

WALK HUMBLY

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Eikev

Walk Humbly

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 Ozhrover 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, made the Egyptians feel secure and therefore bred arrogance.

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)

"Now, Yisrael, what does Hashem, your Elokim, ask of you? Only to fear Hashem, your Elokim . . ." (10:12)

The Gemara (Berachot 33b) asks: Is fearing Hashem a small thing (that it says "only")? The Gemara answers: Yes, for Moshe Rabbeinu it was a small thing. If you ask to borrow a large bowl from someone who has such a bowl, it's a small thing. But, if you ask to borrow a small bowl from someone who doesn't own such a bowl, it's a big deal. [Until here from the Gemara]

The Gemara's answer ("Yes, for Moshe Rabbeinu it was a small thing") requires explanation. After all, Moshe was not talking to himself, he was speaking to Bnei Yisrael!

R' Yitzchak of Volozhin z"l (1780-1849) explains: Moshe was the most humble of all people. The nature of a humble person is to see his own good qualities in others, while thinking that he, himself, lacks perfection in those same areas. Undoubtedly, Moshe thought that he was not humble enough, while he did notice the humility of others. And, our Sages say, fear of Hashem results from humility. It follows, therefore, that Moshe Rabbeinu sincerely believed that fear of Hashem would be easy for Bnei Yisrael. (Nefesh Ha'Chaim: Introduction)

"For Hashem, your Elokim--He is the Power of all powers and the Lord of all lords, the great, mighty, and awesome Kel, Who does not show favor and Who does not accept a bribe. He carries out the judgment of orphan and widow, and loves the proselyte to give him bread and garment." (10:17-18)

R' Yisrael Halevi z"l (Zamosc, Poland; died 1772) writes: These verses answer those who contend that G-d is too great and awesome to bother with or notice the mundane affairs of our world. He explains:

It is faulty logic to think that a great Being would not interact with ordinary people. To the contrary, it is usually people with inferiority complexes who think they are too good for others. The greater a person truly is, the more humble he tends to be. G-d, the greatest Being of all, is also the humblest Being of all.

As noted, this idea is found in our verses and repeated in Nevi'im and Ketuvim (the other two parts of Tanach). In our verses: "He is the Powers of all powers and the Lord of all lords, the great, mighty, and awesome Kel," but also, "He carries out the judgment of orphan and widow, and loves the proselyte to give him bread and garment." In Yeshayah (57:15): "For so says the exalted and uplifted One, Who abides forever and Whose Name is holy, 'I abide in exaltedness and holiness'," but also, "I am with the contrite and lowly of spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." Finally, in Tehilim (68:5-6): "He Who rides upon the highest heavens," but also, "Father of orphans and Defender of widows." All of these verses teach that Hashem's greatness is precisely why He cares about and interacts with us. (Otzar Nechmad Al Kuzari I:1)

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

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 41b) teaches: Rabbi Akiva explained that this verse instructs us to cling to Torah scholars.

R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; died 1952) observes: Rabbi Akiva doesn't 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)

"You shall teach them to your children to discuss them, while you sit in your home, while you walk on the way, when you retire and when you arise." (11:19)

The Gemara (Kiddushin 82a) teaches: "Rabbi Nehorai said, 'I set aside all trades that exist and I teach my son only Torah, for all trades serve a person in his youth but forsake him in his old age, while Torah study stands by a person in his old age and his youth'."

R' Aryeh Leib Burstein z"l (rabbi in Grodno, Poland and London, England; died 1925) writes: Rabbi Nehorai is not comparing the earning power of an elderly tradesman with that of an elderly Torah scholar, nor does he mean that it is preferable to be a Torah scholar because then one will receive charity in his old age. Rather, R' Burstein explains, Rabbi Nehorai means the following:

If one drops a stone from a high place, it accelerates as it falls. In contrast, if one throws a stone into the air, it slows down as it rises. The reason is gravity, which makes falling natural and rising unnatural. This illustrates a general principle that the more natural something is, the easier it becomes over time.

R' Burstein continues: Work is harder for the elderly than for the young, while Torah study becomes easier and easier as time goes on. This proves that Torah study is a person's natural activity while work is not. Why? Because the essence of man is his intelligence, not his body. Thus, said Rabbi Nehorai, I would rather teach my son Torah, for that is what comes naturally to a person; therefore, it must be what he was meant to do. (Derashot Ha'maggid Mi'Horodna)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Pinchas Altshul z"l (1747-1823), a student of the Vilna Gaon z"l and

maggid / preacher of Polotsk, to his children as a tzava'ah / final instructions before his death regarding their service of Hashem. This excerpt is part of his instructions regarding Torah study.

Our Sages say (Kiddushin 30a), "One should always divide his years--i.e., each day--in thirds: one-third for Tanach / scripture, one-third for Mishnah and one-third for Gemara. Tanach precedes Mishnah, and Mishnah precedes Gemara; one who reverses them is a golem / a body with no mind. The order of learning Tanach is to learn the book of one prophet with the commentary of Rashi and then to review it several times without Rashi until it is fluent in your mouth [i.e., memorized].

Even if you learn it additional times with Rashi, don't make an effort to memorize all of the midrashim that Rashi quotes. The main thing is to be sure to understand the pshuto shel mikra / plain meaning of the verse. That is what you should remember. Remember that your goal is to learn Tanach, not midrash. If you want to learn midrash, do that separately, for what does midrash have to do with the meaning of the verse?

In this respect, our nation has gone astray. Because of the midrash, they don't know Tanach. Most likely, if you ask someone about a verse, he can tell you a midrash about it but doesn't know the verse's meaning. He won't know which prophet said it, to whom, why, when, or about which exile or consolation--all because of the midrashim that confuse him and his mind. You, my son, take care to know the verse's meaning, to whom it was said, why, and about what, and don't confuse yourself with midrashim--then you will succeed. . . .

This is the proper way to learn aggadot [the non-halachic parts of the Gemara; similar to midrash]: Your goal should be to understand how the aggadah is interpreting the verse . . . Also, your intention should be to understand in each case what ethical lesson or guidance can be derived from each aggadah, for all good character traits and true piety can be found in the words of the aggadot. Nevertheless, you must be aware that our Sages' intention in the aggadah was to conceal matters of kabbalah. Thus, they spoke in hints, parable and riddles, for it is an honor to G-d to conceal these matters. (Rosh Ha'giv'ah)

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.

Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. The low cost of sponsorship is \$36. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.