

High Holy Dialectics

Source Sheet by Sarina Elenbogen-Siegel

שמות ל"ד:ז'

(ז) נִצֵּר חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים נִשָּׂא עֹן וּפָשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנָּקֶה פֶקֶד | עֹן
אֲבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְעַל-בָּנֵי בָנִים עַל-שְׁלֵשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים:

Exodus 34:7

(7) extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin—yet not remitting all punishment, but visiting the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations."

רש"י על שמות ל"ד:ז'

וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנָּקֶה. לְפִי פֶשׁוּטוֹ מִשְׁמַע שְׂאִינוּ מוֹתֵר עַל הָעֹן לְגַמְרִי, אֲלֹא
נִפְרָע מִמֶּנּוּ מְעַט מְעַט, וְרַבּוּתֵינוּ דְרָשׁוּ מִנִּקָּה הוּא לְשָׁבִים וְלֹא יִנָּקֶה
לְשְׂאִינָן שָׁבִים (יומא פ"ו):

Rashi on Exodus 34:7:4

וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנָּקֶה AND WHO WILL BY NO MEANS CLEAR THE GUILTY — According to its plain sense this means that He is not altogether indulgent to sin (He does not entirely remit the punishment), but little by little exacts punishment from, him (the sinner). Our Rabbis, however, have explained: וְנִקָּה, And he clears — He clears those who repent, לֹא יִנָּקֶה, He does not clear — but does not clear those who will not repent (Yoma 86a).

ספורנו על שמות ל"ד:ז'

וְנִקָּה אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁהוּא מִנִּקָּה לְשָׁבִים מֵאֲהָבָה, וְהִיא תְּשׁוּבָה הַמַּגַּעַת

עד כסא הכבוד כמו שאמרו ז"ל (יומא פ' יוה"כ) שעונות נחשבים להם כזכיות שנאמר עליהם חיו יחיה מכל מקום לא ינקה אפילו לשבים כאשר תהיה תשובתם מיראת עונש בלבד; כאמרם ז"ל שזדונות נחשבים להם כשגגות שנאמר כי כשלת בעונך:

Sforno on Exodus 34:7:5

ונקה, even though G'd wipes the slate clean for those penitents motivated by their love for G'd and not by their fear of punishment, לא ינקה, He will not do this for the ones whose only motivation for turning penitent is their fear of G'd's retribution, or their desire to arrest such retribution. We find confirmation of this in Yuma 86 that i.e. intentional sins of such penitents will be treated as if they had been unintentionally committed sins, a conclusion based on Hoseah 14,2 כי כשלת בעונך, "for you have fallen because of your sin."

במדבר ט"ו:כ"ו

(כו) וְנָסַח לְכָל-עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלִגְרַם הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכָם כִּי לְכָל-הָעָם בְּשִׁגָּגָה: {ס}

Numbers 15:26

(26) The whole Israelite community and the stranger residing among them shall be forgiven, for it happened to the entire people through error.

במדבר י"ד:י"ט-כ'

(יט) סָלַח-נָא לְעוֹן הָעָם הַזֶּה כַּגִּדְלֵי חֲסִידְךָ וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתָּה לְעָם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד-הַנֵּה: (כ) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה סָלַחְתִּי כְדַבְּרְךָ:

Numbers 14:19-20

(19) Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to Your great kindness, as You have forgiven this people ever since Egypt." (20) And יהוה said, "I pardon, as you have asked.

"The story of Yom Kippur is as much one of G-d's forgiveness as it is of human failing" - Mahzor Kol Nidre, The Rabbinical Assembly Inc, 2010

Questions for discussion:

1. Is it possible to be forgiven and not forgiven at the same time?
2. Why do we spend most of Yom Kippur praying for G-d's forgiveness even though we acknowledge that G-d will forgive us?
3. What are two opposing truths you've had to hold at the same time?
4. How can we ritualize holding a dialectic?

Source Sheet created on Sefaria by Sarina Elenbogen-Siegel