

TENTS WHERE TORAH IS STUDIED

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Balak

Tents Where Torah is Studied

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Today's Learning:
Bava Kamma 10:10 &
Bava Metzia 1:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 58
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Beitzah 12

The most famous verse in our parashah is undoubtedly Bemidbar 24:5, *"Ma tovu" / "How good are your tents, O Yaakov, your dwelling places, O Israel."* The midrash states that the "dwelling places" referred to are the batei knaisiyot (shuls) and batei midrashot (study halls) where Torah is studied.

Accordingly, writes R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l (1816-1896; rabbi of Kovno, Lithuania), we can interpret our verse as follows: In what merit will our tents be good, i.e., in what merit will we dwell in G-d's "tent" in Olam Haba forever? In the merit of our dwelling places, i.e., in the merit of the Torah we study in this world.

R' Spektor continues: Those who give financial support to Torah study can reach the highest levels in the World-to-Come. This is alluded to in Kohelet (7:12), "To sit in the shelter of wisdom is to sit in the shelter of money." They are one and the same.

The next verse in our parashah states: *"Stretching out like brooks, like gardens alongside a river, like aloes planted Hashem, like cedars near water."* This refers to the ability of a Torah scholar's words to spread quickly throughout the world like flowing water or like the scent of aloes. Fortunate are the ones who study Torah and those who facilitate that Torah study and the spread of Torah through their financial means, observes R' Spektor. (Ma'amar Al Ha'Torah reprinted in Ma'ayan Yitzchak p.122)

From the Parashah . . .

"Teruat (the trumpet blast of) the King is bo (in him) ." (Bemidbar 23:21)

R' Nachman of Breslov z"l (1772-1811; great-grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov and an influential chassidic rebbe in his own right) taught: The word "teruat" ("trumpet blast") also can mean "breaking," as in the verse (Tehilim 2:9), *"Tero'em (break them) with an iron rod."* Read this way, our verse is teaching that when we break all the lies that cause us to deny G-d's existence, we find that *"the King is bo / in it."* Within our disbelief itself, G-d can be found.

R' Yaakov Meir Shechter shlita (rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Sha'ar Ha'shamayim in Yerushalayim) explains: Every person experiences downturns in his life. For some people, these events cause a loss of faith or hope. Others are able to accept these events as part of life and go on.

In reality, it is not enough to accept these events. Rather, we must see these downturns as opportunities for growth. This is why Hashem initially spoke to Moshe Rabbeinu from a burning thornbush. It taught Moshe that there is no place devoid of G-d's presence.

When a person sins, he obscures the truth. Then, his "kesher" (bond) with G-d, becomes a "sheker" (lie), and "pe'er" (beauty) becomes "epher" (ashes). But when he repents, he can reverse this process. Out of his very downfall comes growth. The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva was an am ha'aretz (ignoramus) until he was 40 years old. He said about himself, "Had I gotten my hands on a Torah scholar when I was an am ha'aretz, I would have bitten him like a donkey." Many years later, it was the same Rabbi Akiva who interpreted a seemingly superfluous word in a pasuk (Devarim 6:13) as teaching that the obligation be in awe of G-d includes the obligation to be in awe of Torah scholars. This was a unique contribution by Rabbi Akiva. Before he came along, other sages had been unable to explain the seemingly extra word.

This demonstrates, writes R' Shechter, that Rabbi Akiva not only learned Torah, he corrected the specific blemish that he had possessed before. Within the very weakness that he possessed - his immense hatred for Torah scholars - was concealed his future greatness - his unique ability to recognize the honor due Torah scholars. (In All Your Ways pp.4-8)

From the Haftarah . . .

"He has told you, O man, what is good, and what Hashem seeks from you -- only the performance of justice, the love of kindness, and walking humbly with your G-d." (Michah 6:8)

The Gemara (Pesachim 50b) teaches: "A person should always study Torah she'lo lishmah (not for the proper reason), for through study she'lo lishmah, one will come to study lishmah (for the proper reason)."

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (founder of the yeshiva movement; died 1821) asks: How can the Gemara say that a person should always study Torah she'lo lishmah? Clearly it would be preferable to study lishmah!

Rather, the Gemara means that a person should stick to his scheduled Torah study sessions consistently even though on some days he does not feel like learning and will only be doing so she'lo lishmah, with ulterior motives. Our Sages understood that it is nearly impossible for a person to maintain the same level of fervor all of the time. Sometimes a person is even feeling down and has difficulty concentrating. Therefore our Sages taught that it is important to maintain a consistent schedule of Torah learning - to learn "always" - even if on some days it is done in a less than ideal manner.

This is alluded to in our verse, writes R' Chaim. The Gemara (Sukkah 49b) questions the meaning of the verse in Mishlei (31:26), "The Torah of kindness is on her lips." Is there "Torah of kindness" and "Torah which is not of kindness"? Says the Gemara, Torah which is studied lishmah is called "Torah of kindness." Torah which is studied she'lo lishmah is called "Torah which is not of kindness." Why?

Our verse speaks of "the performance of justice, the love of kindness." "Justice" is that which adheres to the letter of the law, while "kindness" means going beyond the letter of the law. A person who is not in the mood to learn Torah must do so nevertheless to adhere to the letter of the law. However, his Torah study is not "Torah of kindness." Studying Torah lishmah on the other hand is beyond the letter of the law. That is "Torah of kindness." (Ruach Chaim 2:1)

R' David Kimchi z"l (Radak; major Tanach commentator; Narbonne, France; 1160-1235) interprets our verse as follows:

"The performance of justice" refers to laws between man and his fellow man, for example, monetary laws.

"The love of kindness" refers to doing acts of kindness.

"Walking humbly (literally 'discretely') with your G-d" refers to G-d's Oneness and to loving Him with all one's heart and all one's soul. Because this is concealed in man's heart, it is referred to as "walking discretely."

R' David Lifschitz z"l

R' Lifschitz, known as the "Suvalker Rav," was an important figure in American Jewish life for nearly five decades, as a rosh yeshiva and as president of the Ezras Torah welfare organization from 1976 until his passing. He was born in Minsk in 1906, but moved to Grodno as a child, where he later studied in Yeshivat Shaar Hatorah of R' Shimon Shkop z"l. From there he transferred to the Mir yeshiva where he studied under R' Eliezer Yehuda Finkel z"l and Rav Yerucham Levovitz z"l.

At age 24, R' Lifschitz married Zipporah Chava Yoselewitz, daughter of the rabbi of Suvalk. Two years later, in 1935, R' Lifschitz succeeded his father-in-law as rabbi of Suvalk, a title he carried for the rest of his life.

R' Lifschitz suffered tremendous persecution at the hands of the Gestapo before the Jews were expelled from Suvalk. One-half of Suvalk's 6,000 Jews (including the Lifshitz family) escaped to Lithuania. In June 1941, R' Lifschitz arrived in San Francisco on a boat that carried several other leadingsages. R' Lifschitz's first position was in Chicago, but he soon moved to Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan (the rabbinical school of what later became Yeshiva University), where he remained for the rest of his life. R' Lifschitz passed away on 9 Tammuz 5753 / 1993.

A small number of R' Lifschitz's shmuessen / ethical lectures were printed posthumously under the title Tehilah Le'David. Several of these relate to the subject of "shalom," such as one from Yom Kippur 1974 when he said:

When we say "Shalom aleichem," we are not merely greeting someone; we are blessing him. "Shalom" is a name of G-d, meaning "completeness." "Shalom," or "Peace," means that the whole cosmos has achieved a state of completion through uniting to serve G-d. Whereas man was created lacking, it is his job to complete himself . . .

Israel today [one year after the Yom Kippur War] is in a state of truce. There are agreements, but is that peace? Is a cease-fire peace? Real shalom can exist only when Hashem's awe is over all His handiwork, united to do His will (paraphrasing the Yom Kippur prayers). Shalom cannot be just the absence of war, because peace is completeness, a name of G-d.

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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.

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