

EASY COME, EASY GO

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Parshios Matos & Masei

Easy Come, Easy Go

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The Midrash Rabbah comments on the verse in our parashah (32:1), "The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had abundant livestock -- very great," by citing the verses (Tehilim 75:7-8), "For neither from east nor west, nor from the wilderness harim [see below]; for G-d is the Judge--He lowers this one and raises this one." The midrash asks: What is the meaning of "neither from east nor west"? Not from a person's toils, his travels to east or west, or his crossing deserts and harim / mountains does he become wealthy. Rabbi Abba from Rumania says: Every occurrence of the word "harim" in Tanach means "mountains," except for this one, which means "loftiness." The verse is teaching that one does not become lofty from these things [i.e., toils and travels]. What does Hashem do? He takes wealth from one and gives it to another, as it is written (in the cited verse), "He lowers this one and raises this one." Why is wealth called "nechasim"? Because it is "nichseh" / hidden from one person and revealed to another. Why is money called "zuzim"? Because it "zaz" / moves from one person to another. Why is it called "mamon"? This is short for "ma moneh" / "Why are you counting?" Why is it called "ma'ot"? This is short for "ma l'et" / "Why are you focused on something temporary?"

The midrash continues: You should know that this is so [i.e., wealth is transient and in G-d's hands], for when it was time to make the sons of Reuven and Gad wealthy, Hashem gave the Midianites into their hands [as discussed in the immediately preceding section of our parashah].

"Moshe was angry with the commanders of the army . . ." (31:14)

R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the "Alter of Kelm"; died 1898) developed a strategy to never lose his temper. He had a special jacket that he had set aside to wear when he was angry. He said, "When I feel anger coming on, I know that I have to get my special jacket. But, by the time I do, I am no longer angry."

(Quoted in Ve'karata La'Shabbat Oneg)

"Elazar Hakohen said to the men of the legion who came to the battle, 'This is the decree of the Torah, which Hashem commanded Moshe'." (Bemidbar 31:21)

Rashi z"l explains why Elazar taught this law: "Because Moshe came to anger (see verse 14), he came to err. Specifically, the laws concerning the removal of uncleanness absorbed by vessels which had contained the food of heathens escaped him."

R' Yisrael Avraham Portugal shlita (the Skulener Rebbe in Brooklyn) asks: This seems inconsistent with Rashi's explanation of the last phrase in the verse: "Which Hashem commanded Moshe -- he (Elazar) associated the decision with his teacher." Did Elazar learn this law from Moshe, or did he not?

R' Portugal explains as follows:

We read in Pirkei Avot (Ch. 6) that a person must honor anyone from whom he has learned Torah. The proof for this is that David showed great respect to Achitophel, from whom, the mishnah says, "David had learned only two things alone." Asked R' Yisrael Ba'al Shem Tov z"l (founder of the chassidic movement; died 1760): The mishnah seems to be redundant when it says, "David had learned only two things alone." The explanation is that when a tzaddik teaches Torah, he not only teaches the specific lesson he is imparting at that moment, but he also disseminates and increases the holy light of Torah in the world. That light thereafter enables his students to discover additional Torah insights that their teacher never spoke.

This is only true, explained the Ba'al Shem Tov, of a tzaddik. The Biblical figure Achitophel was, however, wicked. Although he twice taught Torah to King David, he taught only those two lessons alone. His teaching did not have the ability to increase the light of Torah in the world.

This, concludes R' Portugal, explains the seemingly contradictory statements of Rashi. Moshe had not taught the laws of tevilat kailim / immersing vessels to Elazar directly. Nevertheless, it was Moshe's teachings that made Elazar's knowledge possible. (Introduction to his father's Noam Eliezer)

"An inheritance of Bnei Yisrael shall not make rounds from tribe to tribe; rather Bnei Yisrael shall cleave every man to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. Every daughter who inherits an inheritance of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael shall become the wife of someone from a family of her father's tribe, so that everyone of Bnei Yisrael will inherit the inheritance of his fathers." (36:7-8)

After Hashem informed Moshe of the law that a daughter could inherit her father's land if he had no sons, the male relatives of such women (Tzlofchad's daughters) complained that this might result in Tzlofchad's land leaving his tribe (the tribe of Menashe) forever. This would happen if Tzlofchad's

daughters married out of the tribe of Menashe; then Tzlofchad's grandchildren/heirs would belong to their father's tribe.

Moshe responded that Hashem had commanded that Tzlofchad's daughters and any similarly-situated women marry only men from their own tribes. Tzlofchad's daughters complied. However, the Gemara (Ta'anit 30b) derives from verses that this restriction applied only during the first generation after the conquest of Eretz Yisrael. After that time, the tribes could intermarry freely.

What was the purpose of this restriction and why was it in effect only temporarily? R' Samson Raphael Hirsch z"l (Frankfurt, Germany; died 1888) explains:

The law of Yovel--that land that was sold reverts to its hereditary owner at the Jubilee Year--demonstrates the importance that the Torah attaches to keeping the borders of the provinces of the tribes intact. This is in recognition of the unique role that each tribe has in the development of the Nation as a whole. We should not think, writes R' Hirsch, that a full Torah life is reserved for only one class of people. Rather, as Yaakov's blessings to his sons before his death (in Parashat Vayechi) indicate, the Nation needs soldiers, sailors, thinkers, tailors, rabbis, teachers, cattlemen, field-workers, merchants, etc., and all are full participants in the life of the Torah Nation.

It was essential to keep each tribe's unique role distinct at the beginning of the Nation's independent life [and to renew it at each Yovel] in order to emphasize the importance and equal necessity of each. This required the tribes to live separately, as well, in order to develop their own particular identities. Once the land was settled, however, and the above message was clearly understood, such enforced separation was no longer required. (Commentary on the Torah)

Shabbat Preparations: Body and Soul

One should arise early on Erev Shabbat to prepare what is needed for Shabbat. One should make an effort to be personally involved in Shabbat preparations [i.e., men should not leave Shabbat preparations to their wives alone, nor should the preparations be left to household help]. (Shulchan Aruch 250:1)

R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) comments on this halachah: The mitzvah of honoring Shabbat applies to every individual. It is written (Yeshayah 58:13), "You shall proclaim the Shabbat an oneg / 'delight,' the holy one of Hashem, 'honored one'." [This teaches that it is a mitzvah to honor Shabbat.] And, it is a general rule that it is preferable to perform a mitzvah oneself than to rely on an agent.

The Chafetz Chaim continues: One should think thoughts of repentance and examine one's deeds every Erev Shabbat, for Shabbat is called a "bride" and greeting the Shabbat is like greeting royalty, which one would not do dressed in rags dirtied by sin. One should clean away cob webs on Erev

Shabbat, and certainly one should dust the house while it is still day. All of this falls within the definition of honoring Shabbat. One should imagine how one would prepare his house for a visit by a human king, and that is how one should prepare for the arrival of Shabbat. (Mishnah Berurah 250:3)

R' Mattisyahu Solomon shlita (mashgiach ruchani of Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, N.J.) observes: The Chafetz Chaim combines a discussion of spiritual preparations for Shabbat with a discussion of physical preparations. It would appear that he is teaching that cleaning the house is merely a means to awaken oneself to cleanse one's soul before Shabbat. Only then can one properly greet the King of Kings when He comes to spend the holy day with us. (Matnat Chaim: Shabbat p.9)

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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