

# CLEAR VISION

*by Shlomo Katz*

## **Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz**

### **Matot-Masei: Clear Vision**

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Today's Learning:

Gittin 7:7-8

Orach Chaim 475:2-4

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 75

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Berachot 29

Our parashah opens: "Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael, saying, 'Zeh ha'davar / This is the thing that Hashem has commanded'." Rashi observes that many prophets (including Moshe) introduced their messages with the phrase "Ko amar Hashem / So said Hashem," but only Moshe introduced some of his messages with "Zeh ha'davar / This is the thing."

R' Yaakov Kamenetsky z"l (rosh yeshiva in Torah Vodaath; died 1986) elaborates: Our Sages teach that all of the prophets saw their prophecies with an "unclear vision," but Moshe saw with a "clear vision." In other words, all prophets (besides Moshe) had to interpret the visions they saw, a process that could be affected by the prophets' own personalities and predilections. Moshe's prophecy was different; he understood exactly what G-d meant and transmitted it literally and perfectly.

Why is this message alluded to in our parashah? R' Kamenetsky explains: The first section of Matot-Masei presents the laws of vows and oaths. These laws demonstrate man's special status in that,

through a vow or oath, a person can create new mitzvot. For example, if a person says, "I swear that I will eat this loaf of bread," it becomes a mitzvah to eat that loaf of bread. If a person says, "Apples are forbidden to me like a sacrifice," it becomes a mitzvah to refrain from having any benefit from apples. These laws might lead one to think that, similarly, some of the mitzvot in the Torah are a reflection of Moshe's own personality. Accordingly, the Torah chooses this context to inform us that Moshe's prophecy was a literal transmission of Hashem's words. (Emet L'Yaakov)

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*"They said to Moshe, 'Your servants took a census of men of war under our command, and not a man of us is missing. So we have brought an offering for Hashem . . .'" (31:49)*

The Sages explain the purpose of this offering as follows: The generals said to Moshe, "Not one of our men succumbed to immorality while fighting against Midian, but we cannot say that immoral thoughts did not cross our minds."

R' Yosef Shaul Nathanson z"l (1808-1875; rabbi of Lvov, Galicia and prominent posek) explains further: We are taught that Hashem rewards for good thoughts along with good deeds, but He does not punish for sinful thoughts. The reason is that when a person has a good thought, it means that he has defeated the yetzer hara at least to some extent. Accordingly, he deserves to be rewarded.

Likewise, if a person has a sinful thought and does not sin, this is a sign that he has defeated the yetzer hara. He does not deserve to be punished for that thought; to the contrary, it is a wonderful accomplishment. This is what led the generals and army to bring a thanksgiving offering, since they recognized that they had had immoral thoughts but they had not sinned. (Divrei Shaul: Mahadura Kamma)

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*"For our inheritance has come to us on the east bank of the Jordan." (32:19)*

R' Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich z"l (Hungarian rabbi) explained: Originally, the holiness of Eretz Yisrael was limited to the west bank of the Jordan. However, after Bnei Yisrael conquered the lands of Sichon and Og, the holiness of Eretz Yisrael "crossed" the Jordan to the east bank as well. Thus, the inheritance of the tribes of Reuven and Gad "came to them" on the east bank. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

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*"The aretz / land shall be conquered before Hashem, and then you shall return . . ." (32:22)*

R' Eliezer Hager z"l (died 1946; rabbi and rosh yeshiva in Vizhnitz, Rumania) writes:

The verse is teaching us the way of teshuvah, specifically, that one should not, so-to-speak, "immerse in the mikvah while holding a source of defilement" ("tovail ve'sheretz be'yado"). Rather,

one must first conquer the "artziyut" / "earthiness" within himself, and only then can he return.

The verse concludes, "This land shall be a heritage for you before Hashem." We are taught that when one repents out of love for Hashem (as opposed to repenting out of fear), his sins are counted as merits. In such a case, the "land" - the materialism which the penitent has abandoned - will itself be a lasting heritage before Hashem. (Damesek Eliezer)

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*"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael who went forth from the land of Egypt according to their legions under the hand of Moshe and Aharon. Moshe wrote motza'aihem / their goings- forth le'masai'hem / according to their journeys . . . and these are masai'hem / their journeys le'motza'aihem / according to their goings-forth." (33:1-2)*

R' Shlomo Halberstam z"l (the "Bobover Rebbe," whose first yahrzeit is today) asks: What is added by "motza'aihem / their goings-forth"? The main focus of the parashah appears to be on Bnei Yisrael's journeys! Also, what is added by mentioning that Bnei Yisrael went forth from Egypt? Surely we already know this! Finally, why is the order of the words reversed, first "motza'aihem / their goings-forth le'masai'hem / according to their journeys" and then "masai'hem / their journeys le'motza'aihem / according to their goings-forth"?

R' Halberstam explains: We are taught that all of our suffering in exile is for our own good, although we surely do not know how this is so. [Ed. note: It bears mentioning that R' Halberstam lost his father, wife and several children in the Holocaust. The story of his own miraculous survival is told in *Nor the Moon by Night* published by Feldheim.] Somehow, our suffering merely hastens the exile, and the proof of this is the Exodus from Egypt which, because of our suffering, was moved-up 190 years.

The verse states (Devarim 22:7), "You shall surely send away the aim [aleph-mem] / mother [bird] and take the young for yourself." This alludes to the many times that Hashem has redeemed us from exile: He has sent the "aim [aleph mem]" - acronym for "Aharon, Moshe" and also for "Esther, Mordechai" - and He has taken the "young" - the Jewish people - for Himself. Similarly, in the future, He will send the "aim" - acronym for "Eliyahu, Mashiach" - and He will take the "young" for Himself.

Our parashah alludes to all of the major exiles that Bnei Yisrael were destined to undergo in their history: The initial letters of "Eleh masei Bnei Yisrael" / "These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael" allude to Edom / Rome (our current exile), Mitzrayim / Egypt, Bavel / Babylon, and Yavan / Greece. But the verse also alludes to our redemption, specifically, the initial letters of "Eleh masei" are "aleph-mem," which alludes to several pairs of redeemers, as mentioned above.

The midrash on our parashah states that Hashem showed Moshe the leaders of every future generation. Presumably, then, Moshe knew the significance of the letters "aleph-mem."

In light of all of the above, we can answer the questions we posed, says R' Halberstam. The word "motza'aihem / their goings- forth" alludes to the future "goings-forth" of Bnei Yisrael, i.e., our future

redemptions. The placement of "masai'hem / their journeys" before "le'motza'aihem / according to their goings-forth" alludes to the fact that our constant travels in exile hasten the eventual "going-forth." And, lest one lose faith in the redemption because of our suffering, Moshe mentioned that Bnei Yisrael already went forth from Egypt. Surely, then, we will be redeemed again. (Likkutei Kerem Shlomo Vol. I)

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**Shemittah Observance Today** [This week we begin to examine the second common halachic strategy that allows farmers in Eretz Yisrael to tend their orchards and fruit trees during the shemittah year. This is the "Hetter Mechirah" / the sale of the land to a gentile for the duration of the shemittah year. (Literally, "hetter" means "permission" or "release," and "mechirah" means "sale.")]

The posek who is generally credited with formulating the Hetter Mechirah is R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l (1816-1896; rabbi of Kovno, Russia), the leading Lithuanian posek of his time. However, the name most associated with the hetter is that of R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935). As rabbi of Jaffa and the neighboring settlements (1904-1919), rabbi of Yerushalayim, and Chief Rabbi of Palestine (from 1921), R' Kook had numerous opportunities to address the issue, and his works Mishpat Kohen and Shabbat Ha'aretz both discuss the Hetter Mechirah at length. (Our discussion will be based largely on those works.) Among the other major poskim who supported the Hetter Mechirah were R' Kook's successors as Chief Rabbi, R' Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Herzog z"l (died 1959), and as Rabbi of Yerushalayim, R' Zvi Pesach Frank z"l (died 1960).

The theory behind the Hetter Mechirah is that non-Jews are not commanded to observe mitzvot, including shemittah. Therefore, land owned by a non-Jew may be worked during the seventh year, even by a Jew. And, the sale permits the land to be worked during shemittah even if the sale is temporary, so long as it is enforceable and not a sham. Of course, farmers want to ensure that they will get their land back at the end of the shemittah. To address these competing needs, poskim developed a sales contract based on the contracts used for selling chametz. Under this contract, the non-Jew receives complete title to the land and its produce for one year and pays a deposit, with the final purchase price to be determined by experts at the end of the shemittah. The contract also provides that the buyer will allow the seller or those named by the seller to work the land, with all profits belonging to the buyer, and that the buyer will pay the workers a wage determined by the same experts. (In Mishpat Kohen, following siman 82, R' Kook reprints the contract that he sent to Baron Edmond de Rothschild in 1909.)

There are several significant issues that must be overcome by the proponents of the Hetter Mechirah, and, for this reason, many leading poskim / halachic authorities rejected the hetter. These concerns will be discussed in upcoming issues.

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