

The first *Parashah* that we read this week, *Behar*, opens with the *Mitzvah* of *Shemittah* / the sabbatical year for the fields of *Eretz Yisrael*. We read (25:6), "The sabbatical [produce] of the land shall be yours to eat," which R' Eliezer Dovid Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Oyber Visheve, Hungary) explains as follows:

The *Gemara* (*Ketubot* 112a) relates that the sage Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi came to *Eretz Yisrael* (about 200 years after the *Bet Hamikdash* had been destroyed), and he said, "Land! Take back your fruits! For whom are you producing fruits--for the foreigners who dwell here?" [Until here from the *Gemara*.] R' Gruenwald continues: Thus we read (*Tehilim* 4:8), "You put joy into my heart when their grain and wine increase," i.e., that *Eretz Yisrael* feels joy when "their"--the Jewish People's--grain and wine increase. If *Eretz Yisrael* is forced to produce for any other nation, it does not feel joy, as our verse says: "The sabbatical of the land shall be yours to eat": When does the Land feel relaxed on its sabbatical? Only when the produce is "yours," the Jewish People's, to eat!

In *Bechukotai*, this week's second *Parashah*, we read (26:32), "And *Ani* / I, I will make the land desolate, and your foes who dwell upon it will be desolate." *Rashi* z"l writes that this is, in fact, a blessing: no nation will successfully settle *Eretz Yisrael* while we are in exile. (As history shows, this prophecy came true, and *Eretz Yisrael* remained largely barren for 1,800 years.) R' Gruenwald explains that *Rashi* understood this because of the superfluous "*Ani*" in the verse. Our Sages teach that *Hashem* does not attach His Name or Identity to bad things. Therefore, if the Torah emphasizes that "I," *Hashem*, will make the land desolate, it must be something good. (*Keren Le'Dovid*)

Shabbat

R' David ben Shlomo ibn Zimra z"l ("*Radvaz*"; 1479-1573; Chief Rabbi of Egypt) writes: On the level of *Pshat*, The reason for the *Mitzvah* of *Shabbat* is that observing *Shabbat* makes a statement that the world has a Creator and it did not come into existence by chance, that *Hashem* made the world as He saw fit, and that everything that exists is like clay in the hands of a potter, who can twist it any way he wants, which is exactly what *Hashem* did when he brought about the Plagues and the Exodus from Egypt. The forgoing explains why we often find three concepts--belief in Creation, belief in the Exodus, and observance of *Shabbat*--mentioned together.

Radvaz continues: The Torah commands us to remember *Shabbat* with speech (i.e., *Kiddush*) when it enters, as we read (*Shmot* 20:8), "Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it," because something that is remembered regularly with spoken words is not easily forgotten from the heart. The Torah commands us not to work on *Shabbat* so that we will be free to engage in Torah study and deep thoughts, to think about the greatness of the Creator who made everything from absolute nothingness with no effort whatsoever--using only words. Even though the Torah says (*Shmot* 20:11), "He rested on the seventh day," it is only a figure of speech. The verse speaks the way man would speak, referring to someone who has finished his work as "resting."

For the foregoing reasons, writes *Radvaz*, the Torah commands the courts not to punish sinners on *Shabbat*; rather, it should be a day of joy, as we read (*Yeshayah* 35:10), "Sadness and sighing will flee." Likewise, the Torah commands a person not to travel away from his place on *Shabbat*, as we read (*Shmot* 16:29), "Let no man leave his place on the seventh day." That way, a person will be tranquil and relaxed and will devote himself to Divine service rather than running here and there.

(*Metzudat David*, No. 91)

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(5) R' Sa'adiah Gaon z"l (882-942; Egypt, *Eretz Yisrael* and Iraq; author of the earliest known work on Jewish Thought) writes that before the Torah was given, people used to pray to stars and planets and engage in various rituals to bring rain--so they believed--when it was needed. Because the Torah prohibits these idolatrous and superstitious activities, it must, instead, explain how to cause rain to fall in its proper time--i.e., by observing the Torah.

(6) R' Yehuda Halevi (quoted above) writes that the Torah does not need to tell us that the soul can have a relationship with *Hashem* in *Olam Ha'ba*, for, in fact, the Torah can even have a relationship with *Hashem* in this world. The possibility of prophecy is the ultimate proof of the level to which a soul can rise in this world.

(7) R' Yosef Albo z"l (Spain; 1380-1444) writes that the Torah speaks of rewards that apply generally, for example: "If you--i.e., the majority of Jews--observe the Torah, rain will fall in its proper time." Reward in *Olam Ha'ba* is, however, individualized--each person according to his personal merits and demerits. Therefore, the Torah does not speak about it.

R' Shlomo Ephraim writes: With these seven answers we can chase away anyone who would speak ill of our Torah. And, he adds, there is another answer: The Torah tells us that *Hashem* loved Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, yet it does not seem that they led very happy lives. It follows necessarily that the reward for their good deeds awaits them in another world--i.e., in *Olam Ha'ba*.
(*Kli Yakar*)

R' Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter z"l (1847-1905; second *Gerrer Rebbe*) writes: To me, it appears that the Torah is not promising reward at all, for that is not the purpose of the Torah. The word "Torah" means "instruction," and everything in the Torah instructs us how to act. When the Torah says, for example, that rain will fall if we perform *Mitzvot*, it is stating that *Hashem* wants to do good for us--indeed, that is His ultimate goal in giving us *Mitzvot*, as we read (*Tehilim* 81:14), "If only My people would heed Me . . . I would satiate you with honey." The Torah is, in effect, instructing us to act in a way that will allow *Hashem's* goal to be accomplished---for example, to act in a way that makes us deserve rainfall.
(*Sefat Emet* 5655)

R' Reuven Mendlowitz *shlita* (Passaic, N.J.) elaborates: When the Torah promises rain, for example, it is commanding us to act in a way that will allow *Hashem* to give us rain--not as reward, but so that we can perform even more *Mitzvot*, as the *Rambam* quoted above writes. This what *Pirkei Avot* means when it teaches: "The reward for a *Mitzvah* is a *Mitzvah*," i.e., doing one *Mitzvah* prepares us to do another *Mitzvah*. Only good things in this world, like rain, further serve as tools for *Mitzvot*, while *Olam Ha'ba* is purely a reward. Therefore, the Torah commands us to earn rain, and it does not command us to earn *Olam Ha'ba*.
(*Mi'ma'ayanei Ha'yeshuah*)

"I will walk among you, I will be *Elokim* to you and you will be a People to Me." (26:12)

Rashi z"l writes: I will walk with you in *Gan Eden* as though I were one of you, and you will not tremble because of Me. One might think that this means that you will not be in awe of Me! Therefore the verse states, "I will be *Elokim* to you." [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Shlomo Ephraim of Lunschitz z"l (rabbi of Prague; died 1619) writes: In interpreting our verse as referring to *Gan Eden*, *Rashi* means to deflect away from our holy Torah any claim that the Torah does not speak of an eternal reward for the soul. But why, in fact, does the Torah mention expressly only material rewards for *Mitzvot*, such as we find in our *Parashah* (quoted below), while it does not expressly mention reward in *Olam Ha'ba* / the World-to-Come?

R' Shlomo Ephraim lists seven general approaches to answering this question:

(1) According to R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt), the Torah does not describe any rewards for *Mitzvot*, not even material rewards. When the Torah makes statements such as (26:3-4), "If you will follow My decrees . . . then I will provide your rains in their time," the Torah is not promising a reward. Rather, it is promising that if we keep *Mitzvot*, *Hashem* will create conditions that will help us to continue to observe *Mitzvot*. Reward, however, is reserved for *Olam Ha'ba*.

(2) R' Avraham ibn Ezra z"l (1089-1167) writes: The Torah was given to all Jews, but *Olam Ha'ba* is too abstract for most people to understand. Therefore, the Torah does not mention it.

(3) Rabbeinu Bachya the Elder z"l (Spain; early 11th century) explains that the Torah does not need to say that the soul will eventually return to the place from which it came, for that is perfectly natural. The Torah only needs to mention rewards that are not natural, such as: "Do *Mitzvot* and it will rain." After all, there is no natural explanation for the fact that performing *Mitzvot* brings rain and other material rewards!

(4) When the Torah was given (and perhaps today as well), most of the world denied the existence of *Hashgachah*, i.e., that *Hashem* pays attention to man's choices and determines the fate of the world in response. Instead, people believed that all events were predetermined or that one follows automatically from another. To counter those views, the Torah makes promises that are verifiable, for example: "If you will follow My decrees, I will provide your rains in their time." One makes unverifiable promises such as, "If you will do *Mitzvot* you will earn *Olam Ha'ba*," only if he fears that he cannot deliver on his promise--which is not true of *Hashem*, of course. This is the view of R' Yehuda Halevi z"l (Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*; approx. 1075-1141). – Continued on facing page –