

The Path To Follow

Devarim

502

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Who is Rich? He Who is Aware of His Role!

Sefer Devarim begins with a description of Moshe's words from Hashem to the Children of Israel: "On the other side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moshe began explaining this Torah, saying: 'Hashem our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying: Enough of your dwelling on this mountain. Turn yourselves around and journey, and come to the Amorite mountain...'" (Devarim 1:5-7). The words of this passage require clarification. What does the Torah mean by saying: "Enough of your dwelling on this mountain"?

We also need to explain what Rashi says here: "Enough of your dwelling – according to its plain meaning [it refers to the extended length of time]. However there is an Aggadic interpretation: You have received much fame and reward as a result of having dwelled on this mountain. You constructed the Sanctuary, the Menorah, and [sacred] vessels; you received the Torah; you appointed a Sanhedrin for yourselves, officers in charge of hundreds, and officers of thousands." This explanation seems to contain two difficulties, the first being what we have already mentioned, namely what connection this has with the statement: "Moshe began explaining this Torah, saying." The second difficulty is why, in such a case, G-d said to them: "Turn yourselves around and journey"? Why not remain there, by the mountain where they had accomplished so many things, and where they had merited so many privileges?

A few remarks before we proceed: The Holy One, blessed be He, created man with wisdom, each individual having his own particular abilities. G-d breathed into man's nostrils "a breath of life" (Bereshith 2:7), which the Targum translates as "a speaking soul." This wisdom is something astounding, something unfathomably deep, and it develops from childhood to old age, the point at which a person is called *zaken* ("elder"), from the expression *zeh kana chochma* ("this one has acquired wisdom"). If we see that an older person is amazed by the same things that amazed him in childhood, it means that he is a fool, that his intelligence has not properly developed. Generally speaking, one who acquires wisdom progresses in life, meaning that if he loved a certain game in his youth, he will no longer play it once he matures. It is a very simple concept.

We must realize that just as a person's interests change as he grows older, likewise his role on earth also changes. The situation is like a worker who is hired at a factory, and whose initial task consists of cleaning the factory. Little by little, he rises in position until he is eventually named as the factory director. If at that point he begins to clean instead of directing the factory, he is not doing his job properly! The same applies to man, who goes through several stages in life from the age of five (when he must learn Scripture) until the age of 80, and at each stage he has a particular task to undertake. In addition to the general tasks that are incumbent on all men, there are specific responsibilities that are meant for him alone.

For example, people believe that a rich man is someone who possesses large amounts of money and numerous possessions. However our Sages have taught: "Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot" (Pirkei Avot 4:1). This means that the truly rich are not those whose homes are filled

with silver and gold, but rather those who are content with what they have, even if their possessions consist of very little. In fact wealth is measured in proportion to what a person feels that he is lacking, which is why someone who is content with what he has, and does not want more, is very rich. Yet someone who possesses numerous homes, large bank accounts, and luxury cars – and yet still desires more cars, more homes, and so on – is someone who is poor, for he is "lacking" so much.

Furthermore, the Sages have taught that "jealousy, desire, and honor-seeking drive a man from the world" (Pirkei Avot 4:21), for a person should be content with what Heaven has given him. He should not ask for more, nor should he look at what others have and desire their home, their income, or the respect which they enjoy from others. In fact every individual has an entire world for himself, a world that is absolutely specific to him alone.

The Midrash recounts an extraordinary story from which we can all draw a lesson in this regard: One of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's students left Eretz Israel and grew rich, which caused his other students to grow jealous and want to leave Eretz Israel as well. When Rabbi Shimon learned of this, he realized that these other students were clearly not motivated by money, but by a desire to study Torah day and night with complete peace of mind. Nevertheless, he wanted to prevent them from leaving, for such is not the way of the Torah. What did he do? He gathered his students and brought them to a valley, and there he prayed: "Valley, valley, become filled with gold dinarim." At that point the valley began to fill with gold dinarim before their very eyes. Rabbi Shimon said to his students: "If it's gold that you want, here it is. Come and take it. Yet know that everything you take will be deducted from your share in the World to Come, for we receive no reward for the study of Torah in this world, only in the World to Come."

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai showed his students that if it was gold they wanted, they could have it, but only at the cost of their share in the World to Come. You can take gold, you can become wealthy, but you will lose your soul. From here we see just how suspicious we should be of money that is not destined to us by natural means, for all the effort that we make to obtain it by other means is liable to be "at the cost" of our World to Come. Hence Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's students left without touching any of the gold in the valley, as the Midrash says (Shemot Rabba 52:3).

Let us add something else: Everyone has their own role to play in this world, and the role of one is not like the role of another. One receives the trial of poverty, while another receives the trial of wealth. One receives trials in the area of sustenance, while another receives them in the area of children or health, and that is his role on earth. If a poor person wants to become rich, it is possible that his wish will be granted through supplications and prayer, but he will have lost his world in the process, for he will not have fulfilled his task on earth, the task for which his soul – which is a divine spark – was sent here to accomplish. Hence if a person wants to become rich, he may do so, but at that point he will lose

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his World to Come, for the World to Come is granted for overcoming the trials and difficulties that are destined to us, and for having fulfilled the Torah under the most difficult of circumstances, despite our desires and numerous obstacles. We may therefore say: “Who is rich? He who is aware of his role!”

Now that we have gone over this, we can better understand what the passage in this week’s parsha is saying: “Hashem our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying: Enough of your dwelling on this mountain. Turn yourselves around and journey, and come to the Amorite mountain....” In fact when a person sees that he has achieved great success in a certain area, having overcome obstacles and acquired possessions, he has no desire to move on. Yet sometimes, despite all this, his task is to move on to another area,

for that is Hashem’s will. Likewise he must rejoice in his lot, in the role that he has been assigned on earth, be it in poverty or wealth. He must rejoice in the role that has been given to him. This is what Moshe taught the Children of Israel by telling them: “Enough of your dwelling on this mountain. Turn yourselves around and journey.” In other words: It is true that you merited great things at the foot of this mountain – the Torah, the Menorah, the sacred vessels, the Sanhedrin and your officers – but now you have completed the task that the Creator has given to you in this area, which is why you must continue and move on. There is no greater Torah explanation than this realization: “Moshe began explaining this Torah, saying,” this being the answer to all the questions that we raised at the outset.

Real Life Stories

The Wish of the Tzaddik

It is written, “Because he followed Hashem wholeheartedly” (Devarim 1:36).

The sad spectacle would repeat itself every time that Jews of noble appearance stood in the chambers of the gaon Rabbi Yosef of Posen Zatzal. As they presented their halachic questions – which Rabbi Yosef, the pride of Posen, would answer in abundance, such as during the festivals, and which would arouse waves of admiration – the members of the community were stunned by the sight of his wife, the daughter of the gaon of the generation, Rabbi Yechezkel Landou Zatzal (the author of Noda B’Yehuda). She would appear, nobody knew how, by her husband’s side without being burned by his pure and loving eyes, whose charm had an effect on the entire community. She was not dissuaded by the fiery stares that Rabbi Yosef’s beleaguered students threw her way, but instead would utter numerous “compliments” that threw the community into the depths of shame and rage.

Among other things, she would say: “This is a Rav in Israel? He’s horrible! An anti-Semite! You think that he’s a great tzaddik? What! Rav Yosef? He’s an imposter!”

Delegations would enter, one emissary after another. While ignoring the Rebbetzin, who stood at the door, people would quickly enter and distract Rabbi Yosef from the Gemara for a moment. Here, in a tranquil room, before the sweet eyes of their esteemed Rav, their boldness – which had momentarily subsided before the sparkling eyes of the Rebbetzin – returned to them:

“Rabbi Yosef has to do something. The community can’t keep quiet forever in the face of such insults inflicted upon their Rav!”

“The insult to Rabbi Yosef,” said Rabbi Shraga, the head of the gabaim, “is paralyzing us. It’s an insult to the entire community!”

“And the daughter of the gaon of Prague!” stressed a tackles individual, digging the knife even deeper into the wound.

The tranquil eyes of Rabbi Yosef were smiling:

“My saintly father-in-law is one thing, Rabbi X, but my misfortune is another. And so? Will I nail the mouth of my wife shut because she’s the daughter of the gaon of the generation?”

“Nails won’t succeed in shutting her mouth!” Rabbi Shraga replied bitterly. As for Rav Shemuel, a metal merchant, he was lost in some bizarre thoughts: “What if Rabbi Yosef were to purchase nails at my shop...?”

The Sun Set at Midday

The cries of those who prayed in the Beit HaMidrash of Rabbi Yosef of Posen suddenly stopped. All of them. It was as if the some disaster had landed outside the illuminated kloiz and its faithful. The month of Adar,

when joy increases among every community in the Diaspora, acquired an aura of darkness with terrifying speed as Rabbi Yosef’s health kept on deteriorating.

Nobody dared to explicitly describe this terrible catastrophe. The eyes of Rabbi Herschel, the faithful shamash, were drowning in tears as he suddenly entered the heikhal, somberly making his way to the amud of the shaliach tzibur. All hearts were stunned, even more than by the sound of his tears, when he later announced the time of the funeral. The faithful silently dispersed and left the Beit HaMidrash.

Nobody wanted to know how Rav Yosef’s widow would react to the loss. The very mention of her name, now that the sun had set, weighed on people like a heavy cloud that was clearing a path among an entire collection of clouds, like a bitter memory that was best to ignore as much as possible.

When the coffin was taken out, Rav Yosef’s disciples and relatives, who gathered around the body of the “Ben Azai in the main streets of Teveryah,” did not see the narrow shoulders of his slumped-over widow, until finally she threw herself at the foot of his coffin.

Flee from Pride

A terrible cry shook the foundation of the house.

“Rabbi Yosef... Rabbi Yosef, my holy and innocent husband!”

Terrible sobbing, a literal torrent of tears, could only be heard in between the few phrases that she was able to pronounce. The hair of those who were present stood on end as they heard the terrifying admission from the tearful widow:

“Show them, Rabbi Yosef! Show all these people how you forced me throughout our life together, during every gathering and on every holiday, to embarrass you before the holy community, before your students and those who learned your Torah, and to trample upon your honor before them!”

“Prove it, Rabbi Yosef! Prove it before all these people that you were the one who forced me to do this – for I’m afraid to explicitly call out your pure name. It was terrible to find myself within your four cubits and to utter words of reproach towards your name, to trample upon your honor – I, who am not even worthy of trampling upon the dust of your feet! Admit in public that you yourself forced me to do all this as a precondition to our engagement, so that you could flee from pride, which you hated. Will this be counted to me as a sin, to have completely given you my honor and my life, in order to carry out your wish?”

Hundreds of eyes turned to the coffin.

A shiver went through the crowd, for people realized that the deceased was nodding his head in agreement.

– Bessod Siach, Rabbi Yaakov Friedman

Fear G-d, Not Man

It is written, “You shall not tremble before any man, for the judgment is G-d’s” (Devarim 1:17).

When a judge distorts justice, notes the saintly Rabbi Moshe Alsheich, he sins not only in regards to the litigant, but also implicates, so to speak, G-d Himself. How so?

Suppose that on Rosh Hashanah, Heaven decrees that Reuven should have 100 and Shimon 200. Suppose further that Shimon demands a certain amount from Reuven despite the fact that, in all fairness, Reuven owes him nothing, since Heaven allotted both Reuven and Shimon everything that was decreed for them. The amount that Shimon is demanding from Reuven is not included, so to speak, in the count.

If the judge tilts the scales of justice and forces Reuven to give Shimon an amount which, according to true justice, he does not owe him, the judge is thereby contradicting Heavenly justice. This means that Hashem will now be obligated, so to speak, to repay Reuven the portion that was unjustly taken from him, and to deduct from Shimon the portion that he unjustly received.

As a result, the judge has not only judged man – since in the final analysis, if someone unfairly lacks something that was stolen from him, Hashem will provide him with what he lacks – for by his unfair ruling he has judged, so to speak, Heaven. This is why the Torah warns: “You shall not tremble before any man” – for if you fear man and tilt the balance in his favor, you will have implicated G-d; “for the judgment is G-d’s.” Therefore who is it more appropriate to fear: G-d or man?

Where the Giants Lived

It is written, “A people greater and taller than we, cities great and fortified to the heavens, and even children of giants have we seen there” (Devarim 1:28).

This is surprising: Why does the verse interrupt the description of “a people greater and taller than we” – the natural continuation being “even children of giants have we seen there” – by the description which the spies gave of the cites: “cities great and fortified to the heavens”?

The book Meshiv Devarim states that we may say that “a people greater” designates those who lived in fortified cites, but that the “children of giants” could not live within cites, but only around them.

We learn this from what our Sages said about Og, king of Bashan, who uprooted an entire mountain that was as large as the whole camp of Israel, and placed it above their heads with the intention of killing all the people at the same time.

Hence the verse is teaching us that the great people dwelling in the land were the ones who lived “in cities great and fortified to the heavens,” whereas the “children of giants” did not live in these cites on account of their extraordinary size.

Not for Chillul Hashem

It is written, “You retreated and wept before Hashem, but Hashem did not listen to your voice” (Devarim 1:45).

Since the Children of Israel had repented, why were their prayers not answered?

Rabbeinu Ovadia Sforno explains that their teshuvah was not accepted because they had profaned G-d’s Name, for teshuvah does not atone for Chillul Hashem. Only death has that power.

The Power of Renewal in Torah

It is written, “Hashem our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying: Enough of your dwelling on this mountain” (Devarim 1:6).

Throughout the account of the giving of the Torah, the mountain is never called Horev, but rather Sinai. For example, we read: “All of Mount Sinai was smoking” (Shemot 19:18), “Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai” (v.20), and “the people cannot ascend Mount Sinai” (v.23). As a result, why here is it called Horev rather than Sinai, as at the giving of the Torah?

Moshe told the Children of Israel: You have a mitzvah to discover new teachings in the Torah. This is alluded to in the word Horev, which is formed by the same letters as rahav (“broad”), as it is written: “I shall walk in rehava [broad pathways]” (Tehillim 119:45). Rashi explains that King David advanced in Halachah and expanded upon it. If a person studies Torah and reviews it numerous times, he can discover new teachings in it that he did not previously find, as the Gemara states: “One who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times” (Chagigah 9b). Furthermore, the Mishnah states: “Learn it over and over, for everything is in it” (Pirkei Avot 5:21). The more that a person reviews Torah, the more new teachings he will find in it.

This is why Moshe gave the Children of Israel several new passages in this book, which we call Mishneh Torah (the “repetition” of the Torah). It was to show them that the more a person puts an effort into learning Torah and reviewing his studies, the more appealing he will find it. No one is exempt from having to review Torah. No one must say, “I’ve studied this passage two or three times – why should I go over it again? Better to learn something new, something that I’ve never studied before!” The Sages have already responded to this by stating, “Whosoever studies Torah but does not review it, he is like one who plants without harvesting” (Sanhedrin 99a), meaning that his learning will have served no purpose.

The Sages have also said, “[These words] shall not be in your eyes like an archaic decree, which no one takes seriously, but rather like a newly given one, which is eagerly read by all” (Sifri, Va’etchanan 6:6). When words of Torah seem new to a person, he studies them as if he has never seen them before, and he will merit discovering new teachings in them.

In order for the Children of Israel not to say, “If we have a mitzvah to constantly review our learning and to find new teachings in it, perhaps we should add to the number of mitzvot,” Moshe began by saying: “These are the words” (Devarim 1:1). This teaches us that we must not add to them or take away from them, as it is written: “These are the words” (Shemot 19:6) – no less and no more (Mechilta ad loc.).

Guard Your Tongue

A Father Must Guide His Children

If one hears his young son or daughter speaking Lashon Harah, it is a mitzvah to reprimand them and distance them from such behavior, as it is written: “Train the youth according to his way” (Mishlei 22:6). Orach Chaim 343:1 explains that, in regards to all Torah prohibitions, a father must constantly guide his children from youth to guard themselves from Lashon Harah and other forbidden remarks, such as words of strife and falsehood, as the Vilna Gaon writes. In fact this requires a great deal of practice in the area of speech and middot – and practice leads to mastery – here as well as in every area. By doing so, they merit the life of the World to Come and all good things in this world.

– Chafetz Chaim

Until When?

It is said that when the great gaon Rabbi Mordechai Gifter Zatzal arrived in the Holy Land for the first time, one of his relatives asked him: "Have you already gone to the Kotel?" Rav Gifter replied, "Yes, I was able to pray by the Kotel." His relative continued: "And Rachel's Tomb?" "I've been there as well," said the Rav.

His relative continued: "Which moved you the most?" The Rav said that although he was very moved when he prayed by Rachel's Tomb, at the Kotel his emotions were even more heightened.

When Rav Gifter realized that his relative could not really understand him, since many people feel great emotion when they are by the tomb of our Matriarch Rachel, he said to him: "I will explain it to you. You're young, and even youngsters feel that 'Mother Rachel' weeps for them and asks G-d to have compassion on her children. That's why it's very easy to be moved in that sacred place.

"Youngsters who have never seen the world before the Holocaust and the world after the Holocaust cannot imagine what destruction is like. As for myself, I studied in Telz in Europe, and I saw the holy communities of Klal Israel. I saw men who were giants of Torah and the fear of Heaven. I saw what Elul and the Days of Awe are like. All of it was destroyed because of our numerous sins, and I know that the root cause of all destruction resides in the destruction of the Temple. That is why I weep when I see the Temple in its desolation."

For These Things I Weep

In the past, the pain that people felt over the destruction of the Temple was so concrete and heartfelt that every Jew could perfectly sense the grief of the Bein Hametzarim [Three Weeks of Mourning]. The atmosphere in the city streets during that time in general, and the Nine Days in particular, was filled with darkness and anxiety. Mourning infused the daily lives of young and old, women and children alike.

Even non-Jews in the city could fully sense the painful atmosphere over the destruction of the great and holy Jewish Temple. Groaning and cries resounded when everyone was immersed in reciting the Tikkun Chatzot. At

one end of the city people were crying out and shedding tears, "For how long must I bear the ruin of double destruction? For how long will You withhold Your mercy from Jerusalem? For how long must the remnant of Your flock mourn over their pain?" while at the other end of the city people were weeping and imploring G-d: "Look from Heaven and see from Your abode of holiness and splendor. ... For these things I weep."

In this regard, it is said that the Maggid of Dubno once arrived in the town of Lvov during the Bein Hametzarim. The gabaim had asked him to speak to the city residents about this issue, and the Rav of the city (the gaon Rabbi Yakov Orenstein Zatzal, author of Yeshuot Yakov) also wanted to hear him speak.

The Maggid immediately accepted, but asked the Rav and elderly men of the city not to attend his sermon, for his way of speaking caused people to cry. That is, his audience was going to weep so much that it constituted a real danger to the lives of the elderly.

The elderly of the city thought that the Maggid was exaggerating a little, and so they came to listen to him all the same. In the middle of the Maggid's sermon, it is said that everyone began to burst into tears, and that the Rav's health began to deteriorate. In fact things reached such a point that he had to be taken out of the synagogue during the Maggid's sermon.

The Joy of Jerusalem

The gaon Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah, lamented the diminishment of this emotional response. A limited response – had this become the fate of Klal Israel for all the generations, and especially during the Bein Hametzarim, when the seriousness and impression produced by these days used to be seen on the face of every Jew, especially in the holy city of Jerusalem?

"People," he said, "interpret the lamentation: 'over the destruction of the Temple, which was laid waste, and which I will eulogize each year during this month' in a figurative way, understanding it to mean that the concept of destruction itself had been beaten and trampled upon, and that every year we feel it less and less."

In this regard, we note that Rabbi Shlomo Zalman's son, the gaon Rabbi Baruch Auerbach Zatzal, said that often during the year, when there was no one home but themselves, he would hear his father saying several times

during Birkat Hamazon, with great yearning in his voice, "The Merciful One will lead us upright to our land."

The gaon Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman Shlita said something along the same lines (see the book Yimaleh Pi Thilatecha), meaning that in our time, the mourning over the Temple has greatly diminished, even if we observe the laws established by the Sages on the eve of Tisha B'Av and on Tisha B'Av. "Let us hope," he says, "that this allows us to be included among all who mourn for Jerusalem." The intention of the Sages was certainly to make us feel this grief in our hearts, not just to observe the laws of mourning. Yet unfortunately, this aspect has been greatly neglected, and we need to strengthen ourselves in this regard. The more that we strengthen ourselves, the more we will be able to say that whoever mourns for Jerusalem will merit seeing its joy.

We need to understand what the Sages meant when they said that, in the opposite case, we will not see its joy. Does this mean that we will not rise in the resurrection of the dead? After all, the Mishnah in Sanhedrin does not say that one who fails to mourn for Jerusalem will not rise in the resurrection of the dead!

It seems that the intensity of our joy will be proportional to the intensity of our mourning. A person who observes the laws of mourning – yet fails to experience grief – will also not experience joy. We must regret that it is no longer possible to attain the heights of spirituality, and that we no longer have a direct connection to the Holy One, blessed be He. We must regret the fact that all that existed during the time of the Temple – when things were much more elevated in every domain – is no longer available to us today. It is in proportion to this grief that we will merit joy, for to merit the joy of Jerusalem, we must mourn for it.

In general, the higher the spiritual level of a person – in Torah, prayer, the fear of Heaven, good middot – the closer he is to feeling a true sense of grief, the pain of spirituality. Conversely, the more materialistic a person is, the more likely he is to say that everything is fine and that he perceives only material things.

We must live with a sense of deep longing for the Temple – source of the abundance that comes upon Creation – and for Hashem to draw closer to everyone. The more that we spiritually strengthen ourselves, the more we will be able to connect to the mourning for Jerusalem.