

A PARSHAH POTPOURRI

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

[YA – We've tried each week to pick one of the author's longer developments. Occasionally, he did not write one on a particular *parshah*. Such is the case this week. Rather than skip a week, I've put a few of his shorter pieces together.]

As a reward when you listen to these ordinances and you observe and perform them...^[2]

As a rule, people resist to some extent any demand that does not make any sense to them. Worse yet if it seems counter-rational. Those who are entrusted to take such demands to the public in order to win its support try mightily to better understand them, so that they can try to convince others to accept and internalize them. They have a much easier job with demands that are understood as necessary and compelling. Community leaders need not trouble themselves so much to accustom the populace regarding them. When the people hear about them, they willingly comply, seeing them as good and just.

We must know that all of Hashem's mitzvos are proper and just, and can be appreciated as such by those with sufficient wisdom. This is precisely the point that our *pasuk* makes: "When you listen to these ordinances," you should have all that you need to "observe and perform them." Listening to them should be sufficient for you to respond with alacrity, since they are all just and proper.

Alternatively, this *pasuk* may be an oblique reference to the way their parents responded to the offer of the Torah. The nation at Sinai said *naaseh v'nishmah*, whatever G-d tells us we will do, stopping to understand only later. Moshe here praises them for that, and encourages them. He tells them that this attitude now carries over to the next generation. The rich reward that he describes is assured them simply by listening to the ordinances, because it will surely lead to observance and practice.

The entire commandment that I command you today you shall observe to perform, so that you may live and increase and come and possess the Land...^[3]

It's always pleasant to receive a *berachah* – especially straight from the Source of all *berachos*! But what is the implication of "that I command you today?" Why "today" more than any other day? This is not a flashback to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, or to the various times when Hashem taught new mitzvos to the nation. So what could be meant by "today?"

Chazal teach that HKBH credits us for the intent to perform a mitzvah even if we are prevented from acting upon that intention. That may be what the *pasuk* here relates. Moshe had just instructed the

people about how to conduct themselves when they entered the land – how to deal with the inhabitants, how they were to extirpate idolatry from the Land. None of this would happen for a while, until after their entry into Israel. It was certainly not going to happen that day. Yet Hashem promises that they will be rewarded with growth and possession of the Land simply for the intention to observe the law. Their willingness to perform would be valued by Hashem as if they had already done so.

Lest the land from which You took them out will say, "For lack of Hashem's ability to bring them to the Land...and because of His hatred of them did He take them out to let them die in the Wilderness."^[4]

Abarbanel notes that the two phrases are contradictory. The first implies that He wanted to lead them into the Land – but lacked the power. The latter phrase takes the position that He could have brought them in – but hated them so much, that He led them to the Wilderness in order to have them die there. They cannot both be true!

Perhaps we are reading the *pasuk* inaccurately. We've gotten one of the "them" words wrong. It refers to the Egyptians, not to the *Bnei Yisrael*.

The Egyptians convinced themselves that having the *Bnei Yisrael* enter the Land would be more "difficult" for the Jewish G-d to accomplish than setting free their slaves and allowing them to run for the borders. But why, they asked themselves, would He bother, if He could not get them to safety anyway? What purpose was served in having them escape Egypt, only to die near the border of Canaan? The Egyptians came up with an answer: "Because of His hatred of them did He take them out." G-d, reasoned the Egyptians, hated them – the Egyptians – so much, that He would not tolerate the Jews serving in Egypt. Better to allow them freedom from their Egyptian taskmasters, even if it meant that the freed slaves would die without entering the Promised Land.

1. Based on *Melech Machsheves* by R. Moshe Cheifetz, 1663-1711.
2. Devarim 7:12.
3. Devarim 8:1.
4. Devarim 9:28.