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DAF KESHER

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Chaim Aharon ben Shalom ז"ל

DVAR TORAH CHAIN REACTION

The world of Torah and mitzvot is guided by operating principles, much as the natural world runs according to the laws of nature Hashem built into creation. Two such principles are: “מצוה גוררת מצוה – One mitzvah brings about (literally, drags along) another mitzvah” (Avot 4:2); and “מחשבה טובה הקב"ה מצרפה למעשה – The Holy One, blessed be He, joins a good thought with a deed” (Kiddushin 40a), as if it was done.

Based on these principles, the author of the Kedushat Levi (Harav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov, זצ"ל, 1740-1809) explained the first verse of Bechukotai (Vayikra 26:3). He pointed out the seeming wordiness of: “אם בְּחַקְתִּי תֵלְכוּ וְאֶת מִצְוֹתֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם – If you walk by My laws and keep my commandments and do them.” Why did Hashem not simply say, “אם תשמרו מצותי” – If you keep My commandments”?

The Kedushat Levi explains the expression “אם בחקתי תלכו” based on the first principle. Someone who does a mitzvah is given the opportunity to do another mitzvah. But then that second mitzvah brings him to a third, causing a chain reaction. The person begins to grow and grow, and becomes closer and closer to Hashem. “אם בחקתי,” says the verse – if you cling to My laws – then “תלכו” – you will move; you will not remain stationary (see Zechariah 3:7, where angels are referred to as עומדים – standing still at one spiritual level, and people are מהלכים – going, growing, moving).

Rabbeinu Yonah, זצ"ל (Harav Yonah ben Avraham of Gerondi, Catalonia 1210-1263) offers a naturalistic explanation for the principle מצוה גוררת מצוה (Rabbeinu Yonah's Commentary on Avot 4:2): When a person does one mitzvah, he gets used to service of Hashem, and that makes it easier for him to do the second. This, in turn, makes it easier for him to do the third. His mitzvah tolerance increases; he thus becomes conditioned to do mitzvot that involve more and more effort.

The end of the verse is based on the second principle: even intent to do a mitzvah is considered by Hashem as if it was actually done. The verb root שמר, besides meaning to watch or keep, has an additional connotation of waiting and looking forward to something (see Rashi on Bereishit 37:11 – after Yosef's dream, ואביו שמר את הדבר – Yaakov looked forward to when the dream would be fulfilled). Using this meaning the verse now reads: “וְאֶת מִצְוֹתֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ” – if you look forward to doing My mitzvot, even if you aren't able to actualize your desire; still, “וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם” – it is as if you did them.

With his approach to the first verse of Bechukotai, the Kedushat Levi solved a philosophical difficulty the next verse presents. Hashem says that if we keep the mitzvot, “וְנָתַתִּי גֶשְׁמֵיכֶם בְּעֵתָם – I will bring forth your rains in their proper time.” This seems to refute the approach of Rabbi Yaakov (quoted on Kiddushin 39b), who says, “שֶׁכֶּר מִצְוָה בְּהַאי עֲלָמָא לִיכָא – There is no reward for mitzvot in This World”? How does Rabbi Yaakov explain all the blessings of Parshat Bechukotai? The Kedushat Levi answers that even though the ultimate reward comes in the World to Come, through His blessings Hashem provides us with more and more opportunities to do mitzvot in This World. Rainfall, prosperity, and peace allow us to give tzedakah, live as a united nation, and connect to Hashem through His Torah, continuing the chain reaction of mitzvot.

SOURCE GUIDE: THE POSTSCRIPT OF BEHAR

The last two verses of Parshat Behar seem out of place. The rest of the Parshah deals with Shemittah and Yovel and related topics – selling and redeeming property and servants – so why does the Parshah close with two verses about idolatry, Shabbat, and the Mikdash? This source guide is built on the commentators' solutions to this difficulty.

A. The Last Two Verses of Behar

Here are the last two verses of Behar. [Note that even though these are verses 1 and 2 of a new chapter of Vayikra, according to our Mesorah they are at the end of an eleven-verse section in the Torah scroll (a “parshah stumah”)]:

<p>1. Vayikra 26:1-2 (1) Do not make for yourselves idols; and do not set up a statue or a monument for yourselves; and in your land you should not place a pavement stone on which to prostrate yourselves, for I am Hashem, your G-d. (2) Keep My Shabbatot and My Sanctuary you should fear; I am Hashem.</p>	<p>ויקרא כו א-ב (א) לא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם אֱלִילִים וּפְסֵל וּמִצֵּבָה לֹא תִקְיְמוּ לָכֶם וְאֶבֶן מִשְׁפָּת לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּאַרְצְכֶם לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת עָלֶיהָ כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. (ב) אֵת שַׁבְּתוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וּמִקְדָּשִׁי תִירָאוּ אֲנִי ה'.</p>
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The rest of Behar breaks down neatly into seven sections (parshiot) about the following topics:

1. Shemittah (Vayikra 25:1-7);
2. Yovel (Vayikra 25:8-24);
3. “When your brother becomes poor” and sells his inheritance – redeeming land (Vayikra 25:25-28);
4. Redeeming land sold in cities (Vayikra 25:29-34);
5. “When your brother becomes poor” – not lending with interest (Vayikra 25:35-38);
6. “When your brother becomes poor” – and is sold as a servant (Vayikra 25:39-46);
7. When a Jew is sold as a servant to a non-Jew (Vayikra 25:47-55) – is the topic of the first 9 verses of that section. But the last two (Vayikra 26:1-2) verses seem to go off topic, mentioning the prohibitions against making idols and bowing down on stones, keeping Shabbat, and fearing the Mikdash.

B. Jewish Servant with a Gentile Master

The following Midrash provides us with an answer to this question:

<p>2. Sifra Parshat Behar end of Chapter 9 “... For I am Hashem, your G-d. Keep My Shabbatot and My Sanctuary you should fear; I am Hashem” – The verse refers to the one who was sold to an idol worshipper. He should not say, “Since my master worships idols, so will I. Since my master commits sexual sins, so will I. Since my master desecrates Shabbatot, so will I.” The Torah answers him by saying “Do not make idols; keep My Shabbatot; fear My sanctuary.” He is thus warned about all of the mitzvot. “I am Hashem” – trustworthy to pay a reward.</p>	<p>ספרא פרשת בהר סוף פרק ט “כי אני ה' אלקיכם את שבתותי תשמורו ומקדשי תיראו” – כנגד זה הנמכר לעכו”ם הכתוב מדבר. שלא יאמר, “הואיל ורבי עובד עכו”ם אף אני אעבוד עכו”ם. הואיל ורבי מגלה עריות אף אני אגלה עריות. הואיל ורבי מחלל שבתות אף אני אחלל את השבתות.” תלמוד לומר: “... לא תעשו לכם אלילים. את שבתותי תשמורו ומקדשי תיראו.” הזהיר כן הכתוב על כל המצוות. “אני ה'” – אני נאמן לשלם שכר.</p>
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In these verses Hashem speaks to the Jew who sold himself as a slave to a Gentile. Hashem addresses thoughts that might now be running through this Jew’s mind: “I am now a slave to a non-Jew. This is my new world. When I was among Jews I acted Jewish; but now I am part of my master’s household. He owns me and I must follow his rules and adopt his practices. My master runs an idolatrous home; the sexual mores are different than I grew up with; and they do not keep Shabbat here.” Even if the slave doesn’t actually say this out loud or even articulate these thoughts within, he might drift into living with such an approach.

Imagine an uneducated poor Jew, orphaned at a young age, who fell into hard times. A Roman aristocrat

living in Caesaria is willing to buy him as a slave. The Gentile will take care of all his physical needs in return for service at meals, household duties, and whatever else might be needed. The Jew joins the household. Comes a Roman holiday and the Jew is ushered into the temple along with everyone else in the home. It is uncomfortable to stick out; and the Jew goes through the motions and bows down on the stone floor like the rest of the people in the room. And what does he do when, on Shabbat, the Roman's wife asks the Jew to simply boil up a cup of tea for her? The Jew keeps a low profile and brews the tea.

Hashem speaks to this slave. The instructions in these verses, seemingly simple and obvious by now at the end of the Book of Vayikra, are extremely meaningful to this Jew: Hashem tells him, "Don't worship idols. Keep Shabbat. Join the rest of the Jews in the Beit Hamikdash on Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot." No matter where you are and who you work for, you are still My servant: "פִּי לִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים עֲבָדֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אוֹתָם – For Israel are My servants. They are my servants that I took out of the Land of Egypt. I am Hashem your G-d" (Vayikra 25:55, the verse immediately preceding Vayikra 26:1).

C. Sforno: Judaism During the Exile

According to the Sforno commentary (by Harav Ovadiah Sforno, זצ"ל, 1475-1550, Italy), in these two verses the Torah moves from the individual to the national sphere. The Jew sold as a slave to a Gentile serves as a metaphor for the entire Nation of Israel in exile:

<p>5. Sforno on Vayikra 26:1 "Do not make for yourselves" – Even though you will be enslaved by the nations like this person who sold himself to Gentiles, do not exchange your honor for naught. This is said so they should not err as Chazal mentioned (Sanhedrin 105a): Many erred at the time of the exile and said to the prophets, "Does a servant sold by his master or a woman divorced by her husband have any connection [with the previous master or husband]?" The reason they were mistaken is because even while enslaved Hashem says, "You are my servants." This was how the prophets responded when Nevuchadnetzar's servants said, "When a servant of a servant buys property, who owns the servant and who owns the property?" This is true (that we eternally remain G-d's servants) even during the enslavement (of the exile), as He said, "And even so, I have not rejected you ... for I am Hashem your G-d" (Vayikra 26:44).</p>	<p>ספורנו על ויקרא כו:א "לא תעשו לכם" – אף על פי שתשתעבדו לאומות כמו שעשה זה שמכר עצמו לגוים, לא תמירו כבודכם בלא יועיל. וזה שלא יטעו כמו שהזכירו ז"ל (סנהדרין קה.): שטעו רבים בעת הגולה. שאמרו לנביאים, "עבד שמכרו רבו ואשה שגרשה בעלה – כלום יש לזה על זה כלום?" וזה כי אפילו אחר כל שעבוד אתם עבדי. כמו שהזכירו, ז"ל (שם), שהשיבו הנביאים על זה כאמרם עבדי נבוכדנצר, "עבדי עבד שקנה נכסים – עבד למי? נכסים למי?" אפילו בימי השעבוד, כאמרו "ואף גם זאת לא מאסתים כי אני ה' אלקיכם" (ויקרא כו:מד).</p>
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The Sforno explains the second verse in the same vein:

<p>5. Sforno on Vayikra 26:1 "Keep My Shabbatot" – Even during the enslavement and even though resting on Shabbat is associated with freedom. "My Sanctuary you should fear" – This refers to holy places during the exile. They are the batei kneset (synagogues) and batei midrash (study houses). [They are holy] even though the Beit Hamikdash is destroyed. As He said: "I will be for them a minor sanctuary (based on Yechezkel 11:16). And our sages said, "This refers to the batei kneset and batei midrash" (Megillah 29a).</p>	<p>ספורנו על ויקרא כו:ב "את שבתותי תשמורו" – אף בימי השעבוד אף על פי שהמנוחה בהם זכר לחירות. "ומקדשי תיראו" – המקומות המקודשים בגלות, והם בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות, אף על פי שחרב בית המקדש, כאמרו, "ואהי להם למקדש מעט" (על פי יחזקאל יא:טז). ואמרו ז"ל (מגילה כט.): אלו בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות.</p>
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D. Return to Egypt

The progression of parshiot in Parshat Behar reflects the life of a person whose desire for money leads him to eventually sell himself into slavery to a Gentile (see Rashi on Vayikra 26:1). Because he did not keep Shemittah, his financial situation declined and he was forced to sell possessions. He eventually had to sell his house, and even his family's portion in the Land of Israel. He still did not repent and was forced to borrow

money with interest. In his final descent, he sold himself into servitude, first to a Jew, then even to a Gentile.

The tragedy of this slave is that after enslaving himself to an idol-worshipper, he risks joining idolatrous culture. He is on the verge of, in essence, metaphorically returning to Egypt – where the Jews were not only slaves to the Egyptians, but began to worship idols like their masters. Hashem speaks to this slave, and says, “You are an Israelite, and like the rest of your brothers and sisters, you are one of My servants that I took out of the Land of Egypt. I am Hashem your G-d just like I am the G-d of any other Jew.” And as the Sforno says, Hashem communicates the same message to the entire People of Israel in exile. Do not adopt the culture of those who enslave you. You are still Mine. Our connection is never severed.

WITH ME BY RABBI MENDEL FARBER

This week’s Parshah includes the prohibition against permanently selling land in Eretz Yisrael. The verse says, “וְהָאֲרֶץ לֹא תִמָּכַר לְעַמֶּתָּהּ כִּי לִי הָאֲרֶץ. כִּי גֵרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אַתֶּם עִמָּדִי” – Hashem says: You may not make an absolute sale in Eretz Yisrael because the Land is Mine; you are sojourners and residents with Me” (Vayikra 25:23) – with the emphasis on “with Me.”

Ramban quotes the following Midrash on our verse: “Do not be disturbed by your limited rights on the Land, because you are temporary dwellers in the Land. Do not make yourselves the primary owners of the property, for you are with Me. It is sufficient for the servant to be with the Master. If it is Mine, it is yours” (Torat Kohanim Behar 4:8).

The Midrash is saying that if we claim ownership over Eretz Yisrael and, so to speak, remove it from the dominion of Hashem, it is not ours. We are His servants, and have rights to the Land only in that capacity. If we claim it is ours and not His, it is not ours either.

The Land is like no other asset that we own. Everything that is ours is ours to do with as we like, but not the Land. Why is the Land different?

All of our assets we acquire with money or with exchanged value. However, the Land was given to the entire Nation of Israel without our ancestors having to give anything in exchange. Its use was given as an outright gift. But it was a gift with a condition that we constantly remember and recognize G-d as the Land’s real Owner. Hashem gave us His Land to use. If we claim the Land is ours to do as we wish, it wasn’t given to us.

We must strengthen our belief in Hashem’s exclusive dominion over Eretz Yisrael, and increase our longing for a completely rebuilt Eretz Yisrael and for the ingathering of all of our People to our beloved Land with Mashiach Tzidkeinu.

שבת שלום ומבורך

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The following digital Torah resources have been extremely helpful in researching and preparing the Shapell’s Daf Keshet:
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We pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.