

Parashat Bechuchotai 5784, 2024:

Eitz Chayim He

Rabbi David Etengoff

ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

The concluding words of our *parasha* and *Sefer Vayikra* begin with the phrase, “*aleh hamitzvot asher tzivah Hashem et Moshe*—These are the commandments that Hashem commanded Moshe.” (*Sefer Vayikra* 27:34). This refers to the complete and final body of law that Hashem revealed to Moshe on *Har Sinai*, and is interpreted by the *Sifra* on our verse and *Talmud Yerushalmi, Megillah* 1:5, in this manner:

“*Aleh hamitzvot* that Hashem commanded Moshe.” These are the *mitzvot* that we were commanded directly by Moshe, and so, too, did Moshe say to us: “There will never be another prophet in the future who will create new *mitzvot* (literally, *davar*) for you from this point forward.” (Translation my own)

There are a number of passages in *Talmud Bavli*, as well, that follow this approach in explicating the phrase, “*aleh hamitzvot*.” One of the better-known examples is found in *Yoma* 80a:

Measures of punishments are *halakha* transmitted to Moshe from Sinai. Others say: These measures were instituted by the court of Jabez [Rashi, Atniale ben Kanaz]. The Gemara questions this: How can this be? Isn't it written: “*aleh hamitzvot* which Hashem commanded Moshe for the children of Israel at *Har Sinai*?” (*Sefer Vayikra* 27:34). The word “*aleh*” underscores that a prophet is not permitted to introduce any new element related to the Torah and its *mitzvot* from here on. Rather, over the course of time, the people forgot the measures; subsequently the prophets reestablished the measures and taught them to the masses. (*The Koren Talmud Bavli*, translation, Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz *zatzal*, with my emendations)

In his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, the Rambam (1135-1204) counts the principle of the immutability of the Torah among the *Ikkarei Emunah* (Essential Principles of Faith):

The Ninth Principle of Faith is that of nullification. This means that the Torah of Moshe will neither be nullified nor will there ever be another Torah in addition to it from Hashem.

It will never be added thereto nor be detracted therefrom, neither in writing nor through explanation. As is stated in the Torah: “You shall neither add to it, nor subtract from it.” (*Sefer Devarim* 13:1, *Masechet Sanhedrin*, Introduction to *Perek Chalek*, translation my own)

The concept of the fixity of the Torah could lead one to believe that the Torah is static and does not adjust to new scenarios. In his newly published work, *Divrei Soferim: The Transmission of Torah Shebe’ a Peh*, Rav Hershel Schachter *shlita* strongly rejects this idea: “The principle of the immutability of the Torah that we have outlined should not be confused, though, with the mistaken notion that religious practice never adapts to changing conditions.” (All quotations, page 145) To buttress his position, Rav Schachter cites Rabbi Soloveitchik’s exposition of the *pasuk*: “And Yitzchak again dug the wells of water which they had dug in the days of his father, Avraham...and he gave them names like the names that his father had given them.” (*Sefer Bereishit* 26:18, translation, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) The Rav (1903-1993) *zatzal* suggests: “Yitzchak followed the exact *Masorah* (tradition) of his father. This is why when there was a famine in the land, Yitzchak traveled to Gerar, intending to dwell in Mitzrayim, just as his father had done earlier.” Rashi (1040-1105) on *Sefer Bereishit* 36:12 notes, however, that following the *Akeidah*, Yitzchak had attained the *kedushah* of a *korban olah* (a burnt offering); therefore, it was improper for him to go down to Egypt, since such a *korban* must remain in *Eretz Yisrael*. According to the Rav, Hashem was explaining to Yitzchak that by going to Mitzrayim, he would **not** be following in the footsteps of his father. Yitzchak, therefore, remained in *Eretz Yisrael* demonstrating that *Masorah*, and the Torah in general, respond to new circumstances.

I believe this explanation of the Rav in Rabbi Schachter’s presentation sheds new light on

the meaning of a well-known phrase from *Sefer Mishle*: “*Eitz chayim he l’lmachazikim bah*—It is a tree of life for those who grasp it.” (3:18) Just as a tree is a dynamic entity that changes throughout the seasons, so, too, does the application of the Torah’s laws “adapt to changing conditions,” ever guiding us in our service to Hashem.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

Please contact me at rdb718@gmail.com to be added to my weekly email list.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)