

CAN YOU BE TRUSTED?

by Shlomo Katz

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Our Parashah opens with the laws of the annulment of vows, which are introduced with the words, "Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael." R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270; Spain and Eretz Yisrael) writes: There was no need to teach these laws to everyone, only to the heads of the tribes. Indeed, it may have been preferable to conceal them so that people would not take vows lightly. The Gemara (Chagigah 10a) refers to the law of the annulment of vows as a law that is barely hinted to in the Torah. The reason, writes Ramban, is as just explained: so that they won't be taught to those who are unworthy. [Until here from Ramban]

R' Chaim Zaitchik z"l (1906-1989; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Bet Yosef-Novardok in Buczacz, Ukraine; later in Israel) writes: How unpleasant it would be to be counted as one from whom a law of the Torah must be hidden, to be a person who can be trusted only with "second-hand" information that a Torah scholar chooses to share! Who can be trusted with this information, asks R' Zaitchik? He answers: A Torah scholar who believes in the holiness of a person's vow and who knows that man has a G-d-given ability to sanctify his speech. Only one who knows the holiness of speech can understand why a vow sometimes can be annulled; that the same G-d who gave man the power to sanctify his speech gave man the power to annul it in certain cases, for sometimes, that is sanctification.

Similarly, R' Zaitchik notes, Rambam z"l writes that when it is necessary to perform an act on behalf of a sick person that "transgresses" Shabbat, the task should not be delegated to a gentile, a child, or an unlearned person. It should be done by a Torah scholar who appreciates Shabbat the most, for he understands that he is not transgressing Shabbat, but rather observing it in the way that the situation demands. (Ohr Chadash)

"Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people." (31:2)

R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (1896-1974; Mashgiach Ruchani of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav and author of the

Talmud commentary Enayim La'mishpat) writes: Knowing that he would die after this war, Moshe easily could have delayed, rationalizing that Bnei Yisrael grow so much every day that he is their leader. However, to Moshe, no rationalization could supersede Hashem's command. Thus, as we read in verse 3, Moshe actually encouraged Bnei Yisrael to hurry out to war. (Midrash Ariel)

"The children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and said to Moshe, to Elazar the Kohen, and to the leaders of the assembly, saying, 'Atarot and Divon and Ya'azer and Nimrah and Cheshbon and El'aleh and Sevam and Nevo and Ve'on--the land that Hashem defeated before the assembly of Yisrael--it is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock'." (32:2-4)

Why did the tribes of Gad and Reuven catalog the cities in the territory they were requesting? R' Shaul Lowenstam z"l (1717-1790; rabbi of Amsterdam) explains:

The Gemara (Sotah 34b) states that the land of Moav is inferior for planting. Therefore, when we saw these cities, said the tribes of Gad and Reuven, we wondered why Hashem had given them to the Jewish People. Then we realized: "It is a land for livestock." And, we, "your servants[,] have livestock!" (Binyan Ariel)

"Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem . . ." (33:2)

R' Avraham Dov Ber z"l (1760-1840; chassidic rebbe and rabbi of Ovruch, Ukraine; later in Tzefat) writes: The Torah intends that we learn a practical lesson from the description of Bnei Yisrael's travels. He explains:

The primary purpose of being in Eretz Yisrael is to attain Yir'at Ha'romemut / awe of the Creator, the King of Kings, the Holy One blessed is He. Since that is where the primary revelation of His Shechinah takes place, that is where a person can easily accept the yoke of His dominion, on the one hand, and attain humility, on the other hand.

The purpose of Bnei Yisrael's travel through the desolate wilderness, a place of snakes, serpents and scorpions (Devarim 8:15), was so that they could appreciate that there is another type of Yir'ah, i.e., fear of physical things. They needed to know--as do we, hence we read of their travels--that such Yir'ah exists, but it is not the ideal. Yir'at Ha'romemut / awe of G-d is the ideal, while Yir'ah / fear can be a stepping-stone to that higher level. Ultimately, though, one should fear nothing but Hashem. (Bat Ayin)

The Three Weeks

R' Yechezkel Sarna z"l (1890-1969; Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) lists thirty

items/areas to which one should pay particular attention during the period of the "Three Weeks," each with a source in the Book of Eichah, the text of the Tisha B'Av Kinnot, or the Talmud. They include:

1. Loving and appreciating the Torah, and studying it "Li'shmah," i.e., because Hashem derives pleasure, so-to-speak, from our Torah study (see Nedarim 81a and the commentary of Rabbeinu Nissim there).
2. Loving other people and distancing oneself from sin'at chinam / baseless hatred (see Yoma 9b). Also, avoiding fanning the flames of sin'at chinam. R' Sarna notes that if one would reflect even briefly on why he hates the person toward whom his sin'at chinam is directed, he would immediately change his attitude since, by definition, he would find that he has no reason to hate the other person. The real reason there is sin'at chinam is that some people derive excitement from fanning the flames of such hatred.
3. Loving Eretz Yisrael, appreciating its value, and appreciating the value of the Bet Hamikdash. (R' Sarna writes that this is a recurring theme in the Kinnot and in the teachings of our Sages.)
4. Believing and recognizing that Hashem loves the Jewish People in all generations and at all times, whether it is a time of destruction or reconstruction, downfall or elevation. Any suffering we experience is a punishment for our sins, not a sign that Hashem has abandoned us. To the contrary, Hashem so-to-speak suffers with us (see Gittin 56b, describing how the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies appeared to bleed when Titus stabbed it). (These also are recurring themes in the Kinnot.)
5. Belief in, and recognition of, the eternity of the Jewish People.
6. Maintaining one's Bitachon / trust in Hashem even in difficult times (a recurring theme in Eichah).
7. Crying out to Hashem with a feeling of Bitachon [not hopelessness].
8. Distancing oneself from cruelty and other bad traits.
9. Know and publicizing that everything that happens to us is from the "hand" of Hashem, and from no other cause. If there appear to be other causes, they are all directly or indirectly brought about by Hashem. This includes every detail of the "Churban" / destruction, even those that appear to be isolated events. There are no coincidences and no "laws of nature" at play; rather, the whole, and each of the details, was a fulfillment of the warnings and curses contained in the Torah in Parashat Bechukotai and Parashat Ki Tavo. [Ed. note: From the context, R' Sarna appears to be referring here to the Holocaust.] (Daliot Yechezkel III p.266)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

R' Yosef Karo z"l (1488-1575; Salonika and Eretz Yisrael) writes: When one sees [the site of] the Bet

Hamikdash, he says (based on Yeshayah 64:10), "The Temple of our holiness and our splendor, where our fathers praised you, has become a fiery conflagration, and all that we desired has become a ruin." Then he tears his garment. (Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 561:2)

R' Yoel Sirkes z"l (1561-1640; Poland; known as the "Bach," after the initials of his work Bayit Chadash) writes: One must prostrate himself, tear his clothes, cry, moan, and mourn over the destruction of the Temple. He mournfully recites Mizmor L'Asaf [Tehilim 79 - "A psalm of Asaf: G-d! The nations have entered into Your inheritance . . ."]. When he tears his garment, he recites, "Baruch Dayan Emet / Blessed is the Truthful Judge (without saying G-d's Name), for all His judgments are righteous and truthful. 'The Rock! -- His work is perfect, for all His paths are justice; a Kel of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He' (Devarim 32:4). 'You are righteous in all that has come upon us, etc.' (Nechemiah 9:33)." (Mishnah Berurah 561:6)

R' Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky z"l (1872-1956; Yerushalayim; author of Gesher Ha'chaim on the laws of mourning, and other works) writes: At first, I believed that one should not recite [the above] until he sees the floor of the courtyard of the Temple (which is possible from the Mount of Olives and certain place north and west of the Temple Mount), but not when one sees the dome of one of the mosques on the Temple Mount. However, I then saw that the Bach writes that one recites the above upon seeing the 'kaaba,' which, writes R' Tukachinsky, refers to the dome of the Mosque of Omar. This is logical because the mere existence of the dome is a reminder of the Churban / destruction of the Temple. (Ir Ha'kodesh Ve'ha'mikdash 17:3)

One who enters the Temple site today incurs the punishment of Kareit, because we are all tamei from contact with the dead. (M.B. 561:5)

Halachic authorities disagree whether sticking one's finger into a crack in the Kotel Ha'ma'aravi / Western Wall is considered "entering" the Temple Mount, and therefore would be prohibited. R' Shmuel Rabinovitch shlita ("Rabbi of the Kotel Ha'ma'aravi and the Holy Sites") quotes R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995), a native of Yerushalayim, as saying that he never heard of anyone being stringent about this. (She'eilot U'teshuvot Sha'arei Tziyon p.24)