

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bemachashavah Techilah

In a *remez* associated with the count completed in this week's *parashah*, the word "ישראל" is taken as the acrostic "ששים ריבוא" – אותיות לתורה – there are 60 myriads letters in the Torah", one for each man counted in the desert. Each Jew brought to the Torah his own perspective.

Abayei said in the name of Shmuel: For three years there was a machlokes between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel, one saying "the halachah is like us", the other saying "the halachah is like us". Until a bas kol proclaimed "These and those are the words of the Living G-d, but the halachah is like Beis Hillel." (Eiruvim 13b)

The debates of the schools of Hillel and Shammai are not of the type that one is correct and the other false. Rather, both are Hashem's truth. However, in practice we can only follow one, and we rule according to Beis Hillel.

As the Gemara continues: *R' Abahu said in the name of R' Yochanan: R' Meir had a student named Sumchus. He was able to say about any tamei item 48 reasons why it should be tahor. And about any tahor item, he could bring 48 reasons why it should be tamei. (Ibid.)*

Similarly, the R' Elazar ben Azariah comments on the verse, "The words of *chachamim* are like goads, and like nails well planted are those of the masters of gatherings, they are

given from one Shepherd." (Koheles 12:11)

... "Well planted" – just as a plant is fruitful and multiplies, so too words of Torah are fruitful and multiply. 'Masters of gatherings' – these are talmidei chachamim who sit in many gatherings and busy themselves with

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the Torah, some pronouncing tamei, others pronouncing tahor, some prohibiting, others permitting, some declaring unfit, others declaring fit. A man might say, "How then can I study Torah?" Therefore the pasuk continues "all of them are given by one Shepherd." One G-d gave them..." (Chagiga 3b)

How are we to understand this? How can two conflicting ideas be simultaneously true?

The Ritva writes that the Torah contains a range of halachic responses to any given situation. Authority was given to our *rabbanim* to define which of these possibilities is law. The process of *pesak* is not to discover law, but to select which of that range is to become law.¹

¹ Eiruvim ad loc

The Maharal's approach is similar. However, according to the Maharal, it is not that both positions are equally *emes*. In fact, the Maharal believes that this world can not fully capture the full *emes*. Rather, the *poseik* must capture the pure ideal by approximating it. A *pesak* is by necessity a model that approximates the truth, and conflicting rulings can be equally valid models of the same ineffable ideal.²

Rav Tzadok HaKohen offers this explanation of the existence of conflicting notions within Torah:

Whenever a new thing about the Torah is found by a wise person, its opposite simultaneously arises... When it comes to the realm of po'el (action), it cannot be that two [contradictory] things are true simultaneously. In the realm of machashavah (thought), on the other hand, it is impossible for a person to think about one thing without considering the opposite. (Resisei Laylah 17)

Rav Tzadok makes two points. First, the plurality of Torah teachings emerges from finding new ideas. Yes, "all of them are given by the same Shepherd", but were they given explicitly or implicitly? Rav Tzadok writes that Hashem did not spell out every idea of Torah to Moshe

² Be'er HaGolah, introduction

Rabbeinu. Rather, He expressed the ideas from which we are to derive and deduce the rest.

The second point in Rav Tzadok's words is that in the realm of thought, contradiction is not only possible, but also necessary. While this seems surprising at first glance, it is central to our experience. We have all experienced moments of ambivalence. The person who learns of the death of a rich relative who left behind a large inheritance is obligated to bless G-d both as "*Dayan emes*", that the death was just, and as "*Tov uMeitiv*", the provider of the good of the inheritance.

We are used to a tradition of logic that began with Aristotle, one in which there is either truth or falsehood – nothing in between and certainly never both. However, there are other logical systems. In quantum mechanics, the physicist is called upon to consider a "superposition" of conflicting possibilities coexisting. In computer science, many explore "fuzzy logic", a logic system that explores the gray areas of questions such as "John is tall." How does one define a word like "tall" without having room for people at the edge of the definition?

When we looked at *Parashas Behar*³ we looked at the need to have

³ See <<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/5764/behar.pdf>>

After teaching the laws of the *sotah*, the wayward wife, the Torah moves on to the laws of the *nazir*, one who vows to abstain from a number of otherwise permitted activities such as drinking wine. Rashi quotes the famous

both reductionist and holistic analyses of Torah. We need to divide Torah down into its components an understand each, as well as find the understanding of Torah that inheres in the relationship between components. We suggested that this is why the first Mishnah explains the time for *Shema* in terms of the laws of

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kehunah and *taharos* rather than simply spell out the law directly. The meaning of our *din* inheres in its connection to related *dinim*.

This too opens the door for alternatives to Aristotelian logic. Nothing is individual. The smallest item is not a single yes/no question but something that takes its meaning from its relation to many others. It therefore can only be understood when simultaneously perceived in different ways from multiple perspectives.

A third point in Rav Tzadok's comments is that the human condition is based upon dialectics. We speak both of the greatness of man and his ability to comprehend, and his punitiveness and how little he can truly grasp. We can believe that man is basically good, and simultaneously that man is basically evil. If the Torah is to enable us to live within these conditions and

to perfect ourselves, it must be equipped to speak to both sides of these paradoxes simultaneously.

The Torah allows us to develop different conclusions based upon how we evolve as individuals and as a people as a whole. The Maharshal finds the source of this ability in the presence of the 600,000 people present at the giving of the Torah, in the Torah being given through multiple channels via multiple souls, each with its own perspective on the truth.⁴

Yes, the Torah embodies an absolute truth. Not every perspective is valid. Or, if we take the Maharal's approach, not every model is a full three-dimensional, this-world shadow of the supernal truth. The Torah was given to include 600,000 letters, to accommodate analysis from each person's perspective. In a *machlokes*, both conclusions are Torah because both are built upon the original letters; both are perspectives of the same truth. Within Rav Tzadok's world of *machashavah*, both truths are a fulfillment of the mitzvah of Torah study. However, in the world of *po'el*, one better represents the more pragmatically appropriate approach to Hashem given where we stand in relation to the ideal, from the perspective with which we view the mountain.

⁴ Yam shel Shelomo, Bava Kama, introduction.

RABBI GIL STUDENT

Bakeish Shalom

question of R' Yehudah HaNasi, recorded in Sotah 2a, of why the Torah placed the laws of *nazir* directly after *sotah*. What is the connection between these two disparate themes? R' Yehudah HaNasi's answer is that whoever sees a *sotah* in all her shame will

perform a vow to become a *nazir* and to refrain from drinking wine. Rashi explains that alcohol is frequently the cause of lewdness and marital infidelity. After seeing the *sotah*, a person might desire to

refrain from anything that might cause this impropriety.¹

The commentators are bothered with this logic. Someone who sees the results of infidelity does not need to further reinforce his position. Quite the opposite! His repulsion from the results of such acts has been greatly strengthened by what he has witnessed. If so, and this certainly seems to be human nature, why would someone who sees a *sotah* vow to become a *nazir* and refrain from drinking wine?

I believe that one possible explanation is as follows. The Torah commands us to “Judge your neighbor fairly” (Vayikra 19:15) which, among other things, obligates us to assume the best about our fellow Jews.² In explaining the rationale behind this *mitzvah*, the Semak writes as follows: “From one’s judging others favorably one will think that no one but oneself sins and will return to his Creator [i.e. repent].”³ When we recognize that others are sinning, we face less of a psychological burden to sin than otherwise. It is normal to be imperfect, we will think, and only those above-normal are careful about this matter. If, however, we believe that no one sins then performing such an act is not only

¹ See Rashi, Bamidbar 6:2 and on Sotah 2a sv. *yazir*.

² See Shevuos 30a; Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvos, aseh 177. Elsewhere I discuss the absence of this obligation from Rambam’s Mishneh Torah. On this, see R’ Yerucham Fishel Perlow, Sefer HaMitzvos LeRasag, aseh 97.

³ Semak, 225

an imperfection, it is abnormal. By being unable to control ourselves in that area, a matter in which everyone else – everyone “normal” – is able to refrain, we are proving that we are sub-normal. This is a big step to take, one that our natural psychology helps stop us from taking. Absent that boundary, though, falling prey to our desires is much more of a danger. This is why, the Semak suggests, we are obligated to believe whenever possible that others do not sin. It is not for their benefit but for own. It helps us maintain our personal boundaries against sin.

To phrase this differently, seeing someone sin reduces our immunity to that sin. Granted, our desire for that particular sin would have existed whether we had seen its violation or not. However, our automatic rejection of that desire is weakened by knowing – and seeing is certainly more powerful than hearing⁴ – that others are not particularly careful in that area.

The Tosefta in Shevuos (3:4) says that “One who sees sinners was punished to see [them] and one who sees mitzvah performers was rewarded to see [them].” The implication of this passage, as the Chasdei David in the Vilna Shas explains, is that seeing a sin is a punishment for an earlier sin. Just like the Mishnah in Avos (4:2) tells us that the reward for a mitzvah is another mitzvah and the punishment for a sin is another sin, here the Tosefta is saying that the

⁴ Cf. Rosh Hashanah 25b

punishment for a sin is watching another sin. The clear implication is that watching a sin is bad (and, conversely, watching a mitzvah being performed is good). The Maharam Schick finds proof for this in Yoma (70a) and uses what he calls a “*sevara de’oraisa*” to conclude that one is prohibited from watching others sin.⁵ One reason for this, although there are certainly other reasons as well, is that seeing the performance of a sin lowers our own psychological barrier to transgressing that sin ourselves.

Based on the above, we can now understand why someone who witnesses the shame of a *sotah* might want to take extra precautions and become a *nazir*. Recognizing that, now that he knows that such sins are not unthinkable but are actually performed by people he might see and interact with on a daily basis, his tolerance for such sins has been subtly strengthened and his psychological barrier against it has been weakened, he feels a need to fortify his own boundaries by creating a personal fence and refraining from partaking of the wine that can lead to such sins.

⁵ Responsa Maharam Schick, Orach Chaim 71. See also Chafetz Chaim, Introduction, lav 11 and aseh 6 (and in the notes).

REB JONATHAN BAKER

Sefasai Tiftach

G-d, we come to the first major phase of morning prayer: *Pesukei Dezimrah*, the Verses of Song.

Having concluded our study of the Morning *berachos*, a sequence of blessings and

personal acknowledgements that raise us from the borders of consciousness to a point where we can approach a relationship with

Why do we say Psukei Dezimrah? *Parashas Va'eschanan*, opens:

And I entreated the Lord at that time, saying: "O Lord G-d, You have only begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand; for what G-d is there in heaven or on earth that can deeds and mighty acts like Yours? Let me cross over, I pray to You, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly hill-country, and Lebanon." (Devarim 3:23-25)

R' Simlai in Berachos 32b reads this as a paradigm for prayer. "First a person should order the praises of G-d (**entreat...You have...**), and after that he shall pray for what he needs (**Let me...I pray to You**)."

What do we say as *Pesukei Dezimrah*? The Rif's text in Berachos there adds "we say a *beracha* beforehand, and what is it? *Baruch She'amar* and *Yishtabach*." R' Binyamin Yechezkel Romm notes (Sidur Otzar HaTefillos) that *Baruch She'amar* is first referenced in the Halachos Gedolos, which quotes a Gaon Moshe referring to "*Baruch She'amar* etc." – indicating that the prayer was known to the Geonim and, by implication, the Amoraim, thereby supporting the Rif. Furthermore, the Rif and R' Amram Gaon hold that *Yishtabach* does not begin with "*Baruch atah*" because it is the close of a "long-*beracha*" which starts with *Baruch She'amar*. As we know, in a sequence of *berachos*, only the first *beracha* need mention G-d's Name and kingship, and open "*Baruch*"; the later ones only need a concluding "*Baruch*." Thus, they hold (although others disagree) that one may not talk between *Baruch She'amar* and *Yishtabach*, as they are both parts of a contiguous sequence of *berachos*.

Furthermore, R' Yossi in Shabbos 118a prays that his portion be with those who "complete *Hallel*

from *Tehillah LeDavid* to the end of the book" – that is, *Ashrei* through *Kol HaNeshamah Tehallel Kah*.

Now we have a basic view of the content of *Pesukei Dezimrah* in its Talmudic form: *Baruch She'amar*, Tehillim 145-150, *Yishtabach*. But our *Pesukei Dezimrah* has a lot more material. Where does it fit in?

The first lengthy addition, *Hodu*, comes from Divrei Hayamim I:16:8-36. King David gives it to the priests to sing in the Mishkan, as a prelude to the daily offering, until the Temple is built. This temporary ordinance became permanent, and we see in Nehemiah 11:17, the *kohanim* relating that they still said it throughout the First Temple and wished to re-establish it in the Second Temple (*yehodeh* may refer to *Hodu*). Thus, we say it right after the *Korbanos* (in *Nusach Sefard*, even before *Baruch She'amar*), and as the first prelude to the daily *Avodas HaTefillah*.

One Israeli scholar has noted a possible paper trail from these verses through Rabbinic literature to indicate that it was said in the *tefillos* in Eretz Yisrael, and later in early Ashkenazic prayerbooks, making it possibly the oldest human-composed prayer in continuous use. Others, however, are of the view that it was a medieval addition.

Be that as it may, it is a historic reference right after *Baruch She'amar*. Then follows *Yehi Kevod*, a long meditation on G-d's might, as an introduction to *Ashrei* and the "end of *Hallel*" psalms. Then come more miscellaneous verses on Hashem's might, and another historical interlude from Kesuvim, culminating in *Az Yashir*. The sequence closes with *Yishtabach*.

This is a palindromic, or (as some Biblical scholars call it) a *chiastic* structure:

Beracha: Baruch She'amar

History: *Hodu*

Miscellany: *Yehi Kevod*

Hallel: Ashrei → end

Miscellany: *Baruch H'*

History: Avram → *Az Yashir*

Beracha: Yishtabach.

This structure often appears in Tanach to emphasize the unity and importance of a passage, e.g. *Ayin Tachas Ayin* in the end of *Parashas Emor*, or in the Noach story, or repeatedly in the book of Ruth.

This pattern gives a different emphasis to a sequence similar to that in the *Berachos*. Again (particularly in *Ashrei* and its associated miscellanies) we have a series which arouses different emotions in our developing relationship with G-d. However, this is bracketed by history and by joyful *berachos*. Not only are we to construct our relationship with G-d, we are to rejoice in that relationship and thank Him for His great deeds.

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