**6. Forgiveness**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| סְלַח לָנוּ אָבִינוּ כִּי חָטָאנוּ. מְחַל לָנוּ מַלְכֵּנוּ כִּי פָשָׁעְנוּ. כִּי מוחֵל וְסולֵחַ אָתָּה. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה', חַנּוּן הַמַּרְבֶּה לִסְלחַ:  | Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned. Pardon us, our king, for we have transgressed; for you forgive and pardon. Blessed are You, Adonai, who is gracious and quick to forgive. |

In the previous berakhah we asked God to help us regret our sins, the wrong things we did. Now, we that we have repented, we ask God to indeed forgive us for our sins. We have to hope that God is a forgiving God.

* In the first line we address God as "father" or "parent"; in the second line we address God as "king" or "ruler". What is the difference between thinking of God as parent or ruler? Why do we begin with "father" (or parent) and then change to "king"? How is it different when forgiveness is given by a parent from when it is given by a different authority figure, such as a teacher, principal or camp director?
* Is it easy to forgive, especially when you know the person will continue to mess things up? As a forgiver, how is God different from human beings? What can we learn from God?

**Forgiveness in the Jewish Tradition**

**Rambam, Laws or Repentance 2:10**

It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and not to forgive. Rather, he should be easily appeased and hard to anger. And when someone who has wronged him wholeheartedly asks him forgiveness and he sincerely wants to be forgiven, even if that person really bothered him and did many wrong things to him he shouldn't hold a grudge. And acting in this way is what it means to be a part of the Jewish people.

* Why do you think the Rambam adds in that acting in this way is at least part of what it means to be part of the Jewish people?

**Babylonian Talmud Taanit 20a**

Our Rabbis have taught: A person should always be gentle like a reed and never hard like a cedar.

Once Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon was coming from Migdal Gedor, from the house of his teacher, and he was riding on his donkey by the riverside and was feeling happy and elated because he had studied much Torah.

There chanced to meet him an exceedingly ugly man who greeted him, ‘Peace be upon you, my master."

Rabbi Shimon did not return his greeting but instead said to him, "You worthless creature! How ugly you are. Are all the people of your city as ugly as you are?"

The man replied: ‘I do not know, but go and tell the craftsman who made me, 'How ugly is the vessel which you have made.'"

When Rabbi Elazar realized that he had done wrong he got off of his donkey and bowed down before the man and said to him, "I apologize to you, please forgive me." The man replied: "I will not forgive you until you go to the craftsman who made me and say to him, 'How ugly is the vessel which you have made.'"

Rabbi Elazar walked behind the man until he reached his home town. When the people of the city came out to meet him they said, "Peace to you our Teacher, our Master."

The man asked them, ‘Who are you calling "master and teacher?"

They replied, "The man who is walking behind you."

He exclaimed, "If this man is a teacher, may there not be any more like him in Israel!"

The people asked him: "Why?"

He replied: "He did such and such a thing to me."

They said to him: "Nevertheless, you should forgive him, for he is a man greatly learned in the Torah."

The man replied: "For your sakes I will forgive him, but only on the condition that he does not act in the same manner in the future."

Soon after this Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Shimon entered [the Bet Hamidrash] and

said, "A person should always be gentle as a reed and let him never be hard as a

cedar. And for this reason the reed merited that of it should be made a pen for the writing of the Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzoth.

**Questions for Thought:**

* What mistakes did the rabbi make? What mistakes did the ugly man make? What things did they do right?
* What do you think of the main characters in the story? With whom do you have sympathy: the rabbi or the ugly man? What about the people of the town?
* Whom do you think the story teller has sympathy for?