

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Bemachashavah Techilah

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 "lashon hara," (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 (as G-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 had not yet repented then prayer should not help; and if she had (and we can assume that she did) then prayer should not

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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, does not affect Miriam's relationship with G-d, so any result of that (apparently somewhat strained) relationship (i.e. her punishment) should not 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?

Ralbag 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? Would not 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 - do you not 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 did not.

Moshe's prayer was effective 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.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bakeish Shalom

Last week's *parashah* opens with the command "*Naso es rosh* – raise the head" (Bamidbar 4:22), telling Moshe and Aharon to count the clan of Gershom. This is a strange choice of terms. Significantly, the stress is not being placed on counting the *Levi'im* as much as giving each person a sense of his importance and his role, the wherewithal and self-confidence to play his part.

Perhaps the choice of term, *naso*, is to add meaning to the title "*nasi*". The trailing half of the *parashah* speaks of the offerings of the *Nesi'im*, the leaders of each tribe excluding Levi, whose title comes from the same root. Each *nasi* brought the exact same offering, and yet each *korban* is spelled out individually. Why? Does not the Torah eschew redundancy?

The Ramban¹ explains that each *korban* was in fact unique. Even though the items offered were identical, the intent behind the *korban* was specific to that *nasi*'s tribe's talents and history. To Nachshon, the *nasi* of Yehudah, the silver platter was for its gematria (*ke'aras kesef*), 930, equaling the words "*Adam haRishon*", it

weighed 130 *shekel* to equal the number of his children. To Nesan'el ben Tzu'ar of Yissachar, the offering was about Torah study.

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The platter refers to bread, the *ke'aros* that hold up the showbread on the table within the *Mishkan*. The bread, in turn, was a symbol for Torah in his eyes. Etc...

The *parashah* describes the role of *nasi* as being more than merely leader in two ways: First, it is his job to be *nosei*, to lift up, each of their people into their roles. The second is to match each person with his own task. The *nasi* leads by finding his tribe's role as part of the Jewish people, the individual's place within the greater mission; and then motivating and inspiring people to fill their potential.

The Mechilta connects the *mitzvah* of lighting the *menorah*, given at the beginning of this week's *parashah* to the offerings of the *nesi'im*. The *midrash* tells us that Aharon was distressed. His role included leading the *Levi'im* as

their *nasi*. The other *nesi'im* had an opportunity to participate in the consecration of the *Mishkan*, but Aharon did not. Rashi², quoting the Mechilta, explains that the *mitzvah* of lighting the *menorah* was a response; Aharon may have not had the opportunity of the initial consecration, but he and his descendants would consecrate it daily.

This week's *parashah* again utilizes a unique turn of phrase. Hashem tells Moshe to instruct Aharon "*Beha'alojecha es haneiros* – when you cause the lamps to go up" (Bamidbar 8:2). "*Beha'alojecha*" is another unique choice of verb. When talking about lighting the *menorah*, would it not be more natural to say *behadlikecha* – when you light the lamps? One of the explanations Rashi³ offers for this strange terminology is that it refers to a law about how the *menorah* is lit. One may not light the *menorah* directly, by letting a fire touch the wick. Instead the *kohein* holds a fire close to the lamp, not touching it, and the wick bursts into its own flame from the heat.

¹ Bamidbar 7:1

² Bamidbar 8:2

³ Ad loc.

In a sense, it reiterates the point made by “*naso es rosh*”. The notion of inspiring, rather the coercing obedience.

And in fact, the *mitzvah* continues the second element of being a *nasi* as well. The verse continues, “... in the direction of the face of the *menorah* you shall light the lamps.” The *menorah*’s seven lamps parallel the seven wisdoms, the middle, Torah. The wisdoms branch out from Torah, and the *kohein* is mandated to light them so that they all face and serve Torah. Our differences in knowledge and talent are not suppressed. Quite to the contrary, each person is called upon to serve Hashem using those unique abilities.

Rav Hirsch finds within *tzitzis* something to remind us of this idea. The gemara says that the ideal *tzitzis* should be 1/3rd bound, and 2/3 free strings. To Rav Hirsch, this represents a life channeled and guided by Torah, one of self-restraint. “Each human potential is given the chance to develop freely; it is only restrained by the bond of the bundle in order

that ... it may be realized in all the more freedom and equality.”⁴

Hashem chose Aharon and his descendants to serve Him as *ko-hanim*. It seems strange. If anyone should be chosen to be the first *kohein* should it not be Moshe? Was he not the quintessential *eved Hashem* – the greatest servant of the Almighty?

The Gemara attributes to Moshe the attitude of “let the law uproot mountains.” He lived to the ideal, teaching by setting an example of what man can become. He was able

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to separate himself from everything earthly, and single-mindedly pursue the higher ideal. Moshe begins his final speech to his people with the words “Hear O skies and I shall speak; listen O earth to the words of

⁴ Collected Writings, vol. III p. 124

my mouth.” (Devarim 32:1) Rashi comments that Moshe had to use a stronger language in speaking to the earth, as he was a man who was more heavenly than earthly. He was further from the earth, so his call for it to listen had to be more forceful. Moshe stands as a goal to strive for, as an ideal beyond and above the masses.

In contrast, Hillel enjoins us to learn from Aharon, whom he describes as a “lover of peace and a pursuer of peace. A lover of people and brought them close to Torah.” (Mishnah Avos 1:12) Aharon represents a different kind of teacher, one who is part of the people, and works from within the community.

Society requires Moshe’s ideals to which we can aspire. As it says in Tanna Devei Eliyahu (25), “Therefore, I say that every member of the Jewish people is obligated to say, “When will my deeds reach the level of those of my forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov?”” But the role of *kohein* is to be an Aharon, inspiring us upward – each in our own way – from within.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Sefasai Tiftach

There is a *halachah* specific to one verse of Ashrei. Most lines, if said without *kavanah*, need not be repeated. However, if the 16th *pasuk*, “*Posei’ach...*” is said unthinkingly, one must return to that point.¹ For most cases where we need to have *kavanah* we rule that today, when proper concentration is likely to elude us even the second time around, we do not repeat the

phrase.² In this case, however, the *Ba’eir Heitev* makes a point of saying that one is required to repeat the verse.³

“*Posei’ach es yadecha* – You open Your Hand...” The word *posei’ach* is in the present tense, not the imperative. This verse is not a request that Hashem open His Hand, but rather a praise of Him,

² Ibid *siman* 101

³ Ad loc 51, *se’if katan* 5

acknowledging that He already and constantly opens it for us.

One could take the opening of the hand as an act of giving. However, this is not entirely consistent with the word “*Yadecha*”. Since Hashem is kind, the word “*Yemincha*”, specifying “Your right [Hand]” is used for giving. “*Yadecha*”, without specifying which hand, implies restraint. The notion of *chessed* as being on the right and *gevurah*, restraint, on the left is fundamental to Kaballah. This is the reason for such customs as

¹ Shulchan Aruch, *Orach Chaim* 51:7

which hand we wash first upon awaking and before reciting *Hamotzi*.

In our context, therefore, it would seem that the opening we are acknowledging is not the giving, but the removal or at least compromise of Hashem's *Gevurah*. Perhaps because Hashem's giving is axiomatic, it is existence itself.

"*Umasbi'a lechol chai ratzon* – ...and cause satisfaction for every living being..." At this point, attempts to parse the grammar falter. "*Ratzon*" can mean desire, as we see in a few verses, "*Retzon yerei'av ya'aseh* – He performs the desires of those who feel awe for Him." Or it could mean desirability, as in the end of the *Amidah*: "*Yihyu leratzon imrei fi* – May the utterances of my mouth be desirable".

One possible argument in favor of the latter is that it would seem odd that in this verse Tehillim describes Hashem as fulfilling the desire of all living things, whereas a little later the praise is limited to doing the desires of those who merit it. On the other hand, one speaks of satisfying and the other of performing – two different things.

But there is no preposition linking it to the rest of the phrase, so the meaning is obscure. We also do not know whose desire or desirability is being discussed – Hashem's or ours.

The Targum renders it, "And satisfies for every living being their desires." Similarly, Rav Hirsch, in his *siddur*, has "satisfy the desire of every living thing". The Metzudah and ArtScroll *siddurim* take the same approach. But that would more usually be "*retzon kol chai*".

Shemos Rabbah⁴ points out that the Tehillim does not say "hunger" because, as we all know from experience, the hungers of a person

are not always satisfied. Rather, it refers to Hashem's *Ratzon*, that Hashem gives according to His Will. However, that is an idea more usually written "*beratzon* – in/through His Will".

In his book on *tefillah*, Rav Schwab repeats a *devar Torah* said at his *Sheva Berachos*. Why is *Ashrei* written as an alphabetic acrostic? The *alef-beis* structure represents the natural order. When we thank Hashem for satisfying our needs, we are speaking of his doing so through natural means. He does not support us by showering money upon us.⁵ Rather, Hashem provides us with material success. Rav Schwab therefore suggests that "*ratzon*" means desirability, and that we are praising Hashem as the One who bestows the desirability and charisma upon His creations necessary for succeeding at business.

Rav Kook offers a unique alternative. Man needs purpose, goals, something to strive for. Without wants, there is no concept of mission; boredom and ennui quickly set in. Rav Noach Weinberger says that man is a happiness seeker. Thomas Jefferson speaks of the "pursuit of happiness". Happiness can even be defined as the emotion that drives a search, which is why we feel more happiness during the pursuit than once we have gotten used to having our goal. Along similar lines, in *Borei Nefashos* we thank Hashem for creating "the many souls and their lacks". Hashem satisfies us by giving us desires. We thank Hashem for giving us purposeful existence, meaningful lives.

Having needs has a second advantage, in addition to the one discussed by Rav Kook. After the sin of tempting Chavah to take the

forbidden fruit, the snake is punished that it go on its stomach and that its food will be dust. Rashi repeats Chazal's question: How is this a punishment? Is it not good to have food wherever one goes? The punishment was in the implied statement. Hashem did not want to be bothered by the requests and needs of the snake. By giving us needs, Hashem pushes us to pursue a relationship with Him. This provides a nice counter-balance – Hashem supplies our needs, but not to the point that we are free of needing to have a dialogue with Him.

I would like to suggest that the ambiguity is intentional. That, in fact, David and the One Who inspired him intended each of these meanings – and others of which I am unaware and I did not identify in this essay. This is what makes a *tefillah* rich. Each verse has layers of meaning so that even after years of three-times-daily repetition, there are still new thoughts to inspire. Each time we say *Ashrei* we may be saying the same words, but the intent behind those words could be something that speaks particularly to what we wish to express to Hashem at that moment.

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⁵ See Sefesai Tiftach., Bamidbar 5764 <<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/5764/bamidbar.pdf>>

⁴ Ch. 25, beginning