

ARE YOUR EYES OPEN?

by Shlomo Katz

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Mishpatim:

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Today's Learning:

Ketubot 10:3-4

Orach Chaim 382:3-5

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Gittin 17

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sanhedrin 8

This week's parashah contains civil laws and laws regarding the judicial system, two types of rules without which no society could exist. Rashi writes that the parashah begins with the conjunction "And" to remind us that just as the Aseret Ha'dibrot in last week's parashah were given at Sinai, so the laws in this week's parashah were given at Sinai.

Why must the Torah remind us of this fact? R' Yitzchak Meir Alter z"l (died 1866; the first "Gerrer Rebbe," known as the "Chiddushei Ha'rim") explains that because these laws are both essential and logical, there is a risk that one would think that they are man-made. The Torah therefore instructs us that they were given at Sinai and that they should be observed, not because they are logical, but because they are G-d's will.

Rashi writes that Moshe might not have taught Bnei Yisrael the reasons for the mitzvot in this parashah, but Hashem commanded that he should. The Sefat Emet (1847-1905; the second "Gerrer

Rebbe") explains similarly that Moshe did not want the Jewish people to observe the mitzvot because they agreed with the reasons. He wanted to ensure that Bnei Yisrael observed the mitzvot as G-d's decrees.

Hashem told Moshe, "No! Teach them the reasons. The real challenge is to understand the mitzvot and *nevertheless* to observe them solely because that is the will of Hashem." (Quoted in Ma'ayanah Shel Torah)

"When you lend money to My people, to the poor person who is with you . . ." (22:24)

The gemara (Ta'anit 24b-25a) relates that the sage Rabbi Chaninah ben Dosa was so poor that his weekly consumption of food was limited to a quart of carobs. (Rashi writes that R' Chaninah could not even afford bread for Shabbat.) The gemara continues:

His wife said to him, "How long will we suffer so?" He responded, "What shall I do?" She answered, "Pray that you be given something." He prayed, and he was presented with a golden table leg. Thereafter, he [some say, she] dreamt that all of the tzaddikim in Heaven sat at tables with three legs, while R' Chaninah sat at a table with only two legs. He discussed this with his wife and then prayed that the table leg be taken away from him.

R' Yehonatan Eyebchutz z"l (died 1764) asks several questions regarding this gemara: Why was R' Chaninah's wife complaining? Surely she was righteous like her husband and was not troubled by poverty! Also, why do all tzaddikim sit at three-legged tables, and what is the meaning of R' Chaninah's losing a table leg? He explains as follows:

R' Chaninah's wife's complaint was not that she was hungry but, rather, that she could not perform the mitzvah of tzedakah. It pained her to see a poor person, knowing she could do nothing to ease his suffering. She therefore asked her husband to pray that Hashem give them the means to give charity.

However, what happened as a result of R' Chaninah's prayers was the opposite of what his wife intended. When a person truly desires to perform a mitzvah but he is prevented from doing so by circumstances that are completely beyond his control, Hashem views it as if that person had, in fact, performed that mitzvah. Thus, so long as R' Chaninah and his wife were paupers and were unable to give charity, Hashem judged them as if they actually had given a great deal of charity.

On the other hand, when a person does have money and actually gives charity, he can never be sure that he has performed the mitzvah properly. Has he given as much as he should? Has he prioritized his donations properly? Has he, in fact, given substantial sums of money to people who were not deserving?

The three-legged tables in R' Chaninah's (or his wife's) dream represented the three pillars on which

the world stands: Torah study, prayer and acts of kindness. Tzaddikim who have served Hashem in each of the three areas sit at tables with three legs. Had R' Chaninah and his wife remained poor, they also would have sat at a three-legged table, because Hashem would have credited them with the mitzvah of charity (i.e. kindness) that they wanted to perform but couldn't. However, once they became wealthy, they became obligated to give charity, and they risked losing a table leg if they did not perform the mitzvah properly. (Ya'arot Devash Vol. I, end of Drush 4)

"Three regalim / pilgrimage festivals shall you celebrate for Me during the year." (23:14)

The midrash applies to the pilgrimage festivals the verse (Shir Hashirim 7:2), "How lovely were your footsteps when shod in pilgrim's sandals, daughter of nobles!" Why? asks R' Yaakov Yosef z"l (Chief Rabbi of New York; died 1902). After all, pilgrims who entered the Bet Hamikdash were required to remove their sandals!

R' Yosef answers: Surely it was a difficult challenge for a Jew to leave his property unattended and ascend with his family to Yerushalayim. Once he arrived in Yerushalayim, however, he felt so spiritually uplifted that any earlier misgivings were surely forgotten. If so, what part of the Jew's journey was the most praiseworthy? The part when he first left his house, before he reached the Temple and experienced the spiritual rewards that told him that the risks he was taking were worthwhile. And, at that point, when he first left the house, the pilgrim was still wearing his sandals. (Le'vait Yaakov: Drush 19)

"Moshe came and told the people all the words of Hashem and all the ordinances, and the entire people responded with one voice and they said, 'All the words that Hashem has spoken, na'aseh / we will do'." (24:3)

"He took the Book of the Covenant and read it in earshot of the people, and they said, 'Everything that Hashem has said, na'aseh ve'nishma / we will do and we will hear'." (24:7)

Why did Bnei Yisrael at first say only "na'aseh" / "we will do," and later change their answer to "na'aseh ve'nishma" / "we will do and we will hear"? R' Aharon Eliezer Paskez z"l (Hungarian rabbi; died 1 Adar 5644 / 1884) explains:

When Moshe told Bnei Yisrael "the words of Hashem," Bnei Yisrael responded "na'aseh" / "we will do what the Torah requires." Later, however, Moshe read to them the "Book of the Covenant," i.e., the Book of Bereishit, which describes Creation and the deeds of the Patriarchs. When Bnei Yisrael heard this, they experienced a desire to observe the Torah as the Patriarchs had, i.e., without being commanded; therefore they said, "we will do and we will hear" - we will do even before we hear Hashem's command.

How did the Patriarchs know what the Torah requires if it was never taught to them? Because a person whose eyes are open will recognize by studying the world around him: (1) the necessity of observing the Torah, and (2) what the world's spiritual needs are, and, thus, what the Torah requires. Therefore, hearing the story of Creation and the other stories of Bereishit caused Bnei Yisrael to desire to fulfill the Torah without being commanded; when they studied Creation, they, too, had their eyes opened. (Mishmeret Eliezer)

Introductions . . .

In this feature, we present excerpts from the introductions to famous (and not so famous) works. This week, we offer part of R' Moshe ben Nachman's introduction to his commentary on the Book of Bereishit. "Ramban" or "Nachmanides" was born in Spain in 1194 and lived there the majority of his life, and he died in Akko (Acre), Israel in 1270. Except for Rashi, Ramban is universally recognized as the most important Torah commentator.

Moshe, our teacher, wrote this book [i.e., Bereishit] together with the whole Torah, from the lips of the Holy One, Blessed Is He. Most likely, he wrote it down at Har Sinai, for there he was told [in this week's parashah - 24:12], "Ascend to Me to the mountain and remain there, and I shall give you the stone tablets and the teaching and the commandment that I have written, to teach them." "The stone tablets" refers to the luchot and the miraculous writing which appeared on the tablets; in other words, the Aseret Ha'dibrot. [Ed. note: The writing on the tablets was miraculous in that it could be read from all directions.] "The commandment" refers to all of the mitzvot, both the mitzvot aseh / affirmative commandments and the mitzvot lo ta'aseh / negative commandments. [By process of elimination,] "the teaching" must refer to the stories from the beginning of Bereishit, for these teach people the ways of emunah / faith.

When Moshe came down from the mountain, he wrote from the beginning of the Torah until the end of the instructions concerning the construction of the mishkan. He finished writing down the Torah at the end of the 40 years, as it is written (Devarim 31:26), "Take this book of the Torah and place it at the side of the Ark of the Covenant of Hashem . . ."

All of the foregoing is according to the view (Gittin 60a) that the Torah was given in sections [i.e., that Moshe wrote down each section of the Torah as it was taught to him over the 40 year period]. However, according to the view (also Gittin 60a) that the Torah was given "sealed," Moshe did not write down any of the Torah until the end of the 40 years in the desert . . .

It might have been appropriate to write at the beginning of the Torah, "Elokim spoke to Moshe all of these things, saying." However, [the Torah] was written without this phrase because the Torah was not written as if Moshe was speaking. Other prophets mention themselves [in first person], such as Yechezkel, who states repeatedly, "The word of Hashem [came] to me. . ."; Moshe Rabbenu, however, wrote the genealogy of the earlier generations and his own genealogy and the events that

befell him like a third person narrator. This is why Moshe is not mentioned in the Torah until his birth, and then he is mentioned as if someone else is talking about him. . .

The reason that the Torah is written this way [i.e., in third person] is that the Torah was created before the rest of the world [see Shabbat 88b], certainly before Moshe was born. We have received a tradition that the Torah existed at that time as black fire on white fire. This is for certain: the entire Torah, from the beginning of Bereishit until "before the eyes of all Israel" [the last words in Devarim] went from the mouth of G-d to the ears of Moshe. . .

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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.
