

שיחות רב עוזר פרשת דברים תשס"ז

שליט"א Rav Ozer Glickman Insights into Torah and Halacha from

ר"מ בישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Torah and the Acquisition of Eloquence

אלה הדברים אשר רבר משה אל כל ישראל בעבר הירדן במדבר בעברה מול סוף בין פארן ובין תפל ולבן וחצרת ודי זהב:

How חומש שמות has changed since our first encounter with him in חומש שמות. The same man who declared that he was not an "איש דברים" now speaks "הדברים" that will occupy and inspire us for the next several weeks. What effected this dramatic transformation? How did this self-described "כבד פה וכבד לשון" achieve the eloquence on display throughout the פרשיות that follow?

In מדרש תנחומא, the people are seen to have posed this question themselves:

אמרו ישראל: אתמול אמרת "לא איש דברים אנכי" ועכשו אתה מדבר כל כך?

supplies the answer and with it advice for the elocutively challenged everywhere:

אמר רבי יצחק: אם אתה חיד, שנה את התורה ותתרפא.

If you are a stammerer, then study Torah repeatedly and you will be healed.

It was Torah that transformed משה into an orator. The repeated forced connection between thought and articulation helped the יתרו to become the רועה צאן מרעיתך. I think, however, that we should read רבי יצחק with more precision: "שנה את התורה" he tells us. Read the words of the Torah twice. Follow the instruction of the גמרא:

לעולם ישלים אדם פרשיותיו עם הציבור שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום

One should keep up with the community in the weekly portion,

reading the Scriptural verse twice and once in translation.

This is not an unlikely reading at all, לפענ"ד, since רבי יצחק was a חבר of רבי אמי, the source of the מימרא cited herein. In fact, in at least three places in ש"ס that I can remember, the two are quoted as disagreeing with confusion over which one said what: "אמר... אחד אמר... אחד אמר".* This is not to suggest any confusion in tradition, only to assert that these two sages were intimately involved in halachic discourse and that it is not at all forced to suggest רבי יצחק refers to a practice first mentioned by רבי אמי.

Of more interest than this semi-historical aside is the content of what רבי יצחק said. משה רבנו is the paradigm of an individual rendered eloquent through the learning of Torah. I am reminded of an incident many years ago when I was privileged to accompany a world-renowned גדול to an important event. We encountered a close friend of his whom he had not seen for several months. Their conversation was awkward until the subject turned to the סוגיא he was learning. This great man was not particularly expressive in other matters as I discovered taking him home, although he asked politely after my family and how we were settling in our new home. When the topic was Torah, however, his words flowed with confidence and ease. It is a pattern I have seen repeated on other occasions by other eminences.

I had the opportunity this week to meet some wonderful young people spending part of the summer at YU in a terrific program aptly called Summer@YU. My colleague Rabbi Jeremy Weider שליט"א and I had dinner with these students and fielded questions on הלכה and השקפה. One participant asked me about the tension between a fixed liturgy and personal expression. Sometimes frustrated by the demands of the daily מטבע, the questioner yearns to let the spirit soar unfettered by set requirements. "When was the last time you experienced that feeling?" I asked. A visit to a site in New York City was mentioned. "What was your reaction?" I asked. The reply: "I was speechless."

The הל' תפילה at the beginning of רמב"ם ז"ל explains that the fixed liturgy was the response to the dispersion of the Jews among the peoples of the world. No longer able to express themselves in a single language, they lost the ability to articulate their needs and the appropriate praise of God that should precede them. No matter how adept we are in our own vernaculars, however, our attempts at verbalizing our deepest religious feelings often come out sounding trivial. This is to be expected; no one can just pick up a musical instrument without practice and produce beauty. Like משה רבנו, may we learn to express ourselves through the language of Torah, endowing its hallowed phrases with our own spirituality.