

לעילוי נשמת
מרת עקא עדנה
צפורה ע"ה וסרטל
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל



על דשא

AL EY DESHE

Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"a of Gur

Uplifting Ourselves to Teshuvah

ונתתה את הברכה על הר גרזים ואת הקללה על הר עיבל. הלא המה בעבר הידון אחרי דרך מבוא השמש בארץ הכנעני הישב בערבה מול הגלגל אצל אלוני מורה.

You shall deliver the berachah on Har Gerizim and the kelalah on Har Eival. Are they not on the other side of the Yarden, beyond, in the direction of the sunset, in Eretz Canaan, that dwells in the plain, far from Gilgal, near the plains of Moreh?
(Devarim 11:29-30)

The path toward teshuvah is to abandon our ways, to lift ourselves off the ground.

Hashem instructs Moshe Rabbeinu that after Klal Yisrael crosses the Yarden, they should make a treaty, accepting the Torah, on Har Gerizim and Har Eival.

Rashi explains that "acharei" means far; the *pasuk* is telling us that these mountains are located far from the Yarden.

The Sfas Emes¹ points to a Midrash² where this is subject to dispute. The Midrash discusses the *pasuk* which introduces the *Bris Bein Habesarim*: האלה היה — *After these events, the word of Hashem came to Avraham in a vision (Bereishis 15:1)*. Which events does the *pasuk* refer to? According to one view, the word "achar" means far, while "acharei" means close; the *pasuk*, then, is referring to events that happened a long time before the *Bris Bein Habesarim*. The other view holds that "achar" means close and "acharei" means far; the *pasuk* is referring to events that happened immediately preceding the *Bris Bein Habesarim*.

The Sfas Emes asks: When discussing the events leading up to the *Bris Bein Habesarim*, it is possible to consider whether we are referring to events that happened immediately before the *Bris Bein Habesarim* or events that took place a long time earlier. But how can this discussion apply to our *pasuk*? How can there be a dispute regarding the geographical location of Har Gerizim and Har Eival?

Foreign Ideals

Sefer Devarim is the *Sefer Ha'yirah*. *Tzaddikim* would say to learn *Sefer Devarim* the whole year,⁴ certainly, we should learn it during Elul, which is a special time for *yiras Shamayim*.

והקללה אם לא תשמעו אל מצות ה' אלקיכם וסרתם מן הדרך אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום ללכת אחרי אלהים אחרים אשר לא ידעתם.

And the curse, if you do not listen to the mitzvos of Hashem, your G-d, and you stray from the path that I am commanding you today, to follow foreign gods that you do not recognize (Devarim 11:28).

Rashi, quoting the *Sifri*, points out that the *pasuk* is discussing one who only serves *avodah zarah*, and yet, he is considered as having completely strayed from the Torah. This, Rashi says, is the source for what Chazal say: המודה בעבודה זרה ככופר בכל התורה כולה — *One who believes in avodah zarah is likened to one who denies the entire Torah.*

We imagine that since we no longer have a *yetzer hara* for *avodah zarah*, this does not apply to us. We may have other battles with the *yetzer hara*, but we don't have to worry that we might believe in *avodah zarah*.

¹ Likutim.

² *Bereishis Rabbah* 44:5. Rav Y.M. Biderman asks why the *Sfas Emes* quotes a Midrash, when there is a similar Gemara in *Sotah*, 33b.

⁴ *Toras Hayehudi Hakadosh*.

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Equating *avodah zarah* with all the *mitzvos* can be taken simply to mean that it is very serious. Rashi writes that one who serves *avodah zarah* unintentionally is compared to one who transgressed the entire Torah.⁵ Taken simply, the intent may be to stress the gravity of the sin. But when it comes to serving *avodah zarah* purposely, it is not enough to know that it is a grave sin. Someone who comes to serve *avodah zarah* must understand exactly what he is

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doing. The Maharal⁶ explains that even someone who fulfills all the *mitzvos*, if he serves *avodah*

zarah purposely, his *mitzvos* become worthless. The purpose of the *mitzvos* is to fulfill the will of Hashem. Someone who doesn't believe in Hashem may do the proper actions, but since they were not done for Hashem, what are they worth?

This can be understood like the statement of the Rambam. The Rambam writes⁷ that a gentile who takes upon himself the *Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach* is considered one of the *chassidei umos ha'olam* and he merits a portion in *Olam Haba*. However, there is a condition: the gentile must fulfill these *mitzvos* because Hashem commanded them. If he does these *mitzvos* for any other reason, it is not considered as if he is doing Hashem's *mitzvos*. Simply put, this is the Maharal's intent as well. *Mitzvos* done by a Yid who does not believe in Hashem, do not have the distinction of *mitzvos*.

The Maharal can be understood on a deeper level as well. The *sefarim hakedoshim* write⁸ that the word "*mitzvah*" comes from the root of "*tzavsa* — connection." The only possible way to form a connection with Hashem is by doing His *mitzvos*. Someone who does *mitzvos* with an all-encompassing feeling that he is connecting with

Hashem, has formed this *tzavsa*; he has performed *mitzvos*. But, if someone fulfills *mitzvos* without this connection, and does them for other reasons, those *mitzvos* are severely lacking. They do not create any *tzavsa* with Hashem, and they are not considered *mitzvos*.

Avodah zarah does not only refer to idol worship, it can refer to our foreign ideals (*el zar*) as well. Even after the yetzer hara for *avodah zarah* was vanquished, we continue to have a yetzer hara for foreign ideals. We do not do *mitzvos* solely to forge a connection with Hashem, but for our own purposes, too. These *mitzvos*, the Maharal tells us, are missing substance. When our *mitzvos* are done to serve our foreign ideals instead of Hashem, the *mitzvos* become worthless.

No one can say that he is completely free of foreign ideals, and that all his *mitzvos* are done completely for Hashem's sake; we are all guilty of serving our *el zar*. We are only human, and we can do *teshuvah*. But, we must realize that Hashem is all we have in life. We must strive to do *mitzvos* for His sake, and our whole purpose must be to connect with Him.

(סעודה שלישית פרשת ראה תשפ"ד מאמר ב)

⁵ Bamidbar 15:22-23.

⁶ Gur Aryeh.

⁷ Hilchos Melachim 8:11.

⁸ Shelah Hakadosh, Maseches Yoma, chap. Derech Chaim.

Focusing on the Avodah of Today

את הברכה אשר תשמעו אל מצות ה' אלקיכם וגו'. והקללה אם לא תשמעו וגו'.

The blessing: that you listen to the mitzvos of Hashem, your G-d. And the curse: if you do not listen... (Devarim 11:27-28).

The *sefarim hakedoshim* point out that when discussing the *berachah*, the Torah uses the word "*asher* — that you will listen," but in discussing the curse, the Torah uses the word "*im* — if you will not listen." The word "*asher*" indicates something that

is expected. The Torah expects that Yidden will do *mitzvos*, and Hashem looks forward, *k'vayachol*, to rewarding us.

Rashi writes: "*The blessing: that you listen...*" means, on condition (*al tenai*) that you listen. The Maharal explains⁹ that Rashi does not simply mean that the *berachah* will come on condition that we do the *mitzvos*.

The Gemara (*Gittin* 74a) discusses transactions made using different types of conditions. When a

transaction made with a *tenai* should go into effect depends on the language used in the *tenai*. When a *tenai* is made using the language of *al menas* — on condition, the transaction takes effect immediately (assuming that the condition will eventually be fulfilled). However, when a *tenai* is made using the word *im* — if, the transaction only takes place at the time the condition is fulfilled.

The Maharal explains that Rashi is defining the "*asher*" in this *pasuk* as a *tenai* using the

⁹ Gur Aryeh.

Focusing on the Avodah of Today

terminology of *al menas*. Hashem made a condition using the word *asher*, meaning *al menas*. He told us that if we will eventually fulfill His *mitzvos*, the *berachos* will take effect immediately. However, when it came to the *kelalah*, Hashem made a condition using the term *im*. The curse would only take effect at the time when we don't listen; it would not take effect immediately.

The Maharal is bothered by this discrepancy. Why didn't Hashem make the same stipulation regarding *mitzvos* as He did in regard to *aveiros*? The Maharal answers that if Hashem would not allow the *berachah* to come until after we have fulfilled the *mitzvos*, the *berachah* would never come. The *berachah* and *kelalah* that the *pasuk* refers to are the *berachos* and *kelalos* of Har Gerizim and Har Eival. In *Parshas Ki Savo*, the Torah exhorts us not to do certain *aveiros*; if we do them, we will incur a *kelalah*, and if we do not do them, we will merit *berachah*. It is impossible to ascertain inaction. Even if until now, we did not transgress these *aveiros*, it is not considered definite inaction. Who is to say we will never transgress them in the future? Since it is impossible to confirm this inaction, we would never merit the *berachah* of Har Gerizim. That is why Hashem made a condition using the language of *asher* — to enable us to receive the *berachos* immediately.

The Maharal is not merely suggesting that there are two types of conditions in the *pasuk*; he is so certain, that he even asks why it should be so. However, we may question this assertion. First, the word *asher* often means the same thing as the word *im*.¹⁰ Why can't both *asher* and *im* in this *pasuk* have identical meanings?

Second, there is discussion amongst the earlier *poskim*¹¹ about conditions made using

language other than *al menas* and *im*. Some say that if a different language is used (e.g. *al tenai*), it does not enjoy the same halachah as *al menas*, and it cannot cause the transaction to take place immediately.¹² Others say that only a *tenai* using the word *im* is inferior, but any other language would have the same halachah as *al menas*.

Even if we assume that *asher* is similar to *al menas*, perhaps it would not share the same *halachos* as *al menas*, because it does not mean exactly the same thing. Why does the Maharal assume the *pasuk* is making different types of conditions?

Yet perhaps the Maharal is basing his statement on the fact that the *pasuk* uses two different words. If the *pasuk* referred, in both cases, to the same type of *tenai*, it should have used the same word for both — either *im* or *asher*.

The Gemara (*Makkos* 23b) states that anyone who sits idly without performing an *aveirah*, is rewarded as if he did a mitzvah. We see that even sitting idly is considered a positive form of not transgressing *aveiros*. If so, why does the Maharal assume that we could only merit the *berachah* of Har Gerizim once we were definitely inactive in transgressing those *aveiros*? Why can't we receive the *berachah* for every minute that we do not transgress?

However, the Maharal himself¹³ writes that one only receives reward for not transgressing an *aveirah* if he had the opportunity to do the *aveirah* and actively refrained from transgressing it.¹⁴ Accordingly, we would not be able to receive the *berachah* of Har Gerizim for simply not transgressing, unless Hashem would allow the *berachah* to take effect immediately.

However, one question remains. It seems from the Maharal that it is absolutely impossible to receive the *berachah* for refraining from the *aveiros* mentioned at Har Gerizim. Although it is true that one cannot receive the *berachah* if the *aveirah* never presented itself, there are many cases when an *aveirah* does present itself. Why would one not receive the *berachah* in such cases?

We tend to worry that we will never be perfect in our *avodas Hashem*. As hard as we try, we will eventually sin. This causes us to slacken in our

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avodah, as we feel we are hopeless. We must learn from this discussion not to focus on future *aveiros*. Each day, we have the opportunity to serve Hashem, to refrain from *aveiros* and stand up to the *nisyonos* that come our way. Hashem rewards us for each and every time we don't sin.

May Hashem help us be strong in today's fight against the *yetzer hara*. And, the same Hashem Who helped us today should help us tomorrow.

(סעודה שלישית פרשת עקב תשפ"ד מאמר ד')

10 See *Sefer HaShorashim* of the Radak, *shoresh asher*.

11 See *Otzar HaPoskim* 38:3:15, 6, 28.

12 These *poskim* quote the Ramban, who states that we don't know the exact meaning of *al menas*. Only Chazal, who knew the exact meaning, were able to say that it causes the transaction to take place immediately. Therefore, we cannot assume the same about any other language.

13 *Tiferes Yisrael* chap. 20.

14 See *Kiddushin* 39b.