א ביסל תורה!

September 3, 2026

THE PARSHA NEWSLETTER OF MAIMONIDES SCHOOL

כ״ב אלול תשפ״ו · **נצבים/וילך**

Coming to Hashem in the Wrong Way

By Shua Jaffe '28

As the Jews were entering ארץ ישראל, they were commanded in the מצוה of annihilating the wicked כנענים. When the Jews finally entered ארץ ישראל in ספר יהושע, one nation that did not want to get annihilated resorted to trickery. "וְיֹשְׁבֵי גִבְעוֹן שָׁמְעוּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לִירִיחוֹ וְלָעָי: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ גַּם־הֵמָּה בְעָרְמָה" "And when the inhabitants of Giv'on heard what יהושע had done to יריחו and to עי, they also acted cunningly" (יהושע ט:ג-ד). The word "גם" generally means also. If the גבעונים 'also' acted this way, who acted this way before? What does "גם המה" mean?

רד״ק gives three explanations. The first explanation is that "גם" is adding on to the previous פסוק. In the previous פסוק, we hear about how all the nations of כנען prepared to defend themselves with their militaries. The גבעונים *also* prepared to defend themselves - but with deceit, rather than warfare. The second explanation is more of a stretch, in my opinion. The רד״ק says that when the Jews captured יריחו and עי, the גבעונים mistakenly thought the Jews did so through deceit - by making a treaty with the cities and then breaking it. This, of course, never happened, but from the גבעוני perspective, they [the גבעונים] *also* acted with deceit. The רד״ק gives a more midrashic explanation, which says that this פסוק is going all the way back to בראשית. The sons of יעקב acted with deceit when capturing שכם, so the גבעונים *also* acted with deceit.

רש״י gives a more famous answer: In the days of משה, the כנענים like the גבעונים came to משה in deceit, and then the גבעונים, later, *also* came in deceit. Although the story of כנענים coming to משה never appears explicitly in the תורה, it is consistent with the first few פסוקים in this weeks פרשה: "אַתֶּם נִצָּבִים הַיּוֹם כֻּלְּכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם רָאשֵׁיכֶם... וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶרֶב מַחֲנֶיךָ מֵחֹטֵב עֵצֶיךָ עַד שֹׁאֵב מֵימֶיךָ:" "You stand this day all of you before the Lord your G-d; your captains of your tribes... and your convert who is within your camps; from your wood cutters to the water drawers" (דברים כט:ט-י). The Jews had designated tree gatherers and water drawers, namely, communal slaves. רש״י explains that the כנענים that came to משה where not allowed to convert, but rather made communal slaves, and this is what Moshe means.

Some מדרשים have a twist on this - they say that it was actually the same גבעונים that came to משה and were rejected. Only when they came again to יהושע where they accepted (תמחומא). I don't really understand this one, because it doesn't really work out with the פסוקים. So let's say the גבעונים come. משה makes them communal slaves. משה only made them communal slaves with the intent to kill them in twenty years. Then they suddenly pretend that they came from far away in the hope that their lives will be spared. יהושע 'accepted' them, meaning he unwittingly promised to spare their lives. However, he still gave them the same tasks as משה did. Isn't it kind of weird that you would have someone work for you on the condition that you kill them in a few years?

Besides the question of how several entire nations could be so sinful that they become deserving of annihilation, another question arises from this story. Why did משה and יהשוע not want to accept the גבעונים as converts, given that they wanted to become a part

of the Jewish people? Even if Judaism does not force conversion upon people, if someone comes to us wanting to come closer to Hashem and do the right thing it is a big מצוה to support them in their journey! We can learn from here the significance of attitude. The גבעונים did not come with an attitude of, "I'm here to do the right thing." They came with an attitude of, "I'm here for my own benefit." True, they were willing to adopt Jewish culture and customs, but only in order to spare their own lives. Therefore, while they were supported by משה and יהושע, they ultimately lacked the attitude necessary to be a part of עם ישראל.

The foundation of a religious life is keeping all the מצות, but don't let them just become part of your routine. "לְעָבְרְךָ בִּבְרִית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבְאָלָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כֹּרֵת עִמְּךָ הַיּוֹם" "For your passage into the covenant of Hashem, your God, and His oath-curse, that Hashem, your God, is making with you today." (דברים כט:יא) Each day, imagine as if our covenant with God is being renewed. Coming to תורה and מצוות with an attitude of fresh rigor and the intent to do God's will goes a long way.

Life is תורה and תורה is Life

By Naftali Orkaby '30

In פרשת נצבים, two of the פסוקים sound like a warning. In the פסוק "כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדָּבָר מְאֹד" "because the matter is very close to you" (דברים ל:י"ד), we hear that we all have is תורה in our mouths and hearts. "נָתַתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם אֶת הַחַיִּים וְאֶת הַטּוֹב וְאֶת הַמָּוֶת וְאֶת הָרָע", "I set before you, this day, life and prosperity, death and adversity" (דברים ל:ט"ו). This פסוק, which comes right after the first one, tells us about a contrast between life and prosperity, and death and adversity. It is telling us that we have a tremendous power, a gift of תורה, and in this package deal comes life and prosperity.

רש"י on this פסוק says that life and good are connected and dependent on each other. He says that if you do good, you will prosper, and if you do evil, you will deteriorate. We are given this opportunity of תורה! But we are warned not to stray from the path of תורה.

The ספרנו takes a different approach. He says that life is forever. If one follows the ways of the תורה, it will help one forever, now and in the next world. But "טוב", he says, is about the pleasant aspects of this world, leaning more toward the materialistic and enjoying this world.

אבן עזרא fully agrees with the ספרנו that this פסוק refers to this world. He says that following in the path of תורה grants one a long life. From a more materialistic perspective, one will be blessed with wealth, health, and honor.

Now, in the month of אלול, approaching ראש השנה, we are being judged by Hashem. Every one of us has this opportunity to do kindness and מצוות, to follow in the ways of the תורה. Take רש"י's approach. Follow the תורה, and you will do well and prosper! Then look to the future. ספרנו has us thinking about the future, of what will happen in the world to come based on our actions. But also, like אבן עזרא, we should enjoy this world. It has a lot to offer. In this last week before ראש השנה, one should think about one's actions and how they will have an effect on one's life. With the help of G-d, we will all merit to follow in the ways of תורה and reap its rewards.

A BISL TORAH
is published weekly
at Maimonides School,
Brookline, Massachusetts

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