

THE SERVICE OF SERVICE

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Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Zaragoza, Spain; 1255-1340) opens his commentary on this week's parashah with a verse from Mishlei (21:15), "Performance of justice is a joy to the righteous." He writes: King Shlomo informs us in this verse that a person is obligated to feel joy when he sees a mitzvah being performed, not only when he is the one performing it, but also when someone else is. This is indicated by the fact that the verse says, "Performance of justice is a joy," not, "Performing justice . . ." It is known, Rabbeinu Bachya adds, that the joy one experiences when performing a mitzvah is itself a mitzvah. Just as performing a mitzvah is a form of serving Hashem, so the joy one experiences because of mitzvot is a form of serving Hashem.

Rabbeinu Bachya continues: We read (Devarim 28:47) that the curses in Parashat Ki Tavo will come to pass "because you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, with joy and goodness of heart." We also are commanded (Tehilim 100:2), "Serve Hashem with joy." Joy makes our service complete. This is why the Temple service was accompanied by music--both vocal and instrumental--for music puts man's soul on the path to joy. In our parashah (4:47), the Levi'im are commanded to perform "the service of service." The Gemara (Arachin 11a) explains: "What service serves the Temple service? The musical accompaniment!" The Levi'im are commanded to sing so that the mitzvah of the sacrificial service will be performed joyously.

"Take a census [literally, 'Lift the heads'] of the sons of Gershon, also . . ." (4:22)

R' Meir Yechiel Halstock z"l (1857-1928; the Ostrovtza Rebbe) writes: There are two ways one can come to recognize and accept Hashem. One is to seek logical proof of His existence and His dominion, while the other is to receive a tradition from one's parents. The primary difference between a person who discovers Hashem and one who believes in Him because of a tradition is that the belief of the former is dependent on reason, while the latter's belief is not. A conclusion that was arrived at through logic is relatively weak because, if the investigator later thinks of a reason to not believe in Hashem, he will lose his belief.

R' Halstock continues: The names of Moshe's two sons allude to these two types of belief. The older

son was Gershom (not to be confused with his great-uncle Gershon, who is mentioned in our pasuk). His name alludes to Moshe's being alone in the world – a "ger" / "convert," i.e., a person who arrives at a belief in Hashem on his own. By definition, a convert has no Jewish tradition from his parents. Moshe's second son was Eliezer, whose name connotes that "the G-d of my father came to my aid" (Shmot 18:4).

In this light, R' Halstock explains our verse as follows: "Lift the heads of the sons of Gershon, also." Gershon's name also alludes to a "ger," a person who discovers Hashem through his own reasoning. Says the Torah, "Lift his head, i.e., his thoughts, also." He should not rely on his reasoning alone, but also on tradition.

Based on this, concludes R' Halstock, we understand why the family of Gershon was responsible for transporting the tachash-skin cover of the mishkan. The tachash was a, now-extinct, one-horned animal. This was meant to convey to the Gershonites that there is only one sure path to belief in Hashem, i.e., the path of tradition. (Meir Einei Chachamim)

"May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you. May Hashem lift His countenance to you and establish peace for you." (6:24-26)

R' Shlomo Zalman Ulman z"l (20th century Hungarian rabbi) notes that all of the Priestly Blessings are phrased in the singular. They are addressed to each individual separately. How then can the last blessing speak of peace? Isn't peace a collective concept--peace between nations, peace between neighbors, etc.?

He explains: A Jew is commanded (Devarim 6:5) to love Hashem with all his heart and with all his soul. But man has other interests, and his organs are at war with each other. Some want to love and serve Hashem, while others may not. How can man win this war? Our Sages teach that one who wants to purify himself receives Divine assistance. This is the meaning of the blessing that the Kohanim utter: "May G-d establish peace for you," i.e., within you. (Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

"May Hashem illuminate His 'face' for you . . ." (6:25)

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) comments (citing the Arizal): There are two ways in which we feel Hashem's influence. One, alluded to in our verse, is "hashpa'at panim" / "the influence of the face." The second, alluded to in Shmot (33:23), "You will see My back, but My face may not be seen," is "hashpa'at oref" / "the influence of the nape (or back)."

R' Soloveitchik continues: These two concepts may be understood through the following illustrations: In summertime, a river flows in its bed, kept within its banks and its path. Water comes

to those who have prepared for it by digging canals, building dams, pumping water, etc. In contrast, in the spring, when the snow melts and the river rises, the river flows and overflows, flooding and damaging fields on all sides.

The river in summertime is the symbol of hashpa'at panim--a flow that is measured and precise. This is alluded to in the verse (Yeshayah 66:12), "Behold, I will incline to you like a river of peace." The wild river of springtime represents hashpa'at oref--an uncontrolled flow. Our Sages say that when we are deserving, rain will flow exactly where and when it is needed. This is hashpa'at panim. When we are not deserving, rain will fall in greater quantity, but with an offsetting loss of quality. For example, the rain will fall where it is not needed and when it is not wanted.

Another illustration: A reading lamp gives off a small amount of light, but focuses it where it is needed. This is hashpa'at panim--quality over quantity. In contrast, an overhead bulb bathes the room in light, not discriminating between the person reading in one corner and the person sleeping in the other corner. That is hashpa'at oref--quantity over quality.

The mahn in the desert is a perfect example of hashpa'at panim. It was given in precise measure, and no matter how hard one tried, he could not gather more than one omer's measure per member of his household. But, having a hashpa'at panim relationship with G-d comes with a price: it calls upon one to distinguish between the sacred and the profane. Thus, for example, the mahn came with the command (Shmot 16:25-26): "Today [Shabbat] you will not find it in the field. You may gather it for six days, and on the seventh day it is Shabbat, it will not appear."

Our Sages say that the verse, "You will see My back, but My face may not be seen," was taught to Moshe Rabbeinu in response to Moshe's question: "Why do the righteous suffer?" R' Soloveitchik explains that the answer to this question lies in the difference between hashpa'at panim and hashpa'at oref. A righteous person receives goodness in a precise, targeted manner--quality over quantity. The wicked, on the other hand, experience unrestrained, overflowing goodness--quantity over quality. (Festival of Freedom p.75)

A Torah Tour of the Holy Land

"There was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of Dan, whose name was Manoach; his wife was barren and had not given birth.

"The spirit of Hashem began to resound in him in the camp of Dan, between Zorah and Eshtaol." (Shoftim 13:2 & 25 – the first and last verses of this week's haftarah)

"The cities at the extremity of [the territory] of the tribe of the children of Yehuda . . . in the Shefeilah / lowland: Eshtaol, Zorah . . ." (Yehoshua 15:21 & 33)

"For the tribe of the children of Dan . . . the border of their heritage was: Zorah, Eshtaol . . ." (Yehoshua

19:40-41)

Rashi z"l (to Yehoshua 19:41) writes: Zorah and Eshtaol belonged to Yehuda, and the lottery placed the portion of Dan nearby to them. [Thus, according to Rashi, there was only one pair of towns named Zorah and Eshtaol. They belonged to the tribe of Yehuda, but were close to the portion of Dan.]

R' Yehosef Schwartz z"l (1805-1865; Germany and Eretz Yisrael; Torah scholar and geographer) writes: Zorah and Eshtaol exist until this day [in the mid-1800s]. Zara, which is Zorah, is about one hour [on foot] west of "Har Ha'modi'im" [not to be confused with Modi'in]. Another hour away, slightly to the south, is Shtuel, which is Eshtaol. (Tevuot Ha'aretz p.121)

Today, places with these names are located in the vicinity of Bet Shemesh, Israel. These are believed to be in the approximate locations of the Biblical Zorah and Eshtaol. (Note 283 to Kaftor Va'ferach ch.11)

Midrash Bemidbar Rabbah (10:5) states: Because there were cities named "Zorah" and "Eshtaol" in the portion of Yehuda, as stated in one verse in Yehoshua [15:33], and cities named "Zorah" and "Eshtaol" in the portion of Dan, as stated in another verse in Yehoshua [19:41], therefore, our verse had to specify that Manoach was from Dan. [According to the Midrash, there were two pairs of places with the same names.]