

Why Do the Wicked Prosper?

PARSHA INSIGHTS - VA'ESCHANAN (5757)

SOME RESHAIM SEEM TO BE HAVING A GREAT TIME

It has been bothering the finest of people forever. Chapters and even whole books have been written, trying to justify it. Why does Hashem sometimes allow the wicked to prosper?

There is no shortage of information to explain this age-old philosophical paradox. All the way from *Torah Shebiksav* [Written Torah] to *Torah Sheba'al Peh* [Oral Torah], *rishonim* [earliest commentators] to *acharonim* [later commentators], the matter is dealt with in sufficient detail by our sages. In truth, I will tell you a short anecdote to illustrate the BEST answer to this question. As a *yeshiva bachur* [young student in religious school], I once presented several inquiries to a genuine *tzadik yesod olam* [righteous foundation of the world], Harav Mordechai Schwab, *zatzal* [of blessed memory]. He was Rav Shimon Schwab's brother. (A relatively recent Artscroll book has a biography of Rav Mordechai.) One particular mystery really puzzled me, and I anticipated an earth-shattering, eye opening response from the *tzadik* [righteous person]. What was his reply? "*Hanistaros la'Hashem Elokainu*" [Hidden matters belong to Hashem]; we cannot expect to fully comprehend what is going on in the universe. (*Parshas Netzavim, Perek Chof Tes, Pasuk Chof Ches* chapter 29, verse 28). That answer has stayed with me, quite fresh in my mind, and it is the true solution to the problem of "*rasha v'tov lo*" - a wicked person or nation which seems to have a luxurious, comfortable, successful existence and dominates others with ease.

However, as mentioned before, the Torah does deal with this issue, and there is a *pasuk* in today's *parsha* [Torah portion] on the topic. Please note that the *Chovos Halevavos* (in *Sha'ar Habitachon*), a classic *mussar* [self-improvement] work, plus numerous other *sefarim* [books] on *mussar* and philosophy address this issue, and they are worthy of our attention.

Our *pasuk* states that G-d "Pays His enemies to his face to banish him..." (*Perek Zayin, Pasuk Yud* [7:10]). Yes, the *pasuk* begins in plural (His enemies - more than one enemy) and ends in singular (to his face to banish him - only one face and one person). This point will be raised and taken care of later. But for now, please notice the *pasuk* and *Rashi's* interpretation: Hashem pays a *rasha* [wicked person], one who hates G-d, his bountiful reward in THIS world - "to his face". **During his temporary existence in this physical world**, where all sensations and feelings are mild compared to the intensity of *Olam Haba* [the World to Come], where things really count and are felt, **the rasha receives his payment for whatever good he did**. Consequently, Hashem causes him to forfeit his share in the World to Come. It is a clear *pasuk* in the Torah, right in our *parsha*, and it provides a justification for *rasha v'tov lo*!

Indeed, a classic *mussar sefer*, the *Orchos Tzadikim*, cites our *pasuk* in *Va'eschanan* in his discussion of *bitachon* [trust in G-d]. On page 71 in the *Eshkol* version, it is stated as follows. A positive commandment is dependent on the trait of joy - that a person must consider fair and righteous (accept with joy) all that happens to him. As it says (*Devarim* [Deuteronomy] 8:5 - *Parshas Aikev*, next week's *parsha*), "And you must know with your heart that G-d reprimands you just as a man disciplines his child." If after a person repents, his situation is not good like it was before (prior to the time he did *teshuva* [repentance]), it is a *mitzvah* [good deed] for him to realize that his circumstance has changed to evil for his benefit. Before he did *teshuva*, Hashem was paying him his reward for *mitzvos* [good deeds] in this world, in order to banish him from the World to Come. This is indicated by our *pasuk* - *Perek Zayin, Pasuk Yud*. "He pays His enemies to his face to throw him out (of *Olam Haba*)."

The *Orchos Tzadikim* continues. Similar to the way Hashem treats His enemies, rewarding them here so they will lose out in the next world, He also pays those who love Him the punishment for the sins they have done in this world, so they will be pure and clean in *Olam Haba*, ready for eternal bliss. All this depends on the trait of *mitzvah* joy, that the person is content and grateful for the portion Hashem has given him.

We see that our *pasuk* is quite significant in regard to proper *middos* [character traits], attitudes, and Torah values. The *Orchos Tzadikim* uses our *pasuk* to teach the following lesson. Just as G-d rewards the wicked for their *mitzvos* in *Olam Haze* [This World], eliminating their chances for reward in *Olam Haba*, He punishes the righteous in *Olam Haze*, creating the chance for undisturbed pleasure in *Olam Haba*.

The matter is elucidated beautifully by the *Sforno* on our *pasuk*. The reason for a *rasha* who has it good - there are two causes for this. One is merit of his fathers. The second is some merit he has to his own name, but it does not warrant that he be privileged to life in the World to Come. Thus, G-d pays him in this world, because He does not hold back the reward of ANY creature.

We have not yet solved the inconsistent terminology in the *pasuk*. “He pays His enemies (plural) to his (singular) face to banish him (singular).” Why did it begin in plural and conclude in singular?

The *Or Hachaim* explains that the plural in the beginning of the *pasuk* hints to the *rasha* AND HIS CHILDREN. There need to be **enemies** - plural - the *rasha* AND his children - in order for Hashem to be strict and pay him his reward in this world, eliminating him from *Olam Habo*. If the *rasha* ALONE will be wicked, but his children will be *tzadikim*, this whole *pasuk* might not apply. In the case of a righteous child, Hashem will NOT banish the father from *Olam Habo* by paying him for his *mitzvos* in this world. He will NOT treat him like a regular *rasha*. Rather, the child will bring merit to his father, causing him to receive some reward where it really counts - *Olam Habo*.

If so, asks the *Or Hachaim*, why does the *pasuk* end in singular form? The answer is that really, the *pasuk* is speaking about an individual, a particular *rasha*. It only used the plural form in the beginning to awaken you to the fact mentioned above. The PLURAL was the exception to the rule - **it** is the *loshon* [wording] which needed to be explained, not the singular form at the end of the *pasuk*. The lesson is that when the *rasha* and his children will follow evil paths, then this single *rasha*, lacking merit of righteous children, will lose his reward in *Olam Habo* by receiving all of it in this world. The bottom line is that one *rasha* is being discussed here, so the singular form at the end of the *pasuk* is fully justified.

We can gather from all of this that G-d's ways are consistently fair, although we don't always see it on the surface. It is our job to put forth all the effort we can to dedicate ourselves to *limud* [learning] Torah and *shmiras hamitzvos* [observing the commandments/good deeds]. It is not our place to jump to conclusions regarding Hashem's methods of judgment, nor should we spend time trying to figure out why Hashem does what He does. We also see how much children can accomplish for parents. A righteous child can change the entire fate of his parents, since he shows there is hope for his family in *avodas* [service of] Hashem. He can cause his parents to receive everlasting life in *Olam Habo*! May this inspire and comfort us during this wonderful time of *nechama* [consolation] for all of *Klal Yisroel* [the Jewish people].

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