

פרשת כי תבוא Parshat Ki Tavo

Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



RABBI BEN SUGERMAN LOST AND FOUND

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REBECCA HENNER ('22)

YONI KURTZ ('20)

ASHIRA MEYEROWITZ ('21)

MEIR SCHOCHET ('21)

The first aliyah of this week's parsha sounds familiar. It should — it's the pesukim that we say at the seder on Pesach. In addition to bringing his first fruits, *bikurim*, to the Beit Hamikdash and handing them to

the kohen, a farmer is also obligated to recite four short pesukim that provide a brief historical synopsis of the Exodus from Egypt.

The mishna in the tenth perek of Pesachim tells us that a main part of the mitzvah of retelling the story of Egypt is to recite these four pesukim and provide a midrashic interpretation for these verses. And so we do. Every seder night, we start with the classic "Arami oved avi." Additionally, the mishna provides a thematic instruction in terms of how to tell the story of the Exodus.

The mishna instructs us: "*Matchil b'genut u'misayem b'shevach*" — start the story on a downer and end on a positive, as any good storyteller knows.

The gemara in Pesachim relates a debate over how to properly fulfill this requirement. One opinion is that we start with the low point of our slavery and finish off with our emancipation, and another opinion is that we start with our spiritual depravity and finish off with our commitment and connection to Hashem. In practice, we do both. One of the opening paragraphs for the Haggadah's Magid section is *Avadim Hayinu*, while another is *Mitchila Ovdei Avodah Zara Hayu Avoteinu*. The first opinion is the more logical one. The topic of slavery seems to be more germane to the theme of the evening as we are celebrating our exodus from Egypt. How do we understand the second opinion? Is there any indication in the pesukim themselves that we need to tell the story going all the way back to Avraham and his father Terach, reminding ourselves that once upon a time we worshipped idols?

Perhaps the answer comes from this week's parsha. As

mentioned, the prototype story for Yetziat Mitzrayim is the four pesukim beginning with *Arami oved avi*. The Torah provides a very succinct storyline of slavery to freedom.

For the most part, these pesukim are very clear, except perhaps for those first three words: *Arami oved avi*. What do they mean? Rashi gives the more popular explanation, reflecting the view of the midrash that we say every year at the seder: the “Arami” is a reference to Lavan, who sought to destroy Yaakov. A different explanation is offered by Rashi’s grandson, the Rashbam. The “Arami,” explains the Rashbam, is a reference to Avraham. The pasuk should be understood as saying the following: our father Avraham, who was from Aram, was wandering and lost, “like a lost sheep looking for its master.”

Based on this explanation, we see that the Torah itself -- when recounting our story of going into exile -- takes us back to Avraham, who was wandering and searching for truth. The exile and slavery is a means and a backdrop to how we eventually discovered that truth. This is further reflected by the fact that our destination after leaving Egypt is Sinai. Revelation becomes a realization of a search for the Divine that traces its way back to the wanderings of our patriarch Avraham.

One more point to consider...the end of the Magid section concludes with the first two paragraphs of Hallel, which is followed by a break for washing, matzah, maror, and the meal. Later in the evening we resume Hallel with the third paragraph. Is there any significance to stopping after the first two paragraphs? I will suggest that the first two paragraphs are the perfect summation to the dual theme of Magid. For the storyline of how we once served idols, we say *Halluelu avdei Hashem*, “we are now the servants of God.” For the storyline of how we were slaves to Pharaoh, we say *B’tzeit Yisrael mi’Mitzrayim*, “As the Jews left Egypt”. The orchestrator of the Magid section, sensitive to the dual nature of Magid, carefully selected the first two paragraphs of Hallel to conclude Magid -- two paragraphs which embody the essence of both themes!



TODAY FOR ALL ETERNITY

REBECCA HENNER ('22)

In this week’s parsha, Ki Tavo, Moshe continues to tell Bnei Yisrael the laws that they need to know once they enter Israel, known as the “*mitzvot ha’teluyot ba’Aretz*”. He relates to them the laws regarding *bikurim* and announces which tribes will be on Har Gerizim and which on Har Eival. Moshe and the kohanim constantly reiterate that the people must listen to Hashem and do what He commands.

At one point, they say,

היום זהה נהיה לעם לה' אלקינו

“On this day you will be as a nation to Hashem your God” (Devarim 27:9). This phrase raises a big question which doesn’t merely help us better understand the text, but also teaches a lesson which is extremely relevant today. Rashi wonders why now, when the nation is about to enter the land of Israel, do the Kohanim and Moshe say “on this day,” if “this day” is referring to when Hashem chose us to be His nation more than 40 years back?

To help us understand the reason, imagine two individuals who are getting married to each other. It is the best day of their lives, a time they will never forget. So much work has been put into the occasion, and it finally arrives. The party is filled with exuberance and what seems like never-ending excitement. Fast forward 50 or so years, and think about whether the same excitement would still exist. If it does, it is clear that this is a good relationship.

When Bnei Yisrael were given the Torah at Har Sinai, many *mefarshim* explain that it was as if we were “marrying” God. Many individuals felt an inner spark that likely stayed with them for a long period of time. However, when we were in the desert, many people lost that spark, and there was a breach in the connection between God and his nation. The relationship that was once new and exciting soon became dull and a burden.

As Moshe is sending off Bnei Yisrael into Israel, he wants to rebuild that connection and make sure that the Jewish people keep a close bond with Hashem. This is what the words *היום זהה נהיה לעם לה' אלקינו*

are implying. We must always feel like it is the first day that Hashem chose us as a nation. Often it is hard to recognize that Hashem is with you, whether you are having a bad day, struggling with tefilla, or anything else. If we put ourselves in the mindset that today, and not 5779 years ago, Hashem chose us to be a part of His nation, we can reconnect to Hashem and bring Mashiach!

LEFT OR RIGHT?

YONI KURTZ ('20)

Parshat Ki Tavo is a lesson in extremes. The parsha sandwiches a set of blessings for fulfilling Hashem's commandments in between two sets of curses. As the Torah transitions from the descriptions of the blessings into the second set of curses, we find some unusual phrasing. The Torah writes:

וְלَا תַּסֹּר מִכֶּל-הַדְבָּרִים אֲשֶׁר אֱנֹכִי מִצְחָה אֲתֶכָם
הַיּוֹם יְמִינֵךְ וְשִׁמְאָול לְלִכְתָּא כָּחָרִים אֶלְהִים אֶחָרִים לְעַבְדָם

"And do not deviate to the left or to the right from all of the things that I have commanded you today to walk after other gods to serve them" (Devarim 28:14).

The phrasing here is interesting. Rather than simply telling us to listen to the commandments before delving into the curses, Hashem includes the words יְמִינֵךְ וְשִׁמְאָול or "left and right." Is this a political statement? Probably not. Why, then, do we have these seemingly unnecessary words inserted before a chilling description of the horrors of disregarding Hashem's commandments?

The Ramban weighs in on these words by connecting them to the previous pasuk, which is similar in that it warns B'nei Yisrael that they will only receive the brachot if they follow Hashem and not other gods. The Ramban says that the addition of יְמִינֵךְ וְשִׁמְאָול is necessary to teach us that if one even thinks about serving other gods, it is as if he has already "strayed from the path." This is a valuable idea that explains the literal meaning of יְמִינֵךְ וְשִׁמְאָול, but it does not show why these pesukim are directly applicable to B'nei Yisrael before they enter Eretz Yisrael.

Sforno is also bothered by this, and points out that יְמִינֵךְ וְשִׁמְאָול can be thought of more literally. When B'nei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael, they would be directly confronted with outside cultures for the first

time since having been slaves in Egypt. Hashem included the left or right refrain to teach B'nei Yisrael not to literally look to their left or right and integrate the customs of the Canaanites into Jewish culture. Only by doing this could B'nei Yisrael possibly hope to keep all of the Torah while being constantly inundated by other people for the great number of years they would spend in the land. It is for this reason that Hashem chooses to include these words as a final warning before jumping into the curses.

This concept of maintaining tradition in the face of external influences is one that is especially poignant today, in a time in which most of B'nei Yisrael is more exposed to non-Jewish culture than ever before. The challenge for us is not how to shut this culture out of our minds completely, but rather how to live a life in alignment with the Torah in the face of this culture. May we all merit to lead lives filled with Torah and to experience all of the brachot that we are promised in Parshat Ki Tavo.

KEEP THINKING

ASHIRA MEYEROWITZ ('21)

In this week's parsha, Parshat Ki Tavo, the Torah states:

עֲשֵׂיתִי כָּכֶל אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי
"I have acted according to everything that You commanded me" (Devarim 26:14).

This verse is part of Vidui, confession, when one gives a tenth of their money to charity. However, why are we confessing that we have done all we are commanded to? Shouldn't we confess about what we were not able to do?

Rabbi Sholom of Abel answers that it is impossible to completely fulfill everything we have been commanded to do. The Torah commands us to say, "I did all that was commanded" even though we have not, because saying those words reminds us of the improvement we need to make in our lives.

In addition, the Torah also says:

לֹא עֲבַרְתִּי מִמְצֹוֹתֶיךָ וְלֹא שִׁכַּחְתִּי

"I have not transgressed any of your commandments, and I have not forgotten" (Devarim 26:13). Doesn't this seem redundant? If someone hasn't transgressed then how can they have forgotten? Sometimes we complete a mitzvah out of habit and forget the reasoning behind it; we lack the proper kavanah. This is why we state that we have fulfilled the mitzvah and have not forgotten the meaning behind it as well.

HOW CAN WE KEEP EVERY MITZVAH?

MEIR SCHOCHET ('21)

In the beginning of this week's parsha, the Torah includes a troubling pasuk about doing mitzvot. It says:

אָרוֹר אֲנַשֶּׁר لَا יִקְיַם אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַתּُוֹרָה הַזֹּאת
לְעֹשֹׂות אֹתוֹת וְאָמַר כֹּל-הָעָם אָמֵן

"Cursed be he who does not uphold the words of the Torah, to perform them; and all the people will say amen" (Devarim 27:26).

If we were to interpret this literally, we might worry that if we fail to perform every single one of the 613 mitzvot, we are eligible for this curse. However, there are many mitzvot that we cannot fulfill. Some mitzvot only apply to a limited group of people, and others, like the *mitzvot hateluyot ba'Aretz*, don't apply to anyone in our time. Women are generally exempt from positive time-bound mitzvot, while other mitzvot only apply to women. So what does this curse really mean?

The Or Hachaim explains that the pasuk isn't telling us that someone will be cursed for not doing *every* mitzvah, but that one who isn't willing to perform a mitzvah that may come their way will be cursed.

As such, whether or not we are currently faced with a mitzvah, we must have the desire to do every mitzvah that could possibly apply to us. There is a beautiful story told by Rabbi Moshe Kormornick that exemplifies this. Rav Elyashiv had hired an electrician to upgrade the electricity in his home. This work was scheduled to take place right before Rav Elyashiv was told that his daughter had passed away. Rav Elyashiv immediately began to prepare for the funeral, and told his grandson to request that the electrician go home. By the time the electrician showed up, everyone was about ready to leave, but the Rav insisted on staying to find the money to pay the electrician in order to fulfil the mitzvah of paying his workers on time, and only after that did he agree to go to the funeral. Just like Rav Elyashiv demonstrates, this pasuk is not saying that we will be cursed if we do not fulfill *every* mitzvah, but rather that we should always have in mind the desire to perform the mitzvot that may come our way. As Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are approaching, let us have this in mind before the long process of teshuva kicks into high gear. Have a wonderful Shabbos!



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