

Parsha Ponders

HaAzinu | October 11, 2019 | 12 Tishrei 5780

*The gift of forgetting*¹

צור ילדך תשי ותשכח קל מחללך

You forgot the Rock that formed you; you forgot the G-d that brought you forth²

This week's *parsha* contains Moshe's prophetic goodbye song to the Jewish people. It describes scenes from their past, as well as hints to their future. In a poetic sense, each verse is very terse, and contains many layers of depth and meaning. The commentaries offer many different approaches to each word and phrase. One verse focuses on the fact that the Jewish people forget their G-d. This isn't just a fact, explaining how the Jewish people could have ever sinned. It's in fact a very deep rebuke, which can be brought out very eloquently in a parable.

Reuven once borrowed money from Shimon. Shimon kept pressuring Reuven to pay him back, but Reuven at that time wasn't interested in complying. He asked his friend Levi for advice on how to get Shimon off his back. Levi suggested acting like a crazy person the next time Shimon shows up. Shimon will see that there's no chance he'll get his money back, and he'll leave Reuven alone. Reuven eagerly tried this tactic, and was very pleased to find that it worked. Shimon left Reuven alone from that point on³.

At a later juncture, Reuven needed to borrow money from Levi, the one who originally offered him the advice. When Levi came to claim back his money, Reuven again started acting like a crazy person. Levi was livid. What *chutzpah*! Levi taught Reuven this very tactic, and now he has the audacity to use it against him? This was the height of ingratitude!

Levi represents Hashem. He gave us the gift of the ability to forget. If a person never forgot anything, they would have a very hard time living in this world. They would hold grudges against anyone who ever did wronged them. They would never lose the pain that people naturally experience throughout their lives, such as the loss of a loved one, or a harsh illness. Hashem, with His infinite kindness, made it such that these difficult feelings fade with time. People don't remember how hard their past experiences were, and that is a gift.

How do we repay Hashem with this gift? Like Reuven did with Levi. We use it against Him. Instead of keeping Hashem on our minds at all times⁴, we tend to forget Him. It's easy for us to ignore Hashem, and act like He's not there. If we kept Hashem on our minds, it wouldn't be possible to sin. The Torah is telling us that this is how we repay Hashem's kindness, by using it against Him. This verse is read very appropriately just after the Elul, Rosh Hashanah, and Yom Kippur season. These days are all about bringing Hashem back into our lives. Let us not lose the momentum we gained over the past few weeks, and constantly keep Hashem on our minds.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on *Ohel Yaakov* (by the *Dubna Maggid*) to *Deuteronomy* 31:18

² *Deuteronomy* *loc. cit.* Translated based off *Rashi ad. loc.*

³ Perhaps this parable was inspired by *I Samuel* 21:14-16, where King David feigned madness to escape danger

⁴ By fulfilling *לנגדי תמיד יקוק שויתי יקוק* (*Psalms* 16:8). See *Rema, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 1:1. See also *Beur Halacha ad. loc. s.v. הוא כלל*, who discusses the Six Constant Mitzvos, which reflect this concept