



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

Parshas Behar - Bechukosai 5770 פרשת בהר - בחוקתי תש"ע

THE BLESSED CURSE

WONDER BREAD

This week's *parshah* is a study in contrasts. The Torah lists the many blessings that the Jewish people will merit if they follow Hashem's commands, as well as the curses and punishments that shall be visited upon them should they abandon His ways. Quite often in this *parshah*, a particular reward is mentioned in the "blessings" section, and the converse appears by the "curses." For example:

"If... you keep my *mitzvos*... the land shall give forth its produce... and the sword shall not pass through your land" (*Vayikra* 26:1,2, 6).

"But... if you do not fulfill... these *mitzvos*... your land will not give forth its produce... And I will bring amongst you the sword of vengeance..." (*ibid.* 14, 20, 25).

Another of these "consequences" centers around the nutritional (or satiating) value of food. On the positive side, the *passuk* states (v. 5), "And you shall eat your bread with satiation." Rashi explains that this refers to a particular miraculous blessing, whereby the satisfying power of food is increased manifold: the food will be so "super-charged" that a person will be quite full and satisfied by consuming even a little bit. Apparently, once inside, the food expands rapidly.

On the retribution end of it, however, we find just the opposite. There, the verse declares (v. 26): "You shall eat, but not be satisfied." Rashi terms this phenomenon as the *me'eirah* (curse) of the innards, whereby the bread's potency actually diminishes upon reaching the stomach.

With this latter phenomenon, we can resolve a particular

difficulty that arises in the Gemara, as we shall see.

CRASH-COURSE IN ARVUS (HELPING OTHERS FULFILL THEIR MITZVAH OBLIGATION)

We find a concept in *halachah* whereby one individual can discharge his obligation through the offices of another. In other words, if Reuvein has to *bentch*, he can fulfill his obligation by listening and answering *amein* to Shimon's *bentching*.

There is a caveat, though, to this arrangement, as recorded in the Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah (3:8):

זֶה הַפְּלֵל, כֹּל שֶׁאֵינוֹ מְחַיֵּב בְּדַבָּר, אֵינוֹ מוֹצִיא אֶת הַרְבֵּים יְדֵי חוֹבְתָן.

"The general rule is that anyone who is not obligated in a particular mitzvah cannot aid someone who does have that obligation to fulfill his mitzvah."

In other words, while in general Shimon can *bentch* on Reuvein's behalf, Shimon himself must be obligated in *bentching*. If for some reason or another, Shimon himself was exempt from this mitzvah (for example, he was an insane individual, who is exempt from all *mitzvos*), then Reuvein cannot discharge his obligation to *bentch* by listening to Shimon; instead, he'll have to either find someone else or *bentch* himself.

Not only do the two people involved both have to be obligated, but they also have to share the same *level* of obligation. The strongest level of obligation is to be Biblically mandated in a mitzvah; in some instances, a person may be exempt on a Biblical level but obligated by decree of the rabbis. Once again, let us use *bentching* as an example. According to the strict letter of Torah law, a person is only obligated to

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bentch if he is *savei'ah* – full from his meal. However, the Rabbis obligated anyone to *bentch* – regardless of his satiety – as long as he consumed a certain amount of bread (about olive or egg-size). Consequently, two people can sit down to a meal together, but their level of obligation to *bentch* may be unequal. If Reuvein ate a lot of bread, and he's full at the end of the meal, his *bentching*-obligation is Biblically mandated. If his friend Shimon did not eat his fill but merely had an olive-sized slice, then his obligation to *bentch* is only rabbinic. In such an instance, Reuvein (Biblical obligation) cannot discharge his obligation by listening to Shimon (rabbinic obligation).

HUNGRY FOR BENTCHING

This brings us to the perplexing Gemara alluded to earlier. The Gemara in Berachos (20b) speaks of an individual who, unfortunately, does not know how to *bentch*. The Gemara addresses the issue of relying on his children (who do know how to *bentch*); can he fulfill his obligation by listening to them? The Gemara rules that he can rely on them, but adds a remarkable statement:

“תבא מארה לאדם שפגנו מברכין לו.”

“A *me'eirah* (curse) should befall someone who must rely on his children for his *bentching* obligation.”

The Gemara means to convey that – technically speaking – a child can help his parent discharge his obligation. However, by virtue of the fact that the father must rely on his child, it must be that the father himself is an ignoramus, incapable of *bentching* on his own. For this, the Sages say, he should be visited with a curse.

This statement appears troubling on a few counts. Firstly, the reaction to his state of ignorance seems somewhat severe. Is it truly fitting that he should be cursed just for being uneducated?

Furthermore, there seems to be a difficulty on *halachic* grounds, based on the information mentioned before. In general, a minor's obligation in *mitzvos* (such as *bentching*) is only rabbinic in origin, whereas an adult male is obligated from the Torah. As such, how could a child (rabbinically obligated) help the father

discharge his Biblical obligation to *bentch* (especially if the father consumed a full meal)?

According to the Hafla'ah (*Panim Yafos, parshas Bechukosai*), the issue is resolved through the “satiating element” of this week's *parshah*. When the Jews forsake the Torah, they are stricken – in Rashi's words – with the “*me'eirah* (curse) of the innards,” whereby food does not satiate he who consumes it. This, contends the Hafla'ah, is the same “*me'eirah*” to which the Gemara is referring.

In other words, the Sages' intent was not to “punish” the individual who did not know how to *bentch*; on the contrary, they were trying to supply him with a solution to his problem. Normally, his children could not help him discharge his obligation, as theirs is only rabbinic in nature. However, if he gets “the *me'eirah*,” then his children can *bentch* on his behalf. Now, regardless of how much he consumes, he will never be full, so his obligation will only be rabbinic, as well.

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