

THE TORAH STARTS HERE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bo

The Torah Starts Here

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Today's Learning:
Pesachim 10:1-2
O.C. 506:9-507:2
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Pesachim 18
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Demai 19

At the very beginning of his Torah commentary, Rashi suggests that the Torah should have begun in the middle of our parashah (specifically with chapter 12). It is there that we find the first mitzvah that was given to Bnei Yisrael as a group, and what is the primary purpose of the Torah if not to convey the mitzvot?!

Rashi explains that the Torah begins with Creation because (quoting Tehilim 111:6), "The strength of His deeds He told to His nation." Hashem wanted the world to know that He created the world and He is free to give Eretz Yisrael to whomever He chooses.

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l observes that there is another lesson conveyed by the story that the Torah tells up to this point. It is how Yisrael came to be (in the words of the same verse), "His nation." Without that introduction, the coming story of the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai would have been incomplete or even unintelligible.

What does Avraham do in the Book of Bereishit that makes the Jewish people unique? Why, as we will read in the coming weeks, were Avraham's descendants chosen to receive the Torah? R' Soloveitchik explains that Avraham was the first person, and Judaism was the first religion, that progressed from recognizing the existence of G-d to recognizing an obligation to live according to

His Will. Many ancient societies recognized that there is a G-d, but no society concluded that that G-d cared how they lived their lives.

There is another, related lesson: G-d chose Avraham, but Avraham chose G-d. The Torah until now is a prelude to the giving of the Torah because it teaches that Hashem did not give us the Torah against our will. Rather, the Torah is the treaty which memorializes the covenant between Avraham's family and Hashem. (Quoted in Efneh Ve'eshneh p.137)

"It is a Pesach offering to Hashem." (12:11)

Rashi explains that the name "Pesach" derives from the word "skipping." He writes: "For Hashem skipped over the houses of the Jews which were among the houses of the Egyptians. He jumped from Egyptian to Egyptian, and the Jew was in the middle. As for you, serve Him for the sake of Heaven."

What does Rashi's last comment mean and how is it related to his explanation of the word "Pesach"? R' Nosson David Rabinowitz z"l (whose 76th yahrzeit is tomorrow; grandfather of the present "Munkatcher Rebbe") explains as follows:

Sometimes a person witnesses a powerful event which inspires him to strengthen his service of Hashem. However, that is not the ideal. Rather, we should serve Hashem because, and only because, that is His will.

Moshe was concerned that the plague of the firstborn would have an undesirable effect on Bnei Yisrael. This is why, according to Rashi, Moshe instructed them: "As for you, do not serve Hashem because you will see Him skipping over your houses. Instead, serve Him for the sake of Heaven."

In this light, we can understand why the Korban Pesach is referred to (in verse 12:43) as a "chok" - a mitzvah whose reason is unknown. Although the Korban Pesach (whose blood was placed on the doorposts to identify a Jewish house) recalls the great miracle that Hashem performed and our gratitude to Him, that should not be our reason for performing the mitzvah. Rather, we should observe the mitzvah of Korban Pesach as if its reason is unknown to us.

The Torah tells us (12:50), "All of Bnei Yisrael did as Hashem had commanded Moshe and Aharon, so did they do." The Torah is informing us that Bnei Yisrael took Moshe's message to heart and sacrificed the Korban Pesach solely for the sake of the mitzvah.

(Ve'eileh Ha'davarim She'ne'emru L'David p.101)

"On the previous day, you shall eliminate leaven from your homes . . ." (12:15)

Rabbi Yehuda, one of the sages of the Mishnah, maintains that chametz must be destroyed by fire

and not by any other means. He derives this from the law of "notar" / leftovers of sacrificial offerings, which also must be destroyed by fire.

R' Zvi Elimelech Shapira z"l (the Bnei Yissaschar; died 1841) is quoted as stating that whenever the Talmud derives one law from another law, there must be some intrinsic connection between them. What is the connection between chametz and notar?

R' Yaakov Yichizkiyah Gruenwald z"l (Hungarian rabbi; died 1941) explains: Why would a person leave leftovers from a sacrificial offering rather than eat it all within the allotted time? Often, this would occur because he lacks bitachon / trust in G-d and is afraid he will have no food for tomorrow. Chametz alludes to a similar lack of bitachon. What is the difference between chametz and matzah? Matzah does not expand. The way it is made is the way it remains. Chametz does not share this trait. Chametz rises as if it is afraid there won't be enough for tomorrow. Thus, chametz also alludes to a lack of bitachon.

(Va'yagged Yaakov)

"It shall come to pass when Hashem will bring you to the land of the Canaanites . . . And it shall be a sign upon your arm and an ornament between your eyes . . ." (13:11 & 16)

The Gemara (Kiddushin 37b) asks: Why are the entry into Eretz Yisrael and the mitzvah of tefilin mentioned in the same paragraph? The Gemara answers: It was taught in the yeshiva of Rabbi Yishmael, "Do this mitzvah so that you will enter the Land."

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Palestine) explains the connection between tefilin and Eretz Yisrael as follows:

Tefilin, by virtue of where they are worn, parallel the heart and the mind, the organs through which the neshamah and the intellect reveal their powers. However, the heart and the mind, being physical, are subject to man's will, and the powers of the neshamah and the intellect can be lessened by the choices man makes. Therefore, Hashem commanded that we wear tefilin, a crown which is separate from the body and which therefore will be unaffected by man's will. To the contrary, the holiness of the tefilin causes rays of "light" to spread out over the entire body and reach the heart and the mind. As a result, the power of the intellect predominates over the power of the will.

R' Kook continues: The Gemara (Menachot 44a) states: "One who wears tefilin lengthens his life." Why?

Long life usually is dependent on having a healthy constitution. However, a stronger and healthier person is more likely to be challenged by physical desires and other destructive traits; thus, the person who lives long is not necessarily the most fortunate. The exception is a person who wears

tefilin, because the external "mind" and "heart" which the tefilin are, rein in a person's desires and reinstate his intellect to its proper place. For such a person, long life is a true blessing.

The uniqueness of Eretz Yisrael lies in the fact that there a Jew can reach such a lofty level that the bounty of the land enhances, rather than challenges, his spiritual growth. This explains why the Torah repeatedly promises material blessings, the very things that a wise person avoids. When a Jew is under the influence of his tefilin, he can live in Eretz Yisrael and enjoy its bounty without being challenged thereby.

(Chavash Pe'er, Drush 1)

R' Yehosef Schwartz z"l

Along with the medieval scholar R' Eshtori Ha'parchi, R' Yehosef Schwartz is considered to have been one of the greatest students of the geography of Eretz Yisrael prior to the 20th century. He was born in Bavaria (Germany) in 1805 and studied in the yeshiva of R' Natan Adler. (This was not the same R' N. Adler as the teacher of the Chatam Sofer, but perhaps his nephew, who later became Chief Rabbi of the British Empire). R' Schwartz also attended university (possibly the University of Wurzburg) where he studied languages, geography and astronomy. Despite being the only Jew among 300 non-Jews, he remained observant and continued to set aside times for Torah study while enrolled.

At age 24, R' Schwartz developed a burning desire to study works that discuss all types of issues relating to Eretz Yisrael. In that same year (1829), he published his first map of the Holy Land. However, it was not until four years later that he actually reached the Land.

R' Schwartz settled in Yerushalayim, where he fit comfortably into both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities. In the courtyard of his home, he built a mikvah so that he could maintain a constant state of purity. Part of his time he devoted to studying kabbalah in Yeshivat Bet El, an academy devoted to those studies. He also began to tour Eretz Yisrael, attempting to identify places mentioned in Tanach.

In 1840, R' Schwartz's brother, R' Chaim Schwartz, asked him to publish his findings. Two works resulted: Tevuot Ha'shemesh about the proper way to calculate sunrise and sunset, and Tevuot Ha'aretz about the borders of Eretz Yisrael, its cities, and its flora and fauna. (It is reported that, in preparing the former work, R' Schwartz climbed mountains in Eretz Yisrael 2,000 times in order to watch the sun rise.)

R' Schwartz passed away in Yerushalayim on 9 Shevat 5625 (1865) and is buried on Har Ha'zeitim. (Source: Kedoshim Asher Ba'aretz p.112)

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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 **Torah.org** 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/>.

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