

# MOSHEH'S SHIUR, PART II

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom*

## I MOSHEH'S "SHIUR" CONTINUES...

As noted in the last two shiurim, Sefer D'varim is made up of three sections:

Chapters 1-11: Historical Recitation and Exhortation

Chapters 12-26: Laws

Chapters 27-33: Covenant and Blessing

In last week's shiur, we discussed the three lessons (and one significant interruption) which comprise the bulk of Parashat Va'et'hanan and form the first half of the "exhortative" component of Mosheh Rabbenu's speech. In that presentation, I argued that those three lessons are an integrated and "spiraling" educational experience, culminating in a description of the ideal relationship with God.

As we will soon discover, the "shiur" (instruction) which commences near the beginning of Parashat Va'et'hanan (D'varim 4:1) does not conclude with the climactic statement "Sh'ma Yisra'el" which "headlines" the final lesson; indeed, the shiur continues until the end of Parashat Ekev (11:21).

In order to understand the rest of Mosheh's "shiur", we will build on last week's presentation. First, a brief recap is in order.

## II A BRIEF RECAP

In last week's discussion, I suggested that each new component of Mosheh's "shiur" is marked by the introductory phrase "Sh'ma Yisra'el" (or "Yisra'el Sh'ma").

This phrase, found (in inverted form) at 4:1, introduces the first lesson: The nature of God and His incorporeality.

The same phrase, at 5:1, introduces the repetition of the Decalogue and, significantly, the story behind Mosheh's assuming the role of lawgiver. These two lessons are intertwined and somewhat interdependent, as each utilizes the national experience at Sinai as the foundation for the lesson.

"Sh'ma Yisra'el" appears a final time (in Va'et'hanan), at 6:4, in introducing our ideal relationship with God - "You shall love Hashem your God...".

In analyzing these three lessons, we noted the strange interruption (4:41-49) of the narrative of Mosheh's designation of the three (not-yet-functional) cities of refuge on the East Bank. I suggested that the basic lesson of the \*Arei Miklat\* - that intent plays a critical role in the performance of Mitzvot - was a valuable insight into the "inner workings" of the Torah. Mosheh, as the consummate teacher, interrupted his lesson to demonstrate a law which exemplifies the value of intent and attitude as vehicles for moral perfection.

Last week's discussion gave the impression that the "famous" "Sh'ma Yisra'el" (6:4) was the beginning of the final lesson in Mosheh's "shiur". As we will see further on, there are some more lessons that make up this "shiur" - and they take us nearly to the end of Parashat Ekev.

### III

#### THE STRUCTURE OF OUR PARASHA

Parashat Ekev is made up of four distinct sections:

- 1) 7:12-8:20 - the "Ekev" section (another interruption between lessons)
- 2) 9:1-10:11 - the fourth lesson
- 3) 10:12-11:12 - the fifth lesson
- 4) 11:13-21 is a summary of the lessons (this section, along with the "epilogue" of our Parashah, 11:22-25 will not be addressed in this discussion.)

Although we will devote some space to the fourth and fifth lessons - including an explanation of how these divisions are evidenced in the text - the focus of this presentation will be on the "Ekev" interruption which begins our Parashah.

#### EVIDENCE FOR THE DIVISIONS

The division charted above could certainly be challenged - it does not break down by chapters or by Parashiot (paragraphs) - what evidence is there for the existence of this structure?

The easiest component to identify is the fourth lesson. Just as the first three lessons (in Parashat Va'Et'hanan) began with "Sh'ma Yisra'el" (or "Yisra'el Sh'ma"), so does the fourth lesson: "Sh'ma Yisra'el..."

The fifth (and final) lesson in this series is also relatively easy to identify. Recall that the first lesson, beginning in D'varim 4:1, was introduced with the phrase "V'Atah Yisra'el Sh'ma..." - "And now, Yisra'el, pay heed...". The introductory phrase, "V'atah Yisra'el", is only found in two places in the Torah - at the beginning of Chapter 4 in D'varim and at D'varim 10:12. Although the word "Sh'ma" is missing (an omission which will be explained anon), this phrase which is otherwise a hapax legomenon [unmatched phrase in the T'nakh] seems to be a clear indicator of a new lesson being introduced.

## IV

### LESSONS FOUR AND FIVE

Before demonstrating the rest of the "structure", a word about these two lessons. It isn't merely the introductory phrases which indicate the beginning of a new lesson and, therefore, a separate component in the Parashah. The content and context of each section is independent in such a way as to be a clearly marked-off unit. Let's examine them together:

The unit beginning with 9:1 is a rather long speech (40 verses, several of which are extraordinary long) which is Mosheh's retelling of the sin of the Golden Calf and its aftermath. Although it includes two tangential verses (10:8-9) about the separation and sanctification of the Levi'im (marked off by the introductory "Ba'eit Hahee", compare 10:8 with 10:1), this is a part and parcel of the Golden Calf episode as it is the loyalty of the Levi'im which earned them their holy status (see Sh'mot 32:26).

Why is this unit here; i.e. what is Mosheh's purpose in relating this heinous crime within the context of this "shiur"?

In last week's shiur, I suggested that the entire purpose of Mosheh's shiur was to act as "shadchan" (matchmaker) between the B'nei Yisra'el and HaKadosh Barukh Hu. This is, quintessentially, the job of a Rebbe - to bring his students closer to God. As such, Mosheh began with a lesson about the nature of the Divine, using the Sinai experience to point out what their parents saw and what they did not see (physical images etc.). The second lesson justified Mosheh's role as lawgiver. The third lesson describes the ideal relationship between the people and God (loving God etc.). Consider what's "missing" from the formula: If I am interested in entering into a relationship with someone, be it a business partnership, an educational endeavor or what have you, I need to know several things. I must know as much as possible about the potential partner (lesson #1); I'll need to know the medium

of the relationship (lesson #2 - Torah [given via Mosheh] is the medium of our relationship with God) and the ideal of that relationship (lesson #3). There is, of course, one more piece to the puzzle: Who am I? For me to successfully relate to another, I need to know something about my own nature, tendencies, strengths and weaknesses etc.; this knowledge is as critical (if not more so) than my knowledge about the potential partner.

Similarly, the people had been informed about God - but needed to be reminded about how they had previously behaved in their relationship with God. Therefore, Mosheh must incorporate the story of the Golden Calf into his "shiur" which is aimed at bringing the B'nei Yisra'el into a full and complete relationship with God.

The final lesson is also a clear and independent unit. Although the opening formula lacks the familiar keyword "Sh'ma", there is good reason for that omission. Unlike the first four lessons, in which Mosheh is instructing them with information which is indispensable for the success of their national mission, the final lesson turns that instruction on its head and puts the B'nei Yisra'el in the "driver's seat". Now, instead of Mosheh telling them what they must do, he is inviting them to move beyond that which is demanded and commanded:

"And now, Yisra'el, what does Hashem your God ask of you, but to fear Hashem your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul, To keep the commandments of Hashem, and His statutes, which I command you this day for your good?... Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked...You shall fear Hashem your God; Him shall you serve, and to Him shall you hold fast, and swear by His Name." (D'varim 10:12-20)

Until now, the B'nei Yisra'el were given prescriptions and proscriptions - commands and limitations. Although there had been allusions to a greater picture, that had never been laid out in such idealistic detail, nor presented as a challenge in place of a command.

This fifth lesson is, indeed, a culmination of the "shiur", as it goes beyond the ideal relationship outlined in the third lesson ("Sh'ma...v'Ahavta..."). More than the command to internalize our love for God completely ("...with all of your heart..."), this final lesson invites us to rise above our base natures ("...circumcise the foreskin of your heart...") in terminology that is otherwise reserved for eschatological visions (e.g. D'varim 30:6, Yehezqe'el 36:26).

Although this final lesson includes the three verses about the Land (11:10-12), we will examine these from another perspective at the end of this presentation.

## V

### THE "EKEV" INTERRUPTION

As noted above, the first part of our Parashah (7:12-8:20) is something of an interruption - and its identity as an independent and complete section is quite easy to see.

As we have discussed in earlier shiurim, the Torah utilizes all sorts of allusions, complicated structures and literary techniques to impart its messages. It is fundamental to the methodology of our classical interpretive tradition that uncommon words, especially when appearing in significant locations within a given text, have been deliberately placed there by the Author in order to catch our attention. This methodology is particularly helpful when that uncommon word shows up in a seemingly unrelated context - it is often the case that the Torah is creating an association between the two cases in order to create an "information interface" between the two. In Halakhic exegesis, this methodology is known as "Gezerah Shavah"; however, our Rabbis did not limit its use to that discipline (see e.g. Beresheet Rabbah 44:14, Sh'mot Rabbah 9:7).

The second word (and key word) of our Parashah is an extremely rare one in the Torah. The word Ekev, commonly translated as "on account of" or "since", appears in only five locations in the Humash. Not only does our Parashah begin with an uncommon word - but one of the other four occurrences of that word comes at 8:20 - "...Ekev lo Tish'm'un..." Taking into account the common style of "bookending" which the Torah employs (see our discussion on Parashiot Matot-Mas'ei) and the use of this all-too-rare word at both bookends, it is fairly clear that 7:12-8:20 have the potential of being an independent and self-contained unit.

As mentioned, this "structural analysis" only leaves us with a potentially unified section; we have yet to prove that the content and theme fit that bill.

## VI

### ANALYZING THE "EKEV" SECTION

Note that the Ekev section is broken up into three "open" paragraphs ("parashiot p'tuhot" - you can see this if you follow with a Tanakh, such as Koren, which breaks up paragraphs where there are "parashah" breaks):

7:12-26 - "v'Haya Ekev Tish'm'un..."

8:1-18 - "Kol haMitzvah..."

## 8:19-20 - "v'Haya Im Shakhoah Tishkah..."

The final mini-paragraph serves an obvious purpose. All of the blessings which are promised in the first 33 verses of this section will be reversed if the people do the opposite of the stated condition: "v'Haya Ekev Tish'm'un...". If you obey the Mitzvot, God will grant you security in the Land, success in conquest etc. The final two verses leave us without a "pareve" middle ground - if we forget God and do not listen ("...Ekev LO Tish'm'un...") then we will be destroyed.

What are we to make of the first two paragraphs, these 33 verses of condition and blessing?

In order to understand the impact of the "Ekev message" - and the reason it is divided into two separate parashiot - let's take a careful look at the two sections.

Although both 7:12-26 and 8:1-18 promise us a successful entry into the Land and no lack of material bounty if we obey God and remember His kindnesses, the focus is slightly different in each section.

The first section begins with "v'Hayah Ekev Tish'm'un eit haMishpatim ha'Eleh..." - "If you heed these Mishpatim...". However one chooses to translate the various words for Law - "Eduyot", "Hukkim" etc., "Mishpatim" almost certainly belong to the realm of civil law and social interaction (e.g. Sh'mot 21:1).

Conversely, the second section declares its emphasis right away: "Kol haMitzvah..." Although the word "Mitzvah" is usually considered a generic term for all commandments, in the context of the first third of D'varim it seems to take on a unique meaning: Those actions which reflect and enhance our close relationship with God. (See, e.g. D'varim 6:1, 11:22 - see also 30:11)

In the first section, we are told to remember the Exodus - that is, the very fact of our miraculous exit from Egypt.

In the second section, we are also told to remember the Exodus - but here, again, the emphasis shifts. We are told to remember:

"Remember the long way that Hashem your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his Mitzvot. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of Hashem. The clothes on your back did not wear out and your feet did not swell these forty years...then do not exalt yourself, forgetting Hashem your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and

scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good." (8:2-16)

As opposed to the actual liberation that we are told to recall in the first section, it is the fact of God sustaining us throughout the desert for forty years which is the topic of remembrance in the second section.

Finally, note how the Land is described in each paragraph.

In the first section, the emphasis is on the conquerability of the Land:

"Moreover, Hashem your God will send the pestilence against them, until even the survivors and the fugitives are destroyed. Have no dread of them, for Hashem your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God. Hashem your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you will not be able to make a quick end of them, otherwise the wild animals would become too numerous for you. But Hashem your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great panic, until they are destroyed. He will hand their kings over to you and you shall blot out their name from under heaven; no one will be able to stand against you, until you have destroyed them." (7:20-24)

Contradistinctively, the second paragraph ignores the military concerns regarding the Land and instead describes its beauty and bounty:

"For Hashem your God is bringing you into a good land, a land with flowing streams, with springs and underground waters welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land where you may eat bread without scarcity, where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper. You shall eat your fill and bless Hashem your God for the good land that he has given you." (8:7-10)

The three salient differences between these sections can be summed up in this chart:

Section - Laws - The Land - Remembrance

7:12-26 - Mishpatim - Conquerable - Exodus

8:1-18 - Mitzvot - Beautiful, Sustaining - 40 years in the desert

## VII

### THE AVRAHAM CONNECTION

As mentioned above, the keyword "Ekev" is extremely rare in the Torah. Understanding the implications of its use here will help us make sense of the entire Ekev section.

Besides the two occurrences here and one (which will be discussed below) in Bamidbar, the only two instances of "Ekev" in the Torah are found within the Avraham narratives.

When Avraham demonstrates his complete devotion to God on Mount Moriah, he was given the most complete blessing of his life:

The angel of Hashem called to Avraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By Myself I have sworn, says Hashem: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because ("Ekev") you have obeyed My voice." (B'resheet 22:15-18)

Later on, when Yitzhak considers following in his father's footsteps and descending to Egypt to escape the famine plaguing K'na'an, we are told:

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Avraham. And Yitzhak went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines. Hashem appeared to Yitzhak and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you. Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Avraham. I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring, because ("Ekev") Avraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws." (B'resheet 26:1-5).

It must certainly be clear to all members of Mosheh Rabbenu's audience that this rare word, opening and closing this section of his "shiur", is intended to create an Avraham-association for us. But what is that association?

Given these two selections, we would assume that Avraham's greatness lay chiefly in his total obedience to God and the spiritual heights he achieved. The scene at the Akeda is nothing if not the

quintessence of devotional worship.

We are, however, provided another perspective of Avraham's stature which gives us a broader view of his greatness:

Hashem said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of Hashem by doing righteousness and justice; so that Hashem may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." (B'resheet 18:17-19)

As much as Avraham is a devotional worshipper, he is (perhaps even more) a man whose very soul speaks of righteousness, whose being is bound up with the pursuit of justice. Witness his negotiations with God regarding the fate of the evil cities of S'dom (ibid. 18:23-32).

The "Ekev" section in our Parashah is placed here to remind us of the dual nature of Avraham's distinction: Lonely Man of Faith and Civic Man of Justice. (Avraham's reputation is not only based on his success in both of these areas of moral growth - but also his ability to synthesize them into one persona.)

Subsequent to teaching us about our ideal relationship with God (at the end of Parashat Va'et'hanan) and prior to reminding us of our potential for infidelity (9:1-10:11), Mosheh Rabbenu interjects a lesson which is grounded in our awareness of our earliest roots and the spiritual and ethical heights which our first Patriarch scaled.

Before addressing the dual messages of the "Ekev" section, we should briefly examine the one remaining occurrence of "Ekev" in the Torah:

"...nevertheless, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Hashem, none of the people who have seen My glory and the signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have tested Me these ten times and have not obeyed My voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their ancestors; none of those who despised Me shall see it. But My servant Kalev, because ("Ekev") he has a different spirit and has followed Me wholeheartedly, I will bring into the land into which he went, and his descendants shall possess it." (Bamidbar 14:21-24)

As we see throughout the story of the scouts, Kalev was willing to stand up to their derogation of the Land and publicly face his ten blasphemous colleagues. This is very much in the spirit of Avraham, who is called \*Avram ha'Ivri\* (B'resheet 14:13). He is given that name specifically within the context of his war against the four kings and our Rabbis explain the meaning as follows: The entire world was

one one side (\*Ever\*) of the river and he was on the other side. (B'reshet Rabbah 42:8 - see also Yehoshua 24:2). In other words, it was Avraham's willingness to stand up against anyone and everyone to defend and promote monotheism and its attendant value system which earned him the title \*Ivri\*.

This is exactly the spirit which moved Kalev to stand up to the ten detractors of Eretz Yisra'el. The Torah uses the key word "Ekev" in his praise to link him to the valor of Avraham. [Might there be a connection here with Kalev's visit to Hebron and the Rabbinic tradition that he went to pray at Avraham's tomb?]

## VIII

### MISHPATIM AND MITZVOT

We can now revisit our "Ekev" section and explain the two separate paragraphs and their significant differences.

Perhaps the most telling distinction between "Mishpatim" and "Mitzvot" lies in their very nature. Whereas a Mitzvah (in the context of this part of Sefer D'varim) is an act which is part of a life-long process of spiritual development and sensitivity, a Mishpat is purely utilitarian and designed to promote the common weal.

It is abundantly clear why we must not steal, kill etc. and why we must pay workers on time, return lost items and so on. The extent to which a society is governed by these norms correlates closely to its material, social and spiritual well-being.

On the other hand, a person who engages in diligent Torah study, prays with great focus and generally observes those Mitzvot which fall under the rubric of "Ahavat Hashem" (Love of God), finds that the development of that relationship is a slow, arduous process. Each act of devotion is not an end in and of itself; it is rather a building block towards a closer relationship with haKadosh Barukh Hu.

In much the same spirit, we can distinguish between the two "remembrances" in this section. The matter of the Exodus itself, although performed with great wonders and portents, was essentially a utilitarian act. God desired to bring the people out of slavery and into their own Land - and that is exactly what He did.

Conversely, the Mahn (which is the object of remembrance in the second paragraph) was not a

purely pragmatic "gift". The manner in which the B'nei Yisra'el were sustained throughout their desert sojourn was designed to enhance their awareness of the Ribbono Shel Olam on an ongoing basis: "In order to teach you that man does not live on bread alone, but that man may live on anything that Hashem decrees." (D'varim 8:3)

Note that the first paragraph promises us that if we (1) Remember the Exodus and (2) observe the Mishpatim, we will be successful in (3) Conquering the Land. The focus here is purely pragmatic, following the lead of Avraham's "social-justice" agenda. (Keep in mind that it is within the context of war that Avraham earns his title of \*Ivri\*).

In the second paragraph, we are told that if we (1a) Remember the Mahn and (2a) observe the Mitzvot, we will (3) enjoy a beautiful and sustaining Land. Here, the focus is on the personal development of a relationship, the ongoing process of becoming more aware of God's role in our lives and the beauty and bounty of His Land.

## IX

### POSTSCRIPT

After completing his shiur, Mosheh adds three verses which describe the Land in even more glowing terms than those found in the "Ekev" section:

"For the land, which you enter to possess, is not as the land of Egypt, from where you came out, where you sowed your seed, and watered it with your foot, as a garden of vegetables; But the land, which you are going over to possess, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinks water from the rain of the skies; A land which Hashem your God cares for; the eyes of Hashem your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." (11:10-12)

Beyond the pragmatic promise of conquest, beyond even the aesthetic beauty and bounty of the Land, we are given an even more powerful insight into the special place which God has reserved for His people. All of these blessings, including the development of an ideal relationship with God as outlined in Mosheh Rabbenu's "shiur", are only possible in that Land which God always watches, "from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."

---

Text Copyright &copy 2012 by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom and **Torah.org**. The author is Educational Coordinator of the Jewish Studies Institute of the Yeshiva of Los Angeles.