

א ב י ס כ ל ת ו ר ה !

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ט"ו אלול תשפ"ו · כי תבוא

What it Means to Uphold the תורה

By Theo Fraenkel '28

In this week's פרשה, כי תבוא, משה describes how when the Jewish people cross the ירדן, six of the tribes will stand on הר עיבל to receive curses and six of the tribes will stand opposite the mountain on הר גריזים to receive the blessings. Once the whole nation is gathered at the mountains, the לויים will say twelve curses. Each curse is on one who performs a certain action. These actions range from worshiping idolatry in secret to quietly moving the property line with a neighbor. According to many מפרשים including the רשב"ם the common denominator between all of these actions is that they are actions done in secret. The idea behind these curses being all actions done in private, is that the Jewish people must acknowledge that Hashem knows about all of our actions, even if they were not done in public where people might see our behaviors.

While all twelve curses line up well with the theme of immoral actions done discreetly, the twelfth curse seems odd. "אָרוּר אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִקֵּים אֶת דְּבַר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם" "Cursed be he that does not maintain all the words of this Torah to do them" (דברים כז:כז). Unlike the other curses, not maintaining the תורה is not really a specific action, so what exactly is this curse about? According to רש"י, this curse encompasses all the מצוות and here the Jewish people are confirming that they will uphold the תורה and מצוות. The רמב"ן disagrees with רש"י, in that the פסוק is not talking about keeping the מצוות. The פסוק does not say a person that does not keep the תורה is cursed, rather a person who does not uphold the תורה is cursed. The person that the פסוק is really referring to is

the person who keeps the מצוות because that is the socially accepted and normal thing to do, but does not believe that they hold any value or that he will be rewarded or punished for his performance of מצוות. This works well with the classification of these curses as being for people who outwardly keep the תורה out of fear of embarrassment, but privately disregard them.

The רמב"ן offers an alternative explanation of this curse based on a סוטה in ירושלמי. The ירושלמי notices that this פסוק literally means "one who does not stand up the תורה", so this פסוק is referring to the חזן when he lifts up the תורה scroll (ירושלמי סוטה ז). The simple understanding of this ירושלמי is that the curse is on the person who drops the תורה while lifting it, but the רמב"ן interprets it as meaning that this person is cursed because they did not fully and properly show the תורה to the shul. The person that did not fully show off the תורה is like a person who fully keeps the תורה and מצוות, but is not proud of their Judaism and is not willing to show the light of the תורה to the people around them. The פנים interpreted this ירושלמי differently. Instead of the חזן being the lifter of the תורה scroll, the חזן is the school teacher (lifting up the תורה to the children). The בבא בתרא in גמרא illustrates how יואב mistakenly killed only the males of אדום because he incorrectly learned from the פסוק "תמחה את זכר עמלק" "you shall obliterate the memory [zeicher] of Amalek" as "תמחה את" "you shall obliterate the males [zechar] of Amalek" (דברים כה:יט). This happened because his teacher did not correct him when he learnt this פסוק and pronounced זכר wrong, leading to an incorrect understanding of what the תורה actually taught. According to this explanation, the curse applies to

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teachers of תורה who do not make sure their teachings are properly understood by their students and, therefore, will not know how to correctly perform the מצוות.

The Opportunity of Beginnings

By Eitan Orkaby '27

Beginnings are a time to give gratitude to Hashem. One of the beginnings that is highlighted is the first fruits. After the first three years of a tree, in which one is prohibited from eating any fruit from the tree, a farmer looks at their fruit and feels the accomplishment of successfully growing a fruit-bearing tree. A person's natural tendency, after such an accomplishment, is to pat oneself on the back and believe that without them there would have never been a fruit tree as great as the one they grew. A feeling of almost haughtiness might take over a person. Rather than spiraling into this downward slope, the תורה gives a solution: the first of one's fruit must be brought up to the בית המקדש.

Bringing one's first fruit up to the בית המקדש is only the first step; one must give praise to Hashem. What is ironic, however, is the seeming lack of gratitude towards Hashem for allowing fruit to grow off of a tree, which is impossible without Hashem. In the praise one thanks G-d for taking us out of Egypt, and bringing us to this wonderful land. Only at the very end does one stick in that "I brought the first of my fruit of the land that you gave to me" (דברים כ"ו). It seems that the focus of our praise is from how we made it to the land of Israel, more than about how now Hashem gave us fruit.

While giving this praise and bringing the first fruit, one is required to be happy, which might explain the focus

of our praise. Our happiness, says the אור החיים, is supposed to stem from the land itself, that there is no happiness greater than living in the land of Israel. Happiness is not something that one can spontaneously feel, thus the way to have happiness through living in the land of Israel comes from "וַיֵּשְׁבֶהָ וַיֵּשְׁבֶהָ בָּהּ" "posses it (the land) and dwell in it" (דברים כ"ו). One of the ways to show possession is to dig in the ground and plant a tree. In doing so one shows their ownership over the land. Thus, one gives gratitude to Hashem for the land that they possess, by planting a tree and bringing the first fruits to Him.

The first fruits of the year certainly remind us of the incredible opportunity that we have to dwell in such an incredible land, yet we still praise about leaving Egypt. If we had only left Egypt and never entered the land of Israel it would have been enough, except it really wouldn't have been. We needed to enter into the land of Israel through great miracles. Mentioning going down to Egypt as well seems entirely unnecessary, yet that is part of our praise to Hashem.

In answering this question רש"י points out another seeming extra phrase "אֲרָמִי אֲבִד אָבִי" "an Aramean destroyed my forefather" (דברים כ"ו). He explains that לבן, an Aramean, chased after יעקב in the land of Israel, and one praises G-d at the place at which Hashem shows His kindness. So too, one might say, we praise G-d for this land, which to truly appreciate first we must understand the hardship that we went through in order to make it to this land. We must understand our prior beginnings, in Egypt, to understand our new beginning, in the land of Israel, with the ability to grow any fruit desirable, all with gratitude towards Hashem.

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