

QUESTIONS ENCOURAGED!

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At the end of this week's Parashah, the Torah teaches us the difference between Moshe Rabbeinu and all other prophets. Hashem says (12:6-8), "If there shall be prophets among you, in a vision shall I, Hashem, make Myself known to him; in a dream I shall speak with him. Not so My servant Moshe; in My entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him, in a clear vision and not in riddles." We also read (Shmot 33:11), "Hashem would speak to Moshe face to face, as a man would speak with his fellow."

R' Levi ben Gershon z"l (Ralbag; 1288-1344) writes: It was this ability of Moshe Rabbeinu, i.e., that he could speak to Hashem at any time he wished and have Hashem respond, that qualified him to be the giver of the Torah.

R' Alter Chanoch Henocho Leibowitz z"l (1918-2008; Rosh Yeshiva of the Chofetz Chaim Yeshiva in Queens, N.Y.) observes: Ralbag is teaching that Moshe Rabbeinu could not have transmitted the Torah to the Jewish People unless he had the ability to ask Hashem any question he wanted and receive an answer. All of Moshe's unique qualities were not enough. It was not sufficient that he had attained the "Forty-ninth Gate of Understanding." Even the fact that he had learned the Torah directly from the "mouth" of Hashem was not enough. Even though Hashem is the best teacher in the world and Moshe Rabbeinu was the best student there ever was, it was having the opportunity to clarify every point until he was satisfied that qualified Moshe to transmit the Torah definitively.

How much more so must lesser students than Moshe Rabbeinu take care to seek clarification of anything that is not crystal clear! R' Leibowitz concludes. (Chiddushei Ha'lev)

"It was in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud was lifted from upon the Tabernacle of the Testimony. Bnei Yisrael journeyed on their journeys . . ." (10:11-12)

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) writes: These verses lend support to the custom some have to not recite Tachanun for a full week beginning with Pesach Sheni, i.e., from the fourteenth through the twentieth of Iyar, because the Zohar teaches that the Gates of Mercy are open at that time. [Regarding the holiday of Pesach Sheni, see verses 9:10-11 in our Parashah.] We understand why Bnei Yisrael did not leave Har Sinai from the Giving of the Torah until the first of Nissan: they were busy building the Mishkan. After the dedication of the Mishkan, they did not travel because Pesach was approaching. Then, Hashem had them wait for Pesach Sheni. But, why didn't they travel for almost one week after Pesach Sheni? It must be that these days also have the status of a minor festival. Only on the seventh day did they travel [just as a mourner sits Shivah only until the beginning of the seventh day], in accordance with the principle that part of a day is considered to be an entire day. (Chochmat Ha'Torah)

From the same work:

"They journeyed for the first time at the bidding of Hashem through Moshe." (10:13)

What is the significance of "for the first time"?

R' Kluger explains: We read earlier in the Parashah (9:18), "According to the word of Hashem Bnei Yisrael would journey, and according to the word of Hashem they would encamp; all the days that the cloud would rest upon the Tabernacle they would encamp." However, the first time that the cloud actually rose from above the Mishkan, Bnei Yisrael could not be sure what it meant; maybe there was another reason why the cloud would rise. Therefore, "the first time" they traveled, it had to be "at the bidding of Hashem through Moshe." He had to confirm what the rising of the cloud meant. After that, he never again had to tell them that the rising of the cloud meant they should prepare to travel.

"The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving [literally, 'craved a craving'] . . ." (11:4)

R' Shalom Perlow z"l (1850-1925; rabbi of Brahmin, Belarus) comments: Bnei Yisrael had been elevated to the degree that they had no cravings for food. But, they craved a craving; they wanted the Yetzer Ha'ra to tempt them so they could then defeat it. [It seems Hashem did not approve of this approach to serving Him. Notably, many commentaries attribute the same motive to Adam for eating the fruit of the Etz Ha'da'at.] (Divrei Shalom)

"Can sheep and cattle be slaughtered for them and suffice for them? Or, if all the fish of the sea will be gathered for them, would it suffice for them?" (11:22)

Unlike some commentaries (and the above translation), R' Yisrael Yaakov Chagiz z"l (1620-1674) interprets the second sentence in our verse as a statement: "All the fish in the sea will suffice for Bnei Yisrael." He explains: In the desert, Bnei Yisrael were not permitted to eat sheep or cattle except when they brought a Korban. But, there were only three Kohanim (Aharon, Elazar and Itamar) to offer all of those sacrifices, making it impossible for everyone to eat meat at once. Fish, on the other hand, could be eaten freely. (Korban Mincha No.16)

R' Moshe Sofer z"l (1762-1839; Pressburg, Hungary) cites the same interpretation in the name of R' Menachem Azaryah of Fano z"l (Italy; 1548-1620), with the added explanation that whenever a verse contains two seemingly redundant expressions, the second one should be read as a statement, not a question. (Chatam Sofer: Chullin 17a)

"He showed me Yehoshua the Kohen Gadol standing before an angel of Hashem, and the Satan standing at his right to accuse him." (Zechariah 3:1 – from this week's haftarah)

R' Chaim Zaichik z"l (1906-1989; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Bet Yosef-Novardok in Buczacz, Poland; later in Israel) asks: Our Sages usually speak of good things being on the right and bad things on the left. Why, then, was the prosecuting angel standing on the right side of Yehoshua Kohen Gadol?

He explains: The prosecuting angel is one and the same as the Yetzer Ha'ra. Its goal is to cause people to stumble and stray, to cause them to take the "left-hand" path, so-to-speak. However, when the Yetzer Ha'ra sees that it will not succeed with a direct approach, it attempts an indirect approach: it encourages a person to perform a Mitzvah as a means to cause him to sin later. This is what is meant by the Yetzer Ha'ra standing on Yehoshua's right side. But, says our verse, despite the Yetzer Ha'ra being "at his right," it was there "to accuse him."

For example, the Yetzer Ha'ra might wake a person up in the morning to go to Shul. The Yetzer Ha'ra seems to be assisting a person in performing a Mitzvah. However, the Yetzer Ha'ra is not sending the person to Shul to pray. Rather, it is sending him there to talk at a point during the Davening when talking is forbidden, to speak during the Torah reading, or to exchange Lashon Ha'ra with his neighbors.

The lesson, concludes R' Zaichik, is that a person must be on guard at all times and must carefully weigh each step he takes, even when that step includes or appears to be a Mitzvah. (Ohr Chadash)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"It shall be that if you come with us, then with the goodness with which Hashem will benefit us, we will do good to you." (10:32)

Rashi z"l comments: What good did they actually bestow upon him [i.e., Yitro]? Our Sages say: When

Bnei Yisrael were parceling out the Land, the most fertile part of Yericho was found to extend over an area of 500 by 500 amot; they left that area undivided and said, "He in whose portion of land the Bet Hamikdash will be built shall take this land as a substitute for the land he will give up and upon which the Temple will be built." In the meantime, they gave that area of Yericho to the children of Yitro -- to Yonadav the son of Rechev. [Until here from Rashi]

R' Yehosef Schwartz z"l (1805-1865; Germany and Eretz Yisrael; Torah scholar and geographer) writes: Yericho is in the portion of the tribe of Binyamin, about four German parsah'ot [a measure of distance] east-northeast of Yerushalayim and one parsah from the Jordan River. It is called "Yericho" [from the root meaning "to smell"] because of the balsam plants that grew there in earlier times and gave off a pleasant aroma. It also is called the "City of Dates" (Devarim 34:3) because of the many date palms in the region.

(In a footnote, R' Schwartz observes that "Yericho" is sometimes found in later works as a reference to a city in France or Spain; perhaps Lunel, in southern France. ["Yericho" and "Lunel" share a root meaning "moon."])

R' Schwartz continues: Today [in the mid-1800s], there is a small Arab village called "Recha." It is said that this village is on the site where Yericho stood in the time of the first Bet Hamikdash. One hour's walk to the west are ruins, which people say is where Yericho stood in the time of the second Bet Hamikdash, i.e., during the Herodian dynasty. Northwest of the afore-mentioned village is a spring called "Ein Elisha." It is said that this is the spring that the prophet Elisha "cured." (See Melachim II 2:21). (Tevuot Ha'aretz p.96-97)