

PRAISEWORTHY

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bo

Praiseworthy

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Today's Learning:
Midot 2:6-3:1
O.C. 271:8-10
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 34
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 52

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (28:14), "Ashrei adam / Praiseworthy is the man who always fears, but he who is stubborn of heart will fall into misfortune." Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (14th century; Spain) writes: King Shlomo is instructing in this verse that a person should have a "soft heart" (i.e., the opposite of being stubborn). One should always fear that his deeds and actions are not up to the standard they should be, and he should introspect regarding where his deeds will lead him.

Rabbeinu Bachya continues: The verse starts with the word "Ashrei," which is plural. This word never appears in Tanach in the singular form, he writes. The reason is that a person does not deserve to be praised if he has only one good trait, but rather when he combines many good middot. Thus we read (Tehilim 1:1-1), "Praiseworthy is the man who did not walk in the counsel of the wicked, and did not stand in the path of the sinful, and did not sit in the session of the scorners, but his desire is in the Torah of Hashem . . ." We see that the verse lists many good traits of a person who is called "praiseworthy." Our verse, too, encompasses several traits in that a person who "always fears" will weigh the advantages and disadvantages of all of his actions, he will refrain from bad actions, and

will do many good things.

Why does the verse refer to such a person as "adam" rather than "ish"? Rabbeinu Bachya explains that "adam" comes from "adamah" / earth, and refers to a person's baser, less spiritual nature. Praiseworthy is the man who conquers the adam aspect of his nature.

The opposite of the praiseworthy person described here is a stubborn person. [A stubborn person does not examine his deeds.] As described in our parashah and the preceding ones, Pharaoh was stubborn. His punishment, writes Rabbeinu Bachya, was that, even when he wanted to repent, Hashem did not permit him to, but instead forced him to remain stubborn.

"Pharaoh summoned Moshe and said, 'Go -- serve Hashem, only your flocks and cattle shall remain behind; even your children may go with you.'

"Moshe said, 'Even you will place in our hands feast-offerings and elevation-offerings, and we shall offer them to Hashem Elokeinu. And our livestock, as well, will go with us -- not a hoof will be left -- for from it shall we take to serve Hashem Elokeinu; and we will not know with what we are to serve Hashem until our arrival there'." (10:24-26)

When Moshe first appeared before Pharaoh, he said to the Egyptian king (5:3), "Let us now go for a three-day journey in the wilderness and we shall bring offerings to Hashem Elokeinu." How then could Pharaoh suggest that Bnei Yisrael leave without their animals? How would they bring offerings without animals?

Another question: Why did Pharaoh say, "Go serve Hashem," while Moshe answered by referring to "Hashem Elokeinu"? And, after Moshe referred to "Hashem Elokeinu," why did he then revert to saying only "Hashem"?

R' Yitzchak Karo z"l (approx. 1458-1535; uncle of R' Yosef Karo z"l) answers these questions as follows:

[When Moshe came to Pharaoh, Pharaoh said (5:2), "Who is Hashem that I should heed His voice to send out Yisrael? I do not know Hashem, nor will I send out Israel." Moshe then answered (5:3), "The G-d of the Hebrews happened upon us. . ." Commentaries explain that Pharaoh knew that Bnei Yisrael had a G-d, but he did not acknowledge the Name Hashem which represents G-d's omnipotence.] Now, therefore, Pharaoh said to Moshe, "You call your G-d by His special Name, 'Hashem' and you claim that your G-d is the G-d of all beings - not like the gods of the nations that are 'private' gods. I could understand that a smaller god might require an animal sacrifice - for example, the constellation taurus might demand an ox and the constellation aries might require a ram. But your G-d is above all that; He should not require any sacrifices! Therefore, go without your animals."

Moshe responded: "Hashem is Elokeinu - He is above everything, but He relates to us as our personal G-d. He allows us to serve Him in a way that is meaningful for us, although He has no need for our sacrifices." Continuing, however, Moshe acknowledged that there was an element of abstract truth in what Pharaoh said; Hashem is above our service. Therefore, "We will not know with what we are to serve Hashem until our arrival there." (Toldot Yitzchak)

"But among all of Bnei Yisrael, no dog will move its tongue, against neither man nor beast, so that you shall know that Hashem will have differentiated between Egypt and Yisrael." (11:7)

What is the deeper meaning of the fact that no dog barked during the plague of the firstborn? R' Chaim Zvi Senter shlita (rosh yeshiva of Yeshiva Aderes Ha'Torah in Yerushalayim) explained:

The original cause of the exile in Egypt was the sin of lashon hara, which is what caused Yosef's brothers to hate him (see Bereishit 37:2). This is why, when Moshe Rabbeinu realized that Datan and Aviram were tale-bearers, he said (Shmot 2:14), "Indeed, the matter is known!" He meant: Now I understand why our exile persists. Measure-for-measure, Bnei Yisrael were enslaved by Pharaoh, whose name is an anagram (in Hebrew) of "Peh-ra" / "bad mouth."

The Gemara (Pesachim 118a) says that a person who speaks or believes lashon hara deserves to be thrown to dogs. At the time of the redemption, no dog barked, for the fact that the redemption was occurring indicates that the sin of lashon hara had been corrected.

This also explains, said R' Senter, why, as long as Bnei Yisrael were in exile, Moshe had a speech impediment. After the redemption, a midrash relates, Moshe's speech impediment was healed. (Heard from R' Senter, 20 Tevet 5769)

"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 (early 20th century) explains:

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 they did." 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)

This Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

5 Shevat is observed by the righteous as a fast day to commemorate the death of the Elders who lived at the time of Yehoshua bin Nun (Shulchan Aruch 580:2). These Elders died prematurely because they failed to eulogize Yehoshua properly (Shabbat 105b).

When the Bet Hamikdash stood, the barley for the Omer offering would be planted on this date (see Menachot 85a).

On this date in 5652 (1892), the Volozhin Yeshiva was closed by Russian authorities because the administration refused to introduce secular studies into the curriculum (Luach Davar B'Ito p.516).

Erev Shabbat Parashat Bo: R' Moshe Sofer z"l (the Chatam Sofer; died 1839) would review the last two sections of this week's parashah while wearing tefilin because that mitzvah is discussed in those verses.

7 Shevat: According to the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer cited in Midrash Yalkut Shimoni, Moshe Rabbeinu died on this date. Even according to the more widely accepted view that Moshe Rabbeinu passed away on the seventh of Adar, this date is significant because the soul undergoes a change thirty days before a person dies (see Korban Netanel, paragraph 20, to Pesachim ch.10).

Tuesday of the week of Parashat Beshalach: It is said in the name of the chassidic rebbe R' Mendel of Rimanov (died 1815) that reading the section of Parashat Beshalach that deals with the mahn on this day, "shnayim mikra v'echad targum" / twice in the text and once in Aramaic, is a segulah for earning a livelihood (Yalkut Menachem p. 291)

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 59a) states that honoring one's wife [not just on this day] is a segulah for all types of blessing in the household.

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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