

PARASHAT HASHAVUA

PARASHAT EIKEV

The Covenant of Love Between God and Israel

By Rav Yonatan Grossman

This week's parasha constitutes a lengthy introduction to the covenant of Arvot Moav, which is formally enacted in Parashat Ki-Tavo. The "atmosphere" surrounding this parasha is a most pleasant one, replete with warm expressions of love between God and His nation.

In this shiur we will focus on one small unit at the beginning of the parasha, one that features a distinct literary structure and contains the central themes of the parasha as a whole.

The unit under consideration follows a chiasmic structure. That is, the beginning resembles the conclusion, the second section corresponds to the second-to-last section, and so-on, until the central point of the unit. Surprisingly, the center of the unit is the beginning of this week's parasha. In other words, the conclusion of last week's parasha and the opening section of our parasha form part of a single, literary entity featuring a chiasmic structure. The transition between the two halves of the unit occurs right at the beginning of the parasha, such that the opening of our parasha corresponds to the conclusion of the previous parasha.

This is how the unit appears according to our analysis (Devarim 7:1-19): (It would be very helpful if you took out a Tanakh and followed this in the Hebrew):

1. When the Lord your God brings you to the land that you are about to enter and possess, and he dislodges many nations before you - the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations much larger than you -
2. and the Lord your God delivers them to you and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction: grant them no terms and give them no quarter. You shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your children away from Me to worship other gods, and God's anger will blaze forth against you and He will promptly wipe you out. Instead, this is what you shall do to them: you shall tear down their altars, smash their pillars, cut down their sacred posts and consign their images to the fire.

3. For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God: of all the peoples on earth the Lord your God chose you to be His treasured people. It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that God set His heart on you and chose you - indeed, you are the smallest of peoples.
4. But it was because God loved you and kept the oath He made to your fathers that God freed you with a mighty hand and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
5. Know, therefore, that only the Lord your God is God, the steadfast God Who keeps His covenant and kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Him and keep His commandments, but Who instantly requites with destruction those who reject Him - never slow with those who reject Him, but requiring them instantly.
6. Therefore, observe faithfully the Instruction - the laws and the rules - which I charge you today to observe.

F1) (Eikev) And if you do obey these rules and observe them carefully

E1) The Lord your God will maintain for you the covenant and kindness that he swore to your fathers.

D1) He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will bless the issue of your womb and the produce of your soil, your new grain and wine and oil, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock, in the land that He swore to your fathers to assign to you.

C1) You shall be blessed above all other peoples: there shall be no sterile male or female among you or among your livestock. God will ward off from you all sickness; He will not bring upon you any of the dreadful diseases of Egypt, about which you know, but will inflict them upon all your enemies.

B1) You shall destroy all the peoples that the Lord your God delivers to you, showing them no pity. And you shall not worship their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

A1) Should you say to yourselves, "These nations are more numerous than we; how can we dispossess them?" You need have no fear of them. You have but to bear in mind what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and all the Egyptians: the wondrous acts that you saw with your own eyes, the signs and the portents, the mighty hand and the outstretched arm by which the Lord your God liberated you. Thus will the Lord your God do to all the people you now fear.

First, we will compare the corresponding sections of each half of this unit, in terms of both content and literary style:

A-A1: The framework of the entire unit involves the dispossession of the nations from the land, a process to be accomplished by the Almighty Himself. Note the textual similarity between the two

sets of verses: "that you are about to enter and possess" (A) - "how can we dispossess them?" (A1); "seven nations much larger than you" (A) - "These nations are more numerous than we" (A1).

B-B1: Both these segments demand a proper attitude towards the nations currently occupying the land. They are to be entirely destroyed ["and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction" (B) - "You shall destroy all the peoples...showing them no pity" (B1)], so as to avoid their influence towards idolatry. Again, note the textual parallels: "and the Lord your God delivers them to you" (B) - "all the peoples that the Lord your God delivers to you" (B1); "to worship other gods" (B) - "and you shall not worship their gods" (B1).

C-C1: These verses emphasize God's unique relationship with Israel, particularly as opposed to that with the other nations. In C, Moshe stresses Israel's having been chosen from the other peoples, and C1 focuses upon God's special blessing to Israel, which exceeds that bestowed upon any other nation. The two segments share the theme, "Of all the peoples on earth": "of all the peoples on earth the Lord your God chose you to be His treasured people. It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that God set His heart on you...indeed, you are the smallest of peoples" (C) - "You shall be blessed above all other peoples...any of the dreadful diseases of Egypt...[God] will inflict upon your enemies" (C1).

D-D1: These two sections declare God's intense love for His people. This love results in His selection and designation of Am Yisrael and the Exodus (D), as well as His blessing to be bestowed upon them in the Land of Israel (D1). The common expression is: "But it was because God loved you" (D) - "He will love you and bless you" (D1). However, whereas the first section cites the Exodus as an example of this intense love ["and rescued you from the house of bondage, from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt" (D)], in the second segment, this love shapes the very nature of Benei Yisrael's settlement of the land ["in the land that He swore to your fathers to assign to you" (D1)].

E-E1: These two sets of verses add another dimension to the unique relationship between God and Israel, beyond the expressions of love we just encountered. This relationship expresses itself in God's commitment to the covenant He made with His nation (and that will be made again after this speech), a covenant founded on God's kindness towards Benei Yisrael. Not surprisingly, the covenant appears in conjunction with the concept of divine kindness in both these sections: "Know, therefore, that only the Lord your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps His covenant and kindness to...those who love Him" (E) - "God will maintain for you the covenant and kindness that he swore to your fathers" (E1). Note the different points of focus regarding the covenant and kindness in the different sets of verses. In the first segment, the covenant and kindness are directed towards "those who love Him and keep His commandments," meaning, those people who earn inclusion in this covenant through their diligent religious service. The second segment offers another possible manner of inclusion - through the very belonging and association with the nation, by virtue of one's being counted among the descendants of the patriarchs: "the covenant and kindness that swore to your fathers."

F-F1: These segments contain the main body of this entire unit. F concludes Parashat Va-etchanan, while F1 opens Parashat Eikev. Naturally, this central core demands the basic requirement for the actualization of the aforementioned love, covenant and kindness - observance of the mitzvot. Textual parallels highlight the relationship between the two parts of this central unit: "observe...and the rules" (F) - "you do obey these rules and observe them" (F1); "which I charge you today to observe" (F) - "if you do obey...and observe them" (F1).

Thus, this unit incorporates several different topics, which one would not have necessarily associated with one another: observance of the mitzvot, the unique relationship between the Almighty and His people, the obligation of distance from the idolatrous nations of Canaan, and Israel's occupation of the land despite the threatening, occupying forces therein.

A closer look at the progression throughout this unit reveals an ongoing, intensifying closeness between God and Benei Yisrael.

The first stage presents God in a state of conflict with the other nations, which, at this point, does not directly involve Benei Yisrael. The people merely sit on the side in fear: "Should you say to yourselves, 'These nations are more numerous than we; how can we dispossess them?'" The central theme of these two corresponding sections (A, A1) seems to relate to God's unassisted role in the conquest of the land: "and He dislodges many nations before you" (A), "You need have no fear of them. You have but to bear in mind what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and all the Egyptians...Thus will the Lord your God do to all the peoples you now fear" (A1).

As we move closer to the central body of the unit, though, more initiative is required of Benei Yisrael themselves to overcome the enemies. True, "the Lord your God delivers them to you," but now "and you defeat them, you must doom them to destruction" (B), and "You shall destroy all the peoples that the Lord your God delivers to you" (B1).

Thus, whereas A-A1 relates to God's attitude and conduct towards the other nations, B-B1 involves Benei Yisrael's campaign against the nations. The third section (C-C1) proceeds to the relationship between these two, God and Israel, as the other nations move off to the side. Finally, the fourth and fifth segments (D-D1; E-E1) portray a private, intimate relationship between the Almighty and His people. This is a relationship built on love, mutual commitment (=the covenant) and kindness. The other nations are not in the picture at all, not even as spectators. Here God chooses Israel not from among the other nations, but as a result of His love towards them, His commitment to the covenant and desire to perform kindness with Benei Yisrael. Irrespective of the other nations, God wishes to bless Benei Yisrael.

According to this arrangement, though, we might have expected the depiction of God's love towards Benei Yisrael to precede the verses relating to the covenant. If, indeed, this segment follows a steady progression, then presumably the expressions of love, which is far more intimate a relationship than that resulting from a treaty or historical responsibility, should emerge later, after the mention of the covenant. We must remember, however, the general context within which this parasha appears. Moshe is in the middle of his lengthy monologue,

which culminates in the renewal of the covenant in Arvot Moav. As such, the entire presentation serves as but a preparation and background for this covenant. Thus, as he illustrates the nature of God's relationship with His people, Moshe prefers to emphasize specifically the covenantal element of this relationship, rather than the aspect of inherent love. Clearly, the mutual love between God and Benei Yisrael comprises a major theme of Sefer Devarim and our parasha in particular; certainly Moshe does not intend to give this sublime aspect of the people's relationship with God a back-seat behind the responsibilities resulting from the covenant and promises to the patriarchs. In this specific context, though, as part of the preparation for the covenant of Arvot Moav, the element of the covenant must be stressed.

Needless to say, the central point upon which the entire unit rests lies in Benei Yisrael's observance of the mitzvot. If the nation upholds its end of the covenant, following the statutes and strictures of the Torah, then the Almighty will accompany them into the Land of Israel, oust their enemies from the region, and bless them with health and prosperity.

(Translated by David Silverberg)

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