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בשלח

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The Dual Nature of the מן

By Avi Berlove

In the sixth פרשה of this week's עליה, we see the מן for the first time. After reaching their high point crossing through the ים סוף and singing ישיר, אז בני ישראל, begin to complain almost immediately, about water and then food, the most tantalizing of a human's constant physical needs. In response to the people's complaints about the lack of bread, ה' says that he will provide food for them, the מן. Thus, ה' commands that each person should "עֹמֶר לְגִלְגָּלִית... לְקֶטֶף מִמֶּנּוּ" "collect from it [the מן], an omer per her head (טז:טז). The commentators explain how this command was a key part of the test of the Jews' willingness to follow ה'. Through the מן, ה' was seeing if the Jews would be willing to rely on Him and His commands with regards to their sustenance. Thus, despite the Jews' failure to properly keep all the laws with regards to the taking of the מן, its laws show important themes regarding divinely imposed morality and rules of success in the making of one's livelihood.

The מן shows the importance of morality with regards to collecting one's sustenance. In פרשת בשלח, when the תורה discusses for whom the מן should be collected, it notes that "אִישׁ לְאִשְׁרֵי בְּאֶהְלוֹ תִקְחוּ:" "each man should take for those in his tent (טז:טז)." רבינו חננאל, an Italian Talmudist and sage, notes how the תורה focuses on each man taking for those in his tent and explains based on this that the תורה is creating the obligation for each man to support his family and children. Specifically with regards to the hungry Jews collecting their food in the desert, it is easy to see how the ordered collection could quickly devolve into a violent and selfish competition with each man focusing on himself to the exclusion of all others. Thus, the תורה commands that each Jew not only collect and provide for himself, but also for his whole family as well. Each one is required to not only think about what he needs for survival but also what those around him need as well.

The commandment of the מן, however, also shows another important lesson that is supplemental to the previous one: while compassion is important, the strict law matters as well. רש"י notes that when it came to the collecting of the מן, there were those who collected more and less than the specified amount. Despite ה' command to the contrary, the people played around with the amount of מן they collected, failing the test they were given. Man's own insecure desires and perhaps view of morality caused him to violate ה' word. In the end, רש"י notes, however, each Jew found exactly the right rate, of one עומר לגלגלת, in his מן container (טז:טז). The people who changed the amount they collected from the fixed rate perhaps thought they were fulfilling the spirit of the above commandment by collecting or leaving extra for their community at large. Yet, in the end, ה' rebukes them, essentially saying your ways are not my ways nor is your morality mine (see ישעיה י"ח:ט).

פרשת בשלח shows the important themes of morality and divinity in the collection of one's livelihood. On the one hand, man must be conscious and aware of others when he is out in the world making his living. On the other hand, he must also stay in line with the strict letter of ה' absolute commandments as well. The שמעון הצדיק notes as עבודה, of the תורה's way must come hand in hand with its strict laws and גמילות חסידים. The world stands both on kindness to others, and on the תורה and worshiping ה'.

The Most Precious Nation

By Ephraim Fischer

In this week's פרשה, we read the שירת הים, the song that the Jews sing after crossing the ים סוף. In this song the Jews sing a line which says, “תִּפֹּל עֲלֵיהֶם אֵימָתָהּ וַיִּפְחַד בְּגִדְלִי זְרוּעָה יְדָמוּ כְּאֶבֶן עַד-יַעֲבֹר עַמָּךְ ה' עַד-יַעֲבֹר, עִם-זֶו קִנִּיתָ, terror and fear should fall upon them, through the strength of your arm they will become still like stone, until your people cross over, ה', until your people cross over, those who you have acquired. It seems like there is some redundancy at the end of the פסוק. We say “עַד-יַעֲבֹר עַמָּךְ” twice, just with different words coming after them, which seems very unnecessary. Why do the Jews say “until your people cross over” twice?

The גמרא in ברכות (ד' א') explains that the reason why this is mentioned twice is because each time it is mentioned, it refers to a different crossing of a river. When the תורה said “עַד-יַעְבֹּר עִמָּךְ הַ” it was referring to the crossing into ארץ ישראל in the times of יהושע. When the תורה said “עַד-יַעְבֹּר עִם-זֶו קְהִינָתְ” it was referring to the crossing into ארץ ישראל after the גלות בבל, during the times of עזרא. The גמרא also learns something else from this פסוק: It sees from the fact that these two clauses of יהושע and עזרא are right next to each other, that during the time of עזרא, the Jews were worthy of receiving miracles as they were entering ארץ ישראל just like they did in the time of יהושע. However, because they sinned, they did not receive these miracles.

This opinion contrasts the opinion of רש"י and אונקלוס, who both say that the first statement of "עַד-יַעֲבֹר עִם-זֵו קִנְיָתָ" means the crossing of the נחל ארנון, and the second statement of "עַד-יַעֲבֹר עִם-זֵו קִנְיָתָ" means the crossing of the ירדן. These two approaches to this פסוק don't necessarily differ so much. According to the first opinion, the two crossings of a river are where we enter ארץ ישראל as a taking back of the land, as by יהושע and עזרא, both of their entrances into ארץ ישראל symbolized the end of a גלות and a reclaiming of Israel. According to the second approach, the two crossings of a river are the two times where we claim land as ours to reside in during the times of יהושע. When we cross the נחל ארנון, we are crossing into the southern border of ראוּבֵן, and therefore we are crossing into the land which גֵּד רֹאּוּבֵן will stay in until the end of the first בית המקדש. When we cross over the ירדן in the times of יהושע, we do so in order to conquer ארץ ישראל and take it as our rightful land to live in. According to both approaches, the תורה is referring to us claiming land to stay in so that we can build the בית המקדש and worship ה'. This way to understand both approaches makes sense, as we have just been taken out of Egypt, so the next rational step is to go to ארץ ישראל and build the בית המקדש, so it's reasonable for us to have been singing about that at the time of ים סוף קריעת.

Going back to the גמרא which we learned before, we saw that during the time of עזרא, the Jews would have been able to get miracles just like in the time of יהושע, but they didn't because they had sinned. To refer to the crossing into ארץ ישראל in the time of עזרא, the תורה uses the phrase "עַד-יַעֲבֹר עִם-זֵו קְנִיָּה". If we look at "רש" on this, we see that the word קְנִיָּה means precious above all other nations, like something which was purchased for a very high price and therefore is very precious to its owner. This language was used by the Jews in the time of עזרא, who we have just said performed great sins which took miracles away from them. This shows us that even when we have sinned, ה' still holds us dearly above all others. We should not be quick to give up hope because there is always time to do תשובה, as we will always be the "עִם-זֵו קְנִיָּה", the most precious nation.

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