

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

REB GIL STUDENT

Bemachshvah Techilah

When first approaching the Hittite people to request land for burying Sarah, Avraham points out that he is a “*Ger VeSoshav*” (Bereishis 23:4), a foreigner dwelling in the land. The Or HaChaim connects this with the verse commanding the charitable support of a non-Jewish resident, a *Ger Toshav* (Vayikra 25:35). Since the Torah obligates us to provide for the needs of a *Ger Toshav*, Avraham argued that the Hittites must therefore provide for his needs which, at the time, included a burial plot for his deceased wife.

However, the question begs itself. What kind of argument is Avraham offering? The Torah had not yet been given so the commandments were not binding. And even after it was given, the Hittites were not commanded in these mitzvos. Even Avraham only performed mitzvos on a voluntary basis and not out of a formal

obligation. If so, what was Avraham’s argument that was intended to convince the Hittites to offer him land?

The Or HaChaim answers this by pointing out that the mitzvos of the Torah are all logical. They are based on many reasonable provisions that, given some basic shared premises and a lack of confusion and distraction, would be evident to any thinker. Avraham did not intend to tell the Hittites that the Torah says that they have to help him so therefore they must. Rather, he sought to explain to them that basic human law – a natural law – requires them to help him.

While the Or HaChaim is certainly correct that many laws of the Torah are based on reason, others might disagree with his claim that all of the laws are logical. Indeed, it seems entirely out of character for the normally mystical

author to make such a broad rationalistic statement.

R’ Saadia Gaon¹ divides the mitzvos into two general categories – logical commandments and obedience commandments. The former are those laws that we would arrive upon through our own use of logic. The latter are those that, while having reasons, would not be derived through deduction alone. This split is one that was largely accepted by Jewish thinkers. However, R’ Saadia Gaon added an important caveat. Once G-d commanded us to do something, even if we would not have arrived at that idea on our own, fulfilling the desire of a G-d who has brought us into this world and continually sustained us is only a logical act of gratitude. Thus, even non-logical mitzvos are obligated by logic.

¹ Eminos VeDeyos 3:1

Following Sarah’s untimely passing, Avraham proceeds to purchase a burial plot for her from the residents of Chevron. He first announced to the local residents his desire for a place to bury his wife and they consented. He then proceeded to arrange the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah and the entire story is told at length of his

arranging the purchase and, in essence, haggling with the seller to pay rather than receive the burial ground as a gift.

This entire story is quite unusual. For what purpose does the Torah dwell at such length on the dealings? Even if we grant that the result was important to inform, do we need to know in such detail the back and

forth arguments, the claims and counterclaims, involved in the transaction? The Torah is not a business manual. Then why does it tell us of Avraham’s business dealings?

An answer can, perhaps, be found in the following Mishnah in Sanhedrin 24b: “These people are invalid [to judge and to testify]:

Bakeish Shalom

Those who role dice,... those who race doves..." The Gemara offers two explanations why these people are invalid to judge and to testify. According to Rami bar Chama, these people are involved in a form of theft (see Rashi for an explanation of the exact mechanism of theft). If so, we understand that thieves may not serve as judges and are not trustworthy witnesses.

However, Rav Sheshes offers an entirely different explanation. He says that these professional gamblers are invalid to judge and to testify because they are not involved in "*yishuvo shel olam*". Rabbeinu Chananel explains this with the following brief remark: "Such as a trade or working the land." Because these people are gamblers rather than regular workers they are invalid as judges and witnesses. But this is truly puzzling. According to Rav Sheshes, these people have done nothing wrong. They are not sinners! Why should they not be allowed to judge or testify?

Rashi elaborates slightly more in his commentary to the Mishnah. He writes, "Because they are not involved in '*yishuvo shel olam*' they are not proficient in laws and business transactions and are not sin-fearers ('*yir'ei chet*')." However, we are still left with our question, what did these people do wrong that they should be punished in such a way? After all, they did not choose a forbidden profession in which to engage.

R' Avraham Grodzinsky *hy"*², the last *mashgiach* in Slabodka who was murdered by the Nazis alongside R' Elchanan Wasserman

hy"^d, answers this question by explaining that these people are not punished by being invalidated for judging and testifying. Rather, they lack the basic qualifications for these tasks. Just like in order to be obligated in mitzvos a person must reach a certain level of intellectual development, so too in order to be qualified to judge and testify a person must reach a level of understanding of human interaction. As with all learning, this comes only from experience. As children, we begin developing socially and understanding such basic concepts as sharing and ownership. We grow older and learn about social cliques. As we mature we gain understanding of human action and interaction; how people relate to each other and act on their own behalfs. This is a process of learning, one that never truly ends. The wisest are those who have observed others for a lifetime and have developed keen insight into the human condition. However, there is a minimum understanding of human interaction required before being qualified to testify about a social exchange.

Professional gamblers are not involved in normal business transactions. They live in a different world, a synthetic world, that follows its own twisted rules. The constant immersion in such a different world stunts the normal growth of its inhabitants. They stop learning about normal social interaction and learn only about the interaction of greedy gamblers and lowlifes. How can such people, unknowledgeable in basic ways of business, judge or testify about a business transaction? They do not know whether a statement is common courtesy or a real promise.

In their selfish world, the few rules that exist are very different. But the business world has unwritten rules and codes of honor. It is for this reason, their total unfamiliarity with the basic rules of business interaction, that professional gamblers may not testify or serve as judges.

R' Grodzinsky continues that the necessity of being part of normal society goes even further. Those who do not understand human interaction will not even know how to be pleasant to others and bring harmony to the world. The Gemara in Sanhedrin quotes Beis Hillel as saying that, in response to a person who returns from the marketplace with a poor purchase, one may praise the item. Even though this is lying, one may do so rather than upset the person so as to bring peace to the world. For this, the Sages say, a person must always interact with others. Because if a person remains generally isolated he will lack the common sense, the social wisdom, to know what to say in order to maintain harmony. Not only does a recluse lack finesse, his ability to perform certain mitzvos is curtailed.

It is, perhaps, for this reason that the Torah tells us in detail how Avraham wisely argued with the seller while arranging the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah. Not only are we taught that Avraham was a master of social and business interaction, the lengthy diversion teaches us that these matters are important for any Torah scholar. Anyone who studies Torah must also know that understanding human interaction is crucial for becoming a complete Torah individual.

² Toras Avraham, pp. 367-373

Sefasai Tiftach

The *brachah* with which we begin *Psukei Dezimra*, *Baruch She'amar*, is not mentioned anywhere in the Talmud. However, the earliest of the Rishonim tell us that it was instituted by the Sages, which implies that *Baruch She'amar* was composed during the time of the Mishnah or the Gemara and was merely omitted from the Talmud even though it was already recited at that time. Kabbalists tell us that it was written and instituted by the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah during the early Second Temple time.

Baruch She'amar is a preamble to *Psukei Dezimra* and contains two main sections. Starting backwards, the second part is a *brachah*

describing what will be done during *Psukei Dezimra*, praising Hashem for all the many wonderful things He does and has done. It lists the many different ways in which the *davener* will praise, thank, glorify, exalt, etc. Hashem. Additionally, it states with what the *davener* will praise Hashem – the songs of David, i.e. Tehillim, which form the core of *Psukei Dezimra*, the *Hallelukahs*.

The first part of *Baruch She'amar* lists what attributes and actions of Hashem the *davener* will mention in His praise. They include the creation of the world and, perhaps more importantly, the continued sustenance of it and its inhabitants. Not only does G-d support people, he maintains animals and the non-living planet.

This, too, is something for which we praise Hashem. During *Psukei Dezimra* we also praise G-d for his involvement with the world. We thank Hashem for interfering in the world, directing actions according to His plan, rewarding those who merit it and punishing those who deserve it. Furthermore, we thank G-d for His mercy, something without which we could not survive.

All this, in *Baruch She'amar*, is an introduction to and a brief summary of the lengthy praises which we pour out to Hashem in *Psukei Dezimra*. Which, in itself, is an introduction to and a preparation for the actual *davening* of the *Shmoneh Esreh*.

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