

WHAT HE REALLY WANTS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Beshalach

What He Really Wants

In this week's parashah, we find the beginning of the giving of the Torah. On the verse (15:25), "There He established for [the nation] a decree and an ordinance, and there He tested it," Rashi z"l comments: "He gave them a few sections of the Torah in order that they might engage in study thereof--the sections containing the command regarding Shabbat, the red heifer and the administration of justice."

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) writes: This is wondrous! Why doesn't the Torah spell out the laws as it does in other places: "Speak to Bnei Yisrael and command them, etc."? From Rashi's wording it seems that Moshe didn't teach these laws as "official" commandments; rather he told them that this is what they would be commanded to keep in the future, when Hashem would give them the Torah at Har Sinai. In this light, says Ramban, we can understand why the Torah calls these commandments a "test." Bnei Yisrael were being tested to see whether they could accustom themselves to mitzvot and accept them with joy.

R' Simcha Mordechai Ziskind Broide z"l (rosh yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim; died 2000) explains further: Ramban teaches (in his commentary to Sefer Devarim) that the Torah expects more of us than merely keeping the mitzvot. We are called upon to learn from the mitzvot what Hashem's Will is. For instance, the Torah tells us not to speak lashon hara, not to take revenge, and to stand up for our elders. From these and other examples of interpersonal behavior, we are supposed to learn how to interact with our fellow men. Thus, explains R' Broide, when Hashem taught the laws of Shabbat, the red heifer and the administration of justice in our parashah, the purpose was to see whether Bnei Yisrael would look behind those mitzvot to see the Will of Hashem that those laws represent. If Bnei Yisrael succeeded in doing that, it would indicate that they would know what to do with the other mitzvot as well. (Sahm Derech: Ha'yashar Ve'hatov p.19)

"You will bring them and implant them on the mountain of Your heritage, the foundation of

Your dwelling-place that You, Hashem, have made -- the Sanctuary, my Master, that Your hands established." (Shmot 15:17)

The midrash Eichah Rabbah states: "Had you merited, you would have recited the verse [quoted above]. Now that you have not merited, you recite (Eichah 1:22), "May all their evil come before you." [Until here from the midrash]

Both of the cited verses contain verbs with the root "אָבַת" ("bring" and "come"), but surely the midrash is not just making a word play. R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (1747-1805; the Dubno Maggid) explains:

The Gemara (Berachot 3a) teaches that when Jews recite the sentence in kaddish, "Yehei shmei rabbah . . .", Hashem shakes his head (so-to-speak) and says, "Fortunate is a king whose children praise him in this manner! Woe to the father who has exiled his children!" This teaches that Hashem is "pained" by our exile. If we appreciated this fact, our prayers would be very different than they are. Instead of praying that our exile end because Jews are oppressed around the world, we would pray that Hashem redeem us in order to end His own "pain," i.e., His "disappointment" over the fact that His design for the world has been frustrated by our sins.

This is what the midrash means. If we were worthy, we would pray for the rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash *because that is Hashem's plan.* Instead, all we pray for is that He see our suffering at the hands of our evil enemies. (Kol Bochim / Voice of Weepers p.126)

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R' Moshe Isserles z"l ("Rema"; 1530-1572; rabbi of Cracow, Poland, and author of the glosses on Shulchan Aruch that adapted that work for Ashkenazim) writes: Based on this verse, our Sages teach that there is a "Mikdash Shel Ma'alah" / "A Sanctuary [in the Worlds] Above" that parallels the "Mikdash Shel Matah" / the physical Bet Hamikdash in Yerushalayim. [See the related comment of Rashi z"l to this verse.]

What is this "Mikdash Shel Ma'alah"? Rema explains: The "Mikdash Shel Ma'alah" is the universe at large. In what way is it like the Sanctuary of the Temple? Just as Hashem is revealed in the physical Bet Hamikdash through the miracles that occur there and the holiness that is evident there, so He is revealed in the world at large through His running of the world. (Torat Ha'olah I:1)

"Hashem said to Moshe, 'Pass before the people . . .'" (17:5)

Rashi z"l explains: In the previous verse Moshe Rabbeinu said, "Soon they will stone me." Therefore Hashem said, "Pass before the people.' See if they will in fact stone you."

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) comments: Surely Moshe was not exaggerating; he must have had a genuine fear that he would be stoned. Nevertheless, Hashem was displeased with his choice of words.

The midrash Bereishit Rabbah states: "Better the anger of the Patriarchs than the humility of the children." Regarding Yaakov Avinu we read (Bereishit 31:36), "Then Yaakov became angered and he took up his grievance with Lavan; Yaakov spoke up and said to Lavan, 'What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me?'" When our Patriarch Yaakov became angry, he spoke humbly, "What is my sin?" In contrast, when Moshe felt threatened, he spoke accusingly, "Soon they will stone me." Similarly, King David is criticized for saying to Yehonatan (Shmuel I 20:1), "What have I done? What is my transgression and what is my sin before your father [King Shaul] *that he seeks my life*?" David did not have to express openly the fact that King Shaul wanted to kill him. Hashem doesn't want to hear criticisms of His people even when they are true. (Shiurei Chumash)

A related thought:

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: The great love that we love our nation does not blind us or prevent us from inspecting its faults. Even so, even after the most independent examination, we find its essence to be free of any blemish. "You are completely beautiful, My beloved, and there is no blemish in you" [Shir Ha'shirim 4:7].

R' Kook continues: Any statement in the Written Torah or Oral Torah that could weaken a Jew's love for the Jewish People, even for the completely wicked, is a test--a challenge to a person to increase his love of Hashem until he finds a path through the seeming contradictions, so that his love for the Jewish People and for all of G-d's creations will be alive and sustained in his heart with no doubts. (Orot Yisrael 4:3-4)

R' Zvi Yisrael Tau shlita (rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Hamor) explains: R' Kook is describing a love for the Jewish People that is not based on specific good deeds, but rather on an appreciation of the Jewish People's essence. Such love is not blind to the Jewish People's sins; rather, it is pained sevenfold by every spiritual blemish precisely because such blemishes are foreign to the Jewish People. (L'emunat Eetainu V p.10)

R' Nachman of Breslov z"l (1772-1810) writes: The saddest thing is when the holy Jewish Nation falls into sin, G-d forbid. The worst suffering in the world is nothing compared to the heavy burden of sin. Anyone who appreciates the holiness of the Jewish People, who knows where their souls come from, understands that the Jewish People are inherently distant from sin. Therefore, there is no

heavier burden for a Jew to carry than the burden of sin. (Likutei Moharan II 7:3)

Shemittah

This week we interrupt our discussion of the concept of "Kedushat Shevi'it" / the sanctity of the fruits of the seventh year to address a practice that is popular among American Jews around the time of Tu B'Shevat- -planting trees in Eretz Yisrael through the Keren Ha'kayemet L'Yisrael / Jewish National Fund ("JNF").

Much of the land in Israel, even land that is privately controlled or that is farmed by kibbutzim and moshavim, is in fact owned by the JNF. The question arises: Is land owned by the JNF subject to the laws of shemittah?

Why not? R' Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky z"l explains the basis for this question as follows: The halachic midrash known as Sifrei teaches that the agricultural laws (terumah, ma'aser, shemittah, etc.) did not take effect when Bnei Yisrael first entered the Land of Canaan. Only after the Land was divided among the tribes and subdivided into family and individual parcels did those laws take effect.

There are two ways to understand this midrash, R' Tukachinsky writes in the name of Yerushalayim mayor and Jewish Agency head, R' Shlomo Zalman Shragai (1899-1995). One is that the midrash is simply telling us *when* the laws took effect, i.e., after the division of the Land was complete. The alternative is that the midrash is identifying a prerequisite to the application of these laws, i.e., private ownership of land. If the latter interpretation is correct, then land owned by the JNF would not be subject to the laws of shemittah. Also, if the latter interpretation is correct, the laws of shemittah would not apply in Yerushalayim, which was not divided among the Tribes.

After offering additional arguments for both sides of the question, R' Tukachinsky concludes that the lands of the JNF and of Yerushalayim are subject to all of the agricultural laws of the Torah, including the shemittah. Among other reasons, the Torah commands (Vayikra 25:4), "The seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land." According to many commentaries, one is prohibited to work any land in Eretz Yisrael during the seventh year, not just his own land. For this reason, as well, even ownerless land is subject to the laws of shemittah. (Sefer Ha'shemittah chapters 11-12)

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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