

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bemachashavah Techilah-Bakeish Shalom

In this week's *parashah* Moshe and Aharon are asked to count the Jewish people. They are told to organize the count "by their families, by their fathers' households." (Num 1:2) They are told only to count males (ibid) "20 years old and above, every one that goes into public service in Israel." (Ibid 3)

From this *pasuk* the Gemara learns that a person's *sheivet* is determined by patrilineal descent. Membership in the Jewish people, however, is decided by the Jewishness of the mother. Why are these things judged by different criteria?

More fundamentally – how does this distinction reflect the difference in intellectual legacy? In what way does what we learn from our fathers have more to do with the difference between *shevatim*, while what we learn from our mothers is more related to the concept of Jewishness?

There are two laws that apply to firstborn sons. The first is called *bechor lekehunah*, the Eldest for Priesthood. Originally the firstborn of each family were to serve as *kohanim*. After the story of the Golden Calf this honor was transferred to *sheivet* Levi, and to Aharon's children in particular. Because the firstborn son still has the vestiges of holiness, one must redeem him from a *kohein* (*pidyon haben*), normally preformed when the child is thirty days old.

The other law is called *bechor lenachalah*, the Eldest for Inheritance. The firstborn son receives a double portion of the inheritance. Therefore, when three brothers divide

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up the inheritance four ways, the *bechor* receives two portions, or one half of the inheritance, and his brothers each receive only one quarter.

We find an interesting parallel between the laws of *bechorah* and our question. The *bechor lekehunah* is the mother's first born¹. The Torah tells us "the one who opens the womb is Mine." (Shemos 34:19) However the *bechor lenachalah* is the father's firstborn². This is based on the *pasuk* which tells us that when a man has two wives and prefers one of them, "when it comes time for him to bequeath all he has to his sons, he can not choose the son of the beloved wife

¹ Bechoros 46a

² Ibid.

over the son of a hated wife who is the firstborn." (Devarim 21:16)

We see here a pattern. The mother, who traditionally bears most of the responsibility of child rearing, determines who is the spiritual leader among the sons. The father's first son follows in his footsteps taking over the financial obligations of the estate.

Toward the end of the journeys in the desert, Hashem asks Moshe and Elazar to recount the Jewish people. Again he is told to perform this count "from 20 years old and upward according to the house of their fathers." (Bamidbar 26:2)

Immediately after the count of all of the tribes but Levi, Hashem commands that when it comes time to divide the Land of Israel, "only by lottery shall the inheritance [land] be distributed, according to the names of the tribes of their fathers." (Ibid v. 55)

The land of Israel is called an inheritance. Thus, like all inheritances, it would be passed from father to son. The division of land is by *sheivet*. In fact it is impossible to permanently sell any piece of the land of Israel, outside of Yerushalayim or other walled cities. Every 50 years, at *yoveil*, the land returns to the original owners, and therefore to the family to which it was allotted.

This sale of land is more akin to a lease than a conventional sale. Every tribe holds onto their own portion of

land. We have to picture the effects of this. Each family of Yehoshua's generation received a portion of land. This land stayed within the family until the end of the First Temple, divided and re-divided as the family grew. This would mean that no only do you live within your *sheivet*, but your immediate neighbors are your extended family. Since the concepts of *sheivet* and family are rooted in an inheritance, the tribe of the child is that of the father.

One thing particular to inheritance is that it only comes automatically. You cannot choose to be someone's child, and therefore get a particular inheritance. Being part of the Jewish people, however, is more along the lines of the *bechor lekehunah*. It follows matrilineal descent. We know that it cannot be an inheritance because it can be accepted voluntarily – a non-Jew can decide to convert and become a full-fledged Jew.

The exception is the tribe of Levi, of whom we are told "but inheritance among its brothers it shall not have; Hashem is its inheritance, as He has spoken for it." (Devarim 18:2) The father has no financial obligations to an estate. Since his sustenance is his role as *kohein* or *levi*, these are his legacy and inheritance. Like all the laws of inheritance, they are passed from father to son.

This result is somewhat hard to understand: the original *kohanim*, the mothers' eldest, was replaced by *Benei Aharon*, children patrilineally descended from Aharon. But despite this difficulty, it too is an inheritance – one cannot choose to be a *kohein*.

Shlomo writes, "*shema beni mussar avichah, ve'al titosh Toras imecha*" – "Listen, my son, to the legacy of your father, and do not abandon your mother's Torah." (Mishlei 1:8) The first interesting thing to note is the use of the word "mussar," legacy, a term that is related to inheritance. The father's

teachings are called the child's legacy. Rashi does not take father and mother literally in this *pasuk*. Father, he says, is your Father in heaven. Mother is your nation – replacing "imecha" with "umascha". What defines our Jewishness is *Toras Imecha*, the Torah we do not even

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think about, the subconscious value-system we absorb as children at our mother's knee. We all share and advance a common set of values. Our role within that mission, both as part of our *shevatim* (when known) and as individuals requires formal education.

(Readers of last week's *Machashavah Techilah* column³ may be tempted to identify "mussar avicha" with the reductionist approach of understanding Torah by studying its components and "toras imecha" with holistic analysis, studying Torah through looking primarily at how it all interrelates. However, even holistic analysis is formal Talmud Torah, involving the study of ideas through books. *Toras imecha* is the knowledge of Torah through experiencing it. More of a preconscious, innate, knowledge.)

R' Papa said to Abayei, "How is it that earlier generations had miracles happen for them, but we do not have miracles? It cannot be because of their [superior] learning, because in the years of Rav Yehudah all of their studies were limited to *Nezikin* [damages], yet we study all six orders; and when Rav Yehudah reached in [tractate] *Uktzin* [the discussion of], 'If a woman presses

vegetables in a pot' (others say [the part] 'olives pressed with their leaves are clean'), he used to say, 'I see all the difficulties of Rav and Shmuel here.' yet we have thirteen versions of *Uktzin*.

"But, when Rav Yehudah took off his first shoe [at the very start of a fast], rain used to come, while we torment ourselves and cry loudly, and no notice is taken of us!"

He [Abayei] replied, "The earlier generations gave over their souls (mosrin nafshayhu) sanctifying G-d; we do not give over our souls sanctifying G-d." (*Berachos* 20a)

Rabbis of later eras are either unauthorized or unwilling to reject a halachic consensus reached in earlier eras. Here we learn that it is not because the later eras possess less book-knowledge. *Amora'im* of Rav Papa and Abayei's generation engaged in superior *Talmud Torah*. The lack was not in *mussar avicha* but in *toras imecha*.

R' Moshe Koppel, author of the book *Meta-Halakhah*, likens this to the relationship between an author and the laws of language. A native speaker of a language writes with proper grammar, not because he thinks about the laws of grammar and is masterful at the analysis of these laws but because he has an innate sense of what "sounds right". It is only someone who learns the language (or is first exposed to its proper use) later in life who learns its grammar as a set of rules. The rules become necessary as one has less of the preconscious knowledge.

Similarly, authority in *psak* lies more in one's ability to have a feel for what is in line with the Torah. It is only as we lose the Sinai culture that we need to rely increasingly on formal study to compensate for that lack. The accomplished *posek*, like the accomplished author, may confirm that inclination or deal with more complicated or rare cases by referring to a

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

guide. But the cultural knowledge is what underlies their skill, and therefore what underlies their authority to *pasken*.

The Alter of Novardok explains the purpose of *mussar* using a similar concept. His essay “*BeSekufos Ha-Adam*”⁴ traces the development of man from Adam before the sin until his day. The period from which we had just emerged he called the *Tekufas HaYeshivah*, which started at the end of prophecy. During this period, the *yeshivah* and the culture of the nation were unified. The *yeshivah* was not an ivory tower disconnected from the lives of the masses. Rather “each nursed one from the other, and both had a single thought.”⁵

⁴ The first *ma’amar* of sec. 1

⁵ Ch. 5

However, with the *Haskalah*, this ended. The fall of the ghetto walls broke the culture, and the *Haskalah* gave the *am*, the masses, a culture that was out of tune with the Torah ideal and the *yeshivah*. “A gap opened between the *yeshivah* and the world, and the abyss emerged between them.”

Closing this gap requires manually studying those values, working on oneself to inculcate those values that in the ideal we would have absorbed from the Torah community. This, the Alter writes, is the defining purpose of *mussar*, to provide as *mussar avos* that which ought to have been *toras imecha*. That is why the movement did not emerge until R’ Yisrael Salanter’s point in history.⁶

⁶ Revisiting R’ Moshe Koppel’s theme about the evolution of halachah, perhaps this is also why *lomdus* enjoyed such a golden age during the

Mussar, by giving us the ability to recapture more of the Sinai culture, can give us the *mesiras nefesh* necessary to live *halachic* lives, the “native speaker’s” relationship to *psak* and Torah, the skills of priesthood in our role of “a kingdom of priests” (Shemos 19:6) and reconnect us to the core values entrusted to us through a chain of mothers since Sinai, the very values that define us as Jews. Without *mussar* teaching us values, there is so much less we can do with our knowledge of our role in promoting those values gained from formal Torah study.

period. The loss of much of the innate sense of what is halachic caused a greater dependence on the rules that underlie halachah.

RABBI GIL STUDENT

Sefasai Tiftach

The two central texts of davening – *Shema* and *Shemoneh Esreh* – are repeated throughout the different services of the day. *Shema* is recited in *Shacharis*, *Ma’ariv* and at the bedside while *Shemoneh Esreh* is the center of every prayer service including *mussaf*. Another familiar text that is repeated is *Ashrei*. This is chapter 145 of Tehillim with two introductory verses and one concluding verse from elsewhere. In fact, the Gemara refers to this text as “*Tehillah Le-David*”, reflecting the first words of chapter 145 and the third sentence of what we call *Ashrei*.

This text is recited three times a day based on the following passage from the Gemara (Berachos 4b):

“Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Avina: Whoever recites *Tehillah Le-David* three times each day is guaranteed a place in the world-to-come. Why? If you were to say because it in the order of the *Aleph Beis*... Because it contains the verse ‘You open Your hand [and satisfy the desire of every living thing]’... Rather because it has both.”

What follows from the Gemara is that we recite *Ashrei* three times each day, something that is reflected in our *siddurim*, because it is in the order of the Hebrew alphabet and contains the verse “*Posei’ach es yadecha*”. R’ Meir Simcha Ha-Kohen of Dvinsk¹ explains the sig-

¹ Meshech Chochmah, Vayikra 26:4

nificance of these two items along the following lines.

There are two main themes in Tehillim 145. The first is that we praise G-d incessantly. For what? That is the second theme; G-d sustains all of his creatures. He feeds us, protects us and fulfills our needs. This second theme is exemplified with the verse “You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing,” which is why the Gemara gives it as an example for why we recite *Ashrei* three times a day and is why some *siddurim* tell the reader to have extra intent while reciting this verse.

The part of davening called “*Hodu*” contains three sections. The first begins with “*Hodu*” and ends with “*Uvinvi’ai Al Tareyu*”. This is from Divrei HaYamim 1 16:8-22 and is the passage that was read

with the daily morning sacrifice, the *korban tamid shel shachar*. The second section is from “*Shiru La-Hashem*” through “*VeHallel La-Hashem*”, Divrei HaYamim 1 16: 23-37, and is the passage that was read with the daily afternoon sacrifice, the *korban tamid shel bein ha'arbayim*. The last section is from “*Romimu*” until “*Gamal Alai*” and is a collection of various verses describing and requesting G-d’s mercy². Since these passages are related to the sacrificial order *Nusach Sephard* connects them to korbanos and recites them before *Baruch She’amar*. However, since they discuss praising G-d, *Nusach Ashkenaz* recites them after *Baruch She’amar*.

Like most of *Pesukei Dezimra*, the first section has two main themes. The first is the mandate to praise Hashem at every opportunity, loudly, clearly, and constantly. The second theme is the content of that praise. G-d is the master of history who has guided and saved the Jewish people. He has intervened in our individual lives and also in our nation’s collective life, choosing us for distinction and, during our exile, saving us from extinction.

The first section begins with the verse “*Hodu LaHashem*” which tells us to praise G-d and to speak to everyone, Jew and Gentile, about His wondrous deeds. “*Shiru Lo*” Our songs should be about praising Him and our discussions about how He runs the world, rather than about mere mundane matters. “*Hish-hallelu*” We should make G-d’s actions such a center of our lives that we become known as people who speak of G-d and the resource for those who search for Him. “*Dirshu*” We must search for

² This section is the first to be skipped if there is no time. See the Rama in Orach Chaim 52:1 and Aruch HaShulchan par. 7

Hashem in everything that happens, always looking for the Divine hand in our lives. “*Zichru*” Furthermore, we must always remember His hand in history. “*Zera Yisrael*” This is particularly relevant to us, the Jewish people, whom G-d chose and guided with care. “*Hu Hashem*” We are His people and, even though he is G-d to all mankind, we have

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a special relationship with Him. “*Zichru Le’olam... Asher Karas... Vaya’amideha*” Remember the source of our closeness to G-d, the covenant he made with our forefathers which included the eternal Torah. “*Leimor... Bihyoschem... Lo Hini’ach... Al Tig’u*” This covenant includes His protecting us. Even though we are a small people, and we wander throughout the nations, He has not and will not allow any one person to rule over all of us and, thereby, oppress the entire Jewish nation at once. Furthermore, the leaders who did oppress portions of our people were rebuked by G-d and punished.

R’ Meir Simcha further explains that the significance of *Tehillah Le-David* being an alphabetic acrostic is that the alphabet represents the natural order of things. When the verses each begin with a successive letter of the alphabet it indicates the message that the theme follows the normal progression of nature. In our case, the theme of G-d sustaining the world is meant to be through natural means. As a part of nature, G-d provides food and sustenance to His creations. While we may see our

needs satisfied through our own work, we are really witnessing G-d providing for us through nature.

It is this important message that we recite three times a day. While we work very hard for our livings, our success and failure depend on G-d. Hard work does not always lead to reward and little work sometimes leads to great bounty. That is the Divine hand at work providing for us. It is very easy to become caught up in nature and to believe that we provide for ourselves. For this reason Chazal tell us to recite *Ashrei* repeatedly each day so that we do not forget that it is G-d who provides for us.

The Pnei Yehoshua³ adds that when we constantly remember that G-d determines how much money we make we are able to scale back on the time we spend working and allocate more time to studying Torah. It is this additional and worry-free study of Torah, made possible by the message imbued through the daily repetition of *Ashrei*, that guarantees a person a place in the world-to-come. Saying *Ashrei* is not a magic formula. Rather, its message of Divine sustenance and the resulting intensification of religious study is what takes a person into the world-to-come.

³ Berachos 4b

Editor: Gil Student
Associate Editor: Micha Berger

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