

Devar Torah Parashat Shmini

The Way A Person Wishes To Go, That Is How G-d Will Lead Him

There is an interesting Medrash on the pasuk "Wine and strong beverage do not drink" [Vayikra 10:9]. The Medrash cites an incident involving an alcoholic. His addiction was so bad that he would sell everything he owned to support his habit. He ultimately even sold his own furniture and household utensils in order to buy wine. When his children saw what was happening, they decided that they had to do something dramatic to demonstrate to their father the destructiveness of his behaviour.

When he was totally drunk, they tied him up and carried him out to the cemetery and left him there. They figured that he would sleep off his drunken stupor there, and upon waking in the morning, would see where he was, and become shocked by the fact that he found himself in a graveyard. Hopefully, he would thereby get the message that alcohol was killing him and would stop drinking.

The Medrash says that while he slept, a caravan containing barrels of wine passed by. Suddenly pirates approached to descend upon the caravan. The caravan had to speed away at a fast speed. In their haste, they allowed a barrel of wine to bounce off a wagon. It rolled into the cemetery and landed right near the head of the sleeping drunk father.

When their father awoke the next morning, he saw the barrel of wine next to his head and started drinking all over again until he was stone drunk once more. The children arrived at the cemetery the next morning and saw the situation. Frustrated, they said, "Even here, G-d does not allow you to break your habit. Since He gives it to you, we do not know what to do to counteract the Will of G-d." In other words "This is fate. G-d wants you to be a drunkard and there is nothing we can do about it."

What is the point of this Medrash? What is it trying to tell us with this story?

Rav Eliyahu Dessler writes that the lesson of the Medrash is that G-d helps a person do whatever he wants to do. In the way a person desires to go, that is how he is directed from above. If one wishes to become a righteous person, G-d will help him to become a righteous person. If one

wishes to be an evil person, He will find ways to let you be an evil person. If one wishes to be a drunkard, G-d will provide him with a barrel of wine right next to his head.

But one might ask – don't we all want to be righteous people? Who does not want to be a Tzadik? Don't we all want to be Torah scholars? And yet we see that G-d does not make it so easy for us! So, Rav Dessler asks, what is the difference between the drunkard and us? G-d provided the barrel of wine to the drunkard, but we are not so easily provided with what we need to become righteous and scholarly. We sometimes find it so difficult to sit down and learn. We find it so difficult to daven (pray) with proper intent. We find that so many things that we want to do are so difficult for us to achieve!

The difference, Rav Dessler said, is that the drunkard was willing to sell his furniture, willing to sell every last thing he had for another drink. When the will is that strong, it indicates that the person REALLY wants something. When someone REALLY wants something, G-d makes it easy for him to acquire it. Unfortunately, many times, our desire to do the right thing — to learn, to pray, whatever it may be — is not as strong as the will for the alcoholic to have their next drink. (Rabbi Frand)

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Nodov and Avihu think that bringing Ketores would complete the inauguration service of the Mishkan?
2. Where does the custom of visiting a zoo on Chol Hamoed Pesach come from?