

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Terumah
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Terumah – The two categories of mitzvot

We are all familiar with the popular song “Dayenu” that we sing on the Seder night.¹ One of the clauses of the song is as follows: “*If You would have brought us to Har Sinai but not given us the Torah it would have been enough*”. This is hard to understand. Of what use would it have been to bring Bnei Yisrael to Har Sinai without giving them the Torah?

In truth, a similar question can be asked on many of the clauses of this song. There are a number of answers given to this question. For example, the clauses could be understood as follows: “If You would only have done X for us, and not Y, it would be **sufficient reason for us to thank you**.” We will shortly suggest another answer.

In this week’s Parasha of Terumah, we read about the call for donations for the building of the Mishkan, the portable sanctuary that accompanied Bnei Yisrael in the midbar and was a pre-cursor to the Bet Hamikdash.

In his commentary to this Parasha, the Ramban discusses the significance of the Mishkan. The Ramban points out that there are many parallels between the Revelation at Har Sinai and the function of the Mishkan. These include:

- The Glory of Hashem rested upon Har Sinai and also rested on the Mishkan
- Hashem spoke to Moshe on Har Sinai from the midst of a fire and He also spoke to Moshe in the Mishkan (from between the golden cherubim which were the colour of fire)
- Hashem gave Moshe Mitzvot on Har Sinai and he gave additional Mitzvot to Moshe in the Mishkan.

In comparing the numerous similarities between Har Sinai and the Mishkan, the Ramban teaches that Har Sinai and the Mishkan both had two important functions – they were both a resting place for the Divine Presence and also the place that Hashem chose to communicate His Wisdom to Moshe.

We can now answer the question that we posed above from the song of “Dayenu”. At Har Sinai, Bnei Yisrael had two experiences – they experienced a Divine Revelation, and they also received the Torah. Merely experiencing a Divine Revelation on its own without receiving the Torah would have been worth the trip!

Perhaps the Ramban’s reference to the two different functions of the Mishkan can teach us an important lesson about the two categories of mitzvot that we received at Har Sinai. When one considers the Mishkan and the Bet Hamikdash, one probably thinks mainly of ritual law, laws between man and G-d. The Bet Hamikdash was the place that Bnei Yisrael would visit to offer korbanot and re-ignite their relationship with Hashem. However, as we have seen, the Ramban is teaching us that the Bet Hamikdash (and the Mishkan) has two purposes – as well as being a meeting place with Hashem’s Divine Presence, it is also a reminder of our receiving the Torah at Har Sinai. The Torah is not just about Mitzvot between man and G-d. It is also about mitzvot between man and man. The Ten Commandments were given to us on two luchot (tablets) – one representing the Mitzvot between man and G-d, and the other representing the Mitzvot between man and man. The two luchot were of equal size to teach us that both types of Mitzvot are equally important.

¹ Pesach is only 6 weeks away! Have you started cleaning yet?

The Sanhedrin, the highest court in the land, would sit within the grounds of the Bet Hamikdash². The Sanhedrin dealt with all types of laws – both between man and man (such as civil and criminal laws) and between man and G-d (the ritual laws). This demonstrates the inextricable connection between the Halachot relating to ritual and the Halachot relating to interpersonal relations.

Sometimes, some of us may have a tendency to focus too much on one category of mitzvot to the detriment of the other category. We can reflect on this matter and readjust accordingly if need be.

Placing insufficient emphasis on the mitzvot between man and man

For those who focus too much on the mitzvot between man and G-d, the following Halacha provides a powerful reminder to correct the balance. Generally, one can recite a bracha on behalf of someone else. For example, when the head of the household recites Hamotzi on Shabbat, the other people at the table can satisfy their obligation to recite the bracha merely by listening.³ This principle only works if the one who is reciting the bracha on behalf of the other people is also intending to eat bread. If they do not intend to eat, they cannot recite a bracha on behalf of someone else, because from their perspective it would be a bracha said in vain.⁴ To say a bracha over food when you are not intending to eat involves taking Hashem's name in vain, which is a very serious prohibition.⁵

However, there are exceptions to this rule which demonstrate the importance of mitzvot between man and man. In the case of brachot recited over the performance of a mitzvah, one is allowed to say a bracha for someone else even if the one reciting the bracha is not fulfilling the mitzvah at that time. For example, one can recite kiddush or havdala for someone else even if they have already fulfilled their own obligation to recite kiddush or havdala. Why is this not considered a bracha l'vatala? The Mishnah Berurah⁶ explains that this is based on the principle called "kol Yisrael arevim ze lazeh" – all of the Jews are guarantors for each other. In effect, if my fellow Jew has not yet fulfilled a mitzvah, then it is as if I have not really fulfilled the mitzvah either!

Placing insufficient emphasis on the mitzvot between man and G-d

Some people focus on being a 'good person' and are not particularly concerned with keeping the Halachot that relate to Jewish rituals. The laws between man and G-d can often be difficult for us to understand. However, just as Hashem commands us to love our fellow as we love ourselves, and all of the other mitzvot between man and man, He also commands us to keep Shabbat and keep kosher and all of the other ritual laws between man and G-d. We are not the authors and creators of the laws, and they do not have to make sense to us in order for us to have to follow them. As we learned in last week's Parsha – "Na'ase v'Nishma" – we commit to doing Hashem's will even before we know what He is asking to us to do.

Hashem is our loving Father. He sets out how He wants us to serve Him directly, for our own good (the mitzvot between man and G-d) and also how He wants us to treat His children (the mitzvot between man and man). Our belief and trust in Hashem should be complete and not dependant on our understanding of His laws.

Let's try something this week:

1. Remember this lesson from the Mishkan and Har Sinai – the equal importance of the laws between man and man and the laws between man and G-d.
2. Try to notice if we are lax in one of the categories and try to correct the balance!

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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² Rambam, Hilchot Sanhedrin 1:3.

³ This is the principle known as 'shomea k'oneh'. It works provided that both parties have the intention that the listener will thereby fulfil their obligation to recite the bracha. The listener should preferably recite 'Amen' to the bracha. However, even if they don't respond 'Amen' they still satisfy their obligation.

⁴ Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 213:3 and the Magen Avraham (seif katan 7).

⁵ According to the Rambam this is forbidden according to Torah law. Most authorities are of the view that it is forbidden on a Rabbinic level.

⁶ 213:14.