
א ביסל תורה!

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במדבר

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Why Calling 'ה the Idol בעל is Forbidden

By Nessa Jaffe

This week's הפטרה comes from ב הושע פרק. It starts with comfort, continues on to some bad stuff, and then once again has more comfort stuff. One of the פסוקים from the comfort section says: "וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם-הַהוּא" "אֵינִי וְלֹא-תִקְרָאֵנִי עוֹד בַּעֲלִי" And on that day —declares 'ה— You will call Me אֵינִי, And no more will you call Me בַּעֲלִי (הושע ב:י"ח). Both אישי and בעלי are words for husband, but what's the difference between them? We can tell from context that בעלי is the bad thing and אישי is the good thing, but what exactly is the difference?

רש"י says that calling 'ה "בַּעֲלִי" represents our יראה - fear of 'ה. יראה is a good incentive to help us serve 'ה, but it's not necessarily the "fullest" way to serve 'ה. On the other hand אישי represents אהבה - our love of 'ה. When we serve 'ה out of love, not just fear, we are serving Him because we believe doing so is right, we are not just serving Him because we are fearing punishment.

רד"ק has another explanation. He says that the word בעלי is actually representing the בעל - a form of idol worship. This makes a lot of sense in context, since the next פסוק says, "וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת-שְׁמוֹת הַבְּעָלִים מִפִּיהֶם" "וְלֹא-יִזְכְּרוּ עוֹד בְּשֵׁמָם" "For I will remove the names of the בעל from her mouth, And they shall nevermore be mentioned by name" (הושע ב:י"ט). Everyone agrees that this פסוק is talking about the בעל of idol worship, so it would make sense for the previous פסוק to also be talking about the בעל. If the רד"ק is right, that the first פסוק is talking about the Jews calling 'ה the idol בעל, then we would learn another thing from here. We see from the first פסוק that the sin of the Jews was not that they were serving the בעל and forgot about 'ה, rather it is that they called 'ה the name of idolatry. Their sin was that they didn't bother to try to know 'ה, they just assumed He is like the בעל.

However, there is another problem that is raised when we connect these two פסוקים. The פסוקים say that the Jews will stop calling 'ה "בַּעֲלִי" and then 'ה will remove the name of בעל from their mouths. So which is it - are the Jews stopping to worship בעל or is 'ה causing us to repent? אברבנאל explains these פסוקים by saying that if we start repenting, we stop calling 'ה "בַּעֲלִי", then 'ה will help us fully repent and בעל's name will no longer be mentioned. We can learn an important lesson from here. If we learn תורה, and try to really understand what it means to be Jews, what it means to serve 'ה correctly, then 'ה will help us, and make sure that we are able to fully serve Him correctly. We must do our part if we want 'ה to help us.

Separating the Good From the Bad

By Avi Abbett

In the first two chapters of פרשת במדבר, a census is taken of בני ישראל. The count begins first with the names of the heads of each tribe. It then goes on to list the number of men in each tribe who can join the army, giving a final count of 603,550. But this count of the tribes is taken skipping one tribe in particular. The לויים were not included in the count of men able to serve. The פסוק says “אֶת־מִטָּה לְוִי לֹא תִפְקֹד וְאֶת־רֹאשֵׁם לֹא” “Do not on any account enroll the tribe of לוי or take a census of them with the Israelites” (במדבר א:מ"ט). singles them out, preventing any count of the tribe from being taken. Along with this, the לויים were given another role in the nation: to be in charge of the משכן, its vessels and the work that came along with it. Only לויים were able to do this job, anyone else who did their work would be put to death. While it is nice that the לויים are given another special job, why separate them in the count from their brothers and sisters in בני ישראל? What is the point of keeping them apart?

One explanation for this is given by רש"י and the דעת זקנים. ה' knew that in the future a decree would be made, referring to everyone included in this count, that those twenty years and older would die in the desert before reaching ארץ ישראל. This death would occur after the sin made by בני ישראל and the spies, when the spies came back from spying on ארץ כנען and spoke badly about the land, later on in ספר במדבר. There it specifies that everyone who was counted, above the age of twenty, would be punished. In this פסוק, it says “מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה” (במדבר י"ד:כ"ט) “from the age of twenty years up”. רש"י on this passuk explains that this is a direct reference to our פסוק א, פרק א, excluding the tribe of לוי. They did not sin and would not be killed, meaning they were not included in the count along with בני ישראל.

The שפתי חכמים, however, takes a different approach. The count being done of בני ישראל was to see which people in the nation could be a part of the army, which is why they were counted from twenty, which is the normal fighting age. לויים, the legion of ה', were the tribe who was tasked with taking care of ה's resting place, thus they were not part of the count for soldiers, rather part of a special count.

The פרשה begins with משה receiving the commandment to count everyone, the entire nation. This puts us all under one roof, and it demonstrates the אחדות we are all supposed to have, the accountability for each and every one of our brothers and sisters in בני ישראל. The separation of שבט לוי is done only because they decided to stand separate from their family, choosing not to sin in the complicated issue of the golden calf. While they wanted to be part of the great nation of בני ישראל, they could not stay and participate in the sins being committed by their brethren. This פרשה teaches us a valuable lesson on accountability and stepping back to assess the situation before following your friends and family, making sure that what you're doing is right and good, not just going along with everyone else. Being a part of a nation and a community is important, but we must always remember to follow ה' and His mitzvot even when it is not easy.

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