

THE SEVEN BOOKS OF MOSES

by Shlomo Katz

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring
Edited by Shlomo Katz

Behaaloscha

Volume XII, Number 33
3 Tamuz 5758
June 27, 1998.

Today's Learning
Parah 11:1-2
Kitzur 153:15-154:3
Eruvin 40
Yerushalmi Shabbat 62

R' Gedaliah Schorr z"l taught that in this week's parashah, Bnei Yisrael enter a transitional period - the beginning of the end of Moshe's reign. He explained as follows:

According to one opinion in the gemara, there are not five books of the Torah, but seven. The Book of Bemidbar is actually three books, of which the end of one, all of the second, and the beginning of the third are found in our parashah. (According to this view, verses 10:35-36 are a free-standing book.)

At the end of the "first" book, we read that Bnei Yisrael traveled a distance of three days from Har Sinai. Rashi writes that they made this trip in only one day because Hashem was "in a hurry" to take His people into Eretz Yisrael.

Indeed, had Bnei Yisrael loyally followed Moshe, they would have entered the Land at that time and

never been exiled. However, this did not happen. Instead, the "third" book opens by informing us that Bnei Yisrael were complaining about an unspecified subject. What was their complaint?

Chassidic works explain that Bnei Yisrael were unsure whether the miracle of traveling three-days' distance in one day was good or not. The root of this uncertainty, R' Schorr explains, was the fact that Bnei Yisrael had made the golden calf at Har Sinai, thus distancing themselves from Hashem and also from Moshe (who was on the mountain and was not involved). Because of this distance between Moshe and Bnei Yisrael, he could not lead them once-and-for-all into the Land. [Bnei Yisrael were unsure whether it was good to rush to the Land because they sensed that Moshe was no longer the right leader for them.]

In the verses which follow, Bnei Yisrael lodge their complaints against the mahn. This is consistent with the above, for Chazal say that the mahn fell only in Moshe's merit. This is why Hashem's response to Bnei Yisrael's complaints was to appoint a sanhedrin/high court alongside Moshe. This is also why it is in our parashah that two Jews prophecy that Moshe will not enter the Land. (See Rashi to11:28) (Ohr Gedalyahu)

"With matzot and bitter herbs they shall eat it."
(9:11)

R' Moshe Sherer z"l (see page 4) writes: Compared to the symbols of the other holidays, matzah is rather low-key. On Rosh Hashanah, the shofar is blown loudly. On Sukkot, we parade with the lulav standing tall. On Chanukah, we light menorahs in our windows. On Simchat Torah and Purim, we also celebrate conspicuously.

Why is it, then, that throughout history, it was Pesach which seemed to enrage our gentile neighbors the most? Why was it typically at Pesach time that Jews suffered from blood libels and pogroms?

Certainly, writes R' Sherer, this was the work of the sitra achra (loosely translated: the angel who is the guardian of all evil forces) himself. Matzah represents too much for us to be allowed to eat it in peace.

What does matzah represent? It reminds us of Hashem's strong hand and of the eternity of the Jewish people. Even when our ancestors in Egypt fell perilously close to spiritual oblivion, Hashem saved them. Also, matzah represents the transmission of our heritage and beliefs from generation to generation, as it is written (Shmot 13:8), "And you shall relate to your son . . ." Over the matzah, we tell our children of the many empires that forced our ancestors to eat matzah in secret and of the fact that we outlived those empires.

From matzah, we also can learn how to fight those empires, R' Sherer writes. The gemara states that matzah which is made in direct sunlight is unfit for Pesach. So, too, our activism must be low-key. Matzah also may not contain food coloring. So, too, our activism must be free of foreign, non-Torah

influences. (Be'shte' Enayim p. 43)

"When you go to wage war in your Land against the enemy who oppresses you, you shall sound short blasts of the trumpets . . ."

(10:9)

From the seemingly superfluous words, "against the enemy who oppresses you," Rambam derives that there is a mitzvah to sound the trumpets and pray to Hashem over any form of oppression, be it a drought, plague or other trouble. He writes that this is part of the process of teshuvah/repentance, and that through teshuvah one causes his troubles to depart. The biggest sin, Rambam writes, is to ascribe one's troubles to fate or coincidence.

R' Yaakov Yitzchak Halevi Ruderman z"l added (during the Yom Kippur War): Even those who ascribe troubles to coincidence start to pray when the troubles are their own. That is how we must see the troubles of our brethren in Israel - as our own.

Moreover, said R' Ruderman, Chazal teach that every person should believe, "The whole world was created for me." This obligates each of us to believe that his prayers can make a difference. (Masat Levi p. 332)

"Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and its officers . .

." (11:16)

Rashi quotes the midrash which says that the term "officers" refers to those people who were assigned by the Egyptians to whip Jews who failed to meet their work quotas. In fact, these officers failed to do their "duty" and were beaten themselves.

R' Aharon Kotler z"l asks: Why is this a qualification to serve on the sanhedrin/high court? He explains that a Jewish leader can succeed, not in his own merit, but only in the merit of the Jewish people. It is therefore incumbent upon a would-be leader to demonstrate his total commitment and self-sacrifice for his people. Moshe, too, the midrash tells us, used to help his brethren with their slave labor although, as a Levite, he was exempted by Pharaoh. (Mishnat R' Aharon Vol. II, p.113)

"My servant Moshe, he My whole house he is trusted."

(12:7)

What does it mean when the Torah says the Moshe was a "servant of Hashem"? R' David Kimchi z"l ("Radak") explains (in his commentary to Yehoshua 1:1) that someone who devotes all of his powers

to serving Hashem and who, even when he is engaged in mundane matters, does them for the sake of serving G-d, is called a "servant of Hashem."

R' Elchanan Wasserman z"l hy"d elaborates: Slaves cannot own property; everything they acquire belongs to their masters. Similarly, when a person recognizes that all of his powers and belongings belong to Hashem and must be used exclusively to serve him, he can be called a "servant of Hashem." [Ed. note: Hebrew uses the same word - "eved" - to mean "slave" and "servant."]

In this light, adds R' Wasserman, we can understand Rambam's statement that, although no person will ever be as great a prophet as Moshe, one can be as great a tzaddik as Moshe. Anyone can choose, as Moshe did, to direct all of his actions to serving G-d.

Of course, it was easier for Moshe to do this than it would be for any of us. However, the gemara teaches that a poor person's sacrifice of wheat is as beloved to Hashem as a rich man's sacrifice of an ox. One must only make the sacrifice. (Kovetz Ma'amarim p.48)

How can one serve G-d all of the time? R' Eli Reingold shlita (maggid shiur/lecturer at the Yeshiva of Greater Washington) answered with the following parable:

Imagine that you need to move your car from City A to City B, but you do not wish to drive it there yourself. There are companies whose business is finding people who need to travel from City A to City B but who have no cars. These companies match car to driver, collect a fee, and everyone's needs are satisfied.

To ensure the delivery of the car, the company gives the driver a deadline by which he must arrive at the destination (after which the police will be called). The length of time that the driver is given depends on the distance; however, the driver is not expected to drive 24 hours a day. Time is built in to the schedule for an appropriate amount of rest and relaxation.

As long as the driver keeps his destination in mind, a reasonable amount of time may be spent on diversions. So it is with serving Hashem. One is not expected to learn Torah and perform mitzvot 24 hours a day or even at every waking moment. One is expected to keep the ultimate destination in mind and to relax so that he will be able to serve Hashem better. If he does that, even his diversions become part of serving Hashem. (Heard from R' Reingold)

Rabbi Moshe Sherer z"l born June 8, 1921 - died May 17, 1998 (21 Iyar 5758)

This week marks thirty days since the passing of one of the most influential lay leaders of 20th century Orthodox Jewry. As Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel of America from 1941 to 1963 and then its President until his death, Rabbi Sherer helped develop the group into a politically and religiously significant force, both in the U.S. and in Israel.

(The "Agudah," as the group is known for short, was founded in 1912 by a group of rabbis, roshei yeshiva and chassidic rebbes which included the Chafetz Chaim and the Gerrer Rebbe. From the beginning, it served the dual function of promoting Torah values and Torah study amongst Jews while representing Torah-true interests to the secular world. For example, amongst the Agudah's most famous leaders was R' Meir Shapiro, who instituted the Daf Yomi program at the 1923 Agudah convention and also served in the Polish Senate as a representative of the Agudath Israel party.)

R' Sherer was born in Brooklyn and, at a young age, was drawn into Agudah activities under the leadership of the young R' Gedaliah Schorr (later rosh yeshiva of Torah Vodaath). R' Sherer studied in Torah Vodaath under R' Shlomo Heiman and in Baltimore's Ner Israel under R' Yaakov Yitzchak Halevi Ruderman. He also became close to R' Elchanan Wasserman, and served as his attendant during the latter's stay in the U.S. in 1938-39. Still later, R' Sherer became close to R' Aharon Kotler, whom he considered to be his teacher.

With the outbreak of World War II, R' Sherer was drawn into rescue and relief efforts by his cousin Elimelech "Mike" Tress, president of the Agudah's youth movement. After the War, R' Sherer was active in organizing food shipments to displaced Jews in Europe and assisting those who wished to immigrate.

In postwar years, the Agudah under R' Sherer has continued to be involved in Torah-related activities such as promoting the study of Daf Yomi (and sponsoring the once-in-7«-years Daf Yomi siyum at Madison Square Garden) and in legal and lobbying activities on behalf of Jewish causes. In that role, Agudah representatives frequently appear before the U.S. Supreme Court and at Congressional hearings. (However, unlike the many advocacy groups whose policies may be defined by politicians or pollsters, Agudath Israel's agenda is set in consultation with a "Council of Torah Sages" made up of roshei yeshiva and chassidic rebbes.)

In 1988, R' Sherer published Be'shteit Enayim, a collection of his articles, memoirs and divrei Torah. Among other subjects, that work explains the Agudah's philosophy on political activism, Zionism and other issues of the past five decades. (Sources: The New York Times, May 19, 1998, p. A22; Be'shteit Enayim)v

Copyright © 1998 by Shlomo Katz and Project Genesis, Inc.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at Project Genesis start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the Hamaayan page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

