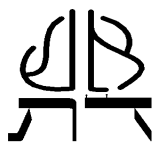


Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Our Torah portion opens with the kindling of the seven lights of the branches of the menorah, specifically ordaining that it be kindled by the Kohen-priests and that it be beaten of gold, in one piece, from "its stem until its flower" (Numbers 8:4). At first glance, it would seem that this Biblical segment is misplaced; its more natural setting would have been the portions of Terumah or Tetzaveh in the Book of Exodus, which deal with the Sanctuary, its sacred accoutrements and the task of the Kohen-priests in ministering within it. Why re-visit the menorah here, in the Book of Numbers?

The classical commentary of Rashi attempts to provide a response: "Why link this segment of the menorah to the segment of the tribal princes (which concludes the previous Torah portion)? Because when Aaron saw the offerings of the princes (at the dedication of the Sanctuary), he felt ill at ease that he was not included with them in the offerings, neither he nor his tribe. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, 'By your life, your contribution is greater than theirs; you kindle and prepare the lights'" (Rashi, Numbers 8:2).

Why would such a task give comfort to Aaron? Since when is cleaning and kindling a candelabrum a greater honor than participating in the opening ceremony of the Sanctuary?

We cannot expect to penetrate the significance of Rashi's words (which are taken from Midrash Tanhuma 8) unless we first attempt to understand the significance of the menorah. At first blush, the lights of the menorah symbolize Torah, "For the commandment is a candle, and Torah is light," teaches the Psalmist. But the ark (aron) is the repository of the Tablets of Stone, and it represents Torah in the Sanctuary.

Moreover, the menorah has a stem, or trunk, and six branches which emanate from it, each with its respective flowers—together making seven lights. And

the "goblets" on the branches are "almond-shaped," (Hebrew Meshukadim, Exodus 25:33) reminiscent of the almond tree, the first tree to blossom and so the herald of spring. The imagery is certainly that of a tree. And if the Sanctuary symbolizes a world in which the Almighty dwells—"And they shall make for me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell among them"—a world of perfection manifesting the Divine Presence and its consummate goodness and compassion, -- then the Sanctuary symbolizes a return to Eden, to universal peace and harmony. If so, the menorah may well represent the Tree of Life— after all, Torah is aptly called "a tree of life to all who grasp it"—or even the tree of knowledge, especially since the ancient Greek tradition speaks of "the seven branches of wisdom," paralleling the seven branches of the menorah (including the central stem). Perhaps one may even suggest that the menorah is the amalgam of both trees together: Torah and wisdom united in one beaten substance of gold, a tree of knowledge purified by the tree of life when the light of Torah illumines every branch of worldly wisdom.

I believe that this fundamental unity encompassing Torah and all genuine branches of wisdom was recognized clearly by the Sages of the Talmud. Indeed, from their viewpoint, all true knowledge would certainly lead to the greatest truth of all, the existence of the Creator of the Universe. Hence the Talmud declares: "Rav Shimon ben Pazi said in the name of Rav Yehoshua ben Levin in the name of bar Kappara: 'Anyone who has the ability to understand astronomy -- astrology (the major science of Babylon) and does not do so, of him does the Scripture say, 'Upon the words of the Lord they do not gaze and upon the deeds of His hands they do not look'" The Sages are saying that one cannot begin to properly appreciate the world without a grounding in the sciences.

Indeed, I shall never forget my first conscious "religious experience." It was in a bio lab, and we were given slides of snowflakes. As I saw slide after slide, with each snowflake perfectly hexagonal and dazzling with magnificently colored designs—but each snowflake different from the other, unique to itself—there were tears coursing down my cheeks as I mouthed the prayer of appreciation, "How wondrous are Your creations, OG-d."

The 12th Century Philosopher-legalist Maimonides also understood the crucial inter-relationship between what is generally regarded as

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Mr. and Mrs. Itzy Weisberg and family**

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secular wisdom and Torah. He begins his halakhic magnum opus Mishneh Torah with the Laws of Torah fundamentals, the first four chapters of which take up cosmogony, philosophy, science—especially the interface between physics and theology. He concludes the fourth chapter in saying that these studies are actually involved in the proper fulfillment of five commandments: knowingG-d, denying the possibility of other gods, unifyingG-d, lovingG-d, reveringG-d (Laws of Torah Fundamentals 4,13). He actually defines Pardes, the "orchard" reserved for those who are already thoroughly conversant in Torah and its laws, as philosophy and science, maasei bereishit and maasei merkavah, which the Sages of the Talmud call "great things" in comparison to the halakhic debates between Rava and Abaye, which are called "small things" (B.T. Sukkah, the end of Chapter 3).

Most amazing of all, Maimonides ordains that the scholar must divide his learning time in three segments: one third for the Written Torah, one third for the Oral Torah, and one third for Gemara. And he defines gemara as extracting new laws as well as Pardes—science and philosophy! Apparently an advanced Yeshiva led by Maimonides would include in its curriculum the study of science philosophy as a means of understanding the world, human nature andG-d!

Let us now return to the relationship between the task of the Kohen-priest in the Sanctuary. If indeed the menorah represents knowledge in its broadest sense, enlightenment in terms of the seven branches of wisdom, the tree of knowledge, then the duty of the Kohen-priest becomes clear. All of knowledge, indeed the entire world, is the matter; Torah must give form, direction, meaning to every aspect of the material world and the life which it breeds. The Kohen, who is blessed to "teach the Torah laws to Israel," must prepare, "clean", purify the lights of the menorah. This is the

highest task of Torah—and the greatest calling of the Kohanim! © 2004 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's parsha, God tells Moshe (Moses) that a person (ish) who is impure because of contact with a dead body (tameh lanefesh) or too far away from Jerusalem (derekh rekhoka) is given a second chance to eat the paschal lamb. (Numbers 9:10-11)

The phrase tameh lanefesh speaks about a spiritual deficiency—when one has contact with a dead body, emotional and religious turbulence sets in.

The phrase vederekh rehoka, speaks of a physical impediment—one who is simply too far away to partake of the paschal lamb on time.

Indeed, throughout Jewish history we have faced both spiritual and physical challenges. What is most interesting is that in the Torah the spiritual challenge is mentioned first. This is because it is often the case that the Jewish community is more threatened spiritually than physically.

Despite its rise, anti-semitism is not our key challenge. The threat today is a spiritual one. The spiraling intermarriage rate among American Jews proves this point. In America we are so free that non-Jews are marrying us in droves. The late Prof. Eliezer Berkovits was correct when he said that from a sociological perspective, a Jew is one whose grandchildren are Jewish. The painful reality is that large numbers of the grandchildren of today's American Jews will not be Jewish.

And while we are facing grave danger in Israel, thank God, we have a strong army which can take care of its citizens physically. Yet, in Israel, it is also the case that it is the Jewish soul, rather than the Jewish body, that is most at risk.

Most interesting is that even the phrase vederekh rehoka, which, on the surface, is translated as a physical stumbling block, can be understood as a spiritual crisis. On top of the last letter of rehoka (the heh), is a dot. Many commentators understand this mark to denote that, in order to understand this phrase, the heh should be ignored. As a consequence, the term rahok, which is masculine, cannot refer to derekh which is feminine. It rather refers to the word ish, found earlier in the sentence. (Jerusalem Talmud Psakhim 9:2) The phrase therefore may refer to Jews who are physically close to Jerusalem yet spiritually far, far away.

The message is clear. What is needed is a strong and passionate focusing on spiritual salvation. The Torah teaches that the Jewish community must continue to confront anti-Semitism everywhere. But while combating anti-Semitism is an important objective in and of itself, the effort must be part of a far larger goal—the stirring and reawakening of Jewish

consciousness throughout the world. © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The narrative part of the book of Bamidbar begins this week in B'Halotcha. Bamidbar is a very sad book because it records the fall of the generation of those who left Egypt, who stood at Sinai and were blessed with the leadership of Moshe, Aharon and Miriam. Instead of becoming the generation that entered the promised land of Israel they are known as the generation of the desert where they died and were buried. Where did they go wrong? This question is discussed by all of the biblical commentators and from their combined view there emerges a common thread.

And this reasoning is that the generation of the desert lacked not so much in faith as in patience, fortitude and the necessary ability to deal with frustration. Basically, they got themselves into a bad mood, a negative frame of mind and soul. When one feels out of sorts, the best steak dinner tastes like ashes in one's mouth. Manna from heaven, containing all of the possible tastes that humans can wish for becomes the source of complaint. The complaint was not so much about food - the manna - as it was about that generation's frustration at its role as being a special people, a holy people, a kingdom of priests - at being different. They always long to return to Egypt, even though they were enslaved there. For in Egypt they were not yet the chosen people, not yet responsible to God for the fulfillment of a mission of enlightening the world. Responsibility brings demands and challenges. It also engenders frustration and resentment. The generation of the desert was unable to handle that frustration and control its resentment. People who are unable to do so are not the candidates of the Lord to settle and populate the Land of Israel.

The Jewish world today is awash in frustration. The rising tide of anti-Semitism, not so ably disguised as anti-Israel, coupled with the intransigent and malevolent Moslem world that constantly threatens our destruction, leaves us with great unease and trepidation. We have seemingly tried every tactic, plan and agreement to solve our problems and yet they remain apparently resistant to all of our efforts and ideas. Frustration breeds bad words and foolish ideas and schemes. Impatience causes errors, sometimes serious even fatal ones. Moshe pleads with the Jewish people for time, patience, an expression of faith in the future and an abiding belief that somehow all will yet come right. But the people are in a bad mood and are thus unable to think clearly and act sensibly.

People who are easily depressed will not find the Land of Israel to their liking. That was true thirty-three centuries ago and it remains true today. The challenges there are strong and constant and only with

optimism, faith, fortitude and a sense of historical perspective can they be dealt with successfully. The lessons of the book of Bamidbar are writ large and clear for all too see. May we be wise enough to learn and profit from them. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

After Moshe's wife, Tziporah, expresses empathy for the wives of the "new" prophets (see Rashi on Bamidbar 12:1), Miriam (Moshe's sister) realizes that Moshe's prophecy had caused him to separate from her. She tells their brother, Aharon, and not realizing that Moshe's level of prophecy was so much greater than anyone else's (therefore necessitating their separation), they approach Moshe on Tziporah's behalf (12:1-2). Speaking about Moshe in a way that assumed he had done something wrong was considered "loshon harah," (a form of slander), so Miriam is punished with the skin condition of "tzara'as" (12:10). Aharon asks Moshe to pray on Miriam's behalf (see Rashi on 12:12), which he does. Seven days later (asG-d tells Moshe that she must endure her situation for the week), Miriam is healed and the nation resumes its travels (12:14-16).

One of the fundamentals of Judaism is that G-d is completely just, and does not give (or allow) reward or punishment unless it is (at least on some level) deserved. We can understand that Miriam had done something wrong, for which she was punished. However, the removal of this punishment should only have come about either because she repented (and no longer deserved the punishment) or because the amount of suffering already experienced was compensatory with the crime. How could Moshe's prayer remove her tzara'as? Why did Aharon ask Moshe to pray for Miriam? If she hadn't yet repented then prayer shouldn't help; and if she had (and we can assume that she did) then prayer shouldn't be necessary- and only helpful if it brings her closer to G-d and thereby worthy of having her situation change. Moshe's prayer, though, doesn't affect Miriam's relationship with G-d, so any result of that (apparently somewhat strained) relationship (i.e. her punishment) shouldn't have been affected either! In other words, if punishment is the result of sin, prayer should only help if it brings the sinner back to G-d. Why then did Aharon ask Moshe (a third party) to pray for Miriam, and how could it have worked?

The Rambam understands Aharon's plea to Moshe not as a request that he pray for her, but that he should forgive her (which would then cause her tzara'as to be healed); Moshe's praying for her indicated that he did forgive her. Most, however, understand Aharon's

request to be that Moshe pray on her behalf, which brings us back to our question of how Moshe's prayer could work if it had no bearing on fixing what caused Miriam's tzara'as in the first place.

When the Torah tells us about Miriam's punishment (12:10), it seems to repeat itself: "And the cloud left from upon the tent, and behold Miriam was [afflicted with] tzara'as that [turned her skin white as] snow, and Aharon turned towards Miriam and behold she had tzara'as." The Torah could have simply said that after the cloud lifted, Aharon turned and saw that Miriam had tzara'as. According to the Sifrei, (47) "the Torah is telling us that whenever he would see her, it (the tzara'as) would break out on her." The doubling of the description of Miriam's tzara'as (and the way it is phrased) indicates that Miriam was stricken with tzara'as, but then healed. However, whenever Aharon would see her, it returned (until he turned away).

Although Miriam was punished for having spoken against Moshe first, it seems that Aharon was punished for being involved as well. While she was stricken directly with the tzara'as, Aharon suffered by having to see his sister with it. Therefore, whenever he saw her it returned, but when he turned away (and wouldn't see her suffer) it disappeared.

What about Moshe though? Wouldn't he also suffer seeing his sister with tzara'as? He may not have realized at first what had happened to her, and this is what Aharon was trying to get across to him: "Moshe—don't you see our sister suffering? How can you just stand by and not try to help her?" Once Moshe realized what she was experiencing, he cried out to G-d (as the Ibn Ezra points out, the word used, "vayitzak," indicates that Moshe was in pain because of his sister's suffering). Aharon may have deserved to be punished, but Moshe didn't.

Moshe's prayer was affective because of how Miriam's affliction affected him, even if it (the prayer) had no effect on Miriam's relationship with G-d. G-d answered Moshe in order to limit Moshe's suffering; not because Miriam no longer deserved to suffer thanks to Moshe's prayers.

May our prayers bring us closer to G-d, allowing us to deserve having them answered. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

by Rabbanit Esther Livingstone, Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue

There are two particularly well known verses in this week's Sidra: "Vayehi Binsoa Ha-Aron...." and "Shuva Hashem..." "When the Ark went forth, Moses said: Arise O G-d, and let Your enemies be scattered and Your foes flee before You... When it came to rest he said: Return, O G-d, the myriads and thousands of Israel". (Bemidbar 10:35-36)

These words are so universally familiar because we say them at least four times a week upon removing the Torah from the Aron HaKodesh (10:35), and upon returning it (10:36).

Unusually, in the actual Torah scroll these two verses are preceded and followed by two inverted "nuns" resembling brackets. Because of this, the Talmud (Shabbat 115b) regards these verses as a separate book indicating that there must be a unique message contained therein.

In terms of the context in which Moses originally uttered these words, it is clear that they had a highly practical purpose. During the forty years sojourn in the wilderness, the Jews encamped and decamped guided by the Clouds of Glory. When these clouds, representing the Divine presence, descended upon the Mishkan, this signalled that it was time to make camp and bring the Holy Ark to rest. When the clouds ascended this was the signal to break camp, and begin moving the Ark forward. The two verses each served as an announcement of one of these events.

But what of the actual meaning of the words? According to some commentaries, these verses comprise something of a "tefilat haderech" prayer for the great journey of life itself. Rabbi S.R. Hirsch comments that, as Jews, we are seen by the world as the representatives of Divine Law. Accordingly, those whose values and aspirations are antithetical to the Torah have often sought to restrict and persecute us. In this vein, the Sifrei contends that the enemies of Israel are synonymous with the enemies of Hashem, and are so described in the above mentioned verses. Thus, before every journey into the dangerous and unknown wilderness of life, Moses pleaded then, as we continue to do, that Hashem should scatter our enemies, and those that hate Him should flee—in order that they do us no physical harm nor deflect us from our spiritual mission.

"Shuva Hashem", incanted by Moses when the Ark came to rest, comprises a second and entirely different request. This verse has two alternative translations. The first is "Return, O G-d, to the myriads and thousands of Israel." In this version, the plea is that we should merit "Shechinat Hashem", G-d continued presence in our lives.

The second translation is, "Bring back, O G-d, the myriads and thousands of Israel." Here the plea is that, after every journey of life, the Almighty should return each and every one of Israel's numbers in peace and safety to their proper place, with no one missing or harmed.

While both versions are acceptable, they differ on whether "Shuva" is to be understood as an intransitive verb (return) or a transitive verb (bring back) — with very different results. But whichever way one appreciates their meaning, these verses are not only beautiful requests in their own right but also timeless

invocations—every bit as worthy of being recited today as they were four millennia ago.

The next time the Torah is removed or returned we would be well to ponder the wider meaning and significance of what we are requesting. Thus, perhaps, we might be inspired toward bringing these words into our lives and their meaning into reality. © 2004 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“**A**nd the man Moshe was exceedingly humble more than any other person on the face of the earth.” (Bamidbar 12:3)

"Humbly walks the duck but its eyes are turned to heaven." (Bava Kama 92B)

How do we reconcile the trait of humility and the need for a healthy self esteem? The Chovos HaLevavos-Duties of the Heart claims that someone at the peak of humility, like Moshe, remains unmoved by either compliments or insults. How is it possible that a person should be unaffected by the attitudes of others? Two simultaneous perspectives are necessary.

1) Imagine you are readying yourself for a special event. You've just purchased a brand new tie for the occasion. You affix the tie with perfection and look on with a last look of admiration at having made such a tasteful choice of matching attire. Then a voice is heard, "The tie doesn't match at all! That style is coming back soon!" You look around. It's a moth on the ceiling. You think to yourself, "Should I change my tie? Nah! What does a moth know about current fashion?" Similarly, if the same moth had spoken admiringly, it would not have been cause to celebrate. What does a moth know?

2) A joke is told about a fellow about to tee off on a round of golf. He lifts the club behind his head for the driving swing and a voice thunders from the heavens, "Halt! Put a new ball on the tee!" He does. A moment later and in great awe he's about to strike the ball when a loud heavenly voice interrupts with further instructions. "Take a practice swing!" He backs off and swings his best practice swing and then approaches the ball. Again he is interrupted from on high and told to take another practice swing. He does. As he steps up one more time and is ready as ever to hit the ball a voice parts the sky again and soberly commands, "Put the old ball back!"

One of the Chassidic Masters explained that any number, no matter how large, is still infinitely shy of infinity.

A) A truly humble person, like Moshe, looks at himself in that most objective of all mirrors. He is humble before HASHEM. Why should he then be overly responsive to the opinions of mortal men? B) He knows his successes are not without assistance from HASHEM and he is therefore eternally grateful. C) He

recognizes that whatever he has in talent and wealth is only temporary. It is his to use but not to keep. D) He feels obliged to use his gifts the way they were ideally meant to be used. E) He feels it is a privilege to perform his Creator's biddings and not a burden at all. E) He realizes his obligation to act on behalf of others. He therefore places the needs of the needy at the center of his universe. F) He is painfully aware of his shortcomings and to what extent he has failed. In his mind he has not yet reached a fraction of what is due. G) He therefore recognizes his place and is jealous of no one else. H) He expects nothing and is appreciative of everything. I) He only wishes to be an instrument of Divine will, like a clean window that lets the light through adding no color of his own.

The secret of the humble one described by the Chovos HaLevavos is not that he forcefully resists public opinion. No! Rather, he is more so yielding to a Higher Source that overwhelms his sense of being. Every other singer in the chorus of his mind therefore is drowned out by the din of that singular voice that resonates beyond all. In that giant truth revealing mirror alone he continually checks his tie, takes practice swings and hopes to gain some day a selfless self-esteem. © 2004 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

The Torah discusses the laws of a person who could not bring the Pascal offering because he was either ritually impure or because he was at a distance from the Mishkan (or in later generations, from the Temple). He is to offer his Passover sacrifice a month later, on the 14th of Iyar.

"Speak to the Children of Israel saying: Any man of you or of your generations who will be impure or is on a distant way nevertheless, he shall bring the Passover sacrifice to Hashem." (Numbers 9:10)

"Or on a distant way"—Rashi: There is a dot on the letter 'heh' (in the word 'rechoka'—'distant'—which means that the letter is then regarded as non-existent) and this tells us that the Torah means that the way need not really be a distant one but merely outside the threshold of the forecourt during the time of the sacrificing of the Passover offering."

Rashi explains the meaning of the dot on top of the letter "heh" in the word "rechoka" which we find in the Torah scroll. Whenever a word has one or more dots on top, the Talmudic Sages interpret the significance of this strange phenomenon. The rule is that when the majority of the letters of a word have dots above them, then the meaning of just these letters is interpreted. When a minority of the letters of a word have the dots, then only the undotted letters are interpreted.

In our case, only one letter is dotted, so it is dropped and the word is read without the letter. The

word that remains is "rachok" which also means "distant" but is the masculine form of the word.

Rashi tells us the significance of this. It teaches us that the words "a distant way" refer to a subjective distance and not an objective one. So the person need not actually be distant from the Temple to be excused from bringing the Pascal offering—as long as he is merely outside the entrance of the Temple he is excused, since that "distance" was enough for him to be delayed in making the sacrifice. The journey itself was not distant; the man was.

The meaning of this interpretation is based on the fact that the Hebrew word "way" ("derech") is feminine while the word "ish" ("man") is masculine. Therefore, once the letter "heh" is dropped, the word "distant" becomes a masculine adjective and refers back to "man" and not to "way."

Considering the rules of dots on top of letters in the Torah, this is a reasonable interpretation.

But for a deeper understanding let us look at the Midrashic source of Rashi's comment.

In the Tractate Pesachim (93a) we find a dispute between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer on this issue. Rabbi Akiva says that the distance is as far as the town "Modi'in," which is about 15 miles from Jerusalem, while Rabbi Eliezer says (based on the dot interpretation) that the distance here is only beyond the threshold of the Temple entrance.

The problem is that Rashi has chosen Rabbi Eliezer's interpretation, which is neither the law nor the closest to the simple meaning (p'shat) of the verse. Why would Rashi do that?

An Answer: It would seem that Rabbi Akiva's simple interpretation of the word "rechoka" as objectively distant (until Modi'in) would be the one that Rashi should have chosen for his commentary, since Rashi prefers p'shat interpretations. But he does not choose Rabbi Akiva's interpretation because Rashi characteristically sees p'shat in a unique way. He sees p'shat through the eyes of the Sages. And since the Sages have a rule about interpreting words that have dots on top of them, then Rashi too bases his interpretation on this principle. So Rashi is left with the word "rachok" (without the letter "heh" at the end) which must refer to a masculine noun—that is to "man" and not to "way." This interpretation also finds some support in the Torah text itself. See verse 13 where it refers to "way" but does not mention the word "distant." This would support Rabbi Eliezer's view that the journey need not actually be "distant."

So Rashi has chosen the p'shat interpretation considering the Sages' principle about interpreting the dots on top of letters in the Torah.

My daughter, Elisheva, has suggested another answer to the question: Why did Rashi not choose Rabbi Akiva's interpretation (distance means "until Modi'in") since it seems closest to p'shat and since the halacha is like Rabbi Akiva?

Her answer is that the verse (9:10) says: "Any man of you or of your generations" (see the complete verse above). Now the distance of Modi'in is about 15 miles from Jerusalem, while the complete Camp of Israel in the wilderness was only 12 miles square (see Rashi in the book of Joshua). So the verse cannot possibly mean "until the distance of Modi'in" as Rabbi Akiva said because Moses was speaking to "YOU" (meaning this GENERATION in the wilderness) and to future generations. So this generation had no Jews living at that distance (15 miles) from the Mishkan! So even according to p'shat Rabbi Eliezer (who says beyond the entrance of the Mishkan) would seem to fit the verse better than Rabbi Akiva.

I think that's a brilliant answer, even if I do say so myself! © 2004 Dr. A. Bonchek and Aish Hatorah

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The preparations for the journey to Eretz Yisrael were almost complete. The positions of the camps were established and the Cloud of Glory had risen from above the Tabernacle, when the Torah suddenly interrupted the sequence to tell us about a short conversation between Moshe and his father-in-law. "And Moshe said to Chovav Ben Re'uel the Midyanite, Moshe's father-in-law: We are traveling to the place that G-d promised to give us. Come with us and we will be good to you, for G-d has spoken well of Yisrael. And he replied, I will not come, rather I will return to my land and to my birthplace. And he said, Do not leave us, since for this reason you know about all our camps, and you will serve as our eyes. And when you come with us, we will share the good that G-d does for us with you." [Bamidbar 10:29-32]. This short passage raises an obvious question: Did Chovav agree to Moshe's request? Why does the Torah hide Chovav's reply from us (even if he gave a positive reply, as the Ramban insists)?

Evidently the fact that the result of the meeting is not reported to us is meant to emphasize that the main point of the story is not the outcome but the request itself. Moshe's request to Chovav seems to have some problematic aspects. His first approach to Chovav can be viewed simply as a friendly gesture—"Come with us and we will be good to you"—and it can be understood as an expression of Moshe's way of thanking his father-in-law for the support and help in establishing the nation's justice system. Once Chovev refuses the offer, Moshe asks him once more to join the nation, and in this case the request can be seen as a plea, because the nation needs guidance by Chovav, who is familiar with the travel routes in the desert. "You know about all our camps, and you will serve as our eyes."

This request, which gives the impression of being dependent on a human being, seems to contradict all the other nearby passages. For example, in the previous chapter it is written, "according to whether the cloud rose up above the Tent, Bnei Yisrael would travel. In a place where the cloud came to rest, they would camp. Bnei Yisrael traveled following G-d's word, and they would camp according to G-d's word." [9:17-18]. It is true that in Eretz Yisrael one would expect life to proceed in a natural way, based on human effort. In the desert, on the other hand, the nation was under control of unnatural processes, through the direct intervention of the Almighty, "who guides you through this great and awesome desert, a place of snakes, serpents, and scorpions, and thirst, with no water, He who extracts water for you from a stone, who feeds you in the desert the Manna, which your ancestors did not recognize." [Devarim 8:15-16]. If the nation is led by a Pillar of G-d, why should they also need the guidance of human eyes?

This can also be seen from the passage that immediately follows the request to Chovav. "And they journeyed from the Mountain of G-d for three days, with the Ark of G-d's Covenant traveling before them, a route of three days, to find a place for them to camp. And the cloud of G-d was above them during the day, when they journeyed from the camp." [Bamidbar 10:33-34]. Whether Chovav went with them or not, they continued to have the Ark to lead them. Bnei Yisrael did not really need Chovav's "eyes" since the Ark went before them, searching for a place to camp. The same word, "latur," appears in a different verse, "Do not follow your hearts and your eyes... I am your G-d, who redeemed you from the land of Egypt" [Bamidbar 15:39,41].

How Was Pesach Celebrated in the Second Year?

by Rabbi Shlomo Sobol, Head of the Torah MiTzion Kollel, Detroit

The command about "Pesach Sheini"—the substitute sacrifice for those who could not bring the Pesach at its appropriate time—is preceded by two verses. "And G-d spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert, in the second year after they had left the land of Egypt, in the first month, saying, let Bnei Yisrael offer the Pesach at its proper time." [Bamidbar 9:1-2]. Before he tells the nation the special laws of Pesach Sheini, Moshe commands them to offer the Pesach sacrifice at the proper time, in the month of Nissan.

But these verses seem to be unnecessary. Why does Moshe repeat the command about the regular Pesach sacrifice? In Shemot, the command to bring this sacrifice every year was repeated several times. This even included at least one time before the Exodus, "Observe this day for all your generations" [Shemot 12:17]. Why, then, was it necessary to command the people again about the Pesach in the second year after the redemption?

It seems that a very significant and important lesson can be learned from these verses. In the first year of the redemption, there was great joy about being released from Egypt, and Bnei Yisrael accepted the command to establish an annual holiday as a matter of course. At the time of the redemption, the feeling of freedom was so strong and was such an experience that there could be no doubt that Pesach must be celebrated again every year.

However, right after the Exodus, a series of problems, difficulties, and complications arose. There were plagues, wars, sins, and a lack of food and water. Perhaps these difficulties led people to wonder about whether an annual holiday should be established, for all generations. They thought:

Is it possible that we were a bit hasty in deciding to celebrate Pesach every year? Could it be that we were too quick to show our joy? Perhaps it was a vain hope to believe that Pesach was the beginning of the redemption, while in reality the many problems showed that it had not yet begun. It can thus be assumed that some of the people did not want to observe the holiday.

And this is the reason that the Torah emphasizes the date of the new command about Pesach, "in the second year after they had left the land of Egypt." At the end of a difficult year, with complications and problems, Moshe once more emphasized the command to observe Pesach at the appropriate time. It is important to retain the proper perspective. There may indeed be difficulties along the path, but they cannot mask or hide the bright light of redemption. We must thank the Almighty for the redemption with all our heart and soul, even if it is accompanied by problems and difficulties.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah gives us a profound insight into the spiritual direction of our present exile and final redemption. The haftorah begins with the prophet Zecharya experiencing a vision wherein the ordained High Priest, Yehoshua, was brought to a critical trial regarding his pending esteemed position. Zecharya says, "And I was shown the High Priest Yehoshua standing before Hashem's prosecuting angel." (3:1) The reason for this prosecution is stated shortly thereafter in the following words, "And Yehoshua was clothed with soiled garments." (3:3) Our Chazal explain that these garments refer to the wives of Yehoshua's descendants. Although Yehoshua was personally a very pious individual some of his children were adversely affected by the foreign environment of Babylonia. They strayed from their rich heritage of priesthood and married women prohibited to them due to their lofty ritual status. Because of this offense to the priesthood,

Yehoshua's personal status of the High Priest was under severe scrutiny.

Suddenly, an angel of Hashem interceded on behalf of Yehoshua and defeated the prosecuting angel with the following statement of defense. "Is Yehoshua not an ember rescued from the fire!? (3:2) This response of defense was quite favorable in the eyes of Hashem and Yehoshua was immediately restored to his lofty position. The angel responded and said, "Remove the soiled garments from upon Yehoshua... See that I have removed his sin from him... Dress him with new garments." The prophet continues, "And they placed the pure priestly turban on his head." (3:4) Rashi (ad loc.) explains that Yehoshua was granted the opportunity of rectifying his children's behavior and he successfully influenced them to divorce their wives and marry more appropriate ones. Once Yehoshua's garments—referring to his children's inappropriate spouses—were cleansed Hashem clothed Yehoshua with the priestly garb and restored him to the position of Kohain Gadol.

What was the angel's powerful defense that produced such immediate favorable results? After his sons' disgrace to the priesthood, what outstanding merit could Yehoshua have possessed that secured his lofty position? The Radak explains that the angel argued that Yehoshua was "an ember rescued from fire." Radak understands this to mean that Yehoshua had been previously thrown into a fiery furnace. He sacrificed his life for the sake of Hashem and was miraculously spared from the fire. Through this heroic act, Yehoshua demonstrated total submission for the sake of Heaven offering his life for Hashem's glory. Such individuals deserve to prominently serve Hashem and His people. Such devotion and commitment must be inculcated into the blood stream of the Jewish people. Although Yehoshua's children veered from the straight path there remained much hope for them.

The shining example of their father could surely inspire them to return from their inappropriate ways. They too could eventually become devout servants of Hashem and attain lofty levels of priesthood. Through their father's guidance they could also rise above their physical and mundane pursuits and develop the purest qualities. In fact, Yehoshua was told that his children could potentially perfect themselves beyond normal levels of human achievement. Hashem said, "I will establish them superior to these angels standing here." (3:7) Yes, Yehoshua's submissiveness could produce untold results and certainly lead his children back to perfects spirituality.

This same lesson is taught to us in this week's parsha regarding the newly appointed judges. We read about the masses of Jewish people straying from the perfect path demonstrating serious leanings towards certain physical and inappropriate dimensions of life. They disgraced the Heavenly manna bread which Hashem sent them on a daily basis and expressed their physical cravings for substitute foods such as;

onions and garlic. They even complained about the Torah's strict standards of morality and sought freedom from its taxing and demanding life. Hashem responded with a severe punishment which ended the lives of many thousands of Jewish people. But at the same time Hashem responded to a plea from Moshe Rabbeinu and instituted a structure of seventy elders to share the judicial responsibilities. During this process these hand-picked judges experienced an incredible transition. The Torah states, "And Hashem intensified the Heavenly Spirit which rested upon Moshe Rabbeinu and shared it with the seventy elders." (Bamidbar 11:25) In addition to their new position as judges, these elders received prophecy and merited for a short time, to actually serve as a sanctuary for the Divine Presence.

Rashi comments on this incident and reveals the secret identity of these seventy elders. He quotes Chazal who explain, "These were the Jewish policemen in Egypt who were beaten mercilessly instead of their Jewish brethren." (Rashi to Bamidbar 11:16) These elders refused to enforce upon their brethren the unreasonable Egyptian demands and opted to accept torturous Egyptian blows on behalf of their brethren. This previous heroic act of self negation now served as a meaningful merit and lesson for the Jewish people. The recent outburst of the Jewish people revealed that they were embarking upon an immoral path, focusing on pleasure and self pursuit. Hashem responded to this by elevating a host of their own peers to the lofty position of leadership. These elders were not ensnared by self pursuit but were instead perfect role models of self negation. Their interest lay in spiritual association with Hashem and their selfless efforts brought them to the lofty achievement of personal sanctuaries for the presence of Hashem. With such personalities at the head of the Jewish people their direction could be effectively reversed. Their self sacrifice could secure the Jewish survival and hopefully remind the Jewish people never to plunge into self pursuit and immorality.

In our present times we hear repeated vibes of similar physical calls to immorality. We realize that our predecessors were also embers rescued from the fiery furnace—the fires of Europe—and their self sacrifice for the sake of Hashem surely serves as an everlasting merit for us. Our recollections of their total devotion to Hashem is a significant factor in the incredible transition for many of us from total physical pursuits to a sincere yearning to become sanctuaries of Hashem. May this new development continue to flourish and contribute to the hastening of Mashiach we so anxiously await.

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