

Parsha Pearls

Va'eira 5768

"And I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be your G-d, and you will know that I am Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out from under the burdens of Egypt." (6:7)

In the Gemara, Berachos 38a, there is a dispute about the meaning of the word "hamotzi" in this verse. Rabbi Nechemiah says it is present-future tense: "You must know that I am Hashem Who is taking you out from under the burdens of Egypt." The other Rabbis say it is past tense, and they connect it to the beginning of the verse: "I will take you to Me for a people when I give you the Torah, and then you will know that it was I, Hashem, Who took you out from under the burdens of Egypt."

This led to a dispute about the correct wording of the blessing over bread. According to the Rabbis, it is "hamotzi lechem min haaretz," meaning "who brought forth bread from the earth." But Rabbi Nechemiah holds that one cannot say "hamotzi" because that would mean "who is bringing forth bread from the earth," which would not make sense because the bread upon which he is making the blessing already came forth from the earth. Rather, one must say "motzi", which is definitely past tense as is evident from Bamidbar 23:22.

The Gemara tells a story: Rabbi Zeira heard his students praising a certain scholar, saying that he was a great man and an expert on blessings. He asked his students to send this scholar to his house so that he could meet him. When the

scholar came, Rabbi Zeira served him bread. The scholar recited the blessing "motzi lechem min haaretz" and ate. Rabbi Zeira commented, "This is the man you said was an expert on blessings?! Had he said 'hamotzi', he would have taught us the meaning of the verse, as well as the fact that the halacha follows the Rabbis. But now that he said 'motzi' what has he taught us?" The Gemara adds that the scholar's intent had been to fulfill his obligation according to both opinions, Rabbi Nechemiah and the Rabbis.

The Satmar Rav asks: What was so wrong with what the scholar did? Is it not praiseworthy to be strict and fulfill all opinions? Does everyone have an obligation to make a point of being lenient in order to teach the halacha?

He explains that the reason to be lenient here is to teach the great lesson that emerges from this verse of the Torah the way the Rabbis interpret it. G-d said, "When I give the Torah, you will know that it was I Who took you out of Egypt." This seems strange: why did the Jewish people need to be convinced that G-d took them out of Egypt? Didn't they already experience ten supernatural plagues and the parting of the sea? If that did not convince them, what would?

The Rambam answers this question in Foundations of the Torah 8:1: "The Jews did not believe in Moshe our teacher because of the miracles that he performed. For one who believes based on miracles retains some doubt in his mind, for it is possible that the miracle was done through magic or witchcraft. Rather, all the miracles Moshe did in the wilderness, he did according to the needs of the time, not to bring proof to his prophecy. He needed to drown the Egyptians, so he split the sea and sunk them in it. We needed food, so he brought down the manna. They were thirsty, so he split the rock. The company of Korach disbelieved in him, so the earth swallowed them up. The same is true of all the other miracles. And on what basis did they believe in him? When we stood at Mount Sinai and our eyes saw and not someone else's eyes, our ears heard and not someone else's ears, the fire and the thunder and the torches, and he drew near to the thick darkness, and the voice spoke to him, and we heard it: 'Moshe, Moshe, go tell them such-and-such.' And so it says, (Devarim 5:4) 'Face to face Hashem spoke with you.' And it says (ibid. v. 3), 'Not with our forefathers did Hashem establish this covenant.' And how do we

know that our experience at Mount Sinai alone is the proof that Moshe's prophecy is true? The Torah says (Shemos 19:9), 'Behold I come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people might hear when I speak to you, and also in you they will believe forever.' This implies that previously, they did not believe in him with a permanent belief, but a belief that leaves room for doubts and second thoughts."

Thus the giving of the Torah was the only true proof that G-d was the one Who took us out of Egypt. Only after the giving of the Torah was it clear beyond a doubt that the miracles of the Exodus were the work of G-d and not done in some other way.

In our time as well, we must always keep in mind that the success of an enterprise does not prove it correct, for success, even extraordinary success, can come about in a number of ways. To determine what is right or wrong we must look only to G-d's words spoken at Mount Sinai and recorded in the Torah, and then we will never be led astray. This is the lesson of the word "hamotzi." (Divrei Yoel, Vayikra p. 82).