

Moshe teaches us the lesson about consequences of our actions.

הַנְּסֻתָּה לַיהוָה אֲלֵינוּ וְהַגְּלוּת לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד-עוֹלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת
אֶת-כָּל-דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת: {ס}

“The hidden (sins) are for HaShem our Lord; and the revealed (sins) are for us, and our children, until forever, to do all the words of this Torah.” (Deuteronomy 29:28).

There are several ways of understanding this passuk. Sins that are hidden from us, i.e. we do not realize that we sinned, HaShem takes care of wiping them out for us. Sins that we know we did, those are for us and our children, and all future generations to do teshuva on. We can also explain this to mean that sins done hidden are for HaShem to take care of. Sins in the public domain are for us, our children, and all future generations to correct and rectify.

The Gemara says in Avos D’Rabbi Nasson 34:5 that there are ten instances when words have dots over them. Our verse is the tenth. “The hidden things are for the Eternal our Lord, and the revealed things are for us and our children forever” (Deuteronomy 29:30). There are dots above the words “for us and our children,” and above the letter *ayin* in the word “forever.” Why? For this is what Ezra said: If Elijah comes and says to me, ‘Why did you write it this way?’ I will say to him, ‘I have already put dots above these words [to indicate I was not certain it was correct].’ But if he says to me, ‘You wrote it correctly’, then I will remove the dots.” This is a puzzling Gemara. The explanation for putting the dots is simply to find out if the words are correct? Ezra seems to be questioning whether he had the text correct, that revealed actions are for us and for our children forever.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin 43:b says, “Why in a Torah scroll are there dots over each of the letters in the words “to us and to our children” and over the letter *ayin* in the word “forever [ad]”? The dots, which function like erasures that weaken the force of the words, teach that HaShem did not punish the nation for hidden sins until the Jewish people crossed the Jordan River. This is the statement of Rabbi Yehuda.” If this is the case, the dots should have been over the word “hidden” in our verse, indicating those sins were temporarily not punishable until crossing into the Land. Emphasizing the “to us and our children until forever” would be some sort of emphasis on a lesson learned regarding those sins.

When reading our verse, the dots seem to indicate that sins are for us and our children until forever. What is “until” forever? And we learned earlier that HaShem visits sins only up to the third and fourth generations. (Deuteronomy 5:9). How can our passuk say revealed sins are visited upon our children forever?

Rashi says that HaShem is saying that the entire community cannot be punished for what someone does in private. “However, those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children that we may put away the evil from our midst; and if we do not execute judgment upon them, the whole community will be punished. There are dots on the words *לנו ולבנונו* to suggest that even for the revealed sins (those committed openly), He did not punish the community until they had crossed the Jordan — from the moment when they took upon themselves the oath on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal and had thus become responsible for one another.” Here Rashi seems to explain that by the dots being on the consequences of the revealed sins, it teaches us the delay in punishment on the hidden sins.

We learned that when the blessings and curses were given upon crossing the Jordan, (Deuteronomy 27:15-26) HaShem cursed individuals who sinned in private. The reason they

were cursed is because the community could not correct the situation and the private sins could affect the entire community. (But see there where many commentators say that private hidden sins are cursed because no one else can correct the situation because no one knows about them; and they, thereby, do not negatively affect the entire community to condemn it to exile).

Ibin Ezra limits the “hidden sins” to the sin of worshipping idols in private. HaShem will take care of that. “As to the revealed sins that are to us and our children, its meaning is that his punishment is in the hands of HaShem, and the Lord will exact punishment from him. However, if the sin was committed in public there is an obligation on us and our children to do in accordance with that which is written in the Torah.” He seems to be connecting the dots on what is for us and our children to indicate that HaShem takes care of all punishment, sins for revealed and hidden. However, revealed sins are for us to correct.

Sforno has more practical interpretation to sins done in hiding and those done in public. “Even though I have said that all of you are standing in the presence of the Lord whom it is impossible to mislead and deceive, so that He will collect His dues from everyone who owes him, HaShem collects directly only from those whom it is not possible for His appointed representatives, i.e. a legally constituted judiciary to bring to justice. Conversely, however, any sins committed publicly must be dealt with by this judiciary, forever, to avenge HaShem, kaviyachil, having been slighted by the public commission of violations of Torah law, especially those affecting other people directly.” Forever, meaning, no statute of limitations.

As to legal obligation, Chizkuni adds something to the interpretation. He also learns that the sins are those done in hiding or those done in public view. Those done hidden in one’s home it is incumbent upon HaShem to take care of them. It is not simply that HaShem will punish them. Moshe is saying in our verse that just as revealed sins are for Beis Din to take care, so too,

HaShem is obligated to wipe out sins done in secret, so that jointly between HaShem and Beis Din all sins are dealt with. He talks about the dots upon the letters of “us and our children.” “In order that you should not say that this approach applies forever (under all circumstances), the words *והנגלות לנו ולבנינו*, “and the publicly committed sins are also the responsibility of us and our children,” have been dotted, i. e. as long as we observe that part of the law, by letting our judiciary punish sinners of sins committed in public, HaShem will take care of those that were committed secretly.”

Gur Areyeh says that “the dot on “until forever” is because the hidden was not punished until they crossed the Jordan. “Until” indicating a time will come when sin would be punished. That was at the time of the Jordan crossing. Until then it was not.” He seems to also comment that revealed sins were also not punished until the acceptance of the Torah after crossing the Jordan, even though it was still the People’s responsibility to make sure sins would not go unpunished.

Ramban learns quotes the Ibin Ezra that “hidden sins” refers to idol worship done in hiding and he also learns the Gemara Sanhedrin 43b as indicating this is so. However, he disagrees. He says, “By way of the simple meaning of Scripture it is my opinion that the secret things are the sins that are hidden from those who commit them, as it is stated, Who can discern errors? Cleanse Thou me from hidden faults. (Psalms 19:13.) The verse states: “[Our] hidden sins belong to G-d alone; for them we bear no guilt for having transgressed [unknowingly]. But the things that are revealed, namely our conscious sins, belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this Law as an eternal statute. As such we accepted it, obligating the one who was present [when the covenant was made] and the one who was not present. And because he included in the imprecation [the obligation] to perform all the commandments, he

excluded from the ban whoever commits a sin unintentionally, so that he should not be afflicted by this curse. The words of Onkelos indicate this, for he rendered it, “The secret things are before the Eternal our Lord,” thus implying that we will not be punished for sins we have committed unknowingly, but if he agreed with the aforementioned interpretation of the commentators [that it is for HaShem to punish conscious sins committed secretly then Onkelos should have said, “The secret things are ‘to’ the Eternal our Lord” to punish.]”

Tur HaAruch agrees with this explanation. The sins are those unknown to the sinner. “Our sages have composed prayers in which we constantly ask HaShem to protect us against committing such sins inadvertently committed. (see Psalms 19:13) In appreciation of not being made responsible for such sins, Moses says that we will take care of knowingly committed sins, do penance, etc., and ask HaShem’s forgiveness and undertake not to be negligent again. The curses Moses has called down on sinners do not apply to people who have sinned unintentionally.”

Daas Zekeinim seems to lean on the view that ‘hidden’ refers to sin done in secret, and explains the Gemara when it says that the dots over “us and our children” are used to mean that hidden sins were not punished until the Israelites crossed the Jordan and accepted the blessing and curses on the mountains. The dots on the letters indicate that punishment for hidden sins, either those done in secret or sins unknown even to the sinner, was not meted out until all the Israelites joined together, in the Land, to accept the entire Torah through the blessings and curses. Once the public acceptance was done, then it was the responsibility of the entire people to correct sins. Those revealed were the responsibility of “us” while those hidden (either in secret or even unknown to the sinner) HaShem had to correct. Thus, the dots above the letters indicate obligation, emphasizing our new responsibility. Before the public acceptance there was no

balancing scale for the whole of the people, so hidden sins did not need to be corrected or punished. There is a sense of responsibility of one for the other now.

Given this explanation by the Daas Zekeinim, it fits with Ramban and my first interpretation, that “hidden” means to the sinner (not the public). Before the public acceptance of the Torah sins that were done in public were punished—as we see by the mekosheish (Numbers 15:32), Korach (ibid 16 et seq), Zimri and the Midianite (ibid 25:6). Sins done in private would thus be punished by HaShem. There is no reason to think sins were absolved simply if done in private. However, when looking at the entire nation accepting the Torah, now we see that sins hidden from the doer were not punished or forgiven by HaShem prior the acceptance. There was no need. It was done unwittingly. However, now that the entire People accepted responsibility of keeping the Torah, the dots indicate that just as revealed sins must be wiped off the tally, so too sins done unwittingly must be wiped now, also.

It is important to note that the Mount Eival and Mount Gerizim acceptance of the Torah was this generations’ first public acceptance of the Torah. None (with the known exception of Yehoshua and Calev) were alive by the Revelation of Mount Sinai. Our verse says “for us and our children until forever.” This means that what a person does—the sins he commits –become part of his personality and possibly, chas v’shalom part of his mesorah. His kids see the sins, even if done out of ignorance or inadvertently, and they can copy that behavior. It is then incumbent on future generations to correct this and end the cycle of sin. There is in our psyche to condone behavior we see of our parents and loved one. If we see our father not being careful in kashrus then we may do the same. If we see our parents talk in shul we may do the same. This verse is telling us, we must follow the “words of the entirety of this Torah.” The words of this Torah are our guide and not the behavior we saw growing up or at home. Each generation has the

responsibility to correct prior bad influences. It is no excuse to just say “this is what I saw in my home, so that is okay.” This also includes the conduct of a generation. Some generations were lack in one area. It is then the obligation of the next generation to correct it. There was a Torah in place that gave the rules of allowed and forbidden speech before the 1850s. However, the Rabbi Yisrael Meir saw a lapse and he wrote his sefer Chofetz Chaim. Rambam saw a lapse in halachic clarification so he wrote his sefer. After the holocaust there was a void of Torah observance and Shabbos keeping in America and the next generation of Rabanan moved to correct it.

We should not think that we are better than previous generations. However, if there is a flaw, we have the obligation to correct it. This could be why the dots are on the words “to us and our children until,” to show that even though HaShem still takes care of the punishment, forgiveness, and wiping our slates, it is incumbent on a father and a generation to correct his or its sins. The father corrects his own behavior so that it does not get repeated down the line. Additionally, later generations are instructed to keep learning Torah so that flaws may be revealed. Hidden sins are for HaShem. He will wipe them out. However, the dots indicate that it is still incumbent on us and our future generations to learn the Torah, to discover what is ‘sin,’ and make it revealed. When it becomes revealed, i.e. learned or discovered, to be a sin, then that child must correct that sin and negative behavior and stop its repetition.

With this we can explain the Gemara of Avos D’Rabbi Nasson. Ezra wrote the dots as an indication for Eliyahu to reveal the correctness of the verse. This means that the dots remind each generation until Eliyahu’s revelation, to keep learning the Torah to find the truth and lessons in all its words. The dots remind us of our responsibility and for us to find the correct path that the Torah provides. In this generation there is an incredible access to the Torah and its commentators. May we continue the explosion of learning and add to it an explosion of proper

conduct. May we be the proper role models for future generations. May we all be written in the Book of Good and Long Life.