

מתוקים מדבש



Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bemachashavah Techilah

“**L**o yihyeh lecha bekischa even va'aven gedolah *Lukitanah* - you may not have for yourself in your pocket a stone and a stone, a large one and a small one” (Devarim 25:13). Rashi¹ explains that you may not measure what you take with the large weight, but measure what you sell with a small one.

Halachah prohibits not just using two sets of weights, but also even just owning them. R. Yehuda of Sura makes the uncontested statement that this verse prohibits owning false weights even if they are not used.² This is also the way the mitzvah is codified in the Chinuch.³

“*Ki so'avas Hashem Elokecha kol osei eileh* - for anyone who does this is *to'eivah* to Hashem your G-d.” (25:16) What is the concept of *to'eivah*? In the *Gemara*, Bar Kapparah treats the word as though it were a contraction of “*to'eh atah bah* - you err in it.”⁴

The word is used most frequently as a description of the idolatrous practices of other nations.⁵ Also, a flawed offering to Hashem, one that

has a blemish prohibited in an offering, is called *to'eivah*.⁶ It also appears as a description of homosexual and transvestite behavior⁷ as well as prohibited sexual liaisons in general,⁸ a woman remarrying her first husband after a marriage to her second,⁹ even *niddah*,¹⁰ as is bringing a *korban* bought with money earned

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through prostitution.¹¹

Aside from *avodah zarah* and sexual prohibitions we find two other cases where the term *to'eivah* is used: our case of owning two sets of weights and eating meat of non-kosher species.¹²

Perhaps the common reason for labeling these activities as *to'eivah* is that they are associated with the cultures of the neighboring idolatrous peoples. This notion of it being the unacceptable behavior of another people is reinforced by its first usage

in *Chumash*. The Egyptians were unable to eat bread with the Jews “because it was a *to'eivah* to the Egyptians”.¹³ Also, we find that they could not tolerate our shepherding, “for it is a *to'eivah* of Egypt, all shepherds of flocks.”¹⁴

The *Gemara* uses the verse prohibiting eating from a non-kosher species, “*lo sochal kol to'eivah* - do not eat any *to'eivah*”: anything I set for you as a *to'eivah* is included in the prohibition against using.” Not only is the proscribed act prohibited, but using its results as well.¹⁵ Implied in this *gemara* is that *to'eivah* is created simply because Hashem declared it as such.

In contrast, Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch makes a point of commenting on our verse on the word “*Elokecha - your G-d*”.¹⁶ We found the same emphasis in Hashem’s contrast between the *to'eivah* practices of those who lived in Canaan before us and those for whom “I am Hashem your G-d.” The *pasuk* is saying that such behavior is repugnant to Hashem, to pursue it would be to forfeit the right to call Hashem one’s G-d. A person who is capable of nonchalantly owning two sets of weights has some

⁶ Ibid. 17:1

⁷ Devarim 22:5

⁸ Vayikra 18:29

⁹ Devarim 24:4

¹⁰ See Yevamos 54b

¹¹ Devarim 23:19

¹² Devarim 14:3

¹³ Bereiehis 43:32

¹⁴ Ibid 46:34; see also Shemos 8:22

¹⁵ Avodah Zara 66a

¹⁶ Devarim 25:16

¹ Ad loc

² Bava Basra 89a

³ Mitzvah 222

⁴ Nedarim 51a

⁵ Devarim 7:25; 7:26; 12:31; 13:15; 17:4; 18:9; 18:12; 20:18; 27:15

other source of values as primary in his life. In contrast to the *Gemara*, this implies that Hashem finds the practice repugnant and therefore declares it *to'eivah*.

The contrast centers around a question Plato raises in one of his dialogues. He has the neophyte Euthyphro speak of "piety" to Socrates. Socrates replies with this challenge: "Is what is pious pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it is pious?"¹⁷ As observant Jews we must ask, "Do the *mitzvos* define piety for no reason other than His choosing to command them, or did Hashem choose these particular *mitzvos* because they define piety?"

What is the source of morality? The problem is that if we say that there is no further reason beyond Hashem's choice, then we are saying Hashem arbitrarily told us to do one set of things and not another. Can value be nothing more than the product of Divine whim? Is there really no more fundamental reason why Hashem chose "Do not murder" instead of "Kill!"? On the other hand, if there is an overarching definition of

¹⁷ Euthyphro 10a-11b

good and evil to which Hashem conformed, then we have placed something "over" Him, something to which He is subject.

Something which is to'eivah therefore defies G-d's purpose in two ways. First, the one who embraces to'eivah denies His being the primary source of our values. Second, G-d's declaration is a warning to avoid that which would harm our ability to accomplish our goals as a people.

A resolution to this paradox is that Plato presents us with a false dichotomy: either there is a reason for one thing being pious and another not, or there is no reason at all. However, G-d had a purpose for creating the universe, which in turn gives a means for ranking our actions. Moral actions are those that further His purpose, immoral actions are ones that are counter to them. In this way, morality is both a product of Divine Will not imposed from without, and yet not simply capricious.

Similarly, we are now asking, is a thing a *to'eivah* because Hashem declared it as such, or is there an underlying concept of *to'eivah* that

motivates the characterization? As the Torah writes, the concept of *to'eivah* revolves around our being Hashem's Chosen People. "Therefore you shall keep My charge, to refrain from doing these *to'eivah* laws which were done before you, and do not make yourselves *tamei* through them; I am Hashem your G-d."¹⁸

At this point, our definitions of *to'eivah* converge. Yes, it is a term denoting the unacceptable elements of another culture.

With respect to the Jewish People, our accepting Hashem as our G-d defines the culture. Something which is *to'eivah* therefore defies His purpose in two ways. First, as Rav Hirsch writes on our *pasuk*, the one who embraces *to'eivah* denies His being the primary source of our values. It violates His declaration of it being *to'eivah*, and thereby our mission to be His people. Second, the relationship is reciprocal. Hashem's declaration is purposive; it is a warning to avoid that which would harm our ability to accomplish our goals as a people.

¹⁸ Vayikra 18:30

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Bakeish Shalom & Sefasai Tiftach

Last week we started looking at developing *hargashah*, a feeling of where one stands, and an internalized, heartfelt awareness of the gap between that and where one ought to be. It is through *hargashah* that one is motivated to change – certainly a timely concern as we get closer to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. But *hargashah* is even more fundamental than that. One of the

attributes by which our forefathers were great was their mastery of *hargashah*.

Chazal teach that the *avos* observed the entire Torah, even though it was not yet given.¹ Rav

¹ Yoma 28b; Bereishis Rabbah ch. 22; Bamidbar Rabbah ch. 14; Tanchuma Behar; Midrash Tehillim ch. 1.

Chaim Volozhiner explains how they were able to do so:

Not that they were commanded, and did such from the perspective of law. For if so, they could not have been relying (G-d forbid) on their knowledge and insight, when they understood according to the root of their souls what was necessary for them to do and change even the smallest detail of Hashem's mitzvos.

Yaakov our father a”h would not have married two sisters, and Amram would not have married his aunt (G-d forbid).

Rather, [they observed the Torah] from the perspective of their understanding through the purity of their minds the awesome repairs that are made by each mitzvah in all the worlds and higher and lower forces, and the great damage, destruction and ruin (G-d forbid) that will be caused in them if they are not fulfilled. ...

Therefore Yaakov our father a”h understood that according to the root of his soul he would cause graet repair in the upper forces and worlds if he would marry these two sisters, Rachel and Leah, and how these two would build the house of Israel. He planned and acted to get them to marry him. And the same idea with Amram, who married his aunt Yocheved so that Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam would come from her.²

The observance of the Torah by the generations that preceded it was not the observance of *halachah* as law. Otherwise, they could never have, on their own initiative, violated a G-d given law. Instead, through *hargashah* they were able to feel what was the appropriate action for the completion of their souls and for the supernal worlds and forces that can be moved by the actions on their souls.

As we discussed last week, the first part of *hargashah* is an awareness of where one stands. We outlined how to get started implementing the *ba'al mussar*'s central tool for this, maintaining a *cheshbon hanefesh*, an accounting of the soul, keeping track of the decisions one makes each day.³

² Nefesh haChaim sec. 1, ch. 21

³ See Bakeish Shalom, Mesukim MiDevash vol.1 no. 41, pp 2-3 <<http://www.aishdas.org/mesukim/5764/shoftim.pdf>>

The other half of *hargashah* is to become aware of the ideal, internalize it, and create a longing to reach it. One tool for accomplishing this is *hispa'alus*, literally, working on oneself. Making an emotional impression through passionate, intense and extended study, reciting “with lips aflame” as Rav Yisrael Salanter repeatedly describes it.

The Alter of Kelm explains *hispa'alus* as a progression. The process begins with *hisbonenus*, intense and single-minded

Hispa'alus is not only used for internalizing an ideal for one's middos but also in the middah of ahavas Hashem, loving G-d and cleaving to Him, through davening behispa'alus.

concentration on a single *mussar* idea from a book, a single sentence or paragraph. The idea is not to cover ground but to internalize just one concept. This is a critical point in relating to *mussar* texts. If one approaches the book as one would any other Torah study, the book would not manage to inspire actual change. For that matter, many classical texts seem too full of self-evident truisms to hold one's interest if studied in that manner. The Ramchal overstates this point in his introduction to *Mesilas Yesharim*, where he tells you that the book will not contain anything you do not already know.

From this (1) intellectual investment one gets (2) emotionally engaged. Let the emotion find expression by reciting the idea out loud and with a melody. Eventually the mental concentration and emotion combine and (3) the student experiences an epiphany, suddenly realizing a new layer of meaning in the idea. Follow through with that *chiddush* (novellum), deepening it into the full profundity of Torah, into

one's own nature, and how they interrelate.

Ideally, such *hispa'alus* should be pursued for around 20 to 30 minutes. Most people are incapable of maintaining attention exclusively on one single subject for that long. So, begin with five minutes and add to the time as you feel comfortable. When distracted by an extraneous thought, don't actively fight it – the process of fighting it is itself extraneous to the topic of *hispa'alus*. Simply return to the topic and continue.

Cheshbon hanefesh and *hispa'alus* can work well together. Generally, one follows a plan in which one is working on a number of *middos*, but with a particular focus on one. This then becomes the central theme in one's *cheshbon* during that period, and the topic of one's *hispa'alus*.

In an essay titled “How to Study a Mussar Thought: *Hisbonenus* in the First Lines of ‘Mesilas Yesharim,’ ” Rav Dessler teaches the kind of analysis produced by *hispa'alus* by example.⁴ The essay is divided into sections, each one developing a theme and concluding a phrase from *Mesilas Yesharim* in sequence. After three pages, the essay does not cover the entire first sentence! For example, the opening phrase is “*Yesod hachassidus, veshoresh ha'avodah hatemimah* – The foundation of piety, and the root of pure worship...” The student asks, “Why is the first called a foundation, but the second, a root? How does the metaphor of a foundation differ from that of a root? Why is piety the one that has a foundation, but worship, a root?” And then, once the meaning inherent in every word-choice and the implication of the text have been extracted, he must ask, “How does this speak to me? How do I implement this idea in my life?”

⁴ Michtav Me'Eliyahu vol. I, pp. 77-80

Hispa'alus plays another role in the *mussar* tradition. It is not only used for internalizing an ideal for one's middos but also in the *middah* of *ahavas Hashem*, loving G-d and cleaving to Him, through davening *behispa'alus*.

The verb form of *tefillah* is "*hispallel*", in a reflexive conjugation. Something one does to oneself. The art of getting close to Hashem through *tefillah* does not involve pleading G-d into doing something He would not otherwise do. Of course G-d will do what is appropriate either way. It is not to call G-d down but to raise ourselves up to Him. Achieving closeness requires change on our part to be close to him. *Hispa'alus* is therefore a productive mode of *kavanah*, of concentration and intent in *tefillah*.

Chazal tell us that the *Chassidim HaRishonim*, a Second Temple period movement that preceded the Pharisees and the *Tannaim*, required an hour to prepare for each prayer, an hour to pray, and an hour after prayers. The *Shulchan Aruch* uses the term *hisbodedus*, to make oneself

alone, to describe their prayer.⁵ Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan notes the speed of prayer implied. We do not know the length of their text for *Shemoneh Esrei*. However, using an estimate of roughly 500 words, it translates to roughly seven seconds per word.⁶ The *gemara* rules that if one cannot maintain *kavanah* for the entire *Shemoneh Esrei*, one should at least maintain *kavanah* for the first *berachah*. Contemplating a single train of thought for that long and at that pace, while praying "with lips aflame" in passion, matches our description of *hispa'alus*.

Someone who is trying to experience G-d's presence in creation could follow a Rav Chaim Volozhiner inspired *kavanah*. "*Barukh atah*

The effect of hispa'alus is slow but cumulative. Each moment of emotional impact leaves its mark.

Hashem" becomes "*Baruch*, a term of increase: You are the Source. You, who can be addressed as 'You' because You are so great – the

⁵ Orach Chaim 98:1

⁶ The Aryeh Kaplan Reader, pg. 191

Havayah, above time, transcendent – as to have the wherewithal to have a relationship with each of your creatures. You, the Source, cause their existence." And so on, watching that thought develop through the words of the *berachah*.

Another time, when the same person is trying to commit himself to worship Hashem, he might take a more Hirschian approach. "I hereby dedicate myself to increase (*baruch*) your influence in this world, Hashem, cause of existence, Who created us as beings who can freely choose to commit to that purpose. This is your gift, your mercy to us." Another entire world of concepts in the same words we recite each day.

It would take an hour before the *Chassidim HaRishonim* were able to return to other activities. When conducted in this manner, the attitudes and feelings of one's *tefillah* linger.

The effect of *hispa'alus* is slow but cumulative. Each moment of emotional impact leaves its mark. Committing to *hispa'alus* now, during *Elul*, can change our *middos* and our *tefillos* so that next year we will not be standing where we stand today.

Editor: Gil Student
Associate Editor: Micha Berger

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