



**TORAH ACADEMY**  
of Bergen County

# קול תורה

**Parashat BeShalach**

**Shevat 15 5777**

**February 11, 2017**

**Vol. 26 No. 18**

## ZEH KEILI VEANVEIHU

by *Rabbi Nosson Rich*

Various Halachot are derived from the fascinating phrases in the beautiful song, Shirat HaYam. One such Halachah is the principle of Hiddur Mitzvah, the concept of striving to do Mitzvot in an enhanced manner in order to beautify our service of Hashem. The Gemara (Shabbat 133b) derives this principle from the phrase, "Zeh Keili VeAnveihu," "This is my God and I will make Him a house" (Shemot 15:2), which is interpreted by our Rabbis as a specific directive to strive to perform Mitzvot in a beautiful and exalted manner. The Gemara provides various examples for this: Lulav, Tzitzit, and Sefer Torah are but a sample of Mitzvot that we are instructed to fulfill in manners that reflect a deep and sincere commitment to our Avodat Hashem.

The Gemara subsequently records the opinion of Abba Sha'ul, who offers an alternative interpretation of that Pasuk. According to Abba Sha'ul, the Pasuk teaches us to follow and emulate the ways of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. "Just as He is compassionate and gracious, so should you be compassionate and gracious" (Shabbat 133b). On the surface, the Gemara is presenting us with two dissimilar interpretations of the same Pasuk, each one striking and poignant, yet unique and distinct. Rav Baruch Epstein zt"l (Torah Temimah Shemot 15:2 s.v. VeAnveihu footnote 12), however, suggests that Abba Sha'ul is not merely offering a new alternative interpretation, but rather he is adding to the view of the Rabbis. Just as one is to beautify his

performance of Mitzvot Bein Adam LaMakom, one should similarly seek to emulate Hashem's compassion and graciousness to enhance his fulfillment of Mitzvot Bein Adam LeChaveiro. It is not enough for one to simply achieve an enhanced relationship with Hashem; he must also demand of himself the same degree of attention and commitment when relating to his fellow man. After all, how foolish would one be if he were to spend extra time, energy, and resources to enhance the quality of his Lulav or Tefillin, yet ignore his basic responsibility to improve upon his interpersonal relationships? In fact, Rav Epstein declares that such an individual runs the risk of causing a profound Chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's name, for people would associate the deficiencies in his character with his religious identity. On the other hand, when one seeks to emulate the attributes of God and demonstrates loving kindness and compassion towards others, this allows for a more ideal fulfillment of Hiddur Mitzvah in all of the Mitzvot that he performs.

Rav Avraham Pam zt"l discussed this matter extensively and often reminded his students to strike the difficult, yet essential balance called "Mishkal HaChassidut," the delicate balance between serving Hashem and helping other people. Rav Pam recounted how the Chafetz Chaim refused to accept the honor of holding his city's only set of Dalet Minim during the Hallel out of concern that it would possibly leave others depressed and disillusioned for not having their own set. Rav Pam himself suggested that while the Mitzvah of rejoicing with a bride and groom is a lofty and important Mitzvah, it is improper for people to stay late at a wedding at the expense of people who may be babysitting their children. These extraordinary examples demonstrate the unique sensitivity and righteousness of the Chafetz Chaim and Rav Pam. These examples provide us with concrete illustrations as to how we must strive for consistency and balance in our service of Hashem, not allowing our sincere desire to connect with God to compromise our responsibilities to

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our family, friends and neighbors. Even when actively serving Hashem, we must maintain our concern and compassion for other people.

Truthfully, one would be hard-pressed to find any chapter in the Shulchan Aruch in which issues of conflict in the realm of interpersonal relationships do not arise. The intricacies of Halachah, combined with the complexities of human temperaments and emotions, demand that we approach our Avodat Hashem with thoughtful foresight and extreme caution. One must continuously evaluate and seek proper Halachic guidance to insure that he succeeds in maintaining the proper balance between his performance of Mitzvot and the need to be mindful and considerate of others.

## COMPLETE RELIANCE

*by Yonatan Sturm '18*

Parashat BeShalach tells of two extraordinary events that seem unrelated to each other outside of their chronological sequence: Keri'at Yam Suf and the beginning of the Yeridat HaMan. However, a closer look reveals that the two events are deeply intertwined.

Keri'at Yam Suf was an event that was noteworthy both for its miraculous nature and historical impact. Following Yetzi'at Mitzrayim, the Jewish people stood surrounded and enclosed from all sides as the Egyptian army chased after them to bring them back to Egypt. The Jewish people appeared to be doomed, their return to Egypt appearing inevitable, with the sea in front of them and the Egyptian army closing in from all directions, so they turned to Hashem and prayed out of sheer desperation. Hashem responded to their passionate plea by telling them to stand and watch while He would save the Jews from the oncoming threat. What ensued was the remarkable miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea and the subsequent decimation of the Egyptian army. It was at this moment that the Jews learned that when faced with

difficulties, they would need to rely on Hashem to save them.

The Jews' complete reliance on the mercy of Hashem at this critical juncture is embodied by an explanation of a phrase in Az Yashir, the song that the Jewish people sang after Keri'at Yam Suf. Rabbeinu Bachya (Devarim 32:39) writes that the word "VeAnveihu" in the phrase "Zeh Keili VeAnveihu," "This is my G-d and I shall glorify Him" (Shemot 15:2) is actually composed of the two words Ani VaHu, myself and Him. Once the Jews had accepted Hashem as their one and only savior, they then realized that their relationship with Hashem depended upon their believing, following and acting in His ways. With the splitting of the Red Sea, the Jews not only became Hashem's nation, but also accepted a higher standard of living--one that would mirror and emulate the ways of their Creator.

Rav Dovid Katzenstein posits that with this understanding of the deep meaningfulness of Keri'at Yam Suf, we can now understand the connection between Keri'at Yam Suf and the Yeridat HaMan. The Man was a form of sustenance that fell from heaven, falling every day of the workweek in order to feed the Jewish people. It was a symbol of Hashem's unparalleled love for His people and their corresponding Emunah in his power to provide for them, total belief in the existence of Hashem and acceptance of all of his commandments. Once the special bond between the Jews and Hashem had been forged by the Keri'ah of the Yam Suf, it was maintained throughout the sojourn in the Midbar by way of the Yeridat HaMan.

This connection between Keri'at Yam Suf and the Yeridat HaMan sheds tremendous light onto how we should strive to act as dedicated members of the Jewish people. If we are able to maintain our relationship with Hashem and recognize that He is our true and only source of sustenance, we will hopefully merit receiving great gifts from Heaven.

*Kol Torah is proud to include the conclusion of the article that ran last week from Rabbi Yaakov Blau, one of our respected Rabbei'im, originally published in his book, 'Medieval Commentary in the Modern Era: The Enduring Value of Classical Parshanut'. After looking at the sugya approach last week, we continue this week with other pedagogic applications of Ramban al-Hatorah.*

## RECONSIDERING PEDAGOGIC USE OF THE RAMBAN AL-HATORAH: PART II

by Rabbi Ya'akov Blau

*Halakhic*

It has been my experience that Humash teachers tend to view their subject as rather bifurcated from Gemara and therefore basically avoid the Halakhic parts of Humash. An oft-repeated mantra is "this is a Humash class, not a Gemara class." While this is certainly worthy of a much broader discussion, I question this approach. Clearly there should be a difference between a Humash and Gemara class, yet approximately half of Humash is Halakha. Why do these areas not deserve equal attention as the more "classic" Humash parts.<sup>i</sup> Both Rashi and Ramban felt that halakhic areas were worthy of the same level of commentary in their works as the other parts of Humash. Focusing on those Rambans can also create an opportunity for overlap between Humash and either Gemara or Halakha classes.<sup>ii</sup>

Some examples of these types of Rambans include his discussion of whether or not *Tevilat Kelim* is actually *D'orayta*. The Gemara in *Avodah Zara* presents a *drasha* suggesting that it is, but the Ramban (*Bamidbar* 31:23) believes that it may just be an *asmakhta*. This is not just an argument in the Gemara that is removed from understanding the basic text; it is rather a question of what the requirements of *tevila* that are mentioned in the *pesukim* are describing. I believe that any attempt to understand this section of Humash must deal with this issue.

Another example would be the question if the need to first offer a peaceful alternative to battle is required when fighting a *melkemet mitzvah*. Rashi (*Devarim* 20:10) seems to feel that it is not, but Ramban (*ibid*) disagrees. Ramban supports his position

from other *pesukim*. Once again, this is a fundamental question about how to read the *pesukim*.<sup>iii</sup>

Similarly, the Ramban can serve as a gateway to the world of *minyany hamitzvot*. Ramban is extremely consistent in his commentary *al haTorah* with his opinions in his *hasagot* on Rambam's *Sefer Hamitzvot*. In fact, studying those Rambans presents the opportunity to expose students to works of *Rishonim* with which they may not be otherwise familiar, in this case the genre of *sefrei hamitzvot*.<sup>iv</sup> One can ask if the mandate to remember what happened to Miriam (*Devarim* 24:9) is actually a mitzvah and see that Ramban says that it indeed is, both in his *perush al haTorah* and in his list of *mitzvot* that Ramban omitted (*Asseh* 7). A similar question arises with regard to the command to be "complete with God" (*Devarim* 18:13 and *Asseh* 8). I will grant that in both of these examples it is debatable how necessary this question is for a basic understanding of the text, but if one is willing to maintain a slightly more expansive view of how Humash should be taught, these are fine openings to a new mode of discussion.

An example which is more basic to the text is the question of whether or not it is a *mitzvah* to swear (*Devarim* 6:13); Ramban's reading, that it is not, is consistent from his *perush al haTorah* (*ibid*) to his attack of Rambam's counting it as *Asseh* 7.<sup>v</sup> Also, his discussion of whether or not the rich person not adding and the poor not subtracting from the half *shekel* (*Shemot* 30:15) is considered a *mitzvah* is straight out of the *pesukim*. Ramban's justification for not counting it is somewhat based on other *sifrei hamitzvot* and it is worth noting that he did not count it himself in his *hasagot* on Rambam's *Sefer Hamitzvot*.<sup>vi</sup> Finally, the famous discussion of whether *v'horashtem et ha'aretz v'yashaotem ba'* ("And you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it," *Bamidbar* 33:53) is a *mitzvah*<sup>vii</sup> or a promise<sup>viii</sup> is basic to understanding that *passuk*.

*Navi*

Several times, Ramban will have a discussion about

an episode in the Navi which is somewhat based on the idea in the *passuk* in Humash. For example, the stories of *Pilegsh B'giva* (*Bereshit* 19:8), Yiftach (*Vayikra* 27:29) , David counting the Jews (*Bamidbar* 1:2) and the complaint to Yehoshua (*Bamidbar* 26:54). Now one could reasonably argue that all of these discussions are overly tangential to the text and should not be done in a Humash class. However, then they ought to be done when covering those stories in a Navi class. Additionally, they present an opportunity to discuss Navi during Humash time, which helps students have a broader understanding of how both subjects interact with each other.

Thankfully, the Ramban *al haTorah* is a part of any discussion on Humash. Given how multi-faceted the commentary is, it is my hope that more of those facets will become part of the day to day *masah u'matan shel torah*.

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i It's true that many pashtanim basically avoid these areas, but there was an understanding that one would read Rashi to get an understanding; see Rashbam's introductions to both Mishpatim and Vayikra.

ii Meaning both that Halakha and Gemara teachers could use such Rambans when relevant, and that Humash teachers could work with those teachers of other subjects in cases where the curricula for that year allow such a cross-discipline discussion.

iii See also his discussion about the chametz of a goy in Shemot 12:19 for another example.

iv In general, Ramban's commentary on Humash has many parallels in his other works that are worth examining, such as his discussion about how l'khatchila doctors are in both Vayikra 26:11 and his Torat Hadam (Sha'ar Hasakana).

v Similarly, Ramban al HaTorah (Devarim 15:3) attacks Rambam for counting charging interest to a non-Jew as a mitzvah (as he does when attacking Rambam's Asseh 198; the attack is on Shoresh 6).

vi Other examples include his discussion of whether "v'akhalta v'savata u'verakhta" is a mitzvah according to the peshat of the passuk (Devarim 8:10) and how to understand the prohibition of "v'ha'aretz lo timakher l'zmitzut" both in Vayikra 25:23 and hasagot to the sefer hamizvot lav 227.

vii See Ramban's list of mitzvot that Rambam left out, Asseh 4.

viii See Rashi and Seforno (ad loc) who seem to understand the passuk as a condition.

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