

עזרי דשע

**Alei Deshe - Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on
the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur**

Finding the Connection

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר

Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai, saying: (Vayikra 25:1)

Rashi famously asks on this pasuk, “מה ענין שמיטה אצל הר סיני” - What does *shemittah* have to do with Har Sinai?” Why is this *parshah*, the *parshah* of the laws of *shemittah*, introduced with a mention of Har Sinai?

The Lev Simchah once commented to my father, in reference to this Rashi, that הר סיני and שמיטה have the same *gematria*. With a quick mental calculation, my father realized that they do not, in fact, share the same *gematria*. Picking up on this, the Lev Simchah quipped that that made perfect sense, since Rashi clearly says, מה ענין שמיטה, אצל הר סיני. Thinking it over later, my father realized that הר סיני with an added *lamed* (להר סיני), does match the *gematria* of שמיטה. What is the meaning of this?

The Gemara (Yevamos 13b) states that the Torah often substitutes a *lamed* at the beginning of a word with a *hei* at the end of the word. For example, instead of writing למצרים (to Mitzrayim), the Torah writes מצרימה. R. Menachem Mendel of Vorka wondered about this: what gain is there in taking out one letter and replacing it somewhere else with another letter? It doesn't make the word any shorter.¹ He explained that a lesson can be learned from this: there are times when one is forced to speak something out, but as long as he can hold it in, he must.

¹ See *Ohev Yisrael, Likutim Chadashim, Vayishlach*

But this is difficult to understand. Granted, there would be a gain where one could keep quiet a bit longer. But that is not the case here. When the Torah says מצרימה instead of למצרים, the *mem* is simply being said sooner, in place of the *lamed*. So what's the point?

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**The eager preparation
for kabbalas haTorah,
means gaining distance
from all the distractions
and temptations of this
physical world.**

I believe R. Menachem Mendel's explanation was given over incorrectly. What he meant was that the Torah is teaching the great value of getting straight to the *tachlis*, to the point. In the word למצרים, the subject is Mitzrayim, and the *lamed* is only a prefix that adds context or grammatical precision. When the Torah substitutes it with מצרימה, it has gotten right to the point; the details can be taken care of afterwards.

This lesson holds true in most areas; generally, it is preferable to get straight to the *tachlis*. But when dealing with Har Sinai, it is not so. One must first prepare himself for Torah; only afterwards can he approach the Torah.

Thus, the proper way of expressing our journey to Har Sinai is להר סיני, with the *lamed* giving us time to prepare for the Torah.

This is the meaning of the *gematria* connection between הר סיני and שמיטה. להר סיני prefixed with a *lamed* - להר סיני. Both the waiting period of *shemittah*, and the waiting period expressed by להר סיני, are not times of empty delay; they are times of meaning-laden pause. The anticipation and the waiting; the eager preparation for *kabbalas haTorah*, means gaining distance from all the distractions and temptations of this physical world.

Once, when the Sfas Emes was a child, the Chiddushei HaRim asked him to explain the pasuk (Shemos 19:2), ויחן שם ישראל, שם

לעילוי נשמת
מרת
עקא עדנה
צפורה ע"ה
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל

נגד הַהָר - *and Yisrael encamped there, opposite the mountain*. The Sfas Emes responded with Rashi's well-known explanation: כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלִב אֶחָד, all of Bnei Yisrael were united as one man with one heart. The Chiddushei HaRim replied, "I explain it this way: Bnei Yisrael faced Har Sinai, and turned their back to the whole world."

This, too, is the idea of *shemittah*; casting off all this-worldly matters and lifting oneself above it. And this is the proper way to prepare for *kabbalas haTorah*.

(בנאות דשא - בהר בחקותי תשפ"א)

Give Me Liberty

Throughout recent *parshiyos* there are several mitzvos which conclude with an exhortation of (or similar to), אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם, *I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt*.² Rashi explains, citing Chazal:³ "על מנת כן הוצאתי אתכם" - On condition of this I took you out." The Sfas Emes⁴ explains that this was an actual stipulation: if at any point in time Yidden fail to keep the mitzvos, they have, retroactively, not left Mitzrayim. This is not limited to specific mitzvos. The pasuk in our *parshah* (26:45) states, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם וְגו' לְהִיּוֹת, *whom I have taken out of the land of Egypt... to be to them G-d*.⁵ This refers to the obligation of *kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim* and carrying out all the mitzvos of the Torah. If a Yid is lacking in fulfilling this condition, he has not left Mitzrayim.

What does this mean? Certainly, one cannot today be enslaved to Egypt; the Egyptians of old no longer inhabit the country. Besides, the original enslavement was itself unlawful. So in what way is one who does not keep the mitzvos still in Mitzrayim?

When Hashem redeemed us from Mitzrayim, he raised us to an exalted spiritual state. One

who is not careful to keep the mitzvos loses this *madreigah*; in this way, he has not left Mitzrayim.

The Sfas Emes adds that it's not all or nothing; one is redeemed from Mitzrayim accord-

manner, he has gone out of Egypt, but remains connected to it in the depths of his heart. But one who truly, thoroughly, accepts upon himself *malchus Shamayim* is completely elevated above

If a person keeps the mitzvos in a simple, superficial manner, he has gone out of Egypt, but remains connected to it in the depths of his heart. But one who truly, thoroughly, accepts upon himself malchus Shamayim is completely elevated above Egypt

ing to degree that he fulfills the condition. If a person keeps the mitzvos in a simple, superficial

Egypt, and attains an exalted spiritual state as at the time of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. We have the ability

² See Vayikra 11:45; 19:36; 22:33; 25:38

³ Toras Kohanim

⁴ *Lekutim*, Kedoshim

⁵ See also Bamidbar 15:41

to leave Mitzrayim – but it is up to us to do so. This is the approach of the Sfas Emes.

The Chiddushei HaRim took a different approach. He expressed amazement at Chazal's statement: if Hashem took us out of Mitzrayim on condition that we keep the mitzvos, it follows that one who doesn't do so remains in Egypt. How can this be? The Chiddushei HaRim explained that it is not so. There is a rule in *hilchos tena'im* that a stipulation is not effective when imposed on an action that cannot be done through a *shaliach*.⁶ *Yetzias Mitzrayim* could only be done by Hashem Himself and not through an agent, as the pasuk (Shemos 12:12) states, וְעַבְרְתִּי, 'אֲנִי ה' - *I shall go through the land of Egypt... I am Hashem*. Accordingly, one who fails to uphold the proviso by not keeping the mitzvos is nonetheless considered redeemed from Mitzrayim.

The Chiddushei HaRim's approach is a *limud zechus* on Klal Yisrael,⁷ but it does not free us of our responsibility to keep the mitzvos. The *Acharonim*⁸ say that even where a stipulation is not effective, such as where the action cannot be done through *shelichus*, the parties are still obligated to carry out the condition. The same is true here: although the Chiddushei HaRim maintains that all Yidden, in whatever spiritual state they may be, are out of Mitzrayim – they must still keep their end of the deal by accepting *ol malchus Shamayim*.

Another such phenomenon appears in our *parshah* (26:3-4) אִם בְּחַקְתִּי תִלְכּוּ וְאֵת מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ: וְנָתַתִּי גֶשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעֵתָם וְגו' - *If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time...* Tosafos⁹ wonders about this: how

could a stipulation be effective on the fulfillment of mitzvos, since each person must perform them on his own, so they cannot be done through *shelichus*? Tosafos answers that in fact, most mitzvos can be performed by a *shaliach*, so the condition is binding.

My father pointed out a difficulty with this Tosafos. The rule (that a stipulation can only be made where *shelichus* is possible) only concerns the *action* promised by the condition, not the proviso itself. For example, if one person promises to do X if another does Y, X needs to be subject to *shelichus* — not Y. Accordingly, Tosafos should not discuss whether people's fulfillment of mitzvos can be done by *shaliach*, but whether Hashem's fulfillment of His promises can be done through *shelichus*. This point is raised, as well, by Maharasham Schiff and *Pnei Yehoshua*.

The Mishnah teaches in Avos (4:19), "What is the difference between *talmidim* of Avraham Avinu and *talmidim* of Bilaam *harasha*? *Talmidim* of Avraham Avinu eat in this world and inherit the World to Come; *talmidim* of Bilaam inherit Gehinnom and descend to the depths of destruction." Why does the Mishnah mention the detail that the righteous "eat in this world"? It seems trivial or meaningless alongside "and inherit the World to Come."

The Sfas Emes¹⁰ explains that the concepts of "eating in this world" and "inheriting the World to Come" are really one and the same. Righteous people, *talmidim* of Avraham Avinu, live in this world and eat its fruit in an *Olam Haba'dig* manner, sanctifying the mundane. When Hashem showers us with material blessing, it is in order that we can elevate the physical, enabling us to better serve Hashem.¹¹

The Sfas Emes further explains that this is why the Torah promises only physical reward, not the spiritual rewards of *Olam Haba*.¹² Chazal (Avos 4:17) teach that one moment of *teshuvah* and good deeds in this world is more valuable than all the life of the next world; living *Olam Haba'dig* by uplifting this world is greater than *Olam Haba* itself. Hashem rewards us with physical goodness so that we can choose to elevate it, creating for ourselves a life of *Olam Haba* on this world.

With this introduction my father explained the above Tosafos. Why does Tosafos consider whether a Yid's fulfillment of mitzvos can be done through *shelichus*, and not whether the fulfillment of Hashem's promises can? Because the fulfillment of Hashem's promises constitutes a mitzvah for us. When He showers us with abundance, it is so that we can grow in *avodas Hashem*. Accordingly, since, as Tosafos answers, most mitzvos can be done through a *shaliach*, this mitzvah too – Hashem's reward – is given the status of being subject to *shelichus*. Thus, the stipulation is binding that (26:3-4) *If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time.*

(בחוקותי תשפ"ב – מאמר ב)

6 See Kiddushin 61a; Kesubos 74a with Rashi

7 We may note that these opinions of the Sfas Emes and the Chiddushei HaRim are consistent with their respective approaches to leadership. The Sfas Emes, like his Rebbe, the Kotzker, was sharp and spiritually demanding of his followers. The Chiddushei HaRim, despite the high spiritual demands he had for his chassidim, had a somewhat gentler approach.

8 See *Ketzos Hachoshen* 241:9; *Chiddushei HaRim*, Kiddushin 47 י"ל ע"ד

9 גיטין 75א לאפוקי ד"

10 Bechukosai 5638 1365 kalaB; ד"ה ואכלתם;

11 *Sfas Emes* Bechukosai 5643; see also *Kedushas Levi* ד"ה ונתתי

12 See Abarbanel to our *parshah*; *Kli Yakar*, 26:12; Maharal in *Tiferes Yisrael* chapters 57-60

Fooling the Old Fool

אם בְּחֻקֵי תִלְכוּ וְאֵת מִצְוֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ

If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments. (Vayikra 26:3)

The Beis Yisrael¹³ points out a seeming anomaly in this pasuk. Chazal¹⁴ say that any expression of אם or ואם ('if') in the Torah implies that the subject of the pasuk is only a *reshus* (non-mandatory). How can we consider it a matter of choice whether to fulfill the mitzvos?

We could explain simply that the word אם in our pasuk does not express that the mitzvos are a *reshus*; but only that Hashem's promise of reward is conditional on our fulfillment of the mitzvos. However, the *sefarim hakedoshim*¹⁵ do delve into this, explaining the pasuk's usage of אם in various ways.

The Beis Yisrael would often repeat from the Imrei Emes a thought of the Yismach Moshe. The Gemara (Berachos 35b) relates that later generations would bring their produce into their homes in a roundabout manner in order to exempt it from *ma'aser*. In truth, however, when one does this the produce remains subject to *ma'aser* on a *mid'Rabbanan* level. They surely wouldn't transgress a Rabbinic obligation, so what did they gain by exempting it *mid'Oraisa*?¹⁶

The Yismach Moshe explained that the level of obligation one has for a mitzvah determines how strongly the *yetzer hara* resists it. The *yetzer hara* works harder to entice a Yid with something forbidden by six prohibitions than with something forbidden by one. As the pasuk (Koheles 7:14) states, אם גַּם עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹקִים - *G-d has made the one opposite the other.*

Earlier generations weren't scared of the *yetzer hara*; they were fine bringing upon themselves an obligation of *ma'aser min haTorah*. The later generations, however, were fearful of the *yetzer hara*'s strength, and wanted to minimize its potency so that they could overcome it. Therefore, they brought upon themselves only a *mid'Rabbanan* obligation.

This, the Beis Yisrael explains, is why the Torah begins our *parshah* with אם בְּחֻקֵי תִלְכוּ, implying that the mitzvos are voluntary. The Torah wishes to minimize the *yetzer hara*'s opposition to our fulfilling the mitzvos, so they are not expressed as an absolute obligation.

This explanation of the Beis Yisrael is, in my opinion, often misunderstood, and I consulted with a highly esteemed *chassid*, who agreed with

me on this. People think the Beis Yisrael meant that when a person sees the *yetzer hara* overpowering him, he should pretend that the matter in question is only voluntary; in this way, he can overcome the *yetzer hara*.¹⁷ But actually, this manner of thinking can be quite dangerous.

The *ba'alei mussar* advocated a similar approach in *avodas Hashem*, but as we shall see, there is an important distinction here.

When Yaakov Avinu related to Rachel and Leah the instruction of Hashem, (Bereishis 31:13), קוּם צֵא מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְשׁוּב אֶל אֶרֶץ מוֹלְדְּךָ, - *Arise, leave this land and return to your native land*, they replied, הֲעוֹד לָנוּ חֵלֶק וְנַחֲלָה בְּבֵית אֲבוֹתֵינוּ - *Have we then still a share and an inheritance in our father's home?* Shouldn't they have simply accepted Hashem's command? Why did they need to rationalize that they would not lose out materially by doing so? The *ba'alei mussar* explained that one must always seek to minimize the *nisayon* that he finds himself in. Since recognizing that one will not lose out by listening to Hashem makes it easier to do so, they took the step of speaking that out.¹⁸

Yet this is true when one uses a true rationalization as a tool to weaken the *yetzer hara*; whether by inducing a Rabbinic obligation of *ma'aser* or by recognizing that following Hashem's directive won't bring him loss. But how could one try to convince himself of a patent falsehood in order to overcome the *yetzer hara*? Although the *yetzer hara* is an old, foolish king,¹⁹ he won't be fooled by somebody claiming that mitzvos are voluntary. In fact, he would likely respond, "All right then, if the mitzvos aren't obligatory, go right ahead and follow my advice!" Clearly, using this understanding of the Beis Yisrael's words can lead one to fall into the *yetzer hara*'s trap.

So what does the Beis Yisrael mean? The Gemara²⁰ teaches that Hashem assists man in overcoming the *yetzer hara*. One of the ways Hashem helps is by weakening the power of the *yetzer hara*. Although a person's thinking cannot fool the *yetzer hara*, the Torah's wording does have the capability to do so. By the Torah implying, with אם בְּחֻקֵי תִלְכוּ, an element of non-requirement in our obligation to keep the Torah and mitzvos, the *yetzer hara* is fooled into thinking that mitzvos are voluntary, so that his opposition to them is weakened.²¹

(בחוקותי תשפ"ב - מאמר ג)

13 5709, 5713, 5715, 5717, 5721, 5726, 5729, 5731, 5736, ובק"פ

14 Mechilta cited by Rashi, Shemos 20:22

15 See *Ma'or VaShemesh* and others

16 See *Tzlach*, ibid דרך ד"ה

17 See *Pe'er Yisrael*, vol. 3 p. 102

18 See *Ohr Yisrael*, letter 2; see also commentary *Iggeres Hazos* p. 25, and *Iyunim U'Burim* p. 369

19 See Koheles 4:13

20 Sukkah 52b, Kiddushin 30b

21 See *Be'er Mayim*, p. 12