

THE BEAUTY OF DEPENDENCE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Eikev

The Beauty of Dependence

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Today's Learning:
Yevamot 2:9-10
O.C. 607:1-3
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yoma 66
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ma'aser Sheni 13

Much of our parashah is devoted to praises of the Land of Israel. We read, for example, *"For the Land to which you come, to possess it - - it is not like the land of Egypt that you left, where you would plant your seed and water it on foot like a vegetable garden. But the Land to which you cross over to possess it . . . from the rain of heaven shall you drink water."* (11:10-11)

Unlike Egypt, which has a constant water supply in the Nile, Eretz Yisrael is dependent on rain. Nevertheless, writes R' Moshe Yechiel Epstein z"l (the Ozhorover Rebbe; died 1971), our verse is difficult to understand. The verse in Bereishit (13:10) praises Egypt as "G-d's garden." Why then does our verse seem to deprecate Egypt?

The answer is in the second verse quoted above. In Eretz Yisrael we are dependent on G-d's kindness in bringing rain. This is desirable because it causes us to humble ourselves before G-d. The Nile, on the other hand, bred arrogance in the Egyptians.

When Yitro heard how G-d punished the Egyptians, he praised Him for acting measure-for-measure. On a simple level, this refers to the fact that Hashem drowned the Egyptians just as they drowned Jewish children. On a deeper level, however, Yitro may have been referring to the fact that Hashem struck the Nile, the very source of Egyptian pride and arrogance. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Esh Dat p.190)

"This shall be the reward when you (plural) hearken to these ordinances, and you (plural) observe and perform them; Hashem, your (singular) G-d, will safeguard for you (singular) the covenant and the kindness that He swore to your (singular) forefathers. He will love you (singular), bless you (singular) and multiply you (singular) . . ." (7:12-13)

Why the sudden change from plural to singular? R' Menachem Menashe z"l (leader of the Yerushalayim Sephardic community and father-in-law of R' Ovadiah Yosef shlita; died 1968) explains: Imagine if you entered a large shul and saw everyone reciting Tehilim or selichot. Assume, even, that every person was reciting the same chapter or the same page. Does this mean that everyone is praying for the same thing? Outwardly, it may appear that way, but Hashem knows what is in every person's heart.

Were all Jews to gather together to pray in unison for the redemption, it would come immediately, writes R' Menashe. That would be the ideal state. However, the less than ideal reality is that each person prays for his own needs even at a time of communal prayer. Through the less than ideal grammatical structure of our verses, the Torah teaches that even in the less than ideal situation described, Hashem will answer the prayers of the individual.

(Ahavat Chaim)

"Hashem, your G-d, shall you fear, Him shall you serve, to Him shall you cling . . ." (10:20)

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 41b) reports that some Sages could not understand how a person can cling to Hashem, who is referred to as a "burning fire." Eventually, Rabbi Akiva explains that this verse enjoins us to cling to Torah scholars.

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; died 1952) observes: Rabbi Akiva does not mean that clinging to a Torah scholar is the next best thing to clinging to Hashem. A true Torah scholar nullifies himself completely before G-d; his ultimate goal is to feel as if he has no existence independent of G-d. Thus, when one clings to a Torah scholar, he is actually clinging to G-d Himself.

In addition, R' Charlap writes, Rabbi Akiva is teaching another lesson. The only way to cling to Hashem is by clinging to a Torah scholar. This is demonstrated by the fact that as soon as Bnei Yisrael loosened their connection to Moshe (thinking that he was not returning from Har Sinai) they immediately fell to the level of making the Golden Calf.

(Mei Marom V p.272)

"At that time Hashem said to me, 'Carve for yourself two stone Tablets like the first ones, and ascend to Me to the mountain . . .'" (10:1)

"I remained on the mountain as on the first days -- forty days and forty nights . . ." (10:10)

We can understand that Moshe's first sojourn on Har Sinai lasted 40 days, for he had to learn the Torah. But why did he remain there for 40 days when he went to receive the second Luchot? R' Eliyahu E. Dessler z"l (1892-1953; head of the Gateshead, England kollel and later mashgiach ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak) explains:

Moshe ascended Har Sinai a second time not only to receive the luchot anew, but also to learn the new method of Torah study that would be required in the post-Golden Calf world. Before the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jewish nation received the Torah as a gift. At that point in history, Torah came naturally to Bnei Yisrael because their spiritual level was equivalent to that of Adam before his sin. Before the Golden Calf, each Jew's yetzer hara was subjugated to such a degree that our Sages refer to it as being "outside of him." The Jewish People's special connection to the Torah at that time enabled it to accept the Torah unconditionally with the words, "Na'aseh ve'nishmah" / "We will do and [then] we will hear."

Not so after the sin of the Golden Calf. Now, man must toil to acquire Torah and never for a moment does the yetzer hara stop resisting. (Of course, it is this toil that ultimately purifies man and brings him closer to the earlier level.)

R' Dessler notes that the difference between the "old" way of acquiring the Torah and the "new" way are reflected in the differences between the first and second luchot. The first luchot were presented to Moshe in a finished state. The second luchot had to be carved by Moshe and only then did Hashem "write" the Commandments on them. The medieval commentator Radvaz writes that the stones of the luchot symbolize man's heart. In our current state, Hashem can write on our hearts only after we prepare them to receive His word.

(Michtav M'Eliyahu II p.27)

"You shall place these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul; you shall bind them for a sign upon your arm and let them be an ornament between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children

to discuss them . . ." (11:18-19)

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (famed mussar teacher; died 2005) notes that in these verses, part of the second paragraph of Shema, the mitzvah to put on tefilin appears before the mitzvah to teach Torah to our children. In contrast, in the first paragraph of Shema (found in last week's parashah), the order is reversed. R' Wolbe explains that this discrepancy highlights the different mode of service required of a ba'al teshuvah versus a person who has never sinned. [In this context, "ba'al teshuvah" does not refer only to a person from a non-religious home who has become religious. Anyone who abandons his bad habits and strengthens his service of Hashem is a "ba'al teshuvah."] When one is already close to "Hashem Echad" as in the first part of Shema, when one has perfected his love of G-d, then the purpose of mitzvah performance is to protect him and keep him on his level. Such a person's primary existence is reflected in his connection to the Torah, with the mitzvot only serving as additional armor.

On the other hand, when one is on the lower spiritual level described in the second part of Shema, when one has sinned and now is returning, it is the observance of mitzvot that will raise his spiritual level to the point where he can achieve a connection to Torah.

(AleI Shur I p.14)

"For if you will observe this entire commandment that I command you, to perform it, to love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in all His ways and to cling to Him." (11:22)

The midrash (Sifrei) teaches: "How does one cling to Hashem? By emulating His ways. Just as He is merciful, so you shall be merciful, just as He is gracious, so you shall be gracious, etc."

R' Moshe Tzuriel shlita (former mashgiach of Yeshivat Sha'alvim and a prolific author) asks: What does this mitzvah demand of us beyond the earlier commandment to "Love your fellow as yourself"? He explains:

Rambam writes that, with regard to most character traits, the ideal place to be is in the middle of the road. Extremism of any sort is nearly always wrong. Yet, standing alone, says R' Tzuriel, the command to "Love your fellow" could easily be taken to extremes. We are not meant to love every person unconditionally; for example, we are not meant to have mercy on Amalek. Thus, we were given the additional mitzvah to emulate G-d. Hashem is not an extremist. He loves when that is called for, but he also knows when harsh actions are needed.

(Otzrot Ha'Torah II p.488)

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