

SECRET LOVE, SWEETEST

Parshas Saitzai - Sovoi

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

I

Hashem's love of Israel is mentioned many times in NACH (Prophets and Scriptures) (Malachi 1:2; Jeremiah 31:3; Hoshaiah 11:1; etc. etc.) but only once in Chumash. Even there it is not mentioned straightforward, but indirectly, in the context of Bilaam Horosho who wanted to curse "But Hashem your G-d refused to listen to Bilaam, and... reversed the curse to a blessing for you, because Hashem loved (loves) you" (Parshas Saitzai 23:6). [Another passage speaks of Hashem's love of Israel, Devorim 7:13, but it is in the context of numerous blessing (love you, bless you, multiply you, etc., etc.)]

This reversal from Bilaam's intention into a blessing seems to be basic in the very priestly blessing, recited before the Mitzva of Birchas Kohanim. The Bracha of the Kohanim is "Boruch... and commanded us to bless His people Israel with love BEAHAVO". Now where in the Torah is it commanded to recite the blessing "with love"? Love is not mentioned in the commandment to bless Israel, in Parshas NOSO (Bamidbar 6:22-27). The answer is found in the above statement, Hashem reversing Bilaam's intentions into blessing, KI AHAIVCHO, because Hashem loves you. In the very blessing of the Kohanim, Rashi indicates a "transformation" into a gracious countenance. Also in the prayers of the listeners (to the priestly blessing) there is a reference to a "transformation" into blessing.

The reason for this INDIRECT form of Hashem's love of Israel is that in this indirect form the love is a higher level of love, the secret love. In marriage it is not the loud music accompanying the bride

and groom after the chupa. That is only an introduction to the validity of chupa, in the YICHUD privacy room.

The priestly blessings with love (in the context of transformation instead of a direct statement) is a reference to that higher level of love, Hashem's secret, private, love of Israel.

Matriarch Sarah was first named Sarai and changed to Sarah (Beraishis 17:15). Sarai means my princess, the private princess of her husband. Sarah indicates her becoming the princess, matriarch of the whole nation. The saintliness of her private relationship, indicated in her former name Sarai, was continued. When the Malochim asked where is Sarah? Abraham replied she is in the tent in privacy, in modesty.

It is for this reason that the letter YUD in Sarai, her former name, was given by Moshe to Joshua (Bamidbar 13:16). Targum Jonathan explains this letter YUD was appropriately implanted in Joshua's name when he emulated Sarah's quality of modesty and humility, and her total subordination to Abraham. Rashi (Avoth 1:1) describes Joshua's unique qualities, being called (at the age of 42, according to some 56) "NAAR" a lad (Shemos 33:11), and "MESHORES" (ibid; Bamidbor 11:28). These titles manifest his humble and selfless dedication to Moshe; he would not depart from within the OHEL (tent) (ibid).

The less ostentation, the less display, the more privacy, the deeper the relationship. The more secretive Hashem's love of Israel, the deeper and more enduring, the more confirmed and validated the priestly blessing with love.

II

Parshas Sovo is one of the portions containing greatest number of blessings. Chapter 28 alone entails fourteen complete passages of blessings.

Interestingly, four passages of blessings (26:5-8) are quoted in the Hagadah on Pesach Seder night, with the Tanaic, Midrashic, elaborate interpretations.

However, also the TOCHOCHO, passages of admonitions, of punishments, may be counted as blessing, since it comes, *chas v'shalom*, only if we violate the mitzvohs of the Torah. This too is indicative of blessings if we DO observe the mitzvohs. This may explain the beginning of the Tochocho using the word "V'hoyo", (if it will come to pass... if you do not hearken to the voice of Hashem). The Midrash teaches us that "V'hoyo" is indicative of rejoicing, SIMCHA (Psichta Esther; Or Hachaim beginning our Parsha). Why then the use of "V'hoyo" in the Tochocho? Since, however, the passage emphasizes the punishments come if we do not hearken, indicating being saved from all these punishments if we DO observe the Mitzvohs, that is the SIMCHA.

Tzror Hamor writes somewhat similar to the above: "V'hoyo" is spelled with the same 4 letters as "Havaya", representing "mercy". Even admonitions are based on "secret love" (*mishlei* 27:5).

Moreover, the Talmud teaches (*Sotah* 10b) that blessing for good deeds is 500 times the opposite of retribution for bad deeds. Thus the TOCHOCHO is indicative of 500 times blessings for doing good, opposite of the number of punishments for violations of the Torah. This, then, adds vast numbers of blessings.

The Parsha speaks about eleven specific mitzvohs (and the 12th, a reference to all other mitzvohs). Six tribes ascended Mt. Grizim, and six tribes ascended Mt. Aivol, the Levyites pronouncing blessings for observance facing Har Grizim, and punishments for violations facing Har Aivol. Yet, the Torah mentions only the punishments (27:15 - 26). The blessings are indicative by the principle of "Michlal Hen..." from the pronouncements of the negative, we

learn by logical inference, deductive reasoning, the opposite for the positive.

The question arises: if the deductive reasoning is the case of these eleven mitzvohs, why not mention the blessing for observance, and learn the punishments for violations by deductive reasoning? The answer is that when the blessings are arrived at by deductive reasoning a more indirect, secretive manner, it is 500 times the original blessing [see essay I - "Secret Love, Sweetest"].

This principle is found in this week's parsha: "Hashem will command the blessing for you "BAASOMECHO" (in your storehouses...) (28:8) upon which the Talmud (Taanis 8b) comments BASOMECHO in your secret treasures. The blessing overwhelms BAASOMECHO in the items that are concealed from the eyes (secretive). Thus, the blessings facing Har Grizim, mentioned in these passages, indirectly, only by deductive reasoning, are more secretive, and thus 500 times the blessing.

We are soon approaching the season to recite SLICHOS, upon which every Piyut is concluded with the thirteen attributes of mercy. On Yom Kippur, at Neila, the thirteen attributes are referred to numerous times. The essence of the 13 attributes is the above principle of 500 times merit (blessings) contrasting the number for the negative (sin). For this prayer is quoted in the Chumash, stating: Hashem "recalls the iniquity of parents upon children and grandchildren, to the third and fourth generations" (Shemos 34:7). Whereas kindness and observance of mitzvohs, Hashem preserves for thousands of generations (ibid). The minimum of the plural form is two, two thousand generations, 500 times number 4, four generations in the negative. This abundant blessing is lavished upon the observant BAASOMECHO, indirectly. You are a shelter for me "SAISER" (secret shelter) (Tehilim 32:7).

