

Parshat Ki Tetze 5777

Oral Torah v Written Torah

First A Story ...is told of a Rabbi who walked into the *Beit Midrash* one *Shabbat* afternoon and noticed some students who were involved in *devarim beteilim* (idle chatter). The Rabbi went over to their table and said to them: ‘The word *Shabbat* (שבת) is an acronym for “שינה בשבת תענוג” – ‘Studying Torah on Shabbat is a delight’. It is also an acronym for “שנה בשבת תענוג” – ‘Sleeping on Shabbat is a delight’. If you are too tired to study Torah, partake of the other delight and you will awake refreshed and in a spirit to study Torah further’.

One of the students replied to the rabbi: ‘The word Shabbat is also an acronym for “שיחה בשבת תענוג” – ‘talking (shemu’esen) on Shabbat is a delight.’ The Rabbi looked at him with disapproval and said, “King Shlomo says, ‘A wise man’s heart is to his right, while a fool’s is to the left (Mishlei 10:2)’. Since this cannot be so literally, I always wondered what he understood by this. Your remark makes me realise that he means the following. When the wise man sees the “*shin*” in the word “Shabbat”, he places the dot above it on the right hand side and thus reads the acronym to indicate either that learning (ינהש) on *Shabbat* or sleeping (נהש) on *Shabbat* is a delight. However, the fool places the dot on the left side which makes the letter a “*sin*” and reads it as *sichah* – idle chatter (יחהש)!”

Now the D’var Torah – “Midah Keneged Midah?” “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the congregation of Hashem.....Because of the fact that they did not greet you with bread and water on the road when you were leaving Egypt.” (23:4-5). Question: Hashem’s punishments are *Midah Keneged Midah* – measure for measure. Why is perpetual exclusion from the Jewish people the punishment for not offering bread and water?

Hashem forbade harming the Ammonites and the Moabites because of two women who would ultimately come from them, Ruth the Moabite (the ancestor of *Moshiach*), and Na’amah the Ammonite who would become the wife of King Shlomo (see *Bava Kamma* 38b).

The Rabbis forbade eating bread baked by gentiles for fear of mixing with them socially, which can lead to intermarriage (see *Shabbat* 17b), although according to some authorities, the prohibition only applies to bread baked in a private home, whereas bread baked in a bakery for commercial purposes does not fall under the prohibition – assuming of course all ingredients are known to be kosher - see *Yoreh Deah* 112:1-2). Similarly, the people of Ammon and Moab did not offer bread so that their people would not marry Jews. Moreover, they hoped that by training their people to distance themselves from the Jews they would assure that Ruth and Na’amah would never become part of the Jewish people.

Since their intent was to prevent intermarriage between their people and the Jewish people, their punishment was permanent exclusion from joining the Jewish people in marriage.

The Gemara (*Yevamot* 76b) declares that the prohibition applies only to the males and not to the females, because it was the role of the men (not the women) to go out on the dangerous paths of the wilderness to bring food and drink to their Jewish cousins. Thus, while men can convert but not marry in, Moabite and Ammonite women may convert to Judaism and marry Jewish men.

Ramban is of the opinion that the Moabites – in contrast to the Ammonites – did greet the Jewish people with bread and water. Accordingly, he explains that the Ammonites and Moabites were prohibited for two different reasons; the Ammonites for not greeting the Jewish people with bread and water, and the Moabites for hiring Bilaam the son of Beor to curse the Jewish people. The source for this view is also the verse quoted above (23:4-5) as it continues.....”and because he hired against you Bilaam the son of Beor.....to curse you”.

Oral Torah Comes to Explain Written Torah and King David’s Yichus

King David said (in Psalms 119:161-162) חנם, ומדברך פחד לבי. יש אנכי על אַמְרַתְךָ, כְּמוֹצֵא שְׁלֵל רָב. (שרים רדפוני) “Princes pursued me without cause, and my heart feared Your Word. I rejoiced over Your Saying, like one who finds abundant spoils” (note the underlinings). This may be explained as a reference to the difficulties David encountered from Doeg, the head of the *Sanhedrin* in the days of King Shaul, and others who sought to discredit him by disparaging his ancestress Ruth the Moabite, based on the above pasuk, “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of Hashem” (whilst ignoring the interpretation in Gemara *Yevamot* 76b).

Rabbenu Bachya (*Shemot* 13a) writes in the name of the *Kabbalists* that the term “*Davar*” – “Word” – refers to the Written Torah, and “*Amar*” – “Saying” – refers to the Oral Torah. Thus King David was explaining, “Princes pursued me without cause” – charging that I was unfit to enter into *Klal Yisrael*. “And my heart feared *Devarecha*” - Your Word – the Written Torah which appeared to disqualify me. “I rejoiced over *Imrosacha*” - Your Saying - the Oral Torah which comes to expound on the Written Torah and allows a Moabite woman to join *Klal Yisrael* in marriage “like one who finds abundant spoils” (and which therefore confirmed King David’s *yichus*).