

## Parshat Ve'etchanan: The Second Version of Aseret Hadibrot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In his commentary on *Parshat Va'etchanan*, the Shem MiShmuel asks a question related to the *mitzva* of *Shabbat* which is mentioned twice. First in Parshat Yitro and then again in Parshat Va'etchanan. But while in Yitro the reason given for the *mitzva* is *zecher l'maaseh bereishit*- to remember that Hashem created the world, the reason given in *Va'etchanan* is *zecher l'yetziat Mitzrayim*- to remember that Hashem took us out of Egypt. Both reasons are valid and in *kiddush* we mention both, so why are they mentioned separately in the *Torah*?

The Rambam's opinion is that the main reason is *maaseh bereishit* and *yetziat Mitzrayim* proves that Hashem created the world as there were fundamental changes in nature during the ten plagues. Therefore, at *Matan Torah* when the first *luchot* were given, *maaseh bereishit* is mentioned as the reason. Whereas in *Va'etchanan* where Moshe reviews the *Torah*, he gives *yetziat Mitzrayim* as a supportive reason.

The Shem MiShmuel suggests a different approach. He brings a discussion between the Kotzker Rebbe and Reb Bunim M'Pesi-cha. Reb Bunim asked the Kotzker to tell him what the core impetus of his *avodat Hashem* was. The Kotzker replied with a verse from Yeshaya, "Look up at the heavens and see who created all this." Reb Bunim said he had a different motivator which was *yetziat Mitzrayim*, the precursor of the special relationship Hashem has with the Jewish people. The Shem MiShmuel elaborates on these two points of view. The Rambam writes that the way for a Jew to acquire love and fear

of Hashem is to contemplate Hashem's wondrous creation. Yet the Shem MiShmuel points out that the *Torah* constantly reiterates the importance of remembering *yetziat Mitzrayim* and many *mitzvot* are connected to it. Both ideas are true. There's a universal concept of serving Hashem through His creation and a more individual concept of serving Him as a Jew who was released from Egyptian bondage.

It seems at least from our tradition and the way Jews have lived for thousands of years that the vast majority are not approaching Hashem from the standpoint of creation. We do speak about it but it doesn't compare to the focus we have on *yetziat Mitzrayim* which signifies the special relationship Hashem has with the Jewish people. It is more difficult to connect to the universal concept of Hashem as the master of the universe and a lot easier to connect to the idea of *Elokai Yisrael*. The way of the Rambam and the Kotzker is the path of select *tzadikim*. However, the average Jew can most easily connect to *yetziat Mitzrayim*. The Shem MiShmuel explains that although discovering Hashem through creation might seem simple, as clearly there is a supernatural intelligence conducting the world, it's in fact difficult for the average person. We must first find Him through *yetziat Mitzrayim* and studying and living the *Torah* and then we can move on and try to discern Him through creation. *Yetziat Mitzrayim* is personal. Hashem stepped into history, into every Jew's life, to bring us to *Matan Torah* and He talks to us as an individual through *Torah*.

The *Torah* and *mitzvot* were given to us as a guidebook to help us navigate the difficulties of

this world. Once this stage of history ends and Hashem ushers in the redemption the *mitzvot* won't be necessary anymore because our character will be so much more developed and refined. There will no longer be evil forces driving us off the true path. By just looking at the universe without having to study *Torah*, Hashem's presence will be so visible that we will discern him straightaway. The Shem MiShmuel is suggesting that perhaps when Mashiach comes the focal service of Hashem will switch from remembering *yetziat Mitzrayim* and the giving of the *Torah* to recognizing Hashem as the master of creation.

Parshat Yitro describes the state of the Jews at *Har Sinai* when they accepted the *Torah*. They were on such a lofty level that they had no *yetzer hara* and they could discern Hashem directly within creation without having to focus on *yetziat Mitzrayim*. However, 40 years later in *Va'etchanan* when Moshe gave his farewell speech, the Jews had experienced many downfalls. The common people needed the *yetziat Mitzrayim* experience and the *Torah* to connect to Hashem.

So too, we in exile must focus on *yetziat Mitzrayim* and *Torah* study which is the guarantee for Jewish survival. Some mistakenly think they can connect to Him through scientific study while neglecting to learn *Torah*. This unfortunately led to widespread assimilation because this pathway which might seem apparent, is in fact quite elusive.

May we merit to achieve a true and lasting relationship with Hashem which will lead us to the *geulah* and the ultimate redemption.

## Tu B'Av

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tzipora Heller-Gottlieb

Tu B'av, the 15th of Av personifies the message of the month of Av which is our relationship with Hashem-av u'ben- father and son. There's the distance and the rebirth. The number 15 equals the numerical value of yud and heh with which Hashem formed the world. Rashi says this refers to *olam haba* and *olam hazeh*. Yud is above the line and signifies something beyond what we can grasp in this world. Heh has two feet on the line and an open bottom to teach us that this world is the world of potential descent, but

both the yud and heh can be joined. The melding of the soul and body is what makes a person human and Tu B'av is the day in which humanity in its broader sense is celebrated. Raban Shimon ben Gamliel taught that there was no greater festival than Tu B'av and Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is about finding oneself and about getting rid of all the obstacles that hold a person back from being his true self. Chazal say that on those days the *Bnot Yisrael* would go out and dance in the vineyards and the men would find their mates.

The yud is the male element and the heh is the female element. Men serve Hashem by bringing *Torah* from above to below. Women serve Hashem by taking that which is in this world and elevating it and there is a place of meeting and wholeness which would take place in the vineyards. Grapes can never be grafted. So too in marriage there is a soul bond that doesn't lend itself to bonding with another. This was the source of celebration. After the sin of the golden calf the Jews repented and Hashem forgave them. But after

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the sin of the spies, they were punished and those between 20-60 had to die. On Tu B'Av they stopped dying. Tu B'Av is a celebration of our survival and a new beginning both because there were matches made and that even after grievous sin there was still a new beginning.

At the start, in order to maintain the integrity of the tribal holdings, the Jews only married within their tribes. However, once the land was settled, on Tu B'Av, the ban was lifted. The most ideal choice is to marry someone similar to yourself. But you can examine your flexibility and decide- I want to be more than just me. I don't need a clone of myself. This is the day we celebrate the possibility of flexibility based on giving.

On Tu B'Av the ban was lifted against marrying into the tribe of Binyamin after the incident of pilegash b'givah. Shevet Binyamin fell because of the terrible trait of disassocia-

tion where you can look at a person and see her someone who doesn't matter. Tu B'Av is the day of joining, of marriage, and forgiveness. Hashem forgave the Jews for the egel. He didn't forgive for the sin of speaking badly about the land and about each other. But we atoned for it and were allowed to eventually enter the land, just as the ban against Binyamin was eventually lifted.

What sets tzadikim apart is that they always ask themselves the question-What does Hashem want of me? Not- What is the easiest way to deal with the situation or what do I need or want. When Yeravam ben Nevat rebelled, he didn't ask that question. He closed the roads to Yerushalayim to prevent people from going up to the Bet Hamikdash. On Tu B'Av, Hoshea ben Ela opened these roads again. On Tu B'Av, the corpses in Beitar were permitted to be buried. Even after many years, they had not decomposed and chazal instituted the blessing of hatov v'hameitav to commemorate this. This tells us that Hashem

is there even the thickest darkness when there's no way on our terms one could see His mercy. We remember this in birchat hamzon because self sufficiency and physical pleasures obscures Hashem. But He breaks through the curtains of concealment and compels us to find Him.

Tu B'Av was known as the day of the breaking of the ax. No more wood was chopped down to be used in the Bet Hamikdash as the days become shorter and the sun was no longer strong enough to dry out the logs. We live lives that always feel incomplete as one thing flows into another. On Tu B'Av, Hashem made us stop and take stock.

Tu B'Av is about thanking Hashem for everything that did work out and for the possibilities that are still there even when we mess up. We can begin again and repent and merit rebirth with the coming of Mashiach speedily in our days.

## Practical Judaism II: Mizmor L'Todah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Ai Jacobson

From Baruch She'amar until after the end of Shemone Esrei one may not interrupt. There are cases when one can interrupt for a mitzva.

The blessings of Shema beginning with Yotzer Ohr have more stringencies. One may not interrupt for Amen and certain parts of Kedusha. One may interrupt in order to answer Amen yehei shemei rabbah in Kaddish and Amen to Hakel Hakadosh and Shomeiya Tefilah. One can answer to Barchu, and to Kedusha with Kadosh and Baruch kvod Hashem. One can't answer Amen to any other bracha. Neither can one say the introductory sentence of kedusha, nekadesh.

In Pesukei D'zimra, one can interrupt to answer Amen to any blessing and one can answer to the entire Kedusha. One may also say Shema with the congregation. Although the Kitzur is lenient about answering Amen, if possible one should only do so at the end of a phrase or section. The Mishne Berura is more stringent. He writes that any Amen except the two exceptions mentioned and Amen yehei shme rabbah should only be recited at the end or in between verses.

One should not answer Baruch hu u'varuch shemo in the middle of Pesukei D'zimra, as it is a custom, not an obligation. If a person needs to relieve himself he should wash his hands but he shouldn't say Asher Yatzar until after Shemone Esrei. The Mishne Berura disagrees and says to recite it immediately because it is likely that one will forget. Similarly, it would seem that one can interrupt to recite the blessings on thunder and lightning because they also must be said right away. During Pesukei D'zimra, a person may accept an aliyah. If he is the only person who can read the Torah, some poskim permit him to interrupt. Getting a tenth person for a minyan is considered a permitted interruption for the sake of prayer, but it is better to do it before Yishtabach.

There's a custom to kiss the tzitzit at the end of Baruch She'amar. With this blessing we begin Pesukei D'zimra, praising Hashem, and our ultimate praise is abiding by His commandments.

The most important verse in Ashrei is "Poteach et yadecha," where we ascribe our sustenance to the Creator. Therefore, this verse must be recited with extra concentration, otherwise one

must repeat it.

Many siddurim have a line separating between 'elilim' and 'V'Hashem shamayim asah,' to remind us not to associate Hashem with idol worship.

One should not touch any parts of the body that are normally kept covered during prayer. If one does, one should wash one's hand. If there is no water available, one should wipe one's hands on a hard surface.

After Baruch She'amar, we recite Mizmor l'todah, the song thanking Hashem. The Torah requires a person to bring a korban todah, a thanksgiving offering, when he emerges safely from four dangerous situations. It is derived from the acronym chaim in "V'chol hachaim yoducha sela." Chet is choleh, a person who was healed. Yud is yotzei beis assurim, one who emerges from jail. The second yud is yordei yam, people who have gone to sea and have returned. Mem is holchei midbariot, people who have traveled through the desert. Today, instead of bringing a thanksgiving sacrifice, one says the Hagomel blessing instead.