

מתוקים מדבש

*Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah*RABBI GIL STUDENT**Bemachashavah Techilah**

A people without a land is a lost people, a homeless nation without refuge or sanctuary. But of what significance is this wandering? Does it increase our spiritual obligations or render us incapable of meaningful service of G-d?

As a description of what will happen to the nation if they do not observe the *mitzvos*, the Torah tells us “you will perish quickly off the good land which the Lord gives to you” (Devarim 11:17). In other words, and as the Sifrei and Rashi state explicitly, a punishment for non-observance of the *mitzvos* is exile for our land. The next few verses then tell us, “And you shall put these words of Mine on your hearts and on your souls and you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand and they shall be *totafos* between your eyes... and you shall write them on the doorposts of your house...” (Devarim 11:18,20). The connection between these verses is unclear. What does exile have to do with *tefillin* and *mezuzah*?

Rashi¹, based on the Sifrei, explains: “Even after you have been exiled, distinguish yourselves by [observing] the commandments: put on *tefillin*, make *mezuzos*, so that they will not be new to you when you return.” The clear implication is

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This is certainly a very difficult idea. As the Ramban² points out, certain *mitzvos* are bodily obligations (*chovos haguf*) and do not vary based on one’s location. Why should there be a difference whether one is in Israel or in Canada. Either way, the bodily obligations still apply.

Furthermore, there are different reasons for the many commandments. Some refine the human character, others train a person to obedience of the Divine, and others are necessary for the smooth running of a civil society. Why should such *mitzvos* apply any less in exile than in Israel?

The Sifrei on Devarim 18:29 relates the following story:

R’ Yehudah ben Beseirah, R’ Masyah ben Charesh, R’ Chananiah ben Achi R’ Yehoshua, and R’ Yonasan were going to [a place] outside of Israel. When they reach Platom, they raised their eyes, shed tears, tore their garments, and recited this verse: “And you shall possess it and dwell in it and you shall observe all the laws and the ordinances...” (Devarim 11:31-31). They said, “[We see from here] that settling the land of Israel is equivalent to observing all of the commandments.”

Once again, we see the importance of the land of Israel in respect to the observance of *mitzvos*. However, in the above story, the exact opposite point might be inferred than from the prior passage. The most recent passage might imply that *mitzvah* observance is specifically for those in exile. Those living in Israel, however, fulfill the commandment of settling the land that is equivalent to all of the *mitzvos*. From the prior passage we see the exact opposite: only in the land of Israel is the observance of *mitzvos* significant.

We can determine that the idea settling the land of Israel is more important than other *mitzvos* this is certainly not literally true. This type of exaggerated statement is typical

¹ Devarim 11:18

² ad loc.

of rabbinic literature and can be found in regard to *tzitzis*, *avodah zarah*, *Shabbos*, and *tzedakah*.³ The upshot of such a statement is that settling the land of Israel is extremely important, but there is no implication that it overrides or renders unnecessary the observance of other *mitzvos*. Indeed, according to the Ramban, *mitzvos* in Israel are more important than outside of Israel, but sins in Israel are also more significant than equivalent acts in exile. The holiness of the land makes abrogation of G-d's law an even more serious infraction.⁴

However, we are still left with the puzzling statement that *mitzvos*

³ Rashi, Bamidbar 15:41; Bava Basra 9a

⁴ See *VaYoel Moshe* 2:37

A recurring theme in last week's and this week's *parshiyos* is the obligation to love G-d. How? How can one be ordered to feel an emotion? How much control and volition do we have over whether or not we love something or Someone?

The same question may be asked of the tenth *dibrah*. How can we be commanded not to covet something? Can someone simply shut off desire as through with a faucet?

The *mitzvah* of *ahavah* in this week's *parashah* is one of many that obligate us to engage in *mussar*. The central concern of *mussar* is the perfection of the self through the perfection of one's *middos*. *Mussar* begins very aware of the gap between mind and heart, between that which we know we ought to do and the priorities that actually shape our decisions. It also gives us tools to bridge that gap. So,

outside of the land of Israel are inherently meaningless. Can that be true? The Kesav Sofer points out

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that the statement of the Sifrei is only regarding very specific *mitzvos* – those mentioned in subsequent verses, i.e. *tefillin* and *mezuzah*. The Gemara⁵ states that the verse “And all the people of the earth shall see that the name of God is called upon you” (Devarim 28:10) is referring to *tefillin*. One of the functions of *tefillin*, and possibly *mezuzah* as

⁵ Berachos 6a

while someone may not be able to prevent a current bout of desire, or simply conjure up *ahavas Hashem*, love of the Almighty, one can change oneself into a person who will respond more appropriately in the future.

The mitzvah of ahavah in this week's parashah is one of many that obligate us to engage in mussar.

The Torah instructs us to bridge this gap when it says, “You shall circumcise the *orlah* of your heart, and no longer stiffen your neck.”¹ The term “*orlah*” is that used for the skin removed during a *bris milah*. Rashi² explains that we are to remove “the blocking of our heart

¹ Devarim 10:16

² Ad loc

well, is as a sign that G-d protects and watches over His nation. When that nation is in exile, the *tefillin* and *mezuzah* might serve not as a *kiddush Hashem*, a sign of G-d's greatness, but as a *chillul Hashem*. We, the wearers of *tefillin*, G-d's chosen people, are second-class citizens, wanderers without a home. The real purpose of *tefillin* is certainly not accomplished in exile. Only in a strong Israel, where G-d's glory is manifest, is the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* properly fulfilled. In all other times, we observe it as preparation for the time – we pray very soon – when G-d's glory will once again be entirely manifest and those who look upon us will see the G-d watches over His people.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bakeish Shalom

and its covering.” How are we to do so?

The Vilna Gaon comments on Mishlei that there are two types of *middos*.

“I already wrote that there are two kinds of middos, those with which one is born and those to which one must acclimate oneself. Those with which one is born are called “derachav” (his path), for they are one's derech from the beginning of one's creation. Those to which one becomes acclimated are called regel (habit or foot), because one becomes acclimated (hircil) to them.

“Those [middos] to which one becomes acclimated, one must guard and straighten them a lot. When one guards them, then those that were in one's nature will certainly be guarded. This is 'Paleis ma'gal raglecha – Make plain the circuit of your feet' [the first half of

our verse]. Those that one became used to, one needs to straighten and to pass little by little from the bad middos, like a peles, and not to grab right away the other extreme. Until one habituates oneself and makes it like nature. (And it sa “ma’gal” (circuit) because to the [middos] to which one acclimates oneself one must go around a revolve...)

“Vechol derachecha yikonu and all your ways will established’ [the verse continues]. Of course those middos that are his derech since birth are established (yikonu), from the term of “kan ubasis” (branch and base). If one does not guard those [middos that are] from habit, even “derachav” will not be established. For middos are like a string of pearls—if you make a knot at the end, then all are guarded, and if not, all are lost. So too are the middos. Therefore [the pasuk] says that if one straightens the circuit of one’s feet (raglav), then one’s ways (derachav) will be set.” (Commentary on Mishlei 4:26)

There are two sorts of middos, those with which we are born and those that we acquire by habit. If we are trying to acquire a level of

ahavas Hashem that is not inborn, the primary tool for doing so is hergeil, habituation.

This is what the Sefas Emes comments on another verse in our

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parashah. “And you shall place these words of mine *al levavchem* – on your hearts.”³ Why “on”, would it not be more appropriate for Moshe to tell the Jews to place them “in our hearts”? The Sefas Emes quotes his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, as follows: The Torah writes, “And you will know today, and you will answer to your heart that Hashem is G-d in the heaven above and on the earth below; there is none else.”⁴ Once we know today, why do we need to answer our hearts? Because there are things known in the mind that

³ Devarim 11:18

⁴ Devarim 4:39

are not yet accepted by the heart. Therefore: “*vehashevosa* – you will answer”, from “*shuv*”, to return. It must be repeated again and again until the words penetrate. This is “*al levavchem*.” Place it on your heart, pile it higher and higher, eventually it will penetrate.

This is a lesson that can be learned from the *mitvah* of *bentching*. As it says in this week’s *parashah*, “And you shall eat, you shall be satisfied, and you shall bless Hashem your G-d for the good land which He has given you.” While the Torah obligation is to *bentch* only after a full meal, when one is satisfied, we *bentch* even after eating the volume of an olive of bread – the smallest amount that *halachah* considers “eating” – even without satisfaction. Nor do we need to actually feel thankful for the land in order to be obligated in the blessing. Rather, the point of the blessing is to set up a *hergeil*, a habit of expressing thankfulness. If it is not there yet, in time the true thankfulness will follow.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Sefasai Tiftach

The second paragraph of *Shema* has significant parallels to the first. Both speak of loving G-d, of expressing that love, and of serving Him with “all your heart and all your soul”. Both describe a progression of that love radiating from the core of our being to the rest of our lives to all that we own can control, and close with *mitzvos* that teach this progression: teaching your children to say *Shema* morning and night, to wear *tefillin* and to hang a mezuzah. However, there are four significant differences.

First, in the first paragraph this is stated as an imperative, “וְאָהַבְתָּ”, and the service involves heart, soul, “and all that you have.” In the second paragraph, it is a conditional “And it will be, if you listen to my *mitzvos* which I command you today, to love Hashem your G-d...” then “I will give your land’s rain...” The relationship to one’s possessions shift from being described as a tool for serving Hashem to a reward dependent upon such service.

Second, the conclusions that describe the *mitzvos* that relate *ahavas Hashem* differ in sequence. “*Ve’ahavta*” places “*veshinantam levaneikha*”, teaching your children, ahead of “*ukeshartam le’os*”, the *mitzvah* of wearing *tefillin*. “*Vehayah im shamo’a*” places *tefillin* first.

Third, it also does not quite describe the same *mitzvah* of teaching one’s children. “*Veshinantam levaneikha vedibarta bam* – and you shall ingrain them into your children and you shall speak of

them.” The *mitzvah* in *Ve’ahavta* is to teach one’s children, with a focus on the effect on the teacher. Teach them so that you shall speak of them. In the second paragraph, “*Velimadtem osam es beneichem ledabeir bam* – and you shall teach them to your children to speak of

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them.” Teaching one’s children so that they say them. The focus is on the children carrying the words into the next generation.

Last, the quantity of people that each speaks of differs. The verbs and nouns of “*Ve’ahavta*” are written in the singular – “*ve’ahavta... levavcha... nafshecha... me’odecha... Anochi metzavcha...*” “*Vehayah*” is addressed to a group of people – “*im shamo’ah tishmeu... metzaveh eschem... levavchem... nafshechem... metar artzechem...*”

We can suggest that this last distinction underlies the others. The first paragraph of *Shema* is a message for the individual and the second, to the nation. From the personal perspective, the essence of teaching is that it forces mastery and focus on the subject. This impact is more a part of the self than wearing *tefillin* on the body. Therefore it appears before *tefillin* in the sequence of describing the radiation of the love of one’s heart outward. The teaching described in “*Vehayah im shamo’a*” is from a national perspective, the need to carry the *mesorah* on to another generation “*ledabeir*” that they too embrace these words. This description of transmission, with the focus on others, comes after the *tefillin* worn on one’s own body.

To the individual, “*sechar mitzvos behai alma leika* – reward

for *mitzvos* is absent from this world”. There is little correlation between a person’s righteousness and his wealth. The individual therefore relates to his possessions solely as opportunities to serve G-d, and their absence solely as a challenge to which Hashem is

asking him to respond to. It is interesting to note that the verse that describes the obligation to *bentch* after meals (also found in this week’s *parashah*) is written in the singular: “*ve’achalta, vesavata, uveirachta...* – and you will eat, and you will be satisfied, and you will bless Hashem your G-d for the good land which He gave you.” The conjugation is in the singular and the blessing comes after enjoying what Hashem gave us. There too, the relationship is one of using what one has, not in earning it.

While it is proper to focus on the religious value of one’s own money, it is incorrect to be similarly “*frum*” when it comes to someone else’s. When looking at the community’s money, this commitment of “*bechol me’odecha*” is not as simple. The attention is less on how to respond to having the wealth, and more on what can we do to ensure that the community has what it needs. Not a response after the fact, but a request before it. On the national level, the warnings of the *tochachah*, the rise and fall of our fortunes as prophesied in *Ha’azinu*, apply. For the nation, property is an indicator; national wealth that is abused is guaranteed to be eventually withdrawn.

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