

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

Our parsha takes us through a bewildering transition. Up until now, the book of Shemot has carried us along with the sweep and drama of the narrative: the Israelites' enslavement, their hope for freedom, the plagues, Pharaoh's obstinacy, their escape into the desert, the crossing of the Red Sea, the journey to Mount Sinai and the great covenant with God.

Suddenly, we now find ourselves faced with a different kind of literature altogether: a law code covering a bewildering variety of topics, from responsibility for damages to protection of property, to laws of justice, to Shabbat and the festivals. Why here? Why not continue the story, leading up to the next great drama, the sin of the Golden Calf? Why interrupt the flow? And what does this have to do with leadership?

The answer is this: great leaders, be they CEOs or simply parents, have the ability to connect a large vision with highly specific details. Without the vision, the details are merely tiresome. There is a well-known story of three workers who are employed cutting blocks of stone. When asked what they are doing, one says, "Cutting stone," the second says, "Earning a living," the third says, "Building a palace." Those who have the larger picture take more pride in their labour, and work harder and better. Great leaders communicate a vision.

But they are also meticulous, even perfectionists, when it comes to the details. Thomas Edison famously said, "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration." It is attention to detail that separates the great artists, poets, composers, filmmakers, politicians and heads of corporations from the merely average. Anyone who has read Walter Isaacson's biography of the late Steve Jobs knows that he had an attention to detail bordering on the obsessive. He insisted, for example, that all Apple stores should have glass staircases. When he was told that there was no glass strong enough, he insisted that

it be invented, which is what happened (he held the patent).

The genius of the Torah was to apply this principle to society as a whole. The Israelites had come through a transformative series of events. Moses knew there had been nothing like it before. He also knew, from God, that none of it was accidental or incidental. The Israelites had experienced slavery to make them cherish freedom. They had suffered, so that they would know what it feels like to be on the wrong side of tyrannical power. At Mount Sinai, God, through Moses, had given them a mission statement: to become "a Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation," under the sovereignty of God alone. They were to create a society built on principles of justice, human dignity and respect for life.

But neither historical events nor abstract ideals -- not even the broad principles of the Ten Commandments -- are sufficient to sustain a society in the long run. Hence the remarkable project of the Torah: to translate historical experience into detailed legislation, so that the Israelites would live what they had learned on a daily basis, weaving it into the very texture of their social life. In the parsha of Mishpatim, vision becomes detail, and narrative becomes law.

So, for example: "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything" (Ex. 21:2-3). At a stroke, in this law, slavery is transformed from a condition of birth to a temporary circumstance -- from who you are to what, for the time being, you do. Slavery, the bitter experience of the Israelites in Egypt, could not be abolished overnight. It was not abolished even in the United States until the 1860s, and even then, not without a devastating civil war. But this opening law of our parsha is the start of that long journey.

Likewise the law that "Anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result." (Ex. 21:20) A slave is not mere property. They each have a right to life.

Similarly the law of Shabbat that states: "Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and so that the slave born in your household and the foreigner living among you may be refreshed." (Ex. 23:12) One day in seven slaves were to breathe the air of freedom. All three laws prepared the way for the abolition of

slavery, even though it would take more than three thousand years.

There are two laws that have to do with the Israelites' experience of being an oppressed minority: "Do not mistreat or oppress a stranger, for you were strangers in Egypt." (Ex. 22:21) and "Do not oppress a stranger; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt. (Ex. 23:9)

And there are laws that evoke other aspects of the people's experience in Egypt, such as, "Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry" (Ex. 22:21-22). This recalls the episode at the beginning of the Exodus, "The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning, and He remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them." (Ex. 2:23-25)

In a famous article written in the 1980s, Yale law professor Robert Cover wrote about "Nomos and Narrative." By this he meant that beneath the laws of any given society is a nomos, that is, a vision of an ideal social order that the law is intended to create. And behind every nomos is a narrative, that is, a story about why the shapers and visionaries of that society or group came to have that specific vision of the ideal order they sought to build.

Cover's examples are largely taken from the Torah, and the truth is that his analysis sounds less like a description of law as such than a description of that unique phenomenon we know as Torah. The word "Torah" is untranslatable because it means several different things that only appear together in the book that bears that name.

Torah means "law." But it also means "teaching, instruction, guidance," or more generally, "direction". It is also the generic name for the five books, from Genesis to Deuteronomy, that comprise both narrative and law.

In general, law and narrative are two distinct literary genres that have very little overlap. Most books of law do not contain narratives, and most narratives do not contain law. Besides which, as Cover himself notes, even if people in Britain or America today know the history behind a given law, there is no canonical text that brings the two together. In any case in most societies there are many different ways of telling the story. Besides which, most laws are enacted without a statement of why they came to be, what they were intended to achieve, and what historical experience led to their enactment.

So the Torah is a unique combination of nomos and narrative, history and law, the formative experiences of a nation and the way that nation sought to live its collective life so as never to forget the lessons

it learned along the way. It brings together vision and detail in a way that has never been surpassed.

That is how we must lead if we want people to come with us, giving of their best. There must be a vision to inspire us, telling us why we should do what we are asked to do. There must be a narrative: this is what happened, this is who we are and this is why the vision is so important to us. Then there must be the law, the code, the fastidious attention to detail, that allow us to translate vision into reality and turn the pain of the past into the blessings of the future. That extraordinary combination, to be found in almost no other law code, is what gives Torah its enduring power. It is a model for all who seek to lead people to greatness. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**W**hen [Hebrew: 'im'] you lend money to My people, to the poor person with you, you shall not behave toward him as a lender; you shall not impose interest upon him." (Ex. 22:24) How can we ensure that Jewish ideals—such as protecting the downtrodden and most vulnerable people in our society—emerge from the abstract and find expression in our daily lives? Our weekly portion, Mishpatim, in addressing the issue of lending, provides an insight to this question, and sheds light on the core Biblical values of compassion and empathy.

The verse cited above raises several questions. First, in stating the prohibition on charging interest, why does the Torah employ a word—im—that usually means if? Our Sages note that the use of "im" in this verse is one of just three instances in the entire Torah in which the word means when instead of if [Midrash Tanhuma]. What is the significance of this exceptional usage of the word?

Moreover, why does the verse seem to repeat itself ("to My people, to the poor person with you")? Seemingly, just one of these phrases would have been sufficient to teach the lesson.

Additionally, "you shall not behave toward him as a lender," says the Torah. Why is this so? Our Sages teach that not only is it forbidden for the creditor to remind the debtor of the loan, but that the creditor must go out of his way not to cause the debtor embarrassment [ibid.]. If, for example, the creditor sees the debtor walking towards him, it is incumbent upon the creditor to change direction. Why not remind the debtor that the loan must be repaid? After all, the debtor took money from the creditor, did he not?

Finally, why is there a specific prohibition against charging interest at all? With respect to the reason for the prohibition against interest, Maimonides

goes so far as to codify: “Anyone who writes a contract with an interest charge is writing and causing witnesses to testify that he denies the Lord God of Israel...and is denying the exodus from Egypt.” [Laws of Lenders and Borrowers, 4:7] Why the hyperbole? After all, there is no prohibition against charging rent for the use of my house! Why should there be a prohibition against charging rent for the use of my excess funds?

A key lesson from our Sages provides the philosophical underpinnings of the answers to these questions. They teach that a person must view himself as if he were the poor person in need of support. We easily deceive ourselves that we are immune from the fate of poverty, a regrettable attitude that can harden us to the real needs of those seeking assistance.

I must look at the indigent as if he were I, with the thought that I, but for the grace of God, could be he.

Rabbi Hayyim ibn Attar, in a brilliant illumination, beautifully explains this passage in his commentary, *Ohr HaHayyim*, which enables us to understand this difficult character change. In an ideal world, he teaches, there ought to be no rich and no poor, no lenders and no borrowers; everyone should receive from the Almighty exactly what they require to live.

But, in His infinite wisdom, this is not the manner in which the Lord created the world. He provides certain individuals with excess funds, expecting them to help those who have insufficient funds, appointing them His “cashiers” or “ATMs”, or agents in the world. Hence, we must read the verse as, “If you have extra funds to lend to my nation—which should have gone to the poor person, but are now with you through G-d’s largesse—therefore, you were merely given the poor person’s money in trust, and those extra funds that are you ‘lending him’ actually belong to him.”

If you understand this fundamental axiom—that the rich person is actually holding the poor person’s money in trust as an agent of the Divine—then everything becomes clear. Certainly, the lender may not act as a creditor, because she is only giving the poor man what is in actuality his! And, of course, one dare not charge interest, because the money you lent out was never yours in the first place.

This is the message of the exodus from Egypt, the seminal historic event that formed and hopefully still informs us as a people: no individual ought ever be owned by or even indebted to another individual. We are all owned by and must be indebted only to God.

This essential truth is the foundation of our traditional legal system, which is uniquely just and equitable: it is especially considerate of the needs of the downtrodden and enslaved, the poor and the infirm, the orphan and the widow, the stranger and the convert, the “chained wife” and the indigent forced to sell their land. From this perspective, not only must we

submit to Jewish law, but it is crucial that our judges be certain that Jewish law remains true to its ethical foundations. ©2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

After the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai, this is followed with a long and detailed list of instructions, commandments, and laws. The mere existence of such a list presupposes the willingness of the population to follow these laws and instructions.

As we are all aware, because of the ongoing incidents that mark our attempt to deal with the current corona virus crisis, that there has to be an internal discipline amongst the people to have them obey any set of laws, no matter how wise and beneficial they may be, in order for the rule of law to be effective.

It has been estimated that over two-thirds of the laws passed by the Israeli Knesset over the past 72 years have never been enforced and are known, if at all, to exist only in the breach. There are not enough police in the world to enforce all the laws that every society has promulgated and advanced. Even in the most rigorous of dictatorships and the most controlled of societies, black markets flourish, crime is rampant and, in fact, the tighter the controls, the more ingenious people become in their methodology of defying and circumventing those laws they feel unfair or unnecessary.

The most disciplined of societies such as Japan, Switzerland, or perhaps even Germany are of that nature simply because of their social compact one with another. The brute force of police may achieve the appearance of obedience to the law and the government but eventually all of history teaches us that subsystems collapse simply because of the weight of the necessary enforcement involved.

The Torah also presupposes that there be a legal system and that judges and police are necessary adjuncts to any civilized society. However, the Torah also realizes that it is only by voluntary acceptance of discipline and obedience to laws, the concern for the public and its welfare, the understanding that one is responsible for the Jewish people as a whole and to the God of Israel for one’s actions, to make the system of laws that we read about in this week’s portion of the Torah workable, acceptable and, in fact, eternal.

If the people are unwilling to follow the rules, there are not enough policeman in the world that will make them, no matter how severe the penalty may be for disobedience and violations of the law.

The Torah records for us once again the response of the Jewish people when offered the Torah: “We will do and obey and then we will listen and understand.” Without that stated pledge to voluntarily

observe the laws and precepts given them at Mount Sinai, there is no method available to human societies to enforce such a rigorous social and spiritual discipline to such a large population of individuals.

It is hoped that through study and education this voluntary acceptance, of the laws of the Torah, that has been hallowed by millennia of tradition and observance, will continue to govern Jewish society and its value system and behavior. ©2021 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

There are several terms in the Torah that have no suitable English equivalent. They should not be translated. Leaving them in the original Hebrew allows the reader to understand that a more detailed analysis of the word is necessary.

An example would be the term *eved* as *eved ivri* found in our portion. In many texts it is defined as slave. But the concept of slavery as understood in contemporary times is foreign to Jewish thought.

What then does *eved ivri*, commonly translated as Hebrew slave, really mean? According to the Mechilta, *eved ivri* deals with a Jew who has stolen but is unable to repay. (Exodus 21:2-6) Rather than thrown into jail, the Torah orders that the petty thief be brought into the life of a family as we might treat a refractory child. (Samson Raphael Hirsch)

A cursory glimpse of the way an *eved ivri* is treated teaches much about the biblical system of criminal justice.

- When an *eved ivri* is ordered by the court to be brought into a Jewish home, he must be provided for with full dignity
- The tasks performed by the *eved ivri* must be in consonance with his normal activities. He must work in his usual occupation.
- The family of the *eved ivri* must also be supported.

Indeed, the Torah stresses to the *eved ivri* the importance of returning to normative society by encouraging him to leave after six years. If he chooses to remain, his ear is pieced near a door to drive home the point that he has not taken to heart the important concept of living in freedom, as symbolized by the door, the passageway to open streets.

Unlike the contemporary system which often fails to rehabilitate the criminal, the Torah insists on bringing the petty thief into a home life where appropriate values are taught in order to mainstream the person who has gone astray.

Far from slavery, *eved ivri* speaks nobly about the Torah's belief in the power of individuals to

transform themselves. And, it presents an ideal that society today is far from realizing – the responsibility of families to take in the *eved ivri* with dignity in order to help their rehabilitation. ©2021 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

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Fire

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

"When a fire is started and spreads . . . the one who started the fire must make restitution" (*Shemot* 22:5). A number of scenarios can result in fire causing damage. In the three cases discussed below, the person lighting the fire or fanning the flame is responsible for the damage done.

1. A person lights a fire on his own property, and it spreads beyond the fence enclosing his property and damages his neighbor's property. The fence could not have been expected to stop the fire.

2. A person lights a fire on his own property and there is a fence which should have been able to stop the fire, but unfortunately did not.

3. A fire was already burning on a neighbor's property. Someone fanned the flames and the fire spread, ultimately destroying the neighbor's property.

Rav Yochanan and Resh Lakish disagree on the reason a person is liable if he starts a fire which causes damage.

Rav Yochanan states that he is liable because "his fire is like his arrows" (*isho mishum chitzav*). Someone who shoots an arrow is accountable for any damage the arrow does. Similarly, a person who starts a fire is accountable for any damage his fire causes. If this is correct, though, in Case 2 the person should be exempt. The fact that the fence should have stopped the spread of the fire should be the equivalent of his arrows having come to rest (*kalu lo chitzav*), at which point he is exempt from damages.

Resh Lakish disagrees. He maintains that fire cannot be compared to an arrow, because fire can spread on its own. Rather, the reason the fire-setter is liable is that just as a person is responsible for damage done by something he owns (like his ox), so too he is responsible for damage done by a fire he set. In other words, "his fire is like his property" (*isho mishum mammono*). If this is correct, though, then in Case 3 the person should be exempt since he did not set the fire. We can resolve this problem if we assume that it is the additional fire (which he caused by fanning the flames) which is considered his property that caused damage.

This disagreement is not absolute. For in some instances, Rav Yochanan agrees that one can become liable because the fire is deemed his property. For example, in Case 2, although *isho mishum chitzav*

might not apply, the person is still responsible because *isho mishum mammono* applies.

If this is so, would Rav Yochanan assert that a person is liable if he fanned the flames of someone else's fire, which then spread beyond a fence that should have been able to stop it? Commentators disagree. Some say that if neither *mammono* nor *chitzav* can apply, Rav Yochanan would exempt the person from liability. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"You shall not pain any widow or orphan." (Shmos 18:6) In the midst of a list of one-line commandments, this one appears, looking much the same. However, instead of just telling us not to pain the widow or orphan, as it previously said, "no witch shall live" or "whoever cohabits with an animal shall be put to death," the Torah goes on to explain the ramifications of the act. If we pain the widow or orphan, they will cry out to Hashem. When they do, He will listen. When He listens, His wrath will burn. When His wrath burns, He will kill the perpetrators and their wives and children will become widows and orphans.

It is measure for measure. This fellow oppressed someone who had no protection, so he will be unable to protect his own family. That's pretty heavy. But of course, it's pretty low to oppress a widow, right? In truth, the prohibition of painning someone is not limited to a widow or orphan. Rather, as Rashi explains, it applies to any person we pain.

The reason these people are mentioned is because they are the people who are commonly picked on as they are weaker and easier to take advantage of. However, even if the widow is wealthy and not at such risk of being harmed, since she has no husband, she feels unprotected and may be prone to cry, thus arousing Hashem's wrath.

The Chizkuni adds another dimension which is important for us to hear. He says that the punishment is written in the plural whereas most of the other laws are written in singular. That's because those who witness these attacks and remain silent are just as culpable. It is therefore as if everyone was guilty and everyone will have to pay the price.

Let's recap: If you make someone cry, or you take advantage of their weakness, Hashem considers that a capital offense. Even if you think the person is overreacting or shouldn't be upset about what you said or did, and they are just extra sensitive like the widow or orphan, you will feel Hashem's wrath.

What does that tell us about Hashem? That He loves all His children and expects us to do the same, or at least respect them. He desires that we be sensitive to others and try to see things from their perspective so we don't even pain them accidentally. He wants us to

be upset when someone else pains them, and find a way to protest, while not painning or embarrassing the oppressor either.

The only way to do this is to foster love and respect for all people within our hearts and develop sensitivities to them. Then, Hashem will also respond in kind and shower us with the love and compassion we so desire.

The Gemara in Kesubos (62b) tells the story of R' Rechumi who would study Torah in the Bais Midrash of Rava in Mechuza, far from where he lived. He spent long periods of time there, and would commonly come home the day before Yom Kippur.

One year, he was engrossed in his studies and lost track of the time. He did not go home. His wife was there waiting for him, scanning the horizon, and saying, "He'll arrive any minute, he'll be here any minute." Finally, she was so distraught that tears fell from her eyes. At that moment, the roof R' Rechumi was sitting on collapsed and he fell to his death.

Because he was not sensitive enough to her pain, he was punished, though she also suffered from the results of his punishment. Life is a balance. We must be thoughtful and careful not to hurt others, yet make the effort not to feel hurt ourselves and effect retribution. One way to resist hurt is to realize that Hashem is our ultimate Protector, so how can anyone can take advantage of us? ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and *Migdal Ohr*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

A Sign of Good and Bad

The Torah tells us, "Behold, I send a mal'ach, messenger (angel), before you to guard you on the way, and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Beware of him and obey his voice, allow no bitterness against him to arise, for he cannot pardon your disobedience for My Name is in him. But only you will surely listen to his voice (obey him) and do all that I will speak and I will be an enemy to your enemies and persecute those who persecute you. When my Messenger (angel) goes before you and will have brought you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I shall have destroyed them separately. Do not bow down to their gods nor serve them nor do anything according to their way (of serving their gods), but rather you will utterly tear down their gods and completely break up their memorial stones. And you will serve Hashem your Elokim then will He bless your bread and your water and I will remove illness from your midst."

You may have noticed that there are two translations for the word mal'ach, messenger or angel. This difference in translation stems from a basic argument about the nature of a mal'ach. Various Rabbis do not wish to accept a mal'ach as a supernatural being that was created by Hashem as His

messengers on earth, each assigned with a specific task to perform that was a message from Hashem. They believe a mal'ach is a human messenger who may or may not know that he is carrying out an assignment from Hashem. Rashi views this mal'ach as a supernatural being who is not only aware of his task but is aware that Hashem is directing him. The Ramban understands that there are actual angels such as Gabriel, who are given a specific task, but Hashem may use a human who is aware that he is the messenger such as Moshe as we see here. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch tells us that "the term mal'ach does not necessarily imply an individual, a human or superhuman creature, but may also be used for any contrivance which Hashem arranges for some special purpose. One could have been able to take it here to mean 'angel' or in the general meaning 'Fate, Providence', literally 'something sent'." He explains that Hashem did not give His instructions to the B'nei Yisrael through a supernatural "angel" but through Moshe. The term mal'ach describes Moshe's actions: "and He sent a 'mal'ach' and took us out from the land of Egypt."

Rashi gives us another explanation for the term "mal'ach." We are aware of the sin of the Golden Calf, which occurs later in the Torah. Rashi informs us that this sin is foreshadowed here since the result of that sin was that Hashem told Moshe that He would not accompany the B'nei Yisrael in the desert any longer. Instead, Hashem would send a mal'ach to go before the people. The implication is that either this is a hint of that future occurrence or this conversation occurs much later and that this entire statement occurs after the Golden Calf. The other possibility is that here we are not talking about an angel but instead about Moshe, and Moshe was to inform the people that they should not rebel against his leadership in the desert because he was sent by Hashem for this task. If this section truly occurs later, we need to understand why the people reacted to Hashem's words here differently than after the same message at the Golden Calf.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin points out that there is no negative reaction recorded here, but the people do cry and are inconsolable after the decree at the Golden Calf. Before the Golden Calf, the people were raised to such a high level that the idea that they could sin against Hashem was foreign to them. They did not see the "mal'ach" at this time as a punishment, for they had not sinned. After the Golden Calf the people cried, not because they were being punished but because they were so embarrassed. It is clear that the first mention of an angel (prior to the Golden Calf) was seen as a sign that Hashem was together with the people. The second mention of an angel (after the Golden Calf) was seen as a sign that Hashem had left the people and they no longer would have a direct connection with Him. They began to believe that Hashem would not

fulfill His promise to their forefathers because they had sinned.

Hirsch explains that the promise to the B'nei Yisrael was not dependent on their fulfilling of any mitzvah prior to receiving it, but did come with several conditions: (1) the land was given to the people exclusive of "their own valor, but that it was entrusted to them by Hashem, solely and only as a result of their obediently placing themselves under the direction of the Divine Will;" (2) obedience to the Torah would be the only means by which the people would retain the land; (3) the people would need to avoid contact with the current inhabitants of the land who would be gradually evacuated so that the B'nei Yisrael would not become influenced by their gods and their morals; and (4) in the future, no heathen or erroneous ideas would be tolerated on this Holy Land.

Our generation has been fortunate to see the return of so many Jews to the land which Hashem has promised us. What many of our fellow Jews do not seem to understand is that the promise can always be taken away from this generation should it prove unworthy. What Hashem does not wish, is that a majority of the people do not deal positively with the ideas of morality, proper dealings with one's fellowman, or concern for his fellow Jews. Unity may be the most important issue, as it requires tolerance and understanding and empathy, qualities which are obvious in Hashem's actions.

Still there is the question of Hashem's presence among His people today. Were you to ask whether the United Nations today would have granted statehood to Israel, the answer would most definitely be no. Only the precise circumstances of the Holocaust, the rise of Russia in the Middle East, and the impatience of Great Britain to be done with the entire area could have brought about the decisive vote for Israel. The many miracles which have enabled Israel to remain secure can only have been from Hashem. May we learn to recognize that the mal'ach which we see is a sign of Hashem's active role within His people. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Parshas Sh'kalim, deals with the collection of funds for the Bais Hamikdash. In the days prior to King Yehoash, the Bais Hamikdash was seriously neglected and much repair work was required to restore it to its original splendor. After the kohanim's unsuccessful attempt to collect the necessary funds, the righteous King Yehoash spearheaded the collection and an overwhelming response occurred.

The reason for this neglect is explained in Divrei Hayomim (2:23) wherein it blames the wicked Queen Atalya and her wicked sons for the deteriorated

condition of the Bais Hamikdash. The royal family had seriously mistreated the holiest structure on Earth and roamed freely inside it, causing much damage to its walls and interior structure. Actually, money was constantly donated to repair the Bais Hamikdash but these funds were repeatedly misappropriated by Atalya. Instead of being used for the Bais Hamikdash they were channeled to further practices of idolatry. Now that the pious Yehoash came to power idolatry was removed from the royal family and the funds were finally applied to their intended usage. After so many years of neglect the Bais Hamikdash was finally restored to its previous glory.

The haftorah of Parshas Sh'kalim echoes the earlier experiences of the Jewish people read in the Torah portion this week. During their exodus from Egypt Hashem rewarded the Jewish people with an abundance of wealth from the Egyptian nation. Instead of applying this towards the service of Hashem the Jewish people donated their precious gold ornaments to produce the Golden Calf. After Hashem's severe response the Jews recognized their error and returned wholeheartedly to Hashem. They were given the opportunity to rectify their grave sin and were invited to participate in the building of a Mishkan. This time they utilized their money for proper purposes and generously donated their funds towards the construction of a magnificent sanctuary. Hashem accepted their teshuvah and consented to rest His divine presence amongst the Jewish people in this glorious edifice.

The reading of Parshas Sh'kalim and its accompanying haftorah serves as a most appropriate introduction to the month of Adar. As we read in Megillas Esther (3:9), the wicked Haman attempted to purchase the Jews from the king with an impressive ten thousand silver blocks. He intended to use his power of wealth to influence the king to grant permission to destroy the entire Jewish nation. However, as the Gemara in Megilla (13b) teaches us, Haman's efforts were preempted by the donations of the Jewish people to the Bais Hamikdash. Interestingly, this exact sum of ten thousand silver blocks was annually donated by the Jewish people for the sake of the sacrifices in the Bais Hamikdash. Hashem said, "Let the Jewish nation's ten thousand abort Haman's influential process of his ten thousand." The Jewish people's annual donation demonstrated that they were not influenced by the power of money. They properly allocated their funds to the most worthy of causes and annually gave ten thousand blocks of silver for the sake of Hashem and His Bais Hamikdash. Therefore, Haman's financial influence, his ten thousand silver blocks had no influence over the Jewish people. They could not be improperly influenced by money and money could therefore never serve to produce an improper influence over them. Eventually, the king would and did see

through Haman's plot and his money and influence were to no avail.

It is with this lesson in mind that we read Parshas Sh'kalim and usher in the month of Adar. Parshas Sh'kalim reminds us of the great significance of money when allocated in the proper ways. Through properly directed donations, the beautiful edifice of the Bais Hamikdash was restored to its glory. Through such donations the Jewish people received atonement for the gravest of their sins. And through these charitable donations we merited the miracle of Purim and learned that even our most powerful of enemies replete with significant funds had no influence over us.

This timely insight sheds a colorful light on the unique mitzvos of Purim. Unlike any other holiday, Purim focuses on the Jewish nation's generosity to give and share its financial resources. The holiday of Purim asks of us to part with our money for numerous causes, such as Machtzis Hashekel, Matanos L'evyonim and Mishloach Manos. Through these, we demonstrate our readiness to allocate our funds to the proper causes. We display this supreme quality of generosity as the hallmark of the Jewish people and remind ourselves that in this merit we were privileged to experience the miracle of Purim. Therefore every Purim we demonstrate this Jewish quality of generosity and put our money to the proper usage. We guarantee through this that no foreign power will ever affect us through its financial influence and we remind ourselves that in this merit of generosity we will eventually witness the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash and the return of the divine presence to Israel. ©2021 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Behold I am sending a messenger before you" (Sh'mos 23:20). Rashi explains this "messenger" to be the angel who would have been sent to lead the nation after the sin of the golden calf had Moshe not pleaded with G-d that He should still lead the nation, not an angel (Sh'mos 33:15-16 and 34:9). This angel was eventually sent to lead the nation after Yehoshua took over as leader (see Ramban on 33:21).

This explanation raises several issues, including why G-d would mention the angel He wanted to send after they sinned if at this point they hadn't sinned yet, and why Moshe didn't protest (this first time) when he was told that G-d didn't plan on leading the nation Himself.

Another issue it raises is based on the borders that G-d set here for the Land of Israel, "from the Sea of Reeds until the Sea of the P'lishtim and from the desert until the river" (Sh'mos 23:31). One of these boundaries is the Sea of Reeds (Yam Suf, or Red Sea), the sea that, immediately after the exodus from Egypt, G-d had

miraculously split in order to allow the nation to cross before drowning their former oppressors in it. As this sea surrounds the Sinai Peninsula on three sides, it was the western part that they crossed (into the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt), and the eastern part that (according to most) is referred to here as the eastern border of Israel. However, when the boundaries are described prior to the nation entering the land (Bamidbar 34:3), the southeastern corner is the bottom of the Dead Sea, which is much further north than Etzyon Gever (modern day Eilat), by the Gulf of Aqaba (the northeastern leg of the Red Sea). Why is the border here given as the Sea of Reeds rather than the Dead Sea? Besides, the border never actually reached that far south. Even at Israel's height (during the reign of King Solomon), the nation that lived by Etzyon Gever feared the Kingdom of Israel, and therefore sent it gifts, as well as following whatever it was asked or told to do (see M'lachim I 8:26-28), but was not actually part of the Land of Israel.

It would also be difficult to ascribe this boundary to any time other than Moshe's, as the verses immediately prior to this are describing the initial conquest of the land. We are even told that they didn't conquer it in its entirety because it was too vast for the size of the nation at the time, with these borders being given in order to show just how vast the Land of Israel was (see Ibn Ezra and Malbim). If the nation never conquered enough land to make the Yam Suf its boundary, why is it mentioned here with the other boundaries?

Many commentaries (i.e. Ibn Ezra, Ralbag, Radak, Metzudas Dovid and Rashi) equate the boundaries listed here with those in Tehillim 72:8 ("and he had dominion from sea to sea and from the river to the edge of land") and/or to Zecharya 9:11 ("and he ruled from sea to sea and from the river to the edge of land"). The Ibn Ezra, Radak and Metzudas Dovid say the former can apply either to King Solomon (which is why he only "has dominion" but doesn't "rule") or to Moshiach, while the latter applies to Moshiach. The question is therefore not why the Yam Suf is given as a boundary at all, but why is it given as a boundary in our Parasha, speaking to the nation that had just come out of Egypt and would (have) shortly start(ed) conquering the land. Similarly, the "river" mentioned as the fourth boundary is the Euphrates, which also wasn't conquered during the initial conquest and usually refers to what the boundaries will eventually be. Why were two boundaries mentioned here that were not relevant to Moshe or Yehoshua?

Rabbeinu Avraham ben HaRambam says that the boundaries given here are those implied in the words "And when G-d will widen your boundaries as he swore to your fathers, and He gives you all of the land that He spoke of giving your fathers" (D'varim 19:8; the second "fathers" referred to here might be the

generation that came out of Egypt, while the first "fathers" refers to the Patriarchs). This is how Midrash Lekach Tov and Midrash Aggadah explain the boundaries given in our Parasha, as does the Mechilta (Bo 12). Why were these future boundaries given here? It would seem that since the sin of the golden calf (and of the spies) hadn't occurred yet, these would have actually been the borders had they entered now; it was only after they sinned that the borders were scaled back, to be expanded in the distant future.

Which brings us to the additional issue with Rashi's explanation of the "angel" G-d referred to; How could G-d tell them how the nation will be led after they sin (i.e. by an angel) if just a few verses later He sets the boundaries of the land they will be led to based on them not sinning? Was G-d telling the nation what things will be like because they are going to sin, or how they would have been if they didn't?

Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 2:34), as well as Ralbag, Rosh, Bechor Shor and Midrash HaGadol (in our Parasha), understand the "messenger" G-d will send to lead the nation to the Promised Land to be a prophet (i.e. Moshe and then Yehoshua). Vayikra Rabbah (1:1) quotes numerous verses where a prophet is referred to as G-d's "messenger." Sh'mos Rabbah (32:2) says that G-d's was presenting the nation with a choice; "if you merit it, I (G-d) Myself will lead you," but if not, "I will give you over to a messenger." It can therefore be suggested that the word "messenger" in our verse has a dual meaning (see page 5 of www.aishdas.org/ta/5764/mishpatim.pdf for another example of a possible dual meaning in our Parasha); if you don't sin, the "messenger" referred to will mean a prophet (Moshe, who will take directions directly from G-d), but if you do sin, it will mean an angel (placing an additional layer between G-d and the nation). Alternatively, it could refer to an angel who is a messenger (such as Micha'el) or the angel who speaks directly for G-d ("Matatron," see Rambam on Sh'mos 12:12 and 23:21), depending on whether or not we sin. Either way, G-d was telling them that there is more than one possibility as to how the nation will be led, depending on their behavior.

After laying out all of the laws in Parashas Mishpatim, G-d told the nation that the way He will relate to them depends on how they will relate to Him; it could be a more direct relationship or a less direct relationship. If they fulfill the mitzvos properly, it will be a more direct relationship, including inheriting a larger amount of land (with wider boundaries). Moshe didn't protest (yet) because G-d wasn't saying that He will definitely send an angel instead of Him, but that it was a possibility. Unfortunately, that possibility became a reality, at which point Moshe did protest.

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