

BOOK ENDS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bechukosai

Book Ends

This week's parashah completes the book of Vayikra. R' Moshe ben Yosef Tirani z"l (the "Mabit"; Greece and Eretz Yisrael; 1505-1585) observes that Vayikra has more mitzvot than any other book: 241. Devarim is next, with 200. A mnemonic with which to remember this is "emet" (aleph-mem-tav) whose gematria is 441 (=200+241). The other three books contain 172 mitzvot, which can be remembered by the mnemonic, "eikev" (ayin-kuf-bet).

But **why** is the Torah divided into five separate books? Why was it not given in one book?

Mabit suggests that the five books of the Torah commemorate the five individuals who received parts of the Torah before it was formally given at Har Sinai. These were: Adam and Noach, who received the seven Noachide laws; Avraham, who received the mitzvah of milah; Yitzchak, the first person who was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth; and Yaakov, who was given the mitzvah of gid hanasheh.

Alternatively, the five books commemorate Amram and Yocheved and their children, Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, through whom the Torah was given.

Or, the five books parallel the five places where parts of the Torah were given: Egypt, Marah (in the desert), Har Sinai, the Ohel Moed/Tent of Meeting, and the Wilderness of Moav.

Mabit adds: Some sources refer to the book of Bemidbar as three separate books, yielding a total of seven. This could parallel the five recipients of the Torah (see above) plus Moshe and Aharon, or it could parallel the seven days of creation. (Bet Elokim, Sha'ar Hayesodot ch.32)

"If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments . . ." (26:3)

Rashi writes that "If you will follow My decrees" refers to toiling in Torah study. If so, writes R' Akiva Yosef Schlesinger z"l (Hungary and Yerushalayim; died 1922), we can understand why this verse

follows immediately after the verse, "My Sabbaths you shall observe." Specifically, the Midrash Tanna D'vei Eliyahu states that the primary time for Torah study is on Shabbat, when one is free from working. (Torat Yechiel)

"Then they will confess their sin and the sin of their forefathers . . . and also for having behaved toward me with casualness. I, too, will behave toward them with casualness . . . perhaps then their uncircumcised hearts will be subdued, and then they will gain appeasement for their sin." (26:40-41)

Many commentaries wonder why the apparent repentance of verse 40 will be rejected and why G-d will "behave toward them with casualness." R' Menachem Mendel Stern z"l (1759-1834; rabbi of Sighet, Hungary) explains that this confession is inadequate because it blames our sins on the way our parents raised us ("their sin and the sin of their forefathers"), failing to recognize that our parents may have sinned, but they did not rebel against G-d. Only when the younger generation's hearts--the seat of their rebellion--are subdued, will they gain atonement. (Derech Emunah)

"I will remember My covenant with Yaakov and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham I will remember." (26:42)

The Gemara (Shabbat 55a) states that Zechut Avot--the merit of the Patriarchs which protects us--has been exhausted. But, the Tosafot write, Brit Avot--G-d's covenant with the Patriarchs--has not been exhausted. This is indicated in the above verse.

What is Zechut Avot and what is Brit Avot? R' Yaakov Leiner z"l (Izbitzer Rebbe; died 1878) z"l explains as follows:

The Patriarchs earned a great deal of merit for their remarkable good deeds. This is called "Zechut Avot." But, after all, what are man's deeds compared to G-d's? In comparison with Hashem's greatness, man's good deeds are like nothing. Thus, Zechut Avot, too, is like nothing, and has long ago been exhausted.

Yet, when the Patriarchs "gave-it-their-all," they were in fact comparable to G-d, who always has all of His abilities at His disposal. The Brit Avot is that Hashem measures the Patriarchs by a yardstick appropriate to them, not by His own yardstick. And, since they were perfect against their own yardsticks, the Brit Avot will always protect us. (Bet Yaakov)

Pirkei Avot

"Ben Zoma says, 'Who is a wise man? One who learns from all people.'" (Ch.4)

R' Yitzchak Berachiah z"l (Fano, Italy; 1583-1658) writes: The wisdom referred to here is specifically the wisdom of the Torah. No person can succeed on his own in knowing the entire Torah, no matter how intelligent and understanding he is, because the Torah is (Devarim 33:4) "the heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov," collectively. Every Jew possesses his own share of the Torah, according to the nature of his soul, and no one can touch someone else's share. This is alluded to by our prayer (at the end of Shemoneh Esrei, among other places), "Give us *our* share in the Torah." Therefore, there is no way to become great in Torah except by learning from all people. A person must even be willing to learn from those who are less great than he. (Chanoch La'na'ar)

"Do not console your friend while his dead lies before him." (Ch.4)

R' Avraham Azulai z"l (1570-1643; Morocco and Eretz Yisrael) writes: One who does so will appear to his friend to be his enemy. Rather, one must share in his friend's pain, as Iyov's friends did (Iyov 2:13): "They sat with him on the ground for a period of seven days and seven nights. No one said a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great." (Ahavah Ba'ta'anugim)

A related halachah:

One who comes to console a mourner may not speak until the mourner speaks. (Shulchan Aruch: Yoreh De'ah 376:1)

R' Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg z"l (1915-2006; member of the Yerushalayim bet din and rabbi of Sha'arei Tzedek Hospital) writes: "I find this very difficult in practice, as do many others, because more often than not, the mourner doesn't speak until he is prodded. Sometimes this is because of his immense pain; other times, it is out of respect for distinguished visitors. Yet, when one does prod the mourner to speak, it is contrary to an expressly stated halachah with which no authority disagrees [as stated above]."

R' Waldenberg continues, offering the following justification for speaking before the mourner: Levush [R' Mordechai Jaffe z"l (died 1612)] writes that the reason for not speaking before the mourner is to give him a chance to express his grief, before which it is not possible to console him. Therefore, writes R' Waldenberg, if the mourner doesn't speak because his grief prevents him from speaking, it is possible to speak first and console him.

Alternatively, R' Waldenberg writes, the halachah that one may not speak before the mourner

speaks is learned from the fact that Iyov's friends sat quietly until he spoke [see above]. But, they were the very first visitors who came to console him. Perhaps if the mourner has already spoken to previous visitors, this halachah does not apply. (Tzitz Eliezer Vol.17, No.45)

Memoirs

R' Yom Tov Lipman Heller z"l (1578-1654) is best known as the author of the Mishnah commentary Tosafot Yom Tov. In 1629, while serving as rabbi of Prague, he was imprisoned on a false charge. That experience is the subject of his memoir "Megillat Eivah"--literally, "The Scroll of Hatred." In last week's excerpt, we read how R' Heller obtained permission to travel to Vienna on his own instead of being taken there in chains. He continues:

On Tuesday, 5 Tammuz, I set out. Around noon on the following Sunday, 10 Tammuz, I arrived in Vienna. They [the leaders of Prague] chose to send R' Henne with me as an advocate. That very day, we went to the Chancellor's palace, but he wasn't there. The next day I stood before him, and he spoke to me harshly about the book Rabbeinu Asher [written in Spain in the 1300s; today it is printed in the back of the standard Gemara] that I published with two commentaries, Ma'adanei Melech and Lechem Chamudot. The Emperor had been told that I had written against their beliefs and their faith, things which should not be said. He went on at length.

I answered him: "G-d forbid that your servant would do such a thing!" I explained that my books are about our Talmud, which is the Torah that Moshe commanded us, and which is our faith. [They are not about *their* faith at all.] I also explained that, when the Torah speaks about avodah zarah, it refers to the worship of stars and constellations and various forms. . . . When I finished speaking, he said, "Sit in your lodgings and do not wander outside, at the risk of punishment to your person and your property, for so the Emperor has commanded." When I pleaded with him, he said that the Emperor wanted me to be thrown in prison immediately, but he had intervened so that I would not be imprisoned. He also said that the matter would be placed before a commission of knowledgeable people who know the language of the Jews, and they will report to the Emperor.

-- To be continued --

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](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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