

PERSONAL AND COMMUNAL GROWTH

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Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz

Ki Savo

Volume XV, No. 45

20 Elul 5761

September 8, 2001

Today's Learning:

Bava Kamma 4:8-9

Orach Chaim 508:2-509:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 43

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Peah 9

One of the commandments in this week's parashah is the mitzvah of bikkurim / "First Fruits." In Chapter 26, verses 3-10, we read that a farmer who brings bikkurim to the Bet Hamikdash is to recite certain pesukim which recall our enslavement in Egypt and the subsequent Exodus.

The Mishnah (Bikkurim 9:7) relates: "Originally, anyone who knew how to read, read, and if someone did not know how to read, it was read to him and he repeated it word-by-word. When those who could not read stopped bringing bikkurim [because they were embarrassed], the Sages instituted that every person would have the verses read to him and he would repeat them word-by-word."

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Palestine) comments regarding this mishnah: It is true that every outstanding person should act in spiritual matters consistently with his own level of development. However, there also exists a concept of serving Hashem as a klal / a community, and if any institution is made to bring up the level of the klal's

service, every individual must participate. An example of this is prayer. There are some outstandingly sensitive and knowledgeable people who might pray better if there were no fixed order of prayers, if every person could pray in his own words, as once was the case. Nevertheless, for the sake of the klal, a fixed nusach / order was established, lest most people not pray at all, and now, G-d forbid that one person not pray according to this fixed nusach.

This idea is at work here with regard to bikkurim. No doubt, a person derived great satisfaction from reading the appropriate verses in a manner that expressed the love of Hashem that burned within him. However, when the illiterate stopped bringing bikkurim and something had to be done, everyone had to participate in the new order. (Ain Ayah)

"He descended to Egypt . . . and there he became a nation - great, mighty, and numerous." (26:5)

The Pesach Haggadah relates the words in this verse, "great, mighty," to the verse (Shmot 1:7), "Bnei Yisrael were fruitful, they teemed, they increased and they became mighty - b'me'od, me'od / very, very much so." The parallelism is clear in that both verses describe Bnei Yisrael as "mighty." However, where in the Shmot-verse is there any allusion to Bnei Yisrael being "great"?

R' Zvi Hirsch z"l (Grodno, Poland; died 1831) explains in the name of his grandfather R' Eliezer z"l (1722-1795): The word "great" connotes wealth (see Iyov 1:3). The word "me'od" similarly can be rendered as "wealth," as in the verse (Devarim 6:5), "You shall love Hashem, your G-d, with all you heart, with all your soul, and with all your me'od." (The other meaning of "me'od" is "very," as we translated above.) Perhaps, then, the author of the Haggadah was reading the verse in Shmot differently than the simple translation given above: "Bnei Yisrael . . . became mighty with very much me'od."

There is support for this interpretation from the fact that the Sages derived from this verse that Jewish woman in Egypt commonly gave birth to sextuplets. Chazal learned this from the fact that the verse contains six expressions of greatness: "Bnei Yisrael were (1) fruitful, (2) they teemed, (3) they increased and (4) they became mighty - (5) b'me'od, (6) me'od." This derivation is more reasonable if, as suggested above, the two occurrences of the word "me'od" have different meanings. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Zera Gad)

R' Moshe Yisrael Feldman z"l (rabbi of Dragomiresti, Rumania; grandson-in-law and close disciple of Maharsham of Brezhan; killed in 1944) offers another answer to the question posed above: where in the Shmot-verse is there any allusion to Bnei Yisrael being "great"?

He answers: The phrase "me'od, me'od" alludes to the trait of humility, as we read in Pirkei Avot (4:4): "Me'od, me'od / very, very much should you be humble." The truly "great" person is the one who is humble. Rashi notes similarly in his commentary to Bereishit (10:25) that Yaktan, whose name means "small," signifying his humility, merited to have a very large family. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shem

Yisrael)

"The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and they placed hard work upon us." (26:6)

R' Yehoshua z"l (1819-1873; the "Ostrova Rebbe"; known as the "Toldot Adam") explains that this verse alludes to both the physical and spiritual oppressions which the Egyptians oppressed our ancestors. "The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us"-physically. "And they placed hard avodah / work upon us"- they caused our avodah / service to Hashem to be difficult. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Admorei Biala-Ostrova)

"Then we cried out to Hashem, the G-d of our forefathers, and Hashem heard our voice . . ." (26:7)

The Pesach Haggadah relates this verse to the verse (Shmot 2:24), "G-d heard their groaning, and G-d recalled His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Yaakov." R' Binyamin David Rabinowitz z"l (Warsaw; died 1885) explains that the Exodus had two aspects-first Hashem ended our suffering as slaves, then He showered us with material and spiritual riches. The verse from Shmot alludes to both of these aspects, while our verse elaborates on one of them.

First Hashem ended our suffering as slaves, and the verse from our parashah explains how this came about. Chazal teach that a person who prays to be answered in his own merit, will be answered in the merit of his ancestors. On the other hand, a person who bases his prayers on the merit of his ancestors will deserve to be answered in his own merit. Thus, when we cried out to Hashem, "the G-d of our forefathers," knowing that we ourselves were bereft of any merit, "Hashem heard our voice." However, this sufficed only to bring about the first part of the Exodus, i.e., to end our "groaning" and suffering. In order to bring about the second part of the Exodus, i.e., to give us material and spiritual riches, Hashem had to recall His covenant with our forefathers, as alluded to in the verse from Shmot. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ephod Bad)

"Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand . . ." (26:8)

R' Levi Yitzchak Horowitz shlita (the "Bostoner Rebbe") writes: We read in Shmot (6:13), "Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon and commanded them to Bnei Yisrael and to Pharaoh. . ." The commentary Siftei Chachamim explains that besides speaking to Pharaoh about Bnei Yisrael, Moshe and Aharon were to command Bnei Yisrael to take themselves out of Egypt. In other words, explains R' Horowitz, just as the first step in obtaining treatment for an illness is to recognize that one is sick and to go to a doctor, so the first step in the redemption is to recognize that we are in exile. Unfortunately, many of the Jews were complacent in Egypt despite the hardships in their lives.

The story is told of a chassid who asked the Chernobyler Maggid: "Why do you keep praying for

mashiach? If mashiach comes and takes us to Eretz Yisrael, who will feed our chickens?!"

The Maggid responded, "How can you worry about the chickens? Would you not like to be freed of the Cossacks who terrorize us every day?"

"Then pray that mashiach come and take the Cossacks to Eretz Yisrael!" retorted the chassid.

This is why Hashem had to take us out of Egypt with a strong hand. Let us at least apply this lesson to our present condition, concludes the Bostoner Rebbe. Let us not be complacent with the short term success that we have achieved, but let us rather pray and cry out to Hashem that He hurry and bring our redeemer and rebuild Yerushalayim and the Bet Hamikdash. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ezrat Avoteinu p. 138)

Selected Laws of Shemittah

(From Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hil. Shemittah Ve'yovel, ch. 9)

1. It is an affirmative commandment to forgive loans in the shemittah year, as it is written [Devarim 15:2], "Every creditor shall remit his authority over what he has lent his fellow." One who demands repayment of a loan after shemittah has passed transgresses a negative commandment, as it is written libid.), "He shall not press his fellow or his brother."
2. The remission of loans does not apply according to Torah law except when the Yovel / Jubilee applies [i.e., when a majority of Jews live in Eretz Yisrael]. . .
3. By decree of the Rabbis, the remission of loans applies even in our times and in every place [i.e., even outside of Eretz Yisrael], even though the Yovel does not apply. The reason for this decree was so that the laws of forgiving loans should not be forgotten.
4. Shemittah causes loans to be forgiven only at the end of the year. . . Therefore, if someone lent money to his friend during the shemittah year itself, he may collect the debt all year long. However, when the sun sets on the night of Rosh Hashanah of the year following shemittah, the debt is lost.
[Paragraph 5 discusses a specific example of a lost debt.]
5. Shemittah causes a loan to be forgiven - even a loan documented by a note and secured by real property. However, if a specific plot of land was identified as security for the loan, the loan is not forgiven. Shemittah also excuses a debtor from taking an oath. [When a debtor claims that he repaid a loan and the creditor denies that the loan was paid, halachah requires the debtor to swear that he paid. However, if he has not yet taken the oath by the time shemittah ends, he need not take the oath since the loan is forgiven in any case.]
[Paragraph 7 elaborates on the previous halachah.]
6. If one made a loan and attempted to collect it, and the borrower denied that there was a debt,

but after shemittah passed, he admitted that there had been a loan, or witnesses came and testified to the loan, the loan is not forgiven.

7. If one made a loan for a fixed period such as ten years, the loan is not forgiven by the shemittah. Even though he is "pressing his fellow" [which the verse prohibits, there is no prohibition here because], at the present time, he cannot press his fellow. . .
8. When the Sage Hillel the Elder saw that people were refraining from making loans and were thereby transgressing the prohibition [Devarim 15:9], "Beware lest there be a lawless thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year approaches, the remission year,' and you will look malevolently upon your destitute brother and refuse to give him," he established the prozbol so that loans would not be forgiven. The prozbol is effective only in our times when forgiving loans is required only by rabbinic decree. A prozbol has no effect when forgiving loans is required by Torah law. . .
9. The following is the body of the prozbol: "I submit to you, so-and-so and so-and-so, the judges of such-and-such a place, that I may be permitted to collect any loan that I have outstanding at any time that I wish."

[Ed. note: The prozbol will be discussed in further detail next week from both a halachic / legal and a philosophical perspective. However, due to our proximity to Rosh Hashanah, it is recommended that any reader who believes these laws may apply to him or her should consult with a qualified rabbi as soon as possible.]

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