

SO, WHO IS THE BOSS?

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

At the end of this week's Parsha, the laws of the individual who pledges the value of a person or object to the Bais Hamikdash - Temple conclude Sefer Vayikra. For example, if a person says, I want to donate the value of my person, or the value of my gold watch to the Temple. In such an instance, the value of the object or person must be determined before the pledge can be paid. The Torah presets some values and the Kohanim evaluate all other pledges relative to their true market value. The very last laws in Sefer Vayikra focus on Maaser Shaynie (the Second Tithe) and Maaser Bhaymah (Tithing the Livestock). Why does Sefer Vayikra (Book of Leviticus) end with these select Mitzvos?

Sefer Vayikra presents the ideal lifestyle of the Jew. It describes this ideal in terms of the priestly obligations, services, and restrictions, both in and out of the Bais Hamikdash.

Following the exodus from Egypt, the Jews went through three historic stages and plans. The first stage preceded the Golden Calf. The second was from the Golden Calf until the incident with the Spies. The third stage was from the Spies until the death of Moshe Rabbeinu.

In the first stage, Plan A, the Jews should have entered Eretz Yisroel after receiving the Torah. Their ability to relate directly to G-d would have rendered the institution of the Mishkan and Bais Hamikdash unnecessary. Every Jew would have been his own living sanctuary, and every Jew would have manifested G-d's intent for humanity through his or her behavior.

Following the sin of the Golden Calf, the second stage, Plan B, the Jews needed the medium of the Mishkan and Temple. Without it they could not relate directly to G-d. Because of the sin of the Golden Calf, they had lost their ability to actualize G-d's through only their behavior. Moshe was the remaining person on earth in a state of such spiritual closeness and purity that his person alone was sufficient to manifest G-d's intent and actuality. This explains the rays of light emanating from his person. On the other hand, the rest of the nation needed the Mishkan as a tangible and external focus for their devotion and spirituality. Therefore, G-d commanded Moshe to build the Mishkan for the sake of the rest of the nation and the rest of history.

Following its construction, while still in the shadow of Mt. Sinai, the nation was taught the book of Vayikra. Once they had been taught the laws and ideals of Vayikra, the nation, under the leadership of Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam, should have entered into Eretz Yisroel. This was the goal of Plan B. However, this was not to be.

The third stage, Plan C, took place after the Jews lost their faith in G-d at the incident with the Miraglim Spies. G-d punished the Jews and rather than leading them directly into the land of Israel, He forced them to remain in the desert an additional 38 years. During those 38 years the entire generation, including Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam, died. The long-term consequences of Plan C relative to Plan B are incomprehensible and terribly tragic. Let it suffice to say that had the Jews not sinned with the incident of the Miraglim - Spies, there would have never been an exile. Moshe would have built the Bais Hamikdash and it would have never been destroyed. The Jews entering into the land of Israel would have heralded the start of the messianic age.

As mentioned earlier, Sefer Vayikra presented the nation with the ideals of a sanctified lifestyle. Succinctly put, the book of Vayikra presents a life of Taharah purity, protected from Tumah impurity, and lived within the confines of the Mishkan. The lessons in Vayikra were designed to prepare the nation to immediately enter the Promised Land and transform it from a pagan wasteland into a contemporary Garden of Eden. Therefore, our analysis of Vayikra's conclusion must be viewed from that perspective. How do the laws of voluntary contributions, Maaser Sheni, and Maaser Bhaymah sum up the essence of a sanctified life style?

There are two classic sources where the Gemara presents the Shalsheles Hakabath Chain of Transmission – the history of the transmission of both the Oral and Written Torah from G-d's revelation on MT. Sinai to this very day. 1. The beginning of Pirkei Avos – Ethics of Our Fathers. 2. The beginning of last week's Parsha, BeHar. The text of Pirkei Avos is the classic presentation of G-d's expectations for our personal and societal behavior. Rashi identifies Parshas BeHar and the laws of Shemitah as the classic example of the association between the Oral and the Written Torah. Just as G-d gave the Laws of Shemitah to the Jews with all their nuance and details, so too did G-d give all the laws in the Torah in complete and detailed form. (Free translation).

Why did the Rabbis choose these two sources, Shemitah and Pirkei Avos, to present the unbroken transmission of Torah and Jewish law? Any area of Torah law would have been equally effective in introducing the Shalsheles Hakabalah Chain of Transmission!

In brief, personal behavior, societal responsibilities, and the extended and intended affect of the laws of Shemitah are arenas that are most often disassociated from G-d. This isn't to suggest that G-d did not give laws to frame those arenas of human interaction. Just the opposite! However, they are arenas where humans feel that they do not require Divine direction. Psychology and sociology are considered the products of human wisdom and experience. Divine instruction is considered unnecessary in such instances, especially when it might be in conflict with what we want to do. In fact, the wisdom and advice presented in Pirkei Avos might be considered by some to be no more divine than the latest self-help guru or time tested common sense approach. Therefore, the Rabbis specifically introduced Pirkei Avos by associating it with the Divine revelation at Mt. Sinai and the authenticity of Moshe's prophecy. Regardless of its seemingly common sense presentation,! Pirkei Avos is as much the Law of G-d as the Ten Commandments, and must be followed because it is the

law of G-d rather than common sense wisdom.

The laws of Shemitah that introduced Parshas BeHar are equally subject to being ignored or challenged as a Divine directive. The laws of Shemitah impose Divine and seemingly illogical restrictions of the nation's economy. For most of the history of the Jews in Eretz Yisroel the nation's economy was land based. Property was the only true wealth and every Jew owned a portion of the land. However, the properties could be leased until the Yovel. Any improvements or development of the leased property were therefore limited to 50 years, after which the properties, improvements and all, reverted back to their original ancestral ownership. (Yes, there were exceptions to the rule). In most instances, the 50-year mark meant a restructuring and redistribution of economic wealth.

Business, money, and the national economy are arenas where most humans would prefer to ignore Divine direction. You can tell me how much Tzedaka - charity I must give. You can command me to share the fruits of my hard labor with the Kohain and the Layvie. However, You (G-d) cannot tell me how to run my business. That I can do all by myself. Therefore, Chazal introduced the foundation of Jewish ownership and management by associating it with the Divine transmission of Torah from Mt. Sinai to the present.

The focus of Sefer Vayikra has been the How to manual on introducing sanctity, Kedusha, purpose, association with G-d into daily Jewish life. Eretz Yisroel was supposed to be the setting where in which the Jewish nation and economy could role model for the rest of the world the integration of G-dliness into normal living. Therefore, the book of Vayikra concludes with the laws of the individual who pledges the value of a person or object to the Bais Hamikdash, and Maaser Shaynie (the Second Tithe) and Maaser Bhaymah (Tithing the livestock).

In the case of the individual who pledges the value of a person or object to the Bais Hamikdash, it does not make a difference what the owner thinks the person or object is worth. The Torah set the price for (27:1-8) people and empowered the Kohanim and the Bait Din Jewish court to assess the value of all other possessions. The message was clear. True value has nothing to do with individual initiative or accomplishment. Rocket scientist, Nobel Prize winner, shoe maker of village idiot are only as important as their subjugation to the law of G-d. G-d determines true value, and association with G-d is the primary criteria for determining value.

The laws of Maaser Sheni and Maaser Bhaymah are equally eloquent in establishing the true criteria for ownership and wealth. Maaser Shaynie required the farmer to transport his tithes to Yerushalayim. In Yerushalayim, he and his family would invite the poor of Jerusalem to share in G-d's bounty. If he did not wish to transport the actual produce (think in contemporary terms involving shipping costs and storage of raw produce) he could redeem its value at the market value plus 1/5 its total value.

The message was clear. The tithed produce was not yours. For that matter, the entire successful yield was a gift from G-d. G-d's instructions were to bring the tithes to Yerushalayim and share it with

the poor. It was the obligation of the farmer to do so. If he decided to go the more convenient route and redeem it rather than transport it, that convenience would cost the farmer 1/5 more than the market value. Given such a scenario, who was the real boss and who was the employee?

The Maaser Bhaymah Tithing of the livestock, was even more direct. The selection of which animal would go to the Bais Hamikdash and which stayed in the barn was a matter of chance. As the new flock was moved from one corral to the next, every tenth animal would be marked as Maaser. If the very best animals happened to be between the selected Maaser, it was too bad. It was forbidden to exchange the better animals for lesser animals (27:33). Why? Because, the livestock was truly not yours. The claims and rights of ownership were only in relation to how the owner used his wealth and property to serve G-d and the do Mitzvos.

Vayikra's final message is clear. Under these laws the enjoyment of life's pleasures, kept within the bounds of morality, becomes in itself a G-dly act, with every home becoming an abode of G-d and every table an altar. Every Jewish man and woman is then consecrated as a priest or priestess without the need for any priestly rite, and they themselves may partake of the things hallowed to G-d. (Rav Hirsch 27:33).

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