

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Reach Out & Bless Someone

This week the Torah offers us a choice between good and otherwise. Hashem promises his blessings if we will observe the mitzvos and follow His ways. The Torah states, "And it will be if you obey the Lord, your G-d, to observe to fulfill all His commandments which I command you this day, the Lord, your G-d, will place you supreme above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings will come upon you and they will reach you, if you obey the Lord, your G-d" (Deuteronomy 25:2).

How does the Torah augment its blessing by adding the words they will reach you to the promise that all these blessings will come upon you? After all, if the blessings will come to you, of course they will reach you. What is the Torah adding?

Rabbi Binyamin Pruzansky, author of the Stories that Warm the Heart series relates the following episode in this weeks column in Yated Neeman. Rabbi Shlomo Gissinger, the Rav of Kehilas Zichron Yaakov in Lakewood, New Jersey is a very close and dear talmid of my grandfather, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l. One Chol Hamoed Sukkos Rabbi Gissinger took his family to Monsey to visit Rav Yaakov. After Rav Yaakov greeted them warmly and invited them inside. Rabbi Gissinger wanted to give his rebbi some nachas. He decided to demonstrate how his fourteen-month-old daughter was learning to walk.

Rabbi Gissinger placed her in a corner of the room and moved back some six feet, while he dangled some candy in front of her to encourage the child to walk toward him. Sure enough, the little girl balanced on her little legs as she wobbled her way towards her father. Indeed rav Yaakov shared the nachas as he broke out in a wide smile as he watched his students little child achieve.

Suddenly, in order to extend the challenge,

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in honor of my wife & best friend
Ruthie Weiss
on the occasion of our 22nd wedding anniversary!
Twenty-two is a great start but
I'm really looking forward to our 100th! ☺

Rabbi Gissinger, still dangling the candy, moved back a few steps, making it necessary for his daughter to walk an additional few steps.

To his shock, Rav Yaakov's smile disappeared immediately. "You must return to where you were just standing and give her the candy in that spot!" said Rav Yaakov. After Rav Gissinger complied and the little girl had her candy, Rav Yaakov explained: "The baby was shown that she would receive her prize if she reached a specific area, but then you changed the area. That is simply not honest. You are being untruthful and teaching her as well. Everything in a child's chinuch (education) has to be based upon the truth!"

Perhaps the Torah is telling us, that when Hashem promises a blessing, he will not dangle it and ask you to come and get it. Thus the Torah tells us: "And all these blessings will come upon you and reach to you." Hashem will not make you do any extra effort in retrieving the blessings. He will not leave you a key and tell you where to pick them up, or direct us to the treasure after our efforts in observance. No! Hashem promises that He will bring the blessing to you! Indeed the Sforno explains the concept of they will reach you that you will not have to do any extra work to receive them.

The blessings of the Almighty are different than those of mortal man. There is no fine print, nor are there extra machinations needed. Hashem promises and he delivers, literally. © 2010 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Three covenants (brit) are mentioned in the Torah, the covenant of the pieces (Genesis 15), the covenant of Sinai (Exodus 19), and the covenant of our portion, which was made just prior to our entry into Israel (Deuteronomy 29). Truth be told, they each contribute to the making of the nation of Israel.

The covenant of the pieces between G-d and Abraham established the family of Israel. It was nothing less than the planting of the seeds from which the Jewish people ultimately emerged. Abraham and Sarah were designated as the father and mother. From them, the children of Jacob were ultimately born. Soon after, we coalesced into a people hood.

The covenant of Sinai introduces a new element. As we became a people, it was crucial that we be governed by law. That law, given at Sinai, is the

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Torah. Its principles and precepts form a foundation which unites Jews, creating a sense of mission that we become a "a kingdom of priests and a holy people."

The covenant of our portion introduces a third critical component. It is not enough to be a people governed by law. Another crucial aspect is required for nationhood - a land. This element is addressed by the brit of our portion. Standing as we were, just days before entry into Israel, our portion begins with the words "When you come into the land," and concludes with the message of the brit.

Not coincidentally, these three covenants, people, Torah, and land, comprise the basis of Jewish nationhood. It is in the words of Rav Kook a combination of the people of Israel, with the Torah of Israel, in the land of Israel.

Throughout the centuries, there have been those who have been bent on destroying the Jewish nation, by attacking one of these three pillars. Some like Amalek in Biblical times, or the Nazis in the modern era, have focused their venom on the Jewish people. Their goal was simply to annihilate us.

Others have directed their hatred against our Torah. A prime example is Christian persecution of Jews in what Raul Hilberg calls "fifteen hundred years of anti-Semitic activities." Their claim was that they had no intention to murder Jews. Rather, it was to kill those who rejected their G-d. Basically, they stated, we accept Jews, but only if they embrace Jesus. In the end, however, it became clear that their goal of destroying our fundamental Torah beliefs was the equivalent of destroying the Jewish people.

Today another type of Jew hatred has emerged in the form of anti-Zionism. Truth be told, in the post-Holocaust era, it is simply not polite to directly target Jews or even their Torah. Hence, the attack against the Jewish land. In the end, however, a Jewish land is so fundamental to Judaism that any attempt to deny Jews their homeland is nothing less than an attempted destruction of the Jewish people. Simply put, anti-Zionism is equivalent to anti-Semitism.

The land of Israel, together with the people and Torah of Israel, are integral parts of our nation. To attack the Jewish land is intense anti-Semitism. This is the time for Jew and non-Jew to stand up and be counted. To be silent is to be complicit. All people of decency should proclaim "I am a Jew." © 2010 Hebrew

Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In two sentences in this week's sedra, the Torah summarizes the entire relationship between G-d and the people of Israel: "You have affirmed [he-emarta] this day that the Lord is your, G-d, that you will walk in His ways, that you will observe His laws and commandments and rules, and that you will obey Him. And the Lord has affirmed [he-emirkha] this day that you are, as He promised you, His treasured people who shall observe all His commandments." (Deut. 26: 17-18)

Here, set out with disarming simplicity, is the dual relationship, the reciprocity, at the heart of the covenant. It is an idea made famous in the form of two jingles-the first, that of William Norman Ewer:

How odd / Of G-d / To choose / The Jews.

and the second, the Jewish riposte:

Not quite / So odd -- / The Jews / Chose G-d.

Between G-d and the people is a mutual bond of love. The Israelites pledge themselves to be faithful to G-d and His commands. G-d pledges Himself to cherish the people as His treasure-for though He is the G-d of all humanity, He holds a special place in His affection (to speak anthropomorphically) for the descendants of those who first heard and heeded His call. This is the whole of Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. The rest is commentary.

The English translation, above, is that of the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh. Any translation, however, tends to conceal the difficulty in the key verb in both sentences: le-ha'amir. What is strange is that, on the one hand, it is a form of one the most common of all biblical verbs, leimor, "to say". On the other, the specific form used here-the hiphil, or causative form-is unique. Nowhere else does it appear in this form in the Bible, and its meaning is, as a result, obscure.

The JPS translation reads it as "affirmed". Aryeh Kaplan, in *The Living Torah*, reads it as "declared allegiance to". Robert Alter renders it: "proclaimed". Other interpretations include "separated to yourself" (Rashi), "chosen" (Septuagint), "recognized" (Saadia Gaon), "raised" (Radak, Sforno), "betrothed" (Malbim), "given fame to" (Ibn Janach), "exchanged everything else for" (Chizkuni), "accepted the uniqueness of" (Rashi to Chagigah 3a), or "caused G-d to declare" (Judah Halevi, cited by Ibn Ezra).

Among Christian translations, the King James Version has, "Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy G-d". The New International Version reads: "You have declared this day that the Lord is your G-d". The Contemporary English Version has: "In response, you have agreed that the Lord will be your G-d".

What is the significance of this unique form of the verb "to say"? Why is it used here? The use of language in the Torah is not vague, accidental, approximate, imprecise. In general, in the Mosaic books, style mirrors substance. The way something is said is often connected to what is being said. So it is here. What we have before us is a proposition of far-reaching consequence for the most fundamental question humanity can ask itself: What is the nature of the bond between human beings and G-d-or between human beings and one another-such that we can endow our lives with the charisma of grace? The answer given by the Torah, so profound that we need to stop and meditate on it, lies in language, speech, words. Hence the singling out, in this definitive statement of Jewish faith, of the verb meaning "to say".

We owe to the later work of Wittgenstein, developed further by J. L. Austin (How to do things with words) and J. R. Searle (Speech Acts), the realisation that language has many functions. Since the days of Socrates, philosophers have tended to concentrate on just one function: the use of language to describe, or state facts. Hence the key questions of philosophy and later science: Is this statement true? Does it correspond to the facts? It is consistent with other facts? Can I be sure? What evidence do I have? What warrant do I have for believing what I believe? Language is the medium we use to describe what is.

But that is only one use of language, and there are many others. We use it to classify, to divide the world up into particular slices of reality. We also use it to evaluate. "Patriotism" and "jingoism" both denote the same phenomenon-loyalty to one's country-but with opposite evaluations: patriotism = good, jingoism = bad.

We use language to express emotion. Sometimes we use it simply to establish a relationship. Malinowsky called this phatic communion, where what matters is not what we say but the mere fact that we are talking to one another (Robin Dunbar has recently argued that speech for humans is like "grooming behaviour" among primates). We can also use language to question, command, hypothesize and imagine. There are literary genres like fiction and poetry which use language in complex ways to extend our imaginative engagement with reality. The philosophical-scientific mindset that sees the sole significant function of language as descriptive-taken to an extreme in the philosophical movement known as "logical positivism"-is a form of tone-deafness to the rich variety of speech.

The Mosaic books contain a deep set of reflections on the nature and power of language. This has much to do with the fact that the Israelites of Moses' day were in the place where, and the time when, the first alphabet appeared, the proto-semitic script from which all subsequent alphabets are directly or indirectly derived. Judaism marks the world's first transition on a national scale from an oral to a literate culture. Hence the unique significance it attaches to the spoken and

written word. We discover this at the very beginning of the Torah. It takes the form of the radical abandonment of myth. G-d spoke and the world came into being. There is no contest, no struggle, no use of force to subdue rival powers-as there is in every myth without exception. Instead, the key verb in Genesis 1 is simply leimor, "G-d said [vayomer], Let there be... and there was." Language creates worlds.

That, of course, is Divine-not human-speech. However, J. L. Austin pointed out that there is a human counterpart. There are certain things we can create with words when we use them in a special way. Austin called this use of speech performative utterance (more technically, illocutionary acts). So, for example, when a judge says, "This court is now in session", he is not describing something but doing something. When a groom says to his bride under the wedding canopy, "Behold you are betrothed to me by this ring according to the laws of Moses and Israel", he is not stating a fact but creating a fact.

The most basic type of performative utterance is making a promise. This is the use of language to create an obligation. Some promises are unilateral (X commits himself to do something for Y), but others are mutual (X and Y make a commitment to one another). Some are highly specific ("I promise to pay you £1,000"), but others are open-ended ("I promise to look after you, come what may"). The supreme example of an open-ended mutual pledge between human beings is marriage. The supreme example of an open-ended mutual pledge between human beings and G-d is a covenant. That is what our two verses state: that G-d and the people of Israel pledge themselves to one another by making a covenant, a relationship brought into existence by words, and sustained by honouring those words.

This is the single most radical proposition in the Hebrew Bible. It has no real counterpart in any other religion. What is supremely holy is language, when used to create a moral bond between two parties. This means that the supreme form of relationship is one that does not depend on power, superior force, or dominant-submissive hierarchy. In a covenantal relationship both parties respect the dignity of the other. A covenant exists only in virtue of freely given consent. It also means that between Infinite G-d and infinitesimal humanity there can be relationship-because, through language, they can communicate with one another. The key facts of the Torah are that [a] G-d speaks and [b] G-d listens. The use of language to create a mutually binding relationship is what links G-d and humankind. Thus the two verses mean: "Today, by an act of speech, you have made G-d your G-d, and G-d has made you His eople". Words, language, an act of saying, have created an open-ended, eternally binding relationship.

Hence the name I have given this four-year series of Torah commentary: Covenant and

conversation. Judaism is a covenant, a marriage between G-d and a people. The Torah is the written record of that covenant. It is Israel's marriage-contract as G-d's bride. Conversation-speaking and listening- is what makes covenant possible. Hence the dual form of Torah: the written Torah, through which G-d speaks to us and the Oral Torah through which we speak to G-d by way of interpreting His word. Judaism is the open-ended, mutually binding, conversation between Heaven and earth.

Despite the deep influence of Judaism on two later faiths, Christianity and Islam, neither adopted this idea (to be sure, some Christian theologians speak of covenant, but a different kind of covenant, more unilateral than reciprocal). There are no conversations between G-d and human beings in either the New Testament or the Koran-none that echo the dialogues in Tanakh between G-d and Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Hosea, Jeremiah, Jonah, Habakkuk and Job. Judaism, Christianity and Islam-the religion of sacred dialogue, the religion of salvation and the religion of submission-are three different things. The use of language to create a moral bond of love between the Infinite and the finite-through covenant on the one hand, conversation on the other-is what makes Judaism different. That is what is set out simply in these two verses: Speaking a relationship into being, le-ha'amir, is what makes G-d our G-d, and us, His people. © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

Chazal instituted the reading of Parshas Ki Savo before Rosh Hashana. Much of the parsha deals with the terrible consequences for not observing the Torah. We read this prior to Rosh Hashana symbolizing that the year and all its curses should come to an end. In reality, we do not read Parshas Ki Savo immediately before Rosh Hashana, but rather there is always a Shabbos after Ki Savo before the year ends. If we want to indicate that the year and its curses are ending, wouldn't it be more appropriate to read this parsha on the last Shabbos of the year? Why did Chazal leave a week between Parshas Ki Savo and Rosh Hashana?

We are taught (Berachos 5a) various methods to overcome one's yetzer hara. If one senses a temptation to sin one should first focus on words of Torah. If this doesn't help, one should recite the Shema. If even this fails to assist in overcoming one's yetzer hara, as a last resort one should focus on death. If thinking about death is the most effective way to prevent one from sinning, why didn't Chazal suggest this as the first response to temptation? Why do we first attempt the less effective deterrents such as Torah study and krias Shema?

When a person is ill there are often different potential treatments. Sometimes a more effective one will not be used at first because of its negative side effects. If the less effective cure is not sufficient and the condition necessitates, the illness must be cured notwithstanding the damaging side effects. Thinking of death is the most effective way of averting sin. However, using this as a constant deterrent can have negative repercussions. A person constantly focused on death will not be able to serve Hashem with joy. His morose mood will prevent him from interacting with others in a cheerful and pleasant way. Thinking of death as a first response to every temptation may be effective in preventing a particular sin, yet it may carry negative consequences that outweigh its benefits. Only if the gentler methods of Torah study and krias Shema fail should one resort to the more drastic approach of focusing on death.

As we approach Rosh Hashana and try to perfect our avodas Hashem, we have many methods that we use. We increase our Torah study and focus on kabbalos Malchus Shomayim-accepting Hashem's kingship over us through our tefillos. There is a last method that we use and that is reflecting upon deaths. Perhaps the most powerful application of this is the tefillah of Unesane Tokef. Yet, the majority of our tefillos on Rosh Hashana focus on Hashem being our King, rather than our own mortality. The mood on Rosh Hashana is both serious and joyful. Constant focus on death would perhaps prevent sin but would also prevent us from celebrating Rosh Hashana appropriately.

During the weeks before Rosh Hashana we prepare our different strategies for overcoming sin. We deliberately do not enter Rosh Hashana on a depressing note having just read the curses of Parshas Ki Savo. Death and suffering are not the methods we want to invoke as we attempt to improve our avodas Hashem. We have these methods available to us in case of need. We read about them two weeks before Rosh Hashana to familiarize ourselves with them, but then have a break of a week so that they do not preoccupy our minds. We approach Rosh Hashana using the methods of Torah study and krias Shema-accepting Hashem as King-as ways of combating sin. If and when we must resort to contemplating death as a way to assist us we are equipped to do so. Parshas Ki Savo can be invoked if necessary but we hope that Torah study and krias Shema can assist us as we strive to perfect our avodas Hashem. © 2010 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**Y**ou shall set up for yourselves great stones... and you shall write upon them all the words of this Torah clarified completely [Hebrew, be'er hetev]... these are the words of the

covenant... which the Lord commanded Moses to contract with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant He contracted with them at Horeb." (Deuteronomy 27:1, 2, 3, 8; 28:69)

Efrat, Israel - When we think of the covenants between G-d and the Jewish people, we usually focus on the covenant with Abraham and then the covenant at Sinai. The first is the Covenant between the Pieces, when G-d guaranteed Abraham progeny and a homeland (Genesis 15). The second covenant, at Sinai, was with the entire nation - the covenant of religious law, when G-d revealed His will in the form of ethical, moral and ritual commandments (Exodus 19-24). But the above-cited verses make clear that a third covenant was also made just as the people were about to enter the land. The text couldn't be more explicit: "...in addition to the covenant He contracted with them at Horeb [Sinai]." Why a third covenant? Weren't the first two enough? Didn't they cover our national identity and our religious destiny? What is G-d now adding?

In order to understand the addition, we must hark back to the divine election of Abraham, the first Hebrew. G-d tells Abraham that "...through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3), which means that the Jewish mission is to reach out to the world. And what Abraham must teach is compassionate righteousness and moral justice (Gen. 18:18,19). Indeed, Maimonides rules that the Jewish people are obligated to teach the nations of the world the seven Noahide laws, the universal laws of ethics and Human inviolability (Maimonides, Laws of Kings 10.8); only when the likes of an Ahmadinejad accepts "Thou shalt not murder an innocent" as an absolute will there be a future for a free and secure world in a global village.

Hence, the third covenant in this week's portion. Just as Israel assembles at the Jordan River - the gateway to the Land of Israel - to become a nation-state, G-d commands them to erect great stones. "And you shall write upon the stones all the words of this law..." (Deut. 27:8). What then follows are the 12 curses (Deut. 27:15-26), each directed toward anyone who fails to live by a certain moral rule, resulting in 12 universal principles. This teaching is to be writ large, "clarified completely" - interpreted by the Talmudic sages to mean engraved deeply and/or translated into all 70 languages. So if the first two covenants stress who we are in terms of a family, genealogical continuity and the creation of our religious identity, the third, symbolized by the erection of the stones, dramatizes our responsibility to the world as a kingdom of priest/teachers.

Tragically however, if we do not "hear" G-d's voice which commands us to be an ethical example to the world, we will lose our homeland and turn into wanderers, prey to heinous hatred and mass murders. We will become victims of violence perpetrated by oppressors so depraved as to be no longer images of G-d. All this is implied in the third covenant. Yes, for a

time, we "heard," we obeyed... and we succeeded. Josephus, among others, records how Jews, together with the Torah, were spreading all over the known world (Contra Apionem 2, 39), attracting huge numbers of converts from every part of the Roman Empire. But sometime in the second century CE - perhaps because in our pride we forgot that it was the Torah's superiority, and not our own, which had brought us such success - we became unable, or unworthy, of sustaining the momentum. We stopped "hearing" G-d's voice, were forced to leave history, and virtually forgot the mission of the third covenant.

As strange as it might sound, Maimonides - the great legalist-theologian who deplores Christianity as idolatry - nevertheless writes that at least in this regard the Christians continued where we left off. In the unexpurgated versions of the Mishneh Torah, he records: "G-d's ways are too wondrous to comprehend. All those matters relating to Jesus of Nazareth and the Ishmaelite who came after him are only serving to clear the way for King Messiah, to prepare the whole world '...to worship G-d with one accord' (Zephaniah 3:9). Thus the messianic hope, the Torah and the commandments have become familiar topics... among the inhabitants of the far-flung islands at the ends of the globe..."

Unfortunately however, the evolving theology of the new church paved the way for hateful, anti-Semitic atrocities. But miraculously, nearly 2,000 years later, a sea change has embraced many leading churchmen, beginning with Pope John XXIII and his *Nostra Aetate* (1965), and going on to include leading Protestant theologians and the world of Evangelicals, who never had a history of anti-Semitism and have been extremely supportive of the State of Israel in general and the settlement community in particular.

Now thank G-d we as a people and a nation have returned to history, in the "Beginning of the period of our redemption." Many are the miracles all around us, including our military victories and the ingathering of the exiles, the Tribe of Dan from Ethiopia and the Bnai Menashe from northern India. Alongside of these magnificent occurrences is the growing threat of extremist Islam with its suicide bombers and commitment to jihadism. Miraculously, the Christian world is finally beginning to rid itself of the ugly specter of anti-Semitism and is beginning to recognize the eternal legitimacy of its Elder Brothers Covenant. It is critically important that - despite the many differences which divide us, especially in our refusal to recognize the founder of Christianity as the messiah or the special and unique son of G-d - we must join hands with the Christians and bring a religion of love, morality and peace to a desperate, thirsting world. The G-d of compassion must overcome the Satan of jihadism, and our revived dialogue with our younger brother must bring the light of freedom and security to the farthest

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha, as do the next few parshiyot of the Torah as well, combines in its text exalted hopes and blessed situations as well as dire predictions and warnings of wretched events that will somehow all occur to the Jewish people. There are wonderful blessings and predictions of happiness and stability and unlimited success in the parsha. But there are also almost unspeakably dire predictions of how close the Jewish people will come to annihilation and disappearance in the future.

It is as though, so to speak, on the surface of the text, the Torah cannot make up its mind regarding the Jewish future and destiny. And it must also be noted that the Torah makes little provision in its statements for an "ordinary" existence. It always seems to be an "all or nothing" situation for the Jewish people—great moments of triumph and/or desperate times of persecution, discrimination and potential destruction.

Part of the main unfulfilled hope of secular Zionism was to make the Jewish people "normal"—to avoid the extreme swings of Jewish life and history. But it is obvious that the State of Israel, the crowning achievement of Zionism, has not succeeded in making us "normal."

We are not Paraguay or Australia. In the short space of sixty-two years of Israel's as an independent sovereign nation—only a blink of an eye in terms of history—it and the Jewish world has experienced soaring moments of success and miraculous accomplishments as well as terrible times of tension, pressures, fear and loss. Apparently this pattern is destined to continue and it has truly been the hallmark of Jewish life over the past century of our existence.

As the Torah indicates, the end of the pendulum we will be on is partially dependent upon us—on our behavior and spiritual thoughts, plans and acts. Just as the events of Jewish life always appear to us as being somewhat extreme, so our goals and behavior are also judged in the extreme, so to speak.

We always have to aim high for ourselves—very high—when it comes to matters of personal development, spiritual attainment and Torah observance. The status quo is an unacceptable state of being in the matter of spirit and tradition. A business that does not grow at least incrementally will surely sink. The same is true for human beings in their spiritual growth.

This is essentially the message of Elul and the High Holy days now upon us—the message of how to attain blessings. Even though spirituality and faith exist in extremes, as I have pointed out above, all extremism must be tempered by the recognition of one's true self

and capabilities. Reasonable and reachable goals should always be our true agenda.

Religious life is not a sprint race. It is a long marathon requiring pace, consistency, training and commitment. There will be a day of greatness and tranquility for the Jewish people. So we are told by our prophets who have never misled us. But we have to do our part to make that promise a reality. © 2010 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

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Although our Parasha is referred to as "Ki Savo" (or sometimes just "Savo"), the first word of the Parasha is "v'haya," meaning "and it will be" (Devarim 26:1). The Sifre's comment on this word has led to much discussion, including whether the Sifre actually commented on this word. The Sifre's second comment (or first, if there was no comment on "v'haya") has also led to much discussion, with some using the latter to explain the former. Let's take a closer look at this Sifre.

The Parasha starts by teaching us the mitzvah of "Bikurim," bringing the first fruits to the Temple, a mitzvah that didn't apply until we entered the Promised Land, conquered it, and divided it up by assigning specific portions to each Tribe and to each family within the Tribe (see Rashi on 26:1). It is therefore seems quite puzzling that the Sifre starts off by telling us that the word "v'haya" always means "immediately." How could the Sifre tell us that the mitzvah of "Bikurim" applied "immediately" if it didn't apply until 14 years later? For this reason, several commentators insist that these words were never really part of the Sifre. And, in fact, if you look at the way the Sifre is quoted by Yalkut Shimoni, these words are put in parenthesis, indicating that they do not really belong. The same is true of the Sifre printed with Malbim's commentary, although Malbim acknowledges that it is in older manuscripts of the Sifre. Last year (5769), Raavad's commentary on the Sifre was published. Since he comments on these words, he obviously had them in his version of the Sifre. Midrash Hagadol and Midrash Lekach Tov, which are compilations of Midrashim made by Rishonim (early commentators), both include this explanation of the word "v'haya," so they must have had this comment in their versions of the Sifre as well. This led Rabbi Dovid Pardo (Sifre D'vei Rav) to say that despite the difficulty with this comment, it would still be difficult to just erase these words from the Sifre.

The Sifre's second comment is also puzzling, as it tells us that by using the opening words "and it will be when you come to the land" to teach us this mitzvah, Moshe was telling the nation to "do the mitzvah that is

discussed here, for as its reward you will enter the land." How can the reward (being able to enter the Promised Land) come years before the mitzvah that it is a reward for can be done?

As I mentioned, these issues are addressed by numerous commentators, and some of their approaches (or aspects of their approach) are incorporated below. For those interested in seeing the sources I used (or was "mechaven" to), as well as others that address one or both of these issues, please see Raavad, Haga'os U'Burim L'Chacham Kadmon Sefardi, Toldos Udum, Sifre D'vei Rav, Malbim, Meir Ayin, Otzer Hamidrashim, and Sefer Sarasi.

Sifre D'vei Rav says that the usual way of saying that the mitzvah currently being discussed brings about the reward just mentioned is "do this mitzvah," not "do the mitzvah discussed here." By telling us that the mitzvah to be done is "what is discussed here" (and not just "this one," the Sifre is alluding to the previously discussed mitzvah, not the one that is about to be discussed. In this case, the previously discussed mitzvah was remembering that Amelek did everything they possibly could to prevent us from carrying out G-d's mission, and because they would always keep trying, to wipe them out. We had to wait until after we were in a position to carry out the last part (which would be after appointing a king), but the "remembering" part, which was a prerequisite to carrying out the rest of the mitzvah, had to be done right away (and be done consistently). It makes sense that being able to enter the Promised Land would result from fulfilling this mitzvah, as if we start the process of avenging "G-d's war" (see Shemos 17:16), He will give us the tools necessary to finish it, which includes getting the land and settling it.

Sifre D'vei Rav brings a similar example from the Sifre's comments regarding appointing a king (Devarim 17:14). Moshe also prefaces that mitzvah with "when you enter the land" (although there is no "v'haya" there), upon which the Sifre says, "do the mitzvah discussed here, for as its reward you will enter the land." Sound familiar? The same issue we had on the Sifre's second comment in our Parasha applies here. However, if the Sifre is referring to the mitzvah discussed right before this one (making sure we have a judicial system that has a central authority, with the same laws applying to everybody, see www.rabbidmk.posterous.com/parashas-shoftim-5770), it makes sense. Moshe is telling us that if we put things into place now, at Arvos Moav when everyone is together, we can cross the Jordan River and spread out without being concerned that each locale will have its own set of laws. If the mitzvah we must start to keep in order to enter the Promised Land can be done before we cross into it, this second issue is resolved.

There is one slight problem with Sifre D'vei Rav's approach. The Sifre never uses the expression "do this mitzvah," so the expression "do the mitzvah discussed

here" doesn't necessarily mean "the mitzvah just discussed;" this could be the way the Sifre says "do the following mitzvah." As a matter of fact, the Sifre uses the expression "do the mitzvah that is discussed here" six times (all in Devarim). Nevertheless, the same issue of being rewarded before the mitzvah can be done would apply to the other four as well. The first two (Devarim 12:29, 18:9) can be addressed the same exact way, while the reward for the third (18:14) is to drive out the nations living there after having crossed into the land rather than the reward being to cross over in the first place; if we don't mimic their ways after we cross, we will be able to drive them out. The fourth (19:8) discusses the cities of refuge, as we will be rewarded with wider boundaries, necessitating additional cities of refuge, if we set up the cities of refuge properly in our original boundaries. In this case, it is the same mitzvah, so the Sifre must be referring to setting up the first cities of refuge in order to merit needing to set up additional ones. Therefore, although one of Sifre D'vei Rav's main arguments for his approach falls away, I think the approach itself is valid, and is pretty much implied in at least one of the six cases.

We are still left with our first question, how the Sifre could say that "v'haya" means immediately if the mitzvah of "Bikurim" won't start until years after entering the land. However, the verse (26:1) doesn't just mention "entering the land," it also mentions "inheriting it and dwelling in it," i.e. conquering it and dividing it up, and the mitzvah of "Bikurim" does start immediately after that. The question becomes why we would think otherwise, necessitating the Torah to tell us that it starts immediately after everyone is settled, and/or why the Sifre had to point it out to us.

Once we've established that "v'haya" doesn't mean "right this second," but "right after certain conditions have been met" (i.e. right after the land was conquered and divided up), everything falls into place. When the prophet (Micha 4:1) tells us that "it will be at the end of days," the "v'haya" teaches us that it will occur right away, at the beginning of the "end of days," not well after they have started. Although the mitzvah of remembering what Amalek did started right away, the mitzvah to wipe them out didn't start until after there was a king. Nevertheless, since it started right after the first king was appointed, Moshe used the word "v'haya." Appointing the king, though, was not required right away (and if anything, should have been delayed more), so there is no "v'haya" there. In order to contrast the "coming to the land" regarding appointing a king and the "coming to the land" regarding "Bikurim," Moshe had to add "v'haya" by the latter and leave it out by the former. Additionally, as the Malbim points out, the mitzvah of separating "Chalah" from dough did not apply to dough that was already kneaded, only to dough that was kneaded after the land was conquered and divided up. Similarly, the prohibition against "Ulah" (fruit from the

first three years) didn't apply to trees that had already been planted, only to those that were planted after the land was conquered and divided up. "Bikurim," on the other hand, applied even to something that had been planted before the land was conquered. Therefore, Moshe told them that "Bikurim" applied "immediately." Not "immediately" after they entered the Promised Land, but "immediately" after it was conquered and divided up. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrاند

This week's parsha contains the terrible Tochacha? the 98 curses delineated in graphic detail, through which the Almighty warns us of what we will be subject to if we do not keep His Torah. Before the Tochacha begins, the Torah provides some "good news". Namely, "If you will keep all my commandments then you will have abundant blessing..." [Devarim 28:1-14]

Immediately following the "good news?", the Torah launches into a description of what will happen "If we do not listen to the commandments of the L-rd our G-d..." The curses contain the mirror image of the blessings. Rather than being "blessed in the city and blessed in the country, blessed in our coming in and blessed in our going out" we will be "cursed in the city and cursed in the country, cursed in our going in and cursed in our going out".

The Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel translates the pasuk "Cursed will you be when you come in and cursed will you be when you go out" [28:19] as follows: "You will be cursed when you come in" means "you will be cursed when you come into the theaters and when you come into the circuses? because you wasted your time on frivolous entertainment rather than spending it learning Torah." "You will be cursed when you go out" as "you will be cursed when you go out to make a living".

Rav Pam asks, what is wrong with making a living? A Jew needs to support his family and earn a living. This is implicit in the pasuk "and you shall gather in your produce" [Devarim 11:14]. We can understand the curse associated with lewd or inappropriate forms of entertainment, but what is the meaning of the curse associated with one's trying to earn a living?

The Gemara in Gittin [34a] discusses the concept of "Ones B'Gittin". A person has granted a conditional divorce (I hereby divorce you with this 'get' document on the condition that I do not return within 30 days) and then is prevented by circumstances beyond his control from returning. The Hafla-ah in Maseches Kesubos writes that the whole discussion in Tractate Gittin is only about a case where a person wanted to return but was prevented from doing so by external circumstances (e.g.? an airline strike). However, in a case where the person would not have come back

anyway, then the external circumstance that also prevented him from returning is not a valid claim to nullify the divorce.

Rav Pam said that there is nothing wrong with earning a living and that earning a living is not in and of itself 'bitul Torah', because one is obligated to support a family. However, people do not work 16 hours a day. What does he do with his leisure time? If he spends his free time learning, spending time with his family, and helping around the house, that demonstrates that he only spent time working because he was forced to do so (ones). However, if learning or attending a shiur is on the bottom of the totem pole, it proves that the time at work was also not just because he had to, but was because he would rather be doing anything other than learning. He will find any excuse not to learn. It is about such a person that we say "Cursed are you when you come in (to the theaters and circuses) and cursed are you when you go out (even to earn your living)". A person must earn a living. However, he must have the attitude that whenever I have the opportunity to do so, I want to use my time wisely from a spiritual perspective.

Rav Henkin, zt"l, once met the Chazon Ish when they were both yet in Europe. At the time, he did not even know the Chazon Ish and he certainly did not realize his greatness. They were both coincidentally in the parlor of a certain Rabbi, waiting to see the Rav and began talking with one another. Rav Henkin asked the Chazon Ish "What's your name?" and he replied "My name is Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz." "What do you do?" inquired Rav Henkin. "I own a store", replied Rav Karelitz. (This was true because the Chazon Ish's wife ran a store and that is how he earned a living." Rav Henkin then asked, "Do you set aside fixed times for learning Torah daily?" The Chazon Ish responded, "When I have time I learn."

Later, when Rav Henkin got in to see the Rav who he was waiting to talk to, the Rabbi told him that he was about to leave his position for several months and travel to Russia. He was planning on leaving his community in the interim with the gentleman in the parlor named Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, who was proficient in all areas of Talmud." What the Chazon Ish told Rav Henkin was absolutely true. Whenever he had time, he learned! That is why he became the Chazon Ish. © 2010 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org



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