

CLING TO HASHEM

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vaeschanan

Cling to Hashem

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We read in this week's parashah (4:4-5), "But you who cling to Hashem, your Elokim--you are all alive today. See, I have taught you decrees and ordinances, as Hashem, my Elokim, has commanded me, to do so in the midst of the Land to which you come, to possess it." What is the connection between these two verses? R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) writes:

The first verse is speaking of Torah scholars, as we learn in the Gemara (Ketubot 111a), which asks: Is it really possible to cling to Hashem, Who is an all-consuming fire? The Gemara answers: If one marries his daughter to a Torah scholar, does business with a Torah scholar, and allows a Torah scholar to benefit from his property, it is as if he has attached himself to the Shechinah. [Until here from the Gemara] The second verse is talking about Eretz Yisrael, as the words themselves indicate.

What do Torah scholars and Eretz Yisrael have in common? Both are not left to mazal / fate, but rather are under Hashem's direct supervision. Indeed, that is why one should cling to Torah scholars, because it brings a person closer to having a direct relationship with Hashem. (Artzot Ha'chaim p.28)

R' Palagi adds: There are those who write that a Torah scholar's home is equivalent to Eretz Yisrael and his prayers are equivalent to prayers uttered in Eretz Yisrael; therefore, there is no need for him to move to Eretz Yisrael. Even so, R' Palagi writes, he would certainly attain an even higher level if he were actually in Eretz Yisrael. Those same sources also write that one who supports Torah scholars will have his prayers answered as if he prayed in Eretz Yisrael. (Ibid. P. 52)

"But you who cling to Hashem, your Elokim--you are all alive today." (4:4)

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (Yerushalayim; 1910-1995; one of the leading halachic authorities of the 20th century) writes:

The mitzvah of Torah study is greater than all other mitzvot, as we read in Mishlei (3:15), "All your desires do not compare to it." Furthermore, the Talmud Yerushalmi states that, not only is nothing in this world equal to Torah study, but Torah study is what gives life in this world and the next.

The Gemara (Ketubot 111a) relates that the sage Rabbi Elazar taught: Those who remain ignorant of Torah will not live at techiyat ha'meitim. When the sage Rabbi Yochanan heard this, he objected. (R' Auerbach explains that Rabbi Yochanan recognized that some people must work hours that prevent them from engaging in significant Torah study.) Rabbi Elazar responded, "I am basing my position on a verse; however, I have a solution for them. The Torah says (in our verse), 'But you who cling to Hashem, your Elokim--you are all alive today.' Is it really possible to cling to Hashem, Who is an all-consuming fire? asked Rabbi Elazar. Rather, if one marries his daughter to a Torah scholar, does business with a Torah scholar, and allows a Torah scholar to benefit from his property, it is as if he has attached himself to the Shechinah." [Until here from the Gemara]

R' Auerbach explains: If you take a plain piece of parchment and write the Torah or the text of a mezuzah on it, that plain piece of parchment becomes holy. Certainly then, if one engraves the holy Torah on the tablet in his heart (paraphrasing Mishlei 3:3), Hashem will guard that holiness so that it will never be lost and, in the future, Hashem will resurrect that person.

Furthermore, R' Auerbach continues, just as the implements that serve a sefer Torah take on the holiness of the sefer Torah itself, so too those who support Torah scholars are sanctified like the Torah scholars themselves. That is why our Sages say in Midrash Tehilim (ch.119), "One who loves the Torah loves life itself." (Quoted in Minchat Avot p.162)

"Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld and lest you remove them from your heart all the days of your life, and make them known to your children and your children's children--the day that you stood before Hashem, your Elokim, at Chorev [i.e., Har Sinai], when Hashem said to me, 'Gather the people to Me and I shall let them hear My words, so that they shall learn to fear Me all the days that they live on the earth, and they shall teach their children'." (4:10)

R' Yitzchak Yerucham Borodiansky shlita (Yeshivat Kol Torah, Yerushalayim) writes in the name of R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l (1895-1974; mashgiach ruchani of the Mir and Ponovezh yeshivot), who quoted R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the Alter of Kelm; died 1898): "All the days" modifies "they shall learn." This teaches that even the generation that witnessed the awesome events of the Giving of the Torah

[see below] would not retain the awe that resulted from that revelation unless they reviewed the events over and over. How much more so must we, who did not witness these events, review them regularly and without end. This is why the Pesach Haggadah says, "Even if we are elders . . . it is a mitzvah for us to relate the story of the Exodus." (Siach Yitzchak: Shmot p.3)

"Inquire, please, regarding the early days that preceded you, from the day when Hashem created man on the earth, and from one end of heaven to the other end of heaven--Has there ever been anything like this great thing or has anything like it been heard? Has a people ever heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire as you have heard, and survived? Or has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation, with challenges, with signs, and with wonders, and with war, and with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with greatly awesome deeds, such as everything that Hashem, your Elokim, did for you in Egypt before your eyes?" (4:32-34)

In the Pesach Haggadah, we recite these verses in the support of the statement: "With great awe-- This is the revelation of the Shechinah."

R' Yitzchak Yerucham Borodiansky shlita (see above) explains: The revelation at the time of the Exodus, as described in our verses, was unparalleled, and therefore brings about awe of G-d. First, the revelation was unparalleled in that it was "before your eyes." Also, it was unprecedented in history--"Inquire, please, regarding the early days that preceded you, from the day when Hashem created man on the earth . . . Has there ever been anything like this?" Any event which is unprecedented is not part of nature, writes R' Borodiansky, but rather a revelation of the Shechinah. (Siach Yitzchak: Shmot p.45)

"Or has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation. . ." (4:34)

Our Sages comment on the words "a nation from amidst a nation"--"Like a shepherd births a sheep." R' Auerbach (see above) comments:

We read in the Pesach Haggadah that the Exodus was brought about by G-d Himself, not by an angel. Why does that matter; isn't the important thing that we are free?

In fact, R' Auerbach explains, the Exodus was not about freedom, but about rebirth, a completely new beginning. That is something only G-d can bring about. (Quoted in Minchat Avot p.118)

Pirkei Avot

Rabbi Yannai says: "It is not in our hands, neither the tranquility of the wicked nor the suffering of the righteous." (Ch.4)

R' Ovadiah of Bartenura z"l (Italy and Eretz Yisrael; late 15th century; author of the widely used mishnah commentary, "Rav Mi'Bartenuara") explains: It is not known to us why the wicked succeed and the righteous suffer. Alternatively, we, in exile, enjoy neither the tranquility that G-d gives the wicked in order to pay them for their good deeds in this world, nor the suffering set aside for the righteous-i.e., yissurin shel ahavah / the punishments which come from G-d's love--which are specially calibrated not to interfere with the tzaddik's Divine service.

R' Avraham Azulai z"l (1570-1643; Morocco and Eretz Yisrael) offers several other explanations:

(1) Rabbi Yannai is complaining that we do not feel that we are in exile. We should be sighing in despair for two reasons-because the wicked are prospering and because the righteous are suffering. But, says Rabbi Yannai, this is not in our hands, i.e., we have forgotten all this and pay no attention to either of these phenomena.

(2) G-d does not give the Jewish People as a whole the tranquility enjoyed by the wicked, for then we would forget Him because of our comfort, nor does He bring upon the common man the suffering of the righteous, for we could not tolerate it. Rather, in His kindness, He pushes us away with His left hand, so-to-speak, while drawing us close with His right hand.

(3) This mishnah is connected to the prior mishnah, which says: "Exile yourself to a place of Torah." Lest you say, I am too delicate to study Torah in a state of discomfort, I (Rabbi Yannai) would respond, too much comfort is not good, nor do we know what real suffering is. (Ahavah Ba'ta'anugim)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), 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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