

שיחות רב עוזר פרשיות מטות מסעי תשס"ז

שליט"א Rav Ozer Glickman Insights into Torah and Halacha

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Suppression of Knowledge of the Law for the Sake of the Law

In מצוות התורה transmitted משה רבנו ע"ה describe the process through which משה רבנו learned directly מפי הגבורה, מפי הגבורה, his brother אהרן entered and was taught by משה after which אהרן listened again as his sons entered to hear the same lesson. They were followed by the זקנים and then the entire people. משה רבנו then left and the process continued with successive teachers who would repeat the lesson and then leave as well: אהרן, אלעזר ואיתמר, אהרן, זקנים. Each participant (or group of participants) therefore heard the lesson four times. As the status of the audience diminished, the number of times they heard the lesson from teachers of diminishing authority increased. The pattern of oral transmission from successive generations farther removed from the original revelation was thereby established from the outset.

The laws enumerated at the beginning of פרשת מטות are apparently the exception that proves the rule: וידבר משה אל ראשי המטות לבני ישראל לאמר זה הדבר אשר צוה ה'

The revelation begins מפי הגבורה (for the Torah specifies "אשר צוה ה'") but stops with the ראשי המטות. So stipulates רמב"ן ז"ל. The reason: there may be good cause for suppressing the information from the masses lest they be led to treat נדרים lightly. If it were to be widely known that fathers and husbands are able to cancel ascetic vows by their daughters and wives, the people might conclude that vows are trivial and easily overturned. The language of the Torah here ("אל ראשי המטות") is exclusive.

The alternative is to interpret the phrase as calling special attention to the role of the ראשי המטות in the promulgation of this one מצוה while not excluding אהרן, אלעזר ואיתמר, זקנים, and the עם. So explains רש"י. The נשיאים were honored by משה רבנו in that they were taught this מצוה first. רש"י is then compelled to find other markers in the verse that indicate its eventual communication to the other parties.

Each interpretation's strength is the other's weakness. רמב"ן can explain the process of communication as written and doesn't need to resort to גזירה שוה to derive communication that isn't in the text. He does, however, need to supply a reason why this one מצוה required suppression. רש"י needs no such explanation but does require a source for communication to someone other than the ראשי המטות. As we see so often in הלכה, one fits the local language and therefore requires a reason to explain deviation from the global standard; another prefers global coherence and must therefore interpret local language nonliterally. כן דרכה של תורה.

רמב"ן's interpretation may perhaps have been vindicated by history. Since the earliest teaching of the מצוות establishes the future pattern of learning, the eventual outcome may be considered an indication of the Torah's original intent. During the time of the גאונים, the study of נדרים was no longer part of the curriculum in the major ישיבות. In a cited in רב יהודאי גאון ז"ל of תשובה, we learn that the institution of הפרת נדרים had disappeared because מס' נדרים had not been studied in סורא and פומבדיתא for more than a century.

And yet we study מס' נדרים today. In fact, it is a favorite among בני ישיבה. What makes us worthy of such study when the two great centers of Torah in בבל judged themselves ill-prepared? I heard once in the name of הר"י, the late ראש ישיבה, חברון, that Torah learning has degraded from earlier times, particularly since the days of משה רבנו ע"ה. There was an immediacy to לימוד התורה then: whatever the people learned was directly applied. That's why the fear of widespread הפרת נדרים led to its suppression. In our day, the link to human action has been broken. Let us therefore aspire, רבותי, to refresh the linkage between תלמוד and מעשה, elevating our learning and sanctifying our lives, effecting a rapprochement between the conceptualization and the concretization of our Holy Torah.

שבת שלום ומבורך