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PARSHAT BEHA'ALOTCHA פרשת בהעלותך

This issue is dedicated in memory of Ella bat Binyamin a"h
by Marc Daniel Selig.

DVAR TORAH MOSHE MOSHE

In his commentary on the first Mishneh of Pirkei Avot, Harav Chaim Volozhin, זצ"ל (1749-1821), goes into an in-depth discussion of the Moshe, Aaron, and Miriam episode near the end of this week's parshah (Bamidbar 12:1-15). He notes a number of seemingly problematic expressions.

Miriam and Aaron say, "Did not G-d also speak **בנו** – through us?" Why, asks Rav Chaim, did they not use the more appropriate, "**עמנו**", with us? G-d, when He reveals the difference between Moshe and other prophets, uses similar expressions. He says that He speaks through other prophets when they prophecy in a dream ("**בהלום אדבר בו**"), and that He always speaks through Moshe directly ("**פה אל פה אדבר בו**"). Once again, why not use the more common "**עמנו**" and "**עמור**"?

The Zohar comments that the words "Avraham Avraham" (Bereishit 22:11) have a break (a "**פסיק**": |) between them, whereas the words "Moshe Moshe" (Shemot 3:4) are not broken up. What is the significance of that subtle difference?

Rav Chaim answers: As Hashem shows Aaron and Miriam, Moshe's prophecy was of a completely different order than that of any other prophet. The Sages compare Moshe's prophecy to seeing through a clear glass and that of other prophets' to seeing a reflection in a mirror (Yevamot 49b). The source of Moshe's high level was his extreme humility. Other prophets had some ego and unrefined physicality covering their "glass," so they view the Divine in an unclear way. Moshe had so perfected the trait of humility and so purified his physical body that physicality was not a barrier to the Divine revelation. Moshe's humility was even greater than Avraham's. Whereas Avraham said, "I am dust and ashes" (Bereishit 18:27), still asserting some individuality, Moshe said, "What are we?" (Shemot 16:8) – expressing total negation before G-d.

We can now appreciate the Zohar's comment. When G-d calls, "Moshe Moshe" or "Avraham Avraham," the two names of Moshe and Avraham refer to the higher and lower levels of their souls. The higher level of the soul is much more exposed to the Divine, while the lower level of the soul is enclosed within a body. The more a person's physical side is refined, the more the lower level of his soul can apprehend G-dliness and the more powerful his prophecy is. Moshe Rabbeinu's body and ego were so refined that they were not a barrier to the soul. This is the distinction between Moshe – no break between his lower and upper soul – and Avraham – where there was some break between them, reflected in the "**psik**" that appears in the Torah notes.

The Sages therefore say, "The Shechinah spoke through the throat of Moshe," the highest level of prophecy possible. This is the reason the Torah's formulates "G-d spoke through Moshe" – "**אדבר בו**". For other prophets this is only possible in a dream, when the physical is neutralized – "**בהלום אדבר בו**". Miriam and Aaron's mistake was misunderstanding their levels, thinking they were also as refined as Moshe – "**הלא גם בנו דבר**". They were mistaken, for G-d only appears to them as a reflection in a mirror – "**במראה**". Only to the most humble Moshe does G-d speak "**במראה**", in a clear vision.

SOURCE GUIDE:

5 TIMES “THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL”

One verse in Behaalotcha mentions “the Children of Israel” five times. Rashi explains why this is significant; but his comment raises two difficulties. One of the solutions, appearing in the Kedushat Levi (the collected writings of Harav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchov, זצ”ל, 1740–1809) is an important source for understanding the significance of the Leviim’s special place within the People of Israel.

A. 5 Times “The Children of Israel”

Here is the seemingly repetitive verse:

<p>1. Bamidbar 8:19 I will give the Leviim as a gift to Aharon and his sons from among the Children of Israel, to perform the service for the Children of Israel in the Tent of Meeting and to atone on behalf of the Children of Israel; so that the Children of Israel will not be smitten with plague when the Children of Israel approach the Sanctuary.</p>	<p>במדבר ח:יט וְאֶתְנָה אֶת הַלְוִיִּם נְתַנִּים לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעִבְדֹת אֶת עֲבֹדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד וּלְכַפֵּר עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא יִהְיֶה בְּבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִגַף בְּגֹשֶׁת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ.</p>
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The expression “Children of Israel” seems to be needlessly repeated; it appears five times in one verse. The following Midrash builds on the repetition:

<p>2. Vayikra Rabbah 2:4 Said Rabbi Yudan: Come and see how much the Holy One, blessed be He, endears Israel, for He mentions them five times in one verse, as it says, “I will give the Levites ...” (Bamidbar 8:19).</p>	<p>ויקרא רבה ב:ד אמר רבי יודן: בא וראה כמה חיבב הקב”ה את ישראל, שמזכירן חמשה פעמים בפסוק אחד שנאמר “ואתנה את הלוים נתונים וגו’” (במדבר ח:יט):</p>
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Two questions:

1. Why mention the Children of Israel five times? Why not seven or eight or four or some other number?
2. Why did Hashem choose this spot in the Chumash to express His love for Israel?

B. Why Five?

Rashi quotes the Midrash, but adds a few words that provide an answer to our first question:

<p>3. Rashi on Bamidbar 8:19 “I will give ...” – Five times “the Children of Israel” is repeated in this verse, to show their endearment, for their name was mentioned in one verse the same number of times as there are Chumashim in the Torah. Thus I saw in Bereishit Rabbah (Harav Chaim Chavel, זצ”ל, (1906-1982), notes in the footnotes of his edition of Rashi’s commentary that this does not appear in our editions of Bereishit Rabbah, but it does appear in Vayikra Rabbah – Source 2 above).</p>	<p>רש”י על במדבר ח:יט ואתנה וגו’ - ה’ פעמים נאמר בני ישראל במקרא זה להודיע חבתן שנכפלו אזכרותיהן במקרא אחד כמנין ה’ חומשי תורה וכך ראיתי בב”ר:</p>
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Five corresponds to the five books of the Torah, the five Chumashim. However, this just leaves us with a new difficulty to deal with: Why did Hashem choose to express His love by mentioning them the same amount of times as there are books of the Chumash? Why not 3 times corresponding to the three forefathers, or 4 corresponding to Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah, or 7 times corresponding to the days of the week or the Shemittah cycles? There are other significant numbers. Why 5?

The answer lies, perhaps, in the following Mishnah, quoting Rabbi Akiva:

<p>4. Avot 3:14 Israel is beloved, for they were given the desired vessel. It is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to them that they were given a precious article, as it is stated: “I have given you a good acquisition, My Torah; do not desert it” (Mishlei</p>	<p>אבות ג:יד ... חביבין ישראל, שנתן להם כלי חמדה. חבה יתרה נודעת להם שנתן להם כלי חמדה שבו נברא העולם, שנאמר, “כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם, תורתי אל תעזבו” (משלי ד:ב).</p>
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Hashem expressed His endearment for the People of Israel by giving them the Torah. It is only fitting that when He repeats their name in this verse it corresponds to the number of Chumashim in the Torah.

C. The Beginning of Every Chumash

Harav Mordechai Breuer, זצ"ל (1921-2007) suggests that we look at Rashi's opening comment in each of the five books of the Torah. You will note, he taught in a shiur (summarized by, יבל"ח, Harav Amnon Bazak of Yeshivat Har Etzion), that in four out of the five books of the Chumash, Rashi begins with a comment that highlights Hashem's special love for Israel:

In **Bereishit** Rashi begins by saying that the entire Creation story affirms Israel's claim to the Land of Israel.

In **Shemot** he begins with how, out of endearment, Hashem compares Israel to the stars of the Heavens.

In **Vayikra** Rashi begins with how Hashem calls out to Moshe, the Jewish prophet, out of endearment.

In **Bamidbar** he begins with how Hashem Israel so often because He loves them so much.

(The Torah also veers from strict chronological order to avoid beginning Chumash Bamidbar with the episode of Pesach Sheni. It is shameful that Israel only offered one Pesach in forty years of travel through the desert.)

Even **Devarim**, a book that contains sharp rebuke to the People of Israel, opens with only hidden references to Israel's sins – to preserve Israel's honor. The opening verse should set the tone for the entire book.

Hashem opened each of the five books of His great expression of endearment with some special expression of His love for His People.

D. Leviim and Israelites

Why was this Divine love alluded to only in the 19th verse of the 8th chapter of the 4th book of the Torah? The Kedushat Levi begins by raising an issue – the choice of the Leviim presents a serious problem:

<p>5. Kedushat Levi – Parshat Behaalotcha For a person who chooses one thing out of many ends up proving that he loves it more than others; for he chose it over all of the other ones. Here, when the Holy One, blessed be He, chose the Leviim, one might have thought that His love is not upon Israel.</p>	<p>ספר קדושת לוי - פרשת בהעלותך כי אדם הבוחר דבר מהדברים נמצא מוכח שזה אוהב יותר משאר דברים כיון שבחר בו מכל הדברים. וכאן שבחר הקדוש ברוך הוא בלויים שמא תאמר חס ושלום כיון שבחר בלויים אין אהבתו על ישראל.</p>
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The choice of the Leviim might imply that they are more beloved in G-d's eyes than the rest of the People of Israel, that the rest of Israel has a secondary status in His eyes. This is not the case at all:

<p>5. Kedushat Levi – Parshat Behaalotcha Therefore He wrote Israel five times in this verse to indicate that He loves them as much as the Leviim – and that the Leviim were chose only in order to atone for the People of Israel.</p>	<p>ספר קדושת לוי - פרשת בהעלותך ולזה כתב ישראל חמשה פעמים בפסוק זה להודיע חיבתן של ישראל כמו ללויים ומה שבחר בלויים הוא רק לכפר על בני ישראל.</p>
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This verse teaches us that Hashem did not choose the Leviim because He loves them more than the rest of Israel. Rather, because He loves Israel so much, He wants to protect them and provide them with atonement through the Leviim. The Leviim provide the needed buffer zone around the Mishkan. We can now reread our verse: "I will give the Leviim as a gift to Aharon and his sons from among the **Children of Israel**, to perform the service for the **Children of Israel** in the Tent of Meeting" – the Leviim are representatives of all of Israel. "And to atone on behalf of the **Children of Israel**" – the Leviim provide Israel with atonement. "So that the **Children of Israel** will not be smitten with plague when the **Children of Israel** approach the Sanctuary" – it would have been dangerous for Israel to approach the Sanctuary without the protection afforded them by the Leviim.

On the contrary, the main message of this verse is that the Leviim's choice is truly for Israel's sake.

DRAW ME CLOSER BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

In Parshat Behaalotcha we find the great watershed separating the two parts of the Book of Bamidbar, the idyllic picture of the united tribes of Israel encamped around the Mishkan, and the degenerate picture of a nation torn apart by lack of faith and internal strife. Where did the fall begin? What was the seminal mistake which led to that slippery slope?

Chazal point to Perek Yud Pasuk Lamed Gimel: "ויסעו מהר ה'" – "They travelled from the mountain of Hashem," and [the Ramban quotes the Midrash] "They left Mount Sinai with joy and relief, 'כתינוק הבורה מבית הספר' – 'Like a child running away from school.'" They wanted to leave the mountain of Hashem **because** it was the mountain of Hashem. They were afraid that Hashem might burden them with even more mitzvot.

Didn't they have to eventually leave? Was the Torah not intended for implementation in another place?

Of course; but the issue is "how?" Had their hearts and souls been truly attuned to Torah, the thought of hearing and receiving more Torah would have filled them with pleasurable anticipation.

But to receive Torah fully one has to resign all other agendas. Children have other agendas. It is a sign of maturity to recognize the self as being no more and no less than a harp or violin, intended to resonate with the Divine music of Torah and mitzvot.

Eventually we leave yeshivah or seminary – the question is "how?" If we do it right, that can be a tikun for, a way of mending a subtle, yet crucial flaw in our national character, egocentric childishness leading to personal agenda. If we transition properly we can experience Torah and mitzvot as an irresistible magnet – not as a תינוק בורה מבית הספר, a child running away from school, but "משכני אהריך נרוצה" – "Draw me closer, to follow Your footsteps we shall run" (Shir Hashirim 1:4).

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The Daf Keshet, a project of Shapell's Darche Noam, is written
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