



שבת קודש פרשת מטות-מסעי | מסכת נדרים דף לט'

INSIGHTS FROM OUR CHABUROS

The challenge of the luminaries to defend Moshe

עלו שמש וירח... ואמרו לפניו רבש "ע אם אתה עושה דין לבן עמרם
אנו מאירים. ואם לאו אין אנו מאירין

Our Gemara reports that when Korach challenged Moshe's authority, the sun and the moon ascended...and said to G-d: "Master of the Universe, if you render justice on behalf of the son of Amram (Moshe), then we will illuminate the earth. But if not, we will not illuminate the earth any longer." The world was created due to Torah, and it continues to exist in the merit of the study of Torah and the fulfillment of its mitzvos. From the outset, all of creation was set contingent upon this arrangement.

The Gemara (Shabbos 88a) states: "If the Jewish people accept the Torah, that will be good. If they do not, the entire world will revert back to being null and void." The luminaries were placed in the heavens to illuminate the world. Accordingly, anyone who challenges the authenticity of the Torah and its prophets is actually threatening the very existence of the world. If the Torah is attacked, the justification for the world's continued survival is at risk. If this would be the case, the luminaries have no purpose in their ongoing mission to provide light and warmth for the world.

Our sages express the series of events surrounding Korach and his followers in allegorical terms. The sun and moon appealed directly to Hashem to put an end to the uprising of Korach and his attack against the legitimacy of Torah. These heavenly spheres realized that their own function was being undermined, and they fought for Moshe and his prophecy to emerge triumphant. Rashba presents a very fundamental understanding of how to interpret the exchange between Hashem and these heavenly spheres. He explains: "In many places, an aggadic text will express a well-known concept in hints and parables. It is essential for our sages to teach that Hashem is profoundly involved in every detail of our existence.

Hashem is also involved in truth and correctness. This dialogue did not take place in a literal sense, for the sun and moon do not have an awareness to be able to conduct a discussion. Yet, we are told that it is as if it did take place. The arguments and the conclusions are valid, for if there would be no Torah, the world would cease." Hashem reassured the luminaries, "Although Korach is staging a threatening condition, it is no different than the fools who engage in idolatry every day. There is a constant barrage of missiles and projectiles which they cast against truth, but the world cannot come to a standstill due to their futile efforts. Rather, the cause of Torah continues, and these scoffers will ultimately pay the price for their actions."

POINT TO PONDER

The Gemara says that seven things were created before the world was created. Why was it necessary to create these seven before the world?

Response to last week's Point to Ponder:

The Gemara says that in the beginning משה רבנו learned the תורה and forgot it until it was given to him as a gift. The Gemara is referring to the 40 days that משה spent in שמים with הקב"ה. Since הקב"ה was going to give him the תורה as a gift why wait until the end of the 40 days? Why not give it to him right away?

The הקדוש explains that משה רבנו needed to be transformed into אדם אלקים, in order to be able to receive the תורה במתנה. Just like it takes 40 days for a new baby to be formed, so it took 40 days to transform משה into אדם אלקים. Learning with הקב"ה for 40 days is what caused this transformation to occur. Therefore it wasn't possible for him to receive the תורה במתנה any earlier.

STORIES OF THE DAF

A question of priorities

כל המבקר חולה

Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l, the Alter of Slobodka, immigrated to Eretz Yisrael when he was already at an advanced age. He was healthy for a time, but eventually got very sick and was bedridden for quite some time. Until the last moment of the Alter's full life he was always striving to draw nearer to Hashem and to continue his life work: to educate others to ever-increasing sensitivity to the needs of their fellow men. When he was very sick he stayed in a hotel in Yerushalayim. There were always at least two devoted students who were at his sickbed at all times, ready to attend to his every need.

One Friday night, one of the students casually mentioned that there was a minyan in the very same hotel. The Alter understood that the young man wished to attend and said, "Feel free to go if you wish." He then turned to the second attendant and said, "You also have my complete permission to go." The second attendant had a feeling that this was the wrong decision. After all, he had come to attend to the famous Alter of Slobodka in his time of great need. How could he just get up and leave him alone? The Alter merely offered because he was a tzaddik. This doesn't mean that the correct decision is to leave him even to daven with a minyan. The second attendant said with resolve, "I will daven here."

His friend left, and he remained. When the first attendant returned, the Alter spoke sharply to him, "How could you have left? Don't you know that Rambam writes that one who visits the ill removes one sixtieth of the patient's sickness, while one who fails to do so sheds the patient's blood? Don't you think your job was to stay with me like your friend? What makes you think that davening with a minyan was more worthwhile? Surely staying here would have been a much greater zechus!"

במקום שנטלן שכר על הישיבה

In a place where they take money for sitting [with a patient]

The Gemara rules that one is not permitted to accept payment for the mitzvah of visiting the ill ביקור חולים. Tosafos and Rosh offer different explanations for this ruling. Tosafos¹ writes that the reason it is prohibited is that visiting the ill is a mitzvah and one should not take money for performing a mitzvah. Rosh² writes that taking money for the mitzvah degrades the mitzvah (מבזה המצוה). Shitah Mekubetzes³ maintains that the prohibition against taking money for visiting the ill is based on the Gemara's earlier exposition (37a) that teaches that just as Hashem taught Torah without charging a fee so too all are charged to do mitzvos without charging a fee. Therefore, concludes Shitah Mekubetzes, it must be that Tosafos and Rosh were offering explanations for that earlier exposition. The Gemara does mention, however, that one is permitted to take money for sitting next to a patient.

Rabbeinu Nissim explains that it is permitted since the mitzvah could be fulfilled even without sitting; therefore, the money that is paid for sitting is not considered to be money that was taken to fulfill a mitzvah. Rosh suggests that the reason it is permitted to take money for sitting with a patient is that that money represents reimbursement for the effort (שכר טרחה) and the loss of his regular income (ביטול מלאכה) rather than money taken for the mitzvah of visiting the ill. Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi⁶, the Re'em, notes a contradiction between two rulings.

The Gemara (39b) rules that one should visit the ill patient even a hundred times if the circumstance warrants. This seems to indicate that one is obligated to perform the mitzvah of visiting the ill even if it takes one away from his job. On the other hand our Gemara that permits taking money for sitting with the patient is based (according to Rosh) on the premise that it is permitted to take money that is reimbursement for lost wages. This implies that one is not obligated to visit the ill if it will cause the visitor to sacrifice his income. Re'em does not resolve this difficulty.

1. תוס' ד"ה על
2. רא"ש בפירושו ד"ה על העמידה
3. שטמ"ק ד"ה על
4. ר"ן ד"ה דאפי'
5. רא"ש הנ"ל
6. דעתו מובא בשטמ"ק ל"ט ד"ה אפי'

אמר להם: בכל יום ויום משתחוים לכם ואתם מאירים. בכבודי לא מחיתם, בכבוד בשר ודם מחיתם.

The Gemorah tells us that during Korach's rebellion, the sun and the moon came before Hashem and declared that if He allowed Moshe to fall and Korach to prevail, they would no longer shine. Hashem rebuked them, saying, "Where were you when people bowed to you as idols? Why didn't you protest then?" This exchange is puzzling. Why were they suddenly so passionate in defending Moshe's honor, yet remained silent when Hashem's own honor was desecrated?

The answer lies in a comment by Rashi on Bamidbar 13:27. When the meraglim returned from spying out the land, they began their report by saying: "Indeed, it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit." Only afterward did they sow fear and negativity about the land. Rashi explains that every lie must contain some truth at its beginning in order to endure. A distortion that begins with factual, appealing statements becomes far more dangerous because it is harder to detect and easier to accept.

Korach's rebellion was exactly that kind of distortion. He didn't deny Torah, he used Torah. His challenge sounded reasonable: "The entire nation is holy, so why do you exalt yourselves?" His words were wrapped in the language of fairness and equality, but his goal was to undermine Moshe's leadership and, ultimately, the authority of the Torah itself. That is why the sun and moon were ready to protest, they recognized that this was a lie clothed in truth, and far more dangerous than open idol worship. But Hashem reminded them that true defense of honor must be consistent; you don't get to stay silent during blatant chilul Hashem and then rise up only when the challenge becomes more subtle. This serves as a powerful warning for us. The greatest threats to Torah values often come not from outside attacks, but from ideas that contain a kernel of truth and dress themselves in Torah logic. That is why maintaining kavod for talmidei chachamim and Daas Torah is so essential. Our mesorah has carried us through every generation, and we must protect it not only from open rebellion but also from the quiet distortions that seem like "logical questions."

PARSHA CONNECTION

The beginning of this week's Parsha is the source for the laws of נדרים which are the subject of our current מסכתא. The Parsha introduces the laws of נדרים as follows: וידבר משה אל-ראשי המטות לבני ישראל לאמר זה הדבר אשר צוה ה':

איש כי ידבר נדר לה' או-השבע שבועה לאסר אסר על-נפשו לא יחל דברו ככל-היצא מפיו יעשה: Why was this מצוה said to the heads of the שבטים as opposed to saying it directly to בני ישראל, like all the other מצוות? Furthermore why does the Torah describe the vows in doubles "והשבע שבועה וכו'". The אלשיך addresses both questions and explains as follows: נדרים are usually done out of anger and impulse. These types of vows are undesirable and they are what the Gemara calls "הנודר כאלו בנה במה" we also see this from the ברייתא throughout קרבן נזיר שמעון הצדיק only ate one דף ט' ע"ב on his life. The נזיר that שמעון הצדיק was impressed by was one who became a נזיר because he was concerned about fighting his הרע לשם שמים. This type of נדר is the type that our Parsha is discussing. The Parsha was said to the heads of the שבטים because they are tasked with teaching the people what kind of נדר is desirable. This is why the description is doubled "וידבר נדר" followed by לה' to qualify that only certain נדרים, namely ones that are made לשם שמים for example to study a perek are desirable. Similarly, השבעה שבועה, means a שבועה like שבועה adds that perhaps נכשל יוסף בועז and בועז יוסף made not to be נכשל. The אלשיך refers to the fact that the person is already סיני מוהר משה and is just adding his own שבועה to reinforce his desire to do what's right.