

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bemachashavah Techilah

This week's *parashah* begins, "Hashem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai, saying, 'Speak to Bnei Yisrael and tell them, 'When you come to the land which I am giving you, the land will rest a Shabbos for Hashem.'""¹

The Sifra asks about this verse, "What is the topic of *shemita* doing next to Mt. Sinai?"² Why does the Torah draw a connection between these two topics? The Sifra answers that the subject of Har Sinai is raised here to tell us that just as the *mitzvah* of *shemita* was given, in all its detail, at Har Sinai, so was every *mitzvah*. Rashi, quoting the Sifra, elaborates. Most *mitzvos* are repeated in Devarim, where Moshe reviews the lessons taught in the desert. The *mitzvah* of *shemita* is a particularly appropriate *mitzvah* to convey this message, as it is not mentioned in the book of Devarim. All of its *mitzvos* are recorded at Mt. Sinai. The Malbim takes this idea even further. *Shemita* had no relevance in the desert; it only applies to fields in Israel. The more appropriate time for teaching its laws would have been immediately before entering the land. Rather, Hashem stresses that the *mitzvah* of *shemita* was given entirely at Har Sinai – just as every law was.

¹ Vayikra 25:1-2

² Sifra *parshasa* 1:1

Why do Rashi and the Malbim need to elaborate on the words of the Sifra, and could not understand them as stated?

Is man basically a self that happens to interact with other people? Or, are we overlapping relationships from which a concept of individual emerges?

The very first Mishnah asks, "From what time do we recite *Shema* in the evening? From when *kohanim* [who had become *tamei* and would become *tahor* at sunset] would sit down to eat *terumah*."³ The first Mishnah does not assume that one is a beginner. Rather, it presumes that the person is already familiar with the laws of *taharah* spelled out in the fifth order of *Mishnayos*. Why? This is a particularly strong difficulty because simply answering "From sunset" would have answered the question in fewer words and more clearly.

There are two approaches a person can take for understanding a complex system. The first is reductionism: breaking the system down into its components and understanding each part. If one can understand how the transmission works, the electrical system, the engine, the steering, etc... one would understand how the car as

³ Berachos 1:1

a whole operates. And to understand the engine, one need only understand the alternator, the pistons, the spark plugs, the injection system, etc... And so on, until whatever level of detail is desired. Aristotle was fond of reductionism, dividing his field of study into category and sub-category, reducing science to almost an outline form.

The problem with the reductionist enterprise is that many features of a system evolve from the interaction of the parts and not the parts themselves. Understanding the workings of a neuron is only a tiny part of understanding the working of the brain – how the neurons interconnect is a much larger picture. In the past decades, mathematicians have found that systems degenerate from order to chaos in many of the same ways, following the same equations, whether one is studying the collapse of a pile of sand or the defibrillation of a human heart. These systems require a holistic approach – seeing the entire system and the interaction as the primary field of study. Even understanding gravity between three objects, such as computing the orbit of the moon (which has significant effects because of the gravity of the moon, the earth and the sun) requires this kind of holistic study.

The Mishnah was the first time *halachah* was presented in an element-by-element manner. *Mid-rashei Halachah*, such as the Sifra

cited above, follow the structure of the Chumash. The Chumash itself often flows from topic to topic, from prohibition to obligation, from interpersonal *mitzvos* to those of divine worship. R' Yehuda HaNasi, however, resisted the tendency of the Mishnah form becoming a reductionist study. Despite the topical organization, the Mishnah also frequently flows conversationally; a feature that dominates the structure of the Gemara. We see this quite clearly in the first Mishnah. Rather than presenting the laws of *Shema* in isolation, R' Yehudah HaNasi chose to show its relationship to other *mitzvos*. He chose a holistic understanding of interconnections over a clearer understanding of a single *din*.

In this light, it is difficult to take the Sifra's question at face value. "What is the topic of *shemita* doing next to Mt. Sinai?" Why not? All of Torah is interconnected! Therefore, Rashi and the Malbim understand the question not in terms of questioning

There are many times that the Torah refers to commandments using different expressions. In three of the places that the Torah uses the term *chok*, Rashi¹ explains that it refers to those commandments whose rationale is not immediately clear. It is therefore interesting that, in our *parashah*,² Rashi explains the expression "follow my *chukim*" as "putting strong effort into Torah." What makes it even more interesting is Rashi's reason for explaining *chok* this way: Since the verse

¹ Bereishis 26:5, Shemos 15:26, Vayikra 19:19

² Vayikra 26:3

the existence of a connection between the two topics. They do not understand the Sifra as expressing surprise; they see it exploring what the nature of the connection is.

This question of reductionism vs. holism is relevant in understanding

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the human condition as well. Is man basically a self that happens to interact with other people? Or, are we overlapping relationships from which a concept of individual emerges?

The Gemara says "*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh* – all Jews are guarantors for one another."⁴ The version found in the Ein Yaakov,

⁴ Sanhedrin 27b

continues "and keep my *mitzvos*," *chok* cannot refer to keeping the *mitzvos*. Rashi himself³ had explained the term *mitzvah* as something [understood to be] worthy of being commanded even if it were not written, such as theft and murder. It would therefore seem plausible that the Torah would use both terms here as well, in order to refer to the same two categories of commandments. Yet, Rashi insists that *chok* here cannot refer to a specific type of *mitzvah*.

The *Ma'or Ve'shemesh* asks (among other things) how the

³ Bereishis 26:5

generally believed to be more accurate than the text of the Vilna Shas, reads "... *zeh bazeh* – all Jews are mixed in [a different use of the word "*areivim*"] one with the other.

For 38 years after the Golden Calf, Moshe lost his special prophetic ability to speak to G-d "face to Face". The Or Hachaim asks how Bnei Yisrael's sin would affect Moshe's prophecy. Giving the above explanation of "*areivim zeh bazeh*", he explains that all Jewish souls overlap. When the Jewish people sin, Moshe's soul is affected because of its overlap and mixture with those who sinned.

The primary existence is that of the Jewish people, the interactions of the whole. We exist as individuals only as a consequence, our individuality is only the sum of the roles we play within those interactions.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Bakeish Shalom

Torah⁴ can promise, as a reward for working hard in the study of Torah and for keeping the commandments, that the land will produce a plentiful bounty. Reward for *mitzvos* does not come in this world,⁵ yet we are told what will happen here if we do what G-d asks.

In order to answer this question, he quotes the *Chafetz Hashem* regarding the prayer said after studying Torah.⁶ In this prayer, we thank G-d for allowing us to share

⁴ Vayikra 26:4-5

⁵ Kiddushin 39b

⁶ Berachos 38b, Shulchan Aruch O"C 110:8

in the study of Torah, and compare our lot with the lot of those not as fortunate: “We get up early, and they get up early...we get up early to learn Torah, while they get up early for worthless things. We work hard, and they work hard... we work hard and get rewarded for it, while they work hard without getting rewarded for it. We run, and they run... we run towards the next world, while they run towards their grave.” The middle statement seems superfluous, as saying that we get up early to learn Torah will merit the next world is enough to show that we get rewarded for studying Torah. The *Chafetz Hashem* explains that everyone has to get involved in mundane matters in order to support himself and his family. However, if our purpose is to provide the physical necessities so that we can learn Torah and fulfill the *mitzvos*, then we are rewarded even for the efforts put in at work (since it is being done for a higher purpose). Others, who work just as hard at making a living, but do so only to accumulate possessions, will not get rewarded for their hard work. This is what we are thanking G-d for (in this line of the prayer) after performing the *mitzvah* of learning Torah; if our “other” work is done in order to

enable us to fulfill the Torah, we will be rewarded not only for the learning of Torah itself, but for every other effort that went into getting us to the point of being able to learn.

Similarly, the *Ma’or Ve’shemesh* continues, the “hard work for Torah” to which Rashi refers is not (just) working hard to understand what is being studied, but working hard for the sake of Torah, i.e. in

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order to be able to study it without having the worries of supporting the family become a distraction. Just as the word *Bereishis* is explained as “for the sake of *Raishis*,⁷” *bechukosai*⁸ means “for the sake of my *chukim*,” i.e. the Torah, and *teileichu* refers to going to work, with the *pasuk* saying, “if you are working for the sake of Torah” you will merit reward for the work itself.

⁷ See Rashi on Bereishis 1:1

⁸ i.e. the prefix of the letter *bais*

Since the point the Torah is trying to make is that G-d will provide the material things necessary for us to continue doing what He wants, there is no difference between the types of commandments we are doing — as long as we keep doing them. And if there is no reason to differentiate between a commandment easily understood and one not as easily understood, then the Torah must mean all categories when it refers to doing the *mitzvos*. Therefore, the term *chok* in our verse must refer to something else... working for the sake of Torah.

If our purpose for going to work is to be able to learn Torah and fulfill the *mitzvos*, G-d will make this work less burdensome by providing a plentiful bounty. It is not a reward for doing what G-d has asked, but rather a means to allow us to accomplish at work what we need to — in a way that permits us to spend more time learning. This is why the “early pious ones,” who spent nine hours a day in prayer and preparation for prayer, had their “work blessed.”⁹

⁹ Berachos 32b. See Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 9:1 for a similar approach.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Sefasai Tiftach

David haMelech composed a *tefillah* that we say part of every morning, “*Baruch atah Hashem, E-lokei Yisrael Avinu...*”¹ Looking at the *tefillah*, we can break it down into five elements.

¹ Divrei HaYamim I 29:10-13

1) ברוך אתה ה' אלהי ישראל אבינו
 “מְעוֹלָם וְעַד-עוֹלָם – Blessed are You, Hashem, the G-d of Israel our forefather.” This is the opening of the *tefillah*. There are two points to note: the section is a *berachah*, and it mentions one of the *avos*.

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik asked how we have the chutzpah to stand

before the Creator and pray to Him for anything. He answers that our only justification is precedent — our forefathers did so and Hashem stated His approval. Therefore, when we approach Hashem in prayer, we open by invoking this justification. Rabbi Soloveitchik explains that this is why we preface our *Shemoneh Esrei* with *Ashrei*'s words “from generation to

generation we tell of Your Greatness...”

2) “לך ה' הגדלה והגבורה והתפארת...” – To You, Hashem, is the Greatness, the Might, the Splendor...” Second, David lists traits through which we see Hashem. As we will see, the mention of *Gevurah*, Divine Might, is significant. It is a significant contrast to the personal G-d Who had a relationship with our fathers.

3) “כיכל בשמים ובארץ” – Because everything in heaven and in earth is Yours” Declaring Hashem as G-d over creation...

4) ... who is also the King. “לך ה' הממלכה” – You have the kingdom, Hashem” Again, we balance the transcendent, Hashem being G-d of heaven and earth, with the immanence of His personal rule.

“And you are exalted as Head of all.” Finally, he praises Hashem in a manner related to the request to follow. In David's case, he was asking for Hashem to aid Shlomo in his succession as king.

Daniel later² followed a similar pattern in his *tefillah*.

1) להוא שמה די-א-להא מברך מן-עלמא ועד-עלמא – May the name of G-d be blessed from forever to forever

2) די חכמתא וגבורתא די-להא היא – For Wisdom and Might are His

3) והוא מהשנה עדניא ומנא – And He changes the seasons and times,

4) מהעדה מלכין ומהקים מלכין – He removes kings and establishes kings

5) יהב חכמתא לחכימין ומנדעא לידעיא – gives wisdom to the wise,

² Daniel 2:19-23

and knowledge to those who know understanding.”

There are other *tefillos* found in *Tanach* that seem to follow a similar structure, with some variations.³ One example: Yehoshafat prays for might⁴, so in his *tefillah* the recurring theme of Might as a Divine Attribute (element #2) would be redundant, as it is a necessary component for the fifth element, the praise related to the request.

1) Hashem, the ה' א-להי אבותינו” – G-d of our forefathers be blessed

2) omitted

3) הלא אתה הוא א-להים בשמים – For are You not the G-d in heaven?

4) ואתה מושל בכל ממלכות הגוים – And You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations

5) ובידך כח וגבורה ואין עמך להתיצב – And in your “Hand” is Strength and Might (thus covering #2) and none can withstand You.

It would seem that when *Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah* wrote the beginning of *Shemoneh Esrei* they turned to the same formula of the *nevi'im*. As we noted repeatedly in the past weeks, the Vilna Gaon understands the first *berachah* as being 5 variations of ideas in the titles by which Moshe Rabbeinu praised G-d – “the G-d, the Great, the Mighty and the Awe Inspiring”. With this notion of a basic structure for introducing *tefillos* of request, we can understand the nuances of each variation.

1) ברוך אתה ה' א-להינו וא-להי אבותינו” – Blessed are You Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers...” Opening by giving Hashem a *berachah* and referring

³ C.f. Daniel 9:4, Nechemiah 1:5, Melachim I 8:23 (which is also Dh"Y 2 6:14).

⁴ Divrei HaYamim II 20:6-7

to Him as the G-d of our forefathers, just as David did.

2) “הא-ל הגדל הגבר והנורא” – The G-d, the Great, the Mighty and the Awe Inspiring” Praising Hashem's attributes, and in particular His Might. The G-d of our fathers is also the abstract incomprehensible G-d of the philosophers.

3) א-ל עליון, גומל חסדים טובים, וקנה “... הכל – G-d above all, Supporter through good kindness and Repairer of everything...” Hashem is G-d over all of creation.

4) And also our personal “מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן” – King, Helper, Savior, and Protector”

Finally, leading into the sequence of *berachos*: “ברוך אתה ה', מגן אברהם” – Blessed are You ... the Protector of Avraham.”

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