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HERE I AM

by Dr. Joel M. Berman

"Tocho KeKevaro" – "the inside should reflect the outside." It is a constant struggle for a person to maintain an appearance and behave commensurately with his inner feelings.

We are all very familiar with the incident of the burning bush. Moshe, while watching his father-in-law's sheep, turns to see a bush engulfed in flames, yet not consumed by the fire. Hashem calls out to him from the midst of the bush and Moshe answers, "*Hineini*," "Here I am" (Shemot 3:4). This answer is the same answer given by Avraham when summoned to the Akeidah of his son Yitzchak (BeReishit 22:1). Why is the word "*Hineini*" used as a response to Hashem by both Avraham and Moshe? Was it appropriate for each of them to respond to Hashem using the word *Hineini*?

Rav Yaacov Haber points out that few of us are familiar with the surprising commentary of the Da'at Zekeinim, who argues that Hashem was in fact angry with Moshe's response. He quotes a Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 2:6) where Hashem responds to Moshe, "Who are you to say '*Hineini*?' Who are you to give the same answer as Avraham? Because of this, your descendants will be neither priests nor kings." Rav Haber points out that a hint to this may be found in the next Pasuk, where Hashem instructs Moshe, "*Al Tikrav Halom*," "Do not come closer to here" (Shemot 3:5).

What is most confounding about this Midrash is how Moshe is expected to know not to respond as Avraham did. Rav Haber explains the problem with Moshe saying *Hineini* is that *Hineini* implies both humility and willingness. We know Moshe as an, "*Anav MiKol Adam*," "Humbler than all of mankind" (BeMidbar 12:3), however, willingness is something which Moshe did not originally have. Unlike Avraham Avinu who woke up early to do the will of Hashem, Moshe Rabbeinu argued with Hashem, claiming that he wouldn't be believed or that he couldn't enunciate his words properly (Shemot 4:1). *Hineini* was, at that time, incongruous with his personality. Although he would soon grow into the role, at that time, he wasn't on the level of *Hineini*.

When we speak on a daily basis, we must ask ourselves if "*Tocho KeVaro*," "If our insides reflects our outside." While it certainly is a constant struggle for us to maintain appearances and behave in a manner commensurate with our inner feelings, we must strive to be genuine people who are true with ourselves and our peers.

Bad Fellows

by Yosef Silfen ('15)

One of many highlights in Parashat Shemot is the scene recounting the fight between two Jewish men and Moshe's subsequent interjection. The Torah recounts that Moshe sees two Jewish men fighting, and Moshe Rabbeinu asks the wicked one "*Lama Takeh Rei'echa*," "Why would you strike your fellow?" (Shemot 2:13). Rashi (ad loc. s.v. *Rei'echa*) explains that the Torah refers to them as "fellows" because they are equal in the sense that they are both wicked. Despite the Torah's equating the two men, how does Rashi conclude that the word "fellow" teaches that these two men are fellows in wickedness and not in some other way? The Maharil Diskin, citing the Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 1:29), explains that Rashi knew that these men were Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliyav. Therefore, Rashi was troubled by the fact that the Torah does not refer to them as brothers, but rather fellows, which means they must be related to each other in an additional way. Since we have a tradition that Datan and Aviram are wicked, Rashi understood that this relation is their wickedness.

Nevertheless, we must understand how their wickedness is expressed. While fighting is certainly not positive, it seems rather harsh to call two people wicked simply because they are fighting. The Talelei Orot cites the Torah Or who notes that the aggressor in this case is wicked not only because he raises his hand to hit his opponent, but also by how he responds to Moshe's criticism. He asks Moshe, "*HaLehargeini Atah Omeir Ka'asher Haragta Et HaMitzri*," "Will you try and kill me just as you have killed that Egyptian?" (2:14). Not only does the man not accept the criticism, he does not even attempt to explain his actions. The Torah Or explains based on this interaction that the true sign of a wicked person is his reacting aggressively to someone who tries to modify his behavior. Because he cannot accept rebuke from others, the Rasha continually and willfully moves in the wrong direction.

Aside from the textual nuance of *Rei'echa*, what basis does Rashi have for classifying the opponent as wicked? The Torah tells us that after this encounter, Par'oh hears that Moshe had killed an Mitzri (2:15). Rashi (ad loc. s.v. *VaYishma Par'oh*) wonders how Par'oh found out about this encounter. Rashi, again citing the Midrash (1:30), answers that both Datan and Aviram informed him about Moshe killing the Mitzri. This means that not only did the man who was criticized inform Par'oh, but the very man that Moshe had attempted to save turned against him. This utter lack of gratitude is a characteristic of a truly wicked person.

When Moshe hears the Rasha's criticism of him for killing the Mitzri, Moshe concludes, "*Achein Noda HaDavar*," "indeed the matter is known" (2:14). Rashi (ad loc. s.v. *Achein Noda HaDavar*) explains that "the matter is known" refers to Moshe's understanding that the reason the Jews are suffering in Mitzrayim is because they are informers. Rashi is clearly suggesting that Datan and Aviram's betrayal of Moshe Rabbeinu is one of the most wicked acts done by the Jews. Although informing on others does not appear to be a valid cause for 210 years of slavery and suffering, we must understand that informing is not simply *Lashon HaRa*, but it is a betrayal of trust. The whole cause of the Jews' original descent to Mitzrayim was Mitzrayim because Yosef informed on his brothers to their father and showed distrust in the family. Moshe understood that we could not leave Mitzrayim and be free unless we correct that sin and rebuild trust in each other. Although Datan and Aviram are wicked for their actions and poor character, it is mistrust in their people which is their worst sin. We must work on ourselves to trust our friends and judge them favorably in order to not make the same mistake which caused our slavery in Mitzrayim.

OUR INNER STENGTH *by Alex Kalb ('15)*

In this week's Parashah, Hashem tells Moshe, "*Al Takreiv HaLom Shal Ne'alecha MeiAl Raglecha Ki HaMakom Asher Atah Omeid Alav Admat Kodesh Hu*," "Do not come closer to here; remove your shoes from upon your feet, for the place upon which you are standing is holy ground" (Shemot 3:5). The Or HaChaim points out that this Pasuk mentions two different commands that were issued to Moshe—first, Hashem commands Moshe not to come closer, and second, He tells Moshe to remove his shoes due to the holiness of the ground. The Or HaChaim (ad loc. s.v. *Al Tikrav*) questions the order of Hashem's commands: why doesn't Hashem first tell Moshe to correct his wrong and remove his shoes, and then tell Moshe not to come closer?

Ramban (ad loc. s.v. *Ki HaMakom Asher Omeid Alav Admat Kodesh Hu*) explains that even though Moshe was far away from the burning bush, Hashem's Shechinah was resting on the top of the mountain, and therefore, it was forbidden to be anywhere on the mountain while wearing shoes. Although this was a serious prohibition, it was a lesser prohibition than actually coming too close to the place of the Shechinah. Therefore, Hashem warns Moshe to stop approaching Him, because that is the more serious prohibition. The Ramban cites other examples where people are not allowed to wear shoes in a place where the Shechinah resides, such as Kohanim being prohibited to wear shoes during Birkat Kohanim. Another example is found when Yehoshua is visited by the angel of Hashem (Yehoshua 5:15). Why is it so imperative not to wear shoes

in Hashem's presence?

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that a person who takes off his shoes in a holy place shows that he is fully devoting himself to the holiness of that place. Therefore, during Birkat Kohanim, a Kohein removes his shoes to completely devote himself to the holiness of the floor of the Azarah. The more a person attaches himself to a holy place, the more he will be able to feel its holiness.

The Magein Avraham writes (in his work, the *Zayit Ra'anani*) that when Hashem punished Adam HaRishon, He cursed the ground (*BeReishit* 3:17), and shoes were subsequently worn to separate man from the cursed land. However, in a place where the land is holy and contained no trace of the curse, such as the Beit HaMikdash, a person would remove his shoes. The Magein Avraham's comment seems to be teaching us to strive to attach ourselves to holy places.

In addition to the Magein Avraham, many Meforashim learn out lessons from Hashem's commandment to Moshe to take off his shoes. The Netziv, Rabbeinu Bachya, and the Keli Yakar write that just as Moshe took off his shoes in front of Hashem's presence, a person must try to remove all of his connections to worldly pleasures at certain times and places. While most cannot abstain from the pleasures of the world on a constant basis, there are certain times and places where this is obligatory for everyone. For example, on Yom Kippur, when we act like angels, we stand in prayer throughout the day without leather shoes, which symbolizes a full day of detachment from this world and enjoying our closeness to Hashem. In addition to Yom Kippur, it is important that we "take off" our material desires just for a little bit in order to demonstrate our desire to connect with Hashem.

The Chafetz Chaim finds a powerful lesson in Hashem's commandment to Moshe to take off his shoes due to the holiness of the ground. He writes that people tend to blame their lack of spiritual growth on factors such as their surroundings, their family situation, or the like. A person thinks to himself that if he had better surroundings or better friends, he would be able to reach higher spiritual heights. Hashem's commandment to Moshe teaches us that the place upon which we are standing is holy. Our holiness is dependent only on our desire to be holy, not our physical surroundings.

It is very important that we realize that each and every one of us has the potential to achieve greatness, regardless of what state we are currently in and what our surrounding are. We should learn about the importance of being in a community which fosters purity and spiritual greatness. If we do so, then it will be easier for us to achieve our full potential.

RECONSIDERING PEDAGOGIC USE OF THE RAMBAN AL HATORAH

by Rabbi Yaakov Blau

Kol Torah is honored to present a series of articles from Rabbi Yaakov Blau's book, "Medieval Commentary in the Modern Era: The Enduring

Value of Classical Parshanut.” This week, we will begin with the analysis of the Ramban and will conclude this section in next week’s issue.

Introduction

The importance of the Ramban Al HaTorah cannot be overstated. Whatever approach one takes to Tanach, be it Peshat, Midrash, Kabbalah, philosophy or Halachic analysis, the Ramban’s commentary is an indispensable aid. The Rav, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, went so far as to suggest that studying Ramban Al HaTorah ought to be an integral part of the curriculum of the Yeshiva University Semichah program.ⁱ While this did not happen, it indicates the degree of significance that the Rav felt that Ramban served in the understanding of Chumash.

I would like to examine three pedagogical uses of the Ramban Al HaTorah which I believe are not currently being maximized.ⁱⁱ Those uses are a) a Sugya approach b) a Halachic approach and c) studying Ramban’s understanding of certain passages of Navi.

Sugya approach

The Sugya approach to Tanachⁱⁱⁱ views Tanach topically, much as one would view a Sugya in Gemara. Rather than just considering the local area being studied, one simultaneously analyzes parallel parts of Tanach, with the Parshanim’s comments on those areas, with hope of reaching a greater understanding of each component part. Ramban can be understood using such a methodology in one of two ways: 1) where Ramban himself quotes the other areas in Tanach that led him to his conclusion and 2) when he discusses a similar idea several different times throughout his commentary on Chumash and, as such, it is up to the reader to study those instances together. In doing so, the reader will gain a broader understanding of Ramban’s approach to that particular topic.

An example illustrating the first option is Ramban’s explanation of the account of the three angels visiting Avraham (BeReishit 18:1). Ramban famously disagrees with Rambam^{iv}, who found it inconceivable that mortals could actually perceive angels and therefore understood the story as being a vision. Ramban points out that Rambam’s approach is not just limited to the Avraham story, but would need to be true for the angels visiting Lot (BeReishit 19) and Ya’akov’s struggle with the angel (ibid 32:24-30), examples where Ramban believes that Rambam’s approach is implausible. To fully understand the Machloket, it is worthwhile to consider each one of those stories as well. The Abrabanel defends the Rambam’s view and claims that Lot had an intuition to leave Sedom and that the story of the angles telling him to leave, as described in Chumash, was indeed merely a vision. Abrabanel (together with the Ritva^v) explains Ya’akov’s injury as being psychosomatic, rather than the result of an actual struggle with an angel. Ralbag gives an alternate explanation: Ya’akov had already hurt his leg and his dream reflected the pain that he was already feeling. Meanwhile, Ramban is willing to concede that when the angel is actually described by the term Malach, Rambam is right that the story being described is just a vision. To that end, Ramban cites the verse in the Hagar story

(BeReishit 16:7-14)^{vi} which uses the term Malach. Once again, that story is worth discussing, based on this new approach.

Another example would be what the Torah means by the term, “*BeEtzem HaYom HaZeh*” (VaYikra 23:28).^{vii} Ramban explains that it can mean that extraneous factors are not necessary for a commandment to be in force. Among his examples are Shavu’ot (VaYikra 23:21), Chadash (ibid 23:14) and Yom Kippur (ibid 23:28). Alternatively, he says there are times that the phrase connotes an event that starts on that specific day and not earlier. Examples of this meaning of the phrase include Noach entering the ark (BeReishit 7:13) and Avraham performing a Brit Milah (ibid. 17:26). As before, examining all the examples that Ramban quotes creates a much richer understanding of the overall idea.

In the previous two examples, Ramban has done the major research for the reader by listing all the parallels. Some issues require more investigation on the reader’s part—for example, the idea of Ein Mukdam UME’uchar BaTorah (that the Torah follows a thematic, rather than chronological, order). The idea itself is incontrovertible,^{viii} as BeMidbar 1:1 occurs in the second month and the narrative account a few Perakim later (9:1) turns back to the first month. Now it is well known that Ramban attempts to limit the application of this principle, whereas Rashi and Ibn Ezra apply it much more freely. However, it is necessary to examine several examples of this phenomenon in order to fully understand its scope.

A classic example is the discussion of when the Korach story happened. Ibn Ezra (BeMidbar 16:1) believes that the story is not in chronological order, because Korach is complaining about the Levi’im being picked, something that happened many Parashiyot before Parashat Korach. Therefore, Ibn Ezra reasons, the complaint must have actually happened at the time of the Levi’im’s designation. Ramban (ibid) refuses to accept this and instead gives a rather plausible alternative explanation. Korach wanted to complain since the time of the Levi’im’s designation. However, he knew that Moshe’s popularity at the time meant that any complaint against the prophet’s authority would have fallen on deaf ears. Korach therefore waited for an opportunity when the people would no longer have a favorable impression of Moshe to complain. That opportunity was afforded to him by the incident of the Meraglim.

Perhaps more telling is the question of when Yitro came. Both Rashi (Shemot 18:13) and Ibn Ezra (ibid. 18:1) feel that the initial story of Yitro coming is out of order and actually took place post Matan Torah.^{ix} Ramban (18:1), at first, entertains this possibility, giving several reasons why one would draw this conclusion, but in the end concludes that the Torah relates this story in order.^x This is instructive on two levels. First of all, Ramban was willing to hear the logic of why one might think that events are out of order, in an instance when the text does not explicitly state that they are out of order. Also, one must take into account how bound

Ramban felt by Midrashim, since in this case, it's a Machloket in the Midrash when the story happened.ⁱ

There are two categories where one might, at first glance, apply this principle, but which are, I believe, actually different phenomena. The first is in poetry. Ramban (Shemot15:9) quotes a Midrash that applies this principle to the quote of "Amar Oyeiv" in Shirat HaYam. The Midrash understands that the quote actually preceded the Egyptian pursuit. Ramban disagrees and feels that the quote is in order. Whatever one's take on the overall question, poetry could well be different.

The other category is when the Torah "fills in a detail" before it happens. So, the command to put a portion of Man in the Mishkan (Shemot 16:33-34) is in the story of the Man, even though the Mishkan hadn't been built yet.^{xii} Somewhat similarly, several characters' deaths are mentioned before they actually died.^{xiii} I believe that the Chidush of the principle is that one would expect the Torah to be written like a history book, but instead the Chumash chooses a thematic order over a chronological one. Now, a history book would "fill in a detail" out of chronological order if it would be confusing to mention it when it actually happened. So, for example, an American history book would mention Benedict Arnold's death in its discussion of the Revolutionary War, rather than just inserting it out of context when it actually happened.^{xiv} As such, the principle of Ein Mukdam UMe'uchar BaTorah is not needed to explain this category.

NOTES

ⁱ Community, Covenant and Commitment, 104-105.

ⁱⁱ I will not be discussing uses of Ramban which I think, and hope, are standard—for example, Ramban's attempts to understand the structure of Chumash, which are found both in his introductions to each sefer and throughout his commentary. Similarly, Ramban's Ta'amei HaMitzvot, while not as systematic as the Chinuch, are a well-known tool.

ⁱⁱⁱ As discussed in chapter 2.

^{iv} Moreh Nevuchim (2:42).

^v Sefer Zicharon.

^{vi} Which Ramban understood as just a Bat Kol, a position which Ramban strongly disagrees with.

An additional position that ought to be considered is that of Ralbag, who believes (most likely based on the Moreh Nevuchim 2:34 and 42) that the term Malach often refers to a Navi (see his commentary on BeReishit 18:2, 21:17, 32:2, Shemot 14:19 and 23:20, Shofetim 2:1, 6:11, 13:16 and Shmuel Bet 24:16).

^{vii} Another example would be Ramban's idea (Devarim 21:18) that several punishments are meant as a warning to society, rather than being justified by the gravity of the sin. These sins are identified as ones in which the Torah says that the people should "hear and be afraid."

^{viii} Pesachim 6b.

^{ix} Rashi clearly feels that the second story (Moshe judging the people) happened after Matan Torah, but he is neutral about the first story (Yitro

coming) about which he quotes both opinions in the Gemara (although it is not clear if that is part of the text of Rashi).

^x Ramban is not clear if he thinks that the story of Moshe sitting to judge the people also happened before matan Torah. In 18:13 he first says that this story happened the day after the previous story of Yitro coming and then he discusses what the Mechilta meant when it said that the story happened after Yom Kippur. One could assume that Ramban is accepting the Mechilta or it could be that he first states what he actually thinks the Pasuk means and then tries to explain what the Mechilta must have meant. See Rabbeinu Bachya on 18:1 who explains how the entire Yitro story, including Moshe judging the people, all happened before Matan Torah.

^{xi} Zevachim 116a and the Mechilta.

^{xii} Ramban uses this example in Shemot 12:43 and BeMidbar 21:1 (while he rejects the application to Pesach in the former, he does not question that it was true about the man). Interestingly, Bechor Shor disagrees with all the other Rishonim and feels that the man was initially placed in front of a Bamah at the time of the initial man story.

^{xiii} Like Terach (Bereishit 11:32) and Yitzchak (ibid 35:28-29). Rashi makes a point of explaining why the former is out of order and uses the Ein Mukdam UMe'uchar for the latter. Ramban (ad loc) feels that both are the normal style of the Torah.

^{xiv} This principle is discussed many, many times by Ramban (not always by name), so the following list is unlikely to be exhaustive: BeReishit 32:23, 35:28, Shemot 2:1, 4:19, 12:40, 15:9, 18:1, 24:1, 32:11, 33:7, 40:2, VaYikra 8:1, 9:22, 16:1, 25:1, BeMidbar 9:1 and 16:1, Devarim 31:24.

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