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Dealing with Beneficence

The fourth *Mishnah* in the third *perek* of *Masechet Taanit* teaches: "We cry out over any calamity that may befall the community except for excessive rain."

To begin with we must define the phrase "excessive rain." As *Rashi* explains (*Rif* 8b), the *Mishnah* is not talking about troublesome rain, rather bothersome rain. We are not referring to rain which is detrimental to society, rather that which is simply unneeded. Nonetheless, the *Mishnah* begs the question of why we should not pray for the stoppage of rain which is simply unnecessary and even to some degree inconvenient for us?

The *Gemara* (22b) asks this very question. The response offered is: "Rav Yochanan said: for we do not pray for the stoppage of excessive goodness." The *Gemara* then asks for the source for this principle and is informed:

As Scripture states - "Bring all the tithes into the storage house, and let it be sustenance in My Temple. Test Me, if you will, with this, says *Hashem*, Master of Legions, [see] if I do not open up for you the windows of the heavens and pour out upon you blessing without end." (*Malachi* 3:10, Trans. Artscroll). And what is the meaning of "without end"? *Rami* the son of *Rav* said- until one's lips will be worn out from saying "Enough!"

Nonetheless, one may still justifiably ask why it is that we should not petition the stoppage of excessive Divine goodness. Fundamentally this question is mandated because although the *Gemara* provided a source for the idea that *Hashem* may over-reward us, no mention was made in the *pasuk* of the undesirability of requesting of *Hashem* to cease this path of action.

The *Meiri* and the *Rambam* provide one course in answer to this question. The *Meiri* (a French, later-medieval commentator on the *Talmud*) writes that petition for the stoppage of rain is deterred because essentially rain is a beneficial phenomenon. The rationale behind the *Meiri's* approach would seem to be that although at his point in time the rain may be unneeded, it is nonetheless, in general, a good thing and therefore its granting by *Hashem* must be related to suitably.

The *Rambam* takes a similar line. In his *Mishnah Torah* (*Hilchot Taaniyot* 2:15) he writes that: "We do not fast in order that the good [i.e. abundance of rain] pass." Inherent in the *Rambam's* line of thinking is the need for broad perspective and historical awareness. In his view, we may

not request the cessation of Divine gifts because it shows an inability to appreciate the current circumstances with respect to the true calamities that may befall mankind. Such petition would highlight a complete lack of sensitivity for the history of humanity and the natural travails that have ravaged it. Could an unpleasant abundance of rain be compared to a drought or a flood? In both the *Rambam's* and the *Meiri's* eyes we do not pray for the stoppage of Divine kindness because this would be indicative of a gross misapprehension of the situation.

Another rationale is presented by the *Ran* (an acronym for *Rabbeinu Nissim*). Himself a medieval commentator on the *Talmud*, the *Ran* interprets the issue as one of emotional sensitivity. In his commentary (*Rif* 8b) he writes:

Since it is the way of *Hashem* in responding to His people Israel to affect them through His goodness until their lips wear out from saying "Enough!" we do not pray against this.

The picture drawn by the *Ran* is that to pray for the cessation of Divine goodness would be insensitive (for lack of a better word) to Him. To simply view the Divine outpouring of beneficence from our utilitarian standpoint and thus to seek to restrain it indicates an inability to view *Hashem's* gifts not merely as a present for mankind but as an expression of His loving kindness irrespective of its functional purpose and/or pragmatic significance. Thus, argues the *Ran*, it would be disrespectful of us to petition the stoppage of Divine abundance.

The issue brought up by the *Ran* carries with it wide ramifications. In his analysis lies an insight regarding human interpersonal relations. The *Gemara* in *Masechet Brachot* (10b) discusses the diverse approaches of the prophets *Elisha* and *Shmuel* with regard to the acceptance of human beneficence. The *Gemara* states:

Said *Abaye* (some say it was *Rav Yitzchak*) - One who wishes to benefit [from the kindness of others] may do so in the spirit of *Elisha* and one who wishes not to benefit may do so in the spirit of *Shmuel*.

I understand from this *Gemara* that there may be situations in which accepting the beneficence bestowed upon one is not only valid as a course of action designed to benefit oneself but is in fact valid because it provides the giver with a receptacle and an outlet for the bestowal of goodness. In this regard there may be occasions in which the acceptance of beneficence is not a self-absorbed act but rather an altruistic and empathetic form of behaviour in that it recognises the human need to give.

Noam Greenberger

Revision Questions

יומא ב' י' – ד' ד'

- On which days during the year do we not begin the set of fast days and why? (ב' י')
- What is the law where a fast day (out of a set of already decreed fast days) coincides with one of the days described in the previous question? (ב' י')
- Meteorologically, what is an indication of a *betzoret*? (א' ג')
- How do we respond differently to the phenomenon described in the previous question as apposed to the way we respond to the lack of rain (as described through the first two *perakim*)? (א' ג')
- Does any rainfall satisfy that the community need not fast? (ב' ג')
- If one city is denied rain, how do the surrounding cities respond? (Include both opinions) (ג' ג')
- What other incident affecting a single city elicits the same response from the surrounding cities? (ד' ג')
- For what six incidents affecting one city, do all the cities throughout Israel react as if it is affecting them? (ה' ג')
- What occurred in *Ashkelon* that caused the *Zkeinim* to institute a fast day in *Yerushalaim*? (ו' ג')
- On which incidents are we *matriyah* even on *Shabbat*? (ז' ג')
- On any negative occurrence we are *matriyah* – what is the single exception? (ח' ג')
- What is the incident including *Choni HaMe'agel*? (ט' ג')
- Does everyone continue fasting if rain fell during the fast day? (י' ג')
- Which are the three times when the *kohanim* do *birkat kohanim* four times during the day? (יא' ד')
- Why do we have the *ma'amadot*? (יב' ב')
- What would the *Anshei ma'amad* do? (יג' ב')
- What days of the week would the *Anshei ma'amad* fast? (יד' ג')
- When would there be no *ma'amad*: (טו' ד')
 - *Shacharit*?
 - *Ne'illah*?
 - *Minchah*?

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6

WEEKS TO GO
TILL

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the next seder?

Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
25 th June כ"ט סיון	26 th June ל' סיון ראש חודש	27 th June א' תמוז ראש חודש	28 th June ב' תמוז	29 th June ג' תמוז	30 th June ד' תמוז	1 st July ה' תמוז
Taanit 4:5-6	Taanit 4:7-8	Megillah 1:1-2	Megillah 1:3-4	Megillah 1:5-6	Megillah 1:7-8	Megillah 1:9-10

