

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

ADAPTED FROM THE SHIURIM OF HARAV YOCHANAN ZWEIG BY RABBI MORDECHAI SHIFMAN

PARSHAS BEHAR

EYE WANT YOURS

“But the seventh year shall be a complete rest of the land...” (25:4)

The Midrash introduces this week’s parsha by noting that Eisav had a “rah ayin” - “bad eye”. This attribute, continues the Midrash, is also exhibited by a person who fails to observe the laws of shemithah, i.e. abstaining from working the land on the seventh year and allowing others to partake from its produce.¹ Why is Eisav’s pursuit of wealth described as possessing an “ayin rah”? If a “rah ayin” indicates that a person exhibits an unquenchable thirst for material possessions to the extent the he is willing to violate the precepts, examples can be shown involving other precepts which require sustaining a financial loss. Why is a violator of the laws of shemithah singled out as possessing a “rah ayin”?

The Torah promises that a person who adheres to the laws of shemithah will be blessed with an abundance of food for the sixth, seventh and eighth years.² Yet Rashi reveals that one of the primary reasons for the Babylonian exile was Bnei Yisroel’s failure to observe shemithah; the seventy years of exile correspond to the seventy shemitos which were not observed.³ With Hashem’s guarantee that they would not go hungry, why did Bnei Yisroel not observe the laws of shemithah?

Rashi, in Parshas Vayishlach, contrasts Yaakov’s manner of relating to his possessions to that of Eisav. Yaakov states “yeish li kol” - “I have all that I need”, while Eisav proclaims “yeish li rav” - “I have much more than I need”.⁴ Generally, we attribute a person’s greed to his insatiable appetite. Concerning Eisav, this explanation does not suffice for he admits that he has more than he would ever need. What could be the motivating factor that drives him to continue amassing more wealth?

Eisav is not driven by an intrinsic desire to satisfy his needs. His desire is fueled by his need to ensure that *no one else* will possess this wealth. Although he is aware that he has no personal need for this wealth, he attempts to obtain it only in order to prevent another from having it. This is the characteristic that the Midrash defines as a “rah ayin”, the inability to “fargin” another person his good fortune. Not only does Eisav not appreciate the good fortune of others, but he does whatever he can to prevent others from having this good fortune.

The inability to observe the laws of shemithah is a result of possessing a “rah ayin”. Even with Hashem’s guarantee to supply us with all our needs, we could not tolerate opening our fields so that others could benefit from them. Although the portion that they would have consumed would not have diminished what we needed for our own well-being, the mere thought of others possessing that which could be ours prevented us from observing the shemithah for the entire duration of the first Temple.

1.Tanchuma 2.25:21 3.26:17, See Shabbos 33a 4.33:11

PRIORITY MEAL

“The Sabbath produce of the land shall be yours to eat...And for your animal and for your beast that is in your land...” (25:6,7)

During the Sabbatical year, the Torah renders all produce of the land ownerless. The verse teaches us that the owner is permitted to take from the produce for his own and his animals’ needs, provided that he allows equal access to everyone else as well. The Torah says “lachem” - “for you” prior to “livhemtecha” - “for your animal”, placing the owner’s consumption before that of his animal. This appears to contradict the halacha taught by the Talmud that before partaking of a meal, a person should first feed his animals.¹ A similar question is posed by Reb Naftali Amsterdam in Parshas Chukas where Hashem instructs Moshe “Speak to the rock so that it may bring forth water and give drink to the assembly and their animals.”² Why are the people given water to drink before their animals?³

If a person has only one portion of food, there is no question that his consumption supersedes that of his animals. The Torah requirement is that when a person has sufficient food for both himself and his animal, the responsibility to his animal comes first. If the food does not belong to the owner of the animal, but it is being given to him as a gift, the person giving the gift does not have a responsibility to his

friend’s animal. In fact, it could be viewed as disrespectful to feed an animal prior to its owner. Therefore, during the shemita year, when a person does not own his produce, but Hashem is gifting it all to him, he may eat prior to his animals. Similarly, when Hashem gives Bnei Yisroel water to drink, His responsibility is to the people first.

With the understanding that feeding an animal prior to its owner is only applicable when the owner owns the food, and *not* when someone else is providing it, there may be grounds to question a ruling made by the Magen Avraham. The Magen Avraham asks why Rivka gave Eliezer water to drink prior to his animals. He concludes that a person is required to feed his animals first only in regard to eating, and not drinking.⁴ Since Rivka was providing Eliezer with the water. Therefore, her responsibility was to the person first and not his animals, and no distinction between eating and drinking is necessary.

1. Berachos 40a 2. Bamidbar 20:8 3. Binyan Ariel ibid 4. Magen Avraham 167:18, See Torah Temimah Bamidbar 20:8 for explanation of Magen Avraham

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Quick Halacha

May a person respond to Borechu if he has not heard the Chazzan’s recitation? If at least nine people have heard the Chazzan’s recitation of Borechu it is permissible to respond. He may not, however, respond if all he hears is the Chazzan’s repetition of the congregation’s response. If the Chazzan recites Borechu in a low voice and fewer than nine congregants hear him, a person should not respond. At least ten people, including the Chazzan, must hear the Borechu for the congregation

Question of the week

The Maharsha states that the students of Rabbi Akiva were punished for the sin of loshon harah. How does his interpretation coalesce with the Talmud’s reason that they did not afford respect to one another ?

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