

Parsha Ponders

Va'eschanan | August 12, 2022 | 15 Av 5782

*Superficial reward*¹

ומשלם לשנאיו אל-פניו להאבידו וגו'

He repays His enemies to their face, to destroy them...²

The Torah makes a vague statement regarding Hashem and His enemies. This is seemingly referring to wicked individuals who brazenly commit crimes and atrocities against Hashem and His Torah. The Torah says that Hashem repays them to their face, to destroy them. What is this referring to? We are taught³ that it means that Hashem repays the wicked for their *mitzvos* in *this* world, so that they don't receive any reward in the next world. Consequently, when they die, they'll be destroyed, as they won't have access to the World to Come.

Two questions on this interpretation. Why would Hashem try to destroy the wicked⁴? If they indeed fulfilled *mitzvos* in this world, why shouldn't they get their due reward, which is to be received in the next world⁵? Furthermore, how is it even possible to receive reward for *mitzvos* in this world⁶? By fulfilling *mitzvos*, we are tapping into spirituality. Unlike the physical, the spiritual has infinite potential. An act of infinite potential therefore has infinite reward. The World to Come is forever, unlike this limited physical reality. How then can an infinite reward be compressed into this finite existence?

Rav Dessler teaches us⁷ that the truly wicked don't really have any *mitzvos*. When we see a wicked person fulfilling a *mitzvah*, we should be suspicious that they have ulterior motives. When they do something good, it's because they want to get something out of it. If they give charity, it's so they receive a good reputation. If they return a government official's lost item, it's so they can later ask for a favor. The same is true with all of their *mitzvos*⁸.

Since their *mitzvos* were superficial, their reward is also superficial. It's impossible for them to receive infinite reward for an insincere *mitzvah*, so the only reward they can receive is in this world⁹. Further, they aren't really deserving of any reward. However, since it appears to all that they did in fact fulfill *mitzvos*, it would create a *chillul Hashem*, a desecration of Hashem's name, if they didn't receive *any* reward. As such, Hashem gives them finite reward in this world for their deeds¹⁰. Since they never accrued any *mitzvos* with substance, there's no reward to give them in the next world. As such, once the wicked's time in this world is up, there's nothing positive that awaits them.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on various sources that I found and collected

² Deuteronomy 7:10

³ Rashi *ad. loc.*, quoting Tanchuma Yashan Vayigash § 8; Targum Onkelos and Targum "Yonasan" *ad. loc.* See also Kiddushin 40b

⁴ Sefer Apiryon *ad. loc.*, by Rav Shlomo Gantzfied, the author of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch. See there where he tries to answer this, but I don't understand the answer

⁵ See Pesachim 118a

⁶ Sefer Apiryon *loc. cit.* See there again, where his answer also eludes me

⁷ Michtav MeEliyahu I p. 95ff.

⁸ See Yalkut Shimoni Toldos § 116

⁹ I don't know if this is Rav Dessler's explanation of our verse and its accompanying explanation, or this is own unique approach to the wicked and their due reward. Because, to be honest, I don't really see how his approach fits with the wording of the verse and Chazal, that Hashem gives them reward *to destroy them*. I also don't see how this fits with the *gemarra* in Kiddushin's phrase of התחתונה למדריגה ולהורישן כדי לטורדן ולהורישן

¹⁰ I don't fully understand this point. Since the righteous only receive their reward in the next world, how would the people know that this wicked person won't be receiving his reward then as well? Why are they expecting him to receive reward in this world, when no one usually does? Perhaps it's because they know he's a wicked person and aren't expecting him to receive reward in the next world. That would then beg the question why he's not getting *any* reward, since he appears to be fulfilling *mitzvos*