to the third — seven generations in total — as we find here:

שִׁבְעָתַיִם יָקָם.

“Vengeance shall be exacted sevenfold.”

In other words, the punishment would come after seven generations.

But see the Gemara in Sanhedrin 27b:

אִישׁ בַּחֲטָאוֹ יוֹמָתוֹ ... וּבָנִים בְּעוֹן אָבוֹת לֹא? וְהַכְּתִיב פֶּקֶד עֹון אָבוֹת עַל בָּנִים?
הֵתָם כְּשֶׁאֲחֻזִּין מַעֲשֵׂה אָבוֹתֵיהֶן בִּידֵיהֶן.

“Each person shall be put to death for his own sin ... But are children not punished for their fathers’ sins? Does the Torah not say that He visits the sins of fathers upon children? That is when they follow in their fathers’ ways.”

Rashi himself explains the pasuk in Shemos similarly:

פֶּקֶד עֹון אָבוֹת עַל בָּנִים. כְּשֶׁאֲחֻזִּים מַעֲשֵׂה אָבוֹתֵיהֶם בִּידֵיהֶם, שֶׁכָּבַר פִּירֵשׁ
בְּמִקְרָא אַחֵר לְשׁוֹנְאֵי.

“He visits the sins of fathers upon children — when they follow their fathers’ ways, as the Torah already specifies elsewhere: “To those who hate Me.””

Accordingly, in our case, where Lemech had not killed anyone according to the Midrash, how could the punishment decreed upon Kayin possibly apply to him? This is precisely the kal vachomer Lemech made, and it appears that the Torah itself supports the underlying principle:

אִישׁ בְּחַטָּאוֹ יוּמָתוּ.

“Each person shall be put to death for his own sin.”

THE QUESTION: Why does the Midrash call Lemech’s kal vachomer foolish, when it seems that the Torah itself agrees with his argument?

LAST WEEK’S ANSWERS

A. The Yefeh Toar — children who were not yet born

R’ Yonasan Apfel (Beit Shemesh) pointed me to two meforshim who discuss this issue.

The first is the Yefeh Toar on the Midrash. He writes that the rule that children are not punished for the sins of their fathers applies specifically to grown children; young children can be punished. Certainly, this would apply to children who had not yet been born when the sin was committed, since they are considered part of their father himself. This is similar to how the entire world was punished for the sin of Adam Harishon.

However, this answer does not fully satisfy me. The Gemara itself asks from the pasuk:

פֶּקֶד עֹן אָבוֹת עַל בָּנִים וְעַל בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל רִבְעִים.

“He visits the sins of fathers upon children and children’s children, upon the third and fourth generations.”

According to the Yefeh Toar, why did the Gemara not simply answer that this pasuk is speaking of children who were minors at

the time of the sin, or who had not yet been born, whereas the rule that children are not punished for their fathers' sins applies only to grown children?

B. Ta'ama D'Kra — a specific decree

The second is Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l, in his sefer Ta'ama D'Kra, who writes:

דזה כללות אבל בגזירה פרטית הוא בכל גוונא.

“That is the general rule, but a specific decree can apply in any case.”

His intention seems to be that the rule that children are not punished for their fathers' sins is a general principle in the laws of punishment. However, in a particular case there can be a special decree that the father's punishment should include the death of his children, even if they themselves did not sin.

R' Moshe Dovid Weissman (Beitar Illit) suggested a similar approach, bringing support from Tosafos, Kerisos 7a (s.v. דחנקתיה). Tosafos indicates that according to the opinion that kares includes the death of one's children, this applies even if the children have committed no sin at all.

I still find this somewhat difficult. Until now, I had understood that the rule that children are not punished for their fathers' sins is not merely an unexplained gezeiras hakasuv, but a fundamental principle of Hashem's justice in reward and punishment: each person is judged according to his own actions, and no one can be punished for a sin he did not commit.

As the pasuk in Yechezkel (18:20) states:

הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחַטָּאת הִיא תָמוּת בֶּן לֹא יִשָּׂא בְעוֹן הָאָב וְאָב לֹא יִשָּׂא בְעוֹן הַבֶּן צְדָקָת
הַצַּדִּיק עָלָיו תִּהְיֶה וְרָשָׁעֵת הַרָשָׁע עָלָיו תִּהְיֶה.

“The soul that sins shall die. A son shall not bear the sin of his father, and a father shall not bear the sin of his son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”

According to these explanations, however, this is not a principle inherent in the very nature of Divine justice, but merely a general rule established by the Torah in the laws of punishment. In most cases, children are not punished for their fathers’ sins, but there are punishments in which even someone who committed no sin himself can be punished. This requires further explanation.

C. R’ Weissman — the kal vachomer does not establish the rule

R’ Weissman sent an additional answer. Even if Lemech was correct regarding the basic principle that children are not punished for their fathers’ sins, this principle does not follow from his kal vachomer.

Lemech’s entire kal vachomer is based on the leniency we find in Kayin’s own punishment: he was not punished immediately. From this, Lemech sought to argue that if the sinner himself was not punished immediately, then certainly someone who did not sin should not be punished immediately.

In truth, however, the principle that one person is not punished for another’s sins stands independently of this kal vachomer. Therefore, even where the kal vachomer does not apply — for example, when the sinner himself was punished immediately — the rule still applies.

איש בחטאו יומתו.

“Each person shall be put to death for his own sin.”

This is a very nice explanation, but one point still requires clarification. Even if the rule of personal responsibility stands on its own, once we find that Kayin was not punished immediately, why can Lemech not argue by *kal vachomer* that his descendants certainly should not be punished immediately? What is the *pircha*?

D. R’ Blair — following in the ways of the fathers

R’ Dovid Blair (Beitar Illit) suggested that when the Gemara says children can be punished for their fathers’ sins:

כשאוחזין מעשה אבותיהן בידיהן.

“When they follow in their fathers’ ways.”

This need not mean that the children committed the very same *aveirah*. Rather, it depends on whether the child is a *tzaddik* or a *rasha*. A *tzaddik* is not punished for his father’s sins, whereas a *rasha* may also be punished for the sins of his ancestors.

We find that Lemech was himself a *rasha*, as Rashi writes earlier:

ויקח לו למך שתי נשים. כך היה דרכן של דור המבול, אחת לפריה ורביה ואחת לתשמיש וכו’.

“Lemech took two wives. Such was the practice of the generation of the Flood: one for bearing children and one for marital relations, etc.”

Accordingly, since Lemech himself was a *rasha*, it could be that he was subject to punishment for Kayin’s sin as well, even though he had not himself committed the *aveirah* of murder.



HOW IT WORKS

Each week, the publication has two parts:

THE QUESTION: We present a strong, unresolved kasha on the Parsha for you to discuss over Shabbos.

THE ANSWERS: The following week, after presenting the new question, we share and analyze answers submitted by readers.

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