

BE A JEW AWAY FROM HOME

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Today's Learning:
Nach: Mishlei 19-20
Mishnah: Shevi't 1:3-4
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 67

In the second of this week's two parashot we read of Bnei Yisrael's travels. On the verse (Vayikra 6:6), "An eternal flame shall burn on the altar, it shall not be extinguished," the Talmud Yerushalmi comments: "Even during the travels." What does this teach us?

R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (the "Reisha Rav"; killed in the Holocaust in 1941) writes: There is an awesome ethical lesson here. When a person is at home, he is less likely to sin. Even if the yetzer hara tempts him, he will overcome the yetzer hara because he knows that whatever he does will come to the attention of his friends and neighbors. Not so when a person is traveling. When he is away, he can act with impunity and it will not become known at home. This fact is alluded to in the verse (Bereishit 4:7), "Sin lurks at the door." When one leaves the door of his house, he is more likely to sin.

However, "Fortunate is one who fears Hashem, who goes in his ways" (Tehilim 128:1). Even when he goes on his way, he fears Hashem. [Note that most commentaries translate: "His ways," referring to G-d.]

This is the message of the Yerushalmi: The eternal flame of love of G-d should burn on the altar in a person's heart even when he travels. As Tehilim (119:1) says, "Fortunate are those who are perfect on the road, who go with the Torah of G-d." (Ha'drash V'Ha'iyun II p.91)

"Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael, saying: 'This is the davar / thing that Hashem has commanded'." (30:2)

R' Klonimus Kalman Epstein z"l (Krakow; died 1823) writes: Why is it necessary to say, "This is the thing that Hashem has commanded"? Would one have thought, G-d forbid, that Moshe said this on his own?

He explains: "Davar" can also mean "word." In the verses which follow, the Torah teaches that a rabbi can release a man from his vow and a husband can nullify his wife's vow. The Torah is teaching us, however, that this release or nullification must be verbal. For example, if a man has made a vow that apples will be forbidden to him, it is not enough if the rabbi feeds him an apple. The rabbi must say, "They are permitted to you."

We do not appreciate the power of speech, R' Epstein adds. There are many laws in the Torah that require action--for example, sitting in a sukkah or putting on tefilin. Other laws are dependent on the spoken word. For example, if a man appears before a kohen with a mark that may be tzara'at, the man is not legally considered to have tzara'at until the kohen says the word: "Tamei" / "impure." Similarly, when the mark disappears, all of the legal implications of having tzara'at remain in effect until the kohen declares: "Tahor" / "pure." Such is the effect that one word can have on another person's life. (Ma'or Va'shemesh)

Why are the verses discussing the laws of vows always read during the "Three Weeks," when we commemorate the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash? R' Meir Horowitz z"l (1819-1877; Dzikover Rebbe) explains:

The first Bet Hamikdash was destroyed after King Tzidkiyahu transgressed his vow not to rebel against the Babylonian king, Nevuchadnezar. And, the Final Redemption will take place only after certain vows that Hashem took against the Jewish People are, so-to-speak, annulled.

The Mishnah (Chagigah 10a) states: "Release from vows hovers in the air." [Literally, this means that the idea that a rabbi can nullify a vow is barely alluded to in the Torah and is learned from the Oral Law.] R' Horowitz comments: On the verse (Bereishit 1:2), "A Divine spirit hovers upon the surface of the water," our Sages commented, "This is the soul of mashiach." It is mashiach who is hovering over the waters--hovering in the air--who will nullify Hashem's vows and make the Redemption possible. (Imrei Noam)

"Nekom nikmat Bnei Yisrael / Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael from the Midianites, achar / then you will be gathered unto your people." (31:2)

R' Chaim Meir Hager z"l (1887-1972; Vizhnitzer Rebbe) observes: Shabbat is a time when one should be especially careful with his speech, as it is written (paraphrasing Yeshayah 58:13): "If you proclaim the Shabbat 'a delight,' and you honor it by not discussing the forbidden." Unfortunately, many people use their free time on Shabbat to speak lashon hara and cause dissension. Regarding this, our verse may be interpreted allegorically:

"Nekom" / "Avenge" the honor of Shabbat, alluded to by the phrase "Nikmat Bnei Yisrael," whose gematria (1193) equals the gematria of "Shabbat malketah" / "The Sabbath Queen." From whom? "From the Midianites," i.e., those who bring din / G-d's judgment on the Jewish People through their lashon hara--"Din" and "Midian" share a common root--and from those who tell lies--the gematria of "Me'et ha'Midyanim" / "From the Midianites" (600) equals the gematria of "sheker" / "falsehood."

What will be your reward for doing so? "Achar will be gathered unto your people." "Achar" has the same gematria (209) as "Bnei, chaye, u'mezonei" / "Children, [long] life, and sustenance." (Imrei Chaim)

"Moshe sent them . . . and Pinchas . . . and the sacred vessels." (31:6)

The Gemara says that the "sacred vessels" included the Aron Hakodesh, inside of which were the remnants of the luchot that Moshe broke.

R' Yissachar Dov Rokeach z"l (died 1927; "Belzer Rebbe") asks: Why would they take a reminder of the sin of the Golden Calf to the battlefield? Shouldn't we fear that it will "testify" against us before the Heavenly Court?

He answers: Just the opposite--the broken luchot are a reminder that no matter how low the Jewish People fall, Hashem remains willing to accept their repentance and take them back. (Sefer Maharid)

"For our inheritance has come to us on the east bank of the Jordan." (32:19)

R' Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich z"l (1863-1944; Simlau, Hungary) comments: Originally, the holiness of Eretz Yisrael was limited to the west bank of the Jordan. But, after Bnei Yisrael conquered the lands of Sichon and Og, the holiness of Eretz Yisrael "crossed" the Jordan to the east bank also. Thus, the inheritance of the tribes of Reuven and Gad "came to them" on the east bank. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

Letters from Our Sages

Below is a haskamah / letter of approbation to the printing of Tzon Kodashim by R' Avraham Chaim Shor z"l (Poland; died 1632), a commentary on the Talmudic tractates dealing with kodashim / the sacrificial offerings. The letter was written by R' Yaakov Yitzchak Ish Horowitz z"l (died Tisha B'Av 5575 / 1815), an early chassidic rebbe known as the "Chozev / Seer of Lublin."

It is not my way to act above my station by giving a haskamah, for I am neither a rabbi nor a maggid / preacher--except when absolutely necessary, for nothing comes before G-d's Will. In this case, however, it seems to me to be a great mitzvah. When I was young, I had a great desire to write a

commentary on the tractates of the Order of Kodashim, for it is well-known how great a mitzvah it is to occupy oneself with the laws of kodashim, as our Sages say, "If one studies the laws of the olah sacrifice, it is as if he has offered an olah," etc. The Order of Kodashim is like a closed book, and its text is not as well-edited as it should be, unlike the other tractates which have the glosses of the Maharshal z"l, Maharsha z"l and Maharam z"l [three 16th century Talmud commentators]. Presumably, this is because these tractates were not studied in depth with students as they are not as relevant in our times. Later, however, the demands of the public, the needs of Bnei Yisrael, which are many, were placed upon me--whether giving advice or praying for them. I was afraid to push people away, since G-d gave me the ability to help the Jewish People. I was very preoccupied, so much so that I can't even study for myself, let alone write a commentary. There are commentaries on Kodashim, for example Panim Me'irots and Mayim Kedoshim, but there are inadequate because their authors were so sharp and had such far-ranging knowledge that they did not have questions about whether the text was precise; they were concerned only with posing questions and answering them. Another work, Birkat Ha'zevach is too concise. For many years, I pined to reprint the work Tzon Kodashim because it is a satisfying commentary and a "big tree" on which one can support himself with regard to alternative texts. I was not able to do this, however, until I met my beloved (paraphrasing Shir Ha'shirim)--my friend, the son of my friend, R' Eliezer Ze'ev son of the late Zvi Hirsch z"l, who used to live in my home--who agreed to print this work. I said that I would write these words so that people like me would accept them, for every learned person should buy a copy of Tzon Kodashim and study the Order of Kodashim, and money should be no object. As the Sefer Chassidim says: It is a bigger mitzvah to buy a set of Talmud than to write a Sefer Torah, for once permission was given to write down the Talmud, it is something that every learned person needs. In contrast, how many Sifrei Torah are never used at all?! Therefore, I have promised to buy a copy. May we merit to perform the sacrificial service in the rebuilt Temple soon in our days.