

Date: 14 Cheshvan 5786 (November 5, 2025)

Torah Portion: Vayeira

Topic: Praising the Righteous

As it is written (Genesis 18:17-19), “And YHWH said, “Shall I conceal from Abraham what I do, and Abraham is surely to become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him? For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they keep the way of YHWH, doing charity and justice, in order that YHWH might then bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken of him.”

The Midrash opens with the verse (Prov. 10:7): “The mention of a righteous man brings blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot.” R’ Yitzchak said: Anyone who mentions a righteous person and does not bless him transgresses a positive commandment. What is the source for this? Because it is written, “The mention of a righteous man is for a blessing.” He maintains that this cannot merely mean that a righteous person merits Elohim’s blessing while the wicked are cursed, because this interpretation does not account for the verse’s emphasis on the mention and the name, rather than the individuals themselves. Therefore, R’ Yitzchak understands the verse to command that one’s mention of a righteous person should bring blessing, and conversely, that one’s reference to the wicked should be followed by a curse.

Similarly, anyone who mentions a wicked person and does not curse him transgresses a positive commandment. What is the reason for this? Because it is written, “But the name of the wicked will rot.” The Talmud (Berachos 10a) explains: In any chapter of Tehillim that was dear to King David, he opened with אֲשֶׁרִי קָדוֹשׁ (ashrei ha-ish), “Praiseworthy is the man” (Ps. 1:1), and concluded with אֲשֶׁרִי כָּל-חֹסֵי בּוֹ (ashrei kol chosai vo), “Praiseworthy are all who trust in Him” (2:12). There were certain *amei ha'aretz* (people ignorant of Torah) who caused severe distress to R’ Meir. He, in turn, prayed for mercy regarding them—that they would die. His wife, Bruriah, said to him, “What is your reasoning for praying for their death?” He replied, “Let sinners (חַטָּאִים, *chattā'im*) cease out of the earth” (104:35). She said, “The word *chattā'im* refers to that which causes one to sin, i.e., the Evil Inclination. Accordingly, King David is not praying for the death of sinners, but for an end to the Evil Inclination that leads them into sin! Therefore, you should rather pray for mercy regarding them—that they should repent of their wickedness and turn away from their Evil Inclination.”

Thus, we are encouraged to praise the righteous so that others will be motivated to emulate them. We are bidden to speak of the evils of the wicked (where this does not constitute *lashon hara*) so that others will be discouraged from imitating their conduct.

Based on the verse, the Midrash states that a wicked person should be cursed. Maharsha takes a different approach. He notes that although the verse begins, “The mention of a righteous one is for a blessing,” it does not conclude similarly by stating, “And the mention of a wicked person is for a curse.” This is because we do not curse the wicked but rather hope to see them return to Elohim. Thus, the verse ends, “And the name of the wicked shall rot,” i.e., their reputation for wickedness should cease on account of their repentance. Maharsha concludes by distinguishing between one who prays for Elohim’s aid in his own repentance and one who prays for another to repent.

Shalom