

MAKING A SEEN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night

These are the statutes and laws to be observed and performed on the land which G-d, the G-d of your fathers in giving to you to inherit all the days that you live on the land. (Devarim 12:1)

There are some mitzvos from the 613 commandments that can only be performed in Eretz Yisroel -- mitzvos that are "talui b'aretz," dependent upon being in Eretz Yisroel. The Talmud learns this from the above posuk, as the following dialogue portrays:

What does it mean "dependent," and what "not dependent" mean? Š Rav Yehudah explained: Any mitzvah that must be performed by the actual person is an obligation in Eretz Yisroel, or, outside Eretz Yisroel. Any mitzvah that has to do with the soil is only an obligation in Eretz Yisroel. How do we know this? The rabbis taught: "These are the statutes" refers to the exegetical teachings Š "and laws" refers to legal decisions Š "to be observed" refers to mishnah Š "and performed" refers to that which is to be done on the land (i.e., Eretz Yisroel). You might have thought that all mitzvos can only be done on the land; says the Torah: all your days that you live on the land Š (Kiddushin 37a)

According to the Kli Yakar on the first posuk of Parashas VaEschanan, this was the basis of Moshe's entire plea to enter Eretz Yisroel. This pshat is supported by what we learned earlier about how zealous Moshe Rabbeinu, Ah"S, was to establish three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan river in the conquered territory -- even though they would not be relevant until Eretz Yisroel was conquered. So "hungry" was Moshe for a mitzvah that was tied to the land that he put all he had into whatever mitzvah he could that even resembled a mitzvah talui b'aretz!

Was in the reward that Moshe was after? No, it was not the reward that Moshe coveted; Moshe knew full well that wanting to do a mitzvah, but being unable to do it for valid reasons, still counts as having done the mitzvah (Brochos 6a; Kiddushin 29b). If so, then Moshe had it easy, getting the reward for having performed such mitzvos without have to go through the back-breaking labor of actually fulfilling such mitzvos; why complain?

The answer has to do with the location in the Talmud where these laws come up, rather "randomly." The tractate is called "Kiddushin," the one that deals with the laws of marriage between husband and wife. Marriage is one of those rare mitzvos that wanting to do is just not enough; either you're married to your spouse, or you're not. Either you're married to Eretz Yisroel, or you're not, and,

performing the mitzvos relevant only to "her" is one of the most important ways of "tying the knot" (even today, when the land-based obligation may only be rabbinical).

Except for orlah. Orlah is land-based mitzvah that applies even to outside of Eretz Yisroel, which means that, everywhere in the world a Jew must not derive any benefit from the fruit of a tree for the first three years from its being planted. Orlah outside of Eretz Yisroel is considered to be Halachah L'Moshe MiSinai (S.A., Y.D. 294:8).

This is interesting. It is interesting that, of all the mitzvos tied to the land, that orlah should be the one to apply anywhere Jews can and will be found. After all, what is the basis of the mitzvah of orlah? The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the THREE hours Adam did not wait before eating against the will of G-d, forcing death upon mankind and expulsion from Eretz Yisr Š oops, I mean Gan Aiden.

In other words, whereas other mitzvos tied to the land remind us to Whom the land belongs, and how we should show our appreciation, the mitzvah to abstain from touching the first fruits of a tree is to remind us to avoid barriers that stand in the way of our relationship with G-d. I mean, it IS called "orlah," the same word used for that which is removed through Bris Milah!

And, seeing how, in 1990, we entered a period of history that corresponds to the hour on Day Six that Adam actually ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and plunged mankind into a period of history that we have yet to recover from, orlah may be a strong symbol of all we ought to rectify. Is it any wonder then why Eretz Yisroel is proving to be such a big test for so many Jews today on all levels of observance, and why, at this late time in history, she has become such a central focal point for the entire world?

It's that VISION-THING again.

Shabbos Day:

You are children to G-d, your G-d. Do not make an incision in your-selves, nor bald yourself between your eyes for the dead. You are a holy people to G-d, your G-d, Who has chosen you to be a special people to Him, from all the nations on the earth. (Devarim 14:1-2)

In the world of flesh-and-blood, we know it is possible for a parent to "disown" a child. If the parent is psychologically healthy, then, usually this can only happen once the child has acted so disgracefully that the parent can no longer maintain a "healthy" relationship with the child. It happens in everyday life, unfortunately, more than one might want to believe (but not always because of the child).

Does it happen with out Father In Heaven? We are called "children to G-d" -- as children to G-d, can we so disgust our Father in Heaven that He disowns us as well? The Talmud answers this question:

"You are children to G-d, your G-d": When you accustom yourselves to act like children, then you are called "children"; when you do not act as children, then, you are no longer called children." That is the opinion of Rebi Yehudah.

That is, act as "children to G-d," meaning, as He would want us to behave. According to Rebi Yehudah, it seems that one who turns his back on G-d forces G-d to turn His back on him, and "disown" him, so-to-speak. However, Rebi Meir disagrees:

Š Whether we do or whether we don't, we are still called "children," as it says, "They are foolish children?" (Yirmiyahu 4:22), and it says, "Š Children in whom there is no faith." (Devarim 32:20), and it says, "Š Evil-doing seed, corrupt children." (Yeshayahu 1:4), and, it say, "It will be in the place that you shall say to them, 'You are not My people,' but say to them, 'You are children of the Living G-d!'" (Hoshea 2:1). Why the extra verses? Because, maybe only when they are foolish they are called "children," but not when they lack faith -- come and see: "Children in whom there is no faith." And, if you want to say that only when they lack faith are they called "children," but not when they worship idols -- come and see: Evil-doing seed, corrupt children. Perhaps, they are only called "corrupt children," but not "eternal children"? Come and see: "It will be in the place that you shall say to them, 'You are not My people,' but say to them, 'You are children of the Living G-d!'" (Kiddushin 36a)

The Talmud seems to side with Rebi Meir, who brings many possukim to support his point of view. However, Rashi inserts a point that puts the entire matter into perspective: if they do teshuvah, THEN they are called "children of the living G-d." It seems as if Rebi Yehudah is not so wrong about what he says.

However, it is an curious point that this mussar would show up as an introduction to a law that teaches us how to deal with death. Apparently, there were all kinds of superstitious practices common among people of the past (and even of the present), especially when it came to death and dying, and they were forbidden to the Jewish people. They were anti-holiness.

According to the Talmud (Yevamos 13b), the specific prohibition is to not wound oneself in mourning for the dead. Of course, one is never allowed to intentionally wound himself, but, one might have thought that, in the hysteria of a tragic moment, Heaven would overlook the transgression. Wrong.

According to the Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah #467), the root of this mitzvah is to do NOTHING that resembles the practices of idol worshippers. However, the words of the Chinuch are very insightful:

Š It is not becoming for the Chosen People, possessed of the precious wisdom of the Torah, to suffer anguish over some incident of G-d's doing, except in an instance where He, May His Name Be Blessed, has commanded us to Š It is solely the act of those who lack sense, who have understood nothing of G-d's handiwork and His wonders."

In other words, the Chinuch is teaching, excessive and unsanctioned forms of mourning symbolize one's inability to relate to Divine Providence, putting into question G-d's justice and, or, His

involvement in the affairs of man on a personal basis. It was this that Iyov (Job) called into question, and, it was for this that he was reprimanded by G-d Himself.

Quite the contrary; it is the way that we deal with tragedy and loss that reveals what we truly feel within our hearts about G-d's involvement in our daily lives, and how much we know and accept that our wisdom can never match His, and therefore, we must surrender our perception of reality to His. This is what it means to be "children to G-d," for, from such an attitude does righteousness grow, and, the ability to relate to G-d as our "Father In Heaven."

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Be careful not to say an unworthy thing to yourself, "The seventh year, the year of remission approaches," and turn a blind eye to your brother and give him nothing. (Devarim 15:9)

Many people are already aware of the concept of Sh'mittah, which has been raised a few times already in the Torah. However, many people understand this mitzvah to apply only to "sh'mittas ha'aretz," that is, that the land should be left unworked for the entire seventh year. However, as the posuk above teaches, the mitzvah of Sh'mittah also applies to loans.

What this means, basically, is that any outstanding loans between Jews, once the seventh year of the Sh'mittah Cycle comes in, automatically become forgivable. As hard as this may be to believe, this is the law from Heaven, because, as with land, so it is with money: once every seven years, we are reminded to Whom the money belongs.

However, humans will be humans, and therefore, we have to be warned with the above posuk. Obviously, the closer to the Sh'mittah year the loan was made, the less chance there was to have it repaid in time. In fact, the borrower might delay payment as possible just to have the Sh'mittah year wipe it away.

As is often the case, it's the honest guy who suffers for the sins of the irresponsible. All it takes is for a few money lenders to get "burned" by the Sh'mittah year by a few negligent borrowers, and the door shuts on all borrowers for good, at least toward the end of a Sh'mittah Cycle. Erev Sh'mittah could become a very difficult time for the poor.

But, what about the mitzvah itself to lend money anyhow?

Well, humans will be humans Š

This is why Hillel was forced to establish the "Prozbol," a special document that passed the loan over into the hands of the Bais Din, just in advance of the Sh'mittah year -- even though the mitzvah today is only rabbinical (Tur Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 67:10). Hilchos Sh'mittah, today, is to help us remember the mitzvah even in non-Temple times (Gittin 36b), and the Prozbol is to help us keep the

mitzvah.

It is a legal loop-hole, to be sure, a declaration made before a kosher Bais Din, in advance of the loan taking place, stating that the law of Sh'mittas Kesafim should not apply to the loan being transacted. However, this was not to protect the wealthy people of society -- the lenders -- but the poorer members -- the borrowers, because, without the prozbol, people would not lend money.

What does the word actually mean?

Rav Chisda said: pros (before the) buli u'buti -- "buli": these are the wealthy ones Š "buti" are the poor ones Š (Gittin 36b)

However, what is interesting and very telling is the choice of words the posuk makes. The word for "unworthy thing" is "blee-all." In fact, the word first shows up earlier in the parshah:

If you hear that in one of your cities, which G-d your G-d has given to you to live within, unruly people (b'nei blee-all) have surfaced among you Š (Devarim 13:13-14)

-- which, Rashi explains to mean:

"Blee-all: Without a yoke, because they threw off the yoke of G-d."

Rashi is saying that "blee-all" (bais-lamed-yud-ayin-lamed) can be looked at as a conjunction of two words "blee" (bais-lamed-yud) and "ohl" (ayin-vav-lamed), the first word meaning "without," and the last word meaning, "yoke." However, why the usage of such a concept here?

Because, the Torah is warning us. Oy, is the Torah warning us. The Torah is saying, "YOUR money?" You don't want to lend money for fear of losing YOUR money Š because the Sh'mittah might come around and wipe away YOUR loan?"

"MY Money," says G-d. "MY loan," says the Master of the Universe, you know, the One Who spoke, and EVERYTHING CAME INTO BEING, including your money?

And, let's say that the borrower doesn't repay his loan in time. Let's even say that he did not pay it purposely, using the Sh'mittah Year as an excuse to steal? Was that not Hashgochah Pratis -- Divine Providence? Can you make a penny not ordained in Heaven, or lose one without the consent of G-d? Will the irresponsible borrower not get his in the end, and did you not get yours now for good reasons too?

Lending to a poor person in advance of the Sh'mittah Year is not only a mitzvah, it is also a chance to show G-d where you hold with His rulership and ownership of creation, and, with Hashgochah Pratis -- to test if we were with "ohl," or, without "ohl." But, alas, humans will be humans, the poor need to eat also, and Hillel, the champion of the poor, was forced to establish the Prozbol to keep things working smoothly, and to save us from sin.

MELAVE MALKAH:

A Song of Ascents. (Tehillim 120:1)

So begins a series of Tehillim known as the "Fifteen Psalms," each beginning with the words, "Shir HaMa'alos" -- A Song of Ascents. Fifteen is an extremely important number in Torah numerology, because, it alludes to the first two letters of G-d's holiest Name: Yud-Heh (10+5), which, in turn allude to the Sefiros of Chochmah and Binah, respectively. Therefore, it represents all that mankind is supposed to strive toward.

This is why the waters of Great Flood rose above the highest mountain fifteen amos, to signify that mankind's activities had been anything but holy, and, had pushed the Divine Presence -- symbolized by Yud-Heh -- toward Heaven and away from man. Thus, the number of stairs leading from the Ezras Nashim to the Azarah in the Temple, upon which the Levi'im stood and sang these fifteen psalms, was fifteen as well.

The Ezras Nashim was the place in the Temple designated for the women, and, the Azarah was where the men stood. The Talmud (Sotah 17a) states that a successful marriage depends upon the inclusion of G-d in the relationship, that is, making the marriage Torah-based. This is symbolized by the fact that the word "Ish" (man: aleph-yud-shin) and "Ishah" (woman: aleph-shin-heh) share common letters: aleph-shin -- which spells the word for "fire" -- but also have one letter different from each other: a "yud" in Ish and a "heh" in Ishah, the letters of which we have been speaking.

The message is quite precise: Remove G-d from a marriage (i.e., symbolized by the Yud-Heh), and you are left with "fire" (aleph-shin) -- unholy passion and a flame that consumes the marriage.

Why would such a personal message be implanted in such a "public" and holy place? Because, it is well known in Kabbalah that man and his down-to-earth relationships reflect what is going on up in the Sefiros which run our history. And, the way we behave down here directly affects how the Sefiros behave up there -- to a degree.

In my distress I cried to G-d, and He answered me. (Tehillim 120:1)

It is no hidden fact that Dovid HaMelech suffered tremendous trials and tribulations. To know the full extent of Dovid HaMelech's suffering -- right to his dying day at the ripe age of seventy -- is to never want to be in his shoes, no matter how much good he also enjoyed. The average Jew could never withstand his tests, as he himself did.

However, in this first verse, we are told the secret to his greatness. You'll notice he does not say, "and He SAVED me," but rather, "and He ANSWERED me." The difference is very basic, yet very profound. Dovid HaMelech is proclaiming that any time he turned to G-d, G-d was there for him and He answered him, **THOUGH** -- and this is the important point to extract -- as we see from his life, not

always in the way Dovid WANTED to be answered!

In other words, says Dovid HaMelech, anyone who turns to G-d can gain instant gratification and security from knowing that G-d always hears his prayers, and, will always answer them Š albeit, not always with the answer for which we hoped. However, if that is the case, then what is the point? If I can't always get what I need, then why pray at all?

The answer to this question comes in the next verse:

G-d, rescue my soul Š (2)

First of all, the Name of G-d used in this posuk is the Four-Letter Name, which always signifies G-d acting in a merciful fashion toward man. Second of all, the type of rescuing Dovid HaMelech is talking about is that of the soul, not of his body. A tzaddik like Dovid HaMelech would never sacrifice his soul to save his body. And, as Dovid HaMelech understood, G-d feels the same way.

In fact, one very accurate way to look at life is in terms of the soul's "safe passage" from birth to death of the body. Imagine the soul being a special individual of extreme importance to the safety of the world, with plenty of evil enemies out to destroy him. Around every corner lurks another potential "enemy" who knows no limits when it comes to eradicating his enemy -- the very symbol of good and morality.

Your mission, which you must accept, is to accompany your soul to its final place of safety, which means doing everything within your power and means to fulfill your mission. More than likely, this means turning to G-d, for, as the Talmud writes and warns, "Would G-d not help a man each day against his yetzer hara, he could never prevail" (Kiddushin 30b). You can celebrate when the job is over, after Yom HaDin -- in the World-to-Come.

All that happens in life, including all the myriads of details and personal living, are just part of the mission, which is not always easy to keep in mind from moment-to-moment. But it's true, and that is why Dovid HaMelech found fit to sing to a G-d who saves souls.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

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