

Too Far for Teshuva?

Class 3

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1. משנה תורה, הלכות תשובה ב'יא

החוטא לחברו ומת חברו קדם שייבקש מחילה מביא עשרה בני אדם ומעמידן על קברו ויאמר בפניהם חטאתי לה' אלהי ישראל ולפלוני זה שכך וכך עשיתי לו. ואם היה חביב לו ממון יחזירו ליורשים. לא היה יודע לו יורשין יניחנו בבית דין ויתודה:

1. Rambam Hilchot Teshuvah 2:11

If a person wronged a colleague and the latter died before he could ask him for forgiveness, he should take ten people and say the following while they are standing before the colleague's grave: "I sinned against God, the Lord of Israel, and against this person by doing the following to him...."

2. במדבר ל"ה

וידבר יהוה אל משה בערבית מואב על-ירדן ירחו לאמר: צו את-בני ישראל ונתנו ללויים מנחלת אחזתם ערים לשבת ומגרשי לערים סביבתיכם תתנו ללויים: והיו הערים להם לשבת ומגרשיהם יהיו לבהמתם ולרכשם ולכל חיתם: ומגרשי הערים אשר תתנו ללויים מקיר העיר וחוצה אלף אמה סביב: ומדתם מחוץ לעיר את-פאת-קדמה אלפים באמה ואת-פאת-נגב אלפים באמה ואת-פאת-ים אלפים באמה ואת פאת צפון אלפים באמה והעיר בתוך זה יהיה להם מגרשי הערים: ואת הערים אשר תתנו ללויים את שש-ערי המקלט אשר תתנו לגס שמה הרצח ועליהם תתנו ארבעים ושנים עיר: אל-הערים אשר תתנו ללויים ארבעים ושמונה עיר אתה ואת-מגרשיהן:
{פ} וידבר יהוה אל משה לאמר: דבר אל-בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם כי אתם עברים את-הירדן ארצה כנען: והקרייתם לכם ערים ערי מקלט תהיינה לכם וגס שמה רצח מכה-גופש בשגגה:



וְהָיוּ לָכֶם הָעָרִים לְמִקְלָט מִגָּאֵל וְלֹא יָמוּת הָרֹצֵחַ עַד-עֲמֻדוֹ לִפְנֵי הָעֵדָה לְמִשְׁפָּט: וְהָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּתְּנֶנּוּ שֵׁשׁ-עָרֵי מִקְלָט תִּהְיֶינָה לָכֶם: אֶתֹן שְׁלֹשׁ הָעָרִים תִּתְּנֶנּוּ מֵעֵבֶר לַיַּרְדֵּן וְאֶת שְׁלֹשׁ הָעָרִים תִּתְּנֶנּוּ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן עָרֵי מִקְלָט תִּהְיֶינָה: לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִגֵּר וְלַתּוֹשֵׁב בְּתוֹכָם תִּהְיֶינָה שֵׁשׁ-הָעָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְמִקְלָט לְנוֹס שָׁמָּה כָּל-מִכָּה-נֶפֶשׁ בְּשִׁגְגָה: וְאִם-בְּכָלִי בִרְצוֹן הִכָּהוּ וַיָּמָת רֹצֵחַ הוּא מוֹת יוֹמָת הָרֹצֵחַ: וְאִם בְּאֶבֶן יָד אֲשֶׁר-יָמוּת בָּהּ הִכָּהוּ וַיָּמָת רֹצֵחַ הוּא מוֹת יוֹמָת הָרֹצֵחַ: גָּאֵל הַדָּם הוּא יָמִית אֶת-הָרֹצֵחַ בְּפָגְעוֹ-בּוֹ הוּא יִמָּתֶנּוּ: וְאִם-בְּשִׁנְאָה יִהְדָּפְנוּ אוֹ-הַשְּׁלִיךְ עָלָיו בְּצִדָּה וַיָּמָת: אוֹ בְּאֵיכָה הִכָּהוּ בִידּוֹ וַיָּמָת מוֹת-יוֹמָת הַמִּכָּה רֹצֵחַ הוּא גָאֵל הַדָּם יָמִית אֶת-הָרֹצֵחַ בְּפָגְעוֹ-בּוֹ: וְאִם-בְּפֶתַע בְּלֹא-אִיבָה הִדְפּוֹ אוֹ-הַשְּׁלִיךְ עָלָיו כָּל-כְּלִי בְּלֹא צְדִיקָה: אוֹ בְּכָל-אֶבֶן אֲשֶׁר-יָמוּת בָּהּ בְּלֹא רְאוּת וַיִּפֹּל עָלָיו וַיָּמָת וְהוּא לֹא-אֵיבִי לוֹ וְלֹא מִבְּקֶשׁ רָעָתוֹ: וְשִׁפְטוֹ הָעֵדָה בֵּין הַמִּכָּה וּבֵין גָּאֵל הַדָּם עַל הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים הָאֵלֶּה: וְהִצִּילוּ הָעֵדָה אֶת-הָרֹצֵחַ מִיַּד גָּאֵל הַדָּם וְהִשִּׁיבוּ אֹתוֹ הָעֵדָה אֶל-עִיר מִקְלָטוֹ אֲשֶׁר-נָס שָׁמָּה וַיָּשֶׁב בָּהּ עַד-מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדֹל אֲשֶׁר-מָשַׁח אֹתוֹ בְּשֶׁמֶן הַקֹּדֶשׁ: וְאִם-יֵצֵא יֵצֵא הָרֹצֵחַ אֶת-גְּבוּל עִיר מִקְלָטוֹ אֲשֶׁר יָנוֹס שָׁמָּה: וּמָצָא אֹתוֹ גָּאֵל הַדָּם מִחוּץ לְגְבוּל עִיר מִקְלָטוֹ וּרְצָח גָּאֵל הַדָּם אֶת-הָרֹצֵחַ אִין לוֹ דָּם: כִּי בְעִיר מִקְלָטוֹ יָשֶׁב עַד-מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדֹל וְאַחֲרֵי מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדֹל יָשׁוּב הָרֹצֵחַ אֶל-אֶרֶץ אֲחֻזָּתוֹ: וְהָיוּ אֵלֶּה לָכֶם לְחֻקַּת מִשְׁפָּט לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּכָל מוֹשְׁבֵיכֶם: כָּל-מִכָּה-נֶפֶשׁ לִפְנֵי עֵדִים יִרְצָח אֶת-הָרֹצֵחַ וְעַד אֲחֻד לֹא-יִעֲנֶה בְּנֶפֶשׁ לָמוּת: וְלֹא-תִקְחוּ כֹפֶר לְנֶפֶשׁ רֹצֵחַ אֲשֶׁר-הוּא רָשָׁע לָמוּת כִּי-מוֹת יוֹמָת: וְלֹא-תִקְחוּ כֹפֶר לְנוֹס אֶל-עִיר מִקְלָטוֹ לְשׁוּב לְשִׁבְתָּ בְּאֶרֶץ עַד-מוֹת הַכֹּהֵן: וְלֹא-תִחַנְּפוּ אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם בָּהּ כִּי הַדָּם הוּא יִחַנֵּיף אֶת-הָאֶרֶץ וְלֹא-יִכָּפֹר לָדָם אֲשֶׁר שָׁפַךְ-בָּהּ כִּי-אִם בְּדָם שִׁפְכוּ: {פ}

2. Bamidbar 35

9 The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: **10** Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, **11** then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you, so that a slayer who kills a person without intent may flee there. **12** The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, so that the slayer may not die until there is a trial before the congregation.

13 The cities that you designate shall be six cities of refuge for you: **14** you shall designate three cities beyond the Jordan, and three cities in the land of Canaan, to be cities of refuge. **15** These six cities shall serve as refuge for the Israelites, for the resident or transient alien among them, so that anyone who kills a person without intent may flee there.

16 But anyone who strikes another with an iron object, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. **17** Or anyone who strikes another with a stone in hand that could cause death, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. **18** Or anyone who strikes another with a weapon of wood in hand that could cause death, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. **19** The avenger of blood is the one who shall put the murderer to death; when they meet, the avenger of blood shall execute the sentence. **20** Likewise, if someone pushes another from hatred, or hurls something at another, lying in wait, and death ensues, **21** or in enmity strikes another with the



hand, and death ensues, then the one who struck the blow shall be put to death; that person is a murderer; the avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death, when they meet.

22 But if someone pushes another suddenly without enmity, or hurls any object without lying in wait, **23** or, while handling any stone that could cause death, unintentionally drops it on another and death ensues, though they were not enemies, and no harm was intended, **24** then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the avenger of blood, in accordance with these ordinances; **25** and the congregation shall rescue the slayer from the avenger of blood. Then the congregation shall send the slayer back to the original city of refuge. The slayer shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. **26** But if the slayer shall at any time go outside the bounds of the original city of refuge, **27** and is found by the avenger of blood outside the bounds of the city of refuge, and is killed by the avenger, no bloodguilt shall be incurred. **28** For the slayer must remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest; but after the death of the high priest the slayer may return home.

29 These things shall be a statute and ordinance for you throughout your generations wherever you live.

30 If anyone kills another, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses; but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of a single witness. **31** Moreover you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer who is subject to the death penalty; a murderer must be put to death. **32** Nor shall you accept ransom for one who has fled to a city of refuge, enabling the fugitive to return to live in the land before the death of the high priest. **33** You shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and no expiation can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. **34** You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I the LORD dwell among the Israelites.

3. THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV

Oh, Alyosha, I am not blaspheming! I understand, of course, what an upheaval of the universe it will be when everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: ‘Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed.’ When the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, ‘Thou art just, O Lord!’ then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can’t accept that harmony. And while I am on earth, I make haste to take my own measures. You see, Alyosha, perhaps it really may happen that if I live to that moment, or rise again to see it, I, too, perhaps, may cry aloud with the rest, looking at the mother embracing the child’s torturer, ‘Thou art just, O Lord!’ but I don’t want



to cry aloud then. While there is still time, I hasten to protect myself, and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind God'! It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for....

I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, what becomes of harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? I don't want harmony. From love for humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, even if I were wrong. Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return him the ticket."

4. Forgiveness is a Prayer (Yom Kippur 5777), Angela W. Buchdahl

Often the most challenging parts of offering forgiveness is the sense that the offender doesn't deserve and hasn't earned our forgiveness. But forgiveness is not about what you are offering someone else – it's what you *give yourself*. Forgiveness is a decision about how *you want to live*. It's taking control of how much power you allow someone *else's* sin to have over *you*. It is a mistake to confuse forgiveness with justice, to think that withholding your forgiveness is a form of punishment for the person who hurt you. In fact the opposite is often true: as the saying goes, "holding onto anger is like drinking poison, and expecting the other person to die." It never works that way.

Again and again, I see the burdens that people carry when they choose *not* to forgive. Pain, betrayal and humiliation can occupy so much psychic real estate in our brains. We hold onto slights we've endured at the hands of our family, co-workers, and friends who excluded us, judged us unfairly, took undue credit or were unappreciative. We have been undermined, cheated, lied to. We have been scarred by emotional or even physical abuse. We have *real grievances*. And our tradition understands the limits of forgiveness. But we also must ask while the gates are open – what would be possible *if we could forgive*?



On Yom Kippur afternoon, we will read in our machzor the words of Rabbi Baruch of Mezbizh:
“To attain truth one must pass through gates, each opening to a new question, the last question beyond which one cannot live without faith.”

I love this as a metaphor not just for attaining truth, but for forgiveness as well. Because we all know that forgiving isn't fast. It doesn't happen in an instant. It is an intention – of unlocking a gate that may feel irrevocably shut. Of opening it tentatively, putting one foot in front of the other to walk through – sometimes with great effort, all the time asking, “Is the person who hurt me really remorseful?” “Has this person changed?”

And each time we see the person who injured us, each time we have to re-live our loss, our humiliation, our betrayal, our pain, we stand at a threshold and are hit with new questions:

“Why am I still holding onto this anger?”

“What burden will I continue to bear if I do not forgive?”

“Could forgiveness be a gateway to a life of greater peace?”

It is said that when God ascends the Throne of Judgement on Rosh HaShanah, that God also prays. What is it that God prays for? While God is seated in Judgement, God prays for compassion and the ability to overcome anger so that *God can be more forgiving*.

Forgiveness is a hope and aspiration.

Forgiveness is a prayer – even for God;

maybe for all of us.

