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LEARNING TORAH LIKE A YID

REALIZING THE TORAH'S GREATNESS

"And these are the laws that you shall place before them: If you buy a Jewish bondman..." Two questions arise: 1. Why is *Ki sikneh* expressed in the **singular**, when the *possuk* spoke of *benei Yisroel* in the **plural** (*lifneihem*)? 2. Why is *Ki sikneh* expressed in the **second** person, when the *possuk* spoke of *benei Yisroel* in the **third** person (*lifneihem*)?

Some *mefarshim* answer: The words *Ki sikneh* are expressed in the **singular**, and in the **second** person, because they are addressed not only to *Bnei Yisroel* at large, but also to *Moshe Rabbeinu* personally. They instruct him that he should teach the people Torah until they have actually **acquired** it (*ki sikneh* - "bought it") and it becomes their own. Also: he should not teach briefly, but should explain and lay out its details **before them** (*lifneihem*), as on a set table. This instruction also applies to whoever teaches Torah over the generations.

Another meaning of *Ki sikneh*: *Kiddush Levana* refers to the Four Worlds, and the phrase that refers to the World of *Atzilus* is *Baruch Konech*, from the same root as *Ki sikneh*. When you teach Torah, you should enable your listener to acquire the understanding that the Torah he is learning is *Atzilus*. True, the World of *Beriah* is a lofty world, but it is nonetheless within the realm of creations. *Ki sikneh* teaches that he should have the feeling that *Torah* is **higher** than that: it is *Elokim*.

UNDERSTANDING WITH KABBALAS OL?!

This hints at another lesson that we can learn: *Parshas Mishpatim* starts off with the laws of acquiring an *eved*, a bondman. This is surprising, because the Torah generally relates to situations that commonly arise. Yet here the Torah speaks of the unusual situation in which a thief who is caught and cannot pay is sold, in order to cover his debt. There are so many other laws that relate to everyday situations. Why start precisely with this law?

Now, there are three kinds of *mitzvos* - *mishpatim*, *eidos* and *chukim*. *Mishpatim* are the *mitzvos* whose rationale we can understand: Do not steal, Honor your father and mother, and the like. In fact, even without the Torah's command, we could have arrived at these conclusions ourselves. *Eidos* are *mitzvos* such as eating *matza*, as a reminder of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. Mortal reason would not obligate us to do this, but once the Torah explains it, we can understand it. *Chukim*: Even after the Torah explains them, they are beyond mortal understanding: "I have issued a decree..." So *chukim* are beyond our understanding, *eidos* are partly within the grasp of understanding, and *mishpatim* can be understood.

"Yet He took this infinite wisdom, which no thought can grasp, and planted it in the Torah in a way that enables a Yid to study and grasp it."

How does our *parsha* begin its list of *mishpatim*? With the laws of an *eved*. From this we learn that even the subjects in Torah that we do understand, we should accept with *kabbalas ol*, like an *eved*. At the same time, however, we are commanded to **understand** them! How can we sort this out?

The Torah is completely higher than *Beriah*: it is *Atzilus* - a *kinyan*, an acquisition of HaShem.

It is the wisdom of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, "Whom no thought can grasp." Yet He took this infinite wisdom, which no thought can grasp, and planted it in the Torah in a way that enables a Yid to study and grasp it.

The *Gemara* relates that King Talmi (Ptolemy) wanted to have the Torah translated for him. So he assembled 70 elders, and sat them down to work, each in isolation from his colleagues. *Min HaShamayim* it was arranged that all of them, independently, should make exactly the same emendations to their text. Their first change: They translated as if the first *possuk* did not say *Bereishis bara Elokim*, but *Elokim bara Bereishis*. Why the change? They were afraid that he might imagine that there existed some entity called *Bereishis*, and that entity created *Elokim*. This creates a problem.

The *mefarshim* are at pains to explain why the Torah begins with a *beis* and not with an *alef*. Yet in the above translation, it starts off with an *alef*. That wasn't why those translators made their change: they did it in order to avoid an idolatrous thought. However, this narration appears in the *Gemara*, so even if it is seemingly related in passing, it is a meaningful part of the Torah. How can we understand this change from the Torah's *beis* to the translators' *alef*?

Here is one explanation: The Torah is the wisdom of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, utterly beyond mortal reason, yet He lowered it to a level that enables a Yid to study and understand it. But the Yid should keep in mind that whatever he understands in the Torah is no more than a *beis*. The *alef* of Torah is that the Torah and *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* are one and the same, that the Torah is beyond mortal understanding. Yet that level has been brought to a level at which we *can* understand it. So what does he gain from this? He realizes that this is all beyond the grasp of his intellect. And that is the *alef* of Torah.

WHICH TORAH ARE WE LEARNING?

People usually conceive of the process of *tzimtzum* of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's chochmah* as in the classic *mashal* of *rav* and *talmid*: since the *rav* cannot convey the full depth of his understanding to his *talmid*, he condenses some part of it in order to make it accessible. One might think that the same applies Above – that the Torah that *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* studies in *Mesivta deRakia* is the real Torah, and whatever lower echo of it that trickles down to us is something else.

This is not the case. Thus we say in *birkas haTorah: venasan lanu es Toraso*: He gave us **His** Torah, the same Torah that is studied Above. When He chose us from all the nations and gave us **His** Torah, He filled it with all the lofty qualities that His Torah has. This is the *alef* of Torah. Although we don't grasp it now, it is there in the Torah that we learn. Only later, in Gan Eden, and more so when Moshiach will come, we will comprehend it.

Who is able to do this? – The Yidden. He chose **us** from all the

nations and gave **us** His Torah. When a Yid studies Torah, he considers whatever he understands in it as a *beis*. The *alef* is his awareness that the Torah is higher than his understanding: it is *Toraso*, the Torah of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. When a *goy* studies the very same *mishna*, such as *Shnayim ochazin betallis* (two men grabbing a *tallis*), the bottom line for him is simply *yachloku* (they divide it); that's all there is in it for him. He doesn't sense anything higher in it. That is why when the Chachomim translated the Torah for the gentile King Talmi, they had to start it with an *alef*, because that was as much as he could grasp.

AN ESSENTIAL CONNECTION

Back to *Ki sikneh*: Those words are connected both with *lifneihem* – “you shall place before them,” and also to the concept of *eved*. The word *lifneihem* reminds a Torah teacher to deliver and set out his explanations conscientiously. At the same time, *Ki sikneh* relates to an *eved*, and thus serves as a reminder of the need for *kabbalas ol*. *Ki sikneh* reminds us that the Torah is both a *kinyan*, an acquisition, and also belongs in *Atzilus*.

So when a Yid studies Torah, he's not merely collecting another piece of information. Every word of Torah that a Yid learns makes him more *eidl*: it refines him and upgrades his connection with the *Eibershter*, with something that is utterly higher than his understanding. For a Yid, this is not a difficulty. This is his *pnimiyus*, his innermost essence, and this is his *chayus*, the source of his vitality. This is his *kinyan*, his acquisition: he knows that the Torah belongs in the World of *Atzilus*, and he has *kabbalas ol* that is higher than his level of existence. This doesn't break him: this is what gives him *chayus*.

“When a Yid studies Torah, he's not merely collecting another piece of information.”



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