

Main Identity

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Sent: Thursday, August 06, 2009 4:42 PM
Subject: Netvort: parshas Eikev, 5769

The Usual

By Rabbi Joshua (ordinarily known as The Hoffer) HoOffman

Moshe, after warning the people not to ascribe their future success in the holy land to themselves, but to God, and, if they forget God and serve idols, they will h, in the end, be chased from the land. He then tells them, Hear, Yisrael, you cross the Yardein today to come and drive out nations greater and mightier than you... but you know, today, that the Lord your God is the One Who passes before you, a consuming fire. He will destroy them, and he will subjugate them before you..."

(Devarim, 9:1,3). Rabbi Mordechai Rogov, ztl, in his Ateres Mordechai, cites a midrash on the first verse, which asks the halachic question, what blessing does one make when he drinks water to quench his thirst? There are two opinions recorded there, one which says to make the beracha that we make, in practice, before drinking water, and the other which says to make the blessing that we now make after finishing drinking the water. This midrash is quite puzzling, because it is hard to see any connection between the the verses in the Torah that we have just seen and the halachic discussion which seemingly comes to explain them. what, then, is the connection?

Rabbi Rogov explains this midrash on the basis of another midrash, which says that once the Jewish nation accepted the Torah and became a full-fledged nation, God said that it isn't appropriate for Him to speak to them in public. Rather, they will make a sanctuary (mishkan) and when I need to speak with them, I will speak to them from teat mishkan. The message of this midrash, says Rabbi Rogov, is that we should be able to understand that God plays a role in our lives from the fact that, in the past, he performed great miracles for us. We should not need constant miracles in order to be aroused to His presence among us. Once the Jews received the Torah , God wanted to communicate with them in a less openly miraculous, more natural way. Therefore, He chose to communicate with them in the mishkan, and later in the Beis HaMikdash, rather than continue to perform great, open miracles, as in the past.

In a similar way, when the Jews went through the process of entering the land, they saw many open miracles from God, and understood, at the time, that he was responsible for their success. The fear, however, was that after settling in the land and living on a more natural plane, they may forget the miracles that occurred, and attribute their successful settling of the land to their own efforts. In a similar way when a person is thirsty, his need moves him to recognize God's hand in providing him with the water, and he readily makes a blessing before he drinks. However , once he has had his fill of the water, he may tend to forget God's role. Therefore, the midrash tells us that he must bless God for he water both before and after he drinks from it. This explanation of the connection that the midrash makes between God's role in the entrance of the nation to Eretz Yisroel and the blessings one makes before and after drinking water is a bit problematic, because, as the rabbis tell us in Prkei Avos, there were ten miracles that happened in the Beis HaMikdash on a constant basis. I would, therefore, like to suggest another explanation, which a message that is, in the end, somewhat similar to that of Rabbi Rogov.

During Chol HaMoed of Sukkos, in the time of the Beis HaMikdash, a great, joyous celebration was held there, called Simchas Beis HaShoeivah. what was the cause of this great simcha? One opinion in the Talmud is that it was then that the water used to pour on the altar was drawn. Another opinion is that they drew divine inspiration, known as 'ruach hakodesh,' which, according to the Rambam in his Moreh HaNevochim, is a certain level of divine inspiration that leads to prophecy, although it does not yet constitute prophecy itself. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, ztl, explained that the two opinions do not necessarily conflict. The celebration over water, he said, is really a celebration of the ordinary, everyday things in life. Water is one of the most ordinary things in the world in our minds, but , when we think of it, we realize that without water, no life could exist. We tend to forget this, and lose our sense of wonder over the really miraculous nature of water, and, therefore are not filled with a sense of gratitude to God for providing us with it. Someone who does not have a sense of wonder for the everyday things in life, for the constant blessings that God bestows upon us, said Rabbi Soloveitchik, will never be able to attain ruach hakodesh.

Following Rav soloveitchik's explanation of the joy at the Simchas Beis HaShoeivah, we can return to our midrash, and the verses it comes to explain. The Torah tells us that once we settle in the land, we shouldn't forget that it was God who brought us there through the miracles He performed for us. How will we be able to maintain this sense of recognition? By having a sense of wonder for the ordinary things in life, such as water. By making a blessing both before and after drinking water to quench our thirst, we will constantly realize God's hand in all that transpires in the world. In this way, we will not forget the role He played in our conquering of Eretz Yisroel, as well.