

Parshat Matot Masai 5777

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-רָאשֵׁי הַמִּטּוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר זֶה הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה'

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel, saying: This is the thing Hashem commanded Bamidbar 30:2.

With the other prophets it says 'koh omar Hashem' so says Hashem. The midrash explains the difference between the prophecy of Moshe and the other prophets was that Moshe designated and created a specific framework ('zeh'), of what the will of Hashem is in this world. The other prophets only expanded or enhanced this already existing framework. Rabbi Leff says that this difference is specifically pointed out in Matos because it deals with vows and speech which are used to designate things to create a framework.

We are now in the temporal framework of 17 Tammuz to Tisha B'Av. In last week's haftorah, divrei Yirmiyahu, dvar Hashem is mentioned over and over as the prophet describes the dismal framework of exile and mourning. The end of the haftorah 'זִכְרֹתַי לָךְ נְעוּרַיִךְI remember the loving kindness of your youth' etc is the diametrically opposed framework.

עַל מַה אֲבָדָה הָאָרֶץ the Navi asks (Jeremiah 9:11) Why was the the first temple destroyed? No one, the sages, prophets even the 'malachai hashareis' could answer until Hashem Himself said 'עַל עֲזַבְתֶּם אֶת תּוֹרָתִי

'Because they forsook my Torah' upon which the rabbis comment

שְׁלֵא בָרְכוּ בַתּוֹרָה תַחִילָה, because they didn't make the brocha on Torah first.

בִּבְא מְצִיעָא פֶּה; נְדָרִים פֶּה בָּא מְצִיעָא פֶּה; But in יוֹמָא ט' it says that this destruction was due to idol worship, adultery and murder.

The purpose of a brocha is to understand in what framework we learn Torah. The brocha tells us what we are praising and why we are thanking. Who we are asking and what He wants from us. Eg a brocha on food puts eating into perspective and so, bircas hamazon mentions geulah etc, to show that we eat for a purpose which the benching elaborates. Rabbi Leff says that they didn't see the brocha as the introduction to the learning. It was merely a brocha before they learned. They did not designate the idea of learning beforehand or see the brocha as defining the framework in which they were learning. Learning is not to show off etc but to connect to Hashem, emulate Him, toil in it, fulfil our purpose etc. Not saying the

brocha 'techilo' means Torah will only be kept on our terms or haphazardly without the correct ideals. This can lead to great sins as avoda can turn into avoda zara as the mitzvos are kept as disjointed things and so become distorted. Thus the mitzvos themselves can become idolatry, adultery and murder. All mitzvohs have to be assessed through the lens of Torah so we know specifically what to do in any given situation. If a mitzvah is out of the framework, then it may not be a mitzvah anymore.

Reb Tzodok HaCohain in Sefer LeKutei Mamorim says that the essential nature of Eretz Yisroel is to live with an awareness of our dependence on Hashem which is included in Torah Lishmah and living there without that awareness is essentially living in Chutz LaAretz. Reb Tzodok writes re the purpose of learning Torah in Eretz Yisrael: הוּא הַכֶּרֶת הַנּוֹתֵן כִּשְׂמִפְרֵד הָאָרֶץ מִנּוֹתֵן הָאָרֶץ אֵז אוֹתָם בָּאָרֶץ חוּץ לָאָרֶץ

Thus, by learning Torah without connecting it to Hashem, they became spiritually disconnected from the land and we may no longer be merited to remain there, thus it was only a matter of time before we were physically expelled from the land.

The Degel Machaneh Ephraim says that the issue was that they didn't say וְהִעָרַב נָא Rabbi Osher Weiss says that only when there is simcha and love and passion for Talmud Torah can it be successfully learnt, with hatzlocha, gadlus and ever increasing the chances that it will be perpetuated. That's why the second part of this brocha is a request that the Torah be transmitted to future generations (וְנִהְיֶה אֲנַחְנוּ וְצִאֲצָאֵינוּ, וְצִאֲצָאֵי כָל עַמֶּךָ.....)

Torah must be observed in the proper framework (not haphazardly in a vacuum) for our mission to be successful. Every aspect of life has to be connected to Hashem. Torah is not just a bunch of mitzvohs to fit in with any given lifestyle. All we do must be within the correct framework of values standards and ideals. We must view all through the lens of Torah to understand what the goal actually is. Keeping Torah outside the correct framework leads to the framework of Bein hamitzorim, the purpose of which is to do Teshuva and reinstate the correct framework (Rambam Hilchos Taniyos Perek 5, Halacha 1)

And with Teshuva, learning and keeping Torah as we should, we will merit as the Navi writes (Zechariah 8, 19) that these days of mourning will ultimately be transformed לְשִׁשּׁוֹן וְלִשְׂמֵחָה וְלִמְעֵדִים טוֹבִים bimehaira beyomaynu.

Sources: Rabbi Z. Leff, Rabbi O. Weiss, Rabbi Y. Zakutinsky